

Tamaracklife

PEOPLE

SYMPHONY IN HARMONY

*Local quartet makes music
for the masses*

STYLE

TROUT

Ultimate Mountain West meal

Wading through God's Country

Every experience level
can enjoy fly fishing

By BRYCE HUBNER



McCall resident Graham Hubner holds a Steelhead on the Little Salmon River

If you believe the book of Genesis, the sea was teeming with trout before God created man. Eventually, God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the air." He couldn't have known that fish would actually rule over us — that in slumber and waking moments alike, dreams of landing the proverbial big one would consume and corrupt us (for fishing has made liars of even the most scrupulous folks).

Indeed, we've been enamored of fish tales for as long as we've been telling stories — from the Greeks to Shakespeare to Robert Redford and Brad Pitt by way of Norman Maclean — and if you still haven't figured out what the fuss is for, you needn't look any farther than the majestic waters surrounding McCall and Tamarack.

Fisheries just beyond and within the Payette River Valley are among the most pristine waters in North America — and the best part is that the rest of the continent doesn't know it yet. Here, both beginning and expert anglers can revel in every kind of freshwater imaginable: the complex Salmon River system and its tributaries eventually lead to the Columbia River, which is punctuated by the mighty Pacific, so you have access to ocean-faring steelhead and salmon, as well as lively Westernslope cutthroat and rainbow trout — to name just a few; you can stalk small fish on intimate water like Hazard Creek, chase hogs in big water, or relax with stellar dry-fly fishing amid the high, quiet solitude of a backcountry lake.

With the region's epic snowfall this winter, spring fishing may be delayed a little; but, that also means that water levels and temperatures on smaller rivers and lakes, for example, will be ideal well into the heat of summer.

What are you waiting for? Grab a fly rod and hit the water.

FOR THE NEOPHYTE ANGLER

Ron Howell has nearly thirty years of outfitting and guiding under his belt, and as founder and principal of Fly Fish McCall, you can take advantage of all he knows. "I would estimate that nearly 70 percent of our clientele are beginning anglers," Howell says from his home in

McCall. "I really enjoy the teaching component of guiding. ... Watching people catch their first fish on a fly rod is one of my favorite things in the world."

Howell and company often use a plot of dry land to introduce clients to the art of fly casting, then they take folks to a lake "where the lesson continues right up until people are catching fish."

Robert Monroe's McCall Angler is another of the area's stellar outfitting options. "We do a couple of different things for beginners," says Monroe from McCall Angler's retail store, located at 305 E. Park Street in McCall. "If a customer is around for a few days or more, I usually try and make sure we give a two-hour casting lesson [prior to a guided day of fishing]. That's usually very helpful because, otherwise, the morning portion of the day is spent learning instead of just fishing after a quick [casting] refresher."

Howell employs drift boats, float tubes and even lamas and pack goats to access and enjoy the water he navigates. "We guide mostly in the backcountry lakes and ponds," says Howell. "It's certainly advantageous to bring float tubes, fins and other gear with you — a lot of gear that you don't want to put on your back for a long hike — and that's where the lamas and the goats are great. ... When we do multi-day trips, they really come in handy."

Of course, as one gets more removed from civilization, fisheries get less pressure, and less pressure means better fishing. "Access for our trips ranges from a short half mile to more than five miles of hiking. I have a license for over 50 lakes in the backcountry around McCall," says Howell, adding, "and out of those 50, only three or four of them are accessible by road." In other words, a guided jaunt into the Payette National Forest might not only yield quality fishing, but a healthy sense of peace and isolation.

Guides like Monroe and Howell are walking libraries of knowledge. It behooves beginners — for the sake of future independence — to ask as many questions as possible when it comes to the intricacies of casting, fishery habitat and food systems. Even the finest anglers in the world continue to learn about these things throughout their years on the water. »

Sustaining our resources

Native Americans, like the Nez Perce Tribe, have been fishing area waters for more than 10,000 years. Be mindful of the fact that our natural resources are more fragile than ever, and that it will take great effort to sustain these fisheries for years to come. Catch-and-release is strongly encouraged — even required at times — through most of the region. For more information on fishing licenses, restrictions, regulations and more, visit fishandgame.idaho.gov.

