

Upper Patapsco River Fishing, Access and Inhabitants

Presentation to Free State Fly Fishers of Maryland

May 3, 2023

Final Version – Cleaned and Duplicates Removed 5/9/2023

Talk description – to include river sections, access points, fishing methods and aquatic insects.

Group Notification <noreply@...>

7:00pm [#5771](#)

Reminder: Club Meeting

When:

Wednesday, May 3, 2023

7:00pm to 8:30pm

(UTC-04:00) America/New York

Where:

Club House 3789 Queen Anne Bridge Rd. Davidsonville, MD 21035

Organizer: Gary Grey [garygrey74@... 4437951953](#)

[View Event](#)

Description:

Our May speaker will be our very own Andy Grosko who is our club's resident expert on fishing the upper Patapsco for stocked trout and smallmouth. He will present a talk on all aspects of fishing this great, underutilized, local fishery. He'll discuss the different sections of the river, access points, the aquatic insects under those many rocks, and the best flies and streamers to imitate them. Come and take notes!



Credit: Bill May
Photo of a
February Brown
Caught on a bead
head pheasant tail
nymph. Carrol
County Times
Midge fishing on
the Patapsco
published article.
Caught in February
a few years back.

Introduction

- Moved to Maryland in early 1980's
- Worked and lived with 5 miles of the Patapsco River over 40 years.
- Catonsville and Granite Maryland.

- Fished Sykesville Maryland to Avalon and each month of the year.

- River is gem and organizations are supporting its return to health.
- High volume of visitors – anglers need to work the edges... explained.

What are we going to Cover?

- Brief history – world famous but just a time for a few points.
- Access – how to get to the river, parking, exploring.
- Fishing – conditions and methods – my viewpoint

- Inhabitants of the river
 - Food Chain and Macroinvertebrates
 - Assessments
 - Future

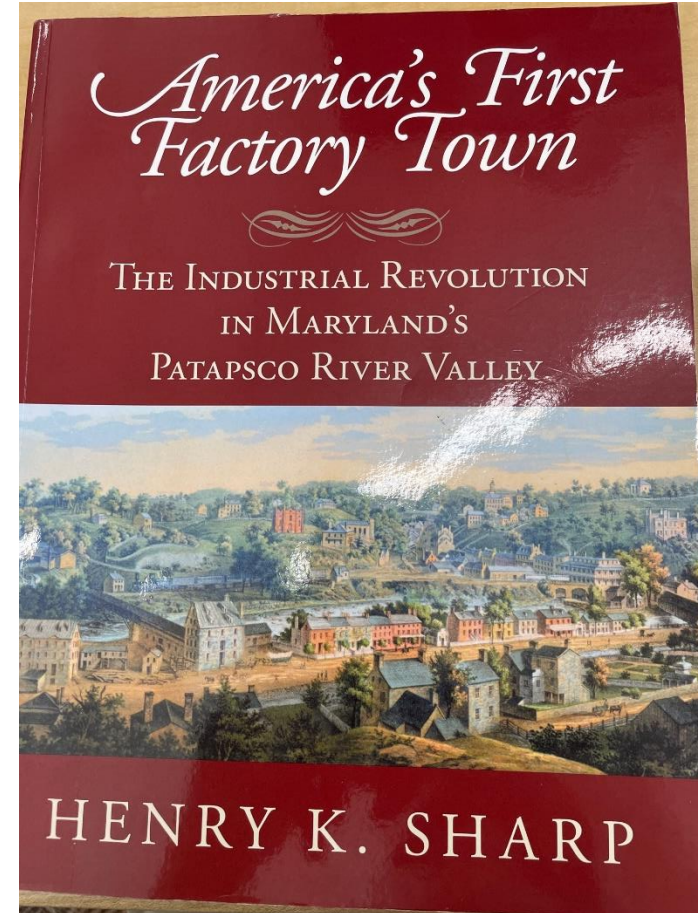
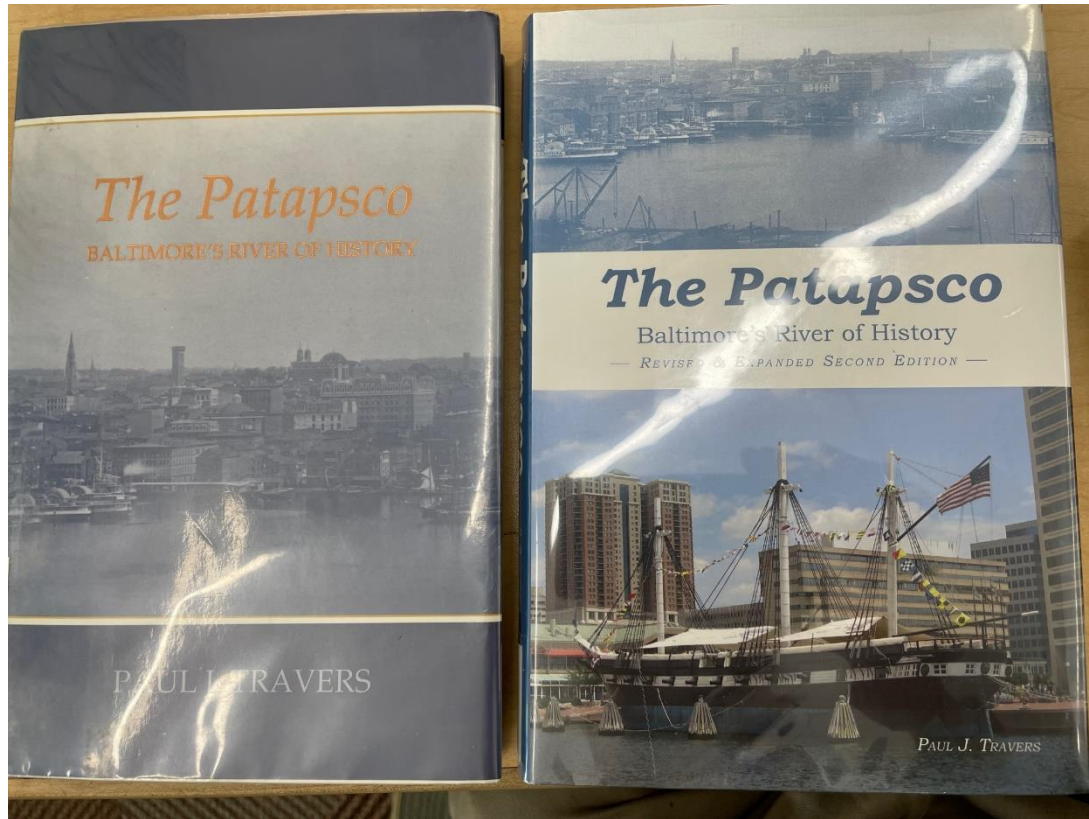
Historical Perspectives



