

Little Walker River, CA By Don Vachini

Draining an extensive eastern Sierra backcountry area, the Little Walker flows from Anna Lake and nearby Flatiron Butte, Hanna Mountain, and Flatiron Ridge, high in the Hoover Wilderness. Just outside Yosemite National Park's northeastern boundary, the stream cuts down Burt Canyon for 6 miles before leaving the wilderness to bounce an additional 8 miles through a sparsely forested, sage-filled course in Toiyabe National Forest. Some irrigational diversions occur in its lower courses, and shortly after crossing under California Route 108, it merges into the West Walker River, which parallels US Highway 395 down Walker Canyon.

From Bridgeport, drive north on US Highway 395 for 17 miles, then turn left onto Little Walker Road about 5 miles past Fales Hot Springs. Continue 3.6 miles on the dusty dirt road to approach Obsidian Campground and access parking. Anglers headquartering here are privy to early- and late-day explorations.

Although the water in the vicinity of the campground is generously stocked with catchable rainbows, this lengthy stream houses healthy populations of 'bows and brookies throughout. Abundant food; quality habitat shaded by willow, aspen, cottonwood, and pine forest; and plenty of spawning areas help maintain a solid fishery. "Most trout will fall into the 7- to 13-inch range, with some holdovers possibly reaching the 1- to 2-pound figure. Though certainly not in the trophy category, trout here offer steady action in a virtually unpressured scenario," says Jim Erdman, a fish biologist with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. While triploid planters generally remain concentrated in the vicinity of the campsites, Erdman believes this river is underfished. "In sectors upstream from [Rickey] Cabin, a pair of recent stream surveys revealed very few anglers, with only brook trout showing in the upper canyon census."

While heavy runoff can be problematic early in the season, cobble bottom, pools, pockets, seams, and eddies become more discernible as its flows decrease. If the river is high, fast, and cloudy, a tandem of weighted, size 16 to 18 Copper John or Zebra Midge nymphs probed through seams and fringes in a high-stick maneuver from shore will help sway reluctant trout.

When flows are lower, wading allows for more-advantageous presentations through structure. Short-lining a size 14 or 16 Prince Nymph dropper under a size 12 Humpy, E/C Caddis, or Parachute Adams, or dapping a size 14 or 16 Flashback Pheasant Tail along shoreline shallows or under brush, effectively imitates swimming mayfly nymphs. Those hiking upstream toward the more compressed canyon will find dead-fall timber, logjams, and brush that create tighter quarters. Here, the aggressive, gaudily attired char seem to prefer tiny emergers, terrestrials, and other dries.

Tumbling nearly 10 miles from an adjacent canyon, tributary Molybdenite Creek pours into the Little Walker at the campground. Offering an additional chance at miles of solitude and wild trout, it is most productive a mile or more above camp.

For accurate advice and reliable local fishing information, contact Ken's Sporting Goods, (760) 932-7707, www.kenssport.com, in Bridgeport, or Tim Fesco, owner of Meadowcliff Resort, (530) 495-2255, www.meadowcliff.com, in Coleville.

Many travelers whisk unknowingly along Highway 395, missing this hidden gem. However, those who make the effort to leave the macadam byway to follow a bumpy dirt road can happily meld with sagebrush reminders of the Old West and miles of lightly fished waters for either planted or native trout—or both.



PHOTO BY DON VACHINI