

Strange Bedfellows-Dinosaurs and Trout

Strange Bedfellows - Dinosaurs and Trout by Ted Cobleigh
September is a perfect time to flyfish in Eastern Utah; the kids are back in school, and the temperatures ideal. My wife Julie and I planned a trip down the Green River with my parents. The guided trip was a nice change of pace for me, complete with two boats, a hot lunch and plenty of fish in the net. The ladies enjoyed the extra attention the guides gave them, and my dad and I threw our line to the seemingly endless noses rippling the surface of the water. We spent the first day on The Green and, at the suggestion of our guide, the next on Jones Hole Creek in Dinosaur National Monument. If you've never floated the Green River below Flaming Gorge Dam, you've missed one of the great angling experiences. The canyon is one of those red rock Utah dreams; the water clear and the fish are always biting. We have spent many days on the Green, both on the bank and in our own boat, but this was my first guided trip down the river. We spent the night in a cabin on the pond at Red Canyon Lodge and met our guides, Jeremy and Brian, just after dawn in the small town of Dutch John. We were among the first boats to push off that morning, and we sight casted alone to rising fish most of the day. Casting Call - Lee Cohen Our guides barbequed on a sand bar below a rock formation known as the Diving Board while we relaxed in the shade and told fish stories with only slight exaggerations. We pulled into Little Hole, the take out, overcome with pleasurable exhaustion from the day on the river. It was one of those days where the guides did the work and we caught the fish. That day on the Green was certainly a treat, but the real treat was the secret Brian let us in on as we unloaded the boats. We were planning to walk and wade below the dam the next day when he whispered, in a hushed voice, "Have you ever been to 'The Hole'?" It was like he had just let out one of the last great flyfishing secrets. Turns out that some of the best trout fishing in Utah is inside Dinosaur National Monument. Spring fed Jones Hole Creek bursts from a single source in the desert plateau. Jones Hole National Fish Hatchery sits in the gorge and the creek flows 3.5 miles to the Green River.

We toured the Hatchery. Interesting and informative, but we were eager to hike and fish. Jones Hole Creek was just as Brian described it, small, cool, thick with vegetation and hopefully full of rainbows. The signs at the trailhead detailed the discovery and naming of this spot by John Wesley Powell's Green River Expedition photographer Jones, but archeological evidence, a petroglyph panel at the Deluge Shelter Site, shows that it has been occupied intermittently by at least fifteen separate Native American Cultures over the last 7,000 years.⁽¹⁾ We left dad on the bank with a fish on and continued downstream to see the petroglyphs. Half an hour later we reached the footbridge above the archeological site. Having soaked up some positive energy from the ancient stone pictures we set to fishing. It was a dry September, but there were lots of crickets and grasshoppers along the banks, so I rigged up a hopper dropper for Julie and invited her to have the first go. I fished with mom and Julie, as we gradually moved upstream, hopscotching each other and changing flies constantly. The presentation of the fly was tight. The stream is only twelve feet wide at the widest spot and often only four feet wide in a deep run. There were overhanging limbs, riverbank nettles, and trees to rear. A little creative casting like the bow and arrow proved to be very essential in the Hole. We figured that one good toss upstream, a mend and drift through and boom a fish. But the reality was that we struggled to bring up more than just a bit of action. I thought, "how could this be the place where mythical men have had forty, fifty, sixty fish afternoons?" Just as I began to get discouraged, and I thought I had tried all my obvious fly selections, we caught up with my old man. He was visibly excited and concentrating intently on replacing a lost fly. His news was simple, like I had heard so many times in so many ways, a fly and a size. "Royal Wolf #16," dad bellowed! With his advice and my vague recollection of the drawings in The Curtis Creek Manifesto, we stealthfully began working up stream. We kept low and casted up to the banks and runs. It was incredible. What a difference the right fly made. Once we had it sorted out, it became exhilarating. Every stretch of stream was loaded with 10 to 14 inch wild rainbows. Powell's descriptions of camping on the sandbar at the mouth of a rich trout stream were true. The cold water from deep in the stone of the desert was a perfect sanctuary for the ancient fish. Today there is still proof, as my wife and I waded up the stream, crossing here and there, and shooting our line to the likely places. In every hole, we caught fish after fish. Mom also had caught enough fish to make her smile broadly. As we began moving up the trail toward our truck, the shadows took over the canyon floor. We paused only to make a couple of quick casts in the sunny spots. Sitting on the tailgate, we laughed, told and re-told our successes of the day, most of them true! These were smart fish, selective fish. They were a challenge for us to catch, a tough cast with an anomalous fly, a vigorous fight and smooth release. I thanked the guides for sharing their special secret and making our trip to the Green special as well. It was my first trip to Dinosaur National Monument, but it won't be the last. I don't know how many "bows we caught at 'The Hole' that day, but don't fret, we left them all there for you. (1) Day, David: Utah's Favorite Hiking Trails, www.utahtrails.com