

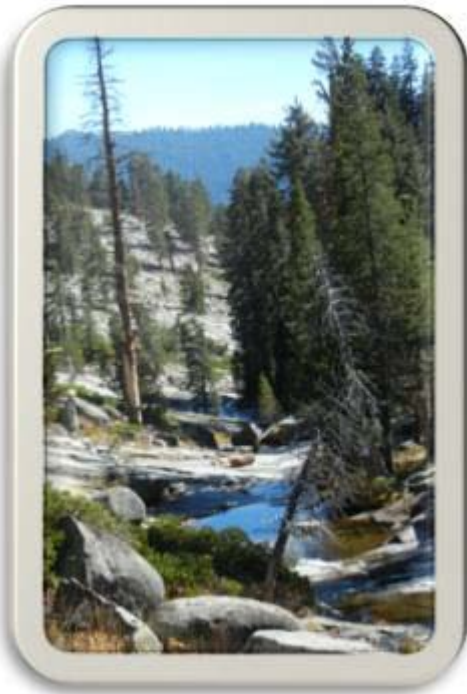
# Fly Fishing the High Sierras

Late October 2011

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My wife, Patti, and I made our usual trip this past late October to visit family in the San Jacque Valley of California and while there I fly fished with local friends in the high Sierras. My friend, Wayne Luallen from Visalia, the town just 9 miles north of smaller Tulare where Patti calls home, fished with me four days just as he always does during our visits to the Valley. Wayne's wife, Donna, fished with us two days. Wayne is a world-class fly tyer and well experienced fly fisher, but Donna is a better fly caster than both of us. We generally fished each day northeast of Visalia and east of Fresno from 1.5 to 2-hours drive into the Sequoia National Forest starting above 7,000 feet and climbing. Weather was generally cool and the air clean. This is particularly noteworthy, as cotton had just been picked in the valley, stubble was being plowed under and the dust was worse than the smog over LA. This was compounded by the fact that walnuts were also being harvested. Consider that what dust doesn't suspend in the air settles on the leaves of the walnut trees. Walnuts are harvested by using a tractor-mounted vibrator to shake each tree until every walnut falls to the dry, dusty ground below. Then the walnuts are swept into windrows and picked up mechanically. The result is that virtually every agricultural activity puts dust in the air at this time of year. You see it and breathe it, but you don't necessarily smell it. This is because just about anywhere you stand in the valley...you will be within 4 ore 5 miles of 100,000 dairy cows. Farming and milk production = lots of dust and manure. It is good to get above it all in the mountains.

Our first day of fishing was up Clover Creek. We walk into the creek at about 7,500 feet and by the time we fish half a day, climbing all the way, it seems you are on top of the world. It's a beautiful place to be. Fly fishing, a good friend and lunch on the stream...priceless!



Clover Creek, as you can see, is very much, uphill through solid rock. We generally climb up the stream bed from one plunge pool to another, fishing dry flies for rainbows and brookies. I think I caught most of my fish on the Western Coachman.



Some of the slopes we have to climb to get from one pool to another are a bit challenging, to say the least. You guessed it...I had just crossed one 90 degree slope, relaxed and the next thing I knew I was tumbling head over heels down-hill until I rolled into a clump of Manzanita. I heard Wayne hollering "Watch out for your rod!" I asked him later if he really thought I had much control over what was happening.

Next day was Gold Creek...named such because this is where we catch golden trout. Gold Creek is at about 7,200 feet and up and supports a pure strain of golden trout that likely were stocked by miners that carried them in coffee pots during the early part of the last century from the Kern River system that is on the east slope of the Sierras.



Donna fished with us this day. Gold creek is a much tighter stream course of plunge pool after another. We typically have to climb around boulders, up and down slopes and through forest from one pool to another. A series of falls at the lower end of where we begin to fish prevents rainbows that are below the falls from moving upstream and affecting the golden gene pool. They are a beautiful fish.

The third and fourth days were spent fishing Big Meadow at about 7,600 feet. Big Meadow is about 1.5 miles long with a number of small streams flowing through ponds and wet meadows. Over grazing and siltation had altered hydrology in the meadow over a period of decades, gradually affecting the brook trout fishery. The stream course(s) was restored perhaps 5 years ago; this is a project I was fortunate to have had an opportunity to have input. It had been over a year since I had seen the meadow, and I was anxious to see how the stream and its fishery were recovering. It looked fantastic as you can see.





The fishery also is recovering well and we saw many brookies on reds. I fished Westerns, Adams and a Green Peter and even fed them some of my Milk Gravy. The fishing was fantastic.



It will not surprise you to know that travel plans are already underway, and we look forward to our next trip to CA!