

Jeff Currier

global fly fishing

THE NEW FORK RIVER AND BROWN TROUT

by Jeff Currier



Fly fishing for brown trout, particularly large ones has always been high in priority for most fly fishermen. This is because big browns are difficult to find and anglers often venture great distances, sometimes as far as Chile, Argentina, or New Zealand. Most of the large brown trout that are found in your western states are found in places that are easily accessible for the common

angler and are sometimes crowded, therefore defeating the purpose of a quiet day on the stream.

We, in Jackson, are a little more fortunate than most, because only an hour drive away we have a true blue ribbon brown trout stream. The banks of this river are owned by ranchers and are about as private as private property can get, and the no trespassing signs you see everywhere are strictly enforced. Therefore, this eliminates the crowds, allowing the fish to grow large and healthy. This somewhat obscure river in the middle of nowhere is called the New Fork.

The New Fork begins its flow heading southeast from Wyoming's Wind River Range, crosses the highway just outside of the small town of Pinedale then soon flows southwest to meet the famous Green River. There is only one stretch of public water available, but it is difficult to get to and also a problem to fish because of the deep holes

and log jams. It is, however, floatable by small boat. In fact, as long as you stay in the boat you can float right through the private land and fish many holes that are hardly ever touched. It is not an easy float and because of the rivers small size, numerous log jams, and even places where barb wire fences completely cross the river a guide is virtually a necessity.

This is Jack Dennis' personal favorite, not only of nearby Jackson Hole rivers but Western rivers in general. That's how it first caught my attention. In late June and all of July I would head for Jack's office in the need of something only to find that he was gone to the New Fork. After this happened about three years I was off to the New Fork to see what it was all about.

My first adventure was to wade fish the one and only public access. Not knowing anything about it, I ran into some immediate problems. First of all, in a two wheel drive vehicle I couldn't get as close to the river as I would have liked, but I tried anyway. My signal to stop was after bottoming out in my car many times until I finally lost my muffler to a large rock. It was then that I parked and headed to where I saw the river in the distance. It looked about a fifteen minute walk. One hour later I finally got there. The whole ordeal took me through a terrible swamp in which I went over the tops of my waders and badly tore the right calf area of my brand new Simms waders on some old barbed wire that looked to be about 30 years old.

Although stressed at this point, I was ready to go and tied on a size 4 Pearlescent Kiwi. The bank where I stood overlooked a hole that was so deep that I couldn't see bottom; it just had to be fished. After three casts against the opposite bank and drifting a Kiwi deep down under a log jam a fish was on. I set the hook hard and added immediate pressure to keep the fish from wrapping up my leader into the log jam. The pressure worked and the fish headed upstream. I was surprised to see it was a rainbow as it jumped several times high enough that its silvery and pink sides flashed about. Within minutes I was easily removing my barbless Kiwi and sliding a seventeen-inch rainbow back to were it was hooked.

All it took was that fish to make a believer out of me. I knew the fish were there and even managed to catch a few browns while wading through the thick brush and deep holes.

When I returned to my car I was exhausted but very pleased with my first day on the New Fork.

I got back to tell Jack about my adventure only to find that he was gone, and you know where. I waited to the next day to exchange stories. I had done well, but he had done far better because he had floated with a guide and good friend Randall Montgomery. They had floated an eighteen-mile stretch of river beginning just out of Pinedale, putting the boat in early and pulling out after dark. They landed many fish, browns and rainbows, including several that were 20 inches and two of which were 24 inches.



I knew then that my next trip would have to be a float trip with one of our guides. Soon a chance came available for me to hook up with Randall for a day. He wanted me to meet him in Pinedale at 8:00 A.M. so I left Jackson at 6:45 so there would be plenty of time to get there. When I arrived, Randall was ready to go and by 8:15 we were on the river. The place we put in was about ten miles up from where I had wade fished before. The river was much smaller, barely wide enough to even get the boat around some of the log jams. Some of my first casts were so short that my fly line was barely out of the rod tip. There were fish, however, in fact, the day quickly started with a nice 16 inch brown while the boat ramp was still in sight.

The river grew fast as we proceeded downstream; in fact, within the first few miles the size actually doubled with Pine Creek entering the New Fork. As noon approached, the sun was becoming very hot and as this occurred the fishing cooled down, which is typical of any brown trout stream. We had caught a lot of fish to this point but nothing of size, in fact the biggest was still the sixteen-inch brown back near the boat launch. We decided to have lunch and hoped that the afternoon would bring a change in the appetites of the large browns that live there.



