



A Summer brown from the Millers

***The Flyfishers Guide
To The Millers River
By
Ken Elmer***

The purpose of this humble endeavor is pretty straight forward. It is to present, in depth and in maybe a non-conventional way, an insiders guide to flyfishing a river that is still a mystery to many who claim to know it. Count me in that group. After over twenty years of flyfishing it's countless pools, runs and riffles, mostly to the exclusion of other more famous rivers, (and other flyfishers) I can justly say that the Millers is in many ways still a mystery giving up it's secrets grudgingly. It will baffle you at times and at other times reward you beyond what one deserves. It can be gentle, almost pastoral in some places and in others tough and brooding.. This guide will steer you to the venue that you prefer but hopefully it will allow you to take in EVERY section that is mentioned. If you like easy wading and a good number of fellow longrodders this guide will show you where to go. If you want to explore and be alone with it's waters then the guide will also point the way. Either way, you'll catch trout.

How This Works

The Guide is laid out in three sections named, you guessed it, 1, 2, and 3!! The first two sections cover the two large catch and release zones and their adjacent waters with the third covering what we call the Lower River. Each section will have a map of itself (no confusing topo knockoffs here but a good hand drawn "treasure" map) which will show the location of the named pools and runs and their ACCESS points. Reference the maps when reading about each section. A very good way to find your way around the Millers is to use YAHOO MAPS. Just plug in the roads that this guide mentions and you will get a great map showing the roads and the river!! You will get LOTS of

access points in this guide that should allow you to cover a lot of water that most flyfishers seldom go venture to. But if you like popular “hot spots” you’ll find them here too.

This Guide is centered around “named” pools and runs which have acquired their monikers over the years. Some are popular (read easy access) while some are only known to a few. Some of the names go back beyond the “dark ages” (1950 – late 1970’s industrial pollution) to the 30’s and 40’s when the Millers was a destination. You can fish between the “names” as I often do but there’s a reason they were given names. The reason is simply TROUT.

The Trout

We’re talking about BROWN TROUT, Salmo Trutta, the King of the Millers and the ONLY trout that belongs there!!! Each spring the state and a private group or two throw in over 10,000 (that’s right) trout. There’re mostly clonebows, excuse me, rainbows that make a lot of casual fishermen feel like experts until mid-late June when they, like the casual fisherman,, disappear. I don’t have anything against rainbows. They’re great in the Swift and other tailwaters but a wasted resource here. Thank the twenty year efforts of local flyfishers for seeing that both C&R sections receive a few thousand brown trout yearly to insure a full season of flyfishing.

The Best Time To Fish

Fish all of the time but some times are better than others. It seems that people forget that the Millers is a freestone stream and not a tailwater. That means that it is a river that will be affected by the thermal ravages of summer more then a tailwater like the Swift. You can fish through the mid day hours from late March to late June and catch lots of rainbows and even some browns but once the daytime water temperatures nudge the 70’s the clonebows chicken out (or die) and the browns wait until the sun begins to set before they go out to eat. You’ve heard the term “Evening Rise”. That is the name of the game once the schools let out or you can fish during the EARLY morning hours and do very well. If you want to flyfish for trout at 1pm on a 90 degree day in July then go to the Swift but hit the Millers on the way home that evening. And don’t pay too much attention to the hand wringing thermometer readers who go into a swoon when the water temperatures hit 75 degrees. It hits 75 degrees EVERY year but the browns know where to go and as long as we don’t have excessive heat AND an earth searing drought they’ll be fine. They always are.

One further note. The BEST dry fly fishing on this river occurs after mid July. Spring can be very good for rising trout but the place can go crazy from late August through October.

The Flies

It would be easy to run of a shopping list of standard patterns like every other river that you read about but I won't simply because it isn't necessary. The Millers has plenty of Hendericksons, March Browns, Sulphers, Isonychia, and a full array of Ephemerella species. It is also home to lots of caddis and stoneflies both large and small. If you have the standard patterns used in other freestone streams you will be well armed for dries. I have come to the conclusion, after over twenty years on this river, that trying to have a match for every adult insect that you will encounter may have you at the vise when you should be fishing. I'm armed with general patterns, either in emerger, parachute or comparadun style, in body colors of brown, cream, olive (don't forget olive) in sizes ranging from size 14 through 20. I've had enough double digit evenings over the course of 20 years to feel confident in this approach. In the late summer one may encounter much smaller flies in the 22 to 24 range. Olive and black bodies fished in the film in those sizes will suit you well. Tiny flies on this river, although they may occur in great numbers, are still the exception. Don't get fooled when you see trout breaking the surface for an insect that you can't see. The first reaction will be to go very small but the browns, more often than not, are feeding on something that is emerging and that something will be much larger. You'll see for sure once the sun starts to go down.

*For those that MUST match the hatch it can be safe to say that the predominant mayflies are as follows: March Brown (*Stenomena vicarium*) a large mayfly that seems to have an extended season on the Millers. Expect them from early May through early July. Yellow Drake (*Ephemera Varia*) another large mayfly that begins to show up in early June and runs through July. Slate Drake (*Isonychia Bicolor*) Expect this large fly to be on the scene from mid June through September, but especially in August. Light Cahill (*Stenacron Interpunctatum*) This species or mayflies that look a lot like it are there from June through September. Brown Drake (*Ephrmaera simulans*) Mid May through July. The imitation for this species is so generic that it can cover a lot of different situations. September of '06 saw a large evening hatch of a large whitish fly that ran into October. I will not say that it was the famous "white fly" found on other rivers but.....*

Also, bring some ants in black and red, especially red, especially in size 16, for September.

