



THE ANGLING REPORT

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

November 2004 Vol. 17, No. 11

DATELINE: WYOMING

Honor Roll Report Goat-Packing For Trout: A First-Person Account

(Editor Note: There is no way we could dream up all the fascinating reports we receive each month from subscribers to this publication. Witness this report on a goat-packing trip into the Wind River Mountains of Wyoming after grayling, golden trout and more. It was sent to us by subscriber Peter G. Kump, who has won himself a place on our Subscriber Honor Roll. He'll be receiving an Honor Roll fishing cap shortly. See page two for more details on our Subscriber Honor Roll.)

This past August my friend Jim and I fished numerous streams and lakes in the northern Wind River Mountains of Wyoming. We packed into this wilderness area using goats, of all things. I arranged the trip through Jim Ferguson, who guides for Sweetwater Fishing Expeditions. My wife and I had fished with Ferguson the previous summer in the Popo Agie Wilderness area and enjoyed a splendid trip.

During our trip, Ferguson had described “goat packing” as a means of traversing the wilderness. I was intrigued and determined then to put

together such a trip a year later. Ferguson made the packing arrangements with Charlie Wilson of Wind River Pack Goats (www.goatpacking.com) located in Lander, Wyoming. Wilson provided 12 goats for our eight-day trek.

The overall trip was wonderful, but two particular highlights deserve detailed description. One day was de-



voted to a trip with the goats to a high alpine lake holding golden trout. Although this species is native to the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California, golden trout have been stocked in lakes in Wyoming since the early 20th century. Indeed, for a number of years, Wyoming was the principle source of golden trout specimens for re-seeding efforts else-

where in the West. Our destination on this trip was a stunning lake that probably sees fishermen only a few times a year. We were rewarded with voracious and indiscriminate fish. Because the fish were feeding so readily, Ferguson asked everyone to keep count, although that is neither his nor my custom. I counted 42 fish brought to hand within two hours. Two other fishermen accounted for an additional 37. Most were small, but I caught at least one reaching 16 inches and several others in the 14- to 15-inch range. They were truly gorgeous fish.

After crossing the Continental Divide, we had another interesting day in which I claimed a “Wyoming Grand Slam.” The day started with a confrontation with a bull moose and his mate at early light as I emerged from my tent. Later that morning, Ferguson and I traveled approximately three quarters of a mile to a small lake stocked with grayling. We caught eight- to 12-inch grayling at will. Later, after returning to camp and while the others were packing for the day’s trek, I fished another nearby lake where I caught stocky brook trout ranging 12 to 13 inches. We then traveled about five miles to our final camping destination on Ross Lake. That evening, I caught Yellowstone cutthroats and an 18-inch rainbow. Four species on the same day ought to qualify as something!

The Ross Lake area was spectacular to fish. The stream connecting Ross Lake and Hidden Lake, known as West Torrey Creek, holds rainbows and cutthroats. Some of the rainbows were surprisingly large. Hidden Lake rewarded us with cutthroats in the 16- to 18-inch category. In approximately two hours of fishing that lake, we all caught numerous fish, with my total

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exceeding a dozen. Ross Lake is an intriguing fishery that we were unable to explore because of bad weather. A single one-hour period on its shore resulted in a rainbow of 20 inches. Ferguson explained that his favored technique in this lake is to spot a feeding trout and then fish that specific fish. The fish I caught that after-

noon was on a Black Woolly Bugger, but more of my catches on the trip were on dry flies.

Wilderness fishing is like no other. We were consistently able to find eager and gullible fish, and the fishery would change from day to day as we moved through the mountains. Wilderness hiking and camping, how-

Honor Roll Subscribers

■ The *Angling Report* encourages subscribers to file reports on great places to fish and/or important news developments that help the rest of us decide where to go (or not to go!) fishing. Subscribers who file unusually important and useful reports are placed on our Subscriber Honor Roll and are sent a complimentary *Angling Report* Honor Roll Fishing Cap. If you have been on an interesting trip recently, send in a letter-length report and see if you can get on our Subscriber Honor Roll. Our latest Honor Roll subscriber is **Peter G. Kumpe** who filed the report on goat-packing in the Wind River Mountains of Wyoming that begins on page 1 of this issue. Our other Honor Roll Subscribers are:

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ever, does bring challenges. Often, we spent significant time on camp maintenance, or on the trail rather than with a fly rod in hand. One must be flexible or run the risk of frustration. A missed trail or bad weather can require a change in plans. Also, wilderness travel can be strenuous. We had several hiking days that challenged the limits of our endurance; although both my friend and I are 57 years old, we are in moderately good shape. The outfitters were considerate, set a pace that we could handle and offered unplanned rest days when our bodies were feeling worn.

