

Fly Fishing Virginia

A No Nonsense Guide to Top Waters

Beau Beasley

Foreword by King Montgomery



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Photo by King Montgomery



Photo by Beau Beasley



Photo by Beau Beasley

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Photo by Eric Evans.

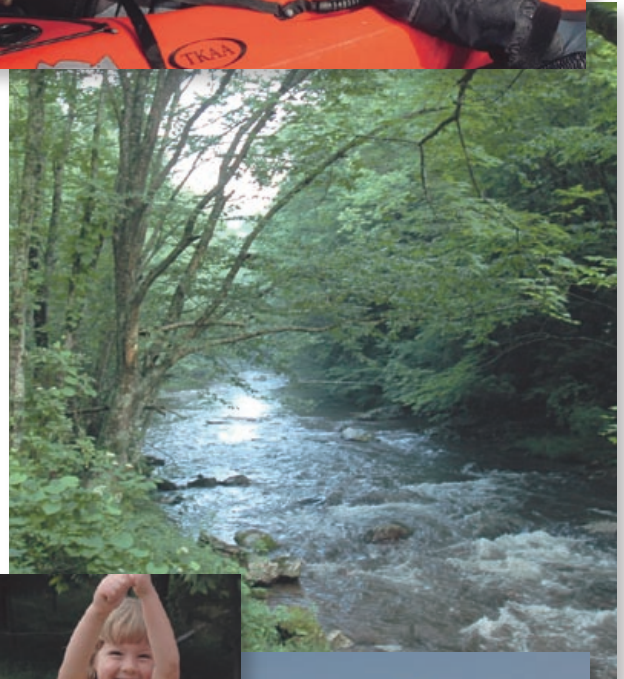


Photo by Beau Bastky.



Photo by Beau Bastky.



Photo by Chris Neusome.

Virginia Specialty Flies— Trout, Bass, and Saltwater



Bruce's Little Bow



Coburn's Cress Bug



Coburn's Inchworm



Dover's Peach Fly



Dusty's Deviant



Finn's Golden Retriever



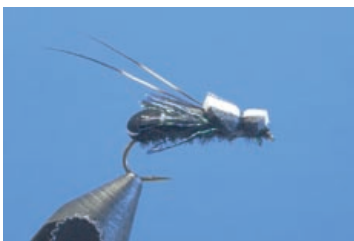
Gelso's Little Black Stonefly



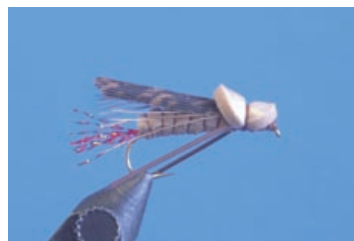
Murray's Mr. Rapidan



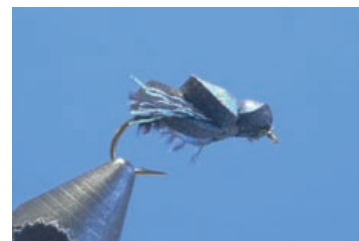
Steeves' Attract Ant



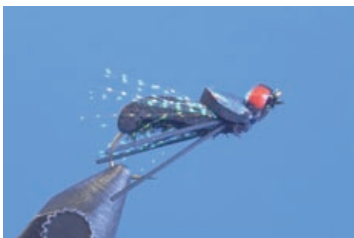
Steeves' Bark Beetle



Steeves' Crystal Butt Hopper



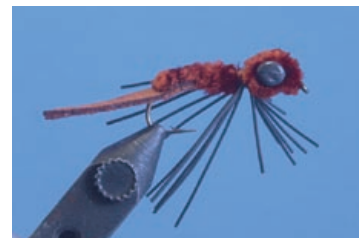
Steeves' Disc O' Beetle



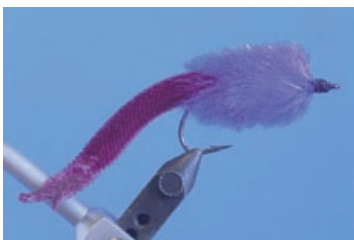
Steeves' UFO



Chocklett's Disc Slider



Claw-Dad



Cramer's Jail Bait Minnow



Hickey's Condor (Orange)