Subsurface – You know what to do. Bring the buggers in black, olive and brown and all of your standard nymph patterns. There's a goofy looking wet fly that I was introduced to in '06 called the Moby Dick. God only knows what it's supposed to be

but it drives the browns nuts! Any bead head nymph with a simple dark dubbed body will produce all of the time if you adjust the size for the season. Lead wing Coachman worked here in the 1930's and still work today. Soft hackles have always worked during the pre hatch period. Just adjust the color and size to suit the condition. A favorite of mine is a rust colored body tied thicker than normal with dark brown partridge hackles. Have a few western foam flies to. It seems that every one of them will occasionally get some attention.

As you can see I don't believe that fly selection is rocket science on this river but presentation is. Knowing the difference between a sipping rise and a "dorsal and tail" rise will mean the difference between a few trout and many trout.

SECTION 1 THE BEARS DEN

I'll divide the Bears Den into three parts: the Upper, Middle and Lower sections. Each have great pools and runs that will keep you occupied.

THE UPPER SECTION

This marks the beginning of about six miles of catch and release regulations in the Bears Den. The official start of C&R is at the RAILROAD TRESTLE just downstream from the village of South Royalston. It's also one of the least fished areas due to a bit of hiking that is required to get there but it is well worth the trip.



A March Brown Along For the Ride



Thousand Acre Run looking downstream from mid-point. Thousand Acre "Pool" is at the every end and bears to the right

THOUSAND ACRE RUN

This is named after a major tributary at the end of this section. I consider this Thousand Acre Run to begin at the railroad trestle and ending at the mouth of Thousand Acre Brook, a distance of about a half a mile. Now, some will call this Thousand Acre Pool after the large, long pool at the mouth of this tributary. Don't be fooled! This pool will draw you in from a distance but it is too shallow with very little cover for trout. It's the fast water below the trestle which smoothes out to a beautiful glide on the way to the pool that will keep you busy.

How To Get There – Let's start at Route 2. Take exit 19 and head west on Rt. 202. Go past the King Phillip Restaurant (on the left) and continue for about a mile to a right onto Highland Ave. (If you pass a motorcycle shop you've gone too far). Follow Highland Ave for two miles to another intersection. Bear left and drive another two miles to another intersection. Turn left, cross over a railroad track, then over a bridge which crosses the Millers and bear left to the village which has a General Store (right) and a restaurant named Pete and Henry's. Park across from the restaurant but not in their parking lot. Suit up, cross over the old bridge (closed to cars) and follow the path along the RR tracks downstream to the trestle (about ½ mile).

Another approach which will bring you to the middle of this Run is as follows. About a half mile before the intersection (where you took a left to take you over the RR tracks and the bridge) you will see a posted DFW access point on the left. (see map) Park there and follow the path down to the river (a five minute walk). When you make it to the river you can look upstream and see the aforementioned trestle. Entry to the river

here can be tricky due to a occasional steep bank. It is also difficult in high water. You want to cross the river if you can as explained below.

How To fish 100 Acre Run

Now, the BEST way to fish thousand Acre Run is from the RIGHT side of the river heading downstream. It will give you the best approach since most of the current and deeper water is on the LEFT side of this Run. It also has the best (safest) wading and has plenty of backcasting room. Just cross the trestle and work your way down to the river.

If you don't have surface action then fish a large nymph (stonefly), a large hare's ear, that thick bodied soft hackled fly that I mentioned earlier or a bugger pattern deep on a short line. Don't try to cover a lot of water with each cast. Do your casting lessons somewhere else. This is classic short line nymphing water. You have a good chance of scoring a "triple" here. Browns, rainbows that migrated from above the C&R and native brookies from the feeders inhabit this run. The key is to be slow and patient and fish every logical location. If you encounter rising trout then match what is rising. Regardless of what is hatching if you see large stoneflies in the air (mostly yellow) then tie on that imitation. The strikes will be hard.

I mentioned the "pool" earlier. The first time I saw it back in the '80's I thought I had discovered Nirvana. It's right at the end of the fast water and from a distance looks great but as I said it's sandy and shallow and a major letdown. The very tail end of this pool has promise. Read on!

THE ROCK GARDEN

This long section which runs from the end of Thousand Acre Pool to just above the mouth of Buckman Brook was named by an individual who managed to float this section during a fairly low water period. It is a section of the Millers that is very seldom fished due to it's very limited access although a few guides who float through this section have reported good success. I've hiked downstream and upstream through this area and have caught fish but the going is very tough. First, there are no streamside trails to follow. It's bushwacking most of the way. Second, if there's a place for a good wading staff this is it. There is another way to explore the area. Along the south bank there runs an old cart road (see map) that, for the most part, lies within sight of the river. You can pick up this cart road just upstream on the mouth of Thousand Acre Brook or pick it up just up river from the mouth of Buckman Brook. You walk along the path, catch sight of the river, and then cut through the woods to the river and start fishing. I would familiarize myself with this area first before I ventured out. I'd also take a flashlight just in case. In any event you may be the only one fishing. It is true solitude.

HOW TO FISH THE ROCK GARDEN

Bring along the standard subsurface flies (buggers, stones, large hare's ears) and thoroughly work the fast water that this stretch is noted for. Sometimes, the faster the water the better the results. I once took a large trout from what can only be described as a whitewater chute. The tails of some of the long, slow stretches are also productive.

As stated earlier, this is a difficult section of river to fish while wading. Floating this long section makes more sense if time and your legs are not on your side. Harrison Anglers run guided float trips through the Bears Den which will get you through the Rock Garden in style. Harrisonanglers.com will get you in contact.

