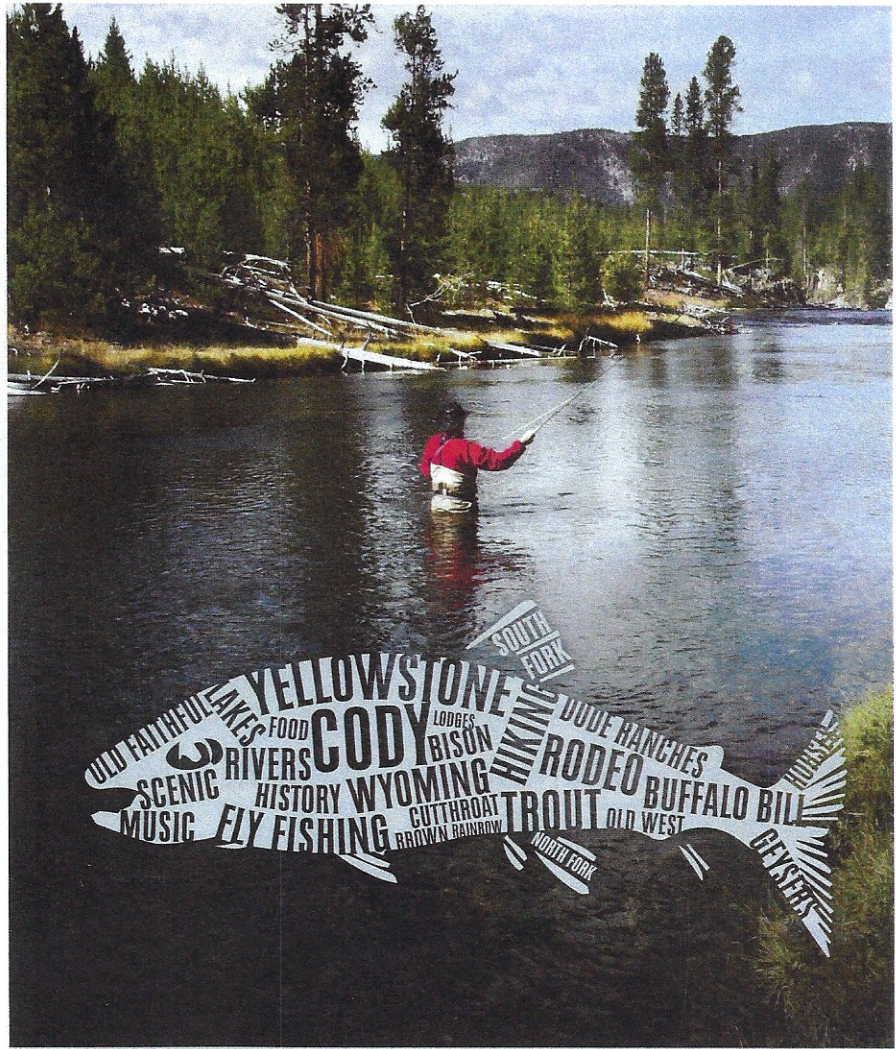


PHOTO BY KEN PROPER

cutthroat trout flourish in this basin.

The old town of Montgomery was established in 1861, two years after the Colorado gold rush began. By 1862, it had three hotels, 150 cabins, and the largest dance hall in the region. Town folk named 14,286-foot Mount Lincoln after President Lincoln and sent him a bar of gold. Now, much of the ghost town remains lost under the water of the reservoir, but impressive abandoned mining structures line the trail to the lake.

The Middle Fork River flows from the reservoir through the Placer Valley, Fairplay Beach, South Park, and five state wildlife areas. It gains strength from numerous small creeks and offers anglers many miles of public water. Like the arrowheads and gold, it has been hidden in plain sight for a long time. Fly fishers just need to keep an eye open for it.



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Angels Creek, CA By Don Vachini

Fed by snowmelt from the vast west-slope Sierra Nevada backcountry northwest of Yosemite National Park, tiny Angels Creek gurgles pleasantly through the heart of gold country. Home to feisty rainbow and brown trout where miners once panned for the precious element, it remains one of my "secret cache" waters.

Gathering muscle as it leaves the Stanislaus National Forest boundary, the 12- to 15-foot-wide stream courses

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through the foothill towns of Murphys and Angels Camp before emptying into massive New Melones Reservoir. Both Angels Camp and Angels Creek were named for Henry Angel, who opened a trading post in 1848 and served the nearly 4,000 gold miners who tent camped along the creek seeking placer deposits. While productive as a gold-bearing site, this Mother Lode venue also gained further notoriety from Mark Twain's penned descriptions of its popular Calaveras County frog-jumping contests.

