Tempting Wallowa River redsides with flies



DAUBLE

THE NATURAL WORLD

orry to leave you, but I've got Jhappy feet," I say to a fellow writer after we polished off a three-course breakfast in the Wallowa Lake Lodge dining room. What I didn't share was early departure from the summer conference would allow me to toss a fly on the way home. After spending two nights in a pup tent staked next to a gurgling mountain stream, wild rainbow trout called.

One hour of driving north on Highway 82 provides a close-up glimpse of the Wallowa River and roadside access to several miles of water. I ease my truck over to a gravel shoulder where a slow meander beckons and hike through waist-high orchard grass only to find a sign: "Private Property. Subject to Arrest."

Motoring on down the road, I look for another fishable stretch of water. A long deep run punctuated by boulders and framed by overhanging alder shows. Unfortunately, flying bugs and activity from feeding trout are lacking. Which begs the question: What fly pattern do you tie on when all you have to go on is a wrinkled page clipped from a dated magazine article?

The river still runs high and turbid from late-season snowmelt. It's too deep to wade across and too wide to cast to the opposite shore. A light breeze stirs tufts of roadside grass. The late July sun blazes hot overhead. Worn paths lead to casting places high above the river where any self-respecting trout can



Dennis Dauble/Contributed Photo

The stretch of the Wallowa River visible from Highway 82 is popular with anglers and recreational rafters alike.

see you. Easing into the river knee-deep, I work upstream along the bank and grasp reed canary grass for balance. Behind me, the busy highway hums with RVs, SUVs, horse trailers, semi-trucks, sedans and minivans.

The Wallowa River is catch-and-release for wild trout with a two-fish limit for hatchery fish, but gets hammered all year long. What makes me think I can hook a hefty trout in the middle of the day? I recall a visit to the Deschutes River during the famous salmon fly hatch. Not a single resident rose to the fly until a setting sun dropped below painted hills. On my home stream, the South Fork of the Walla Walla River, trout can be brought to a fly from morning until dusk.

A beadhead nymph drifted under a royal wulff fails to elicit a strike. When overhanging alder blocks progress I crawl up the bank where a two-footlong bull snake sunning on a boulder startles me. Two trucks parked at the next pull-off thwart intention. Next up is a one-lane bridge that leads to promising water along the other bank, but it's posted "No Trespassing.'

The next open stretch of

river requires sliding down a steep bank covered with invasive reed canary grass, which I accomplish without mishap. I'll worry about how to get back up later. Unfortunately, four kayakers row within 10 feet of my rod tip to wreck any chance of hooking a trout. I also encounter another large bull snake. This one drapes over a willow branch at eye

Two years ago, during a float trip on the Wild and Scenic portion of the Grande Ronde River, a guide shared, "If you want to catch trout on dries, then you fish the Wallowa." Sadly, half a dozen dries have so far failed to attract a single trout.

My goal of catching a deep-body Wallowa River redside is revised to fooling an 8-incher. I'm fast running out of river miles when I get to Big Canyon Road, where another bridge spans the river. If grass is greener on the other side of the fence, surely trout are more abundant on the other side of the river.

Find good water, cast a fly that's worked for you in the past, and hope for a dumb trout, I tell myself. A deep slot upstream of the bridge suggests a two-part hole. With the sun at my

back now, I stand between sprawling willow branches and cast to where water crests over a large boulder. Wham! A nice-sized trout strikes my No. 10 Royal Stimulator and shakes me from my revelry. When I lead the fish upstream against the current, it pulls free. No matter. The hookset validates my ability to know where trout live.

After checking the hook to make sure I haven't broken off the tip off on a rock, I move three steps downstream and hook a carbon copy of the first trout. This one makes one halfhearted leap and is led to shore for release. Walking back to the bridge 15 minutes later, I cast to the first deep slot again. Wham! An identical-looking trout strikes my fly, quickly tires, and rolls on its side.

A hungry trout might chase a well-placed fly half a dozen times before they spook. They might even take the same pattern if you give them a rest.

Which reminds that some anglers say cutthroat trout are the easiest trout to fool. After hooking and landing the same "cutt" from the Naches River twice in 10 minutes, I was inclined to agree. Never, though, has a wild rainbow trout allowed itself to be caught two times after it felt the sting of a hook. Chalk the experience up to either a dumb fish or dumb luck. Either way, my goal of catching a Wallowa River redside is met and any guilt remaining from an early exit to the writer's conference vaporized.

Dennis Dauble is a retired fishery scientist, outdoor writer, presenter and educator who lives in Richland, Washington. For more stories about outdoor adventure, including fish and fishing in area waters, see DennisDaubleBooks.com.

Greats:

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also was selected to the 1980 Shrine Game.

Vorvick continued his football career at Oregon Institute of Technology. He was a second-team all-conference pick three times, and a second-team all-division player twice.

After college, Vorvick played semi-pro football for the Portland Thunderbolts, checking in at defensive end and on the offensive line.

Nicole Osborne Stewart (1988-91)

One of the top female runners in Eastern Oregon in her time, Osborne placed third, sixth and ninth at the state cross-country meet.

She once held or still holds records in the 3,000 meters and the 800 meters, and was part of a dominant 4x400 relay team that set a school record.

After high school, Osborn attended Central Oregon Community College, where she continued to shine. During cross-country, she placed 25th as her team finished second. The following year, she was 15th as her team won a national title.

She moved on to Montana State, where she was part of the 1995 Montana State women's cross-country team that was inducted into the MSU Hall of Fame in 2008.

Osborne returned to coach at Pendleton in 1997. Her girls cross-country teams placed third at state in 2008 and fourth in 2010. In 2009, she was named the Oregon High School Coach of the Year.

Shawn Flanagan (1999-02)

Another dominating tackle for the Buckaroos, Flanagan was a two-time all-conference player on offense and defense in 2000-01, and was named to the all-state team his senior year. He was named to the 2002 Shrine Game, where he came away with MVP honors.

Flanagan received a full ride to the University of

Oregon, where he became a part-time starter in 2004 after his redshirt year. An injury set him back, and when he healed, he transferred to Eastern Oregon University where he earned first-team all-conference honors.

After one season at EOU, he finished his playing career at the University of Sioux Falls, where he was a two-time All-American with the Cougars, who won the 2008 National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics national title with a 23-7 victory over Carroll College, and finished the season with a 14-0 record.

The 6-5, 310-pound Flanagan signed a free-agent contract in 2009 with the New Orleans Saints, but his career was short-lived.

Bobby Lee Jones (1965-

One of the top running backs in Requa's era, Jones ran for 1,095 yards and scored 79 points his senior season. He was named an all-conference player, and also was the top linebacker in the conference.

Jones also was an outstanding catcher for the Bucks, and also played two years of basketball.

Jones, who died in 2002, is being honored posthumously. Brent Merriman (1973-

One of the premiere basketball players to grace the court at Pendleton High, Merriman, a guard, scored 1,023 points during his career, averaging 18.9 points as a junior and 24.5 as a senior. During his senior season, he set a single-game scoring record at the state tournament with 44 points.

He was a two-time all-conference player in the Intermountain Conference, and was third-team all-state as a junior and earned secondteam honors as a senior.

He went on to play one year at Blue Mountain Community College.

Merriman also was a part of the Bucks 1975 baseball team that played Klamath Falls for the state title. The Pelicans beat the Bucks 6-0.

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