

*Lued*

Return to Bud Lilly

Memorial Day, May 30, is opening day for the Madison River in Yellowstone Park. Outside the park, the Madison courses through Montana, and the season remains open year around. Opening day in Yellowstone may find it snowing large wet flakes typical of spring snow storms, or it can be, and often is, beautiful spring weather.

The stream is swollen and usually discolored. The snow of the high country is still melting, but now the days are warmer, and the streams will begin to drop and clear.

The Madison is formed by the confluence of the famed Firehole River and the beautiful Gibbon Rivers of Yellowstone Park. From its source, until it leaves Yellowstone, the Madison flows for about fourteen miles, then enters Hebgen Lake in Montana. This section of the river is known as the upper Madison.

With the river running bank full and roily, the angler must fish as conditions dictate. Large streamers, size #1/0 through #6, big nymphs size #2-#6 and fished deep with a wet line will bring results. Flies must be used as all of the Madison is restricted to artificial flies in Yellowstone.

The Upper Madison could be described as a large meadow stream. It meanders in big bends, cut banks, deep pools and broad flat, fast riffles. The nature of the Madison makes it attractive to Brown trout, Rainbow to a lesser degree, a few Grayling and of course, the native Rocky Mountain Whitefish. In a day's fishing, a majority of Browns can be expected, followed by Rainbow. The Grayling has not persisted and are a rarity, but ~~it~~ occasionally you catch one. The Whitefish run in schools and should you encounter a school feeding, they will take the fly with real gusto.

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Nine-mile hole, the slow Bend, Back of the Barns, Seven Mile bridge, Elk Meadows are some names the fisherman will come to know as he becomes acquainted with the Madison. The lunker Browns are hungry in the spring; they feed often and are looking for a meal, thus the need for big wet flies. Some big trout three to five pounds and sometimes larger, will be taken the first week or two that the season is open. As the river drops and clears, insect hatches occur, and the fish will feed on the surface.

About mid-June, during an average year, you will see the stream beautifully clear and low enough to be waded in chest high waders. As the air and water temperatures rise, insect hatches increase in frequency, and the size of the bugs gets larger, increasing conditions more suited to dry fly fishing. The time comes for more delicate nymph fishing and the surface dry fly.

The first hatches occurring in early June are tiny midges which the fish seem to ignore, as well as a hatch of millers or moths which are referred to locally as pine moths, since they appear to come from the trees. When they emerge, it looks like the blizzard of "85". Yet the fish do not feed on the flies that dip down to the stream surface.

The fish at this point are still foraging 90% underwater. The stream is regenerating after a long winter, and the bottom is literally moving with nymphs. As these bugs move toward the surface, the trout chase them, and will bulge out of the water in their chase. This roll or bulge is recognized by the experienced angler as nymphing trout. To the inexperienced, it looks as if the trout are feeding on top.



In an attempt to catch these rolling trout, a novice will try everything in his collection, and give up in disappointment. If he only knew that catching a trout on a dry fly under these conditions would be a very unusual event. It's a happy time for tackle dealers, as these fishermen will try the works, even against advice that they try under water flies.

2/ The next flies to emerge are the drakes, and the trout do feed on these insects. The drakes drift along with one inch high wings held vertically, drying before they leave the stream. The floating minature sailboats are taken by the trout with audible slurps. Merely listening to the feeding fish in a one hundred foot area, you come to know how it was as Goldilocks tasted the porridge. At the peak of a hatch you can see many fish from thirteen to sixteen inches, taking flies in this manner. There is always, of course, the lunker up to twenty or twenty-two inches, and strangely enough, they create less disturbance than the smaller fish. You see a tiny ring, cast to it, and find eighteen inches of really excited Brown trout on your line.

Fifty feeding fish within one hundred feet, the air a cloud of insects, and the trout taking artificial flies as readily as they do the natural ones, then you are present for a "duffers" hatch. This kind of fishing lasts only a few days, but you can't beat it for delight to the angler.

The requirements of catching fish while the May flies are emerging and the fish are taking on top, are having a leader of sufficient length and yet small enough diameter not to frighten the trout and flies tied on size ten thru fourteen in blue grey, brown or ginger color. The experienced angler with skill will catch some big trout ~~twenty~~ inches or over, but the average angler can catch plenty of fish too. The lunker class trout requires more



deceptions, that's all.

The morning and late afternoon hatches of large drakes will ordinarily come on for a week to ten days, and then taper off to smaller and smaller flies. The angler adept with small dry flies and tiny nymphs, in sizes sixteen and eighteen, fished on long fine leaders, will continue to take the wariest of Browns in the last days of June following the May flies.