*Group on the Patapsco at
Alberton, upstream from
Ellicott's Mills. 1857*

ven into flannels or sheeting. Independent agents sold these finished products on commission.⁵²

The Patapsco Baltimore's River of History



Fishing – conditions and methods – my viewpoint

- Excellent in April and May with fly hatches, stocked trout and various other species to provide good fly fishing.
- USGS Patapsco River Hollifield gauge reading about 80-300 CFPS.
 - Better / safer if about 250 CFPS or less. Questionable to wade.
 - Prefer clear water, or green tinge of color.
 - Stable weather and a few days after river settles from significant rain best.
- Fishable year around – weather dependent.
 - Water low 50s mid 60 degrees F. most species, trout, chubs, river shiners.
 - Summer, expect SMB, sunfish.
 - Fall – trout stocking about October / Columbus Day weekend.
 - Less pressure as water cools, trout retained in 2-fish limit areas.
 - Fishable even in late winter with holdovers from October stocking.

The “believing lane simplified nymphing” is my most successful method on Patapsco.

- “How It’s Done” article by Brad Latham Fort. Distributed photocopy of this old magazine article “Simplified Nymph Fishing” – the best.
- Show equipment and demonstrate method. What I am showing is even more elaborate than what I used 90 percent of time.
- Key is finding a believing lane.

Simplified Nymph Fish by Brad Latham Fort

Best article on “the believing lane” Practice it.

- 1. Tackle:** The nymphs you use are by far the most important tackle. Collect live samples from the stream as well as fish you retain.
- 2. Water:** Apply this system only to turbulent, broken water.
- 3. Technique:** There’s no casting involved in simplified nymphing. You’ll catch trout by drifting your nymph through a “believing lane 3 to 15 feet from where your body is planted. Keep your line off the water. Study where your leader enters the water. Set hook whenever it hesitates.
- 4. Persistence:** Stick-to-itiveness pays off. Believe that pocket or run in front of you is best spot on entire river.

