

Sycamore Creek , TN

By Ty Goodwin

"Dude, I will hurt you if you write about Sycamore."

Ouch. That seemed a bit harsh, but my friend's response was what I expected and probably what I deserved. I was threatening to break one of the sacred codes of our many years of fishing together, a long-standing blood oath that we keep our yaps shut about our "list." No exceptions.

Many anglers have a list like this, a compilation of secret fishing locales held close to the vest, maybe shared with one or two trusted friends. Our list is a pleasing mix of blue lines, remote backwaters, and nondescript farm ponds. All have in common two main characteristics: a reasonable expectation of solitude and great fishing. For the better part of two decades we've spent untold hours tromping around the Southeast sniffing out these hidden nirvanas.

Sycamore Creek in east Tennessee was an early entry on our list and over time became a standard against which we measured other waters. The best places are often studies in contradictions, and Sycamore epitomizes this. It lies within the popular, heavily fished Tellico River watershed, but goes largely unnoticed. Access is easy, but its trails are usually empty. The fishing is outstanding, but anglers often pass it by for more glamorous nearby rivers like the Bald, the North, and the Tellico itself.

This lack of attention is surprising, because the stream is full of acrobatic wild rainbows that readily pounce on any well-placed fly. And then there are the brookies. In its upper reaches, Sycamore morphs from an easygoing mountain flow into a rugged little brawler of a creek, squeezing itself through jumbles of boulders and deadfalls as it spills from the surrounding summits. Fishing this upper section can be challenging, but the reward is no small thing: native southern-strain brook trout. Dry-fly fishing can be a year-round affair on Sycamore, with the wild trout there rarely passing up a well-presented Stimulator or Humpy. Adding a small dropper nymph is a solid strategy in winter. Be sure to wear drab clothing and keep a low profile.

Access to Sycamore is easy enough. From Tellico Plains, head east on State Route 165, and after about 5 miles, turn east onto Forest Service Road 210 (Tellico River Road), heading up the Tellico River for 16 miles until you reach the Tellico Trout Hatchery. Parking is available at the hatchery or in the nearby Pheasant Fields picnic area at the mouth of Sycamore where it drops into the Tellico River. Forest Service Trail 163 (Sycamore Creek Trail) begins near the mouth and follows the creek for 2 miles before turning sharply away toward Whigg Ridge. Above this turn in the trail, there are another 1.5 miles or so of fishable water for anglers willing to navigate the streambed itself and do a little boulder hopping. Generally speaking, brook trout are found upstream of this switchback and rainbows downstream, but don't be surprised if you see brookies well below this point. The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) is actively working to establish brook trout strongholds throughout the length of the watercourse, and these native fish are gradually displacing the rainbows in some of the lower stretches.

In the fall, be aware of bear hunting season, which is open for various periods from September through January (for specific dates, contact TWRA, www.tn.gov/twra). I always wear a piece of bright-orange clothing when fishing this time of year, and often meet hunters on the trail when the season is open. I once had two hunters come charging down the trail toward me and ask breathlessly if I saw the bear that had been heading my way. The answer, fortunately, was no, but that encounter taught me to take extra precautions when fishing Sycamore in the fall.

Regardless of when you go, pack a lunch and make a day of it. Take the time to thoroughly enjoy this superb little stream. Sycamore Creek might end up on your own list.



PHOTO BY TY GOODWIN



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