The Middle Section



Here it is. If you want the Bears Den Catch & Release area with VERY easy access AND good flyfishing then you have found the place. There are well defined trails, fairly easy wading and lots of browns.

How to Get There – From the village of South Royalston (see previous directions) go through the village and take a LEFT at a fork in the road. Head uphill and take the first LEFT (Gulf Road). This road will turn into a dirt road shortly. Follow the power lines that hug the road and follow them as they take a left (a mile or so). If you see a sign that says “road closed” you’ve just missed the left turn off. Follow this dirt road until you see a red cottage. Parking is next to the TU kiosk on the right. You are 30 yards from the Millers River.



BUCKMANS RUN

As seen from the railroad trestle

The Middle Section starts from Buckmans Run at the end of the Rock Garden. It gets its name from Buckmans Brook which enters the river at the upper right end section of this photo. This small beautiful brook is host to a equally beautiful population of native brook trout. The fast water (just to the right of the top of the photo) smooths out to a nice sand and gravel bottom with adequate depth and cover to keep you casting. Most of the cover (trout) is on the right (upstream) side of the river. The section covered by the photo is a bit over a quarter of a mile long.

How to Get There – Park your car, suit up, walk down to the river and start heading upstream. Follow the path along the river until you hit the railroad embankment. Cross the tracks and climb down to the other side. Follow the trail, or what passes for a trail, to the head of the Run. Although Buckmans Run is part of the middle section it receives very little fishing pressure because of the more accessible pools and runs that one will encounter in this area. But the wading is easy, the casting is easy and the trout are there.

Rezendes Pool

This is the first place that you will see in the middle section of the Bears Den once you leave your vehicle at the Middle Section. (It's the photo shown under the caption "Middle Section") It actually starts just below the 2nd railroad trestle which is just upstream and to the right of the photo. It ends at the first fast water section. This is the area where the Millers Chapter of Trout Unlimited starts its yearly stocking of brown trout. It has every type of water: knee high riffles, a beautiful run and a deep tail pool. It has a good coldwater tributary (Gulf Brook) and an even colder spring, both on the left bank of this section



Rezendes Pool looking upstream, around the bend, towards the 2nd trestle

How To Fish Rezendes Pool

Your first urge will be to jump right in and start fishing the deep holding water at the lower end of the pool. If there is nobody there and the browns are rising then go for it. But to thoroughly enjoy the place just do the following. Walk upstream on the left bank, cross Gulf Brook and head for the railroad trestle just around the bend. Now, you have a choice. If you can make it across the river, depending on water conditions (the closer to the trestle the better your chances) you will be on the opposite side of the river and in the absolute "sweet spot". You will be on the inside of the curve in the pool and will be assured of great drift lines regardless of your method of presenting a fly. The further downstream you go the better your position will be. All this depends on the rivers depth so be careful. You will also have to retrace your steps to get back to your vehicle since crossing the pool from the mid section downstream is impossible unless you like to swim. Regardless, this is the best approach you will have great casting room, fairly easy wading AND no competition since nobody but me approaches this pool in this way.

If you can't get to this side of the river don't cry. You can still have great fly fishing from the left side of Rezendes. You will notice a large rock about a hundred yards downstream of the trestle. You can enter here and have casting access for another fifty yards or so. I've taken many good trout here. Also note that Gulf Brook has a good pronounced gravel bar at its mouth. You can walk out quite a ways on this bar and be in good position for anything that happens. A little side note: this gravel bar is a favorite hangout for redfin shiners, a protected species that the Millers is full of. An old 1930's era streamer, the Millers River Special, invented by the late, great Paul Kukonen, was tied to imitate this bait fish.

What To Use – Well, during the last few years it went like this. Deep Buggers, stoneflies, caddis in all forms, all emerging mayflies and that god awful Moby Dick. In

other words, use what you think will work based on observation or superstition. Just be careful to tell the difference between nymphing trout that are breaking the surface and a full fledged rising trout. Emerger patterns, in the right size and color, will save the day for you.

Evenings in September of 2006 were evenings to dream about at Rezendes Pool. Browns galore, all rising and willing and very little fishing pressure.

First And Second Runs



“Fish on” at the First Run

These are two important runs that are directly below Rezendes Pool and for the most part provide more action through the season than Rezendes. First Run starts with a heavy fast water chute that gathers the flow from Rezendes Pool and then spreads it out into a deep even run of over sixty yards that has good depth and plenty of cover in the form of large submerged rocks. This is a difficult section to wade (bring a wading staff) but it is easily worth the effort.

How To Fish First Run

This is usually fished on the right side of the river facing downstream but the best fishing is from the opposite shore. Roll casting is preferred on the near side due to the lack of back casting room. The upper part of the run fishes well with a short line and some weight. The lower section works well with a long quartering cast letting the fly swing in the current until it's directly below you. Most of the browns I've caught here were caught using this method.

This is a good run for larger and heavier flies due to the strong current and depth. My favorite flies are black buggers and the Moby Dick although I've done well with large (size 8 and 10) soft hackles especially in the lower reaches. First run is a great place to start during the late afternoon while you keep an eye open for rising trout at Rezendes Pool during the evening.



Second Run looking Downstream

Second Run starts where First Run ends. It's less extreme than First Run as far a depth and current are concerned plus it gives you plenty of room to backcast. One should fish this run much the same way as First Run. Because of the easier wading and casting room there is a tendency to work this run too quickly. Slow down and keep your casts short covering the fast water at the head of this section. The far bank is a sweet spot!!

Below these two runs is a riffle section that is always overlooked. Don't do it. I've heard word that the float guides love this section!

