

# *Sample Chapter*

## Trout and Smallmouth Fishing on the North Branch of the Potomac

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***Liability Disclaimer and Warning:*** It goes without saying that *fishing in streams and rivers is dangerous* and that is particularly true of the North Branch of the Potomac as a result of the fast water and slick rocks. You need to exercise caution, particularly in the spring when the water is high, before you fish anywhere. You absolutely need a wading staff on the North Branch and, depending on your condition, you may consider wearing a life vest -- one of those that automatically inflate is a good idea.

Even when you take all the precautions, you can still slip and fall on the rocks and sustain severe injury. You could drown. You can get hooks caught in your skin, face, eyes or other sensitive places. There are a number of bad things that can happen to you when you go into the woods to visit the places I describe here. There are active train tracks, deep potholes in the water, slick hills covered with scree, cliffs, dirt roads with deep potholes, wild animals and all sorts of other challenges. The bottom line is that you must make your own judgment in terms of acceptable behavior and risk and not rely on my opinion. What is good for me may be wrong for you. Finally, access points along roads in the "Put and Take" areas may change based on property transfers or owner decisions to post property.

Accordingly, ***we disclaim all liability and responsibility for any actions you take*** as a result of reading this CatchGuide. If you do not agree with this, you should not read this guide and definitely should not take any of the advice offered here. ***Use of this material is at your risk.***

## ***Bloomington – Barnum Lower Catch and Release***

### ***Summary Rating***

#### ***Normal Perspective***

Pressure	Green	Trout Size	Green
Physical Fitness	Red	Bass Size	Red
Access	Red	Regulations	Green
Hard to Find	Green	Stocking	Green
Scenery	Yellow	<b>Overall</b>	Red

#### ***Aggressive Perspective***

Pressure	Green	Trout Size	Green
Physical Fitness	Green	Bass Size	Red
Access	Green	Regulations	Green
Hard to Find	Red	Stocking	Green
Scenery	Yellow	<b>Overall</b>	Green

### ***Special Regulations***

Be careful here. The “Put and Take” section begins at the entrance of [Piney Swamp Run](#) and extends down to [Westernport](#). That section allows a daily / possession creel limit of 5 trout. The section covered in this discussion is UPSTREAM from [Piney Swamp Run](#) and ***falls into the Catch and Return portion*** of the river that begins 4 miles farther south just below the spot known as the “[Blue Hole](#)”.

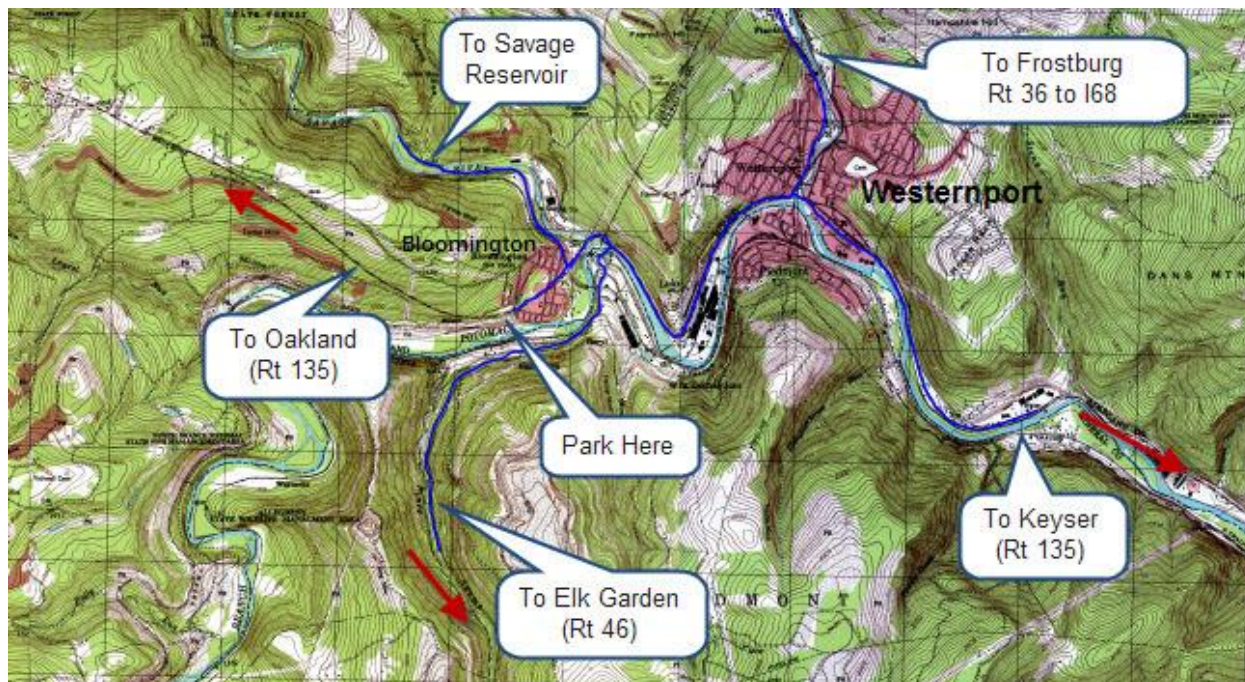
The regulations restrict you to artificial lures and flies at this spot. Those artificial lures must be unscented and you cannot apply scent to unscented lures. Bait is expressly prohibited in this area. See the back of the CatchGuide for [Maryland’s definition of artificial lures](#) as of 2009.

