

# A Grand Slam on Bear Creek

*California's rugged and scenic High Sierra is the setting for an attempt at catching four trout species from the same body of water.*

By DON VACHINI

**A** sort of frustration was welling up in me, as for the umpteenth time my fly was retrieved without any hint of a strike. Above us, the mid-afternoon sky was rapidly being enveloped by deep black clouds which had already covered the higher peaks further up the valley. Obviously, this was to be no passing thunder shower. Along with the threatening weather, some uncooperative brown trout were thwarting my attempt to complete a rare angling feat — the chance to catch four species of trout from the same body of water.

We were at about 8,000-foot elevation on a fishing/backpacking trip in the John Muir Wilderness, located about 100 miles east of Fresno, California. Our party consisted of my three sons, Chris (age 13), Matt (age 11), Jason (age 9), and me.

We had camped for three days on the banks of upper Bear Creek after an 11-mile hike in, and were now in the process of packing out. We stopped to fish in an area about four miles from the trailhead, on the lower courses of the creek.

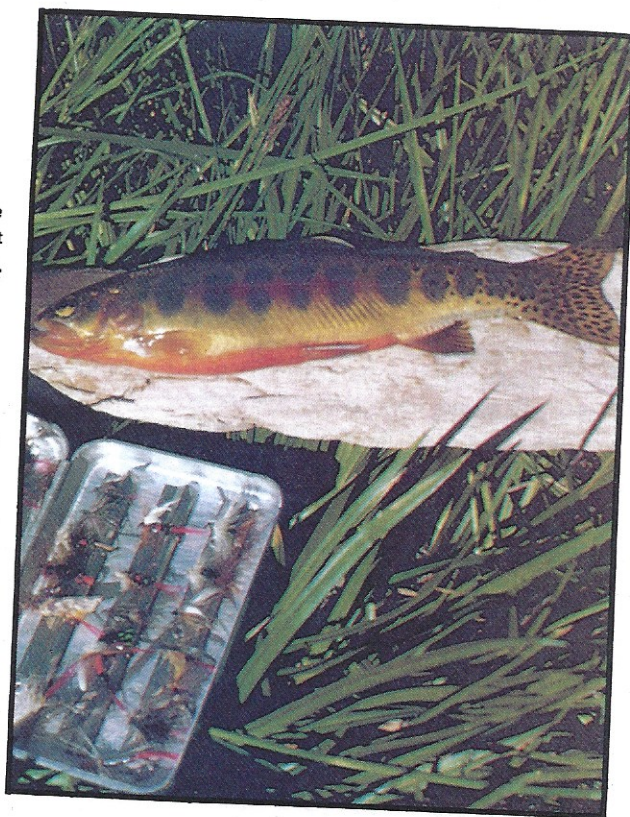
Bear Creek originates high on the Sierra Nevada Crest well above 10,000 feet and flows in a southwesterly direction about 16 miles to join the South Fork of the San Joaquin River below Florence Lake. Though not a large piece of water (perhaps 40 to 45 feet wide in most places), it runs briskly over a rock-

*Please turn to page 9*



Though extremely wary, brown trout dominate the lower courses of Bear Creek.

The golden trout, probably the most colorful of all the trout family, is California's state fish.



Brook trout supplement the golden fishery, and in some places are more abundant than Salmon aqua-bonito.



Available  
at most  
Northwest

*Pay Less*  
*Drug Stores*

COMPLETE SELECTION  
AT ALL G.I. JOE'S STORES



Show your dealer this ad and ask him to call us for wholesale quantities.

If not yet available in your area you may order below:

SIZES: No. 2, 1/6 oz; No. 3, 1/4 oz;  
No. 4, 3/10 oz; No. 5, 2/5 oz.

Colors: Red/White, Purple/White, Red/  
Yellow, Brown/Yellow, Black/White

3 for \$5.00 postagepaid

7 for \$10.50 postagepaid

Please send me the following Spinner Bugs:

Size:            Color:            Quantity:


I enclose \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

St \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

QUALITY  
TACKLE  
COMPANY

P.O. Box 02367  
Portland, Oregon 97202  
(503) 239-5858  
(Dealer Inquiries Invited)

### GRAND SLAM ON BEAR BEAR CREEK

*Continued from page 3*

strewn bed as it drops about 4,000 feet in elevation.