After lunch I could see a huge thunderhead in the distance. Perhaps the afternoon would bring a change in the weather and turn the fish on. There was also a Gray Drake hatch beginning. These dark colored mayflies were beginning to congregate in the numerous back eddies and sloughs (one of the special characteristics of the New Fork)

and fish were beginning to work them, especially the rainbows. As we drifted into one of Randall's favorite sloughs I spotted a nose taking large mayflies nonstop. I had been casting Kiwi Muddlers, Bash Buggers and Pepperoni Yuk Bugs all morning and fishing a dry fly was going to offer a nice change. It was time to have fun so I broke out my 8'9" #3 Sage Lightline, changed flies and began to cast.

At first I landed my fly well away from the fish, but the cast wasn't right so I tried it again. The fish was cruising the entire slough, getting very close to the boat, at one time so close that we both froze perfectly still so he would not spook. It really killed me to look right into the fishes eye and not be able to cast. It was a rainbow, probably twenty inches, maybe even better.

When the fish began to move away from us again I made another cast. I landed it a good six feet away from him, purposely playing it safe, because he was headed in that direction anyway. The fly was soon spotted and within seconds I had the huge monster on.

The fish acted as if it had been struck by lightning and catapulted itself from the water and came straight for the boat. He seemed to have one thing in mind, returning to the river from the slough and our boat was blocking him. I was stripping as fast as possible. Reeling would have done no good as the line couldn't have been collected fast enough. When the fish went under the boat I attempted to swing the rod tip around to fight on the other side facing the main river channel. The line was wedged between a branch and the bottom of the boat and snap went my 4X tippet and a 20" rainbow.

Randall looked at me with a smile and we both began to laugh. What a great fish! As I tied on another size 12 Parachute Adams another fish began to rise and I worked him just like the first one only this fish was brought to hand. He was a rainbow that looked like a football with fins about eighteen inches long.

The next two hours we spent stopping at various sloughs and casting to large rising fish. They were all very powerful and two more of them took me to the cleaners, while I won the battle with 3 more including a 21" brown.

Although the hatch was still strong, Randall convinced me to switch back to a Kiwi Muddler and do what we call dredging for a huge brown. The Kiwi was a size 4 and I had two BB split shots with a 10-pound tippet on a six-foot leader. When it hit the water it looked as though a small bird or a mouse had fallen in from a tall tree above. It was a lot of fun, in fact, even though I am truly a dry fly fisherman, I can honestly say I was having more fun with the streamer.

The weather had now changed as some dark clouds passed overhead. I cast into a deep hole and bent over to put on my rain jacket, assuming my fly was sinking rapidly to the bottom. Just as my right arm entered my jacket my rod almost jolted from the boat. You never saw someone finish putting his jacket on and pick up a fly rod so quickly. With a huge strip of line and a rod raising hook set I drove my Girdle Bug into the fish. Although he wasn't making a big run there was a tremendous amount of power felt in heavy slow pulsations through the tip of my 7 weight. I knew it was a big fish that must have thought my fast sinking Girdle Bug was some sort of a large nymph. This was a smart fish because his next move left me helpless and I'm sure he knew it.



The fish moved slowly upstream easily pulling line from me even though I firmly palmed my reel, fully aware that my stout leader would hold. After getting upstream of us about 50 or so feet, the fish turned and charged downstream. Within seconds I was badly

entangled in the log jam and Randall slowly rowed the boat over the spot. We hoped the fish would be there and perhaps I could untangle it and continue the fight, but no such luck. All I saw was an entangled mess of leader which I had to cut completely off and attach a new one at the butt section. At this time my hands were shaking and the whole process took a lot longer than it normally would.

After getting re-rigged I looked down at my watch, 8:15 PM. as with any action filled fantastic day of fishing time had passed quickly, but it wasn't over. In July the sun sets at 9:00 p.m. and you can still tie on a fly and accurately cast until 10:00. The guides of the New fork, including Randall, will stay out with you until the last minute and today was no different. During the last two hours I got the most consistent strikes of the entire day. Everywhere that you looked there was a fish that was willing to take your fly. It was the most spectacular streamer fishing I have ever experienced and we boated many fish.

That day we put the boat on the trailer at 10:45 P.M.. Randall worked behind the oars putting me on fish for nearly 15 hours that day. We estimated landing 25-40 fish from put in to take out of mostly browns, a few rainbows and one brook trout. The sizes ranged anywhere from 12" to 23 inches. We landed four fish that were definitely more than 20 inches and several others close to that. I now know why this great river is Jack Dennis personal favorite and hope that you will take an opportunity to join Randall or one of our other experienced New Fork guides for this fabulous fishing adventure.