



Satisfaction in a Different Opening Day Experience: The Trout Angler Count

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Opening day eve in southeastern Pennsylvania, and the forecast doesn't sound good with rain overnight and drizzle tomorrow and temperatures in the low 40s. It's been beautiful for weeks. Now, it's going to be miserable for the late March opener. That's a shame.

It's still dark as I rise, and the temperature is 40 degrees F, but at least it's not raining, or not that I can see through the windows. I eat a warm breakfast, dress for cold, damp weather, grab my gear and head for the creek. It is drizzling. I'm off to do an 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. angler count by walking 2.5 miles of a stocked stream through farm country and woodlots. This is part of a multi-year, statewide effort to determine the appropriateness of the preseason trout stocking rates based on opening weekend angler usage.



photos: Spring Ganthart

To my surprise, there are plenty of anglers. Everyone appears to be dressed appropriately, although gloves are lacking, and even last night's campers are now eating breakfast and looking happy.

It's 8:00 a.m., and trout are on immediately. Barely moving, I have already counted 25 anglers. I start downstream, attempting to dodge the multiflora rose and staying as close to the stream as possible. Trout lily leaves are in abundance, but I can't spot a flower. I find an isolated angler off the beaten path. After that, I'm on my own. I ease my way across a tributary and reach the next two stocking points about 0.5 miles downstream from my starting point.

There is a large contingent of anglers. A number have fish, and some are starting to look cold. I try to make minimal



Photos: Spring Ceanhart

There is a large contingent of anglers. A number have fish. I try to make minimal eye contact, so I can keep moving and get the quickest count. This is part of a multi-year, statewide effort to determine the appropriateness of the preseason trout stocking rates based on opening weekend angler usage.

eye contact, so I can keep moving and get the quickest count possible before people start leaving. I occasionally greet anglers and ask how they're doing. I apologetically squeeze closely behind some anglers beneath an iron bridge. Once downstream, 150 yards from the bridge, I'm around a bend and there are no others in sight. I have ¼ mile to go to the next stocking point, but I'm slowed by multiflora rose, which I skirt, returning intermittently to the stream to search for anglers. Finally, more appear.

The first anglers are a father and youngster combination, which is a nice sight. Next, a Schuylkill County angler and his teenage son recognize me. They are catching chubs, but just then the father catches a trout. Satisfaction shows. Farther down, there are three gentlemen standing in the creek so close together that I figure they're either long time friends or congregating for warmth. My angler count keeps rising. I'm impressed.

I leave this stocking point and head to the next. This stretch is beautiful with steep slopes, flowers and a quiet woodland. About 40 yards ahead of me I see a red fox jogging on the moss covered rocks along the water's edge. Surprisingly, this goes on for a few minutes. Eventually, the fox sprints up the steep slope and then disappears, leaving me to my own slippery climb. This sighting has made my day.

A few hundred yards later, I'm descending the slope. This time I'm going to the most isolated stocking point, which is by an old railroad bridge. I try not to become the fool on the slope overlooking the anglers. Thankfully, I avoid a slip on the damp logs and slick rocks. Among the spin anglers are two father and daughter bait fishing pairs. It is nice to see. One daughter, perhaps age 12, is receiving lessons. Another,

perhaps 13 years old, is unfortunately left to her own devices. I wish I could help, and I offer encouragement. Eight more anglers, and I'm off again, headed downstream through more woods and soft bottomland. Anglers occasionally appear including one standing next to beautiful habitat absorbed by a phone call.

I near my end point later than expected. It's a major stocking point, yet I see one final angler ahead. He's number 92. But what's this? It's a fly rod, the first of the day. Ninety-two anglers later, and I find a lone fly angler using Pheasant Tail Nymphs within a stocked segment of stream all to himself. He's from Bucks County, about 50 miles from home, and he has fished this same stretch on opening day with a fly rod for 14 years. I remark how lucky he is to have this spot to himself. As we converse, I learn that his fly rod is a retirement gift. He teaches me a variation on nymphing and convinces me by catching a trout every 3 to 5 minutes. All the fish are released. I wish him good luck and start my 2.5-mile walk back.

I now have time to speak with anglers along the way. Many have had success, but most of them look cold. An older gentleman and his equally seasoned friend are on their way back to the house. They've had a great time and "love it," referencing opening days. I recognize many faces from my downstream trek and spot some new faces, as anglers keep arriving. I'm awed with their resolve despite the weather. I look for littering but see none, which is encouraging to me and I'm sure the landowners.

Ten wood ducks flush ahead of me but turn to fly directly overhead. What a sight. It's been a good opener after all. ☐