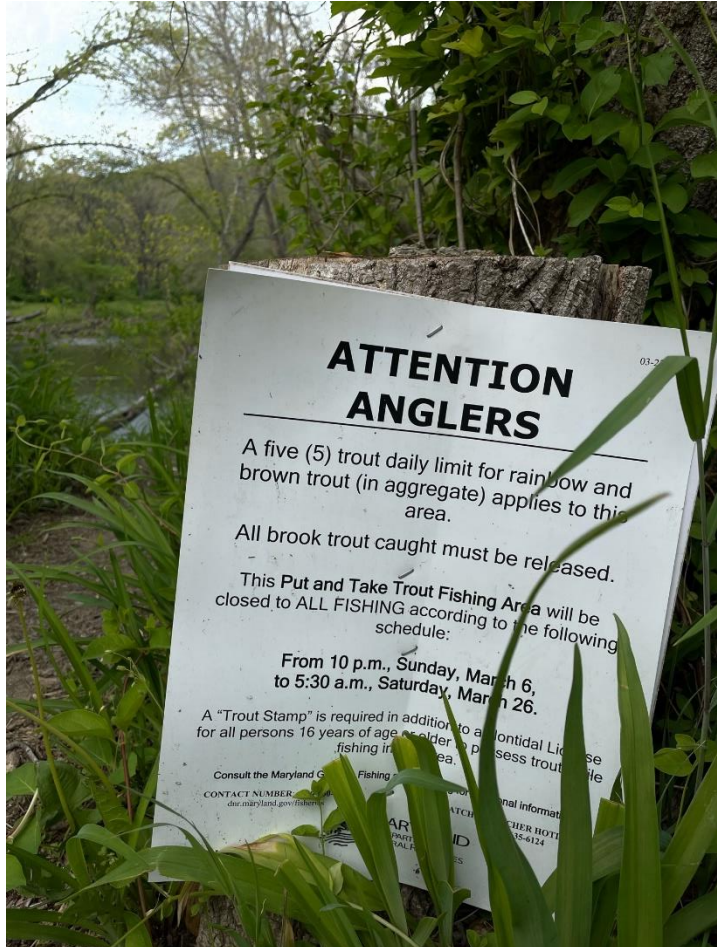
Results from delayed harvest area last evening - in
in the believing lane... do you see it?



Great advice from Bill May 11/19/2017 article on Patapsco River midges.

- Midges often provide the best trout fishing in winter. There are hundreds of styles, colors and patterns -- dry flies, emergers, pupae, larvae. I have seen trout streams "boil" with trout feeding on emerging midges, and this can go on for hours. So here are some guidelines for flies and fishing. The most dominant color in our area is black, but I have seen major hatches of cream-colored midges on Beaver Creek and the Patapsco River. Sizes range from size 20 to as small as size 28.
- The best bet for matching local midges are to go to one of the fly shop listed below. One good generic pattern is a Griffith's Gnat in size 20 - 24. One snowy Valentine's Day Jim Heim and I took rainbows for hours on floating Griffith's Gnats, dunking our rods repeatedly to keep the guides from icing up.
- The small hook gaps on these flies make hookups difficult. Many anglers use pliers or hemostats to slightly open and offset the hook. When setting the hook, use a "slip set" strike and drag the fly to the side rather than upward.
- Hatching midges tend to be in the surface film or slightly under. These tiny flies demand fine leaders. Personally I don't get finer than 6X, but some experts go as fine as 8X. My arthritic hands and tired eyes can't deal with these dimensions in the cold. So I tie a half dozen or so midge patterns on 18 to 24-inch leaders at home and have them ready in my vest. I'll tie on a highly visible dry fly, like a size 12 Humpy or Wulff pattern on a 7 to 10-foot leader tapered to 5X. This fly serves as a subtle indicator. Then I'll tie the tippet with the midge to the bend of the indicator dry fly with an improved clinch knot

Three sets of regulations – know where you are fishing the Patapsco River. Usually posted streamside signs.



- Normal 5 trout / day
- Two trout per day always
- Delayed harvest, artificial lures only.

Feeder creeks and depth attract fish. There were 4 smallmouth bass in this pocket on left.



