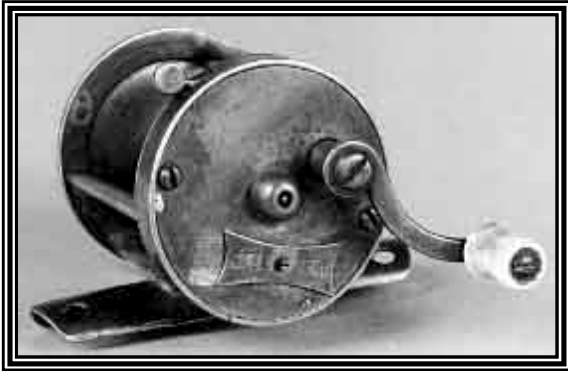


BASS IN THE BLUEGRASS

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Anglers have been fishing Stoner Creek in Bourbon County for nigh unto 200 years. That's what researchers say, and when they compile the history of sportfishing in America, Stoner Creek ought to share some of the pages. It was this limestone bottom stream that inspired George Snyder, a watchmaker and silversmith who lived in nearby Paris, to invent a device that remains to this day, the world's most important piece of fishing equipment.

A sport fisherman with a European background, Snyder longed for a method to get his bait to where the big fish were. This, coupled with the distaste for getting his feet

wet while fishing (no self-respecting member of the gentry of that period would be caught dead wading bare-legged for a lowly fish!), caused him to invent the very first double-multiplying geared casting instrument – a “baitcasting reel”. Snyder's baitcasting instrument would make the limestone-bottom streams of Kentucky's Bluegrass region famous among fisherman throughout the 19th century. Anglers from far and wide traveled to the center of the commonwealth to purchase and fish with what would become known worldwide as the “Kentucky Reel”.

Today, these same historic waters – the ones that form the base of the world's finest sippin' whiskey while satisfying the thirst of the finest thoroughbred racehorses on the globe – continue to be a stronghold for stream smallmouths.

Charley Cooper, a wholesale grocer from Cynthiana, is convinced that the South Branch of the Licking River that flows through Harrison and Pendleton Counties was another inspiration for Snyder and the early reel makers in Kentucky. This wide and shallow limestone stream produces quality fishing for smallmouth's running to two and sometimes three pounds from the early spring through late autumn. Cooper, an avid bass fisherman in a state crazy about black bass, says that bass fishing in the numerous limestone-based streams in the region is a treat anytime water temperatures are above 50 degrees Fahrenheit, and especially during springtime. *“The fish are hungry and ready and there just isn't any pressure to speak of,”* notes the longtime central Kentucky angler.

Cooper fishes the South Branch more than other streams simply because of low fishing pressure and plentiful numbers of fish, but says that there are several others that offer the same angling quality for smallmouths. These include the nearby Silas, Hinkston, Elkhorn, Hanging Fork, Slate, Brashears, and Jessamine Creeks. Silas is in Bourbon and Harrison Counties. Hinkston is in Bourbon and Nicholas Counties. And that doesn't count the dozens of smaller streams that crisscross the landscape in this region. Any creek, he says, that holds water year-round and features pools three or more feet deep probably supports a good population of smallmouth bass. Because these streams are shallow, lure and bait presentations that work on or near the surface are effective throughout the season. Cooper's favorite mode of attack is to load up with a handful of six inch purple worms and fish them Texas-rigged through any pool more than three feet deep, dropping them over the lip of limestone ledges that fall off into deeper pockets.

Equally effective is the Model 9 floating Rapala in silver-and-black finish, cast to any likely looking spot and allowed to rest on the surface a few seconds before “twitching it to life.” Rebel's Wee-Crawfish and Deep Teeny Wee-Crawfish models in pond-colored finishes work best with a straight retrieve, especially in and around riffle areas.

When wading, Cooper prefers fishing upstream, figuring he eliminates the chance of spooking the fish ahead of him. And because all fish face the current, he believes an up-current presentation gives smallmouths a better opportunity to see and bite his offering. Smallmouths are found in every kind of condition common to shallow, rock-bottom streams, but most action will occur in the first 50 feet immediately above and below a riffle area. *"You'd be surprised how many good-sized smallmouths live in a spot no bigger than a car in these streams,"* Cooper adds, pointing out that each pool between riffles has at least one or two such places where a limit (six smallmouths that are 12 inches or more in length) can be caught in no time at all.

