



YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK.COM



Daisy Geyser -Yellowstone National Park

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"FLYFISHING - NORTHEAST"

Considered, the most beautiful area of the Park, the northeast quadrant contains three of the most popular streams-the Lamar and Yellowstone Rivers, and Slough Creek-all home to the native Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

The Lamar River is a late bloomer, usually the last river in the Park to clear of snowmelt. But when it comes on, it comes on strong, with good fishing using grasshoppers and other terrestrials in late July. This situation reverses that on most other rivers in the Park-where hatches come early in the season and terrestrials follow. Tributaries of the Lamar, Slough Creek, and Soda Butte Creek are also popular with anglers, who make it a yearly ritual to fish each stream.

The Yellowstone River is the world's finest trout stream. Through far-sighted fisheries management, its cutthroats are more numerous and larger than they were 30 years ago. Downstream from Yellowstone Lake and above the falls, the Yellowstone is an insect factory. We've counted hatches of at least 11 major mayflies, six caddis, and two stoneflies that are important to the trout diet. At times, the number of different species of flies on the water can be overwhelming. Native cutthroats have the reputation of being easy to catch, but on this part of the Yellowstone the cutthroats can be more selective than a spring-creek brown.



From its Grand Canyon downstream to the town of Gardiner, Montana, the Yellowstone and its tributaries are a long way from the road. The trout here see less pressure and are more cooperative. Bring your pack, camera, and bear bells, and have a good time.

Broad Creek - Cutthroat

This fair-sized tributary of the Yellowstone River holds cutthroat trout that average 12 inches and is seldom fished. It drains a large part of Mirror Plateau, east of Yellowstone Rivers Grand Canyon. The lower creek, and its tributaries Shallow and Wrong Creeks, all flow through steep, narrow, remote canyons, and thus are seldom visited. Access is via a 14-mile hike on the Wapiti Lake Trail, which starts at Artist Point, an overlook to the lower falls of the Yellowstone River south of Canyon Junction. You'll want to fish the upper reaches of Broad Creek downstream to Joseph Coat Springs, a distance of 5 miles. Below the springs the stream enters a narrow, steep canyon, and both fishing and access become more difficult. The same is true of its tributaries, Shallow and Wrong Creeks, which enter Broad Creek from the east. This area is home to many of the Park's grizzly bears.

Cache Creek - Cutthroat-Rainbow

A major tributary to the Lamar River, Cache Creek is accessible by hiking the Lamar River Trail, found near Soda Butte, 14 miles south of the Northeast Entrance on the Northeast Entrance Highway. Follow the Lamar River Trail south for about 3 miles and you'll reach the lower end of Cache Creek itself. If you wish to hike upstream via the trail rather than up the creek, take the Cache Creek Trail (it's marked), about 4 miles before you reach the creek.

Cache Creek contains a fine population of both cutthroat and rainbow trout of up to 13 inches. This is one of the few small streams in Yellowstone Park with reliable hatches. Green Drakes, Pale Morning Duns, and *Heptagenia* mayflies, along with several caddis species, provide the hiking angler with good dry-fly fishing during July and August. Come September, look for good ant, beetle, and grasshopper fishing.

Cottonwood Creek - Cutthroat

This fine cutthroat stream is located in the Black Canyon of the Yellowstone River, halfway between the Hellroaring Creek Trail and the Blacktail Deer Creek Trail. The Hellroaring Creek Trailhead is 4 miles west of Tower Junction, on the Mammoth-Tower Highway. Follow this trail north until it connects with the Yellowstone River Trail, then take a left and head west for about 3 miles, cross over Little Cottonwood Creek, and walk another mile to Cottonwood Creek. You can also reach the creek by taking the Blacktail Deer Creek Trail, located 7 miles east of Mammoth on the Mammoth-Tower Highway. It's 4 miles down the trail to the Yellowstone River, then another 3 miles east on the Yellowstone River Trail to Cottonwood Creek. This creek has good fishing for cutthroat trout averaging 12 inches, with larger cuts possible. It receives little angling pressure due to the long hike and the grizzly bears, I We've been treed by a grizzly near this stream

Hellroaring Creek - Cutthroat-Rainbow

This medium-sized tributary to the Yellowstone River is accessible via the Hellroaring Creek Trail, found 2 miles west of Tower Junction on the Mammoth-Tower Highway. After hiking downhill 1 1/2 miles, you'll cross the suspension bridge over the Yellowstone River. Continue for another 1/2 mile and you'll connect with the Yellowstone River Trail, which takes you west the final 1/2 mile to Hellroaring Creek. The fishing is mainly for 10-inch cutthroat and rainbow trout, although larger cuts migrating up from the Yellowstone can be found in the lower creek. Fishing the Yellowstone River at its confluence with Hellroaring Creek, we've taken cutthroat, brook, brown, and rainbow trout along with the occasional mountain whitefish. This is a pleasant day trip that offers a nice blend of scenery, feisty trout, and solitude.

