

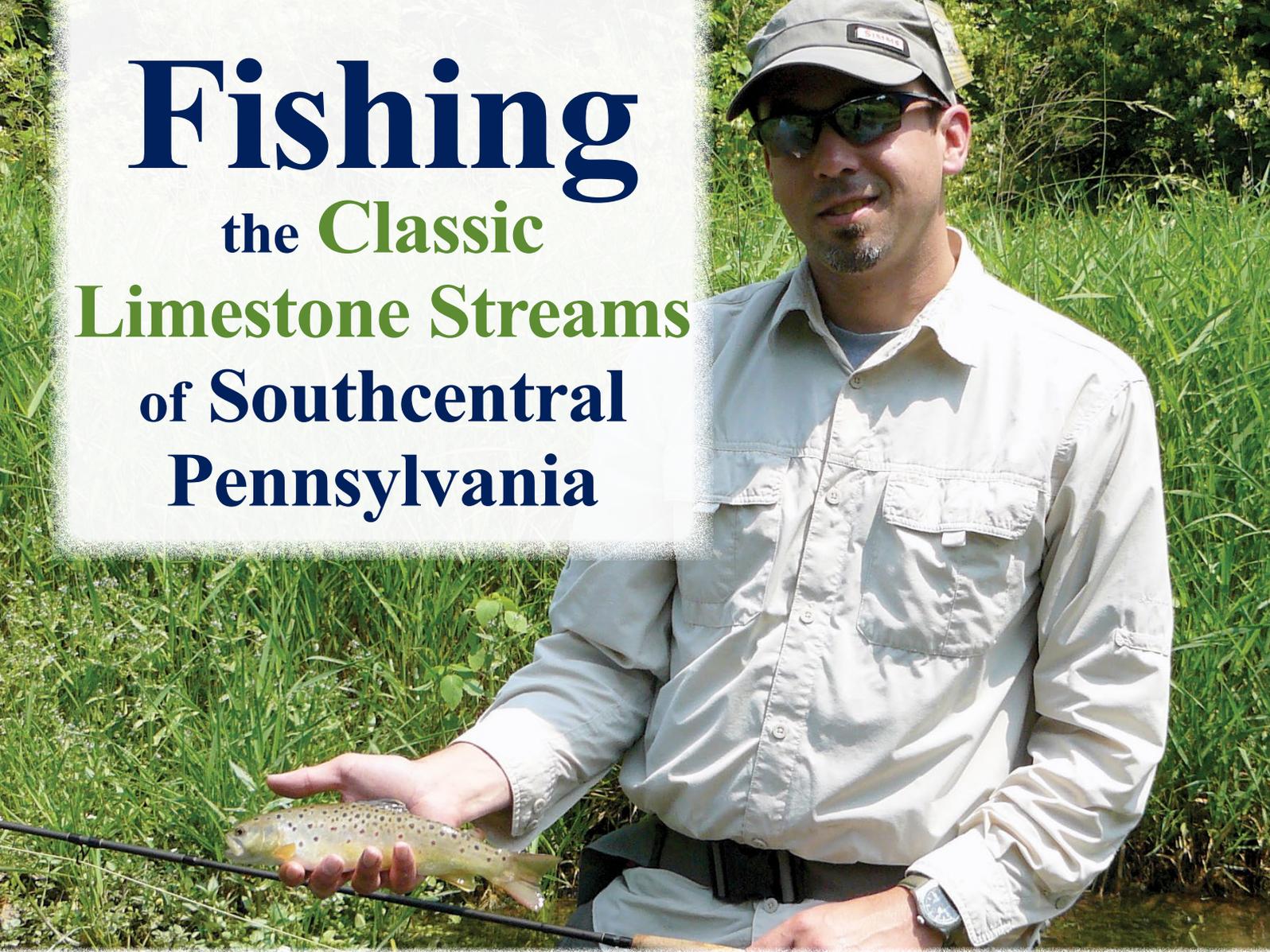
Fishing

the Classic

Limestone Streams

of Southcentral

Pennsylvania



by John Allen photos by the author

On a seasonably cool July morning in 2002, I found myself standing on the banks of Falling Spring Branch, Franklin County, for the very first time with my “combo” fly rod and a box of standard flies purchased from a local sporting goods store. I had been successful by my own standards with these flies on other streams, so I figured why can’t I do the same here. Three hours, 20 plus fly changes and 3 or 4 dozen missed trout later, I began to understand what I was up against. I spent that summer learning more about fly fishing than I ever thought possible. Fortunately, I was slated to go to college just a short drive away that fall, so I was going to have a good 4 years to figure this place out. Just when I thought I had things figured out, I decided to try Big Spring Creek, Cumberland County, followed by Letort Spring Run, only to find out that they presented their own unique challenges that required me to go back to the drawing board over and over again. Even now 15 years

later, it is safe to say that each visit to one of these streams is a new learning experience.