The upper drainage (above the impassable falls) is one of several in California that is dedicated to the perpetuation of golden trout, the state fish. As is the case in all golden waters in the state, the area is accessible by foot or packtrain only.

I had made two previous backpacks into the area for golden trout with friends in 1975 and 1979. The scenic beauty of alpine forest, mountain crags and the excellent fishing impressed me so much that I promised to bring my sons to the area when they were old enough to enjoy it.

In the spring of 1980, I contacted the Department of Fish and Game office in Fresno regarding some additional backpacking information. It was during this brief discussion that a representative of that office said, "Incidentally, Bear Creek contains golden, brook, rainbow, and brown trout . . . one of the few places in California where four species of trout can be caught!"

This statement changed the whole

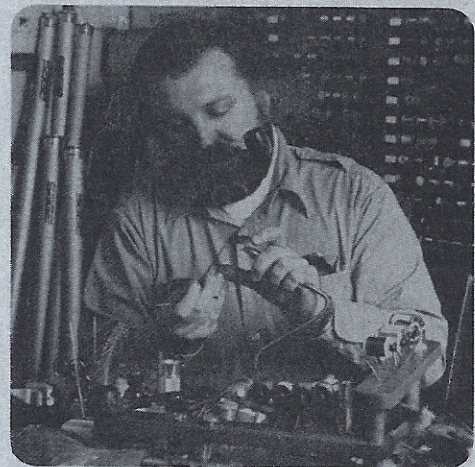
dimension of our venture. I often plan trips for the express purpose of catching more than one species of trout, having caught three separate species on several streams on which I have fished. Never before, however, had there been an opportunity for me to collect more than that. This situation seemed made to order, especially in light of the fact that the trail follows the banks of the creek virtually all its fishable length.

We borrowed the grand slam term as it pertains to various big game animals and applied it to our attempt to catch four trout species, which became our goal for the trip. The boys were as excited about the possibility as I was.

My sons would attempt to complete their slam over the three days allotted for the trip, giving them a leisurely and enjoyable pace. By no means was there any pressure to complete the slam, as it was strictly a fun type incentive. I set my sights at catching all four in one day because it offered me a stiffer challenge. I would have to complete an 11-mile hike in one day while trying for the four species.

On August 21 at 6:00 a.m. my sons and I began our jaunt to adventure. The trail undulated gently for a while, but as we crossed a long granite field we stead-

Flyfishing specialist André Puyans would like to dispel a myth once and for all: "Flyfishing's not complicated or elitist," he says. "To me, it's the most fun you can have knee-deep in water in the middle of nowhere. I believe you can flyfish for anything, from sailfish and tarpon to black bass and trout—provided you've got the desire and the right gear." The FFF's Buzz Buszek award-winner for 1978, Andy has been tying his own flies for 40 years, and in that time has added much to the art and instruction of flytying—including his loop-wing style and A.P. mayfly-nymph series. It's that same sense of integrity and expertise that attracts Andy to Sage Rods and Blanks: "It's the only line of rods I've ever seen, in any material, where every model is the pinnacle of its class. Any one of 'em does all that you can expect from a rod." To learn more about Sage, write us at: 9630 N.E. Lafayette Street, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110.



# SAGE™

# Clipper Craft

Registered Trade Mark

DORIES

- \* Lighter
- \* Stronger
- \* More Seaworthy
- \* More Economical

**PROVEN  
PLYWOOD  
CONSTRUCTION**



Shown:  
Pilot House Model  
26 Feet

Combining the centuries-old qualities of the famed North Atlantic dory with modern materials and techniques, the Clippercraft lapstrake models have created a new generation of boats for the sportsman.

CLIPPER CRAFT MANUFACTURING CO.