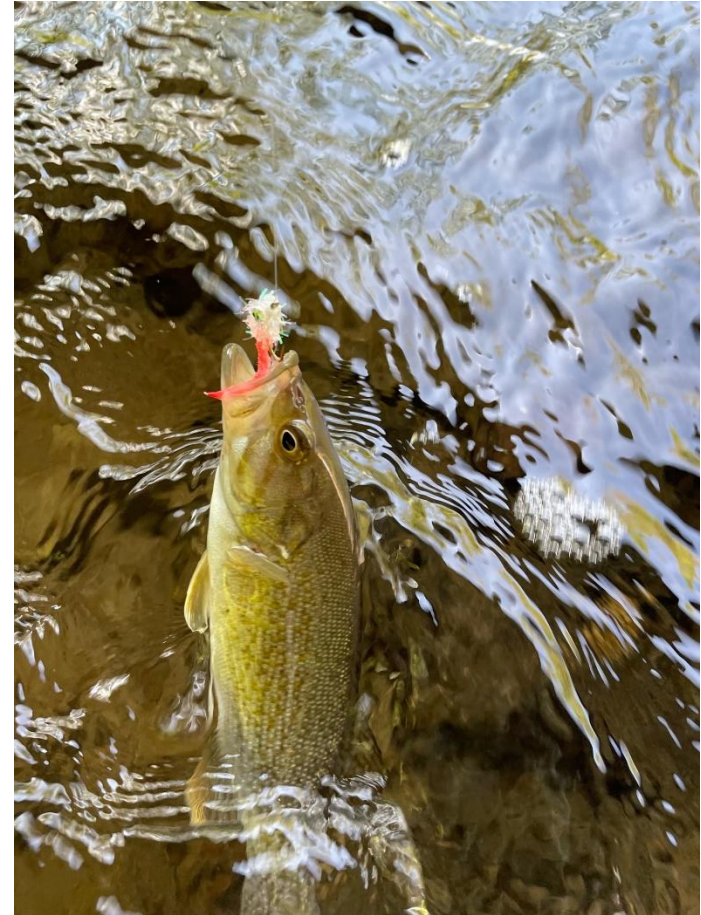
Do you see the fish in both pictures? There is a 20" plus sized rainbow in the left one. See it?



Shadows, structure and current attract fish. Note logjam.
Do you see that large rainbow trout? Polarized glasses help.



Both the golden trout and SMB hit gaudy fly.
Most of time I fish a scud and beadhead nymph.



Example email fishing diary entry 4/26/2023 BTW: 83 CFPS

- Fished the river at Marriottsville Road today. Sunny and intermittent cloudiness this afternoon. Water temperature 58 degrees. Water low and clear. I walked along banks and located a big rainbow trout - one in the 5 lb 20" plus size. It was finning in mid-right i from of a log jam. When back to my van, got by flyrod and tried to find that trout again. It was now deeper and just below the log jam. Impossible to fish it now. Headed downstream and found a nice sized golden rainbow trout feeding in a riffle. Eventually got it to hit a crystal white egg pattern with an orange tail and white barrel shaped lead eyes. Hard to believe it hit such a gaughty fly instead of the size 16 pheasant tail nymph fished tandem with it.

Ended up snagging the gaughty fly and replaced it with a beadhead stonefly nymph, size 12. Kept this combination the rest of the trip. It worked well. Ended up catching 9 rainbows (9 to 14"), 11 common shiners 4 to 8" and 1 small smallmouth bass about 6". All fish were caught in fast moving riffles with an indicator float about 4' up the leader. Good hatches of black caddis flies, tan caddisflies, and light tan mayflies had fish feeding. At times I could see the trout hit the drifting fly or flash near it... time to set the hook.

All the shiners were caught in one long shallow riffle. There was a massive mayfly and midge hatch there and they appeared to be in spawning condition. Brightly colored red fins and bumps on head - indicative of spawning condition in minnow family.

Great evening to be out fishing. Forgot to mention, located some trout on a big hole that were difficult, including a huge golden rainbow that 2 other anglers tried to catch but end up spooking it to leave. Best fishing was in riffles in evening...

Sent from my iPhone

Access is key, fortunately there is plenty.

- Review list of access and types of water, parking situation, etc
- Cover 3 favorites spots and why. Give handout on access.
 - Alberton Road
 - Marriottsville Road
 - Maybe now the delayed harvest area.
- Tell 3 stories that are hard to believe but true. Two are difficult access...
 - Smallmouth bass fishing during late summer evening slate drake hatch.
 - Sunfish and bass fishing during evening til well after dark – steady rises.
 - Trout fishing with family off those Alberton Road riverbed stones.

Access to Delayed Harvest area - FYEO



Access to Delayed Harvest area - FYEO



What is under those stones? Fish food.