The Gorge Pool



The Lower Gorge Pool looking upstream

This is one great pool. Actually it's two distinct pools that require two distinct approaches to be successful. But first we have to talk! The Gorge Pool has been known as the "Gorge Pool" for over seventy years and I know the guys who fished the place back in the 30's and 40's and they called it the "Gorge Pool" back then. Lately there are a few "revisionists" who decided, without any regard to the fine tradition of fly fishing the Millers, to call the place McKenzie's Pool or something like that. Forget it!!! This is the Gorge Pool – always has been and always will be. Case closed!!

One word of note. The lower section has the easiest approach, the upper section is a true bear to get to. I'll start with the lower section.

How To Get There – Start at the parking lot at Rezends Pool and follow the old cart path downstream along the right bank. The cart path turns into a foot trail that has been improved and marked by a mountain bike group. After a bit less than a half mile walk you will begin to climb a fairly steep hill. You'll also notice that the river has begun to narrow and quicken. When you approach the top of the hill look down the CLIFF on the left and there you will see the upper section of the Gorge Pool. You will also see why this section is so hard to approach. It is foolish to try to work your way down this incline in waders and almost impossible to climb back up.



The upper section of the Gorge Pool

Now, someone may say “why don’t I just walk down the railroad tracks that run along the river and ditch the hill climb? The answer is easy. You will be on the wrong side of the river to fish the Gorge Pool successfully.

Continue along the ridge of this hill. After a hundred yards or so things will level off and you will find yourself in the middle of the lower section of the Gorge Pool. (see photo at the beginning of this section. It is a mild walk down to the middle portion of this section. For a quicker but less scenic entry back cast on this guide to where I gave directions to the Middle Section. At the part where I mentioned “road closed” just park your vehicle at that point (or go further if you trust your four wheel drive) and follow West Gulf Brook until you arrive at the lower end of the lower section of the Gorge Pool. However you arrive you will now be ready to fish.

How To Fish The Gorge Pool

The upper section is about a hundred yards long, the lower section is about two hundred yards long. The easiest way is to work your way up through the lower section. The lower section is made up of slow moving deep water with adequate casting room. It holds a lot of trout but unless you have surface activity then head to the fast water at it’s head. This is a great spot to fish with large sunken flies (read buggers). The upper section of the Gorge Pool, with the steep bank (cliff) is now plainly visible. It hold some memories for me. One July evening I lost a large trout (brown) who took a wooley bugger on a deep drift. It snapped a 3x like a cob web!

I found an old fire pit along the shore of the Gorge Pool. Someone had camped here and maybe even fished although I have seen very few people here over the years. If there was one spot on the Millers where I would like to camp from a Friday afternoon until Sunday afternoon during the months of June and July it is certain that the Gorge Pool would be the place. Solitude, great water and the promise of great fly fishing would draw me there.

(Note: I believe camping here is prohibited. Damn!!!!!!)

The Lower Section



A Section of "The Flats"

This section begins once the river snakes its way out of the woods below the Gorge Pool and runs for quite a distance (a mile or more) and ends at the UTD dam above the center of Athol. (UTD stands for "United Twist Drill", once a major employer in this area. What also ends at the dam are the catch & release regulations for the entire river that I have previously mentioned. It is made up of a long continuous series of riffles and pocket water which was known at "The Flats" since the 1930's. Be prepared to walk if you want to enjoy this section. The saving grace for this section is that the railroad runs along the left bank of "The Flats". One can hike down the tracks from Rezendes Pool or hike up the river from the dam. More on hiking from the dam later.

The railroad tracks will give you the opportunity to hop scotch The Flats to fish the best runs quickly. Floating this section makes more sense. Whatever you do bring a selection of muddlers, mostly small and fish the fast water. I know of one adventurous soul who spent most of an entire season battling the browns that reside here. It was the small muddler fished through fast water that worked every time.

Another word of note: During the Spring there is a good chance that you will be sharing the river with kayakers. It's not a bad thing since they seem to give the fly fisher plenty of space on this big river. You may also, if your skills allow, try using a kayak or a pontoon craft especially on this last stretch.



The top of the UTD Pool



The "head pond" of the UTD Dam

I like the UTD Pool. The dam creates a large deep area that is best fished with the above mentioned watercraft. It's the head, or upper section of this "pond", that is beautiful. It starts with a broad section of riffles that widen out to a smooth, wide run that slowly deepens until it enters the "pond". The best fishing is from the left (facing upstream) side of the river. Wading is easy and back casting is easier. Strangely, this area receives little pressure even with easy access and downtown Athol in plain view.

How To Get There – Find your way to Rt. 2a heading west into Athol. This is also Main St. Before you hit downtown proper you will take a left across from Stan's Auto Body. Cross two bridges a very short distance apart and then take a right at a fork in the road. Take the first right that you encounter on Chestnut Hill Ave. and follow this short, residential road to it's end. You will see a yellow gate which will keep you from going any further. Park on the side on the road. You are surrounded by houses but don't worry. You're ok here. Follow the dirt road downhill behind the gate and you will see the UTD pond and it's perfect upper run. This is also a good spot to work your way upstream to "The Flats".

SECTION TWO

The Lower Catch & Release

Here it is Fly fishers. Great pools and runs, very easy access and LOTS of trout. This C&R section is much shorter than the Bears Den (only about 2 miles at the most) but its “storied” pools have become legend to the fly fishers who have worked these waters over the last twenty five years. Still, many fly folk find themselves in one or two popular spots (under the Rt2 bridge, for one) and don’t venture further. This is my favorite spot on the Millers and has been since I began fishing this river over twenty years ago. Let’s take a look, ok? We’re starting upstream and working downstream.