Lamar River - Cutthroat-Rainbow

The Lamar River begins its long journey out of Hoodoo Basin high up in the rugged Absarokas, on the east edge of Yellowstone Park. The river carves its way through 30 miles of canyon, dropping nearly 100 feet per mile. A number of small tributaries enter the Lamar from both sides of the canyon, transforming this small, tumbling, mountain stream into a blue-ribbon meadow river by the time it joins Soda Butte Creek, at the head of Lamar Valley.

This long upper stretch of the Lamar is home to small cutthroats, as the sharp drop in elevation makes the habitat unsuitable for larger trout. The better habitat lies downstream of the canyon. The river is always the last one in the Park to clear from snowmelt, and it usually isn't fishable until late July or early August. Even then, frequent summer thunderstorms in the Absarokas will turn the river muddy for two or three days. If you're fortunate enough to be here the day it clears, the fish will make you beg for mercy.

The canyon ends and the meadow section begins at the Junction Pool, where the Lamar River joins with Soda Butte Creek. For the next 6 miles, the river flows through one of the most beautiful valley meadows you'll ever see; it's paralleled by the Cooke City Highway. Bison and prong-horns are easily found grazing along the rivers banks, but the cutthroat, rainbow, and cuttbow hybrid inhabitants are not so easily found. They have a reputation for migrating- here today, gone tomorrow. A run that was productive one week will seem fishless the next. While this may be abnormal on most streams, it's normal on the Lamar, and when it happens you must start covering water to find the fish. Once you find the trout, you may not have to move again for a while.

The average trout in the meadow section is 11 inches long and readily takes dry flies and nymphs. The Lamar is known primarily as an attractor-fly and terrestrial stream, but you may encounter a few hatches. Of these, the only one you can count on is the Green Drake hatch of late summer. These are often confused with Brown or Gray Drakes, because this Green Drake isn't really green. It's a member of the Green Drake family, but it varies in color from tan to gray. The trout don't seem to care; they gobble up virtually every one that floats downstream. Hatches of this Green Drake are fragmented and seldom heavy, but they're consistent. All it takes is a little effort to patrol the river for this emergence.

The big draw on the Lamar is always its late-summer terrestrial fishing. We say "big" because the insects are *big*. The grassy meadows along the banks of the river produce some enormous grasshoppers, beetles, and- especially- Mormon Crickets. Were sometimes embarrassed when people look into our fly boxes and shudder at the size of the flies we use. Crickets and grasshoppers 2 to 3 inches long and beetles the size of a nickel are crammed into fly boxes set aside only for this river.

At the end of the meadow, the river enters the lower Lamar Canyon, a 6-mile piece of water that finally merges with the Yellowstone River at Black Canyon. The lower canyon is split into two sections by the Lamar River Bridge on the Cooke City Highway. Above the bridge the river is easily accessible from the main road. This narrow canyon produces some nice cutthroats, rainbows, and hybrids if you get deep with big Golden Stonefly nymphs or sculpin patterns. This method will produce the best fish) but the dry-fly fisher can also do well with large attractors and terrestrials worked among the big boulders.

Below the Lamar River Bridge the river curves away from the road on its way to the Yellowstone River; it can only be reached by hiking. While this section of the canyon is scenic, the fishing isn't particularly noteworthy. Poor habitat and small fish are scattered throughout this otherwise lovely canyon. We view this as hiking and not really fishing.

The meadow section of the Lamar was called Paradise Valley by fur trapper Osborne Russell in his 1830s diary, *Journal of a Trapper* (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE, 1965). Fly fishers would agree with this even today, which is why the Lamar River is one of the most popular streams in Yellowstone Park.

