

Early Season Fishing Trip Out West

The first week of April Mimi and I were fortunate to spend a week in Wyoming and Montana fly fishing a couple of lakes and the Bighorn River. The first day was a beautiful one on Monster Lake, a private lake near Cody with large trout and plenty of food for them. The ice had just melted, so the trout were cruising the banks where the water warms first and insect life begins. We found the right location with trout visible from the bank all day long. It was an epic day of fishing. Mimi caught 17 rainbow trout between three and seven pounds on callibaetis nymphs and sow bugs.

The next day was rainy, snowy and windy, so we took the day off to tie flies and tour the Museum of the West. The Museum is just incredible and well worth seeing. We stayed at a historic hotel built by Buffalo Bill Cody called the Irma, named after his daughter. It has a beautiful cherrywood bar given to him by Queen Victoria. The rooms were nice and the food was great, but the old steam heated radiator system clanked all night long!

The following day we found fewer fish near the banks on the Lake, but still had a great day. That night we drove to colorful (and very small) Ft. Smith, Montana – a town with at least one drift boat in every yard but no restaurants or bars (selling liquor is prohibited on the Crow Indian Reservation). Tuesday we fished the Bighorn River with a guide, Gordon Rose, who had owned one of the fly shops there for 12 years. We had a good day catching mostly brown trout, despite the rain, snow and sleet. When sleet accumulated on the drift boat, the little boy in me could not help but throw a sleet ball into the river.

The water on the Bighorn was running at 9000 cfs in anticipation of high runoff that was to follow because snowpack in the Wind River Range where it originates was near 200% of normal. We had expected closer to 3000 cfs with more dry fly opportunities, but unfortunately there were few places to get out of the boat to wade. For the next two days we rowed a rented drift boat and had a lot of fun as the water release climbed to 9500 and then 10,000 cfs. By Thursday we had had enough of the high water.

We returned to Cody for more lake fishing. Along the way we stopped for lunch in the tiny town of Edgar, Montana at the justly famous Edgar Bar, mostly because Mimi's maiden name was Edgar. It was quite the place.

When it was time to return to the airport in Billings Sunday morning, we almost got stuck in a snow storm in Cody, but as soon as we reached the top of the pass just outside of town, the snow cleared for a while and the drive to the airport was uneventful. Overall it was a great trip, with the kind of weather conditions you might expect in northern Wyoming that time of year. I am truly blessed to be able to share this kind of experience with my wife.

Jim Harvey