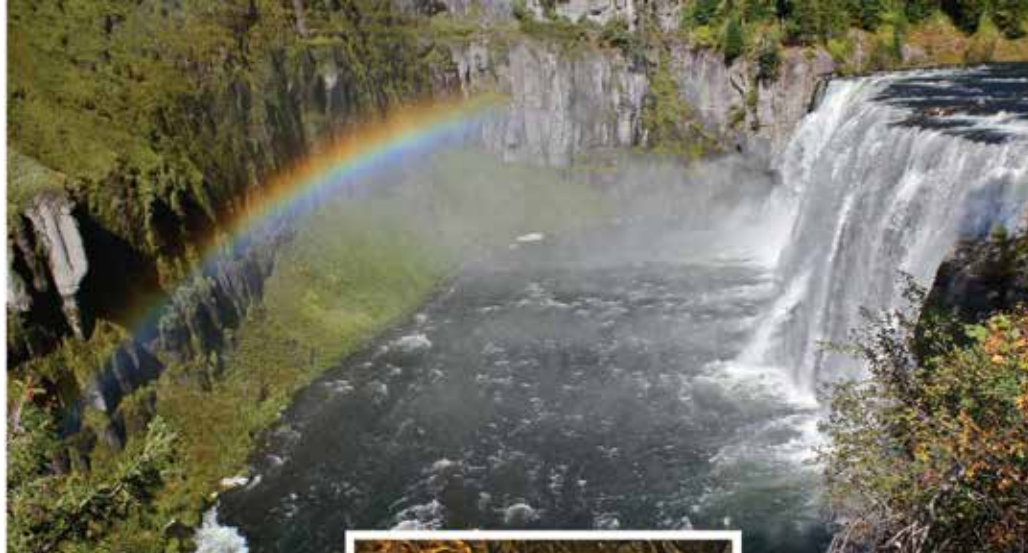




FISHING IDAHO'S HENRY'S FORK CALDERA



An immense eruption 2.1 million years ago creating Island Park propelled 2,500 times as much volcanic ash skyward as the 1980 Mount St. Helens explosion. The Henry's Fork Caldera is more visible than any other. Its 29- by 37-km circular rim is clearly visible as you traverse the spectacular national forests in southeast Idaho. The concave bluffs confirm to the eye that you are operating within the stage setting of an ancient crater. It may be the largest symmetrical caldera in the world. The eruption that erected these colossal parapets occurred 1.3 million years ago.

The A-Lister of these *divovatis personae* is the hotspot, still deemed an active volcano at Yellowstone National Park. Although the last super eruption here was 640,000 years ago, this very dynamic area is responsible for major volcanism across the northern part of our continent. The striking geothermal features caused by its underlying magma chamber, and scenic grandeur of the region spurred President Ulysses S. Grant to create the world's first national park in 1872. This hotspot burned its way across southern Idaho over 16 million years leaving a 110-km channel through the Rocky Mountains which allows significantly more moisture to transverse from the Pacific Ocean to the east. Thus the Snake River Valley, Yellowstone Plateau and Tetons are much more green in the summer with more abundant streams, flora and fauna and receive more snow in the wintertime.

This morning we had observed the spectacular Teton Range to the southeast from Angler's Lodge. I daresay, given the advancement of the women's agenda and the current mania for political correctness, they would be given a different name today. They remind us that unlike our planetary neighbors in the Solar System, about 60% of volcanic activity on Earth is from tectonic plate activity and about 40% from hotspots.

As our careening raft narrowly misses the porous edge of a jutting monolith of ancient lava, and I have gained nothing on my rainbow-colored adversary in this last breakneck mile. Ahead is a maelstrom grade whirl in the current. Yet, the

steep walls erected by Vulcan on both sides continue to tell their tale. Concluding the first act and beginning Act II, the script takes on increasing relevance for the modern angler.

It is said that all life on our planet depends on six inches of topsoil and certainly the thin soil of Idaho merits substantial benefit from volcanic ash. However, the new character introduced into the story has been living a secret existence beneath the sage and irrigated farmland around us. It is the Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer - another progeny of Vulcan's labors.