Pelican Creek - Cutthroat

This major tributary enters Yellowstone Lake on its north shore. The first 2 miles upstream from the lake are closed to fishing to protect spawning habitat, so plan to hike the Pelican Creek Trail to get to fishable water. The trailhead is found 3 miles east of Fishing Bridge, across from Indian Pond, V) mile down the access road that leaves the Fishing Bridge-East Entrance Highway; it's on the north side of the road. Take the Pelican Creek Trail northeast until the Pelican Valley opens up before you, a distance of about 2 miles. From this point you can fish either upstream or down for cutthroats that average 13 inches. This meandering meadow stream lies in treeless Pelican Valley, and it's prime grizzly bear country. Groups of four or more hikers are required for this trip.

Pelican Creek is primarily a spawning stream, but the fishing is good when the creek opens on July 15. By late August the majority of trout have returned to the lake, though, and the fishing becomes quite difficult under the late summer sun. Gray Drakes and PMDs provide fishable hatches on this stream, but we've always found that the fish rise to terrestrial patterns better than to any other flies.

Pebble Creek - Cutthroat-Rainbow

Originally named "White Pebble Creek" because of the chalky white sedimentary pebbles found at its headwaters, this fine tributary to Soda Butte Creek enters the stream at Round Prairie, 10 miles south of the Northeast Entrance, on the Northeast Entrance Highway. The Pebble Creek campground is next to the creek, and upstream for 1/2 mile from the campground, fishing is productive of cutthroat and the occasional rainbow trout, which average 9 inches. Beyond this point the creek winds its way upstream through a steep, trailless canyon that's difficult to hike. The Pebble Creek Trail parallels the creek, but it sits atop a high ridge that makes it useless for stream access.

Anglers wanting to fish the upper meadows should take the Pebble Creek Trail from its north trailhead, 1^ miles south of the Northeast Entrance, on the Northeast Entrance Highway. Follow the trail northwest for about 2 miles and you'll come to the upper meadows of Pebble Creek. Fishing can be good here for cutthroats that run 10 to 14 inches.

This small tributary enters Slough Creek from the south in its second meadow. For all practical purposes this stream is fishless.

Slough Creek - Cutthroat-Rainbow

Slough Creek is a tributary to the Lamar River located just north of the Lamar River Bridge on the Cooke City Highway, in the northeast corner of Yellowstone Park. Slough (pronounced "sloo") Creek rises in the Beartooth Mountains of Montana and enters the Park at its north boundary, 11 miles upstream of the Slough Creek camp-ground. The only access to the creek is via the campground road. If you wish to fish either up- or downstream of the campground, you'll have to hike.



To reach the upstream waters, don't hike the stream up from the campground; it travels through a nasty gorge better suited to rock climbers. Instead, start from the trailhead found about U mile before the campground. Look for the outhouse and trail marker; this is the parking area and trail-head for the upper meadows. There are usually cars parked here, because this is also the access to the private Silver Tip Ranch, located just outside the Park's north boundary. The ranch is permitted to use horse-drawn wagons to carry passengers and supplies because it was in existence before the Park was, and this is the wagons' only access. These wagons are used for ranch purposes only; they do *not* provide trail rides, so please respect their privacy and don't ask.

The area above the campground is divided into three meadows. Plan on a comfortable one-hour hike to the first meadow, two hours to the second, and three hours to the third meadow. The meadows are separated by obvious landmarks. The first meadow features patrol cabins on its south hill; the stream is on your left when going upstream. You can't miss the second meadow; the trees on your left give way to a meadow that opens before your eyes as you walk down the hill. The third meadow begins at the patrol cabin on Elk Tongue Creek, which crosses the trail.

The three meadows contain cutthroat and a sparse population of rainbow trout. All the meadows hold roughly the same numbers and sizes of fish, the difference being that the farther you hike, the fewer people you'll see. You won't need to pack in waders here; the only reason to enter the water is to cross the stream. The fish are less sophisticated in the second and third meadows, so matching the hatch isn't critical, but you'd better be prepared to match hatches in the first meadow. The fish will rise to your fly provided you concentrate, exercise patience, and use a fly pattern that matches the natural that they're taking. They aren't necessarily difficult in the first meadow, but they do want things their way. The fun here is catering to their whims.