Falling Spring Branch

I like to think of Falling Spring Branch as a healthy mix between Letort Spring Run and Big Spring Creek. This stream is mostly wild Rainbow Trout with a good population of wild Brown Trout. The stream was brought to notoriety because of its famous hatches of sulphurs and tricos. Like Big Spring Creek, this stream saw a major decrease in quality over the years only for the stream to receive extensive habitat revitalization. This work has allowed the hatches to come back quite nicely as well as boost the fish populations.

The highlight of this stream is the upper 2.5 miles of Catch and Release Fly-Fishing Only water. It also features 1.02 miles of Delayed Harvest Artificial Lures Only water



An angler landing a Falling Spring Branch, Franklin County, Rainbow Trout.

that winds through downtown Chambersburg and always seems to have trout. The last stretch before running into the Conococheague Creek is governed under Stocked Trout Waters and receives several stockings each year.

Much of this stream runs through private lands and is available to the public for fishing. Fortunately, this stream features a lot of tall vegetation on stream banks, allowing anglers to fish for trout without being easily detected. On Falling Spring Branch, it's amazing how the smallest differences in the shape of a fly or the presentation can make such a huge difference between success and failure.

Big Spring Creek

Big Spring Creek was made famous in the 1930s by anglers who took trains from Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia to Newville in search of the giant wild Brook Trout that called this stream home. The Brook Trout population crashed in the 1970s, and it has taken valiant efforts from many different organizations to restore the Brook Trout population. Right now, the stream is a good mix of Rainbow Trout and Brook Trout with the rare Brown Trout mixed in.

The highlight of this stream is a 1.52 miles stretch regulated under Catch and Release Fly-Fishing Only. From the end of the special regulations until the stream enters the Conodoguinet Creek, the stream is a stocked trout water under Commonwealth Inland Waters regulations, receiving preseason and inseason stockings each year.

I have found that this stream differs greatly from Letort Spring Run, not just in species but also in how the fish act. In much of this stream, it seems that trout will allow you to stand fairly close while making casts.

I have found this to be a good introductory stream to someone who wants to target wild limestone trout since they are able to see the fish that they are targeting. Even though trout will let you stand nearby, getting fish to take your fly can be a much more daunting task. This is where the low, slow approach is again more favorable for enticing strikes.

The section below the famous "Ditch" has been the subject of many habitat revitalization projects over the last 10 plus years. This stretch used to be fairly void of trout until these efforts took place. Now, this stretch is every bit as populous as the "Ditch," probably even more.

Letort Spring Run

Letort Spring Run is the crown jewel for many fly anglers, a sort of mecca, if you will. Every fly angler in Pennsylvania needs to visit this stream at least once.

The stream is almost entirely wild Brown Trout with the rare wild Brook Trout and Rainbow Trout mixed in. The highlight of this stream is the upper 1.7 miles of the stream, just south of downtown Carlisle, which is regulated under Catch and Release Fly-Fishing Only regulations. This is the stretch that Charlie Fox and Vincent Mariano made famous through their writings in the 1950s and 1960s. Many of the flies that they developed from fishing on this stream are still used today.

Letort Spring Run is difficult because of its clear, flat water surrounded by very little cover for anglers to hide behind. Much of the stream bank is very marshy. When you step too close to edge, you most likely put every trout within 30 feet of you on notice. The second your fly touches the water, trout will be darting away from your position. In order to be successful on the Letort Spring Run, you need to take an extremely slow, low profile approach. Long, light leaders and long casts are a must. You need to keep false casts to an absolute minimum. Most anglers who find regular success on this stream will step back and watch the water for several minutes before even considering a cast, allowing them to spot various feeding fish and identify what fish are eating.

Overall, all three streams offer tremendous year-round fishing opportunities all within 35 miles of each other. Each one can be quite frustrating to an inexperienced angler, but you will find each stream as equally challenging as it is fun. Once you finally do land one of these weary trout, take a moment to soak it in and realize that you just caught one of the hardest trout in the state, if not the country. ☐

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