

“El Solo Toro”

by Tom Deschaine

On my fishing trips across the county I can't help but develop a special fondness for certain rivers, and they aren't always the rivers that produce the most fish. Sometimes it's just a special feeling I get ... a oneness with the beauty, the quiet solitude, or the challenge of the fly and the



fish. Some rivers just naturally draw me back, if not in person, than in dreams and desires. Some of my favorites are the Big Hole, the Au Sable, the Mad, the Mohawk and the Beaverkill. But one very special river that has been on my mind for the past several weeks is 'Rock Creek,' in Montana. I first visited this river many years ago after reading a short article in a trout fishing magazine claiming that the river was home to brook, brown, rainbow, cutthroat and the endangered 'bull' trout. I couldn't

help but wonder how many anglers have scored the 'grand slam' on this river system.

Rock Creek is located in the Sapphire Mountains of Montana, approximately 25 miles southeast of Missoula off of I-90. Its headwaters start some 50 miles to the south. The river flows from south to north until its confluence with the Clark Fork. The mountain range takes its name from the sapphires that are mined in the area and are also found along the banks of Rock Creek. Starting in May, the winter snow melt turns the creek into a full-fledged river bringing with it a full complement of fly anglers.

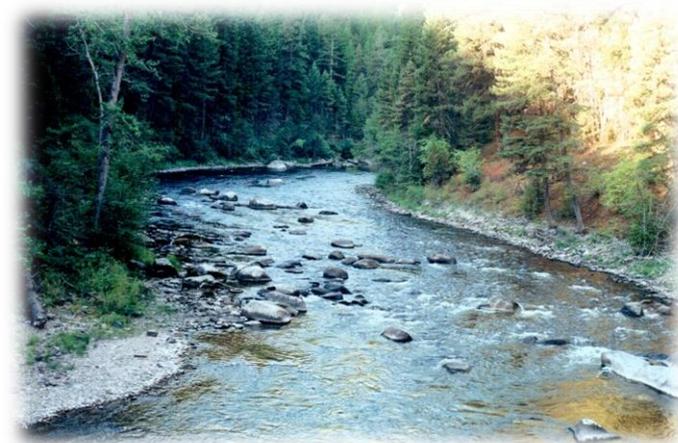


Rock Creek is considered a non-technical river with a 'blue ribbon' designation. The often steep banks are lined with fir and pine. Access is good and the river is excellent for wading, especially in the lower sections, from July through October. The whole of the river is loaded with 12-16" fish with large to jumbo browns in the deep pools. You'll find most every type of fishing situation; riffles and pools, swift runs, still and pocket waters. Fly hatches are varied and numerous; stoneflies, caddis and mayflies. On Rock Creek the fishing pressure is usually heavy ... but not in the usual sense of the word. There are a lot of fishermen but the river provides such great access that no one seems crowded. When I planned my trip I was well advised to do my homework. Not having the appropriate patterns would really spoil my days on the water. Information, assistance and appropriate patterns can be picked up at the Rock Creek Fisherman's Mercantile.

I arrived on the river in the middle of July. I arrived with visions of executing a ‘*grand slam.*’ Armed with an 8 foot, 5 weight rod, new Orvis waders and a couple of boxes of home spun flies, I was ready for the ‘*kill.*’ The stage was set: moderate cloud cover, water temperature in the 50s and sediment free waters. I intentionally planned this trip for the middle of July knowing that it would be hopper season, but I was also hoping to take advantage of the Spruce Moth hatch.



The Spruce Moth is an environmental disaster. During major infestations they can denude pine trees of their needles. The last couple of years this area of the country has been plagued with them. When present, they are the insect of choice. They have large wings and are so light weight that the slightest breeze will blow them from the trees, into the water. On a breezy day the trout will gorge themselves on these moths. I’ve even seen trout leave the water to take these moths in midair.



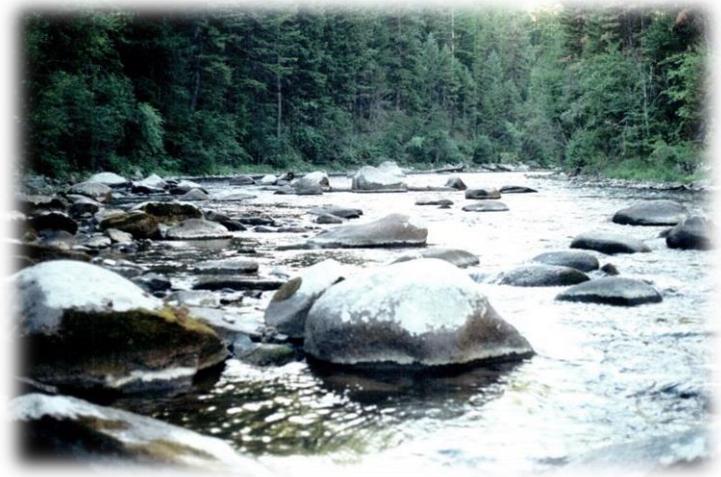
I started at the confluence with Clark Fork and planned on working my way south to the head waters ... or at least as far as I could make it during my two days on the river. The entire first day I saw no action at all. There were no insects on the waters and no trout were rising. The banks were littered with grass hoppers but none of my offerings seemed to interest the trout. I’m not a world class fisherman by any stretch of the imagination, and even after 30+ years of fly fishing my casting is anything but an

art form, but I do know enough about casting and reading the river to completely bamboozle a few ignorant trout and impress the drive-by tourist. But, simply put, I could not raise a trout!

Day two, I was more determined. No one likes to see their fishing log with a creel count of “0”. The days I put in tying Spruce Moth patterns were wasted, not one could be seen anywhere. No one gets skunked at Rock Creek! Out of desperation, I resorted to my ‘never fail,’ ‘guaranteed to kill’m,’ secret fly box. Still nothing! So went the morning and early afternoon.



In an act of resignation I stopped fishing and sought out the company of other anglers to find out if I was the only one experiencing this lack of activity. One angler had landed a 14" rainbow earlier in the morning and the other two I spoke to were sharing the same kind of afternoon as me. They had no secrets to share.



Upstream I continued ... changing flies every ten casts or so ... still nothing! Two, three, four more access sites ... still nothing! FINALLY ... at an access site just south of the Dallas Campground, using a generalized parachute hopper pattern, I nailed and netted a 12" Bull Trout!

My log will reflect ... two days fishing ... one **LONELY BULL** !

See you on the water.....

Tom Deschaine
~www.michigandryflies.net~

Note: The 'Bull Trout' (Salvelinus confluentus) is actually a member of the 'Char' family. It is a threatened species. In the state of Montana if one is accidentally hooked, the law demands immediate release.

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