

wading on summer nights feels grand.

When the fish aren't rising, nymphing is usually your best bet. Frankly, when the fish aren't rising, such as on bright afternoons when there's likely to be a mob on hand anyway, I avoid the place. However, if you are willing to hike a bit, almost any standard nymph in the size-12 to -16 range will get grabs. Try to hang the nymph 3 or 4 feet beneath a small strike indicator. Bird's Nests, Pheasant Tail Nymphs, Copper Johns, and at least a hundred other conventional or bead head nymphs will probably work just fine. These trout are not selective as long as the size of the fly and the drift are about right. The trout aren't huge, so a 3- to 5-weight rod is just about right too.

On most summer evenings there's usually dry-fly activity around dusk. If you arrive a few hours before dark, you are likely to experience the best fishing of the day. Small caddisflies are most common, but several varieties of mayflies may also join in the fun. Regardless of what's actually hatching, the fish will hammer a size-14 to -16 dead-drifted Comparadun or Elk Hair Caddis most of the time.

Look for drop-offs, deeper runs, and the heads of pools. I've had some of my best fishing where tributaries join the river. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife will not divulge exactly where the trout are planted, only that they are never carried far from the hatchery trucks. (That's a hint.) The most popular area for fly anglers is upstream from Marion Forks.

If you are tempted to take a break from stalking wild trout, give the upper North a try. Just remember that any friends who mock you have undoubtedly done it themselves, probably more than once.

### Kirkwood Creek, CA

By Don Vachini

In 1860 Zachary Kirkwood homesteaded three 160-acre parcels in the vicinity of Carson Pass in the Sierra Nevada for his summer cattle operation. In the process he imprinted his name on many of the area's landmarks.

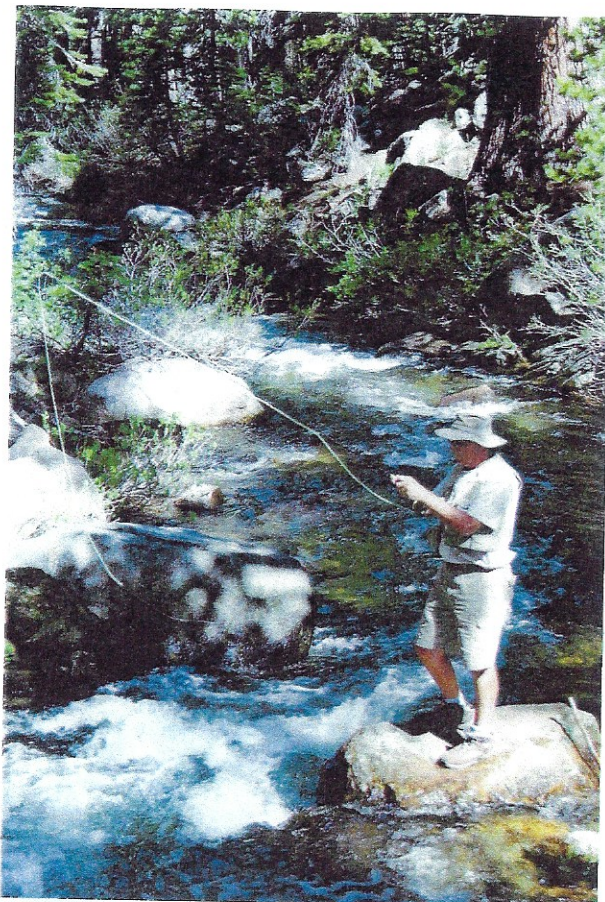


PHOTO BY DON VACHINI

By 1864 Kirkwood Station had been built along the wagon trail initially blazed by Kit Carson and John C. Fremont 20 years prior. In addition to serving as ranch headquarters, Kirkwood Station soon became a post office, stage depot, and hostelry. A tiny creek crossing the roadway next to the establishment provided the water that attracted ranchers with their cattle, the local Washoe Indians, and a string of travelers.

Fast-forward a bit more than 150 years. Winter finds this area between Caples Lake and Silver Lake alive with cross-country and downhill skiers from Kirkwood Mountain Resort, and summer brings flocks of campers to nearby Kirkwood Lake, all delivered here by California State Route 88.

