

## Paul's Ruby River Adventure

In 2016 Dusty Wissmath, a local fly fishing guide, spoke at a Potomac Valley Fly Fishing meeting and described a fly fishing destination trip to the Upper Canyon Outfitters ranch on the Ruby River in Montana. The pictures were beautiful and the trout were big and plentiful. I became obsessed with trying to find a way to ask my wife if I could go on this trip and get an affirmative response. Then one day she asked me what I wanted for my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. I asked that my gift be this adventure. My lovely and understanding wife agreed.

In January, after asking a lot of questions, I paid my deposit and began the long wait for the day I would depart for Montana. It seemed to take forever but on Friday, July 27<sup>th</sup> I arrived in Bozeman. The next day Dusty picked me up along with some other guests and we headed for the ranch.

The lodge was quiet and comfortable, with a front deck that served as a nice dining area for the mosquitos during happy hour. The lodge served some tasty treats for happy hour. Favorites were baked brie, cheese with huckleberries, stuffed mushrooms, asparagus, and many other tasty morsels.

Dinner each night was outstanding and it was a feast every night. During the week they served elk in a variety of forms as well as beef, pork chops and catfish. All were seasoned to perfection. It was a good time before we even got to the fishing!

The stream on the first day feeds into the Ruby River well below the dam. It was there I learned the art of nymph fishing. It was an effective method of fishing this water and I caught about 15 or so fish that day. Some small and some up to about 12 inches. I missed a bunch of takes simply because I was learning the intricacies of a new method of fly fishing. If I had hooked and landed every take I probably would have caught more than double that number.



On day two I fished the Ruby River dam. At the dam the water is very swift making it a challenge to stand in the current and land the fish. We used the same style of nymph fishing. I was so glad I had the chance to "practice" the day before because the first fish I hooked was a 15 inch brown trout and he put up a tremendous fight. The fish know how to use the current to their advantage. I caught about 16 fish that day and none were smaller than 12 inches. Most were in the range of 15-19 inches. The challenge of fish so large that fought so fiercely that you had to put them on the reel and let them take line in

order to land them was a highlight of the day, and of the whole trip. There was a lot of technique to getting them to the net. Even listening to the guide and trying our best to do what he said we lost fish. Sometimes the hook straightened out, the line broke or perhaps they simply were not hooked well and the hook pulled out. The fish bit our nymphs all day. It was a day of fishing that dreams are made of.

On the third morning I went to the upper part of the Ruby River. The headwaters were narrow and shallow. I caught a number of cutthroat trout using a top water fly. I had landed about 5 that were between 4 to 5 inches and then I hooked one that was about ten inches. In the afternoon we went downriver a bit and fished an area where the stream was only about 2-3 feet wide with high banks. It was difficult fishing because the grass, weeds, and high banks made it difficult to get a drift. We were fishing hoppers and a three foot drift was about the best you could do. The wind was not helping either. The first hour was even more difficult because we were not catching fish. Then I managed to catch three small brown trout. Looking at the size of the stream and the size of the fish I was catching I thought this was what to expect for the remainder of the day. I was fishing a particular spot and having a very difficult time getting a drift. The guide was standing about four feet away on the opposite bank. Because the guide encouraged me I continued to try to get a good drift. Then it happened. The fly was in the water next to the bank on my side so I could not see it, but I felt the take. The rod began to bend and I lifted it to set the hook. There was tremendous splashing for such a narrow stream. The guide slid down the bank and netted a 14 inch brown trout. I never would have expected such a large fish in that spot. About an hour later I caught a 17 inch brown in a spot that was deeper but narrower. He was longer than the stream was wide in the spot where I hooked him. This day provided three surprises of much larger fish than I expected to catch in the stream we were fishing.

The fourth day was overcast and we went to an area called Lazy Man. When it was cloudy the fish simply would not rise to take a fly. We tied on droppers and caught a few. The most interesting part of this day's fishing is when the sun was out the fish would bite. When the sun was hidden they would not bite. The sun stayed hidden for most of the morning. After lunch we fished a little more upstream. The guide gave each of us an area to fish with current and a couple of eddies. We still were not having much success then the sun came out and stayed out. In about twenty minutes I caught four fish. The first was a 4 inch rainbow trout. I caught him simply because he kept rising to my fly and I kept offering it to him. It took him about 5 attempts to actually get the fly in his mouth. After catching him I moved up a couple of steps and caught a 6 inch white fish. Then I moved up a couple of more steps and caught an 8 inch rainbow. The last fish I caught in this pool was a ten inch rainbow trout. It was an exciting finish to a slow day.

The final day they allowed us to request an area to fish. I asked to go back to the dam because I do not know an area near Maryland where I can nymph fish with such fantastic results. The morning bite got off to a slow start during the first hour. It then began to pick up and just before lunch it picked up a lot, so we postponed lunch to make the most of our luck. We kept the guide busy for three hours running back and forth because it seemed one of us always had a "fish on." I had 15 fish in the net by the time we broke for lunch. I was able to enjoy the battle with a lot of other fish but they simply got the best of me before they made it to the net. After lunch it was threatening rain but after discussing the weather we decided to go out again simply because it was our last day.

We went to a place where the water was moving swifter than any area we had fished before. The guide sent me out into the swiftest area. I was skeptical about wading into the fast moving current but he assured me I would be ok. I was thankful for every ounce I weigh and every inch of height while standing in the fast moving water. As I was casting and getting some good drifts the balloon we were using for a

strike indicator completely disappeared. I sat the hook and tried to move the fish towards the guide standing downstream. The fish would not budge, he was just taking line. I turned my body to get some leverage and started sliding downstream with the current. I slid about two feet before I was able to turn sideways and regain my footing. Thinking "I am never going to land this fish," the large brown trout made four or five runs and we finally got him in the net. This was the most epic battle I have had with a fish on the line. I hooked four more fish about the same size in the same stretch of water in that hour and I am proud to say I got all of them to the net.

The trip to the Ruby River was just as Dusty said it was. Plenty of trout, plenty of large trout, good food, and beautiful scenery. I would recommend the trip to anyone wanting to fish for trout using different methods in a variety of water on the same river. I want to take this opportunity to thank my wife for this gift that provided some wonderful memories.

And now it's back to the College's ledgers and planning for the annual meeting.