

Notes, News & Reviews



PHOTO BY DON VACHINI

Burney Creek, CA

By Don Vachini

On a late October morning, Burney Creek's lower courses still maintained substantial volume, flowing icy cold beneath a coniferous canopy. Fittingly, a forceful tug-of-war with a rosy-hued, 2-pound rainbow highlighted my rewarding four-trout session, and I was pleasantly alone!

Often overshadowed by the Inter-mountain Area's more famous destinations—Hat Creek, Baum Lake, and Pit River—Burney certainly remains a worthwhile choice for both solitude and trout. According to Steve Vaughn, owner of Vaughn's Sporting Goods in Burney, (530) 335-2381, nearby Mount Lassen's volcanic influence enhances the dynamics on the lower sections of this eastern Shasta County creek. Snowmelt percolates through igneous filters, then travels in underground lava-tube aquifers to bubble through basaltic fissures, not only providing steady, season-long flows, but virtually doubling the volume on Burney's lower 4-mile-long section.

Leached minerals help generate prodigious weed growth, which in turn harbors prolific insect and crustacean populations—a healthy formula for producing weighty trout.

Throughout its 18-mile course, beginning on 6,804-foot Clover Mountain and ending at Lake Britton, this stream contains self-sustaining populations of rainbow, brook, and brown trout. However, it also benefits greatly from timely California De-

partment of Fish and Game plants, receiving 15,000 rainbows and 5,000 brookies, mostly between 0.75 and 1.5 pounds, from April through the mid-November closure. The stockers are heavily concentrated along the short stretch coursing through McArthur-Burney Falls State Park above the falls.

Expect plenty of summer company from hordes of gear anglers, usually within 100 yards on either side of the footbridge where the trout are regularly

deposited. However, many surviving trout fin well upstream on the lightly pressured, gently cascading, 2-mile-long beat approaching Big Springs. Adjusting to the bountiful insect bonanza and water conditions, they rapidly take on the tendencies of wild fish.

Here, with feisty natives more prevalent, wading allows for a more efficient presentation when stealthily plying the edges of stringy weedbeds; insects cling, and trout learn to pick



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them off readily. Caddisfly, stonefly, and *Callibaetis* mayfly attractor patterns are highly effective. There's no need for lengthy casts, just short-line presentations through the drift, then up-current retrievals.

The 1.5-mile section of the creek from below its namesake falls to Lake Britton has artificial-lure, barbless-hook regulations, with a 14-inch minimum size for kept fish and a two-fish limit. Robust, wild browns prevail here, most residing in the deep, swirling pool at the falls' base, along with a small scattering of brookies and 'bows.

The 129-foot, cascading waterfall is mesmerizing (and a huge tourist attraction), but anglers need to maintain their focus. A wading staff helps negotiate the treacherous currents and slick rocks, and Vaughn recommends drifting a size-8 or -10 October Caddis with a size-14 Copper John, Pheasant Tail, or Bird's Nest dropper along the shelf line where water funnels from the huge pool. Other effective dry flies include size-14 through -18 Little Yellow Stones, Sparkle BWOs, and E/C Caddises, while additional nymph selections include caddisfly pupa patterns, various flashback nymphs, and mayfly nymphs in sizes 12 through 16.

A floating line, 9-foot leader, and 3X tippet will suffice for the 11- to 13-inch planters, but you'll need lengthier leaders and 4X or 5X tippets to handle the more challenging, vigorously battling natives below the falls. An 8- or 9-foot rod is a good match for either setup.

Food and lodging are available in the town of Burney. From downtown, continue driving north on California Highway 299 to the California Highway 89 intersection. Follow Highway 89 west for approximately 4 miles, turning left onto Clark Creek Road. Travel 1.2 miles to a marked parking turnout where a trail connects to creek access.

Trout

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