How To Get There – Ok, that would help. Rt. 2 is our starting point. If you are heading west on Rt2 pass the exit for Rt202 Amherst/Belchertown and keep going. You will go over a large bridge over the Millers. Take your first left after the bridge (Rt. 2a) and take another left. From the west you will take a right after the paper mill in Erving labeled “Rt2a Orange”. From either direction you will pass the Copper Angel Restaurant (a nice place) and then take your first right after a half a mile. Cross another bridge over the Millers (the start of C&R regulations) and park your vehicle in the vacant spot just after you pass under the Rt2. bridge. This is your launch pad for what comes next.



The Upper Trestle Pool

This is it!!! Mecca and the Holy Grail rolled into one. This place has been this writers’ favorite pool for over twenty years. Now, some who might be familiar with the place may say “It’s not in the lower catch & release section”. They are right but it cannot be excluded. I, and others, fought hard twenty years ago to include this “storied” pool in the C&R but the authorities said “no” but for me and the others it is

the true beginning of the series of pools and runs that make up this fabulous section of the river.

How To Get There – Park your vehicle in the spot that I mentioned previously. Walk to the railroad tracks and take a left (upstream) on the tracks. After a few hundred yards you will come to a railroad trestle. Ignore the deep water on the left and look upstream upstream on the right. There it is!! Head upstream on the LEFT side of the river to the head of this pool.

The Upper Trestle Pool is a great summer/fall pool. Broad riffles that feed the head of this stretch smooth out to a deep pool that is the home throughout the summer for eager brown trout. You may have luck here earlier in the season for rainbows and browns but its' success rate is equivalent to other pools in this area during that time. But after the 4th of July GET READY!! Cold springs and seepage at the upper right side maintain a comfort level for the browns as does the right side of river which really never gets the blast of mid day summer sun. It is not hard to wade and you can back cast to you hearts' content.

How To Fish The Upper Trestle Pool –

It's a calm, early evening at the Upper Trestle on the first week of August. The daytime temperature made it to the lower eighties but now, at 8:00pm you feel a soothing coolness to the air around you. The sun has fallen behind the trees and the ridges to the west. If the temperature that day was only in the seventies you may begin to see a slight wisp of fog along the shoreline. This place cools off quickly. You are in position facing upstream for what will lie ahead. You may not have to even bother to fish down through the pool earlier with sunken flies. Why bother, for the Upper Trestle will soon lay at your waders a classic upstream dry fly experience. Why settle for less.

Check out the above photo. You will see a large rock at the upper end on the left side of the pool. This will be, if the water level is right, your entry point. Now, this pool is fed by a broad set of riffles which are certainly worth a try with whatever you want to use. On the opposite bank at the end of the riffle section there is considerable seepage from a spring which helps keep the Upper Trestle cool in the summer. You will also notice, usually in the summer, two rocks that break the surface in the upper section of this pool. They are one behind the other and separated by about twenty feet. These rocks are important because if you are to have evening surface activity it will start between these rocks and the opposite bank. It always does.

Once you enter the pool below that big rock in the photo you will encounter a long sandbar. Follow that sandbar downstream until you are across and just a few feet below the second of those two important rocks that I mentioned. Start wading across the pool until you are ten to fifteen feet across and below that second rock. It is here that you may stumble on what appears to be a pile of rocks on the bottom. I've used these rocks as a casting platform for years. Now you are set for action. As the sun sets

below the ridges the browns will begin to rise from the right to the left across this pool. As darkness descends these trout will have moved across the pool and will be all over the sandbar. You will be in PERFECT position for some serious upstream dry fly action. A word of note – this position can only be attempted during low water conditions. Low water means that the two important rocks will be a minimum of a foot above the surface.

You can fish the Upper Trestle Pool down and across and sometimes it's the only way to do it successfully but it's the above mentioned scenario that has brought me here on summer evenings for over twenty years. There's nothing better than to see a size 16 olive comparadun floating drag free into the feeding lane of a rising brown trout.

The Upper Trestle is my home pool, my “go to” place!!

The Lower Catch & Release Proper



*The Start of the Lower C&R from Wendell Bridge
Looking Downstream*

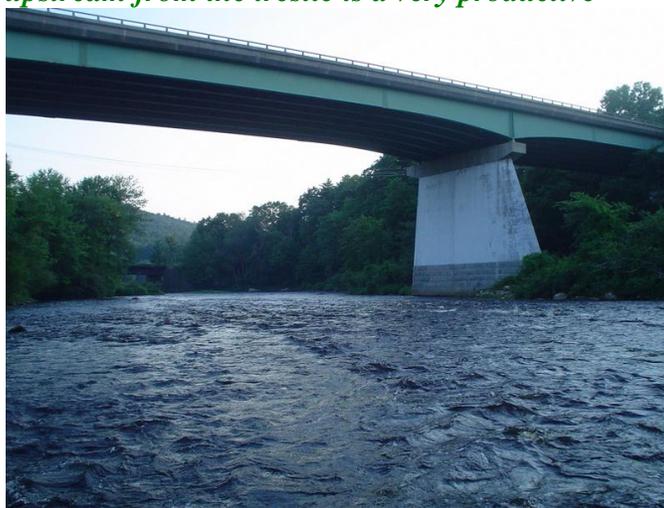
The Lower Catch & Release Section, commonly known as “Wendell Depot” starts at the Wendell Bridge over the Millers River (see previous directions on how to get there) and ends approximately two miles downstream at the bridge crossing the Millers in Erving Center.. It has become, over the years, a favorite spot but still cannot be considered crowded especially during the week days and during the Fall season. It has the benefit of three cold tributaries (Moss Brook, Whetstone Brook and Osgood Brook) which help out a lot during the summer.