At the bottom of the first meadow, the river quickly tapers into a gorge, changing from a calm meadow stream to a raging cascade. Take our advice and stay on the trail, for it's the shortest way to the campground. For a few hundred yards below the Slough Creek campground there's a nice piece of rough-and-tumble water, ideal stonefly habitat. During July, stonefly nymphs and dries fished through the heavy water often yield surprising results. After these riffles, the stream regains its meadow character for the last 3 miles before it enters the Lamar River. Although this water looks similar to that in the upper meadows, there are some big differences. The stream is much larger and deeper here than it is above. Insect life is much more abundant, varied, and consistent, and the trout take advantage of this increased food supply. Even the fish are different, while cutthroats have the edge in numbers, rainbows and cutthroat hybrids dominate in size. These fish can be as hard to fool as any spring-creek trout.

The nature of this lower water breeds selective trout. It's slow and clear, with multiple currents that lead to immediate drag. These fish have every opportunity to inspect their prey prior to feeding, and they pass up many naturals as they do imitations. The trout tend to cruise, patrolling the cross-currents, whirlpools, and slack water along the edges, searching for food. Insects collect in the deadwater of back eddies, mixing with foam and other debris. Fish move into the eddies, gulping insects from the foam and scum lines. It's not unusual to locate feeding trout strictly by the sounds of their gulping. Quite often you'll find these gulpers in 6 inches of water.

The entire stream holds excellent populations of *Baetis*, PMDs, and Gray and Green Drakes. Caddis include *Brachycentrus*, *Lepidostoma*, and *Helicopsyche*. Stoneflies present are the Salmonfly, Golden Stonefly, and Little Yellow Stone. Midges are very important here. Trout thought to be taking the obvious small mayfly duns or spinners may be sipping midge pupae just under the surface. Grasshoppers, beetles, ants, and crickets all have their moment in the sun. Of special note are the flying ant swarms in August, which trigger a feeding frenzy. What appears to be barren water suddenly changes to feeding time at the hatchery. We've actually seen trout bobbing vertically for ants, their heads popping out of the water in unison. Unfortunately, few anglers are ever prepared for this unusual event. Nestled at the foot of the Beartooths, where mountains snag the clouds, Slough Creek curls its way-through four meadows and some of the most spectacular scenery in Yellowstone Park. As good as the fishing is, it's only half the story.

Soda Butte - Cutthroat-Rainbow

This large tributary to the Lamar River parallels the Northeast Entrance Highway, from the Northeast Entrance to the stream's confluence with the Lamar, a distance of 15 road miles. Soda Butte Creek is a mountain stream in its upper reaches, containing 10-inch rainbows and cutthroats, but it changes character downstream from Icebox Canyon. The tree line now gives way to meadows, and the fish range from 12 to 14 inches. In this stretch, hatches of Green Drakes, *Baetis*, and PMDs produce fine rises of trout nearly every day during July, August, and September. Terrestrial patterns such as crickets, grasshoppers, and beetles are "must-haves" during late summer and early fall.

Yellowstone River - Brook-Brown-Rainbow-Cutthroat-Whitefish

The Yellowstone River is the showcase of American trout streams—the world's premier cutthroat trout fishery and the longest undammed river in the United States, it has the most prolific insect hatches of any place we know and is the most popular river in the Park for angling and fish watching.

The Yellowstone River begins its long journey to the Missouri River as two small branches in Wyoming's Shoshone Mountain Range, flowing north from 12,000-foot Yount Peak and crossing the south boundary of Yellowstone Park, where it enters the Park's Thorofare region. For the next 14 miles to Yellowstone Lake, the river meanders through the wildest and most primitive country in the lower 48 states. Its surroundings are marshes, bogs, and sloughs, making travel difficult until late summer. Biting flies and mosquitoes can make life uncomfortable in these parts until things dry out. The grizzly bears remain, however.

A trip to the Thorofare demands respect. At best it's two days in, two days out, and you've yet to wet a line. Plan on a minimum 7-day trip; 10 days is best. Hire an experienced outfitter who'll take care of the camping, food, and bears while you tend to more important things, like fishing. This area is untouched, a place of exceptional beauty no different today than when the first fur trapper passed through in the 1700s. The cutthroats here are highly migratory, as the river is primarily a spawning stream for Yellowstone Lake cutts. The trout average 15 to 16 inches and are no more plentiful here than anywhere else on the river. The reason to make this trip is for the scenery and solitude, not necessarily the fishing.

After leaving the Thorofare region, the river enters Yellowstone Lake's southeast arm and exits at Fishing Bridge on the lake's north shore. By now enriched with the waters of many fine cutthroat streams, the Yellowstone becomes one of the largest and best trout streams in the world.

