

Pine Creek Offers More Than Just Trout



by Tyler Frantz

photos by the author

The impressive Pine Creek Valley has gained notoriety as one of the top trout fishing destinations in Pennsylvania, and rightfully so. Winding through the expansive northern-tier mountains of Potter, Tioga and Lycoming counties, the picturesque Pine Creek boasts approximately 50 miles of stocked trout waters from Galetton to Waterville.

During the spring, it serves as a hotspot for fly anglers eager to take advantage of prime caddisfly, mayfly and stonefly hatches, bringing trophy Brown Trout and Rainbow Trout to the surface near Cedar Run, Slate Run and Bonnell Run.

With plenty of small watercraft access along Pine Creek Water Trail and the limitless biking and fishing opportunities provided by the Pine Creek Rail Trail, the

valley is popular among trout fishing enthusiasts who also enjoy camping, biking and kayaking.

But, by late summer, with water levels down and temperatures up, trout are forced to take refuge at the mouths of tributaries that pull cold water into Pine Creek from higher elevations. At this time, trout are most vulnerable to additional stress and should be left alone.

That doesn't mean the action is over, though. It just means anglers should shift gears to pursue other, lesser-publicized varieties of gamefish that can be found in Pine Creek.

Pine Creek offers more than just trout fishing opportunities. In fact, it is a good Smallmouth Bass fishery. Channel Catfish, Rock Bass and even Walleyes can be pulled from its depths during the warmwater fishing seasons.

It's simply a matter of adapting to seasonal changes in the stream structure, just as the fish do, to encounter productive fishing throughout the entire duration of the year.

Smallmouth Bass are disbursed throughout the entire creek but seem to be most abundant in the deeper, slower



Juvenile Smallmouth Bass are numerous and eagerly strike streamers drifted through riffles.

reaches below Waterville. In late summer, bass tend to lay in the riffles and pocket water where oxygenation is high.

Anglers have great success wet wading into the creek and dead-drifted flashy streamers, soft plastic creature-baits and live minnows through the current. A few summers ago, my brother floated a live crayfish through a rocky channel and landed a large bass while vacationers splashed nearby in the creek.

Rock Bass are found anywhere large boulders break up the underwater dimensions of the stream. This structural cover is essential to their survival, as a number of predators attempt to eat them on a daily basis, so these bass will often hang tight to the seams.

Try running nymphs or dangling a piece of a live grub or red worm off the rock ledges of these fragmented habitat areas. You will often be rewarded for your efforts with a vigorously fighting Rock Bass on the end of your line.

There is a surprising number of Channel Catfish that move through the creek during late summer as well. They are most active at night and respond well to cut baits, chicken livers and juicy nightcrawlers weighted and fished near the bottom.

Catfish have been pulled from holes near Ramsey's bridge area, and a friend of mine landed a 25-inch catfish a few miles upstream last year using a white inline spinner. While I wouldn't recommend this approach for specifically targeting catfish, it proved there are some catfish of respectable size eager to be caught.

Walleyes don't seem to exist in huge numbers in Pine Creek. Most stick to the largest, deepest pools and are only interested in the evening and early morning.

White twister tails, swimbaits and live minnows or nightcrawlers can be used

to coax fish out of deep-water haunts. Diving crankbaits in the 3- to 5-inch range can be effective too, as my father recently proved when he reeled in a 15½-inch Walleye on a slow retrieve.

The Pine Creek Valley offers some of the finest trout fishing in Pennsylvania. However, it shouldn't be overlooked during the non-traditional trout months

of the calendar. A number of equally satisfying target species exist within its scenic, flowing mountain waters. □



Walleyes hang in the deepest pools and can be tempted into hitting a diving crankbait on a slow retrieve.