

The North Yuba River

By **Bill Carnazzo**

“I fish because I love to; because I love the environs where the trout are found, which are invariably beautiful, and hate the environs where crowds of people are found, which are invariably ugly...because trout do not lie or cheat and cannot be bought or bribed or impressed by power, but respond only to quietude and humility and endless patience; because I suspect that men are going along this way for the last time, and I for one don't want to waste the trip.”

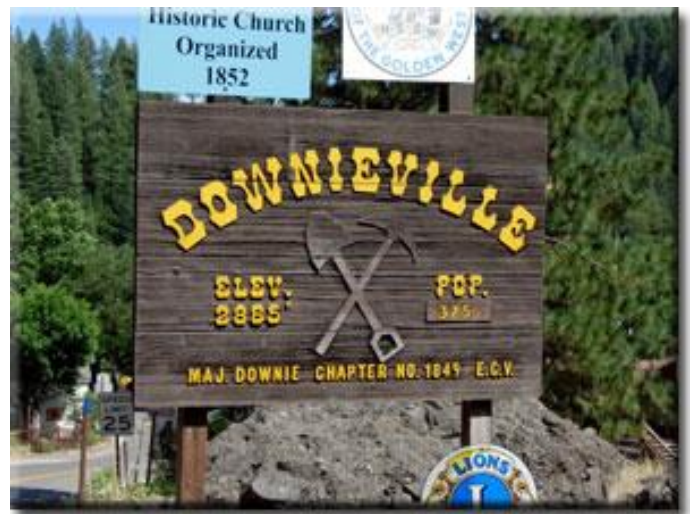
— Robert Traver, *Testament of a Fly fisherman*

These incomparable words could have been written for the North Yuba River—a true gem of a freestone stream. I have fished this river for forty years, and have guided it for the last ten of those years. Although it has been impacted adversely in recent years by excessive mining activity, its resilient beauty and wildness keep me going back. An excellent source of information on the river and its fishing spots is [Fly Fishing California's North Yuba River](#), by Ed Klingelhofer, Salmo Press, 1993, updated in 2004.

In my way of thinking, the river can be divided into three parts: the lower river, extending from the Highway 49 Bridge to Downieville; the middle river, extending from Downieville to Sierra City; and the lower river, extending from Sierra City to the headwaters.

Access along the lower river is relatively easy because Highway 49 follows the river's path for much of the way to Downieville. There are, however, some areas where the river parts ways with the road, sometimes necessitating adventurous hiking. There is a relatively new trail that extends for about 7.5 miles along the south side of the river, beginning at Rocky Rest Campground, found at mile marker 5.74. The trail provides access to some spots not obvious from the road.

Good, fishable water can be found at Convict Flat picnic area; below Ramshorn Campground; near Goodyear's Bar; and intermittently in the riffles and runs below



The sign greeting visitors on entering Dunsmuir



Convict Flat picnic area

Downieville. At Goodyear's Bar there is an old road called the "Toll Bridge Road" that runs upstream for a few miles. This very narrow road provides good access along that side of the river. While there are "no parking" signs along the road, it is likely that no one will bother you as long as you have parked off the road so that cars can pass.

At Downieville, the Downie River and the North Yuba River join, providing the significantly larger flows found in the lower river. This is where the middle river

begins. Here the angler can pause for refreshment at one of the several restaurants in town, pick up a deli sandwich at the grocery, or simply stock up on goodies for the day. There are angling options available also. Instead of continuing east on Highway 49, one can fish the Downie River, along with its major tributaries: Pauley Creek and Lavezzola Creek. There are good trail and local roadway maps of the area, thanks to the mountain biking crowd that now frequents Downieville. One such map is the "Lakes Basin, Sierra Buttes, and Plumas Eureka State Park Map published by the U.S. Forest Service. Also, Ed Klingelhofer, in his excellent book on the river, gives a detailed account of the Downie River and its two major tributaries.



