

# FISHING MOUNTAIN STREAMS WITH MINNOWS

by Vic Attardo photos by the author



A steep, bedrock wall may present a slow, flat pool that is best worked from downstream to the top of the pool.



A wise man—probably me—once said, “Don’t complicate simple things.” And, so it is with fishing minnows for trout, specifically fishing mountain streams where minnows are such terrific and natural bait.

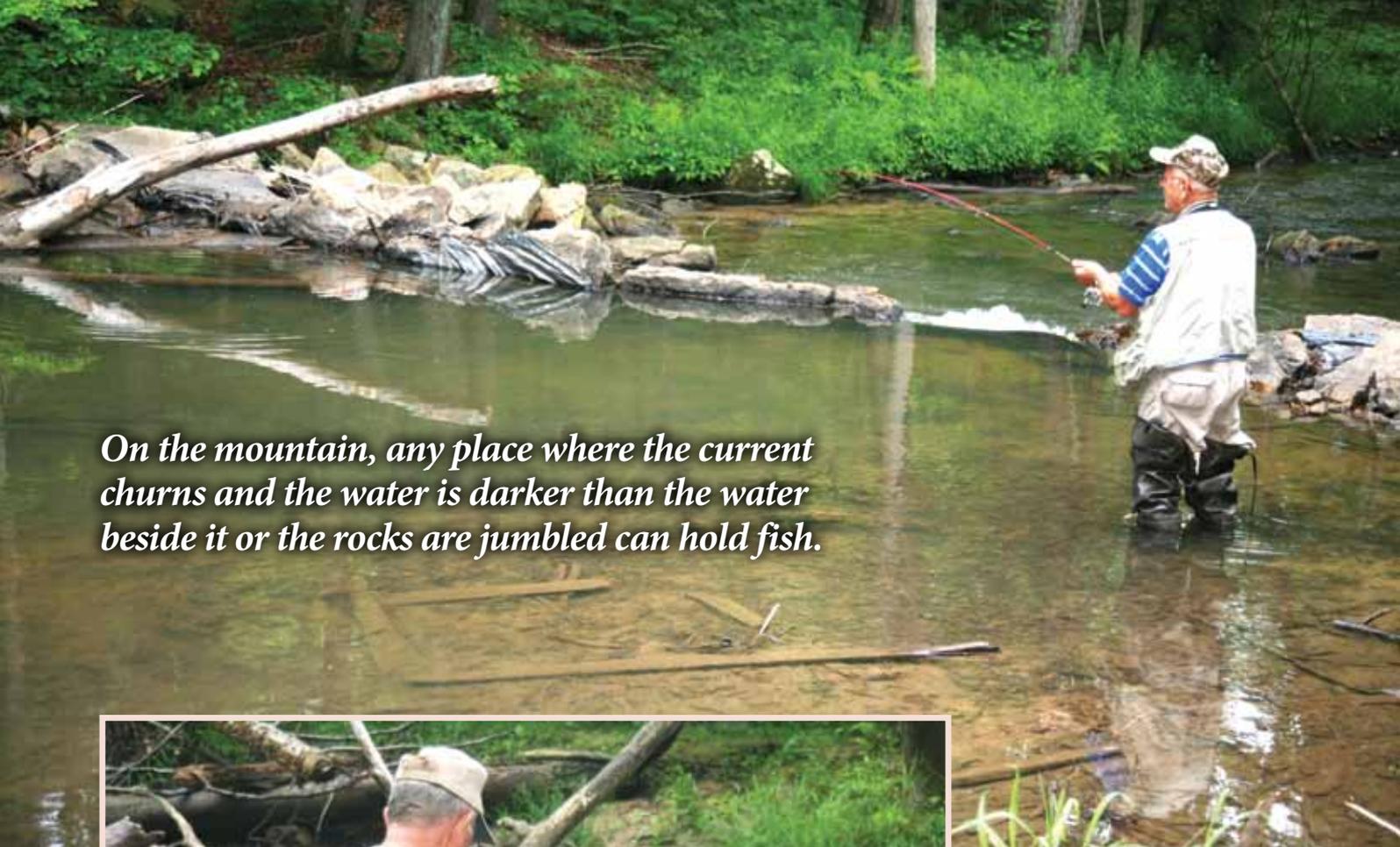
But a wise man—this time I’m sure it was me—also said, “To do things right, you have to know your stuff.” And, so it is with the unpretentious but somewhat detailed ways of fishing mountain streams with minnows.

