



LOOKING OVER THE RIMROCK AND DOWN INTO A CANYON LINED WITH SAGEBRUSH AND JUNIPERS I CAN SEE THE WILLOWS AND PONDEROSAS HIDING A DIMINUTIVE, MOUNTAIN-FED CREEK. FAINT GAME TRAILS TRAVERSING THE STEEP SLOPES OFFER THE ONLY PRACTICAL ROUTES OF DECENT. "JUST AS WELL," I THINK TO MYSELF, "DIFFICULT ACCESS KEEPS THIS WATER LIMITED TO THE FANATICAL FEW TO DISCOVER THE REWARDS OF THIS HIDDEN JEWEL."

SECRET CREEKS

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A BEAUTIFUL SUNSET
ENDS A PERFECT DAY ON
AN EASTERN OREGON
SECRET CREEK. THE CREEK
FLOWS ALONG CATTLE
GRAZING FIELDS, BUT THE
WATERS ARE PROTECTED BY
FENCING WELL AWAY FROM
THE RIPARIAN ZONE. THIS
WATER IS HOME TO LARGER
MIGRATORY REDBANDS
THAT SWIM UPSTREAM
SEASONALLY.

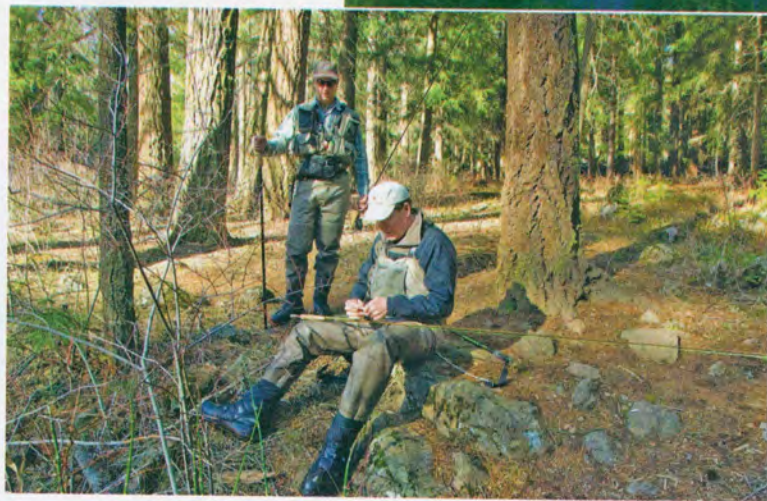
I descend, slip-sliding along the game trail, catapulting rocks and dirt below with clumsily agility, attempting to stay upright on the steep incline. This game trail is better suited to small hooves and four legs, not fly anglers in waders and studded boots. Finally reaching the canyon floor, I pull out a reel and rod tube from the pack and tighten a pewter colored prewar 3-1/8" Hardy Perfect onto a newer, but still old, Winston IM6. This is the very rod on which I caught my first western trout, and since then, it has bowed to countless numbers of trout in the northern and southern hemispheres. I loop on a new 5X, 8-foot leader. The fish in this canyon are not leader shy. The shorter leader is about the right length and keeps the rigging light enough to make

subtle, tight loop presentations under the streamside vegetation. The Purple Haze is the fly for tonight. The lavender cast of the abdomen and grizzly wrapped parachute create just the right illusion for the evening bite. Secret creek fish are not picky, but tying on a confidence fly keeps me walking and fishing, rather than changing flies in a perpetual aquatic entomology experiment.

I keep the secret creek fly box simple. Mine is a small box that can fit into a pocket and holds enough flies for the evening – in this case it is a small Wheatley box, with the classic windowed compartments. Flies need not be sophisticated nor do anglers need much variety. Go-to dry flies for these creeks

SEARCHING THE POOL
FOR AN ACTIVE FISH.

THIS POOL IS ON A
WELL-KNOWN RIVER, BUT
THIS UPPER STRETCH
IS HARD TO FIND AND
EQUALLY DIFFICULT
TO REACH AMONGST
A LABYRINTH OF
UNMAINTAINED FOREST
SERVICE ROADS.



TAKING A BREAK IN A FOREST OF
PONDEROSAS TO PREPARE, BEFORE HIKING
TO A DOWNSTREAM "SECRET" SPOT.

include the ubiquitous Parachute Adams, Elk Hair Caddis and its variations, and the Purple Haze. I also include a few CDC emergers. They are always difficult to see in the evening hours but I've become accustomed to just set the hook when there is a nearby splash. More often than not, the post-splash hookset is all that is needed to make a connection to a Redband trout.

After rigging up, I hike downstream along another faint animal track leading through ponderosas and some large boulders. These boulders would have made fun climbing projects during my younger, rock climbing days. The geological ruggedness of this place impresses me and I wonder just how many millennia it took for the secret creek to carve out this 300 foot gorge. I walk over to the water and observe a holding pool. This mountain-fed waterway always has a frosty feel. Even on sultry August evenings there is a refreshing crispness in the air. Native Redbands, some surprisingly large for such smaller water, take refuge in the shadows of the trees and overhanging brush.