By late June and early July, the water volume has dropped by about one-fourth its early June level. The water temperature approaches 70-75 degrees, depending on seasonal conditions. Hatches of insects are less specific. The larger fish are not seen feeding as they were at the time the juicy May flies were present. Occasionally a good fish will clear the water in pursuit of a dragon fly. Dragon flies, some delicate blues, some ginger brown, are on the stream in great numbers, but seem to be difficult to match and catch fish.

Recent investigations made by fisheries' biologists in the Upper Madison, indicate that heavy insect hatches occur after dark as the summer nights get warmer. These hatches occurred in abundance from 12:00 to 3:00 A. M. when we think the big trout are gone or are not feeding. They are feasting and frolicking while we're fast asleep.

Legal fishing hours in Yellowstone are 5:00 A. M. to 9:00 P.M., during the regular season. Some big trout and trout of all sizes can sometimes be caught early morning or late evening when the fish appear not to be feeding. Big nymphs, wet flies and streamers again come into use.



The wise fisherman adapts his methods as conditions dictate. Chuck Gash, Vacaville California, developed a streamer for the Madison and called it the "8:30 Special". It was most effective from 8:30 to 9:00 P. M. after the fish had started these late feeding hours. Wally Eagle, West Yellowstone, Montana has spent considerable time experimenting with fly size and general coloration during the May Fly hatch. His efforts are spent on imitating by size more than by color. The champion of the Wolly Worm, a nymph, is Sid Tirrell, Phoenix, Arizona. Each of these fishermen knows the time of the season when these methods should produce, best, and they use them.

July and August are not good months for the Upper Madison of Yellowstone, there are other streams, however, in the Park that are at their best during this time. Grasshoppers are a favorite food of the trout, and a good imitation in sizes six and eight will take fish during these slow times of July and August on the Madison.

If you prefer the quiet poetry of trout fishing in a beautiful mountain setting with an abundance of bird and animal life, then the Upper Madison is a great choice. Not often will you find impossible winds, wading is easy in some deep water, feeding places are easily defined, and trout are usually obeying the rules of behavior for trout. But move downstream twenty five miles ~~below~~ *and beyond to* man-made Hebgen Lake, where God created Earthquake Lake. There follow the river forty-five miles to Meadow Lake. What a Jekell and Hyde you find the Madison is!

3 / The Lower Madison, as it is known here, is whipped by strong mountain winds that sway up, down or across as the mood strikes them. Sometimes it tries to do all three at once. In contrast with the meandering stream it is in Yellowstone, you will find



it has grown to be big and rough. The stream is always remembered for its rushing water and the slickest rocks known to fishermen.

Usually the last week in June there appears upstream from Meadow Lake a large insect known as the "Salmon Fly" which is actually a Stone Fly. The Salmon Fly hatch is a progressive movement upstream from day to day. As the days get warmer and the water temperature rises, the flies emerge farther and farther upstream. The rate of movement seems to depend on a number of factors that will speed it or slow it accordingly.

The nymph stage of the fly called "helgramite" crawls from the stream bed onto rocks and willows bordering the bank. The adult fly, sometimes one and one half inches in length emerges, leaving the nymphal shucks littering the stream side with clumps of these black cases.

These flies cling to rocks and bushes for a day or two before taking off over the stream in their mating and egg laying flights. The trout feed first on the nymph stage as they develop on the stream bottom. The helgramites are found under the rocks on the stream bed several days before they crawl out to hatch. Black or brown artificial nymphs, tied on hooks size two thru six with extra long shank and sometimes weighted, fished along the bottom will bring excellent results. The fish will gorge their gullets with the naturals and will readily pick up an artificial drifting along like a dislodged bug. Each day the nymphs can be found on a different section of the river, upstream from the previous day's hatch.

When the adult fly leaves the bank to deposit her eggs, completing the cycle for another year, the real excitement begins.



After dipping down to release her eggs, the female is often tumbled into the water. Countless flies are blown into the stream and the trout commence to feed on the surface. A heavy flight looks like a B17 attack of World War II. The air is moving with flies, the bushes and grass are dripping with them, and the trout take these floating giants with a vengeance. Contrary to many fly hatches, this one may reach its zenith anytime between 10:00 A.M. and 4:00 P.M.

There are many hypotheses as to how the trout feed on the bugs and how the "hatch" should be fished. Some anglers believe in fishing the stream section where the hatch has occurred and has been on for several days, or even after it has passed, the idea being that the trout are accustomed to them and will expect them. Others prefer to fish ahead of or in the hatch.

