

Trout Tale 3

This is the third of three stories in a series I've decided to share about my adventures in trout fishing. This third story occurred on the Colorado River about fifty miles downstream from Lees Ferry, but above the Little Colorado, in northern Arizona.

I was one of the leaders on a week-long raft trip from Lees Ferry, Arizona, down Marble Gorge, through Grand Canyon National Park, to Peach Springs, led by several scientists from the Institute for Creation Research (ICR) to show evidence for the catastrophic, global flood described in the Bible.

The Canyon is the premier location for bringing scientists, graduate students, and interested lay people to literally "put their hands" on the Great Unconformity, the interface between the pre-flood world and the world of today. The tours sponsored by ICR were a life-changing event in many people's lives.

The drama of riding class-ten rapids on the Colorado River, being a mile deep between sheer vertical walls, camping for a week with a group of thirty like-minded explorers, and sitting under the teachings of some of the world's leading creationist scientists was a profound experience.

On one of the ICR raft trips I decided to carry with me a collapsible fly rod and a few flies to try my hand at catching the wily rainbow at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. On the second evening of the trip about 50 miles downstream from Lees Ferry, I had my chance. We beached the rafts about 4 pm. This gave me about 90 minutes to fish while the boatmen were preparing dinner and before the light faded on the river deep in the gorge.

I located my gear and headed upstream to look for fishing spots along the river. The Colorado runs deep and wide through Marble Canyon and the National Park. It's over 100 feet wide in many places and the water flows 20-30 miles per hour in the narrow spots through the rapids.

The water is generally bluish green and cold because it issues from the bottom of the Glen Canyon Dam about 60 miles upstream near Page, Arizona. The next

evening would be much poorer fishing because muddy water from the Little Colorado River mixes with the main stream a few miles downstream from where I was, turning the river reddish brown, reflecting the Mexican name, Colorado.

Finding a likely spot for fly fishing along this big, rapidly moving river is a real challenge. I had brought two flies and one spinner in case I had to resort to fishing the main current. As I worked my way upstream along the bank I tossed a tentative cast into the edge of the river realizing this wasn't my kind of water. As I've mentioned earlier, I like small, quiet water. This was big, noisy, and dangerous water.

On the third cast my fly submerged into the water, hung up, and I lost one of my two dry flies. I attached a new fly and reduced the size of the shot on the leader to keep the fly higher in the water. After another few casts I came around a small bend and came upon two kayakers camped in a tent. I noticed as I approached their campsite, that the best fishing spot along this side of the river was directly in front of their camp.

The campers came out of their tent as I walked by and greeted me with exaggerated bluster. It was obvious they had been celebrating for a while and offered me a beer. I said thanks, but I only had a few minutes remaining before it would be too dark to fish. They seemed a little miffed that I declined their drink and began ranting about the motors on our rafts fouling the air and water with smoke and oil. It was obvious I had run into some disgruntled "Friends of the River" and decided my best option was to keep on walking.

I took a wistful look at the good fishing location and continued upstream. The spot in front of their camp I thought might hold a fish was a small spit of land that jutted out from the shore where a permanent eddy swirled water in from the river on one side and out on the other. It seemed like a natural location for a trout to wait for food to drift toward him. Oh, well, it wasn't worth a potential confrontation.

I continued upstream flicking my remaining fly into the edge of the river as the light faded and the opportunities became worse and worse. Then I caught one small trout that was about 8 inches. I threw him back and immediately caught another. He was only 6 inches and I tossed him back as well. Then I caught

nothing for about ten minutes until I hooked something sizeable. It turned out to be the bottom!

I pulled gently, then harder, and soon realized my fly wasn't coming loose. My line finally broke and I lost my last fly. Okay, it was time to return to camp for dinner. But, wait a minute, if I tied my spinner on, I could at least toss it into the current as I walked along the edge with an outside chance a nice trout might be attracted by the flash of the spinner. It was an ugly setup - a fly rod, a short leader, and a spinner with a treble hook. How hokey can you get?

I had forgotten my detractors were still at their campsite on the way back. As I walked past their tent, they re-emerged, inebriated even more, took one look at my gear, and began to ridicule me. I attempted to explain that I had lost my last fly and had geared-up with the only tackle I had left. They continued to belittle my fishing prowess, so I didn't figure I had anything to lose.

I said, "You know guys, you've got the most likely place along this side of the river to catch a trout, right here in front of your tent. Would you mind if I just gave it a try for a few minutes?"

They went into hysterics. One of them said, "You're going to catch a trout on that rig? This I've got to see! In fact, we'll stand right here and watch. This ought to be good!"

So, I walked quietly over to the head of the eddy and tossed my spinner out about ten feet from the bank and began to reel it in slowly. The spinner moved less than three feet toward me and I felt a strong pull on my line. I jerked the pole quickly to set the hook and had a battle on my hands less than eight feet from shore. The fish jumped, dove, and then jumped again.

Because he was so close to me, I had no room to play him, but simply lifted him out of the water and dropped him onto the rocks. I couldn't believe it. In front of me and my astonished critics was a beautiful, red, yellow, and green rainbow trout, over 18 inches long. He was tall and thin, so he only weighed about 3 pounds. If he had been well-fed, he would probably have weighed 5 pounds.

But, he was big enough to elicit a howl of outrage from the two campers. They turned away angrily, walked into their tent, and zipped the flap!

Like the other two trout stories I've told, I had a decision to make. Should I keep him and return to camp or should I return him to the river. I thought about this seriously for several minutes. There were 30 people back in camp. My fish wouldn't feed many people. But, I wasn't about to give him to the two campers. The rainbow looked like he needed more nourishment. Maybe if I threw him back, he might become a real trophy fish by the next time someone caught him. So, without any regret I bid him adieu and tossed him back in the Colorado.

On the way back to camp I realized I had the freedom to report my fish as any size I chose, possibly up to 10 pounds, since I didn't return to camp with him! But, that didn't turn out to be an issue. I had a difficult time getting anyone to believe I had even caught a fish, let alone a 3-pound, 18-inch rainbow.