A PERFECT STREAM

Revised for David Maclomber - Big Sky Journal

Rock Creek is a dream—with monsters.

BY DATUS C. PROPER

ROCK CREEK RUNS CLEAR. YOU can fish it even during the peak of spring runoff, when the salmonfly hatch brings the biggest trout to the surface. The slopes above the stream are so steep that you can hardly stand on them, but old pines and firs and larches trap the snow, then filter melt-water down through thin topsoil, slowly. The watershed is like a shaded reservoir half a million acres in size.

Water from those slopes keeps Rock Creek cool during the hottest days of August, too. That's when John Adza and I went fishing. John had one day off from

PHOTO BY PAUL UPDIKE

FIELD & STREAM
JANUARY 1992

CURES FOR COMMON COLDS

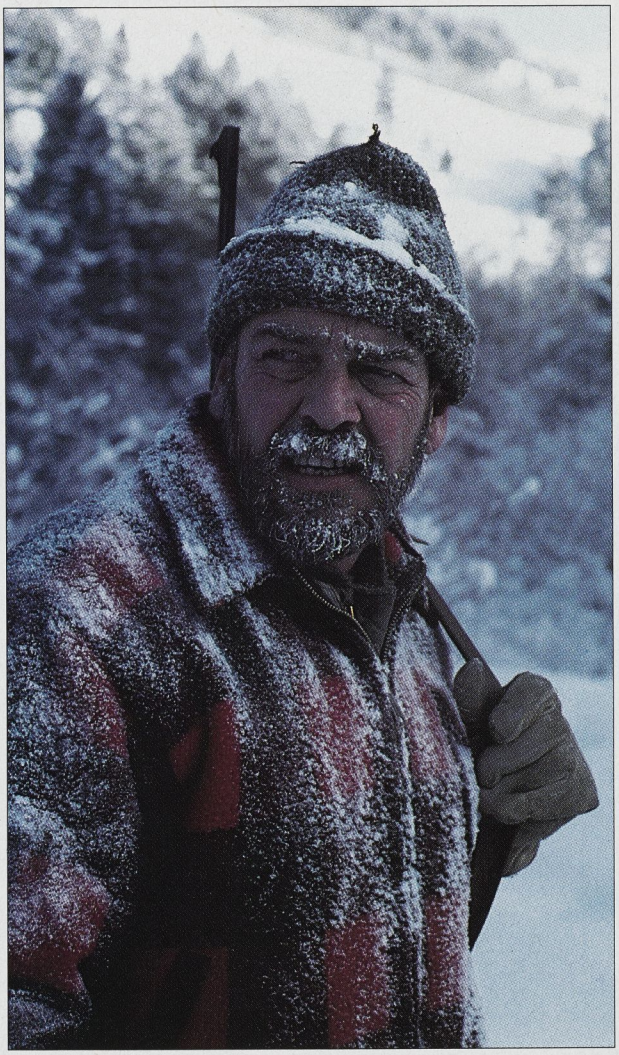
BY NORMAN STRUNG

COLD THAT DRIVES to the bone is a frequent companion to outdoor sports. Ice fishing, late-season waterfowling, and big-game hunting are just a few of the pursuits that are often accompanied by low temperatures, numb fingers, and chattering teeth. But these discontents of winter have simple cures—there are lots of ways to keep from getting chilled, or to warm up once you get that way.

In order to avoid getting cold it helps to understand how it happens in the first place. Imagine your body as a combustion engine. Your torso produces energy and gives off heat, and your extremities act like a radiator, siphoning off that heat and dispersing it. When both systems are in balance, you maintain comfortable temperatures. When they are not, you become either too hot or too cold.

Following this analogy, the effects of overheating are felt a lot faster than those of cooling off. Heat is generated in the body frame, and mechanisms equivalent to thermostats reside there, so rising temperatures register quickly. The insidious thing about getting cold, however, is that heat loss works inward from the limbs so you don't feel the change until it reaches your frame, at which point considerable body mass is already chilled. The easiest way to stay warm then, is to recognize the early signs that you're cooling off.