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## Getting to the Stream

Mapquest™ or Google™ Local yourself to Bloomington, MD.

As you drive south on MD 135 from the bridge, turn left onto Seldom Seen Road and park at the iron bar gate in the wide spot to the left of the gate. There is only room for one or two trucks here. The “parking area” is directly behind an apartment building and only a short distance from the turn off of MD 135.



Walk on the road until you decide to cut over to the stream. The road moves away from the river, so make your move before it starts to follow the hill that looms high above the river unless you want to walk to the bend and begin fishing there.

The first time I came here, I was optimistic that Seldom Seen Road would allow vehicle access all the way into the heart of the catch and release area. If you look at the map, you can see that it extends deep into the back section. With the gate firmly locked, that hope was destroyed.

If you want to fish the “Put and Take” area below [Piney Swamp Run](#), you should go to the kayak takeout just upstream of the bridge ([GPS 39.476949,-79.068003](#)) and start fishing there. It’s about a mile from that point to [Piney Swamp Run](#). Another alternative is that you can walk to the intersection of Seldom Seen Road and the railroad. Turn left and follow the tracks back down to the river. That will be a ½ mile walk, but you will move faster than wading up the river.

But the real reason to come to this spot is to fish the catch and release section. You have two options.

**Option 1:** Be prepared to deal with the underbrush. As you walk past the intersection of Seldom Seen Road with the rail bed, start looking for a good place to cut to the river – there is no beaten trail. The easiest place is after passing a fenced area (GPS: [39.473546,-79.08652](#)) that you can see in this picture.