Kreelex



Murray's Lead Eye Hellgrammite



Murray's Marauder



Patuxent Special



Super Patuxent Special



Trow's Minnow



Walt's Popper



Walt's Slider



Chocklett's Gummy Minnow



CK Baitfish



DuBiel's Finesse Fly



DuBiel's Lil'hadden



DuBiel's Red-Ducer



Russell's Mussel



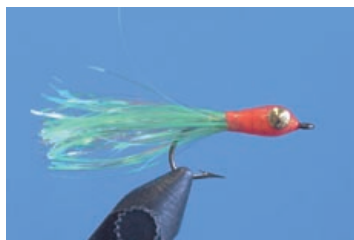
Tommy's Crease Fly



Tommy's Eel Fly



Tommy's Torpedo (Chartreuse)



Tommy's Flash Torpedo (Orange)



Walt's Saltwater Popper



- 1 Bridge
- 2 Mossy Creek Presbyterian Church Parking Lot
- 3 Lower Parking Area
- 4 Fence Crossing

Mossy Creek



Mossy Creek

Outdoor writer Dan Genest once described Mossy Creek to me as “an enigma meandering through a meadow”—and to date, his is the best description I’ve ever heard of this water. Mossy, as it is lovingly referred to by fly anglers in the Old Dominion, is arguably the most famous trout stream in Virginia, and with good reason. Anglers regularly catch trout in the 20-inch range here, as well as fish that exceed six pounds.

About a three-hour drive from the nation’s capital, Mossy Creek runs through the picturesque Shenandoah Valley, what was once the heart of the Confederacy during the Civil War. Conveniently accessible from Interstate 81 near the hamlet of Bridgewater, Mossy sees visitors from around the country—and, in fact, the globe. Upon seeing Mossy for the first time, one might wonder why anyone would travel hundreds or even thousands of miles to fish here, in what amounts to an ordinary-looking spring creek. The answer is quite simple, really: Mossy’s monster trout give new meaning to the term “selective.” If anglers can make it here, they can make it almost anywhere.

Types of Fish

The river is famous for its big browns.

Known Hatches

The hatches on Mossy are consistent with what you would expect to find in most mountain streams. They include Blue Wing Olives, Winter Stoneflies, Blue Quills, Hendricksons, March Browns, Little Yellow Stoneflies, Sulfurs, Quill Gordons, Caddis, Cahills, and a host of terrestrials. This stream can also have a huge trico and midge hatch.

Equipment to Use

Rods: 3-8 weight, 7-9 feet in length.

Reels: Standard mechanical.

Lines: Weight-forward floating matched to rod. Use of the occasional sink tip is also an option.

Leaders: 2X-7X, 9-12 feet in length. The wide range is warranted due to the varying sizes of trout and the wide range of tactics employed on this beautiful but difficult stream.

Wading: Hip waders are fine, but anglers may not enter the river at any time.

Continued



Lefty Kreh releases a nice rainbow trout while friend Billy Kingsley looks on. Photo by King Montgomery.



Virginia's most famous trout stream (and perhaps its toughest), Mossy Creek, draws anglers from across the Mid-Atlantic. Photo by Beau Beasley.

The headwaters of Mossy Creek begin on Mount Solon, from which the river zigzags erratically like a drunken sailor across farmers' fields and private lands for nearly seven miles before it empties into the North River. Although Mossy flows through both Rockingham and Augusta counties, it's the three mile stretch of fly-fishing-only water in Augusta County that draws the attention of most fly anglers. This Special Regulation Trophy Trout Stream is surrounded by privately owned land, and if not for the consideration of the landowners, this jewel of the Commonwealth would remain out of reach of most anglers.