The best indicators are fingers, toes, and the top of the head. When they start to feel cold, you're beginning to lose core heat. If you keep your extremities warm, you'll stay warm. There are three means to this end: insulate against the cold with clothing; exercise to stoke up your engine and boost blood circulation; and add heat to your body.



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The layering principle is the most effective way to insulate against cold. Trapped air keeps you warm, and several layers of clothing keep you warmer than one heavy garment of equivalent weight. A typical example of layered clothing would include polypropylene insulated underwear, wool pants and shirt, a wool sweater, a quilted down jacket, and a waterproof, hooded jacket and pants to protect you against the wind or shed rain should either prevail. Although each of us differ in how much heat our bodies produce, this combination keeps most folks warm in actual or wind-chill temperatures of 10 to 20 degrees. Another benefit of layering is the option to remove clothes a layer at a time should the weather turn warm or a brisk hike find you breaking into a sweat.

"If your feet get cold, put a hat on" is an age-old homily, but its truth is not diminished by time. Because heat rises, your head radiates a great deal of warmth, and should your hairline be receding toward the back of your neck, you'll lose it even faster. The most effective way to cap off your head is with headgear that is soft, clinging, and has a lot of loft. Depending on conditions, consider one of two hats: a plain wool watchcap or a *(Continued on page 70)*

❖*Norm Strung passed away on October 10, 1991. A consummate professional till the end, he completed many assignments shortly before his death. These pieces will appear periodically in upcoming issues.*

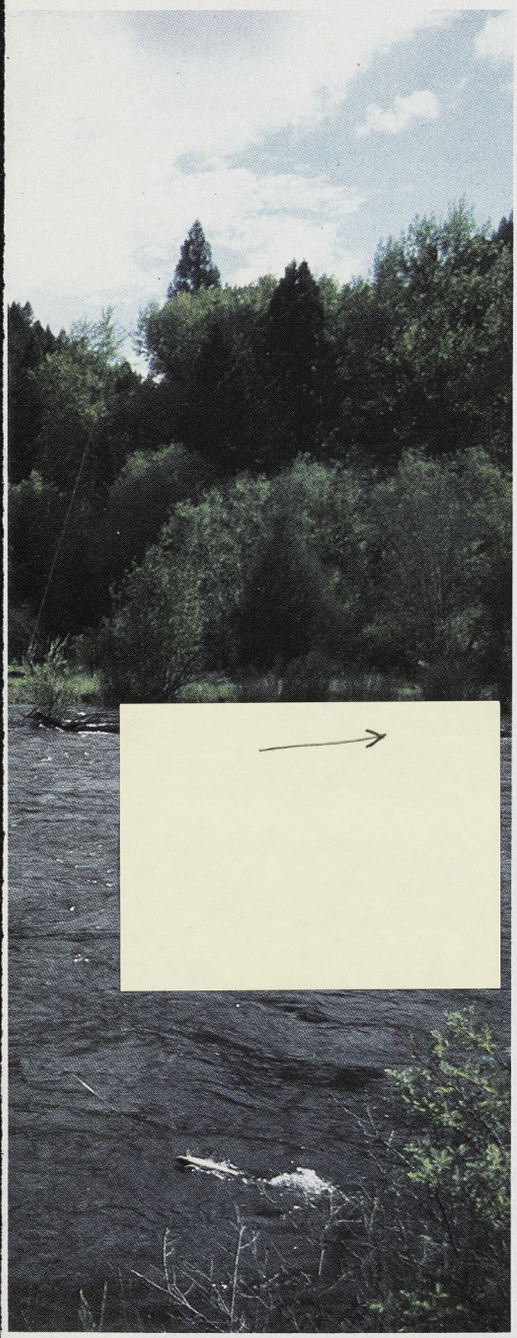
PHOTO BY SIL STRUNG

his outfitting business, and Rock Creek was where he wanted to spend his time. We drove upstream for an hour on a road that was not paved and never will be, I hope. A herd of bighorn sheep crossed in front of us, and later—where we traversed a talus slope—a solitary pika, running for cover. Bighorns are abundant in the watershed, and the rams reach trophy sizes. The pikas don't. Picture a miniature, fat, stub-eared rabbit that sits on rocks and squeaks at you. The two species have this in common: They are fussy about where they live.

