



October 25, 2015 SF Snake River above Jackson Winter Dry Fly Fishing Report

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45°/Light wind/Overcast

Day 2: South Fork Snake River above Jackson: I'll write this blog, but there is no way I can express how awesome one single day of fishing could be!!

We were up at 6:00 AM and out the door headed for Jackson. The shuttle services were all shut down for the season, so we had to take two vehicles – Joe's car and the boat and my car as the shuttle. It's a two-hour drive one way to reach the section of river we intended to fish. Daylight found us at the top of the pass above Jackson with the lights of the city illuminating the valley. We motor on through Jackson with another 50 miles to go to reach our destination, a place called Pacific Creek Put In. A few miles out of Jackson and a little after daylight, we spot a big bull moose off the side of the road; a little farther up the road, an enormous bull elk is walking toward the highway only 100 yards away. Farther on we see a sign that indicates wild buffalo. We swing around a corner and a herd of the shaggy-haired dudes were feeding just off the road. All the time we were driving upriver, small windows of sunbathed the massive Teton Peaks that loomed into the sky above us. It was absolutely surreal and I told Geoff, "If we don't catch a fish today, the drive here was worth the trip."

We finally reached our destination, unloaded the boat, and then ran the shuttle to the take-out. By the time we launched the boat, it was roughly 11 AM. The South Fork of the Snake was running around 356cfs and it was totally gorgeous. The water was slightly more than gin clear and from the launch point, I could see three spectacular hatch riffles within a half mile below us. There isn't a lot of fall in the river in the section we floated, so the river meandered like a snake down through one gorgeous riffle and a hatch flat then another and another. In between were downed logs, transition lines shallow to deep, and tributaries entering the river mostly out of the east. There was more fantastic fishing water on this stretch of river than I have ever seen in my lifetime. It was lights-out fishing water!!

We start our expedition as normal with no feeding fish and Geoff and I in charge of figuring out which "Searcher" bug might raise a cutthroat off an edge. Geoff's tie-on was a Black Gold Stimulator #14 and I went big with a Fall Caddis pattern #10. Neither of those bugs raised a fish so Joe parked the boat and ran a streamer through a run for 30 minutes without hooking a fish. Geoff and I waited for Joe to finish then we moved downriver. Thus far, we had not cracked the code and we were all wondering if the fishing trip would be a bust. There was one piece of valuable information: Geoff was sure he saw two fish flash under the Black Gold. That meant he moved the fish and they had enough interest to rise.

I thought about the Black Gold and I knew that the cutties love the fat body of a Humpy. I tied on an Olive Brown Humpilator #14 and started serving to the edge of the river. Against the west bank the river ran under the roots of a large deciduous tree and there were little fingers of holding water between the tangled roots that extended out into the water. One of those roots ran parallel to the river and there was a cubbyhole under the root. The water depth under the root was probably 12 inches deep. I laid the Humpilator right against the root and watched as the fly floated along the cubbyhole. Suddenly out of nowhere I see the whole side of a Yellowstone cutthroat magically appear and eat the bug. It reminded me of the Idaho license plate that has a Yellowstone "cutty" pictured, but this was much more vivid. I set the hook and landed the first fish of the day – a spectacular 18-inch cutty. I'll remember that take for the rest of my life.

We moved farther downriver and Joe, being the master oarsman that he is, paddled us up into a small stream. I make one cast into the riffle and hook the second fish of the day – a shimmery 16 incher. We reentered the river and started serving our flies back to the edges. Under another tangle of roots, I put the Humpilator in a perfect pocket that would hold a fish. No fish came to my hook so I pulled my fly out to recast. The second my fly leaves the water and I'm still looking at the pocket that my fly just left, a fish rises. Geoff sets the hook and lands another cutty. His fly and mine were floating in the exact same location when I pulled my fly out, the fish ate his. I tried to get an assist on that fish, but Geoff would have none of it.

At this point in the float, we still had not seen but a couple of fish rise and there was no hatch of any kind coming off. Joe decided it was time to yank a streamer again, so rather than sit and wait for him, Geoff and I moved downriver on foot. We covered a third

of a mile along a big, long slick without seeing a fish rise. We finally sat on a log for 20 minutes waiting for our ride as our hatch window severely diminished.