Henry's Fork

C.A. Van Nies, Vista, California is an expert on the "Salmon Fly" hatches. For many years, his routine has been to commence with Henry's Fork of the Snake River in Idaho. The "hatch" occurs here in early June. This season past, "Van" reported catching and releasing a number of Rainbow over four pounds here and several of five pounds. Rainbow are the only trout found in the upper portions of the river. Following this warm up, he moves to Montana's

Madison. "Van" is a devotee of the "follow the hatch" group. In the <sup>last</sup> ~~first~~ days of June he begins to work the water above Meadow Lake near Varney Bridge. By mid-July the hatch has spent itself forty miles upstream at Earthquake Lake, and Van follows it all the way.

The rise of a Brown trout in typical dry fly streams is often just a tiny dimple on the surface or a subtle slurp. Not so on the Madison where the Salmon Fly occurs. When a trout takes a salmon fly, the disturbance can be compared to dropping a bowling ball in the stream. Another characteristic of these feeding fish



is that they will move from mid-stream to gorge on the bugs dropping from the willows near the bank. In water only a few inches deep, you will see a swirl like an alligator taking a pup. This is a Madison Brown. The Madison is not for those of faint hearts. It's tough to wade, and the fish are big.

Ordinarily, it is necessary to use as fine a leader tippet as possible to deceive the fish. This is not true when the trout are on the "Salmon Fly" kick. Dave Bascom, the lovable advertising man from San Francisco, earned the title 4X Bascom when he insisted on this diameter leader for all streams. He has since decided he too will use 0X or 1X leaders for the big ones on the Madison after several experiences hooking and losing good fish.

After selecting a good strong leader and choosing a dry fly to fit the occasion, (favorites are flies in sizes four thru eight and such patterns as Joe's Hopper, Sofa Pillow or Bird's Stone Fly), you locate a rising fish and cast ten feet above it. The excitement of the strike can be compared to that of a quail getting up from under your feet or a pheasant's coming out behind you, or lights flashing all over the place!

4 ✓  
Sam Radan from Las Vegas, Nevada, puts more into the strike than anyone I know who fishes the Madison. He rears back on the rod with a powerful strike, hollers, hoots, laughs and the fight with the fish is on. Sam is also one of the outstanding waders of the slippery rocks and heavy current.

Wading the Madison is as important to catching fish as anything you can do. It is possible during this period to find fish feeding along the bank, but it is necessary on occasions to fish the heavy water and big rocks out in the stream. Fishermen not able or willing to do this don't like the Madison.



Red Davis, a six foot-five motel owner in West Yellowstone, Montana, is equipped to wade the Madison as well as anyone. Add to this a natural love for water. Red feels he hasn't had a good day unless he tears his waders, falls in several times and of course, hooks a fish that will go three or four pounds.

How heavy will the hatch be, how fast will the emerging flies move upstream, when will the hatch begin, where are the flies presently hatching on the river, should I fish above the hatch, in it or below it, are the many questions anglers ask. There are several ways to get answers to these questions.

One fisherman I know arrived about June 15 last season. He put on his waders, strung up his rod and didn't miss a day coming into my shop and inquiring in a semi-hysterical shout "where's the hatch"? Another more ideal method would be to arrive about mid-June, and to fish every day until September 1. This is how Warren and Mickey Palmer, two school teachers from Los Angeles, California solve it. Warren and his wife Mickey, have fished all over the west. The Madison is the stream they've found most challenging and rewarding. They are both expert fly fishermen, having received many Field and Stream big fish awards. Both are members of Bud Lilly's Trout Shop Lunker Club, having caught trout over three pounds for minimum qualifying weight.

The largest trout recorded in the Lunker Club from the Madison this past season was seven and one-half pounds caught by Don Miner. There were reports of some larger, but were not officially registered. The greatest number of trout caught over three pounds is during this Salmon Fly feast. June 27 to July 13 was the hot period in 1963. A week either way will see a repeat performance year after year.



June 27, 1963 was a memorial day for Ed Zern, outdoor writer of humorus stories. Ed had never fished the Madison prior to this date. Most of his fly fishing was done on the difficult eastern streams. He commented on the way down to the river that in all his trout fishing experience he had never taken a Brown over eighteen inches. The salmon flies were in full flight this day on the section of the river near "Varney Bridge" about 10 miles upstream from Meadow Lake. The Anglers in Ed's party put an eight man rubber raft in the Madison at the Bridge and floated in the course of the day six or seven miles of stream. Floating crafts are permitted down stream from Varney, but not above. After drifting down stream a short distance, rising fish were spotted feeding. The boat was beached and the fishermen waded into position on the rises.