John and I were by no means the only fishermen interested in Rock Creek. Near its mouth was a good new fly shop. Farther up, we drove by anglers' houses. Cars were parked at the fishing access points, many with out-of-state license plates. The creek winds through its mountains for a lot of miles, though, and some pieces of water are well back from the road. John showed me a stretch where old Douglas firs lined the banks and we were the only fishermen. He tied an imitation of a spruce moth to his leader. I had no spruce moths, so I tied on a little Coachman. Its white wings would at least be easy to see on the shadowy water where a cliff slid into Rock Creek.

A few of the real moths fluttered around without falling on the stream. There was no hatch of Coachmans, either, but I teased up two rainbows, one brown trout, and a baby cutthroat. Then I stood without casting for a minute, rummaging in my vest for a fresh fly. My Coachman sank and swung below me in the current. The water bulged and my line jerked tight. I did not get organized in time to set the hook.

Rock Creek has an underlying fertility that is not obvious. Rainbows regularly grow to 18 inches, browns to 20 inches. Down deep, a few huge bull trout lurk in the rocks. They are permanent residents of the stream, not migrants. John Adza described them as freshwater equivalents of moray eels, fond of snacking on little brook trout and feasting on plump rainbows. Picture a salmonid that is colorless, potbellied, big-headed, and full of teeth—the kind of demon that every paradise requires. Despite their tough looks, however, bull trout are the most pollution-sensitive of Montana's gamefish. They can survive only where there is beautiful water and lots of it, cool all season long and low in sediments.



In 1990, the U.S. Forest Service released a plan for management of the Rock Creek watershed: 126,000 acres (about 22 percent of the total) were proposed for timber production, beginning in 1992. During the first decade, about 11,000 acres would be cut and 80 miles of new roads would be built to get the logs out. Feeder streams of Rock Creek would be in the logged area. The logging would probably require government subsidies, which is to say that the Forest Service would spend more money building roads and providing other services than it would get back from timber sales.

Public reaction has been intense. Sportsmen, streamside residents, and environmentalists have opposed large-scale logging and road-building. Loggers, lumber companies, small-town merchants, and Congressmen want the jobs logging creates. Everybody has something important to lose.

When John Adza went back to earning a living the next day, Bill Gray offered to show me a different piece of Rock Creek. Over Bill's gray hair was a cap that read "Save a Logger—Eat an Owl." He also had a vintage Chevy truck, a golden retriever, and two springer spaniels that stood in the bed of the truck and yipped at the whitetail deer along the road, which did not pay much attention.

Bill took me to the creek behind a cabin he had built for himself with lodgepole pine logs. The water was just as pretty there, but different—long runs, not a riffle-pool sequence. Bill likes to fish wet flies and nymphs. The place he chose was right for the method. I called it a good piece of river, and Bill corrected me: it's a great piece of creek. It has more water than the Beaverkill River in New York, where Bill grew up, but rivers and creeks are not distinguished by size alone. What matters is the setting. Rivers are broad, with flood marks, brown runoff, and debris on the banks. Rock Creek isn't like that.

Rock Creek is perfect. Its water is clear as a diamond, and the mountains are a flawless setting. If you have ever pushed your chair back from your desk and invented a trout stream, it probably looked like this one: grassy banks with big trees for shade, slopes rising steep to keep your place private, big boulders and shimmering riffles, and deep, dark pools. Everybody notices: "This is special," they say, or different, or extra pretty—all of which is true without explaining anything. What they mean to say is this stream is a dream extended, a thin blue lifeline between a world gone wrong and a place in the headwaters.

Perfection is not a constant state. It is always subject to change.

Rock Creek is being studied for designation as a scenic river under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. I can't imagine that the decision will be difficult.

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The author, a Montana resident, has long had an interest in trout and trout streams.