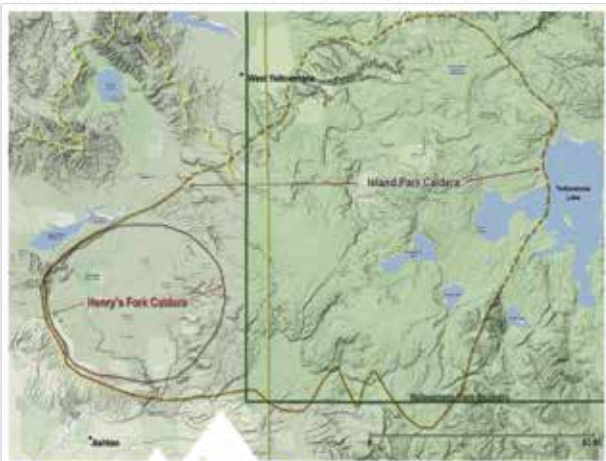
This is comprised 90% of irregular underground layers of volcanic basalt and about 10% sediments. This sponge-like structure allows a water molecule to travel between one and ten feet per day, so that roughly two centuries is required to transverse across the upper two to three hundred feet and across its length. It is estimated to contain almost twice as much water as Lake Erie, and thus is one of the largest aquifers in the world.

The water emerges as crystal clear springs. This provides the drinking water in the region for about 300,000 people and the irrigation for their agricultural pursuits. Although some parts of this area get abundant rainfall, specific areas are semi-arid receiving less than

eight inches per year. This underground system is truly a treasure to the state's citizens who must monitor new levels of contaminants. It is a special gift to fishermen.

The northern or Henry's Fork of the Snake originates at Big Springs flowing at 120 million gallons per day. This is a first-magnitude spring and the Henry's Fork vies as potentially the largest spring-fed creek on the planet. The large rainbow trout there may be fed but not captured.

In planning our fourteenth annual Father-Son Fishing Tournament, we had looked to the north where in these late spring days of May and early June, the rivers of Montana were swollen past optimal fishing conditions by the run off from above-average winter snows. To the south, the cold waters of the San Juan would be incurably disturbed by the yearly massive flushing from the planned dam opening on these dates. But on the Henry's Fork, the springtime flow would not be affected by such factors and could be relied upon for conditions which can only be described as beautiful and the angling pressure is low. We had found our "sweet spot," including a brief but robust Salmonid hatch. And so the fate that brought me to these circumstances in this raft grup-



The nose of the inflated raft crashed steeply down into the white water, soundless in the river's throaty roar. Its Kevlar surfaces would face a mortal test: fail for once, fail forever. So very cold that brisk spray from across the prow, confirming across our faces how early was the season in these mountains.

At least three times his body length into the air, the magnificent rainbow trout regarded me most disapprovingly from above eye level and headed for the chute between the twin sarsens of volcanic basalt speeding towards us.

"That's the biggest rainbow I've seen on this river in five years!" Screamed Matt Stalnaker, professional fishing guide and current "I've got my hands full" oarsman.

I recalled the scene in the movie version of Norman Maclean's brilliant *A River Runs Through It*, when Brad Pitt is carried far down the river attached to a giant trout by his fly rod. Small gassy business compared to this breakneck career which would take us miles downstream from our entrance at the precarious 1,500 foot slide beneath Lower Mesa Falls on the Henry's Fork of the Snake River.

It was a staccato mélange, a rapid shutter imaging of the riverbank's geological features that bombarded the visual cortex. These came fixed between the frameworks of the dual sides of the U form given to my six-weight fly rod by the powerful trout beneath. Like a child's flipbook creating a movie with a pad of flipping pages, not just a pencil-drawn galloping horse, but the entire history of how the physical, then ecological and subsequent biological character of this place came into being. It was mesmerizing, as if being pulled from your seat at the theatre and into the movie as it played.

The screenplay is a Scorsese-DeNiro grade drama of super-volcanos. Island Park, Idaho derives its name from the massive caldera, a word derived from the Latin *calderia* for "cooking pot." The Island Park Caldera, at 80 by 65 kilometers and crossing into Wyoming's Yellowstone National Park is one of the largest in the world, but is actually composed of several other such structures layered upon one another. These vast crater-like depressions which persist today are from the collapse of the emptied central magma chamber of the original volcanos.