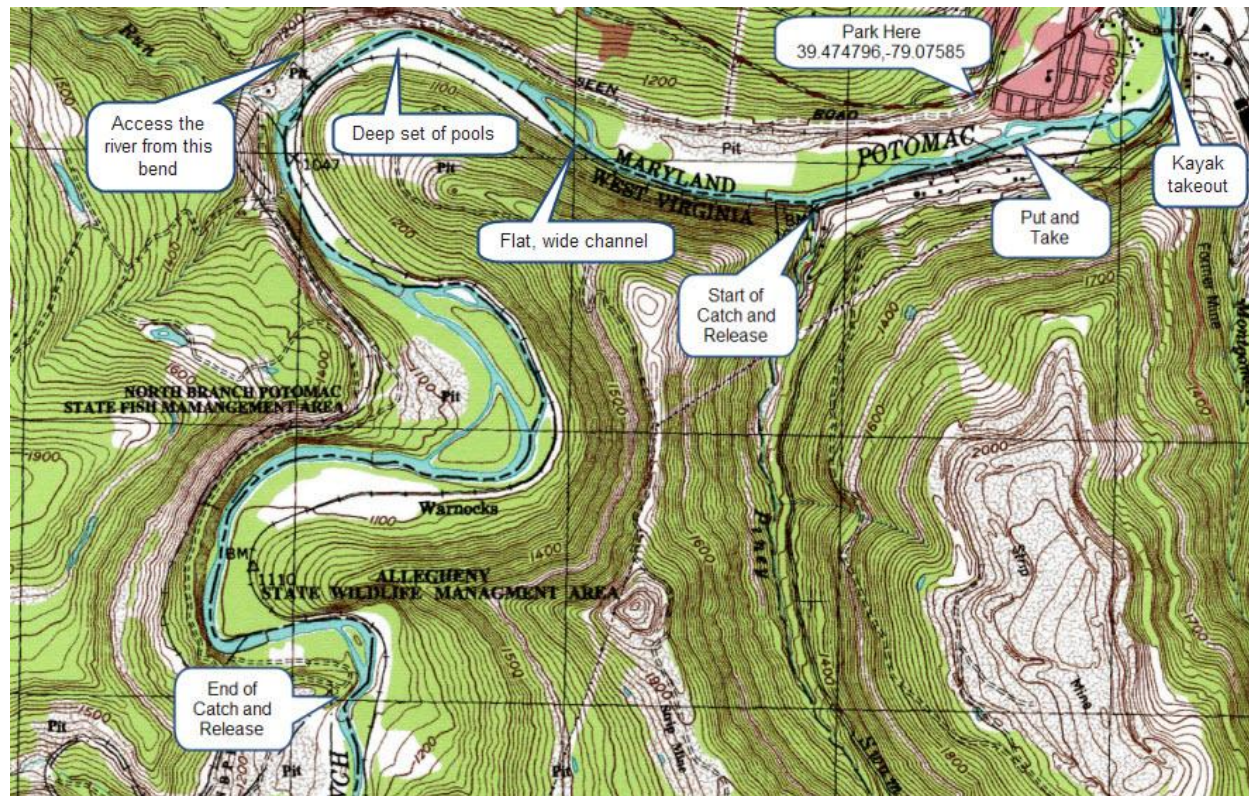


Follow the ravine on the west side of the fence through some heavy undergrowth to emerge at the river bank opposite of [Piney Swamp Run](#).

**Option 2:** Instead of cutting immediately to the river, follow the rail bed to the west. Do not follow the road! The road dips down in the valley and eventually climbs back up the hill to intersect with the track. Unless you want the exercise, stay on the tracks and walk west for another ½ mile. Hop back onto the road when it rejoins the tracks and follow it down the long steep hill. After a 0.4 mile, it bottoms out in the valley near a sharp bend in the river. From this point ([GPS 39.477239,-79.101895](#)), it's an easy walk through the underbrush to the water.

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## Environment and Fish



The primary species of fish here is trout – brook, brown, cutthroat and rainbow thrive in the cold water discharge from the Jennings-Randolph Dam. In fact, trout can be found many miles below Westernport because of the reinforcing effect of equally cold water from the Savage River [joining](#) the North Branch at [Bloomington](#). There are no smallmouth bass between Piedmont and the Jennings-Randolph Dam because of the cool water that stays below the 60 degree temperature for required for spawning.

The river starts out flat and wide at the beginning of the catch and release area. During high water in the spring, it will flow fast and deep; something confirmed by the water marks carved onto the high southern bank. There are plenty of rocks and boulders that break up the water and provide good holding cover for trout. A heavy coat of North Branch slime coats all the rocks and demands cautious wading. The scenery is typical North Branch except for the early portion where you can still see and smell the activity down in Luke and Bloomington, which is why this earns a “Yellow” for the scenery category.

