

Colorado

I was lucky enough to get two days of fly fishing in the Rockies during a Nov 2015 visit to our son's family currently in Denver. Prior to leaving Australia some research led to a decision to go with Mile High Angler - <http://www.trouttrips.com> - with Chris Wells. His prices were quite reasonable though I did splurge and opt for one day on private water at additional cost.

The first day was on the William's Fork River near its confluence with the Colorado River. Mainly brown trout along with some rainbows – very technical fishing but good results especially in one run with 6 hooked and 5 landed. Oh, and one big one dropped in the river – I slipped on the muddy bank and landed head first backward in the river. Saved by my backpack. Score of 8 but with degree of difficulty 9. My excuse was that the felts were better suited to the stones in the river than the damp sloped clay on one of the tracks.



This Rocky Mountain white fish being held by Chris is a native salmonid but is not highly sought after - nevertheless, it was my first Colorado fish and also added a new species to repertoire.

*Most of
the fish
here
were
good
solid
browns*



*This was
one of the
5 fish
landed out
of 11 hits
in one
section of
riffle water
showing
that
rainbows
were also
on the
offer.*



The scenery is amazing, this is near Ute Pass (9,000 feet in the Front Range). Afternoon lighting conditions prevented a good photo of the Sawatch Range covered in snow and in the morning I was too busy following Chris over a wet dirt road.

The second day was on the North Fork of the famous South Platte River and probably my best day fly fishing ever. 2 miles of private water reserved only for him that day. Tough buggers. One busted off, a few dropped. Didn't quite snow on the river though the drive over 11,500 foot Hoosier Pass was just like a White Christmas.

The fish on the South Platte were all solid rainbows (well ... all but one which I'll discuss in a moment). You can see here the earthworks of the river improvements Chris is making in partnership with the land owner).





Chris worked on my fish holding technique - he is keen on the fish opening their mouth and for me to minimise obscuration of the fish by my hands.

Certainly fat fish.



It was interesting that amongst fishing for all these big fish, I had some great fun using bow and arrow (another first) casting to an albino rainbow hard against the bank and under some overhanging trees. Failed to hook the albino but instead caught two rainbows hiding in the riffles between me and the target!

I mentioned river improvements earlier. The background behind this is that this section of the South Platte is used by Denver Water as a sort of aquaduct. A portal at the headwaters brings water from the western slopes of the Rockies through to the eastern slopes. Denver Water had straightened sections of the river impacting on trout habitat - also flow levels are inconsistent depending on water demands of the city. Chris's work is creating better structure designed for differing water flows - also providing bank side works with mature trees and grasses being established - a very ambitious piece of work that he should be congratulated for.



Winter is coming - scene typical of the higher passes through the Rockies.

Chris had me set up with a very particular rig. Small nymph droppers off a bead egg pattern - the latter was something I'd not seen before - a single yellow plastic bead (around 3-4mm) with the tippet passing through two or three times with a bare hook (#12?) a couple of cm below. This accounted for most of the fish operating as an alternative to a conventional globug that I would typically use at this time of the year. On the first day the indicator was a substantial clump of blonde globug yarn carefully teased out with a velcro pad on a stick. This teasing was followed up with a good dosing of gink using the velcro. This indicator worked all day long despite multiple dunkings. On the South Platte the indicator was very familiar as I'd used the little plastic 'thingamabobbers' often before. Tippets I believe were 6lb on the first day and 8lb on the faster moving South Platte. Chris fitted a couple of split shot and made frequent adjustments of putty sinker to ensure we were getting down to the fish. Casting was generally pretty basic letting the line head downstream to load the rod for a 'simple' lob upstream. Mending to control drag when the line was well out or highsticking (bit like Czech nymphing) when the drift line was closer - all this to reduce drag. As usual I tended to cast too directly upstream while Chris encouraged me to adjust. As often is the case, Ian's truism of fish taking on the downstream swing and lift proved itself again on many occasions. A key learning point

for me was the importance of striking with the rod low and swinging downstream - not something I'd been taught before. Similarly Chris encouraged me to fight the fish with the rod low and downstream (maximising fly line in the current) only coming upright when the fish was cross current to me and ready for the net (lifting its head up).

On recommendation from Chris, I stayed in Breckenridge; quite a pretty ski resort town - like many of the small towns around there it was originally a mining town with some charming old buildings. Breckenridge was centrally located for the locales Chris had in mind for my fishing. As a skiing town, the accommodation was pretty up-market (along with the price) but this suited me as a compensator to my wife for my two day's absence.

Chris can provide all the required gear (rods, waders etc) along with lunch/drinks for full day bookings. The angler is given a check list of stuff they have to bring (all the usual suspects like wet weather gear etc). On line arrangements with Chris were conducted with no problems - and he can also offer you a chance to chase bones and other exotica in the Florida Keys during the Northern winter.