

A Remote Section of the Brodhead

By Don Baylor

Long-time local anglers have referred to it as “The Gorge.” It is a spectacularly wild section of the Brodhead Creek between the Stroudsburg-East Stroudsburg interborough bridge and the Rock-Tenn Paper Mill. Very little of this wild stream segment is visible without traveling on foot from top, bottom, or down a steep decline from one of the bordering ridges. Looking downstream as you cross the route 80 bridge just east of Stroudsburg, you can see the Brodhead make a sharp bend to the east at the beginning of the gorge. A few miles farther east on Route 80, at the next bridge crossing, you can see a portion of the lower end of the gorge upstream and the Rock-Tenn Paper Mill below.

Through the gorge, having gathered the combined flows of Pocono Creek and McMichael Creek the Brodhead flows large through deep green pools and boulder strewn riffles. The joining of Brodhead and McMichael Creek waters can be seen looking upstream from the Route 80 crossing near Stroudsburg. Though much of the Brodhead escaped its bed forming totally new configurations in recent floods, it remained little changed through the confined ledge and boulder structure in the gorge.

The east side of the gorge is traversed by an active rail line. On the west side, From Glenn Park, one can easily hike or bike the remains of an old rhododendron –lined rail bed halfway down the gorge to a point where the rail bed disappears in an old wash-out. At the lower extremity of this rail bed, The Brodhead contains the remains of an old power generating dam. This dam and one that confined the Brodhead above the paper mill are long gone, but the aprons and wings of the dams remain. My friend Bob Lambert, a native of Delaware Water Gap, had a grandfather who, years ago, manned the power dam daily by hiking over the ridge from that town. The height and length of the power dam impoundment was made clear to me when Bob related his grandfather’s story of one winter ice skating all the way from the power dam to the interborough bridge. As a child, I remember returning home with a few valued crystals from an abandoned quartz quarry in the gorge near the current Marshalls Creek exit from Route 80.

As a young boy already enamored of trout, I was intrigued by my neighbor’s stories of large specimens he caught near the paper mill where he worked. Years later, I often stalked the gorge in pursuit of those elusive trophies. In recent years, I abandoned the gorge because declining water quality eliminated the sensitive aquatic insects that brought the feeding trout to the surface. A number of point and non-point source discharges negatively impacted water quality through the gorge. During summer low flows, from the paper mill to the Delaware, sewage fungus coated the Brodhead stream bed like shag carpet.

Brodhead Creek Regional Authority’s new state-of-the-art wastewater treatment plant and improved water quality below the paper mill may mark the beginning of a renaissance for the Brodhead through the gorge. Stormwater and other discharges still need to be addressed to bring this gorgeous part of the Brodhead to its full potential as a resource rather than just a receptacle for our waste.