All of us have secret places, spots on a map, we hold dear and only share with a few trusted friends. Sometimes these places are forgotten and remote and take a dedication of time and travel to reach. Other secret creeks are hidden in plain sight. There is a commonality in each of these places – clean water, lack of people, and an abundance of large, but often small fish.

Over the decades I have discovered and accumulated more creeks than I have lost due to so called progress. I have been fortunate. Expanding suburbia can transform the edges of a city's sage land into a high desert golf course or gated development overnight. A seasonal rivulet in the coast range, home to native coastal cutthroats, can easily become part of someone's back yard. These types of losses can remind us of the importance of free access to these precious natural resources.

I am not so naïve to think secret creeks are my secret alone. I have never fished or discovered any water that wasn't already explored by another angler, no matter how remote. Perhaps the other angler was here only the week before, or maybe it was last year. All the same, we all are stewards of the waters and the surrounding lands. When on a creek that is nearer to population centers I am extra vigilant to erase evidence of my presence by minimizing my footprint and always police the area for any signs of human contact before I leave.

I also spend a lot of time on large, well-populated waters. Trout on unpressured waters behave and act differently than fish on pressured waters. There is a certain rhythm amongst the fish in secret creeks. They can be persistent risers, unperturbed by intrusions. I've seen this so many times going back to my early fly fishing days on creeks that empty into Cape Cod Bay. The magic hour begins as the daylight fades into dusk, and the trout of secret creeks are totally uninhibited, constantly rising like some wind-up toy. A flubbed cast doesn't stop the rises, the trout stay down for a minute or two, and then the perpetual up and down starts again, and nearby splashes signal the slashes of trout.

The Black Drake (*Sipplonurus occidentalis*) hatch is uncommon in the West and limited to a few isolated areas such as the Klamath Basin in Oregon. There are weeks during the month of June when trout only look up for Black Drake spinners and day-long hatches are almost a sure thing. Some Black Drake hatch waters are well known, and then there are lesser known hatches, on out of the way waters, known only to local anglers. A few overlooked and forgotten waters also host Black Drake activity but these are frequently behind fences unknown to even the landowner or rancher.



A LOW SUN ON THE HORIZON SIGNALS THAT IT IS TIME TO WALK TO A FAVORITE RUN ALONG THIS DIMINUTIVE SECRET CREEK.

RELEASING A REDBAND ON A CREEK ALONG THE EASTERN SLOPE OF THE CASCADES.



Black Drakes can keep trout rising all day long. One memorable experience came during a rare high-water year. Many of the hot spots on this secret creek became inaccessible and impossible to fish. A fish on the opposite bank was one of those persistent risers, and was completely irresistible to this fly angler. Because of the cresting river waters, the dry fly drift would last no more than two seconds before the Black Drake spinner imitation was violently pulled into the main current. I'd cast and put the fly right on the money, only to watch the fly get ripped into the rapid main current. I cast again and again with the same result. I had drifts, albeit short, into the strike zone.....all to no avail. During these attempts, the trout kept rising, never alarmed by constant casts to the feed zone. I must have cast no less than 50 times into the same spot, with only micro differences in the drift of the fly. Finally, there was a take that resulted in a Redband, one that was well above the average for this piece of water. Never before had I appreciated the challenge of the Redband as much as this.

What is it about small waters, especially headwaters, where all the trout are so brilliantly painted? The native, wild Redband trout of the Oregon desert sport golden yellow edges and cheeks of rose deepening to crimson-striped sides. The local planted brook trout are just as vivid and quite garish in their October spawning colors.

While I hold near and dear many of my secret creek fishing waters, one fishing experience occurred on a creek that might not be considered secret. This was one of those 'hidden in plain sight' secret spots located at an infrequently visited headwaters. I was fishing a bank heavily lined with lodgepole pine, making my way downriver in-between rapids, climbing over downed tree after downed tree. I soon came to a large pool

more expansive than any of the small plunge pools. I walked around the water's perimeter to a streamside meadow and picked a bowl of huckleberries for the night's dessert. It was then I saw it, a vision more akin to a bonefish flat than a trout stream. Two fish larger than average cruising along the bank in unison. I put down the container of berries, took off my pack and readied the rod.

The two fish skimmed along the bottom of the pool seemingly picking their way towards me. I kept still and distantly watched their behavior for several minutes. They were obviously looking down, occasionally tilted head-down and tail-up, ever so slowly finning towards me. I glanced at my fly box and pulled out a beadhead Pheasant Tail, quickly tying this on while I watched the moving fish. I held the rod in the ready position with my casting hand and the nymph between my thumb and forefinger. I knelt down and crawled closer to the bank, watching the fish from behind the streamside grass. It only took a single false cast and the fly landed gently a couple of feet in front of the pair's path. Waiting until the fish were a foot away, I made a minute strip just to twitch the fly. Instantly, both fish rushed in and tilted towards the fly. I saw a white mouth and subconsciously made a long strip feeling the pressure as the line straightened on the surface of the pool.

There were no visible snags in the clear green pool, so I relaxed during the ensuing fight, eventually landing what turned out to be a dazzling rainbow just shy of 20 inches. Could this be a resident fish? Or perhaps a rainbow migrating up from a connected lake? I've never repeated this feat again, but it remains one of my pinnacle fly fishing moments. After releasing the fish, I sat and just thought of how special the secret places can be.