

By Lance Wyche

Guest Writer

I found out early on in life that the earth is mostly water and I have always been attracted to this God-given entity for fun and relaxation. Once again I was called to the Rocky Mountains of Montana to test my skills at the art of fly fishing. The mountains and streams are everything that Lewis and Clark described back in 1804 and the wildlife is still abundant as ever.

My adventure started by meeting three other close friends in Great Falls, Montana and being escorted to the ALazyH Outfitters Ranch in Choteau, at the base of the mountain range.

We spent the night in an old log cabin located on a pristine private lake built by A.B. Guthrie, Jr. I guess you are wondering who this guy is. He wrote *Shane*, starring Allen Ladd, and *The Big Sky*, which was a Pulitzer prize winner.

My bedroom was lined with dozens of signed autographs by such stars as Clark Gable, Loren

Bacall, Allen Ladd and many others. The whole cabin was nostalgic right down to the old coffee pot that boiled your coffee and didn't perk it – oldtimers call this “egg shell” coffee, because the shells cause the grounds to settle to the bottom.

The next morning, our horses and 10 pack mules were quickly loaded with all the supplies for a seven day journey into the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area. We spent four hours in the saddle the first day and that gave me a chance to get acquainted with my horse, Harley, and all of his quirks. He knew that I was a neophyte from the get go, when I had trouble getting my leg over the saddle.

This reminded me of the last time that I went with Dad to Colorado and we had to find a boulder for dad to climb on so that he could saddle up. I thought at that time that I would never have that problem. Wrong again, although I did get better as time went on and thank God I didn't need a boulder.

We rode through country that the Blackfoot Indians inhabited. They were the ones who caused the Lewis and Clark expedition to go south, looking for a place to cross through the mountain divide, when they were so very close to an easy area just north of Grand Rapids. These Indians chased them totally out of their territory and could not be reckoned with.

As camp was being set up, we all could not wait to get a fly in the water and see the first rise from the surface. I tied on a number 10 size Sofa pillow Stonefly pattern and was not

disappointed with a rise from a 16-inch Golden Cutthroat. Each day was better than the last in size and weight with the largest being 22 inches. We netted many in the 16 to 18 inch range and it does not get any better than that. Our cook and owner, Sally Haas, created gourmet meals that were unbelievable and served up fried trout that was as good as Clydie May Abner's (who helped raise me and teach me many things about life).

Our horses gave us the advantage to cover many miles of the Sun River and fish selected areas that held large quantities of fish. We tethered our horses to trees with a half hitch due to the abundance of bears in the area. The forest Ranger who we met said that black bear spoor (poop for those that don't know what spoor is) had berries, small animal bones and such in it, but that grizzly bear spoor had ground up pepper spray cans and pieces of fisherman rubber wading boots. I just threw away my El Grande can of "You can't Miss Pepper Spray," after receiving that information from the Ranger. Thank God I didn't see any, but I did see a lot of tracks on the gravel bars.

The weather was a perfect 85 degree high during the day and 35 degree low at night. Skies were so clear at night that the celestial beauty of the sky stood out like you could touch each star. It seemed a satellite went by every 45 minutes in this area and I had not seen that before.

We always went to bed with the howling of wolves, which was another first for me. Since the introduction of wolves in the area, the wolves have now increased to around 2,600 in number. This is causing some problems once again with the ranchers, who want them all exterminated. In fact, I was talking with an old rancher in a bar one night, and I asked him what he thought about the wolf problem. He said, "Sonny (can you believe he called me sonny) I use the Three S Method on my ranch."

I asked what in the world is that, because I had heard of no such thing. He informed me that it meant Shoot, Shovel, and Shut-up. The saga continues between the environmentalists and those trying to keep their livestock alive.

Not many places in this world can you drink water out of a pure mountain stream without fear of catching something or it is so cold in August that you can put beer in it and have a cold one after you return from a hard day of fishing. How great is that?

My close friend Paul Brandt, from Phoenix, and his two buddies, Greg Wingate and Jeff Kennedy, were all veteran ropers and loved the game of Pitch. That caused them to continually take advantage of me and set me up for a good laugh every time I turned around, but what a great bunch of guys they were. It always makes for a wonderful trip when everyone likes to laugh a lot.

On the way out, we were in the saddle for six hours and I was beginning to feel like a veteran cowboy, because I had learned all the parts of what went on the horse, except Sally did continue to come over and check the tightness of my cinch and see if I put the bridle on backward, which I found that Harley took offense to.

Montana fishing trip

Thursday, 06 October 2011 19:48

We went through the mountain divide and remained in the snow for a number of miles. The trail was very narrow at times and it would tend to make one pucker up. Harley kept wanting to nip the heads off of Thistle plants along the way and with the precipice being 3,000 to 4,000 foot drops, I uttered some unsavory language each time his back foot slipped off or he stumbled.

It was great to go, but also great to return home to a loving wife that understands my need for the outdoors.

See you on the other side of the mountain.

- Lance Wyche