Both Ferguson and Wilson have a background with the National Outdoor Leadership School located in Lander, Wyoming. They have a depth of knowledge about the wilderness that creates great confidence in their leadership. Conversations are educa-

tional as well as entertaining.

As for goat packing, the animals provide a unique charm. These goats, all neutered males, did not "smell" as my wife predicted they would. In-



deed, they were docile and affectionate, behaving more like canines than other pack animals I have experienced. After packing the goats with a saddle and pannier arrangement simi-

lar to that used for horses, Wilson would simply turn the goats loose and charge down the trail. Invariably the goats lined up after some sorting and followed along. Soon, we all became part of the "herd." We were so accepted that if a fisherman fell too far behind, the tail goat, invariably the one named Trapper, would stop and bleat as if to warn the rest of the herd that some one was lagging and insist that the laggard catch up. At camp, the goats would be unpacked and allowed to roam freely. They foraged happily on whatever was available at a campsite and along the trail. The only special food Wilson carried was some treats that he used to gather the animals in the morning. They would alternatively feed and bed down during the night generally right outside the tents.

Goats provide some distinct advantages over other pack animals in the wilderness. As described, they are much more easily managed than other pack animals. That they forage on their own means packing food for them is unnecessary. They are nimble and readily travel places that would challenge a horse. Their cloven hoofs are much kinder to the trail and environs than are horse hoofs. Their feces consist of grassy spheres similar to "moose marbles." Invariably, goat feces became prevalent around the campsite, but it is inoffensive compared to that of a horse.

Both Ferguson and Wilson were very accommodating. They teamed up to provide extraordinary meals. Ferguson brought fresh foods, both vegetables and meats, and orchestrated the meals so that we consumed the most perishable items early in the trip. Freshly caught rainbow trout augmented the packed provisions. Wine was provided at every meal, and both Wilson and Ferguson challenged us to identify the single malt scotch each claimed as his favorite.

The cost of the trip was \$2,500 per person. It is a trip suitable for anyone in moderately good shape. The fishing skills required are minimal.

Sorting Out The Sweetwaters....

■ In case you are confused about the company mentioned in this report (Sweetwater Fishing Expeditions), it's not connected to another company we've covered before called Sweetwater Travel. It's also not connected to Sweetwater Expeditions. What we have here are three completely different fishing companies with very similar names.

Sweetwater Fishing Expeditions (Tel. 307-332-3986. Web: www.sweetwaterfishing.com) is headquartered in Lander, Wyoming, and is operated by George Hunker, an Orvis-endorsed guide. The company specializes in extended camping/fishing trips in the Wind River Mountains and caters to fly fishermen. Hunker customizes all of his trips to the customer's needs and desires. In addition to camping trips, he also conducts day-trips to local streams.

The second company, Sweetwater Travel (Tel. 800-347-4286. Web: www.sweetwatertravel.com), is based in Livingston, Montana, and is operated by the Vermillion

brothers. Sweetwater Travel books and operates fishing trips around the world, including Mongolia, French Polynesia, Argentina/Chile, Brazil, Russia, New Zealand, Alaska and Montana. They have been mentioned in these pages numerous times, and we have many subscriber reports on them in our database.

And, finally, Sweetwater Expeditions (Tel. 970-728-1757. Web: www.sweetwaterexpeditions.com) is based in Telluride, Colorado, but operates in Chile and Argentina. This company offers trips for sea-run browns in Tierra del Fuego; salmon and "saltwater" rainbows that run like steelhead in Chile's coastal rivers; and trout in the streams and stillwaters of Argentina's Esquel and Rio Pico regions. The company is operated by Jeremy Freymoyer, a Colorado-based fly fishing guide who travels south every November and works with two locals who have guided in Argentina and Chile for a combined total of more than 35 years. — *Barbara Crown.*

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Ferguson provides everything except a personal sleeping bag and fishing gear. He is also accommodating about the logistics of pick-up and departure. We flew into Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Ferguson met us at the airport and offered to return us there, but friends living in the vicinity kindly provided a hot shower and transportation at the end of our trip. Sweetwater Fishing Expeditions can customize all of their trips to meet the client's desires. Contact them at 307-332-3986; or visit their web site at www.sweetwaterfishing.com. - Peter G. Kump.

