INTERMEDIATE

TROUT FISHING WITH A PACK ON YOUR BACK

by Carl Haensel *photos by the author*

Hiking down the trail winding south along the Susquehanna River, we descended into thick rhododendrons. We could hear the stream burbling, sliding over bedrock ledges and through the forest. Soon, Tucquan Creek, Lancaster County, came into view as we followed the Conestoga Trail along the water. A few minutes down the trail, a deep pool appeared revealing the spot to unpack the rods and start casting. While it took a while to reach the water, it didn't take long to hook up with the first trout of the day, a beautifully colored Brook Trout. A designated Wild and Scenic River in Pennsylvania, Tucquan Creek was stunning at each bend and turn as we followed the trail towards its mouth at the big river. Underneath an old railroad bridge, a deep pool in the creek beckoned. We shouldered our packs and moved down to keep exploring our fishing options.

Streams similar to Tucquan Creek abound throughout Pennsylvania, and trout fishing with a backpack is one of the best ways to get out and explore Pennsylvania's more remote streams and rivers. Whether you use a robust day pack or a full-blown backpacking kit, you can get away from the hustle and bustle of roadside fishing and deep into untouched waters. As an angler, I consider any fishing more than a half-mile from the parking area worthy of bringing along a pack. This includes both your fishing gear and the essentials for time on the trail to be comfortable and safe. Longer trips that involve overnight excursions need camping essentials, too.

Setting off on a backpack fishing trip is always exciting. While it's sometimes possible to park near the stream, sometimes you may be a long distance off and far from the water. The anticipation is real as you approach the water for the first time, wondering what you may find.

Fishing Methods for Backpacking

Traveling lighter is key to fishing with a backpack. I often pare my gear down to a single fly box or tackle box. Usually, just a few flies or lures work well to cover ground while you're fishing. Fish are often less picky about what fly or lure they will take. I rarely use live bait while hiking, because it transports poorly.

Finding trout with a backpack means covering water. If you're new to fishing a stream or river, don't spend too much time fishing any specific area. Focus on trying to catch actively feeding fish, whether with flies or spinning tackle. Flies and lures imitating baitfish are often productive for fish that are less pressured. Small inline spinners work wonders for ultralight spin fishing anglers. For safe catch and release, crimp the barbs on treble hooks and consider replacing them with a single

Small, remote streams like this one are great to explore while backpacking. Carry a small hip or chest pack like the author to hold a small amount of gear when you're fishing after you take your pack off.

Use a small fly box with only a few patterns to keep fishing simple on the trail. These patterns include (top row left to right) Royal Wulff, Elk Hair Caddis, Foam Beetle, Bead Head Prince Nymph, Bead Head Woolly Bugger and Bead Head Soft Hackle Pheasant Tail.

A light box of lures is often all you need when backpacking. Top lures for trout on the trail include (top row left to right) an inline spinner, crayfish crankbait, minnow crankbait, small spoon and marabou jig.

hook. Fly anglers will do well tossing Woolly Buggers or other streamers that can be stripped. In faster pocket water conditions, fluffy dry flies are the best way to find active fish. Flies like Elk Hair Caddis or Royal Wulffs do well.

If you don't find trout quickly, hike other areas along your trail route. Often, the further you hike, the more productive the fishing. You can sometimes find hefty trout on small streams in large pools.

Backpack Fishing Areas

Some streams and areas have designated hiking trails along the water. Others are remote, and you'll need to find your own way. Plan thoroughly for a safe and enjoyable hiking adventure.

- Hickory Creek Wilderness, Warren County
- Hickory Run State Park, Carbon County
- Lick Run, Clinton County
- Quehanna Wild Area, Cameron, Clearfield and Elk counties
- Stony Creek Watershed, Dauphin County
- Tohickon Creek, Bucks County
- Tucquan Creek, Lancaster County
- Wallace Run, Centre County

Essentials for Backpack Fishing

Fishing Gear

- Fly or Tackle Box
- Pack Rod and Reel
- Lanyard with Clippers and Forceps
- Spare Line, Leader and Tippet
- Fly Floatant
- Splitshot
- Polarized Sunglasses
- Fishing License

Hiking Gear

- First Aid Kit
- Water Bottle
- Snacks
- Knife
- Cell Phone Backup Battery
- Sunscreen
- Lip Balm
- Over-the-counter Painkillers
- Rain Jacket