

SOMETIMES YOU GET LUCKY

AUGUST 25, 2014
WILDER ON THE TAYLOR



Regardless of how much you practice you have on the water, even a good fisherman needs a little luck to bring it all together! WATCH THE VIDEO

By Lu Warner, Master Guide

August 25, 2014—About three weeks ago I spotted a Rainbow Trout in the Taylor River at Wilder that was a extremely large. Hard to tell how large but he was an impressive fish. Of course he was in a tough spot to fish and was protected by fast, heavy currents on either side of his domain. To get a fly to the fish would be hard and I tried three quick times in the next two weeks, once with an owner, once with Brad with video camera, and once solo with little success.

The first two times entailed a few casts with a heavily weighted Streamer which failed to move the fish. Then one evening I had the chance to try a large Mouse

pattern just at dark. I cast and mended several times hoping to hold the fly near the fish. It was not pretty. At the last seconds of reasonable drift, I saw a huge mouth and wake charge the fly, just as it got pulled away by the fast currents and on down the river. It was a miss! I stayed for a few more casts but it was obvious that the big guy had enough for the time being. Back to the drawing board.

A few days later, the dam release flows on the Taylor were cut by 150 CFS or roughly 30% and the river now low looked prime to try for the big fish again. The only problem was that with the lower flows the fish had moved. I searched the pool from the bank and was unable to find him for two days. Then, when working at Wilder with a fellow guide, Mike, a few days later, we had some time to look and it was Mike who noticed the big fish, about 30 yards downstream from before, in a new lie. Plans began to formulate in my head as I tried to figure out when would we have time; how to approach

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the fish; how to film it if it happened; what fly to use etc.

The following Thursday we had a group of clients leave in the morning and another one arriving in the afternoon. Between groups I had a little time so I walked out to the river with Jason White from Crested Butte Anglers and Brad Willett from the Wilder and we saw the fish finning in his new spot. Previously I had thought that I needed to cross the river to get the proper angle for the cast I wanted to make, however when I walked to the water and waded in without rod it became apparent that I was standing in the spot I needed to cast from. Presto! With the positioning problem solved, we walked up to the camp to have a sandwich and a plan came into being. Brad would set up the video camera and Jason would be the net man if we were lucky enough to hook the fish. I would get the first try with the rod.

I carefully set up a rod, attached a large dry and a long dropper, debated which tippet to use, selected short 20lb to dry, 3X from Dry to #6 Double Bead Nymph and 4X to trailing #20 Hares Ear (thinking he would eat the small fly), double checked all the knots and with butterflies in my stomach walked down to the river. I was about as nervous as I can remember as I waded into position and got ready to cast. Showtime!

From where I stood I could see the fish, about 20 feet away, 3 1/2 feet deep on clean gravel and this didn't help my nerves at all. Truthfully, it looked like a pretty easy deal so I particularly didn't want to blow it, especially in front of Jason and Brad. Whew! Finally, I took a deep breath, told Brad to turn on the video camera, and worked out a little line to prepare for the cast.

Above the fish were what we fisherman call "hinky" currents. Confused swirls that make it difficult to judge where the fly will go when it hits the water. I picked a spot and made a cast. When the fly hit the water the currents boiled and the big Dry was rejected and deflected to the left of and ten feet above the fish. "Short" I said to myself as the fly would clearly drift down about six feet to the side of the fish. Whoops!

I wanted to wait until the fly had passed well behind him to re cast so he wouldn't spook and was already thinking of the next cast when a huge shadow moved quickly over to where the nymph was drifting. Just as my eyes went from fish to fly, the top fly took a dive, I set the hook hard, Jason whooped, threw his cell phone in the grass and the battle was on.

At first the brute was confused and kind of swam in circles close by, then I think he realized what was up and he tore up the river with the power of a Bulkley River Steelhead right to the bottom of the falls in the head of the pool we were in. After some frantic scrambling to keep him away from the big boulders in the pool and me from falling into the river, I was able to get the line cleared and on the reel and put steady pressure on the fish. I said to Jason that I wanted to see what nymph he ate so I knew what tippet I had him on. He immediately told me that I had him on the larger nymph with 3X so I was pretty confident that I could put the wood to him and not worry about breaking him off. The 5 wt rod that I had in my hand would probably break before the tippet.

Jason was on fire, running up and down with his landing net to be ready when the big fish came in and maybe keep him from leaving the pool down below. At one point we had a close call with the fish swimming right over Jason's outstretched net and not dropping in. Pro guide that he is, he retracted the net and gave me room to work the fish some more. The fish, spooked by the net and maximum pressure from the Scott A-2 rod made a hard run downriver. I watched as he approached the shallow tail out of the pool, expecting him to head downriver and me to be running after him. It wouldn't be the first time in this river. I tightened up as hard as I dared, waiting to hear the sickening crunch of exploding graphite and was just able to hold him inches above the fast water that lead down into the next pool. Finally and begrudgingly he slowly started swimming back upstream and at this point I think that I began to breath again. Whew!

After a few strong tail slaps, one of which got Jason pretty wet, the big guy started to tire and using his momentum as he came back down river he let me lead him into Jason's waiting net and the battle was over. As we tried to take pictures of the fish, that was a whopping 29 5/8 inches, I noticed Brad's hands were shaking like a leaf, so were Jason's and so were mine. The whole episode took under 6 minutes but the adrenaline rush that we all got lasted all afternoon.

Being as the fish was landed quickly and hooked in the corner of his mouth he fully recovered in a short time and swam off strongly back into the river. Later that afternoon someone asked if I wanted to make a few casts on the river. "I'm good" I said. Sometimes you get lucky!

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Lu Warner is a master fishing and mountain biking guide at Wilder on the Taylor, a ranch community located between Gunnison and Crested Butte, and has been fly fishing and tying flies since the young age of 8. Since 1985, he has worked as a fly fishing guide in Idaho, Montana, Colorado, Alaska, Argentina and southern Chile. Warner has guided the summers in the Crested Butte/Gunnison area since 2000. From October through May, he resides in the Patagonia of Chile where he owns and operates the Valle Bonito Lodge, which specializes in fly fishing, hiking and mountain bike adventures.

Wilder on the Taylor is an angling paradise and a preservation-oriented 2,100± acre ranch community with a total of 26 homesteads conveniently located between Gunnison and Crested Butte, Colo. Each homestead is a minimum of 35 acres with a one-acre building envelope. As private fly-fishing water is increasingly difficult to procure, Wilder presents a rare and distinct opportunity to own an undivided interest in one of the best fishing properties in the western United States.

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6337 COUNTY RD 742
ALMONT, CO 81210
(970) 641-4545
WILDERCOLORADO.COM