MAIL ADDRESS:  
6507 N. Monteith  
Portland, Ore. 97203

Telephone: 503-286-3013  
10130 N. North Portland Rd.  
Portland, Ore. 97203

# Cortland

## 333 Fly lines for every fishing situation.

Cortland has a 333 fly line to meet every need. Floating, Sinking and Sink Tip fly lines — Cortland makes 'em all. And, you'll find the weight and type you need. Go to your

Cortland Authorized Dealer and see the full selection of Cortland 333 fly lines. Discover just how great fly fishing can be with Cortland fly lines.

### Taking any other line is taking a chance.

CORTLAND LINE COMPANY • Dept. 8B7 • 67 E. Court St. • Cortland, NY 13045



ily climbed for three miles before reaching Bear Diversion Dam (most of Bear Creek's flow below here is diverted for use by Southern California Edison Power Company).

Upon reaching the dam, we followed the creek up the narrowing canyon for about five miles to a large open area below the confluence with Cirque Creek. This spot is signified by two large waterfalls and is simply known as twin falls. Between twin falls and the diversion dam, brown trout dominate the stream, with a scattering of rainbows. This section is considered the creek's lower courses.

We planned to eat, rest and fish in this area for a few hours before going on. "How about some soup?" Matt asked as we approached the clearing. "Yeah, and some jerky, too," chimed Jason, attesting to the constant hunger of young boys.

After a brief rest and a hasty meal, the boys were anxious to commence fishing. I would relax by watching them fish. Chris and Matt walked upstream to a brushy area above the falls, while Jason opted for the huge emerald-colored pool at the base of the falls.

Ultralight spinning rods and reels were our basic bread and butter gear since the fish we would be trying for would be small (a 10-incher would be a nice fish). With this setup we were afforded three types of fishing — bait, spin and fly. We would use 4-pound test monofilament with 2-pound leaders for all our fishing on this trip. For fly fishing, a clear plastic bubble attached about three feet above the fly would serve the purpose. A small BB weight pinched on a foot or so from the fly would allow it to be fished wet. Since we use this setup almost all of the time, it was one we were all comfortable with. It is also easily packed. We brought size 0-1 spinners and size 14-16 flies.

Chris rigged up with a bubble and size 14 Black Gnat, Matt with a size 16 black Woolly Worm, and Jason chose a size 0 brown Rooster Tail spinner.

In a short time, I observed Chris land and release a small rainbow and Matt follow the same procedure with a tiny brown. Jason, however, provided the first surprise. "Look at the spots, Dad," he yelled over the roar of the falls. I figured brown trout, but close inspection revealed dark vermiculations on its back and white on the leading edge of the lower fins — his first brook trout! Even though browns dominate the area, some brook trout occasionally wash down from above the impassable falls, located about a mile above the twin falls area.

Without any further angling success, we resumed hiking. From twin falls, the trail veers away from the cascading creek and we completed a steep and steady ascent up the north wall of the canyon for approximately two miles. This was the most physically demanding stretch of the whole trip, taking us well over two and a half hours including frequent rests.

From the summit, the mile descent back to the creek proved extremely scenic and, happily, took little more than half an hour. We rejoined the creek in a flat, open area, suitable for either resting or camping (also known as the Kip Camp area). From here upstream to the headwaters is known as the upper courses.

The impassable falls (not visible due to the creek dropping off into a deep canyon) acts as a natural boundary for the golden trout of Bear Creek. Besides golden, brook trout are common in this section.

We established camp among a stand of lodgepole pine overlooking a briskly moving section of the creek. During the following two days we were in an angler's paradise, enjoying beautiful scenery, a clear, cold cascading creek and an abundance of golden and brook trout as well as complete solitude. Many golden waters are above timberline and unappealing, but Bear Creek flows through forested area, giving it an aesthetic and pleasing setting.

Using flies, we had great angling success, releasing most of the fish we caught. Nevertheless, we were able to enjoy fish at every evening meal, a welcome enhancement to our supply of freeze-dried dinners.

One of my greater thrills was observing all of my sons catching their first goldens, a feat yet unaccomplished by many a veteran trout fisherman. I felt especially proud of their deeds in light of their ages.