Aiding the early mining efforts, additional water was provided by a network of canals, ditches, and flumes from the upper reaches of the Stanislaus River drainage. Today, the 15-mile-long Utica Ditch, which began in 1851, continues to augment year-round flows for Angels Creek. Thanks to this bonus water, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) plants rainbow trout throughout Tryon Park in Murphys, in the vicinity of downtown Angels Camp, and under State Route 49. While the 9-mile section between these two hamlets tumbles through private land and is largely inaccessible to the public, the CDFW rainbows are regularly deposited in easily reached roadside spots. Often overlooked, many travelers in cars either feel the creek is too brushy or don't even notice it.

Some hefty rainbow and brown trout dwell in New Melones and some of them ascend the Angels Creek arm for recruitment purposes (browns in the fall and 'bows during the spring). These temporary lake-run residents and their progeny favor the brush-laden courses shaded by alder and willow canopy. While the cold water and adequate spawning gravel provide favorable habitat, the more secluded, private sections form a little-known refugium, allowing the fish to remain anonymous for much of their residency.

I often bushwhack scrappy holdover and native treasures in the harder-to-reach sections of this intimate creek, which requires stealthy, well-planned approaches and dainty probes under sweepers and along undercut banks. A 2- or 3-weight rod matched with a floating line and 9-foot leader is perfect for these tactics.

Little Yellow Stoneflies (Yellow Sallies) abound, and both caddisflies and mayflies hatch prolifically. Dapping a size 14 or 16 Parachute Adams, BWO, or Elk Hair Caddis over their pools, pockets, and seams often achieves best results. In the absence of hatches or rising feeders, fish a small Copper John, Pheasant Tail, Blood Midge, Ant, or Zebra Midge along the bottom. Adequate tension on the drift is a must to feel the take. Where pools exist, a dry/dropper tandem is a good choice but in most cases,

quarters remain tight and a one-fly, keep-it-simple approach is most feasible to avoid tangles.

Angels Creek is open only during the general season with no special restrictions. It's best from May into July. Always be mindful and respect private property wherever it exists.

From State Route 108 in Jamestown, travel north on SR 49 for 15 miles to the town of Angles Camp and the intersection with SR 4. For local information, contact Lisa Mayo, the marketing director of the Tuolumne County Visitors Bureau, (800) 446-1333, www.yosemitegoldcountry.com. Glory Hole Sports, (209) 736-4333, www.gloryholesports.com, can help pinpoint sketchy access trails to the lower creek.

While certainly not a major fly-fishing destination, Angels Creek does allow anglers to stake a momentary claim. However, instead of panning for long-depleted gold, they can prospect for lively rainbows and brown nuggets.

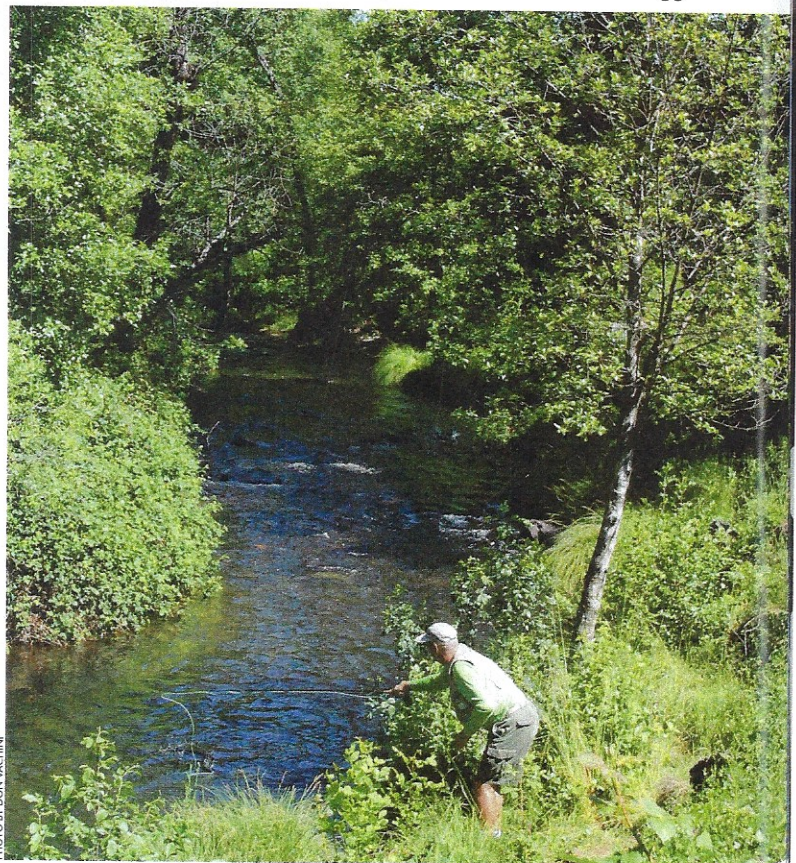


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