From 8 miles upstream (south) to 1 mile downstream (north) of Fishing Bridge, the river is permanently closed to fishing. But this is a great place for fish watching, which is currently more popular than fishing on the river. For the next 6 miles, as you journey downstream to Sulphur Caldron, the river is open to catch-and-release fishing for Yellowstone cutthroats. (The only exception is the 1-mile-long study area at LeHardy Rapids, which is halfway between Fishing Bridge and Sulphur Caldron; this is closed to fishing.) At first glance the river here

seems slow moving and easy wading, but looks can be deceiving. This current is powerful, and you can easily be swept off your feet if you get careless.

The Yellowstone cutthroat is the only trout in the river from Yellowstone Lake downstream to the Upper Falls, a 13-mile section paralleled by the Lake-Canyon Road. Access is as easy as the drive; there are plenty of turnouts and three picnic areas. The Buffalo Ford picnic area is one of the most popular spots for catching trout that average 16 to 17 inches-and for watching other people catch them. There's no other place in Yellowstone Park so accessible to anglers, including those with physical disabilities.

The water in the river runs cold all year long, and most insect hatches don't begin until 10 A.M., truly gentlemen's hours. We often drive along the road looking for rising trout before deciding on a place to fish, because studies have shown that the cutthroats not only move around in the river, but also move in and out of Yellowstone Lake. Some fish, tracked via radio collar, moved up to 8 miles in 24 hours!

The Yellowstone River is a virtual insect factory. The list of important insects is nearly as long as the river itself. The three most important are Pale Morning Duns, Green

Drakes, and Gray Drakes. Other major mayfly hatches include *Baetis*, *Rhithrogena*, Flavs, Pink Ladies, *Attenella margarita*, *Sermtella tibialis*, and *Heptagenia solitaria*. Major caddis emergences include *Hydro-psyche*, *Hesperophylax desig-natus*, *Micrasema bactro*, *Lepidostormapluviale*, *Brachycentrus americanus*, and *Rhyacophila bifila*. There are Salmonflies and Golden Stoneflies, there are several species of midges that emerge all season long, and the river is loaded with scuds. The banks virtually crawl with grasshoppers, ants, crickets, and specially-beetles.

Don't be intimidated by this long list; it's one of the reasons the Yellowstone is the Park's most popular river. One or more insects are usually emerging daily, with staggering numbers of trout rising to them; and while these trout have the reputation of being easy the first two weeks of the season, they soon become very selective. Avoid flock shooting. Pick out a single fish, determine what insect it's eating, and match that with an imitation. To avoid drag, fish the shortest possible line.

Downstream from Buffalo Ford, just below Sulphur Caldron, the river is reserved as a wildlife-study area and is closed to fishing for the 6 miles down to Alum Creek. From Alum Creek downstream to the Chittenden Bridge, the river grows less productive as it picks up speed, heading to the Upper Falls. Be careful wading here; you're close to the falls and the current is deceptively strong.

Below the falls and all the way to the town of Gardiner, Montana, a distance of about 45 miles, the river cuts through two canyons. Directly below the falls is the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, and access to this stretch is very difficult.

The least-difficult spot is Seven Mile Hole, a mere 1,500-foot drop down the canyon wall. The hike down isn't too bad, but climbing the wall at the end of the day might make you reconsider. There are cutthroat, brown, brook, and rainbow trout here, along with some huge whitefish, but the fish are neither larger nor more plentiful than in the section below the lake, and the only hatch you're liable to hit may be the Salmonflies in July.

The Grand Canyon ends and the Black Canyon of the Yellowstone begins at the Cooke City Bridge. For the next 20 miles en route to Gardiner, Montana, the river is remote, brawling canyon water, never closer than a mile to the road. Access to the canyon isn't difficult, but maneuvering around the canyon walls is. There are few trails once you're in the canyon. This is prime grizzly country; take precautions to prevent an encounter. If you like solitude, you'll like it here, but we don't recommend this for a fishing trip.

The Yellowstone River strides across the entire length of Yellowstone Park, with unmatched scenery, solitude, and fishing. The best fishing and the best hatches are found from Yellowstone Lake to Sulphur Caldron. The fun begins on July 15. We'll see you there!

For more information on Yellowstone National Park and the surrounding communities visit these helpful sites:

YellowstoneNationalPark.com - YellowstoneLodging.com
YellowstoneFlyFishing.com - YellowstoneMedia.com

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