North Fork Yuba Experimental Trout Management Area

The portion of the middle river (about 7 miles) between Downieville and Ladies Canyon Creek is dead-on next to the river. There can be good evening fishing in some of the more attractive pools and runs near the Shangri-La Lodge up to Union



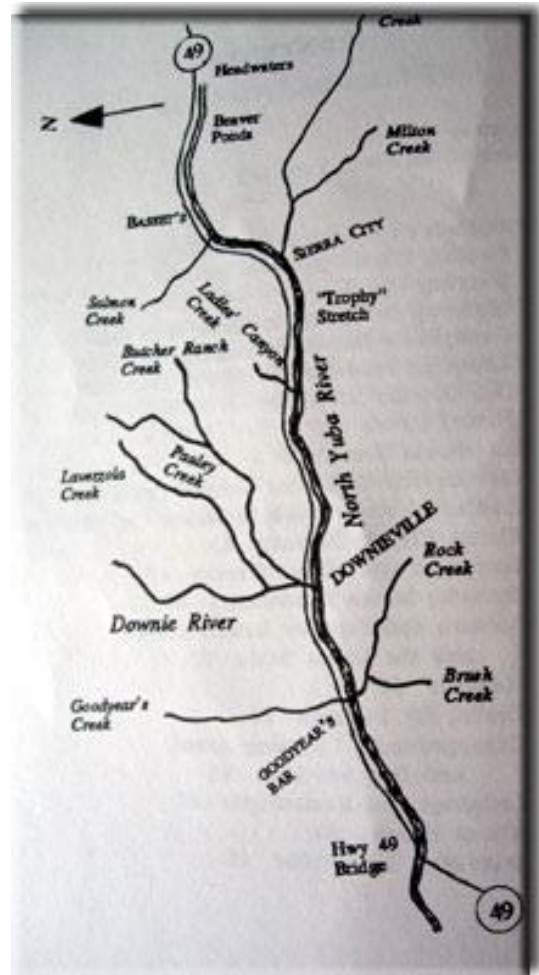
Fishing the North Yuba

Flat campground, but I tend to confine my time on that water to weekdays- preferably Wednesday or Thursday. At Ladies Canyon Creek, there is a sign that proclaims the river from that point up to the westerly edge of Sierra City to be a wild trout area with special regulations. Sorrowfully, there is no enforcement. That said, there is some very productive water in this area for knowledgeable fly fishers. Notable spots are the Fournier Ranch; Kokanee Cabins; Loganville Campground; and just below Herrington's Resort, the "meadow"

section that winds its way up to the resort. You can also find good fishable water at mile marker 26, where there is a good turnout area, and at a spot just past that marker where there is a dirt road that hooks back west.

The upper river begins at Herrington's Resort; from there upstream it gets smaller as you pass its tributary creeks: Haypress Creek at Sierra City, and Salmon Creek at Bassets. Past Bassets the river is more like a creek, especially as you work your way upward onto the Yuba Pass. About five miles east of Sierra City there is a large, paved turnout on the north side of the road. There is a large spring there. If you park at the spring and walk across the road, you will see a series of inviting small pockets that stretches for about a half mile downstream. This water is excellent for dry fly fishing in the evening. The fish are generally small, but an occasional 12" "lunker" can be taken here. Beware of rattlesnakes, black flies, and slick rocks.

Effective nymphs for the North Yuba include Mercer's Poxyback Golden Stonefly in the spring; Prince Nymphs, Hare's Ear Nymphs, Dark Lord Nymphs, Pheasant Tail Nymphs, and Copper John Nymphs all year long; and Bill's Stick Caddis Nymph (grey version) in the fall. Productive dry flies include yellow Stimulators, Sallies, King's River Caddis (parachute version), Parachute Adams, and a Light Cahill pattern tied in the "hackle stacker" style.



North Yuba River map