Although the historic landmark station has been renamed Kirkwood Inn & Saloon—<http://summer.kirkwood.com/site/inn-history>,

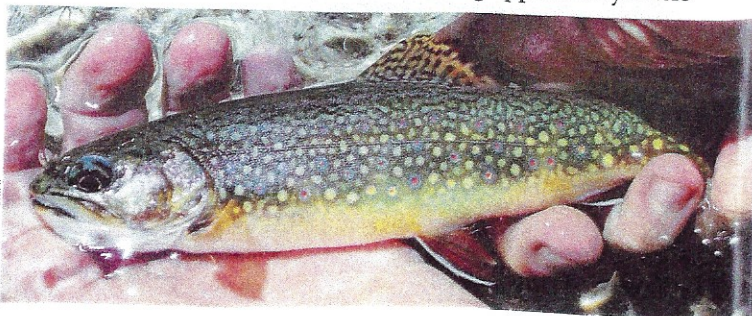


PHOTO BY DON VACHINI

(209) 258-7304—it retains much of its rustic charm while efficiently furnishing substantial meal and beverage options. Only tiny Kirkwood Creek, which still gurgles gin-clear past the inn's parking lot, remains truly under the radar.

Between 12 and 15 feet wide and scarcely 4 miles long, this El Dorado National Forest gem flows in relative anonymity, as most travelers simply drive past it without noticing. Emanating from the lofty slopes of Thimble Peak (elevation 9,827 feet) above the ski resort, it serpentine through Kirkwood Meadows, where it virtually disappears from view. Hidden under a

canopy of stunted willows, the creek harbors healthy, native brook trout in the 7- to 10-inch range, as the overgrowth provides ideal cover, cold water, and an adequate insect and terrestrial food base throughout the season.

The section below SR 88 enters a thick, pine-forested landscape and then plunges steeply before merging into Caples Creek. Five miles farther down the canyon, Caples meets the Silver Fork American River.

Coursing where Alpine, Amador, and El Dorado counties intersect, this diminutive, unstocked creek is certainly not a destination, nor is it noted for big fish. An 11-incher would be considered a monster. But the fish are wild, and the fishing opportunity offers

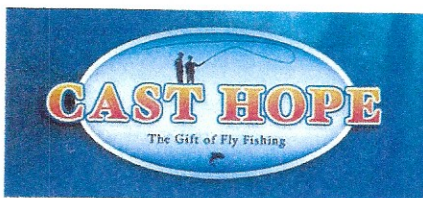
a soothing respite during an extended drive.

Conducting a ritual stop here and stretching my legs a bit after a three-hour drive, I usually escape downstream to the confluence with Caples Creek and pick my way back upstream. The most efficient strategy is to use short-line presentations while dapping and drifting a beadhead nymph through likely structure. Small pools are scarce, but swirling eddies, seams, and pockets are plentiful. A few open areas allow downstream drifts along undercut banks or overhanging sweepers, but stealthy crawls and tight-quarter presentations are often needed to reach the creek's wary residents.

A 2- to 3-weight, 7- to 9-foot rod with a floating line is appropriate for presenting standard beadhead Prince Nymph, beadhead Pheasant Tail, ant, or caddisfly patterns during the higher, early-season runoff. As flows wane and the fish congregate, dry flies, including Humpies, Adamses, mosquitoes, and hoppers in sizes 14 through 18, become much more effective.

From Jackson, follow SR 88 east for 65 miles and park in the dirt lot next to the inn. While some private property surrounds the creek's upper sections, a footpath leads down the canyon.

After an hour or so of hiking, parting brush, and performing small-water tricks on this nearly indiscernible creek, I often work up a hearty appetite. Thankfully, the Kirkwood Inn remains a beacon where I can enjoy a large burger or rib-eye steak washed down with a cold beer.



### Cast Hope

By Hogan Brown

A number of things happened when I turned 30. Most of them occurred in my head, but some happened in the real world as well. The stuff in my head

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