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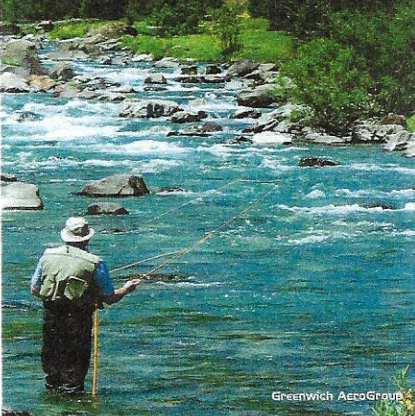
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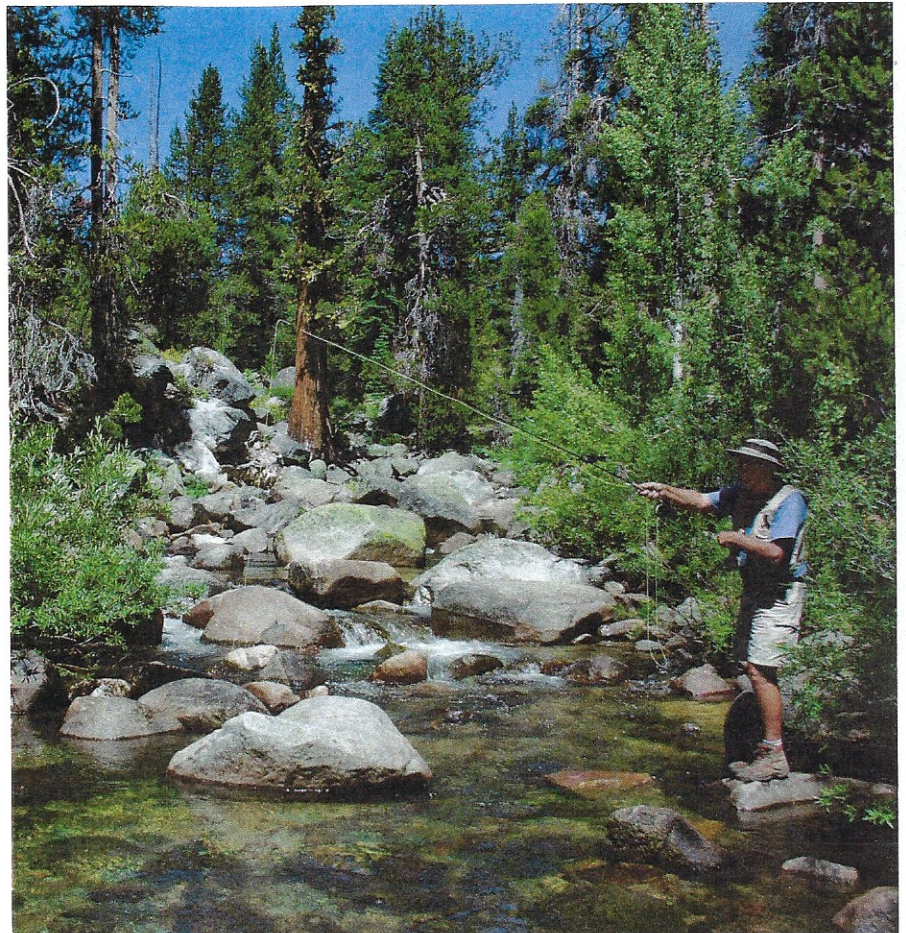


PHOTO BY DON VACHINI

Yosemite Creek, CA

By Don Vachini

Although wildflower-filled meadows, spectacular waterfalls, and mind-boggling vistas of the majestic Sierra Nevada make Yosemite National Park extremely popular among hikers, climbers, and geology lovers, it's not particularly noteworthy as an angling destination. And, thanks to the park's more than 4 million visitors annually, there are very few waters where anglers can find solitude and trout.

One pleasant exception is little-known Yosemite Creek, a lovely, 12-mile-long ribbon of water emanating from the Grant Lakes, which sit at an elevation of more than 9,000 feet in the park's backcountry. Gathering additional flows, it descends southward while dropping nearly 2,400 feet through a forested corridor and then falls from a sheer granitic precipice to create Yosemite Falls before it meets the Merced River.

