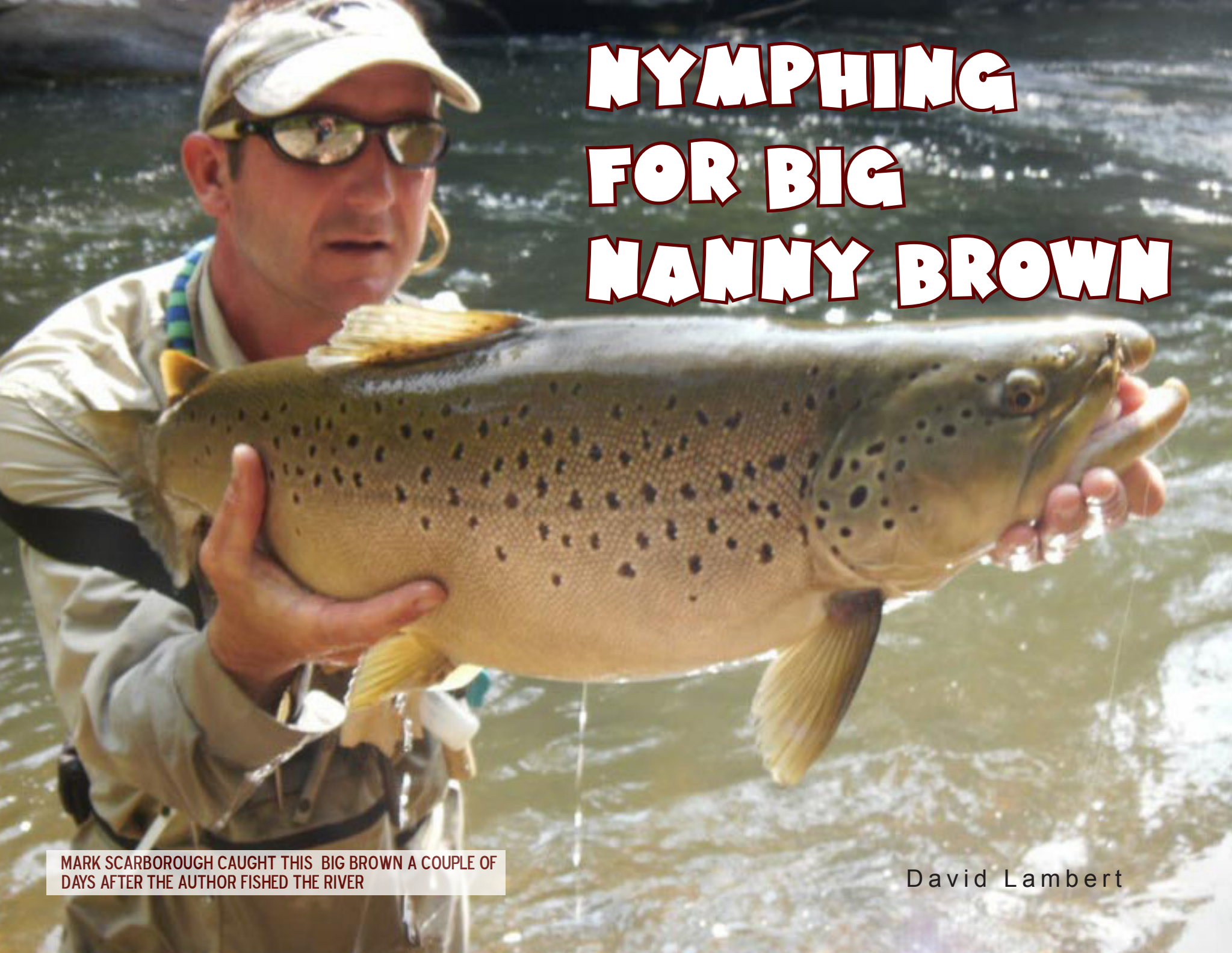


NYMPHING FOR BIG NANNY BROWN



MARK SCARBOROUGH CAUGHT THIS BIG BROWN A COUPLE OF DAYS AFTER THE AUTHOR FISHED THE RIVER

David Lambert

free
nymphing
fast
waters
calls
for a
different
set of
fishing
skills

by David Lambert

Ken said we'd be fishing from a boat, that this river might be too cold for me to wade.

