

Around the East

News, Views, and Piscatorial Pursuits



PHOTO BY TY GOODWIN

Upper Hiwassee River, TN By Ty Goodwin

The Hiwassee River in southeast Tennessee is a coin with two very different sides. The Hiwassee below the Apalachia powerhouse is an excellent tailwater trout fishery with roadside access and considerable amenities (see *Eastern Fly Fishing*, January/February 2014). The river above the powerhouse, on the other hand, is a rugged backcountry bass stream best suited to anglers who relish adventure. If they were stepsisters, the lower “Hi” would be the gorgeous debutante in a sundress with a daisy tucked behind her ear. The upper Hi would be the sultry beauty with a sleeve tattoo and brass knuckles in her purse.

The upper section is well known locally for its resident smallmouth bass. These thick-bodied thugs are more than willing to feed on the surface, and top-water action can be spectacular. Dead-drifting large flies like Turck Tarantulas or Kent Edmonds’s Stealth Bombers works, but adding a twitch or two during the drift often triggers explosive strikes. If surface activity is slow, high-sticking olive crayfish patterns or big rubber-leg nymphs through deep slots is a proven tactic.

Most bass range from 0.5 to 2 pounds. Five- and 6-weight rods are perfect for these fish and sturdy enough to handle the occasional 4- to 6-pound bruiser in the upper river. These huge smallmouth are not easy marks. I’ve heard more than one story from glassy-eyed friends about “the biggest bass of my life” rising



PHOTO BY TY GOODWIN

to a fly, only to refuse it at the last moment.

This is rough country, and precautions are in order. The river squeezes through massive rock formations throughout this stretch, so expect to do some climbing and clambering. Solid wading boots and a wading staff are important. Cell service in the gorge is nonexistent, so don’t fish this area without letting someone know where you will be. It’s always a good idea to fish here with a friend or two.

Also, keep in mind that all power-generation water releases from the reservoir above Apalachia Dam occur at the Apalachia powerhouse via an underground conduit and do not affect the upper Hiwassee. However, the Tennessee Valley Authority occasionally opens

the dam spillways during significant rain events, dramatically increasing the volume of water coming through the upper river. This is rare, but when it happens, this section is unfishable and dangerous. Check www.tva.gov, click on "Lake Levels," select "Apalachia," and click "View Info." If the information states that Apalachia is spilling, then avoid the upper river. Again, it's a rare event, but I never fish here without checking the website first.



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The upper Hiwassee is best accessed by following railroad tracks (on the south bank) that parallel it for several miles. The John Muir Trail runs along the opposite riverbank and is also an option; however, the trail leaves the river frequently and access is spotty at best. The tracks can be accessed near the powerhouse at the terminus of Powerhouse Road. To reach the powerhouse from State

Route 30 in Reliance, turn north onto SR 315, crossing the river; then turn right on Childers Creek Road. Travel 1 mile and turn right onto Powerhouse Road. (This road is actually marked as Childers Creek Road, but soon transitions to Powerhouse Road.) At approximately 4 miles, the road ends in a small roundabout. Park here and cross the footbridge to the powerhouse. Bear left after

crossing, following the tracks upstream. There are literally miles of good fishing from that point. There are few access trails from the tracks. The best approach is to simply look for a viable place to climb down the embankment to the river. Note that this is an active railroad and a train could rumble through. Be alert and prepared to move away from the tracks if necessary.

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