

Dry Flies to Rising Trout in the Big Sky Country of Wyoming and Montana

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We've all dreamed of taking one of those once in a lifetime fly fishing trips where the trout are rising to naturals and taking our dry flies almost as a preference. Well, my wife, Patti, and I just returned from such a trip to Wyoming and Montana where we shared some of the most beautiful and productive trout waters you can imagine with Donna and Wayne Luallen. The fishing was fantastic, we saw lots of wildlife and the landscapes seemed endless.

My biological imperative was telling me that I was overdue for a few days of fishing on a cutthroat stream earlier this spring when Donna and Wayne suggested we join them to fish the Green River and its tributaries near Pinedale, Wyoming this mid-July. The plan was to start in the Green River Valley, work our way up through Yellowstone National Park and conclude the ten-day trip by spending a few days in Bozeman with Anna and Darwin Atkin of Porterville fame. I assume most of you are well familiar with Anna and Darwin, and have listened to many of Darwin's stories. Needless to say, we gladly accepted the invitation.



The trip didn't start off badly, considering that we flew into the Jackson Hole Airport at the base of the Grand Tetons, a sight that would make any trip a success. An hour and a half later though, and we arrived at our initial destination, the Green River Guest Ranch a few miles north of Cora, Wyoming, where Donna and Wayne had just arrived. We expect the boonies, and we definitely were in wild country. Cora is only a Post Office in the sage brush, and our living quarters were primitive at best. There were no phones, televisions or papers to read, but we watched mule deer walk around our cabins every day and listened to sandhill cranes trilling from the wet meadows of the Green River Valley each morning. Oh yes, and there were mosquitoes...more mosquitoes than we could have imagined. The fellow at the fly shop in Jackson where we purchased our fishing licenses told us "You might want to get something for mosquitoes". Patti and I both thought "What can a guy

in Wyoming tell us about mosquitoes?" Heck, we live in Florida with a swamp in our backyard. We soon found out. Thank goodness for *Ultrathon*.

Fishing began early the next morning when we climbed into two drift boats with our guides, Kyle Burrell and his partner Butch, to drift an 18-mile privately owned stretch of the Green River. Patti and I had hardly gotten settled when both Donna and Wayne each had big browns on, one fish jumping and then the other. And, that's just about the way the rest of the day went. We caught lots of rising browns and rainbows almost exclusively on parachute Adams; they were big, they exploded on our flies, they jumped and came to hand reluctantly and we released them all safely for others to enjoy. Mule deer, moose, eagles and lots of other birds watched us along the way. Interestingly, the river was high from an unusually wet June, and our guides admitted at the end of the day that we really had a below average day. I couldn't help but think that if it had been any better, the good Lord probably would have saved it for himself. It was a great day on the river as far as the four of us were concerned.



We hiked to several smaller streams and found some of them too high to fish effectively, but the air was clean and cool, the wild flowers were in full bloom and the mountain vistas outstanding. We did find two streams though that we fished with memorable results. One was Horse Creek across the valley about an hour west of Pinedale, and the other was Fish Creek that flowed across the Continental Divide at over 8,000 feet high in the Wind River Range. Fish Creek flowed rather gently through what looked like an almost flat mountain meadow before descending down a mountain side, but we fished upstream through a series of shallow lakes joined by gentle to nondescript runs. We didn't see many fish, but when we did, they were rising, and we caught plenty of very nice brookies and cutthroats. I fished both an Iris Caddis and the Western Coachman, of course, and they both caught well.



But then there was Horse Creek where we had the most classic dry fly fishing to rising big cutthroats I have experienced. We actually fished this stream two days without fishing the same waters twice, and both days were productive. Imagine watching large cuts rise to sip naturals and then casting above them to watch them slowly rise to sip your fly in the same manner and then try to take your rod away from you. I actually had several fish on that I simply couldn't turn and lost them under logs or overhanging limbs with which they seemed quite familiar. Those of you who have been fortunate enough to fish for cuts probably have memories of similar encounters. I fished the Parachute Adams, Iris Caddis and Western Coachman, all with success. We only caught cutthroats in Horse Creek, and yes...all fish were caught on barbless hooks and safely released back into the pools from which they were caught.



Too soon it was time to leave the Green River and the many pronghorn antelope we saw each day, continuing our adventures to Bozeman, Montana where we all settled with Anna and Darwin for a few more days. We talked about a lot of things that had to do with fishing, but the best part was listening to Darwin tell his stories. Actually, that wasn't the best part; we thoroughly enjoyed Anna's gracious hospitality.



But, my fishing had not yet ended, as Darwin had made special arrangements to visit a private section of Willow Creek to the west of Bozeman near the little town of Willow Creek. It seemed that I was the only one that could fish that day, and the trout were rising when I arrived on this beautiful little stream. I tied on a Klinkenhammer to take a few browns and rainbows, switched to a Western Coachman and continued fishing upstream, catching a nice representation of both species. The stream eventually drew me into a tight canyon where it appeared climbing would be necessary. That seemed like a good place to bring a memorable fishing trip to an end; so, I picked a comfortable spot in the sun where a white-tailed doe watched me eat my sandwich. It was another good day on the water.

You probably are wondering "Just how big were some of those fish?" The fact is that they were as big and fought as hard as I remember them, but you can judge for yourselves from the photos. Yes, the trip truly was one of a lifetime, but I may not be able to leave it that way. I keep thinking about visiting the Green River Valley again one day. You just can't beat a good sandwich along the bank of a beautiful trout stream, especially when good friends are along.