Looking upstream to the Wendell Bridge

Starting at the bridge you will notice Moss Brook flowing in on the right. You'll also notice a beautiful run just downstream from this junction. This whole section from Wendell Bridge, under the Rt2 overpass, to the railroad trestle is GREAT pocket water that holds trout throughout the season. It's also a place that can be fished hard because it's the first place that one sees when you approach the lower C&R.

There is a special place, an odd place, situated just above the railroad trestle in the next photograph. Just upstream from the trestle is a very productive



Wendell Bridge Run looking downstream under Rt2. The railroad trestle is in the background.

hole that is unusually deep for this section. For years I fished this hole from a downstream approach and had good success. One day I decided to fish it from above. As I approached the hole I noticed that the rough, cobblestone of the riverbed had given way to a hard, flat surface. It was as if I was walking on a submerged road!! I was so preoccupied with this discovery that I walked right into the hole and went right

over my waders! I don't know what this structure was but I can reason that it may have been some structure, a road or a bridge, that was taken down in one of the many historical floods of the last century. It's a mystery but a great place to fish, especially UPSTREAM.



The start of the Kempfield Pool Section looking downstream from the railroad trestle. Note the dark clouds to the left of the hill in the background. At the time that this photo was taken Wendell was being struck by a tornado which damaged many structures and took down thousands of trees.

The Kempfield Pool Section

Call it what you like but the Kempfield Pool Section is one of the best places to cast a fly on the Millers. "Call it what you like" means a few different things. You may hear it called by either the Kempfield, Whetstone, or Power Station names. Whetstone is the most logical name because of the major cold water tributary that enters the section. The name never stuck!(for reasons to be explained later). The Power Station basically says that you don't like to walk and will be satisfied with fishing the wrong side of the river. Here's the story about the name "Kempfield". Back in '84 when I first moved to the area I heard of a great stretch of river that offered rising trout throughout the summer. A few locals spoke of the "Kempfield Pool". I couldn't find a tributary of that name (logical choice) and the nearest "Kempfield" referred to a road a mile or so from this area. It wasn't until I followed a local fly fisher and made it certain that I wasn't going to get off his back until found this secret spot. The name "Kempfield" was created among local fly fishers to keep a deep, dark secret. The secret's out and the name Kempfield is here to stay. I love the Kempfield Section.

I mentioned the "Power Station". It is an entrance to this section that has only one advantage: very easy access to water. The only problem is that the water is all wrong.

It's on the south side of the river which keeps you out of most of the great runs and pools. I will not even give you directions to the "Power Station". If someone gives you directions to this place, other than what I am going to give you, just say "thanks" and take in the following directions.

Park your vehicle by the RT2 bridge as mentioned in the previous section. Walk down to the railroad tracks and head right (downstream) on the tracks. After the trestle, just take the path on the left and you will be on your way.

The first thing you will notice downstream from the trestle is a great rock ribbed pool. For want of another name I'll call this the "Lower Trestle Pool" (I just made it up. I'll take the liberty of naming it because I have seldom seen anyone fish it in twenty years).

Back in the 80's and 90's I fished this pool because it looked so good. My results were poor. So many times I eyed this place while arriving in the early evening and spied it as I left at nightfall. It was an unbroken mirror of water with no surface activity. Then in late September of '06, while arriving to fish the water downstream, I saw one, then three, then a dozen or more rising browns in this pool. I crossed the trestle and then bushwacked (I mean bushwacked) my way to the pool. The water level was at the lowest it had been all season and maybe it was the reason for all the rising browns and my unexpected success. A weekday evening in mid October, with very low water, was a night to remember. A size 16 olive comparadun was all that it took to get me near the double digit mark. I have no reason why this spot was such an unproductive area for years and then have it erupt into the bonanza that I had last fall. I will always keep an eye on the Lower Trestle. You will see this pool in the foreground of the previous photo.

The Kempfield Section-Proper



The Kempfield Pool looking upstream from the "glide" to the "riffles"

Ok fly fishers, you are now entering the Holy Land. Back cast to the directions that I previously mentioned concerning crossing the railroad trestle. Walk through the woods, on a faintly traveled trail (the river will always be on your left) until you see a very big rock as seen in the top of the last photo. There is a trail that will bring you downhill to the river just above the rock and an island in the river. You are there!! The area above the rock is a great opportunity (as is anywhere below the railroad trestle) but the riffle section on the left side of the island is pure Nirvana. This is the beginning of the “Kempfield Pool”, a long set of riffles that feed a beautiful glide that feed a deep holding pool.

The Riffles- If you decide to cast a long line through this section then you ought to buy a set of clubs and take some lessons. You will have more success. This is a set of riffles that are best fished with a short line nymphing technique. Scourer the bottom of this set of riffles using whatever fly that you like. In the evening this is a great place to cast a bushy dry fly upstream to the browns that call these riffles home.

The Glide – The riffles feed into this lovely section just across from where Whetstone Brook enters the Millers. Frankly, this whole section should be called the “Whetstone Section”. It almost was but the name never stuck. Pay special attention to the rocks that protrude the surface during early summer onward. It seems that surface action begins behind and in front of these rocks. It is dry fly water supreme. These is really the home of the large mayflies that I mentioned earlier in this guide due to the sandy bottom. Fishing a dry across the river is much harder due to the many currents that will cause drag. Fish your dries upstream!!!!

