

Serious Trout Fishing on the Allegheny

by Mike Bleech photos by the author

Every sport fish has its fans. Each and every one of these fans has reasons for their sport fish preferences. Then, there are a few fish that have a following that is not fully realized. Such is the case with big Brown Trout. Virtually every angler would be thrilled to catch a big Brown Trout. Though, few anglers claim to pursue them, probably, because the odds lean strongly toward failure. No one wants to look like a loser.

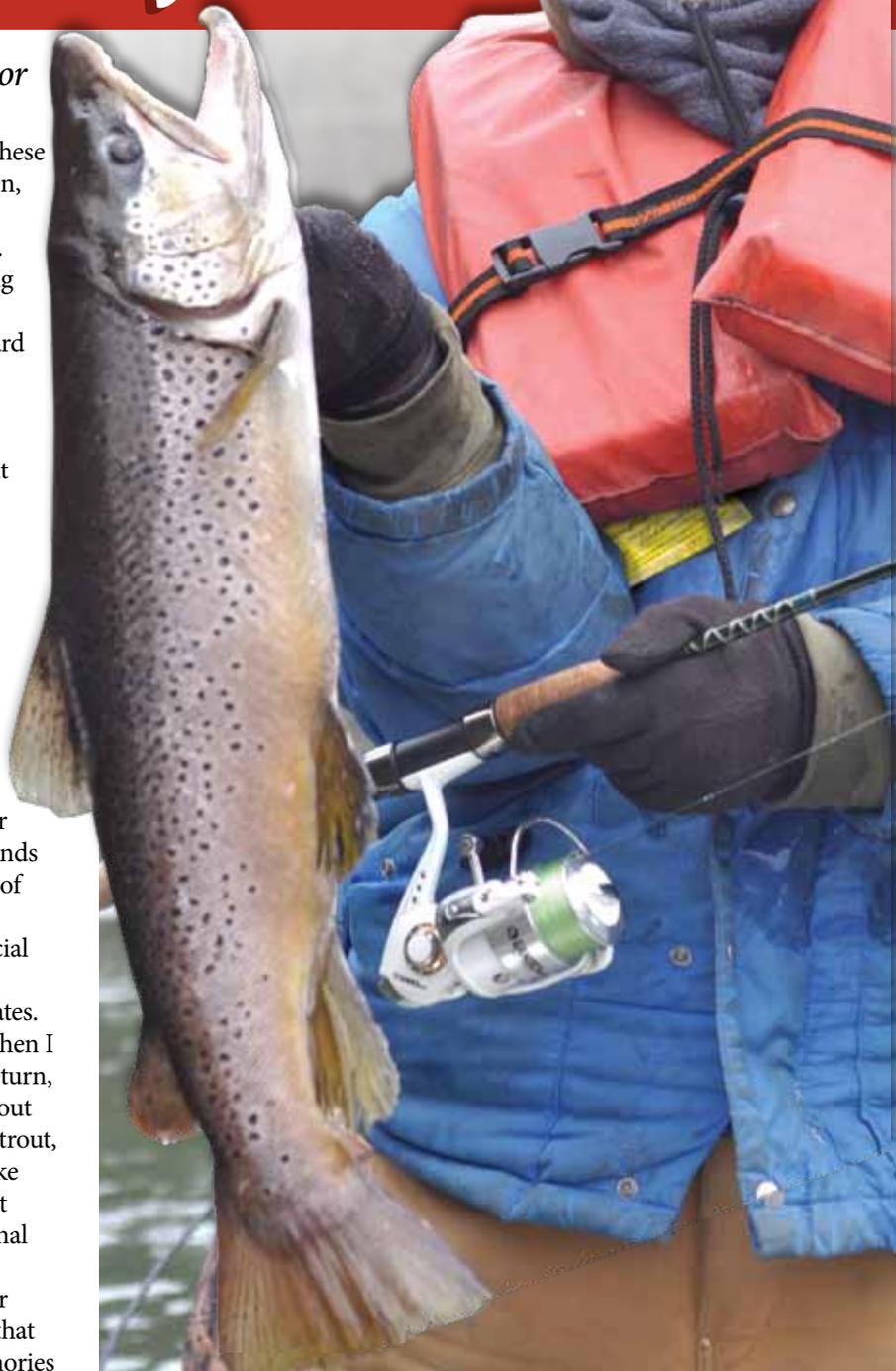
Fortunately, for anglers who long for big Brown Trout, the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) has developed several excellent Brown Trout fisheries where anglers have a good opportunity to catch big Brown Trout. One such location is the Allegheny River below Kinzua Dam.