The ladies and gentlemen at McCall Angler and Fly Fish McCall can also be of service on the aforementioned fronts. For more information on their casting classes, guiding schedules and rates, contact the companies directly:

MCCALL ANGLER

Robert Monroe
305 E Park Street, McCall, Idaho, 83638
Tel: 208 634 4004
www.mccallanglers.com

FLY FISH MCCALL

Ron Howell
P.O. Box 2117, McCall, Idaho 83638
Tel: 208 634 1324
www.flyfishmccall.com

Fine Fish

These are a few of the fish you can expect to see when you wet your line in local waters:

WESTSLOPE CUTTHROAT TROUT

Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi

Commonly referred to as 'cutties' or just 'cutthroat'

RAINBOW TROUT

Oncorhynchus mykiss

Commonly referred to as "bows" or 'rainbows'

STEELHEAD TROUT

Oncorhynchus mykiss

The anadromous version of rainbow trout, commonly referred to as 'steelies' or 'steelhead'

» FOR THE MORE ADVANCED, ADVENTUROUS ANGLER

"With [veterans]," says Monroe, "we try to identify their needs and [proceed accordingly]. Some customers don't mind catching fewer fish if there's a chance they'll land a six- or seven-pounder; others might simply want to go out and have a chance to catch a bunch of 16- or 17-inch cutthroats."

Guided or not, experienced anglers will find that the nearby Little Salmon and South Fork of the Salmon rivers offer everything from killer steelhead and salmon runs to excellent Westslope cutthroat fishing.

"There are no outfitting permits issued on the Little Salmon, but we're always happy to point people in the right direction when they stop into the shop," says Monroe. "The Little Salmon is definitely among the best year-round fisheries we have. The water levels are fairly consistent ... and even during a winter

[with remarkable precipitation], you're just a short drive away from escaping the snow and catching fish."

The Little Salmon has both fall and spring steelhead seasons — mainly A-run and even some B-run steelies — and though many fish have already retreated to the Salmon, the best fishing usually takes place during the latter weeks of the calendar year's first quarter. Because the river ranges between 30- and 60-foot wide in most places, most anglers will have no problem identifying potential holding water. (A less experienced angler who might not know what to look for should study the flow and ask, "If I were a fish, where would I chill out after swimming through that whitewater?") Chances are good you're eyeing places where fish will hold. You'll really only need a five or six weight set up, and you can fish a ton of seams and pockets without even having to wade. You must also remember, however, that despite the readability and accessibility of the water,

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you're still fishing for steelies — a two- to three-fish day is a very good one.

If you're hungry for some dry-fly action come summer, the South Fork of the Salmon is as good as it gets. "We do a lot of walk and wade [guiding] down on the South Fork of the Salmon River — and even though it gets hot, it's good all summer," Monroe says. "There's brilliant cutthroat fishing in there. ... Early in the spring we like to throw a lot of big stonefly patterns, or big stonefly nymphs. And when summer rolls around, it's pretty much hoppers and big attractor patterns — like [size] fours — because those cutthroat like big meals, they're not scared."

The area's high country lakes also offer great dry-fly and cutthroat opportunities, and for anglers who are unfamiliar with the region, a guided outing is well worth the price. "High country lakes are notoriously hard to figure out," says Howell, adding that it can take years to develop an understanding of how