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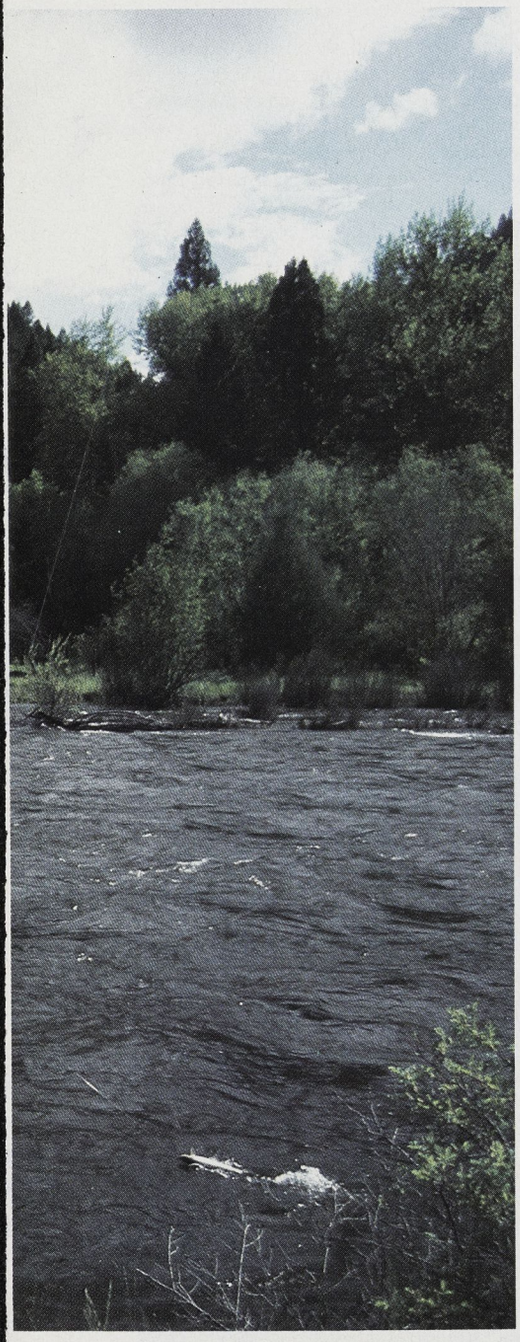

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(Continued from page 31)

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No. They were immature ponderosa pines, Bill said, with dark bark. When they grew up, they would turn yellow-brown, put on girth as well as height, and send out broad limbs. They would be beautiful, then. We were sitting on a portion of the riverbank that had been burned just eighty-one years ago, Bill thought, so the trees were still scruffy adolescents.

I asked why the growth was so slow.

THERE AREN'T MANY PLACES

LEFT WHERE YOU CAN FISH

THE STREAM OF YOUR DREAMS

This was dry country, Bill said. There was little rain in the summer, when trees want to grow. You could not compare the high, arid West to the humid country on both sides of it. Out on the wet Pacific Coast, for example, you could cut down a fir in thirty years and find growth rings half an inch wide. In a place like that, you could do real commercial tree-farming, with a sustained yield. In Montana, by contrast, the rings of a stump might be thin as the blade of a penknife.

I asked how lumbering ought to be managed under Montana's slow-growth conditions.

You could hardly talk of a sustained yield, Bill said—not in country where the best trees might not mature till several generations of people had been buried. That's forever, in human terms. Very little of the nation's timber is produced here. You could cut some trees in some places, though, and get them out without damaging the watershed, using methods ranging from horses to helicopters. You could not haul logs over steep slopes by truck, because roads would speed the runoff of sediments into Rock Creek and its feeder streams. You had to remember that the water is, by any measure, a more valuable resource than the trees protecting it.

BILL GRAY LIKES TO COMPROMISE, work things out, come up with solutions that protect people and their environment. He has a feel for the land. Moderates are an endangered species in Montana, though.