Fishing tactics developed over several decades at the Kinzua Dam tailwaters can be used, in some cases with minor alterations, to catch big Brown Trout just about anywhere Brown Trout are available.

The immediate tailwaters of Kinzua Dam, from the outflow downstream along Dixon Island (the first large island below the dam), is the most popular area for trout fishing. A special regulations area extends the tailwaters downstream to Warren, to the mouth of Conewango Creek. Although trout can be caught in several places down at least to Tidioute, it is the special regulations area that stands out as one of the best fisheries for big trout in the Northeastern United States.

The Kinzua tailwaters was a bright star in 1971 when I returned home from the Army. Not long after my return, my long-time friend Bill Anderson put together a trout fishing trip for us at the tailwaters. I caught just one trout, a fat, 20-inch Brown Trout. At that time, it looked like a huge trout to a guy who had done most of his trout fishing in wild trout streams in the Allegheny National Forest, where a 9-inch trout was big.

Through the years, I have caught numerous larger trout from the Allegheny River, but the memory of that first big trout keeps it special. The most lasting memories come from adventures with good friends, not from measuring tapes.



Anglers regularly catch Brown Trout like this one at only a few waterways in Pennsylvania.



Most of the best trout fishing in the Allegheny River is in the channels along islands. These channels resemble trout water more than the larger pools.

Catching big trout from the Allegheny River is not a mystery. If there is any so-called secret, it is use big trout tactics to catch big trout. Of course, some very fine trout have been caught by anglers who were using tactics better suited to smaller trout. Now, though, we are looking into specialization.

This specialization goes so far as to separate big Brown Trout from big Rainbow Trout. If you take one of each, of approximately equal size and compare them, one thing you will notice is that the Brown Trout has a much larger mouth. Brown Trout are built to eat bigger meals, so we will be offering them bigger meals, even if it means fewer hits at the end of the day.

Start with the tactic that, through the years, has most likely accounted for more big Brown Trout from the Allegheny River than anything else—stringing minnows. This tactic has the advantage of fishing a real minnow like an artificial lure. Another advantage is that trout are seldom hooked as deep as with other bait fishing methods. The only nonstandard tool necessary is a bait needle, which is nothing more than a very long needle with a slot in the eye.

Tie a snap to the end of the line, insert the snap into the needle eye and run the needle into the mouth of a minnow and out the vent. Remove the needle and replace it with a treble hook. Pull the line gently, just enough to pull the snap and the hook eye into the minnow. At the same time, insert one point of the treble hook into the minnow between the vent and tail.

Sinker style and weight depends primarily on the current and depth. Wind may necessitate more weight for accurate casting. While fishing relatively shallow water alongside the islands, a medium to large splitshot should be adequate. Altering the weight in small increments is easy using a removable splitshot.



The hook jaw on this nice Brown Trout and its slender shape indicate that it has recently spawned, probably in one of the small tributary streams.

While fishing off the walls immediately below the dam was allowed, most anglers used barrel sinkers as heavy as $\frac{3}{4}$ ounce for casting into the turbulent water between the upper walls. Either a splitshot or a swivel is used to separate the sinker from the minnow.

If an angler were limited to one type of lure for big trout fishing in the Allegheny River, it would be stickbaits. As a general rule, use natural colors from late spring through late fall. Then, between those times in the cold water period, use bright or loud colors. Natural colors are black, blue or green on the back and upper sides, white on the belly and silver on the sides. Loud colors for big Brown Trout start with gold with a bright red back, which is a long-time standard. Chartreuse back with silver sides may be effective. Various “clown” color patterns are useful. These are brightly colored dots over various background colors such as white or yellow.

If you are serious about trying to catch big Brown Trout, stay away from small stickbaits. Stickbaits should be 4- to 6-inches long.

Vary your retrieve. Standard retrieve should not be steady reeling. Your retrieve should be reeling and pausing or sweeping the rod and pausing. ☐

