

Willowemoc Creek, NY

By Mike Valla

It might be argued that Willowemoc Creek holds as much significance in the history of American fly fishing as the celebrated Beaver Kill, the water it weds after its 27-mile journey through a lovely valley in the Catskill Mountains in New York. In his influential 1864 work, *The American Angler's Book*, Thaddeus Norris (1811–1877), described fishing the stream with Grannoms and Jenny Spinners, two old British patterns. Anglers who followed Norris also wrote compellingly about the creek.

Theodore Gordon, who learned to tie flies from Norris's book, wrote about the Willowemoc in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. George M. L. La Branche (1875–1961) in *The Dry Fly and Fast Water* (1914), described his first experience fishing a floating fly, an event that occurred on the upper Willowemoc a dozen or so miles upstream from the creek's junction with the Beaver Kill in Roscoe.

"Upper Willow," as it is informally called, is generally defined as water upstream from Livingston Manor; "Lower Willow" runs downstream from "the Manor" to the Beaver Kill. The oft-ultra-clear upper creek, rife with aquatic invertebrates, provides plenty of forage for its stocked brown trout, wild brown trout, and wild brook trout.

The upper creek offers the quintessential Catskill fly-fishing experience. I love fishing my 7.5-foot 4-weight along most of the stream, reserving shorter, lighter rods for the upper reaches. Classic Catskill patterns still perform well on the Willowemoc. Dette Flies in Livingston Manor, (845) 439-1166, www.detteflies.com, is a source of good advice concerning the best patterns. Not far away, Antrim Streamside, (845) 747-0704, www.antrimstreamside.com, offers excel-

lent rental cottages and cabins, along with private access to the Willowemoc. The upper creek runs in and out of private land, but ample public mileage is accessible via multiple formal state parking turnouts along County Road 81/82, which



PHOTO BY MIKE VALLA

follows the creek from Livingston Manor upstream to its headwaters.

I like to think of Upper Willow in three sections: the lower 6 miles between Livingston Manor and Debruce; the middle 4-mile stretch between Debruce and the hamlet of Willowemoc; and the uppermost trickles between Willowemoc and the creek's origins in a tract of state land called the Big Indian Wilderness. Some of my most cherished memories stem from experiences fly fishing the section from Livingston Manor to Debruce.

Three state parking areas are located along CR 81, which follows the stream between Livingston Manor and Debruce. You'll be in the company of other anglers during May and June, when Hendricksons, March Browns, and various caddisflies bring fish to the surface. However, the parking turnout at the old Debruce Road, 1.5 miles upstream from the intersection of CR 81 and State Route 17, is not directly on the stream; the creek is accessed via a footpath down a steep hill. The walk deters some anglers from fishing that section, which holds some fine browns and a few brook trout.

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