The high, steep hill on the southern bank tucks the rail bed tight into its lower slope and offers a high speed, fast track if you want to use it to get upstream. On the northern side, the terrain is equally as steep after you pass the fenced area. Once you get into the water and start fishing upstream, you will move away from any easy escape route. Be prepared to hump up a very

steep hill or move all the way to the bend for a gentler exit. It's a 1.5 mile walk back out from the bend.

The southern bank shelters a series of good spots that have the most depth. The gradient of the river moves quickly from deep to shallow as you traverse from south to north. The southern bank is abrupt and tight against the steep hill while the northern bank features the broad rock farms associated with a shallow bank that quickly transition into a steep hill mirroring the one on the other side. This continues as you move west.

The river narrows as it comes out of the upstream bend and the steep cliff face closes out access from the northern bank. This same structure creates a beautiful ¼ mile narrow, deep channel that can easily absorb your total attention for more than an hour. The best structure in the channel is next to the northern bank and there are also large boulders scattered throughout the stretch that provide targets for your efforts.

To fish this effectively, you need to go deep. A sink tip or full sinking line is an advantage here. If you are using spin gear, you should weight your spinners with split shot to get them deep quickly. Otherwise, the fast current will whip them downstream over the top of the fish.

As you round the corner, the river returns to the flat, open character. It is not shallow but is wadeable. The next ¼ mile upstream is fast, rushing water that presses through deep cuts. You must pick your course carefully as the water compresses and increases velocity down the moderate gradient. The boulder strewn bottom is perfect habitat for the wild trout that live here.

If you want to move quickly upstream, you can do it here by crossing and hopping on the wide path that used to be the railroad track leading to the mining town of Warnocks.

On the northern bank, if you do not want to fish the pools at the bend, continue on Seldom Seen Road. It breaks into a small open field that is your last easy opportunity to access the river. Cut across the field and move through any of the openings to walk to the river. The river tightens up at this end of the bend before it turns south into the long flat section leading to the [area discussed in the next chapter](#). As a general rule, I recommend you abandon Seldom Seen Road at the pools at the bend, cross the river and use the railroad track leading to Warnock as your primary trail.

Since this area is at the extreme northern end of the [northern Barnum catch and release](#) area, it is unlikely that you will see anyone else here. The 1.5 mile walk in from Bloomington is easier than the 2.5 mile walk from the south.

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This is the view upstream from the option 1 [entry point](#) at the bottom of the ravine just past the fenced area.

The river is broad and flat with a few boulders poking up here and there.

The deeper section is on the southern shore. You can see from the boulder field at the right of the picture that the gradient slopes to the left (south towards West Virginia).

Looking downstream from the option 1 entry point.

Mud and muck protect much of the northern bank in this area.

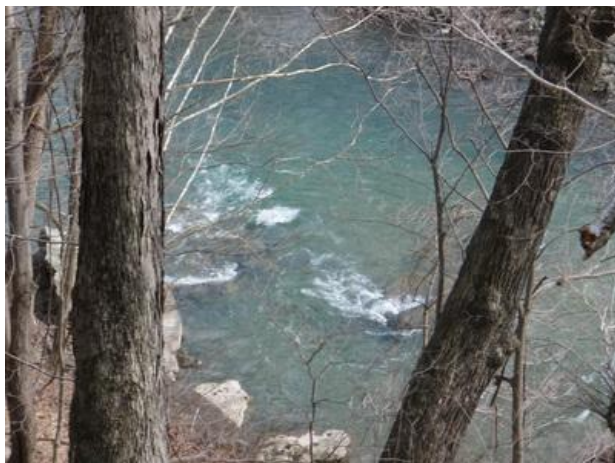
Be careful when you enter the stream. You can sink up to your knees if you are not careful when you step off the bank.



This is the road that leads to the option 2 entry point. It takes a long, gentle angle down the steep slope to the river

With the leaves off the trees, you can see the broad sweep of the river upstream.

This is far enough from the normal Barnum southern access point that this section does not get much pressure.



This picture shows the rock structure at the upstream start of the long, deep pool section at the bend in the river.