Fishing Mossy Creek is not for the weak. Although there are few trees to grab your fly, there is also little room for mistakes here. Drag-free drifts and delicate presentations are the order of the day. The funny thing is, it's also the place for plopping large leggy-type flies and trolling six-inch streamers along undercut banks and near heavy vegetation. Anglers can use a wide variety of fishing techniques on Mossy and the key to success is patience and experience. Although you will be tempted to fish beneath the bridge near the parking area, these trout have seen more fly anglers than you have, so move on either above the bridge or below. The barbed wire fencing looks menacing, but new wooden fence crossings were added in 2005, making trips in and out of the creek much easier and safer.

Fly anglers owe much to the efforts of conservationists—particularly Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries biologist Larry Mohn and Shenandoah Valley Trout Unlimited member Urbie Nash—who convinced local landowners to fence out their cattle in exchange for state stocking of the stream. These tireless individuals also built up Mossy with riparian grasses and stream bank structure. The combined efforts of private landowners, state officials, and local Trout Unlimited chapters and members have made Mossy Creek the envy of trout anglers across the Mid-Atlantic region.



Colby Trow with a hard-won Mossy Creek brown trout.
Photo by Brian Trow.

Flies to Use

Dries: Adams #14-20, Braided Butt Damsel #10-12, BWO #14-20, Dusty's Deviant #12-16, Elk Hair Caddis #14-20, Flying Ant #10-18, Gelso's Little Black Stonefly #16-20, Lt. Cahill #14-20, Little Yellow Sally #14-20, March Brown #10-14, Murray's Mr. Rapidan #14-20, Pale Morning Dun #14-20, Quill Gordon #12-22, Stimulator #12-20, Steeves' Attract Ant #16-20, Steeves' Bark Beetle #16-20, Steeves' Crystal Butt Cricket #8-10, Steeves' Disc O' Beetle #14, Steeves' UFO #10.

Nymphs & Streamers: BH Goldilox #6-10, BH Hare's Ear #14-20, BH Prince Nymph #14-20, Bruce's Little Bow #6, Coburn's Cress Bug #14-20, Coburn's Inchworm #12-14, Egg #6-20, Finn's Golden Retriever #6-10, Green Weenie #14-16, Matuka #4-10, Mickey Finn #6-10, MC2 Crayfish #4-6, Muddler Minnow #6-10, Murray's Marauder #6-10, Pheasant Tail #14-20, River Witch #6, Scud #10-18, Sculpin #4-8, Woolly Bugger #6-10.

Keep in mind that the larger fish will often hit patterns much larger than you would normally consider for trout. With that in mind, don't be afraid to throw large streamers near undercut banks. These additional patterns would include Cramer's Jail Bait, Kraft's Claw-Dad and Kreelex as well as Trow's Minnow, Tommy's Eel Fly, and assorted deer hair bass bugs in sizes #1/0-2.

When to Fish

You'll never find a bad time to fish Mossy Creek. The stream is spring fed, so most of the time the water stays at about 56-60 degrees. The water can be low in the summer—but this doesn't keep the fish from biting. Keep in mind that if you want to focus on the larger trout, you'll need to use tactics and flies more akin to catching smallies than trout.

Seasons & Limits

Mossy Creek is a fly-fishing-only stream. Anglers may keep one fish over 18 inches. If you do, however, I personally believe that you should be summarily shot! You will need a special permit from the landowners and VDGI to fish the public-access section of Mossy Creek. Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to VDGI, Verona Office, P.O. Box 996, Verona, VA 24482. The permit, good for a year, is free.

Nearby Fly Fishing

Keep in mind this stream also has private water; several guides have access to those private sections on Mossy. You may do well to hire a guide for one day and fish the public section the next. Other nearby fishing opportunities include the St. Mary's, the South River, and other portions of the Shenandoah National Park.

Accommodations & Services

Bridgewater is near Mossy Creek. Anglers will find more dining and lodging options in Harrisonburg, home to James Madison University (JMU). Here you'll also find two great fly shops, Blue Ridge Angler and Mossy Creek Fly Fishing.

Rating

As far as big trout go, it doesn't get any better than Mossy. When you consider that this creek is completely on private land donated for public use, Mossy Creek handily rates a 10.