We jumped back into the boat and begin the float again. There were numerous steep cobblestone banks that fell into the river on the edges creating deep water very close to shore. We discovered that the cutties really liked those edges and we scored a handful of fish in river structure with cobblestone banks.

We were maybe a third of the way through our float and there was a small tributary that dumped into the main river. Above that tributary was a slick that ran along a willowed edge. For 75 yards along that edge for the first time all day, fish were feeding and the BWOs were floating the surface in large numbers. Only one person could fish the run, so Joe took the dry fly rod and Geoff cranked up the camera. I left them and headed downriver in search of my own BWO hatch.

I didn't find many feeding fish below the tributary and they were all across the river out of range. I watched the fish across the river for a few moments and a large fish rose. Immediately I take off downriver toward the bottom of the run where I could wade the river. Three hundred yards downriver on the tail out, I crossed the river and begin working my way back upriver toward the small pod of feeding fish. The big fish I marked with a V-cut in the cobblestone bank. I walked within 70 feet of the "V" then slipped off the bank under the fish. The cobblestone bank was over 6 feet tall which meant I couldn't cast straight out. All deliveries had to be upriver at a quarter-angle over the fish, which I don't prefer. I slowly moved up into range of the large fish that continued to aggressively feed. I finally moved into casting range and served a Single Upright Wing BWO #22 to the fish. First cast and I hook the fish and after a pretty good fight, I slide a 17-inch brownie into the net. It was the only brown trout we caught all day.

After landing and releasing the fish, I set up on another small pod of fish just upriver. There were four or five fish feeding on the slick surface and they were hard to target because they were on the move side to side. I managed to hook two of the fish. I landed a plump 16 incher and lost a fish similar in size. Joe and Geoff showed up and we moved farther downriver.

We came around a sweeping right-hand corner in the river and about 400 yards down we see a large animal at the river's edge. Geoff states, "It's a bear!" and on a closer look, it was not only a bear, but a grizzly bear with 2 cubs. One of the cubs was at the river with its mother and the other cub was sitting up on the bank 30 feet above his mother. We deduced that the cub sitting on the bank was in "time out" suffering through the wrath of his mother's discipline. We moved closer and the mother ushered her cubs up the riverbank and they disappeared into the brush line. As we moved closer, there was a dead bull elk on the river's shore that someone had cut off the head and left the entire carcass. The bears were gorging on the remainder. At this point, we were wondering what we might see next because we'd seen just about everything already.

A mile or so downriver there was a gorgeous riffle that entered a long, curving slick. Below the riffle for a quarter mile there were fish feeding all over the slick. We did find the hatch riffle we were looking for but it was too late to get out and fish it because we didn't know how much farther it was to the takeout. We fished the slick in the boat, anchoring and casting, then moving and anchoring and casting. In the crystal clear water, many of the fish were alerted to our presence before we could make a delivery. I was fortunate being at the front of the boat because I could long cast to the feeders before they saw us. We landed five fish on that run but if we'd had the hour and a half of streamer fishing back in dry fly fishing, we would have caught some fish there.

By now it's 6 PM, the sun's down, it's getting colder by the moment, and we have no idea where in the hell we are on the river or where the takeout is. We quit fishing and Joe starts pushing the boat downriver in double time. It's 6:30 PM and nothing downriver looks remotely like the takeout area I'd seen in the morning. It's 7 PM and it's white-knuckle time as darkness is closing in with no takeout in sight. Add to that, the river is turning bony with large boulders protruding up through the surface. We eventually hit one of those boulders that nearly capsized the boat. We finally came around a corner in the river and I recognize a short mountain ridge that I had marked in the morning when we left the takeout location. Joe pulled in and sure enough, it was the takeout about 50 yards below us. We all breathed a heavy sigh a relief, loaded the boat, and skedaddled back upriver to get my car at the put in. The Snake River run had one more surprise for us. As we were driving home, three cow elk tried to cross the road right in front of us. If the lead cow wouldn't have stopped, it would have crashed into the side of Joe's car.

So, the day ended and I thought about all the things we'd seen, the fishing, the wildlife, the beauty...and the ever present Teton Peaks that overlooked us on every turn of the river. It was magical!!!

Flies that Caught Fish:

[#14 Black Gold Humpilator](#)

[#14 Black Gold Stimulator](#)

[#22 & #20 BWO Single Upright Wing](#)

[#22 BWO Emerger](#)

[#22 & #20 BWO Convertible](#)

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