There are qualities about some of the fishing lodges of the world that are hard to put into words. They don't have to be the finest or most luxurious, but when the right elements of character are there - they are classic. Angler's Lodge, right on the bank of the Henry's Fork has this character.

The hotel is a real bargain. The restaurant features meals designed by world-famous chef Gordon Ramsay. The lodge is well situated for visiting The Jackson Hole, Wyoming area or Yellowstone National Park. The staff are wonderfully friendly. It was a great match for a fishing tournament group of around twenty like ourselves.

It is a family run entrepreneurship. Dave and Dede Eby are right on hand and possess that "western type" spirit that I love so much. Dave is an avid fly fisherman himself. On our last morning, looking out over the river, he told me, "Within 50 miles of where we stand are more waters than a man could fish in a lifetime."

There are many fishing services hereabouts. Just up the street from the lodge Three Rivers Outfitters was a great shop. They are a wonderful assemblage of characters. All are generous of time, energy and spirit. They have everything even a large group needs to get fishing right away and are intimately familiar with all the waters of this region. I long to fish with them again.

The Island Park area is easily reached by air into Idaho Fall, Bozeman Montana, Jackson Hole Wyoming or the airport at Yellowstone. It is a reasonable drive from Salt Lake City, Utah.

pling with the edges of a giant eddy, were in the making back when the rocks were still molten. Yet the story continues, albeit in a whirl.

For the span of the last two hundred years or more, the sparkling clear water we floated upon had slowly negotiated its passage through the subterranean aquifer. It still remembered how to pick up the pace and how to conceal a great trout in its gunmetal gray depths. The last time these molecules had flowed here, the First Nations people still dominated the land. The strongest of these were the Shoshone and the Nez Perce (actually the Nimitipu. Nez Perce comes from a French term for "pierced nose.") In those days, salmon migrated up the Snake by the millions from the Pacific as far as Shoshone Falls. The river's aboriginal name was the *Shawpatin*. Sighted by Meriwether Lewis of the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1805, he had tried to name it for himself and inadvertently called the local Shoshones the "Snake Indians." After being called many names during the westward expansion era of our country, Snake River remained due to the misinterpretation of an S shaped hand gesture the Shoshone used to denote the swimming motion of the salmon as the sign of a snake.

Andrew Henry was a partner in the Missouri Fur Company and led an expedition from St. Louis in 1809. After losing 30 of his horses to Crow Indians he established the settlement of Ft. Henry. But this is far from the best story of horse thievery hereabouts and I will return to it soon.

Spinning 'round and 'round in the eddy's frothing vortex, I was starting to hear some hypnotic Jerry Garcia guitar licks from a Grateful Dead concert I had attended



in 1972. Stern of rudder and stout of prop, the big rainbow-colored submarine beneath us was still giving it the deep six; his impersonation of Jurgen Prochnow in *Das Boot*.

It was a three-day tournament. The pot of money was whopping. The bragging rights with this crowd - beyond priceless. Some groups give of themselves to noble enterprises, social issues or political endeavors. With this bunch it was mainly manning the bar deep into the night with bad jokes, loud songs and braggadocio. In short, they were my kind of guys.

An internal change had been creeping into reality. Except to go directly to dinner, I had not slain a fish in years. I belonged to multiple fishing conservation groups - membership cards were compressed in the wallet beneath my right cheek on the seat. Sizeable donations had been made. But this trophy rainbow trout was a ticket to the throne of the kingdom. I would be master of bragging rights above them all. Every indecent part of me was throbbing with excitement. How could I concede to the temptation? I now depart from this moment, but will return for its *abandonment*.

Getting away from it all as a concept means starting down roads you might never have found. And so we came to Sberdan Lake and Creek with finality at the tournament's end day, behind on points and nothing biting in the lake. We landed the boats and turned our footsteps "up the creek."

Every American deserves to experience the west. No wonder Theodore Roosevelt was so taken by it. He wanted "western types" at his side when he charged up Cuba's San Juan Hill

in 1898, a day that galvanized his political career. He deserves more credit than Grant for our National Park System and so his place next to the other American political titans on Mount Rushmore just over the horizon to our east. To this day we can still wonder at the beauty and feel in touch with the vibrancy, surrounded by lands protected for the generations. What afternoon is better spent than reviewing the art work of this part of our land by the inspired Thomas Moran or Frederic Remington? An easy answer: an afternoon fishing here in the American West.