Though no trout have been planted in the park since the mid-1970s, this stream is blessed with adequate spawning habitat, cold yearly flows, and suitable food forms. For more than three decades, it has continued to maintain healthy, self-sustaining, and vibrant populations of brook and rainbow trout.

To find the creek, and the good fishing, follow State Route 120 8 miles past the Big Oak Flat Entrance, then turn left onto Tioga Road. Continue approximately 18 miles to the signed creek crossing, where a picnic area and the Ten Lakes trailhead parking lot are located. Although this popular pathway follows the creek both up- and downstream from the roadway, I prefer to hike the sketchy trail downstream along the east side of the creek, concentrating my efforts along this 2-mile "way" that leads to Yosemite Creek Campground.

Throughout the creek's entire length, there is plenty of variety, with plunge pools, pockets, swirling eddies, and well-defined seams, all of them hiding feisty native fish. While the upper sections above SR 120 offer a more sedate gradient

with deeper pools and glides, flows below the highway cascade more rapidly, tumbling loudly as they grind over granite. Here, the coniferous canopy keeps temperatures cooler, and there's plenty of secluded trout structure. On two occasions I shared the stream with a surprised black bear as I fished my way back upstream.

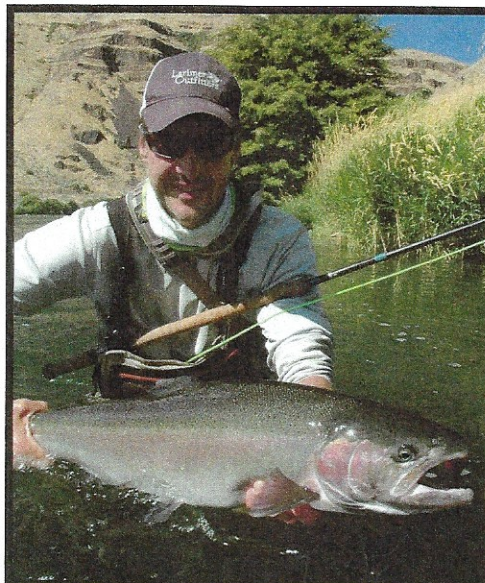
Wading with neoprene booties provides an efficient way of negotiating this tiny but productive stream. Its bottom is usually sandy and solid, with smaller rocks and boulders providing somewhat secure footing, even though reaching productive lies often requires a bit of scrambling over and around obstacles such as downed logs, stream-side willows, and larger boulders.

Though the plentiful, 8- to 11-inch residents feed with urgency, they aren't pushovers and require patience and precise presentations. The high, cold, turbulent flows of the early season normally necessitate a high-stick maneuver with tension on the leader—and vigilance. In these cloudy water situations, a size 14 plain or beadhead Pheasant Tail, Bird's Nest, Caddis Pupa, or Prince Nymph plied deep and slow will often work magic on spring's lethargic trout.

As the summer progresses and the flow slows, clears, and warms a bit, inhabitants will eagerly pursue a well-presented dry, such as a size 14 to 18 Parachute Adams, *Callibaetis*, Elk Hair Caddis, or Humpy. Ant, hopper, and beetle patterns are effective terrestrial choices.

With long casts the exception here, I prefer a shorter, 7- or 8-foot, 3-weight rod matched with a floating line, a 7.5-foot leader, and a 6X or 7X tippet. This shorter "wand" offers more control in negotiating tight, brushy quarters where dapping or making short flips behind rocks or under shoreline limbs is required.

The season is open from the last Saturday in April through mid-November, with no special regulations or gear restrictions. For up-to-the-minute information, contact Yosemite National Park, (209) 372-0200, or visit www.nps.gov/yose.



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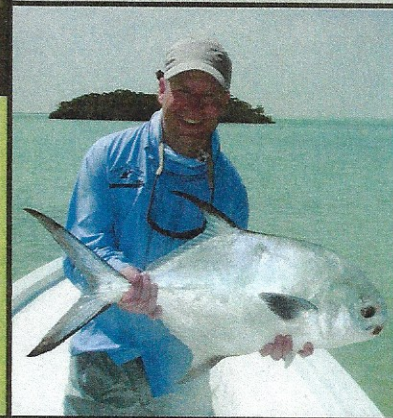
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