My guess is that, under pressure of public opinion, the logging plans will be reduced in scale. Economic growth in the high West today is driven by people who come to the last best place for what is last and best about it: trout, big game, birds, mountains, ranches, and just living. And besides, the most valuable trees have already been cut from the low-lying, flat, easy-to-log places. Up on the higher slopes, some of the big private timberlands have been cut bare, right down to the streams. Montana still has no law to control forestry practices on private property.

Montana loggers need jobs. Some will build cabins and make wood products locally, adding value to a reduced harvest of timber. Some will guide sportsmen and perform other services that the new economy of the region requires. It will be a more prosperous economy, but the change is hard. It's hard on communities, hard on businesses, hard on the Forest Service, and hard on Congressmen who can't deliver the kind of work that people want where people want to live. Most of all, looking for a new job is hard on a man who's trying to settle down and raise a family.

I fished alone on the last evening and picked a piece of stream that was studded with boulders the size of Bill Gray's cabin. I hoped that they would be home to a trout the size of Bill Gray. If I were a fish, I would choose a boulder-home. There is comfort in rock. It lends solidity and permanence to a turbulent world.

I started early. Couldn't wait. The sun was toasting the ponderosa pines, filling the air with a smell of resin. A flock of Clark's nutcrackers sassed me from the branches. I floated my fly around the boulders. As light faded, a few moths were kind enough to drown themselves—not enough to start a feeding frenzy, but enough to wake the river up. I hooked a rainbow. It dashed and jumped with the kind of manic energy that only [illegible] are in a river that gives [illegible] bigger fish that had [illegible] evious evening. Out [illegible] resembled an over- [illegible] en time to tie on a [illegible] the fly, ran under a [illegible] est that the lost fish [illegible] s, though. During a [illegible] ghed more than 20 [illegible] per reaches of Rock Creek. Anglers had caught other monsters during the salmonfly hatch.

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As it grew dark, I remembered the bigger fish that had taken my drowned Coachman the previous evening. Out of my fly book came a streamer that resembled an oversized Coachman. I should have taken time to tie on a heavier tippet, too. Something took the fly, ran under a boulder, and broke off. I do not suggest that the lost fish was a bull trout. I have my fantasies, though. During a stream survey, a bull trout that weighed more than 20 pounds had been found in the upper reaches of Rock Creek. Anglers had caught other monsters during the salmonfly hatch.

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BY BILL TARRANT

THE HUNTING GUIDE

This master host of bobwhite hunts is an independent contractor who knows how to put down sure 'nuf trained bird dogs.

ILLUSTRATED BY SAL CATALANO

BUD DANIEL IS ONE part gun dog trainer and one part grassroots philosopher. Not only does he train up gun dogs you can shoot over, but he entertains you while you're doing it.

This 6-foot 2-inch, 226-pound combination Arkansas native and Texas migrant (let me explain that: he trains in Arkansas during the hot summer months, and hunts bobwhite in South Texas during bird season) says of himself, "I'm like a mule. I have no pride of ancestry and no hope for posterity." You got to be country folk to recall mules can't throw beget.

And that's the way Daniel carries on, saying such things as, "Never hire a man who wears a straw hat or smokes a pipe. . . he's forever chasing that damned hat or packing that damned pipe." His wisdom is deep and rustic—always with a sense of humor—and he makes a master hunting host. Here's how this works.

He can be an independent contractor, booking his own hunts, catch as catch can. Or he can contract with a business that wants to entertain customers, award employees, and develop new clients. Such firms rent the lease, buy the truck, furnish the noon meal, and do whatever else pleases them. Bud shows up at the lease gate at sunrise, waits for the sports, and when they arrive he takes them hunting over at least twelve bird dogs he'll carry at all times so there'll always be a fresh brace down.

"My job is to accommodate the customer," says Bud, "and I put down sure'nuf trained bird dogs, conditioned, field and bird wise, with plenty of bottom in them to get the job done. You know, in South Texas if the scenting conditions are poor, then that means the birds have flown ahead. We don't have a wind, we don't have a breeze—we've got a southeastern drift, and we develop dogs that can work on that paucity of help.