Ed got out a line, drifted an imitation over the feeding fish and was into a twenty inch brown. These Madison river brown don't dog it. Their initial run usually will take most of the fly line. They will jump and clear the water several times. Aided by the strong current you must go down stream with them. Ed followed his prize in such a fashion and was able to bring him into the net after ten thrilling minutes.

Meadwhile each of the other members had hooked into big fish in the same area and were fighting them. When the smoke cleared, Sam Radan had a twenty one inch Rainbow, Bud Lilly had a twenty-two and one half <sup>inch</sup> Rainbow, and Ray Rhoades, the fourth member, fought and lost a huge trout. All of this action transpired in less than one half hour, and of course fish were caught and released throughout the day. There usually are two periods in the day when the big boys are on the prowl. These may occur between 10:00 A.M. and 7:00 P.M.



When the "hatch" has run its course by moving upstream several miles each day and has petered out at Earthquake Lake, the action definitely slows down all along the river. Fewer trout three pounds or over can be found surface feeding, they are more specific on what flies they want, and finer leader tippetts are a part of success.

Deer Hair dry flies in size ten-twelve-fourteen, Ginger Quills in size twelve and fourteen and Joe's Hopper size six and eight usually bring results during a surface feeding time. <sup>now.</sup> The fast choppy water of the Madison makes using a fourteen dry fly difficult. To float the fly successfully requires real skill. Bert Brooks and his wife Mignon can do this, and as a result, took good fish three to four pounds long after other fishermen gave up and left for greener pastures.

5 > During August the trout seem to feed less on the surface and more on sculpin or bullheads as they are sometimes called. Streamers are called for now. Consistant producing patterns in size one <sup>to</sup> thru six would be Muddler Minnow, Bloody Butcher, Spruce Fly, Michigan Minnow. At this time, anglers using spinner and wobblers fished slowly and deep will have good results too. There will be periods when the fish seem to be gone from the stream. Perhaps they are only feeding during the darkness hours.

Streamers  
flies  
lure

By mid-September, the nights are getting cold. Usually there has been a snowstorm or two, but it does not stay. Temperatures drop below freezing at night and approach 70 or even an occasional 80 during the day. Indian summer is a spell over the woods and streams. Clear bright, windless days that delight fisherman



characterize this time of year. Trout begin to feed again more frequently in the Madison of Yellowstone Park. The angler uses about the same methods he used one hundred days before, large nymphs and streamers fished deep.

Many fishermen plan their arrival for this phase of Madison fishing as for any other. They know the big trout will be feeding. They also know that spawning Brown trout accompanied by Rainbows will be coming upstream into the Madison from Hebgen Lake.

Blaine Gasser, a fisherman from Pocatello, Idaho took two Browns over five pounds each, almost a year to the day apart. He prefers to fish the Madison during this period and is a master with large nymphs fished on a wet line.

Ernest Schwiebert and Gene Anderegg of New York City, (Ernest, outstanding as a fisherman and writer of books on flies and insects, Gene, a photographer), were introduced to the Madison for September and October fishing this season. Their skill and the Madison produced many trout eighteen inches and some larger. Neither angler had fished the Madison at this time of the year and both were delighted with the results.

Hebgen Lake, a reservoir created by the damming of Madison Canyon years ago, is the rearing grounds for storybook Brown Trout. The largest of recent years was twenty three pounds. The fish move up the small creeks and the Madison river in the fall to seek their spawning beds. During this response to their natural instincts, they are accompanied by Rainbow that apparently spawn too. However, Rainbow are spring and early summer spawners,



depending on the temperature and altitude. Both species seem to feed readily or it is speculated, may strike at intruding objects moving near their spawning beds, such objects of course, as artificial flies.

Brown trout five to eight pounds are caught more frequently in the late fall than any other time. These larger fish apparently come into the Madison from Hebgen Lake and return following their spawning run. Many fish remain to live, grow, and spawn another year. As a result, the fish population continues to be good, and a renewed supply of big fish is present for the beginning of another exciting season when the snows have come and gone again.

One Hundred days of fishing the Madison at its source in Yellowstone and down the stream for seventy miles to Meadow Lake will provide trout fishing as varied in stream types, insects, trout and terrain as you can duplicate anywhere in the world. May it long continue against the odds of poor conservation.



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