DATELINE: KAMCHATKA

On-Site Report The 'Real Skinny' On Fishing Kamchatka

(Part 2 of a 2-Part Series)

(Editor Note: This past summer, in an effort to find out more about the Kamchatka Peninsula of Russia and the fishing available there, we sent correspondent Tim Jones to that part of the world, where he gathered a treasure trove of facts and insights that should help you decide whether this fishing frontier is right for you. Last month, he gave you the real skinny on what's involved in getting there; what the camps there are like; and just who books and outfits what in this vast region. This month he turns his attention to the fishing itself. Enjoy!)

If you have read much about the Kamchatka Peninsula of Russia and the fishing available there, you already know the species available are rainbow trout and Pacific salmon (including king, silver, chum, sockeye and cherry salmon), plus incidental species such as grayling and a variety of char: Dolly Varden, khundza, Arctic char and some locally specific varieties such as Two-Yurt char. My concern before going to that part of the world was that Kamchatka is a hell of a long way to travel for fish that are mostly available in Alaska. I was also concerned, as an Atlantic salmon addict, that rainbows, even ones that average over 20 inches, are still just trout. I

couldn't have been more wrong.

Kamchatka is simply spectacular and, best of all, almost completely unspoiled. While in camp, I never heard an engine, saw a plane, helicopter, boat or person not directly associated with our camp. In traveling nearly 100 miles on two rivers, I saw exactly one set of very old vehicle tracks, probably made by a Russian army transport several decades before. The claims that Kamchatka is "Alaska 60 years ago" are absolutely accurate. The only place I've ever been that felt nearly as remote as Kamchatka is northern Labrador, and the snow-covered volcanoes of Kamchatka are like nothing I've ever seen. Plus, on appropriate tackle (6- and 7-weight rods), the rainbows in particular were outstanding gamefish in numbers,



size and stamina.

On the Tigil River, we'd leave from camp each morning by jet boat with a packed lunch to fish a "beat" anywhere from four to 10 miles long. Normally, these beats were shared by two anglers, but I fished alone, inviting my guide to fish with me. We did all of our fishing by wading, and the wading is very easy. This would be an ideal venue for anglers with limited mobility or who have difficulty wading, especially later in the summer as water levels fall.

The water temperature (during the second week in August) was in the low 40's in the morning, rising to the high 40's by late afternoon. The fishing was best in the afternoon and early evening when the water was warmest. On sunny days, the fish

would sit over sand bottoms in shallow water, plainly visible, and would almost always rise to a skated mouse pattern. The more realistic the pattern and the larger wake it threw, the more effective it was. The fish would turn away from any mouse that sank even momentarily. The rainbows were also beginning to key on the spawning chum and sockeye salmon and would readily take an egg-sucking leech, though most would also rise to a mouse. We often found it effective to fish through a run with a leech after having first made a pass with a mouse.

The rainbows on the Tigil averaged between 21 and 22 inches, with girths of 14 to 15 inches common. We didn't weigh the fish, but I'd guess most were in the three- to five-pound range. I easily averaged over a dozen memorable fish a day, with some days seeing 20 or more. My largest fish was 27 inches long and had a 16½-inch girth. The largest rainbow taken in camp was a 29 incher. Interestingly, there don't seem to be any small fish in the river; the smallest rainbow I saw was 14 inches, and fish under 18 inches were rare.

These fish were strong, often acrobatic, with many jumping four or more times during the fight. None ever made long runs. The only time I saw my backing on the Tigil was when I foul-hooked a chum salmon. I also fair-hooked several chum salmon on the egg sucking leech patterns. These fish were just on the edge of spawning, were in good shape and fought hard. Dolly Vardens and khundza had not yet entered the river in any numbers. I caught only one small khundza, and one of the other anglers took a 24-inch Dolly on the last day.

The sense I got from talking to the guides is that the fishing on the Tigil was steadily improving as the season went on - perhaps because the water was warming and dropping, but that's pure conjecture. The simple fact is that the Tigil has had less than 30 sport anglers on it in total, and we