

UPPER CANYON LODGE

Upper Canyon Lodge, Alder, Montana,
or

What We Did On Our Summer Vacation

By Sam Yee

The traveling partners of Ron Bergstrom, Tim Au-Young and myself took off from Sacramento in early August bound for the holy waters of the Ruby River Valley in Montana. Only Ron was a return visitor, so before we checked into the lodge we stopped at the “famous Red Barn”, Ron’s favorite place on his trip last year.



Ron Bergstrom & Tim Au-Young

Walking downstream about a quarter mile, I fished dry flies without success, so, while walking back upstream, I switched to a huge black and olive beadchain biot nymph tied on a size 8 hook. I picked this fly because it was heavily weighted and I wanted to make sure I was fishing the bottom of the deeper holes which appeared to be at least over my head. Fishing the riffles with my beadchain nymph, I caught a few Arctic grayling and small trout. I was amazed that these small fish were so aggressive and hit such a big fly.

Later Ron caught up to me and was having success on small dry flies and Tim was still trying to break in his new handmade landing net without success. On our way back to the car, Tim let me fish the Honey Hole with my huge nymph. The Honey Hole was one of the deeper holes, surely over my head, and it was below a bend in the river with a little white water. On the first cast, I rolled some extra line toward the fly to let it sink deeper. Then I followed the line through the drift with my rod tip. Halfway through the drift, I was rewarded with a beautiful 17” Brown Trout.

I have never been to Montana before, but my time spent at Upper Canyon Outfitters was well spent. I fished hoppers and dry flies for 6 days and I loved every minute of it. All my life I had heard about hopper fishing and finally I got my chance—It was great!

After our stay at Upper Canyon we spent two days fishing near Yellowstone National Park, but I should have stayed at Upper Canyon for two more days. I encourage you all to visit Upper Canyon Lodge if you are ever in the south-west corner of Montana. During our stay, there were many other guests who were regular visitors. After staying there, I would like to become a regular visitor too.



Sam Yee with Brown Trout

Donna and Jake McDonald were gracious hosts and Jerry and Terry, the guides, were helpful, even though we couldn't fish with them because they were both leaving on family vacations. Terry did show us several places to fish and how to fish those places the first night we were there. He told us to fish a Royal Wulff with a beadhead nymph dropper during the mornings and a grasshopper in the afternoons. This simple technique was just the ticket for the whole time we fished.

Cottonwood Creek was a small stream with a population of cutthroat trout about a 20-minute walk upstream, and Glenn Yee, Hideo Okino and Frank Yamanaka fished it with some success.

Another location only 10 minutes upstream from the lodge was Warm Springs, the former Orvis Fishing Lodge that had been purchased by a wealthy family. Above the private section were two fishable public sections. The lower section that was close to the road has watercress and grassy meadows close to the stream and Tim did very well fishing the watercress edges.



Upper Canyon Lodge

The upper section required some walking in a beautiful valley with a few resident beef cattle. The stream was about 3-6 feet across and averaged about 12 inches deep with 2-3 foot holes. Every 20 feet or so there was a fallen tree or undercut bank that was home to a Rainbow or Brown Trout in the 8-12 inch range. This section was one of my favorites for the whole trip. I did well fishing the upper section with grasshoppers, size 10-12, and parachute dry flies, sizes 12—16. The water was clear and a stealthy approach was a must. If possible I used the stream as my casting lane and cast upstream. Other times I used the streamside grass and brush to camouflage myself.



Sam Yee at "Fixer"

"Claypool" was a "pay to play" section of the Ruby River about one and a half hours from the lodge. It was owned by the "Mayor of Alder", Mr. Claypool. He once owned most of the property in the area. At a cost of only \$65/day/angler they promised us really large brown trout. We saw huge risers as soon as we got there and I was sure we had gone to fly fishing heaven, but those huge risers turned out to be 18-22 whitefish. I did

manage to catch one on a dry fly, but it was also my last.

Ledford was another favorite stream to fish and it had a lot of water that we never even fished. Again, it was hopper fishing and the stream had a variety of water: Beaver ponds, beaver dams on streams, lots of fallen trees, open meadow streams and lots of fish including Brook, Rainbow, and Brown Trout. We walked a lot from spot to spot but you were rewarded with fish almost every time, from every fishy looking spot.

Smack your hopper on the water and let it drift. If you were lucky, a 14-inch rainbow or brown trout would speed out of nowhere and nail your offering, then immediately return to its lair. By the second day, I was horsing fish out of snags, really testing my 4-weight rod. That is what I will remember best about my trip to Montana and Upper Canyon Lodge in the summer of 2001.

Sam Yee is a past Director of CFFU and has been a member since 1995.