Next to me, my son Hunter's footsteps were becoming tired. He was just finished with his fifth round of chemotherapy. His battle had cost him 60 lbs. He sagged as we pulled the wool cap snugly down on his hairless head. I was so glad he could come to this beautiful place. I made great effort to stifle a choking sound in my throat.

It was on Sheridan Creek that the Nez Perce leader, Chief Joseph and his band had camped. The formidable American army force led by General Oliver O. Howard was just behind them. What was called the Nez Perce War of 1877 was actually a



for their sore lips and sent on their way. He eclipsed the rest of us, varying his presentation, changing his bait when the fish tired of the previous prospect for a meal. He stacked on the points. My eyes search the tree lines around us for the dappled rumps of the Nez Perce Appaloosas whose spirits might yet race across this land. And a father's heart was full.

The prize money was Hunter's. That night at the Angler's Lodge, glasses were lifted, victory hailed and oaths shouted. Above in the night sky, the great bodies of the heavens came into perfect alignment and sang their song in unison. But our screenplay is not yet complete, we have the matter of a subplot to resolve.

The three man raft went airborne unleashed at last from the eddy's grasp. The oars spun like helicopter's props through the wind. We splashed down in a flawless pool surrounded by primeval flows of lava. It was perfect setting to land the huge trout, a veritable stage for the event. Kismet at last seemed to find my side.

The line was almost entirely back upon the reel. And the fish was up just beneath me. Every nefarious fiber within resonated with all that would come to me with this trophy fish. The moral compass within was covered by hoof marks from the stampeding ego. I would lord over the rest. None, not a single one of them would ever hear the end of it.

The dense torpedo outline of the fish was there, he had the shoulders of a buffalo. I reached my hand into the water.

There was nothing that actually happened. There was no cause and effect relationship among events. It was just that the trout was no longer hooked to the line. The fly dangled in the air and he was free. Everything else about the river and the wind and the sky were exactly the same. There was nothing to say, nothing to think in the instant.

He lingered with intent, giving me the chance. I could take him now that he was free if it was worth so much to me. Here was my test. Our eyes met.

The Buddhist term is *Satori*. The light touched me and my confusion was gone. I would never cross the line of being descendant from the level of my best self to my worst by killing him for the sake of fleeting glory. I could take away from this encounter in an ancient volcano some humility which would be of true value more than a record trophy. I could see he was beautiful, old and august, a teacher of men who would hear or see. I loved him thoroughly for his nobility. Then he drifted away into the watery shadows of the past. I remembered some words I had read.

"If you love him, it is not a sin to kill him. Or is it more?" *The Old Man and the Sea*. Ernest Hemingway

Much comes our way from fishing in places crossed by history and fate. To sons and fathers alike. ☪

1,170-mile retreat from eastern Oregon across the Island Park caldera towards asylum in Canada to meet with Chief Sitting Bull of the Lakota Sioux. Here, on August 10th, the Chief, whose real name meant "Rolling Thunder down the Mountain," laid a trap. In the early light he surprised Howard's camp, stealing three horses and 200 mules. When the soldiers pursued, the Nez Perce warriors were ready for them. Howard was forced up to Montana for fresh stock and Chief Joseph's band escaped. His maneuvers were so respected by Howard and other military experts that he became known as "the Red Napoleon." Indeed, a better story of the stealing of horses.

The sun was on the downward part of its journey. An eagle circled above a nearby herd of galloping pronghorn antelope. The warm rays and cool breeze, the liquid music of Sheridan Creek were the setting for the final act of our script in progress. It was a place of moment, these were waters of destiny.

It was time for some rolling thunder of our own - and it came. A fly floating along a bend in the current with an air of innocence suddenly found a shadow rising beneath it, like Aelian's "fish of a speckled hue," in Mesopotamia. It was a harbinger of the fate inherit in his place since the time of great volcanoes, recalling Jed Clampett's single errant rifle ball discovering "Texas Tea." Our sinking streamers found their marks. In the deep cuts of the narrow stream, large rainbows bit by the dozens. All of our rods bent low.

But it was Hunter who would carry the day. One after another, 20-inch rainbow trout were asked for forgiveness