"But we've got the birds. Why, I've moved as many as thirty-seven coveys of bobwhite in one afternoon. The other day, we stopped by a windmill for lunch. And while they were putting the trash in tote sacks I let two dogs loose. Before we left that windmill we got into eight coveys. And when I say we ran into thirty-seven coveys you've got to realize we were delayed mightily by the gunners getting off and back on the hunting truck."

Daniel, who played pulling guard at Arkansas in a single-wing formation, and surprisingly has a degree in forestry (I look around for a tree), starts talking about today's guy and his gun dog. He says, "Dogs are better than they've ever been, it's people who aren't what they used to be. Most dogs have been bred now to the point where they have all of the best in inherent qualities. But most people who own these high-bred dogs usually have a job somewhere and can only train or bird hunt on a weekend. Now, these dogs are taken care of feedwise and medically, and they're in excellent shape as far as everything but being conditioned; and the guy lets the dog loose on a weekend and by Sunday night he's not even started to get the edge off.

"Used to be when the dogs stayed up under the house and you walked out with your shotgun and they heard the bolt fly to, they come out from under there ready to go; and it was over the fence at a real leisurely gait, and they had finding birds on their minds instead of seeing what was on the other side of that ridge. . . because they had already seen what was on the other side of that ridge.

"And we say those oldtime dogs were better bird dogs. They weren't. We're just not the people that we used to be because our lives are geared different. Nobody has the chance to live on the land and get out to the fields each day. And that's what a gun dog needs.

"Shucks, there ain't nothing to breaking a bird dog. South Texas is such a wonderful place because you can sit there on that hunting truck and that dog can go through covey after covey after covey and make all his mistakes and keep making them over and over and you know just as soon as he's cleared that one there's another one over there just a few steps. And that's not just with one dog, that may be with four or five down, and that running lets them get all those mistakes out of their system.

A PERFECT STREAM

By Datus C. Proper

Rock Creek is a dream—with monsters

Rock Creek runs clear. You can fish it even during the peak of spring runoff, when the salmonfly hatch brings the biggest trout to the surface. The slopes above the stream are so steep that you can hardly stand on them, but old pines and firs and larches trap the snow, then filter melt-water down through thin topsoil, slowly. The watershed is like a shaded reservoir half a million acres in size.

Water from those slopes keeps Rock Creek cool during the hottest days of August, too. That's when John Adza and I went fishing. John had one day off from his outfitting business, and Rock Creek was where he wanted to spend his time. We drove upstream for an hour on a road that was not paved and never will be, I hope. A herd of bighorn sheep crossed in front of us, and later—where we traversed a talus slope—a solitary pika, running for cover. Bighorns are abundant in the watershed, and the rams reach trophy sizes. The pikas don't. Picture a miniature, fat, stub-eared rabbit that sits on rocks and squeaks at you. The two species have this in common: They are fussy about where they live.

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When John Adza went back to earning a living the next day, Bill Gray offered to show me a different piece of Rock Creek. Over Bill's gray hair was a cap that read "Save a Logger—Eat an Owl." He also had a vintage Chevy truck, a golden retriever, and two springer spaniels that stood in the bed of the truck and yipped at the whitetail deer along the road, which did not pay much attention.

Bill took me to the Creek behind a cabin he had built for himself with lodgepole pine logs. The water was just as pretty there, but different—long runs, not a riffle-pool sequence. Bill likes to fish wet flies and nymphs. The place he chose was right for the method. I called it a good piece of river, and Bill corrected me: it's a great piece of creek. It has more water than the Beaverkill River in New York, where Bill grew up, but rivers and creeks are not distinguished by size alone. What matters is the setting. Rivers are broad, with flood marks, brown runoff, and debris on the banks. Rock Creek isn't like that.

Rock Creek is perfect. Its water is clear as a diamond, and the mountains are a flawless setting. If you have ever pushed your chair back from your desk and invented a trout stream, it probably looked like this one: grassy banks with big trees for shade, slopes rising steep to keep your

place private, big boulders and shimmering riffles, and deep, dark pools. Everybody notices: "This is special," they say, or different, or extra pretty—all of which is true without explaining anything. What they mean to say is this stream is a dream extended, a thin blue lifeline between a world gone wrong and a place in the headwaters.

