

Around the Northwest

News, Views, and Piscatorial Pursuits



PHOTO BY DON VACHINI

Gros Ventre River Tributaries, WY By Don Vachini

We were not alone.

Just starting to fill with water, the 10-inch-wide paw print sent a chill down my spine. One hand tightened its grip on my fly rod, while the other inched slowly toward the bear spray holstered on my hip. I meticulously scanned the dense bankside willows, but I did not want any part of a grizzly “gunfight.”

The otherwise pleasant, gurgling creek that my friend Terry Donahoe and I were sharing courses through a remote expanse of land in west-central Wyoming’s Bridger-Teton National Forest, 45 miles east of Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. As guests of Gene Borre, owner and operator of Western Wyoming Outfitters, (307) 762-3306, we were spending three days hiking and exploring a network of noteworthy creeks that feed the Upper Gros Ventre River. This major waterway meanders for 50 trout-filled miles before entering the Snake River near Grand Teton National Park.

Heading high along the west slope of the Continental Divide, Cottonwood Creek and feeders Sohare and Dog Creeks, along with Fish Creek and its tributaries Purdy and Bacon, drain a vast and primitive backcountry and maintain solid densities of Snake River fine-spotted cutthroat trout throughout. Beneficiaries of a healthy, pristine ecosystem that includes stonefly, caddisfly, and mayfly hatches supplemented by grasshoppers, beetles, and ants, these nimble residents range from 8 to 14 inches, with 10 inches being about the average.

Most of these remote waters are only reached by foot or horseback and offer a glimpse back to the days of untracked wilderness. Elk, moose, deer, and bighorn sheep, plus wolves, grizzlies, and black bears, still roam this drainage. During his scouting

duties prior to the hunting season, Borre often finds these intimate streams among his most predictable and productive for fishing. “They usually see less than a dozen anglers a year and, in some cases, none at all.”

Following the Sheridan Trail along Fish Creek’s North Fork and the main Cottonwood Trail from Forest Service Road 30410, we successfully probed the gentle gradient of floodplain streambeds and their scaled-down, trout-holding structure with 7- to 9-foot, 3- and 4-weight outfits and 9-foot leaders with 6X tippets. Dapping and floating size 14 through 18 dry patterns—Parachute Adams, Pink Sparkle Dun, Madam X, Green Drake, Elk Hair Caddis, hoppers, and ants—along undercut banks, gravel sills, truncated pools, and narrow pockets, our presentations often lured trout that smacked our flies with reckless abandon.

On a pair of secluded Cottonwood Creek tributaries, we fished tiny beaver ponds. We scouted from above to locate the quarry, then worked these still waters in stealth mode while attempting to maintain an out-of-their-window approach. Size 16 and 18 Light Cahills, Hendricksons, and

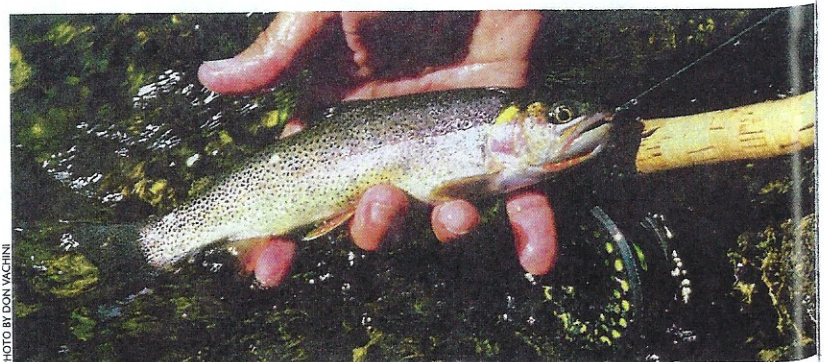


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TROUT

Goofus Bugs, presented daintily from below the dams, often drew confident rises from the resident cutts, including one yellow-hued, 15-inch leviathan.

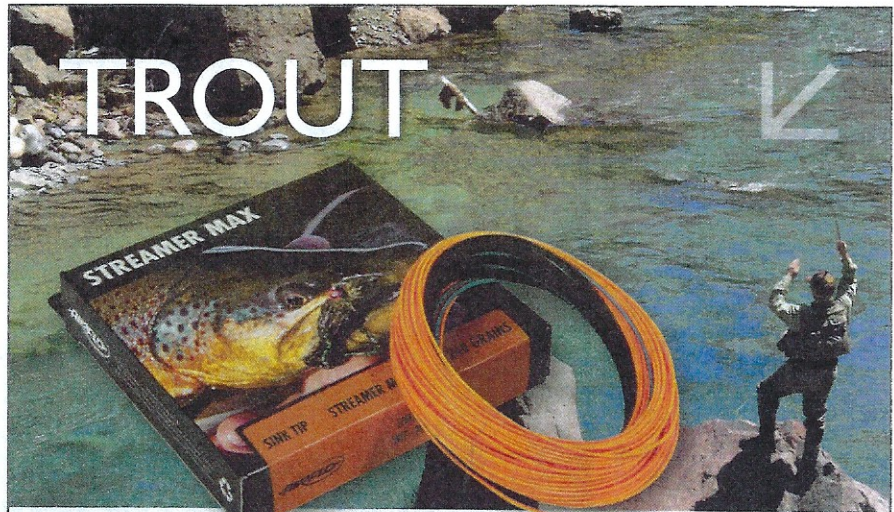
To reach the portal to this isolated destination, we turned off US Highway 26 about 7 miles north of Jackson Hole, onto Gros Ventre Road. After traversing 38 miles of undulating badlands and skirting Lower and Upper Slide Lakes, we shifted into four-wheel-drive on an ever-thinning dirt road before reaching base camp 7 miles past the Goosewing Ranch.

High Country Flies, (307) 733-7210, www.highcountryflies.com, is a helpful fishing contact, and a US Forest Service map of the Bridger-Teton National Forest Buffalo and Jackson Ranger Districts comes in handy. Order it by calling the Jackson Ranger District at (307) 733-4755.

Although we avoided a grizzly encounter on our visit, fresh tracks imprinted on moist sand provided an epiphany: this was primitive, old West habitat. While having our way with the cutthroat, we humbly acknowledged we were number two on the food chain!

Newman Lake, WA By Dave Dana
The Spokane area of eastern Washington is rich in warm-water fly-fishing opportunities, with lakes and rivers teeming with bass, tiger muskies, carp, crappies, bluegills, brown bullheads, catfish, and perch. Starting from Spokane, you can easily be afloat and fishing any of myriad waters within a 30-minute drive. One of my favorites of the many easy-to-reach-after-work fisheries is 1,200-acre Newman Lake, just 20 miles east of the city.

Newman offers consistent action for spiny rays, and it hosts all of the above-mentioned species, including tiger muskies that are periodically stocked by the Washington Depart-



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