But this is a late afternoon in early-June in the mountains of North Carolina and I've just spent six hours standing in the swelt of the North Georgia sun, then driven 2 hours to get here. So, I'll be damned if I don't at least get my sweaty, sore feet wet.

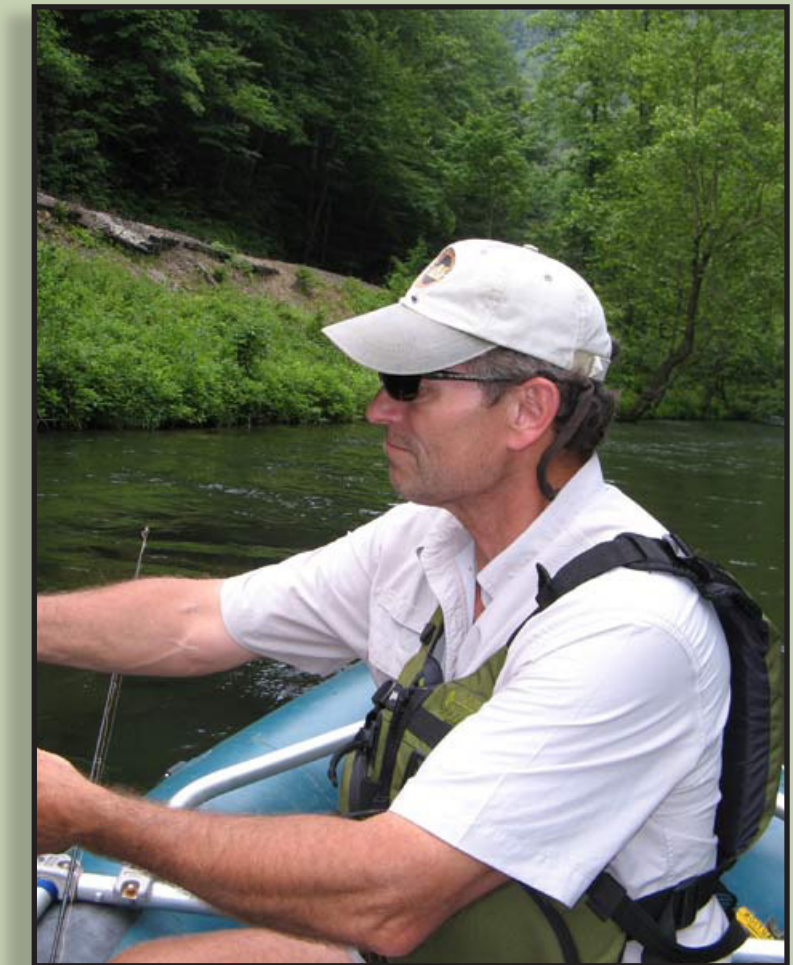
So I do, step right on in, right up to my thighs, right there next to the rubber boat we'd humped over a riverside rail into the river. Ken was right about the water; at 45° it sends my testicles in search of warmer housing.

Ken Kastorff is right about a lot of things when it comes to fishing western North Carolina. He's paddled these mountain rivers for 30 years years. He's a guy people listen to. Ken wants to do some R & D fishing to find one of the really big fish this rugged, fast water is known to hide. Big brown trout, that's what we're looking for. Two state records have come from this river recently, he tells me. Neither were caught on a fly.

But the free-nymphing fast water requires a different set of fishing skills than fishing the slow-water/deep-water fishing on my North Florida spring river. . .and I have maybe never fished for trout with streamer.

'I'm not much good at this,' I tell him truthfully.

Fast-water nymphing is a specialty skill, one that requires lots of hands-on, lots of hours dredging the bottoms of cold-water rivers. This fishing calls for a sort of 'fling and flop' casting style, but also technical casting, too, lots of round casts and curving deliveries, all of which will be around or under jutting rock, rhododendron and blooming mountain laurel.