Rock Creek is being studied for designation as a scenic river under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. I can't imagine that the decision will be difficult.

Bill and I leaned our backs against a bull pine and waited for the spruce moths to bring up the best fish. He had done a lot of logging, so I asked him about bull pines. Were they a separate species, like bull trout?

No. They were immature ponderosa pines, Bill said, with dark bark. When they grew up, they would turn yellow-brown, put on girth as well as height, and send out broad limbs. They would be beautiful, then. We were sitting on a portion of the riverbank that had been burned just eighty-one years ago, Bill thought, so the trees were still scruffy adolescents.

I asked why the growth was so slow.

This was dry country, Bill said. There was little rain in the summer, when trees want to grow. You could not compare the high, arid West to the humid country on both sides of it. Out on the wet Pacific coast, for example, you could cut down a fir in thirty years and find growth rings half an inch wide. In a place like that, you could do real commercial tree-farming, with a sustained yield. In Montana, by contrast, the rings of a stump might be thin as the blade of a penknife.

I asked how lumbering ought to be managed under Montana's slow-growth conditions.

You could hardly talk of a sustained yield, Bill said—not in country where the best trees might not mature till several generations of people had been buried. That's forever, in human terms. Very little of the nation's timber is produced here. You could cut some trees in some places, though, and get them out without damaging the watershed, using methods ranging from horses to helicopters. You could not haul logs over steep slopes by truck, because roads would speed the runoff of sediments into Rock Creek and its feeder streams. You had to remember that the water is, by any measure, a more valuable resource than the trees protecting it.

Bill Gray likes to compromise, work things out, come up with solutions that protect people and their environment. He has a feel for the land. Moderates are an endangered species in Montana, though.

My guess is that, under pressure of public opinion, the logging plans will be reduced in scale. Economic growth in the high West today is driven by people who come to the last best place for what is last and best about it: trout, big game, birds, mountains, ranches, and just living. And besides, the most valuable trees have already been cut from the low-lying, flat, easy-to-log places. Up on the higher slopes, some of the big private timberlands have been cut bare, right down to the streams. Montana still has no law to control forestry practices on private property.

Montana loggers need jobs. Some will build cabins and make wood products locally, adding value to a reduced harvest of timber. Some will guide sportsmen and perform other services that the new economy of the region requires. It will be more prosperous economy, but the change is hard. It's hard on communities, hard on businesses, hard on the Forest Service, and hard on Congressmen who can't deliver the kind of work that people want where people want to live. Most of all, looking for a new job is hard on a man who's trying to settle down and raise a family.

I fished alone on the last evening and picked a piece of stream that was studded with boulders the size of Bill Gray's cabin. I hoped that they would be home to a trout the size of Bill Gray. If I were a fish, I would choose a boulder-home. There is comfort in rock. It lends solidity and permanence to a turbulent world.

I started early. Couldn't wait. The sun was toasting the Ponderosa pines, filling the air with a smell of resin. A flock of Clark's nutcrackers sassed me from the branches. I floated my fly around the boulders. As light faded, a few moths were kind enough to drown themselves—not enough to start a feeding frenzy, but enough to wake the river up. I hooked a rainbow. It dashed and jumped with the kind of manic energy that only rainbows have, and then only when they are in a river that gives them everything they need.

As it grew dark, I remembered the bigger fish that had taken my drowned Coachman the previous evening. Out of my fly book came a streamer that resembled an oversized Coachman. I should have taken time to tie on a heavier tippet, too. Something took the fly, ran under a boulder, and broke off. I do not suggest that the lost fish was a bull trout. I have my fantasies, though. During a stream survey, a bull trout that weighed more than 20 pounds had been found in the upper reaches of Rock Creek. Anglers had caught other monsters during the salmonfly hatch.

I don't want to catch many bull trout. It would be fun to land just one, though. There are not many places left where a fisherman has a chance to do a thing like that.