

SPOONING CLASSICS

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WALT
DITZ

T r a v e l



By John Ross

Let me tell you how it is with us travel writers. We bang into a location, expect to sample all its favors in a day or do, and then flee on to somewhere else with a handful of impressions indecipherably jotted in spiral-bound notebooks and a few dozen photos on the memory card. Brother, it's a tough life, and I just know you'll give me you fullest sympathy.

Last summer's research for my new book for Trout Unlimited – *Rivers of Restoration* – took me into 21 watersheds where TU staff and volunteers are restoring and protecting fisheries. I walked streams, interviewed sources, took pictures and seldom if ever picked up a fly rod. I had 'em with me in my green duffel, but there they stayed most of the time.

So this summer with a much different book abirthing, I'm planning on spending more time on fewer waters. Michigan's Au Sable, the Bitterroot, streams of the Catskills and the South Fork of the Snake should fill my dance card nicely.

Had I my druthers, I'd begin in the Catskills. No height of land has woven itself so deeply in the fabric of American fly fishing. An elevated plateau rather than a range of mountains, the Catskills span more terrain than Connecticut. Its tranquil ridges, forested once more now than the tanneries, acid distilleries and sawmills are gone, are so riven with

Determined to spend more time on fewer waters, the author shares his summer itinerary of four great lodges and the streams they fish.



Dazzling mountain splendor heightens the angling experience for these fly fishermen at South Fork Lodge in Idaho.

freestone streams that every valley holds a trove of trout, previously native brookies of five pounds or more, but today mostly browns and rainbows. The names: Esopus Creek, Neversink, Beaverkill, Willowemoc, the Delaware are as well known to anglers as their own.

So too is the first fly of spring, the Hendrickson, initially tied by Roy Steenrod of Liberty, New York, in 1916. With two miles of private access to the West Branch of the Delaware, the cabins and lodge of the Delaware River Club in Starlight, Pennsylvania is a great place to

hang your waders. It'll take you a week just to become acquainted with the West and East Branches and the river's main stem. The Willowemoc and the Beaverkill are within easy striking distance. Among my favorite runs is

the upper end of the Willowemoc. Nice browns, especially on a four-weight, and fewer anglers whet my appetite.

Before summer arrives, I'd also like to make the dash to the bitterroot near Darby, Montana. One spring a couple of years ago, I stumbled into the skwala hatch in May. We fished for cutthroat with #8 foam imitations, tied Chernobyl style. The flies were so large I could see 'em without my spectacles. The

cutts could see them too. Hard against the bank, in the eddy behind every boulder, the curl aft of fallen trees, there lay cutts eager to feed.

We hit the skwals near Hamilton, but last summer I wandered up the West Fork headed for Painted Rock Dam, source of the releases that fill the Bitterroot during summer. A classic freestone stream, the West Fork offers mile after mile of pocket water and pools. And up one tributary is Triple Creek Ranch. A member of the worldwide Belais & Chateaux resorts association, Triple Creek is known for attention to detail and understated elegance. If the river happens to be high, you'll have to content yourself with mammoth trout in stocked ponds. Life is hard.

Were it not for Michigan's Au Sable, there'd likely be no Trout Unlimited. For it was in the living room of a red clapboard cabin overlooking the Au Sable that George Griffith and his cronies hatched TU. In mid-June I floated the river with bamboo rodmaker John Pickard and Carl Heuter. It was midday. We caught lovely little brookies, but the leviathan browns for which the upper river is famed, eluded us.

Not so that evening. Entering the South Branch just at dusk, we fished the hex hatch below Mason's Chapel, where the stream is narrow and tight. Casts needn't be longer than 15 feet. You'd feel a surging strike, see the splash sparkle in the starlight, and hold on like hell to keep the browns out of the fallen timber across the channel. I lost several, but landed one and felt like I'd entered the hall of heroes.

Should your travels take you to the Au Sable, check into Gates Au Sable Lodge. The Gates family has been stewards of the river for more than 50 years. In the lodge and fly

shop you'll encounter, no doubt, members of the Anglers of the Au Sable, a non-profit group that's been instrumental in protecting waters that are indeed holy to fly fishers everywhere.

Come fall, you'll find me on the South Fork of the Snake below Palisades Dam in Idaho. It's my September song, an aging angler's penchant, I suppose, for returning to western water he loved first.

I don't need to tell you about the South Fork, about the spawning browns and cutthroats plump from a summer's foraging and eager to add a few more ounces of fat before winter comes. You know about the gravel bars and pool at the base of the falls above Conant and the yellow cottonwoods with leaves that flutter in the constant breeze. Some of you know as well to pack a little twenty gauge because grouse are plentiful and occasionally so are ducks.

And when the day's done, stretch your stocking feet toward the fire on the hearth in your cabin at South Fork Lodge. If you feel you can't bestir

yourself to amble over to the lodge for dinner, a plate will be brought to you — just don't tell them I said so. ✪

IF YOU WANT TO GO

Au Sable:

Gates Au Sable Lodge
471 Stephan Bridge Road
Grayling, MI 49738
989-348-8462; Gateslodge.com

Bitterroot:

Triple Creek Ranch
5551 West Fork Rd
Darby, Montana 59829
406-821-4600; triplecreekranch.com

Catskills:

The Delaware River Club
1228 Winterdale Road
Starlight, PA 18461
570-636-5880; Mayfly.com

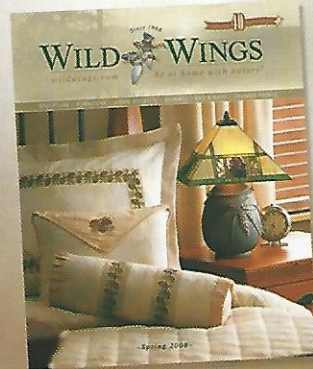
South Fork Snake:

South Fork Lodge
P.O. Box 22
Swan Valley, Idaho 83449
208-483-2112; southforklodge.com



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