Small and mid-sized mountain streams are full of fascinating cover, cover that changes dramatically every few feet. When two friends and I worked East Licking Creek in Tuscarora State Forest, the upper terrain across the Blacklog and Shade steeps contained glossy, green rocks and gushing pockets. We had to locate our minnows, like postage stamps, in the various runs of

dark water and deep holes. I enjoyed the challenge of maneuvering the bait. We were rewarded with another triumph—a solid strike.

The creek passed through flatter farmland when we came off the mountain. Here, the stream held longer riffles and slower runs and pools with less foam. Now, the casts were lengthened, the practice more like hitting a bull’s-eye at 50 paces. Drifts were longer, but the trout still came from anticipated places. In retrospect, the two faces of East Licking Creek are a microcosm of what many mountain streams comprise. Fishing them integrated all strategies.

The simplest of rules for fishing mountain streams with minnows is to work upstream when facing the narrow, high gradient spots and to work downstream, as much as possible, in wider, flatter parcels. The exception



*On the mountain, any place where the current churns and the water is darker than the water beside it or the rocks are jumbled can hold fish.*



*In the water above a small dam, look for the dark spot that will indicate a deeper hole.*

to the second scenario is when encountering a deep hole beside a sycamore, hemlock or a plunge pool beneath a small dam. Then, it's a good idea to reverse and work upstream.

Plunking and dunking is the way I'd describe my presentation through the higher ground. There's more drifting and swimming in the flatter water.

On the mountain, any place where the current churns and the water is darker than the water beside it or the rocks are jumbled can hold fish. In those small spots, an angler needs to be on his proverbial toes. This means locating the holes before the presentation and having your fingers at the ready as the bait moves through the water. Using a spinning outfit, it's best to keep

*A shoreline log jam can offer a terrific hole to directly drop the minnow from above.*



*When working upstream into a plunge pool, start by casting at the back of the pool and work your way to the lip.*



*The dark water beside a pile of jagged rocks is the perfect hideout for mountain trout.*

the line between your thumb and forefinger. One of my friends holds the line out a foot from the bail. When he feels the strike, he's pulling the line further out and the rod tip up at the same time, much like a fly rod set. He's very practiced at this, so it works for him.

I like to approach gushing holes from the back or downstream end of the current, gradually working up until the entire hole is covered. On some streams, like Stony Fork Creek in Tioga County, high, steep bedrock banks create extremely deep and languid pools. I work these from the back to the front to avoid disturbing the fish in the clear water.

In a lowland pool with wider water, the situation is a little different. Working downstream, I toss the minnow in well ahead of the expected lie and let it drift into the run or hole. I also work the inside edge of the turn before working the deeper, darker outside turn. Certainly, most of the hits occur in the latter location, but there are also many trout along the rim of a hole. I tend to guide the minnow bait with the rod tip when drifting through longer runs. In high-gradient holes surrounded by brush, there may not be as much time or space for guiding the rod, but be prepared for quick lifts.

When fishing these terrains, there are a few fine points I like to follow. The best minnow baits are collected directly from the watershed you're fishing. Dace are particularly good while on the western side of the state. Use a needle minnow rig that has a dual hook extending from the belly. Strike quickly to avoid a deep hookset.

As Robert Frost wrote, "The woods are lovely, dark and deep." This often translates to difficult vision. I like to have a spinning rod spooled with gold-colored line in the event of a shadowed jungle. Tie a 2- to 3-foot fluorocarbon leader to the gold, and the bright line is much easier to follow even in dabbled sunlight.

The faster the water, the more weight you need to sink the minnow quickly. I use tiny splitshots, but I don't create a tight string of pearls. Instead, I separate each shot by an inch or so. In this way, they're less likely to snag into a rocky crevice. I also use a small, black swivel to mollify annoying line twist. ☐



*If a pool below a rock drop is shallow, first work carefully from the shallow edge.*



*A log jam creates a deep pool that should be worked from all angles.*