All of the goldens caught were vividly colored and highly active, making them well worth the effort to reach them.

By evening of the next to last day, Chris and Matt had completed three-fourths of their goal and Jason one-half of his. I was now looking forward to my attempt with mounting excitement. It would begin early the next day.

The following morning, I awoke before dawn. It wasn't quite light yet, but as I rigged up my ultralight tackle a twinge of excitement passed over me like a cold chill. While tying a fly on my leader, I became aware of several clouds in the sky which had a pink hue to them.

Past experience had shown goldens to be very abundant in the creek's upper

# Buck's Camp, RIVERS INLET BRITISH COLUMBIA

600-MILE FLY-IN SAFARI FROM  
VANCOUVER, B. C. TO THE  
HOME OF THE **BIG FISH**

Steelhead — April and May  
Salmon — June to October



NORTHWEST SAFARIS, LTD.  
Box 86344, North Vancouver, B.C.  
Canada V7L 4K6

JOHN BUCK (604) 985-3638

A New Experience In Stripping Baskets  
Saves Temper ☆ Saves Space When Not In Use ☆ Saves Tackle

THESE WATERS RESTRICTED  
TO  
**FLYFISHERS ONLY**

**\$39.95**

Add \$2.50 Shipping Costs  
Calif. Res. Add \$2.40 Sales Tax



HOW TO GET MONEY BACK FROM YOUR BASKET:  
Accidentally drop your glasses,  
fly box or reel in it  
then pick 'em  
up!



NO MORE TANGLED LINE  
UNDER YOUR FEET  
OR IN THE WATER

## Strip-N-Save Stripping Basket



DISAPPEARS WHEN  
THE FISH IS ON!

ADJUSTABLE BASKET  
Will Extend 15 Inches In Front Of You

AVAILABLE  
THRU



I.Q.M.A. • Box 2067 • Anaheim, CA 92804

ORDER BY WAIST SIZE.  
Belt will expand for  
waders, coats, fat, etc.

courses. In the early light, I chose an open stretch of fast, white water, broken by various-sized boulders. They formed small pockets, ideal for holding trout, most hopefully goldens.

Hopping onto a small rock to give me a good vantage point, I cast my bubble with a size 14 black Woolly Worm upstream and allowed it to drift naturally behind a boulder. The fly circled the emerald swirl once and then a reddish-orange flash appeared out of nowhere and my bubble instantly sank. By lightly but firmly lifting the tip of my rod, I set the hook. The force on the other end left little doubt as to what it was as a fiery-red streak bulged from its sanctuary and shot into the fast water. As it was being maneuvered gently back toward shore, it leaped twice, each time showing a vivid crimson flash even in the dim light. Sliding it onto a slab of granite and admiring the array of red-orange, golden-yellow and olive-drab colors, I felt as though I had just stolen the crown jewels! Certainly goldens are the most colorful of all the trout family, especially the stream residents.

Brook trout supplement the golden fishery and in certain sections are actually more abundant. One such location was a brushy, log-jammed tangle just below our camp. It was overgrown with scrub willows and had several undercut banks due to the disrupted flow.

During our stay, brook trout had been caught consistently in this section. I headed into this area next in an attempt to lure one more brookie from its lair.

Standing on a log, I carefully drifted a size 14 Royal Coachman dry along a willowy undercut bank. After a brief drift my fly disappeared and a healthy tug-o-war ensued. Leading it away from brush and then into a patch of open water, I was forced to derrick it over a log pile before easing it onto a tuft of grass.

Blue halos encircling red dots, worm-like markings, and black and white bordered fins characterized the 8½-inch scrapper, adorned in spawning colors, as a male *Salvelinus fontinalis*.

With the sun just touching the tip of Recess Peak, which was towering over me, I felt my excitement mounting. I had just completed my quest in little more than an hour. However, I knew the tough part lay ahead.