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Robert Monroe

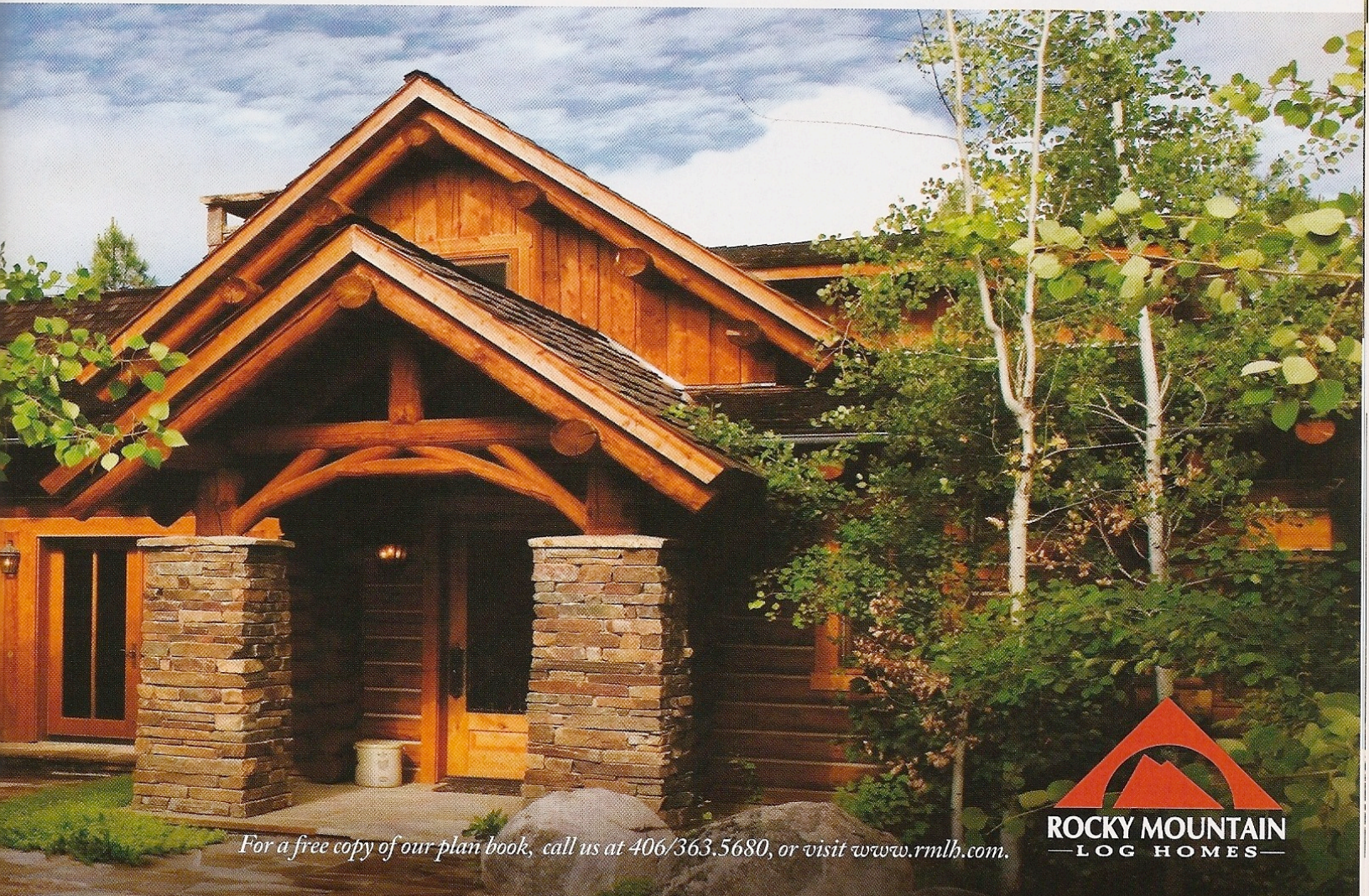
seasons, water temperatures and other natural variables can influence a given fishery. "We have a good feel for what's going on up there, and, for example, if it's a nasty warm summer, we know exactly how to get higher and find the fish."

The North Fork of the Payette is also an option, but only during the spring and fall when water temperatures are cool. Both McCall Angler and Fly Fish McCall have their secret stashes on the river, including a stretch that is sur-

rounded by private land and is almost exclusively fished by way of their float trips.

DEVOUT ANGLERS ALL

There's truly something for everyone here. Even the most adept and battle-scarred anglers will find infinitely diverse water and fishing for all seasons. Beginners will test their mettle and come to understand the ineffable natural-world connections that at once make fishing mankind's favorite and most frustrating pastime — and, as is invariably the case with all who make a cast, they'll learn the art of hyperbole when telling their friends and families about the one that got away.



For a free copy of our plan book, call us at 406/363.5680, or visit www.rmlh.com.

