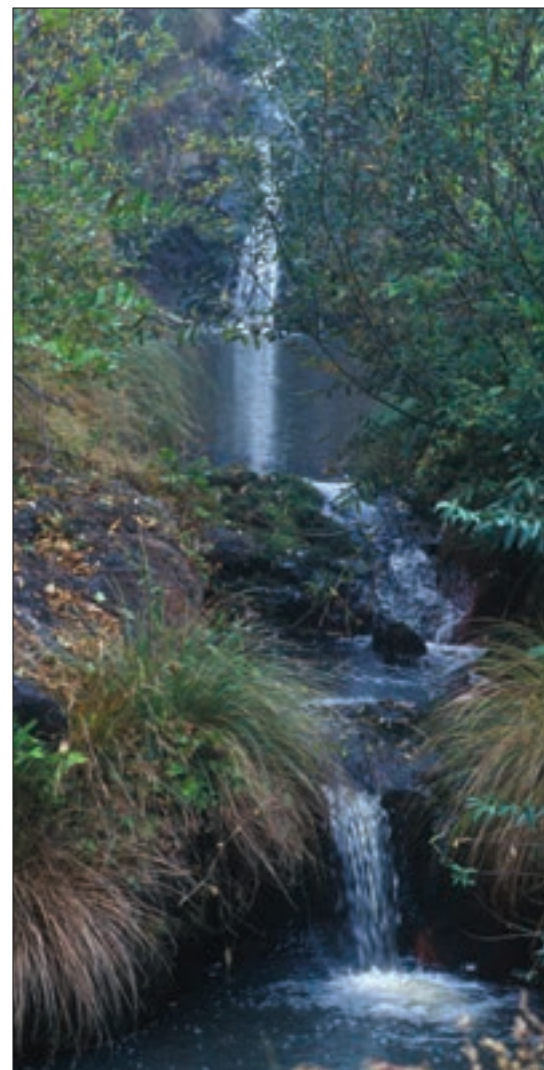
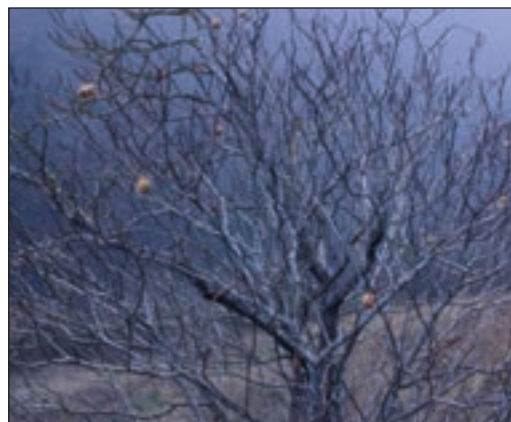


Unseen Reaches

A rare look up Milliken Creek

Photos by Lowell Downey

Lowell Downey created these images while fulfilling a commission from the Napa Valley Museum to document the Napa River and its watershed over a year-and-a-half time for the exhibition "Voices of the River." He now collaborates with the Napa-based watershed education organization ICARE, and supports other area nonprofits involved in ecosystem education.



by JOHN STEPHENS

In the afternoon rays of sunshine you can see the rivulets in Milliken Creek, each four-foot-wide rock creating miniature waterfalls that produce tiny droplets that shoot straight up and drop back down, forming an endless cacophony of spray. Some even shoot counter-current, upstream, to reenter the flow over the same rock that created them. It is an endless chorus in an unseen stream.

Milliken Creek descends a steep ravine through volcanic rock. It was a perfect place for the early city of Napa to build a dam that would hold the most water and be gravity-fed into town.

Above the dam, the city of Napa owns two-thirds of the stream, which helps keep the water clear and clean. The V-shaped walls shelter both flora and fauna. The watershed above the dam has been isolated by some impenetrable falls and is home to the only pure native strain of steelhead left in Napa County. The public is not allowed in this hidden area, and except for the vineyards and cattle in Foss Valley, the stream is untouched for the majority of its run.

The cool canyons with minimal daylight hours also are home to the tallest—perhaps record-breaking—forty- to fifty-foot-high California nutmeg trees. California nutmegs are normally found in isolated slopes in the cooler coastal ranges, but here they have found the ideal microclimate in which to grow.