The only way to fish this is to go to the bottom and cross the river.

The view upstream from the option 2 entry point at [GPS 39.476949,-79.101541](https://www.google.com/maps/place/39.476949,-79.101541).

There are numerous deep channels spread across this section. You may have to move up or downstream to find a spot to cross.

The Barnum gage was running at 241 cfs when I took this picture.

The level spot on the left is the old rail to Warnocks.



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The view downstream from the option 2 entry point.

Cross here and move down the right hand bank to get to the cliff area at the top center of the picture.

Fish your way downstream – there are plenty of good spots here.

This picture looks upstream into the pool area.

Note the steep bank on the right (north) side. The water runs shallow to deep from left to right. The deepest spots are next to the cliff face.

The velocity of the current is quick here.



Once you fish the broad, flat area upstream of the option 2 entry point, the river completes its turn around the bend.

Picture taken looking downstream from [GPS 39.47504,-79.10506](https://www.google.com/maps/place/39.47504,-79.10506)

The vegetation is dense on the north bank. Fish this from the south bank.



View into the start of the bend that leads to the northern Barnum catch and release area.

The river is very tight here as you can see from the whitewater.

The smooth, flat rail bed leading south is at the upper left in this picture.



### *A Day on the Stream*

On an earlier trip into the catch and release section near the [Blue Hole](#), I discovered a picnic table on the west bank of the river with a rough 4x4 road leading up to it. When I got home, I did some research and concluded that this was the end point for "Seldom Seen Road". With that in mind I was anxious to investigate the access in the [Bloomington](#) section to see if Seldom Seen Road was open for vehicle traffic.

When I rolled to stop behind the large apartment building, I was disappointed to see that Seldom Seen Road was gated, but, since I was here, I parked the truck in the small area to the left of the gate and geared up. As I started to walk down the road, a kid roared up in an ATV and dodged around the left hand gate pole. I flagged him down to ask if the road led all the way to the river. Amazingly, he replied that since he was from Westernport (see map), he was not "local" and did not really know. Guess this redefines "local". I shouldered my rod and began to slog down the wide gravel road.

When I reached a fenced area, I assessed the situation and decided to bushwhack to the river down a narrow ravine. After fighting through the brush, I popped out on the edge of the river. Excited to be on the water, I took a hasty first step into the river and immediately sunk into knee deep muck. Bad call on where to step off the bank. Once into the river, the typical rocky characteristic of the North Branch revealed itself; wading staff required!

The river in this section, on this late fall day, was fairly shallow; running wide and fast at 177 cfs. The quick current pulled at my feet, working hard to flip me off balance and toss me into the 58 degree water. Judging from the high water marks, I could see that the river was running well under that level at this point in the season yet it still demanded respect.

I started fishing upstream, searching for the deep cuts that would hold fish.

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I worked nymphs while my fishing buddy, Dick, stuck to dry flies. This was going to be one of those days where we got to enjoy a great day of fishing; a bad day of catching. In the two hours we worked the stream, nothing was moving.

As the sun set, we faced the facts that it was getting late, we had a long drive home and we still had to get back to the truck. We looked around and discovered that the western bank had changed character from a gentle slope to a steep, steep mountainside. Decision. Walk back or walk up? We decided to climb out where we were, heading up the mountain to intersect Seldom Seen Road and then use it or the rail bed to make it back to the truck. [note: on this day, I had not discovered the easy way out!]

This was a heck of a climb. I traversed in a zig-zag fashion, having to grab trees and roots to get over the really steep spots. It took a good 20 minutes to work up the hill. With trembling legs, I was grateful to see the railroad loom into view as I heaved over the crest and collapsed in a heap to wait for Dick. Once we both recovered, it was an easy walk back to the truck.

### ***Bottom Line***

The character of this water is good and “trouty”. However, the scenery is bland in the lower portion when compared to what you will encounter farther upstream. Given the demanding walk to get into and the climb out of this section, it is not heavily pressured.