The Pool – The pool starts at the last rock that breaks the surface on this section, about 30ft from the right bank. This is a gem during the late season. Water level is low enough to wade out far to position yourself. Earlier during the season (April through June) you will have to content with being within twenty feet of the bank. Back casting room is adequate so not to worry. This pool is deep but flies swung just below the surface get action during the high water of the spring. The largest trout that I have caught on the Millers was a 23 inch clonebow early in the season on a marabou streamer just below the surface. It doesn't count as far as I'm concerned. A guy with a salmon egg would have appreciated it more than I.

A Kempfield Story or Two - Back cast to a Sunday afternoon in late September of 2006. The water level was invitingly low as I made my way to the Kempfield Pool. I was able to wade out to almost the middle where I spied the dorsal fins and tails of nymphing browns. I was soon joined by another fly fisher. The pool is large enough to accommodate more than one so neither of us felt crowded. For the next two hours we took over a dozen fish all on emerger patterns. The sun was warm, the fish were willing and the poor guy who came in at the Power station side, hemmed in by deep water and a lack of back casting room, had to watch our whole episode. Lesson – fish the Kempfield from the north side!!!!

Now back cast to 1992. It's a misty, foggy Saturday evening in mid July. I'm fishing the Kempfield at the "Glide" section mentioned above. There is very little action. All this changes as dark descends on the river valley. The glide comes alive with slashing, rising browns. The mist begins to turn to a light steady rain but the surface action will not stop. Every brown is caught on a size 14 olive comparadun on an upstream drift until one fish breaks me off. Damn it! No, I didn't have a flashlight so this exciting but sublime evening is over. On the way home I decided to stop at the late and dearly lamented Highland Café for a brew or three and to vow to buy a pocket light the next day. At the pool table stands Jerry Doiran, the genius who invented the Regal Vise. He looks up from studying his next shot and says "how many?" I hold up all fingers from one hand and three from the other. "Then what the hell are you doing here?" he said as he continued to survey the table. "Don't ask" is all I could say.

SECTION THREE

The Lower River



The end of the lower Catch & Release as seen from the river crossing in Erving Center.

Now I'll take you to a place where the river is still a mystery. The Lower River is a paradox. It contains a section that has been viewed by more anglers than all other sections combined but also has sections that are seldom visited by fly fishers. Even the bait boys seem to stay away even though this section is open to all angling methods. Let's start at the top and work down.

Check out the above photo. This is the end of the lower catch & release section of the Millers. For years the end of this section was publicized as the "breached dam in Erving. Now it's the "bridge crossing in Erving". So be it. Anyway, you get there be taking your first left when entering Erving Center on RT. 2 from the east, your first right when entering Erving Center from the west. Drive under the railroad bridge and the bridge crossing the Millers is just a few yards up the road.

There is good fly fishing upstream from the bridge, past the mouth of Keyup brook (left side going upstream), up to three long deep pools ending just below the paper mill along Rt. 2. Downstream you will find a nice run of pockets and riffles for about a half mile until you hit the railroad trestle at the beginning of Farley Flats.



Looking downstream from the Erving bridge. Very nice water!!!

Farley Flats

Ok, you've all seen it. It's point along Route 2 in Erving where the Millers leaves the back roads and presents itself to thousands of people every day. The vast number of people who try to fish this section will do it after pulling off the highway by the railroad trestle. Some will try to work downstream on the highway side but will soon realize that unless they know how to rollcast they will stand more of a chance of hooking a Toyota on the backcast than a trout on the forward cast. (You may hook an 18 wheeler so bring plenty of backing). This was the situation that I encountered when I moved to this area over twenty years ago. It is easily remedied. Walk up to the trestle at the head of this stretch and walk downstream on the tracks. Your back cast will be hampered by the embankment so a good roll cast is in order.

There is one spot that deserves attention. As you drive along the river you will see a large, beautiful pool with a very large rock in its middle. This rock has some painted markers on it which were probably put there by some kayakers to measure water depth or something like that. This pool is deep and this pool is good all season long. It can be reached from either side of the river but the tracks side is the best. Bring the full

arsenal of flies at all times and you would not be wrong to bring a sinking line for the early season. The riffles above and below this spot produce but this pool.....well, it's pretty good. As an added bonus, I never see anyone fishing it.

The Bridge Street Pool



The Bridge Street Pool looking upstream from the bridge

Don't let the forked sticks by the shore turn you off or the abandoned lawn chairs sinking into the sandy shore. Don't let the remains of at least four vacuum cleaners in the lower pool turn you off either. (a good spot for a river cleanup). The Bridge Pool has a bit of West Virginia in its makeup. Sorry to those who hold the Mountain State dear. It's just that this one excellent pool is also visited by those who still uphold the Millers tradition as being a dumping ground. All evidence is that the aforementioned violators center around this spot and go no further. Let me tell you of this spot.

Bridge Street is an exit of of Route 2 in Erving or more exactly in the Village of Farley. If you are heading west past Erving Center you will pass Farley Flats and then take the first left (that's Bridge St.). Be very careful of oncoming traffic. If you are heading east it is the first right a few miles or so from the rest area on Route 2 east of Millers Falls. After the exit travel about 100 yards, go over a rickety metal bridge, and park on the right side of the road. Suit up and do one of the following. Head to the right side of the road and jump down the old cement wall and enter the river at the head of the

pool or head to the left, enter the river, cross under the bridge and head to the head of the pool.

The Pool – People should learn how to fly fish HERE!! IT IS A CLASSIC POOL!! A broad, shallow riffle empties into a storied deep pool with plenty of casting room. A spring enters on the opposite side of the river from where you are standing. The pool is almost “swimming hole” deep throughout the summer and the trout hang in there.

