



# SLIPPERY ROCK CREEK

*by Ralph Scherder*

*photos by the author*

Several years ago, my friend Greg asked if I wanted to explore a stream he just discovered. He was on his way home from a Boy Scouts outing with his son, when he crossed over a stream that looked too good to pass up. They stopped and walked down to the first nice pool to fish. Within a few casts, Greg caught a 20-inch golden rainbow trout and several other trout. One week later, he returned to the same section and slammed the Smallmouth Bass. So, I agreed to meet him one afternoon in June.

The stream was Slippy Rock Creek, and the meeting place was Kennedy Mills off of Frew Mill Road, Lawrence County.

For 3 hours, Greg and I pool-hopped downstream, picking up fair numbers of bass and trout as we went along. I could not help wondering why I always overlooked “The Rock,” despite growing up only 20 minutes away.

Slippy Rock Creek begins near Hilliards, Butler County, and flows west-southwest for approximately 30 miles before emptying into Connoquenessing Creek near Ellwood City, Lawrence County. Located less than a 1 hour drive from Pittsburgh, the stream is a popular destination for paddlers. Although Slippy Rock Creek is wadable in many sections, road access is limited to a handful of bridges, and only a few sections closely follow the road. A canoe or kayak helps anglers reach more productive water away from the bridges while enjoying a peaceful float through scenic country.

Perhaps the most scenic water flows through McConnells Mill State Park. Roughly 140,000 years ago, a large glacial



*Built in 1874, the McConnell's Mill Covered Bridge is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.*

lake burst, causing water that previously flowed in a northern direction to begin flowing southward. The sheer volume of water carved out what is known today as the Slippery Rock Creek Gorge, a National Natural Landmark. Here, you will find Class II and III rapids and the opportunity for a quality whitewater adventure.

Keep in mind that this is rugged country and dangerous water. The stream is named Slippery Rock Creek for a reason, and wading can be treacherous. Also, the large rocks dotting the stream's course create tricky currents and undertows that should not be taken for granted by even the most experienced paddlers. Every year or two, it seems, somebody underestimates the power of the water and pays the ultimate price.

Three sections of Slippery Rock Creek are stocked with trout. Section 2 and Section 3, which comprises the 15-mile section from Slippery Rock Road just south of the town of Slippery Rock downstream to the lower property line at Heinz Camp, receive one preseason stocking and two inseason stockings. Section 4 begins from Heinz Camp property downstream to 0.25 mile below SR 2022 Bridge. This 0.5 mile section is deemed Catch and Release Fly-Fishing Only and receives one preseason and one inseason stocking of trout.

Most years, Slippery Rock Creek is only marginal trout water during the summer months. By late-June, temperatures reach 70-degrees F and trout seek out the cooler tributaries and deeper holes found throughout the gorge.

Of all the tributaries that flow into Slippery Rock Creek, Hell Run is the most interesting, because it is one of only two streams in Lawrence County where natural reproduction has been documented. In fact, Hell Run carries a Class A Waters designation with a good population of wild Brown Trout. Be forewarned, however, that accessing this isolated little gem is not for the faint of heart. You must either hike up from the bridge on Mountville Road or come in from the top using trails found near the parking area on Shaffer Road. Before attempting it, be in good physical condition and take a friend, because it is challenging, canyon-like terrain.

Slippery Rock Creek is best known as a Smallmouth Bass fishery. Bass ranging from 9- to 16-inches, sometimes larger, are common.



*A Smallmouth Bass caught on a chartreuse Deceiver fly pattern.*

Although the gentler gradient upstream and downstream from the gorge makes wading safer, I prefer fishing from a canoe or kayak, because it allows me to cover more water. Much of the stream above the gorge consists of long stretches of knee- and waist-deep water between large pools. Anywhere you find structure, though, you will find fish. When I come to a good stretch, I paddle to shore and get out, so I can work it over. A good float trip can be had by launching at one of the public access points on Studebaker Road or Stoughton Road and pulling out at the bridge on Old Butler Road near Rose Point Park.

Downstream from the gorge, Slippery Rock Creek widens considerably, reaching 80- to 100-feet in most places. There is lots of good bass fishing in this section, as well as potential for Muskellunge, Walleye and other warmwater species. The lower sections truly are a mixed-bag fishing experience.

Slippery Rock Creek is home to a handful of mayfly hatches, and some of these hatches are quite good. In the spring, Quill Gordons, Blue-Winged Olives and Light Cahills along with a mix of caddis can be found. August marks the beginning of the White Fly hatch, which provides a unique opportunity to catch Smallmouth Bass on dry flies.

The only drawback to Slippery Rock Creek is that it flows through a large amount of agricultural land. The creek muddies quickly after a rain and takes a long time to clear. Track the weather leading up to your trip to ensure good fishing conditions. When you arrive, enjoy the natural beauty that Slippery Rock Creek has to offer. ☐