KEN KASTORFF

continued on next page



THIS BROWN FOUGHT OUTSIDE ITS WEIGHT CLASS

Getting the fly to the fish is only part of the game. Fast water is no place to hone one's line-control skills. Here, you command your fly line or you get skunked, or worse, you get fouled. Seeing the take and setting the hook is a masters level course. In the tumble and boil of a fast-river bottom, a fish can spot your fly, taste it and reject it before you ever know it. And landing a big fish in fast-running water from an oar-powered boat can present its own difficulties.

The best anglers – pros like Ken and his buddy Mac Brown of Bryson City – those guys have it down. They use advance techniques lesser anglers wouldn't conceive. They might drag the nymph slightly faster than the cur-

rent. They fish tandem and triple flies. They dredge streamers on the bottom, pulling them in advance of the flow, or retard them. And they fish the shallows, the bubbly, churning riffles.

I spent the better part of two days fishing this stunningly cold river from Ken's boat, a rubber craft with fore and aft seats and a rowing rig. It's a utilitarian vehicle, perfect for a river that moves this quickly, one that responds well to the oar through Class II and III rapids. My perch is in front; Ken mans the oars from the center seat. He is an expert oarsman and we float down this bumpy mountain water in search of big brown trout.

Because this river is in Western North Carolina and because it is very close to the Smoky Mountain National Park, it sees lots of river traffic. Possibly a hundred rafts passed us each day I fished. . .and many more kayakers. Nearly everyone who goes by asks if we're catching fish. It's impolite not to respond, but you find yourself wishing no one would ask. The answering gets tiresome. So here's the conundrum: Do you lie and tell them you're doing great, catching lots of fish? Or do you tell them the truth as they whoosh by: that you're out testing the waters for really big fish and that you're not really fishing for the small guys?

Conundrum, Part 2: Fishing the river is part of Ken's business at Endless River Adventures. It's not good for business to tell the truth either way; that is, if you say you're taking lots of fish, you're enticing more anglers to fish this river than it can handle; if you say 'not many,' then Ken loses potential guiding clients.

So Ken's developed a psychology that pretty much salves the situation: He's cut out and carries a stringer full of obviously plastic fish. He leaves it dangling over the side of the boat. When someone asks if he's catching fish (and the virtually all do) he quietly displays the stringer of plastic fish. It's great for a laugh, real fishermen get the joke, the myriad paddlers think it's clever, six-pack rafters think it's funny—and he's not given up any info on the quality of fishing on this inviting, tumbling water.

A final note on this: One can quickly see how answering the same question a hundred

times a day might become annoying, especially if you have a client in the boat who can't cast, or who doesn't listen, or if the fish aren't biting and it's 95 degrees. A stringer of plastic fish keeps the a little humor in the process, it diffuses the bomb in the boat. A smart solution, really. Oddly, with all the interest from the passing paddlers, and barring a couple of riverside anglers, we were the only fishing boat on the river the two days we fished.

How'd we do? I caught maybe 15 fish total on both days. And none were the really big ones we were hoping for. Mac Brown called later on the final day of fishing. He'd had the U.S. Fly Fishing Team on a couple of rivers for some mentoring. These are the best young anglers in the country; they represent us international competition. Mac told me most of his guys caught far fewer fish; said the past couple of days had been real tough fishing.

So Ken and I didn't do too bad fishing what is largely a rafting river, looking for those big browns. Mac sent me a pic a couple of days later of a 29-inch fish caught on a streamer by a local fly guy.

I know the spot. Ken put me on it and told me to fish it as we passed over it – twice. I did. But did I fish it well? That is another question entirely.

(Note: Ken Kastorff and Endless River Adventures has built a really cool fishing lodge with individual cabins in Ecuador. From there they do trout trips, bird tours, eco tours, and lots of kayaking. For more information on fishing the Bryson City, NC area visit [Endless River Adventures, www.endlessriveradventures.com](http://www.endlessriveradventures.com) -- or call Ken Kastorff at 800-224-7238.)



THE AUTHOR WITH A SMALL RAINBOW TROUT

Because this river is in Western North Carolina and because it is very close to the Smoky Mountain National Park, it sees lots of river traffic. Possibly a hundred rafts pass us each day . . .and many more kayakers. Nearly everyone who goes by asks if we're catching fish.