How To Fish IT – Short casts from the riffles down to the deep holding water will work very well here. So will stonefly imitations since this section abounds with them. Watch for rising action on the far side. This is a section that is heavily stocked with rainbows but strange things will happen. In April of '06 I was standing in the exact place that I previously mentioned, fishing a #12 stonefly nymph, catching a lot of rainbows, when I felt this enormous strike. Five minutes later I landed an 17inch brown of that great honey-brown color that says “holdover or native”.

The “forked sticks and lawn chairs”? I’ve only seen two bait fishermen in my 20 years of fishing this place. They didn’t catch anything. I’ve never seen anyone in the lawn chairs. Maybe they were just taking in the sun. If so, take your chairs home with you. The vacuum cleaners? I think they were the Sears brand.



*A nice stretch about a ¼ mile below the
Bridge Street Pool*

The Cable Pool

I’m the only one who uses this name for this nice piece of water. Here’s why. Back in 1985 I decided to check out the water below the bridge Street Pool. About a ½ mile below Bridge Street my eyes popped out of my head not because of seeing a beautiful piece of water but because of what was straddling it. Someone had strung steel cable across the pool at about a 10 foot height. This was repeated over the length of the pool

at about 20 foot intervals. On each cable there were two or more sliding “gates” that could be positioned anywhere over the river. My guess is that this section was used as a kayak training course back then. I had no problem with this dual use of the river due to fact that very few people used the river for recreation of any type back then. I had a good time learning to cast between the cables and gates and caught a lot of trout. The cables are long gone but the trout are still there.



The Cable Pool without the cables

Adjacent Waters

Orcutt Pool



Orcutt Pool looking upstream to the Holtshire Bridge

No mention of the Millers River would be complete without mentioning Orcutt Pool. Actually this stretch was once called the Holtshire Pool due to the bridge (Holtshire Bridge) and the road that goes over it (Holtshire Road). The name "Orcutt" comes from Orcutt Brook which enters the Millers just above Holtshire Bridge (see photo) on the left upstream side of the River. Some of us veterans will never call it "Orcutt", preferring to remember this place from years ago before it became popular.



Orcutt Pool looking downstream from Holtshire Bridge

Why is it popular? First, it has very easy access. Park your vehicle (if you can find a place to park), walk for 30 seconds and you're there. Second, it's the easiest wading on the Millers. The bottom is made up of small stones and gravel with no real deep water to deal with. Third, it has good insect hatches due to that fine gravel bottom and some great weed growth. Fourth, it's stocked very heavily. You will find most fly fishers below the bridge covering the first 100 yards of the pool or fishing the mouth of Orcutt Brook. This place gets hammered from May through June and then the fishing pressure drops off quickly. Why is that? Here's my theory. Easy wading means easy

fishing which means it's going to be populated with folk who like daytime hours (no good during the Summer) and don't want to have to move around a lot. I've always found it amazing why this place is deserted at dusk in mid summer and why hardly anyone, with the exception of my friend Don, bothers to fish the tail end of this great run as night falls. The "tail end" is located about a ¼ mile downstream just before the heavy fast water. The browns begin to leave the cover of the fast water as night falls and take position at the tail of this pool. That's where the action is after mid June. You may be the only one there. I'll wave to you!!

How to get to Orcutt Pool – Take Route 2A out of Orange, pass a Chinese restaurant on the right and a gravel operation on the left. Holtshire Road is your next left. Park in the grassy lot just off the road, walk under the railroad bridge and there you are.

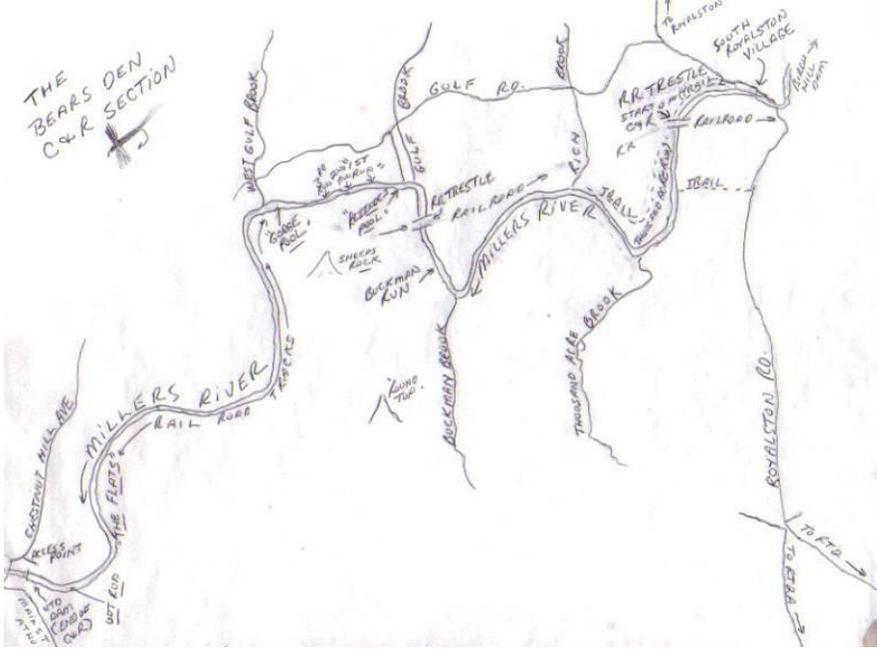
Other Places

Go ahead and find them. I'm not going to tell you everything. If you visit every one of the places that I've mentioned in this guide then you will have a very good working knowledge of this river and that should keep you busy for years. It did for me!

Good Luck!

Ken Elmer

THE BEARS DEN
C&R SECTION



MILLERS RIVER
LOWER C&R