After a hearty breakfast, consisting of freeze-dried eggs and potatoes washed down with hot chocolate, we broke camp, vowing to return again to this location to sample its wares. As we began the return hike, dark clouds became increas-

ingly threatening even though the sun was still shining.

Over an hour later we arrived back at twin falls. A large emerald pool forms where the two falls empty. Since I was anxious to be about my business, I chose to start at this spot. There was no magic way to determine which type of trout I was now fishing for, so the situation was largely a hit and miss proposition. I would need a handful of luck to reach my goal in the half a day left me.

The double falls tumbling together caused uneven currents in the pool. While watching my line in a swirling eddy, I noticed a slight hesitation and instinctively raised the tip of my rod sharply. "Wow!" I bellowed. Due primarily to the surge of the different currents, the trout's initial run caused a deceptive curve in my rod. The boys heard my shout and came running to see what the commotion was about. The fish quickly subsided and I proceeded to lead it toward shore and land it.

Looking down from above, Chris questioned, "Brown?" I held up a bright silvery specimen with a size 14 Black Gnat still tucked securely in its lip. "Rainbow," I shouted back. Indeed, it was a sharp contrast to the flashy red-orange and yellow-hued golden trout I had been catching only hours before. The presence of black spots over much of its upper body plus a bright silver sheen characterized the rainbow from the vivid goldens. Luck had been with me, and I was now three-quarters satisfied in my slam.

While attempting a picture, a dark shadow was cast over the pool and I suddenly became aware of many black clouds in the sky, gathering around diminishing patches of blue.

We confidently continued down the trail, stopping to fish many likely looking spots. However, the browns that dominate the stream proved to be very wary and elusive (the lower courses receive much more angling pressure than the upper courses). I could see trout in some sections of water, but could not entice them into striking. Pools, pockets, riffles, brushy areas, and undercut banks wouldn't turn up a brown, although several more rainbows were caught and released.

After two full hours of fishing and hiking down the trail, I noticed a large open area. "Let's take off our packs and wait here for Jason and Chris to catch up," I said to Matt. He nodded in agreement.

As we were taking off our packs, thunder began clapping loudly above us

as the impending storm grew closer.

"We'll have to make a decision pretty soon," I mumbled, my confidence of a few hours before now diminishing. "From the looks of the weather, we're in for a bad storm." Was the weather going to cause time to run out on my quest? I decided to wait until the other boys caught up before making a decision.

From our resting place, I noticed a small waterfall, the tailwaters of which drifted under some low cottonwood branches. Fighting through the stream-side brush, I pitched my bubble and Black Gnat into the white froth and let it catch the current. Drifting under the branches, it hesitated momentarily, but I was too sluggish in reacting. "A hit," I said to no one in particular. However, my concentration was back and on my next cast I was ready. Anticipating the strike, the hook virtually set itself and I was satisfied to feel a surging object on the other end of my line. "Fish on!" I shouted, as Matt looked on. After a brief encounter, I led the fish out of fast water and a nice 10-incher soon wiggled in my palm.

Setting the hook was by reaction, playing the fish was by habit, but as I began to inspect it, my emotions came into play. Heavy black spots with some red dots over a bronze cast sent my adrenalin rushing. It was definitely a brown trout and the culmination of my goal. "A grand slammer for both of us!" Matt exclaimed while looking over my shoulder (he had completed his earlier in the day by catching and releasing a rainbow).

After a quick array of pictures in the fading light, we heard Chris and Jason approaching. When they noticed us, they broke into ear to ear grins. Like Matt and I, Chris too had completed his grand slam, releasing a small brown. Jason, to this point was still one species short, missing out on a rainbow.

With black clouds swirling above us, by now emitting droplets of rain, we decided to pack up and head out. Jason was thrilled just the same, happy to have had so much angling fun over the three past days. He also had many opportunities to return in search of future grand slams.

Listening to the steady rain pelting our ponchos, we hiked the remainder of the trail, anticipating the bath we would take at Mono Hot Springs. There we would savor not only the thrill of our grand slam but, more importantly, a truly enjoyable father-son wilderness experience from Bear Creek — a remarkable alpine trout stream □