As the water warms up in the late spring, and throughout the summer and autumn months, Cooper likes the thrilling surface explosions that occur when a noisy top lure is worked slowly past a shaded cover area. A medium-size buzzbait is his favorite weapon, but he notes that any surface disturber will work. *"Stream smallmouths like to hear a little noise and see some commotion on top when the water warms,"* he says.

Pete Pfeiffer, Kentucky's fishing director, says that the state's limestone smallmouth streams are in good condition, overall, and provide anglers with the opportunity to fish uncrowded pristine waters in one of the most scenic regions in America. *"There is always something pulling on your line. Maybe not the big fish, but lots of them and on light tackle. For a lot of folks, that's what is important in fishing."*

KENTUCKY'S SMALLMOUTH BASS WATERS

- *This is a list of waters in each county where anglers can have a reasonable chance to catch smallmouth bass when seeking this species.*

Adair: Russell Creek, Sulphur Creek, Green River (Good floating), Green River Lake (Expanding Population)

Allen: Drakes Creek, Barren River (Floatable)

Barren: Fallen Timber Creek, Skaggs Creek, Barren River Lake

Bath: Slate Creek (Excellent), Cave Run Lake (Lower lake good)

Bell: Cumberland River (Floatable), Cear Creek

Bourbon: Hinkston Creek (Riffle areas good), Stoner Creek (North of Paris good), South Fork Licking River (Excellent)

Bracken: Bracken Creek, Locust Creek

Breathitt: Troublesome Creek (Marginal) Quicksand Creek (Marginal)

Calloway: Kentucky Lake – West side (Good)

Carter: Tygarts Creek (Riffle areas good), Grayson Lake (Marginal)

Casey: Big South Fork Rolling Fork, Green River (Floatable)

Clark: Stoner Creek, Lulbegrud Creek (Good wading)

Clinton: Cumberland Lake (Excellent), Dale Hollow Lake (Excellent), Spring Creek (Good wading)

Edmonson: Nolin River Lake (Marginal) ,

Franklin: Benson Creek (Good), Elkhorn Creek (Excellent wading & floating)

Fleming: Fleming Creek

Grayson: Nolin River Lake (Marginal)

Green: Little Barren River, Russell Creek , Green River

Greenup: Tygarts Creek (Riffle areas good)

Harlan: Poor Fork Cumberland (Good), Clover Fork Cumberland, Martins Fork

Hart: Nolin River Lake (Marginal)

Harrison: Licking River (Floatable), South Fork Licking River (Unimpounded sections good)

Jefferson: Floyds Fork (Fair)

Knott: Carr Fork Lake (Some big fish)

Laurel: Laurel River Lake (Mid and lower area)

Lawrence: Blain Creek (Marginal)

Leslie: Greasy Creek (Marginal)

Lewis: Kinniconick Creek (Riffle areas good), Laurel Fork (Overlooked area), Grassy Creek (Overlooked area)

Logan: Red River

Lyon: Kentucky Lake – East side (Excellent), (LBL shoreline to face of KY Dam)

Madison: Otter Creek, Paint Lick Creek, Silver Creek

Marion: Big South Fork Rolling Fork, Rolling Fork River

Marshall: Kentucky Lake – West side (Good)

Menifee: Slate Creek

Metcalfe: Little Barren River

McCreary: Cumberland River, Big South Fork Cumberland River, Little South Fork Cumberland River, Indian Creek, Marsh Creek

Monroe: Barren River

Montgomery: Slate Creek, Lulbegrud Creek (Good wading), Hinkston Creek

Nicholas: Hinkston Creek, Licking River (Floatable), Oldham Harrods Creek (Good)

Pendleton: Licking River (Riffle areas good), South Fork Licking River (Excellent)

Perry: North Fork Kentucky River

Powell: Lulbegrud Creek (Good wading), Middle Fork Red River

Pulaski: Cumberland Lake (Excellent)

Robertson: Licking River (Riffle areas good)

Rowan: Cave Run Lake (Lower area good), North Fork Triplett Creek, Triplett Creek

Russell: Cumberland Lake (Excellent)

Scott: Elkhorn Creek (Good)

Simpson: Red River, Drakes Creek

Spencer: Salt River (Above Harrodsburg), Brashears Creek (Below Guist Creek)

Taylor: Green River, Green River Lake (Seasonally good)

Trimble: Little Kentucky River (Excellent), Corn Creek (Good)

Trigg: Kentucky Lake - East side, LBL shoreline (Excellent)

Wayne: Cumberland Lake (Excellent), Beaver Creek

Whitley: Cumberland River (Mid and lower areas), Laurel River Lake

Wolfe: Red River (Riffle areas good)