

# Unknown Waters: How to Get Off the Beaten Path and Find New Fishing Holes

by Carl Haensel

The morning light creeps over a high ridge. Mountain laurel is blooming along a swiftly flowing stream. Trout are rising all around you, and there's not another person in sight. This is the dream that many anglers have when they try to find a new fishing spot. Whether it is trout, bass, pike or panfish, recent advances in mapping and internet information make locating and learning about new fishing waters a lot easier.



Once you've done your research, a good Atlas will get you to your final destination. Remember to review your fishing regulations before visiting a new spot.

## Fishing research toolbar

### Streams and Lakes in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission County Guide:  
[http://pfbc.state.pa.us/CountyGuide/County\\_Guide.htm](http://pfbc.state.pa.us/CountyGuide/County_Guide.htm)

### Topographical & Other Pennsylvania Maps & Data

PA Topo Maps:  
[http://maps.pasda.psu.edu/website/Imagery\\_Viewer/viewer2.asp](http://maps.pasda.psu.edu/website/Imagery_Viewer/viewer2.asp)

Pennsylvania Spatial Data Access:  
<http://www.pasda.psu.edu>

### Fisheries Data

Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission Trout Waters:  
[http://www.fish.state.pa.us/waters\\_trout.htm](http://www.fish.state.pa.us/waters_trout.htm)

Biologist Reports:  
[http://pfbc.state.pa.us/Biologist\\_Reports/Biologist\\_Reports.htm](http://pfbc.state.pa.us/Biologist_Reports/Biologist_Reports.htm)

### Aerial Mapping

Pennsylvania Aerial Maps: <http://www.pamap.info>  
Google Earth: <http://earth.google.com/>  
MSN Live Maps: <http://maps.live.com/>



## Research

Begin your search by using a few of the tools in the fishing research toolbar. Start by locating information about a favorite stream or lake that you know well. Compare the information to other waters that are unknown to you. There are pros and cons to different tools and data. For example: MSN Live maps can offer, via their Bird's Eye view, an aerial photo that's detailed enough to see each riffle and run on a stream with four different angles. On the other hand, Google Earth, a free program that you'll have to install on your computer, allows you to pan around detailed aerial photos of the globe in 3D. Some data even highlights which streams have better public access. If you've never used these types of programs and web sites, don't worry. Most are easy to learn and have detailed help available. You'll find these waterways fall into the following categories.

## Ridiculously hard to get to water

It's over a mountain ridge, down a valley and a long way from any road. It definitely exists in Pennsylvania, and it can provide great fishing. It can also get you lost, dehydrated and in trouble. If you're heading to a way out location, bring a buddy along. Don't forget to leave detailed notes with someone at home of where you're heading and when you'll be back. Bring along a GPS. Not only can it keep you from getting lost, you can program in waypoints before you leave home. Always bring a paper map and compass as a back-up.

## Away from the access water

New water does not have to mean a new lake or new stream. There's a finite amount of flat water in the state. Take a look at maps of your favorite lake, and head all the way up creek arms, inlets and bays. I'll even get out of the boat and start wading up a creek to find a good pool, dam or blockage. On streams and rivers, getting away from the access means looking at maps and finding areas with poor access and heading for them.

## Ugly water

There is good fishing in some really ugly places. Yep, those urban blight types of areas, next to rusted shopping carts and boxes of trash. Ugly as they are, the fish may be hanging around, maybe even some trophies.

## Water near the source

Watershed degradation has been happening for a long time. If the first stream fishes poorly, don't give up. Try upstream, and keep heading up a watershed until you get above the problems. Sometimes the only good fishing in an area is near where the stream originates.

## Not on the list

Think that all of the trout streams in the state are on the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission's web site? Marginal waters, feeder streams and odd little places here and there have certainly failed to make it on any list, but they can still hold a good fish. Don't give up on water just because you don't see it listed anywhere. Look for watersheds and fishing areas that are similar to something that you know is good. These topographically and geologically similar locations are the key to finding your own off the list secret spot.



photo-Carl Hansel

*Wild brook trout can be a well-won reward for the adventuresome angler*

## Asking for access

Before you head out, you should take a number of steps. Try to figure out who owns the area. Local plat maps can help, and some are available online. Nothing is more frustrating than checking out a new piece of water and finding out that it is posted and private. That doesn't need to be a trip-ending finding. Start knocking on doors to find out if those no trespassing signs apply to you. Here are some hints that can help open doors:

- Call ahead.
- Offer to pick up trash or litter.
- Offer to stop back each time before fishing, so that the land owner knows when someone is fishing on their property.
- Bring business or personal identification cards along with you, so the landowner knows just who they're letting on their property to fish.
- Offer to practice catch and release, or alternately, to bring some fish back to the landowner if they'd like some for dinner.
- Offer to help out around the property.
- Don't wear waders and fishing gear when you're trying to secure permission to fish.
- Always be courteous and respectful, even if you are denied access to fish.