

TRIP REPORT - FERNIE: RIVERS AND STREAMS

THE ELK RIVER

The Elk River originates from the melting ice off of the glaciers in Elk Lakes Provincial Park. As it makes its way down the mountains it flows into the Elk Lakes and down the Elk Valley, where it is joined by many tributaries that produce some amazing trout of their own. With over 90 miles of fishable water the Elk River is quite possibly the best dry fly fishing river in North America. Largely undiscovered and still only a three hour drive from Calgary and a two hour drive from Kalispell, the Elk River flows through one of the most picturesque valleys in British Columbia.

Whether you are a novice or expert, a trip to Fernie is something you'll never forget. Casting to rising native Westslope from our fully-appointed McKenzie style drift boats is the best ways to see the Elk. The drift boat allows us to move freely on the river and access many great places to stop and wade. We also can arrange walk & wade trips to some of the smaller streams which are all located just a short distance from Fernie.

Probably the one thing that keeps our customers coming back year after year is the variety of waters in the area. We have about 15 small streams within about a 30 minute drive of the Elk River. Many of these streams are full of large bull trout and native cutthroat trout.

SMALL TRIBUTARIES

Of course we are close to popular streams such as the Wigwam, Skookumchuck and Crowsnest Rivers, but they are just the streams that get the most attention. It is the smaller streams, the unknown tributaries where trails do not exist. These are the places that we take our clients.

We suggest you bring a 3 or 4 wt rod for these streams. Most of the banks are very wide open and we are generally using dry flies and light tippet. Some of these streams do require some difficult wading but we also have a few put away for those guys that are not able to get around like they once did. Our clients range in age from about 11 years of age to several clients in their 90s.

Simply put, the tributaries in the Elk Valley are wonderful and mostly untouched.

THE WIGWAM

Whenever one of the guides get a day off there is a good chance that they will be found roaming around on the Wigwam River. This is arguably the most beautiful river in the west. The multi colored polished stones on the river bottom shimmer through the gin clear waters. As the stream cuts back and forth it digs deep pools and creates a perfect habitat for the large native bull trout and cutthroat trout. This river is a tributary to the Elk River, but on average has larger trout than any other stream in the Kootenays.

Your day on the Wigwam will be spent walking between pools, fishing riffles and often sight casting to rising trout. The hatches on the Wigwam are incredible and very reliable as well. The drake hatch seems to last weeks and almost every day you can count on something emerging regardless of weather conditions.

The Wigwam River also has the largest run of bull trout in the west with thousands migrating upstream to spawn in the fall. As these monsters spend the summer months in the river they are often caught on streamers and even dry flies at times. Every year several of our clients hook bull trout over 10 pounds on the dry fly. During the 2004 season Jeff Mironuck actually guided 13 different anglers into bull trout over 27 inches on dry flies. Since the Wigwam is only a short drive from Fernie we run this as a day trip.

ST MARY RIVER

The St.Mary River is located only about an hour away from Fernie and this beautiful stream is a perfect combination of spectacular scenery and great fishing. We offer the St.Mary as part of our regular package and have access to six different floats on the river, which is more than any other outfitter around. The fishing on the St.Mary is generally best in August and September with dry flies working for most of the day. Westslope Cutthroat are native to the river along with bull trout but over the past few years more and more rainbows have been finding their way into the system. Since access is limited on the river, only a few outfitters have access to the water and very few private boats will be found floating. The solitude of this river combined with excellent dry fly fishing makes it a favorite for many of our returning clients and friends.

KOOTENAY RIVER

The Kootenay River was once thought of as nothing more than a mystery. Since all the major streams in the Kootenay Valley empty into the Kootenay River the summer is not the time to fish here. This river is fished best in April and May before runoff when we experience one of the best Mothers Day Caddis hatches found anywhere. It is common to float down this stream and see the banks boiling with rising cutthroat. Even with all of the exciting dry fly action the Kootenay offers, it is the bull trout which most of our clients are really after. Since the water level is low and clear many of these huge trout are caught on small streamers and nymphs. Once you spend a couple days on the Kootenay River you will surely be hooked into returning every spring to this unique fishery.

Fernie – The Rivers and Streams was written by Jeff Mironuck to provide clients of Fly Fishing Adventures insight into the many fly fishing opportunities in the area.

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Fly Fishing Adventures
888-347-4896
flyfish@napanet.net