- Stream surveys to assess stream health.
 - How – explain, briefly SOS / Izaak Walton League Rocky Stream Protocol.
 - Why?
 - What do we see?
- What did I learn – movement, abundance, variety by season...
- Lots of examples... tell me when had enough.
- Most photo credit to Mandy Deleo from Patapsco Heritage Greenway



Sorted 3 hours to find 470 macroinvertebrates from 90 second sample. Credit Mandy Deleo from PHG for pictures of surveys / insects.





Microscope for details.

- Close calls require magnification.
- Mostly use hand lens.
- More magnification revealing.

- See fish eggs and fish fry next.
- Photo Credit: Mandy Deleo of Patapsco Heritage Greenway (PHG).

Larval fish with yolk sac. Fish egg, eyed.

Microscope photos credit Mandy Deleo, Patapsco Heritage Greenway





- Black fly larvae in foreground.
- Chironomidae in background.
- Size difference exaggerated by camera.

Both are small $\frac{1}{4}$ " length or less
No legs, fleshy prolegs only.

Blackfly larvae in fast water suspend on threads.

Chironomidae larvae wiggle a lot, colors vary from red to orange, yellow, tan, white.

Caddisfly Larva

- Ventral view to show legs (6), head distinct with jaws.
- Hooks on tail portion.
- A dorsal view would have shown plates on top one or two segments.
- Colors vary by species. Green pupae dominant now and are hatching through may. Case builders.
- Yellow, orange and tan netspinnners are abundant. Brushes on body.



Caddisflies emerging.



In a stickcase.





Mayfly - Swimmers

- Note three tails, one toe per foot.
- If only 2 tails, check for gill plates on abdomen. Mayflies have them. Stoneflies have 2 tails but never gill plates on their abdomen.
- These swimming mayflies are fast and have gill plates and medium size antennae.
- Note thin legs. And brushes on front pair for feeding.



Mayflies: Clinger and 2 Crawlers

- See difference in leg and head.
- Clinger is built for navigating rocks in fast water.
- Note its flattened legs, wide flat head and small antennae.
- Overall body is flattened as well.
- Crawlers have body with rounded cross-section thin legs and slightly larger antennae.



Mayfly Clinger

- Powerful, flattened legs, gill plates.
- Note tail length exceeds body length.
- Dark eyes and large mandibles.
- Found in fast water riffles.
- Size varies, some species barely visible at 1/8", other nearly an inch.
- Browns, greys, black. Casselman had very large ones that had red/orange leg margins. Patapsco has many.

Small winter stoneflies
two tails, two toes, two
species.





Which photo contains are
mayfly?



Young Sculpin > 1", Adult up to 4"



Two large predatory aquatic insects.

Dragonfly nymph

Hellgrammites





Young Sculpin < 1" pictured.

- Almost every sample in fast water contains sculpins.
- Note flattened head, broad pectoral fins.
- Adapted to stay put in fast water.
- Large mouth captures anything that drifts by.
- Seen them up to 4" long. Two species in the Patapsco samples we took. Dominated by Mottled Sculpin.

Caddisflies emerging.



In a stickcase.



The assessment based on % of each sensitivity category.

INDIVIDUAL METHOD

Method	Number of Organisms	Number of Organisms	Number of Organisms	Number of Organisms
Method 1	20	20	20	20
Method 2	20	20	20	20
Method 3	20	20	20	20
Method 4	20	20	20	20

Method C: Standard Organism Group	Number of Organisms	Method D: Non-Standard Organism Group	Number of Organisms
Clams	1	Clams	1
Crabs	1	Crabs	1
Polychaetes and Annelids	1	Polychaetes and Annelids	1
Starfish	1	Starfish	1
Sea Urchins	1	Sea Urchins	1
Longhorn Shells	1	Longhorn Shells	1
Mollusks	1	Mollusks	1
Shrimp	1	Shrimp	1
Starfish	1	Starfish	1
Crabs	1	Crabs	1
Total Standard	10	Total Non-Standard	10
Total number of organisms in samples	220	Total number of organisms in samples	220
Percent	4.5%	Percent	4.5%

DATA SHEET MONITORING DATA FORM FOR SOCKET BOTTOM METHOD

Future – no dams, more eels, smarter development? Patience Required...



- Briefly mention
 - postboard of articles.
 - eel ladder – pictured to left at Daniels Dam
- Smithsonian Team Searching for herring via DNA samples in Patapsco River after 3 dam removals.
- Concerns regarding snakeheads

Any future interest? Can provide URLs to SOS, PHG, etc.