

Fly-Fishing ASPEN

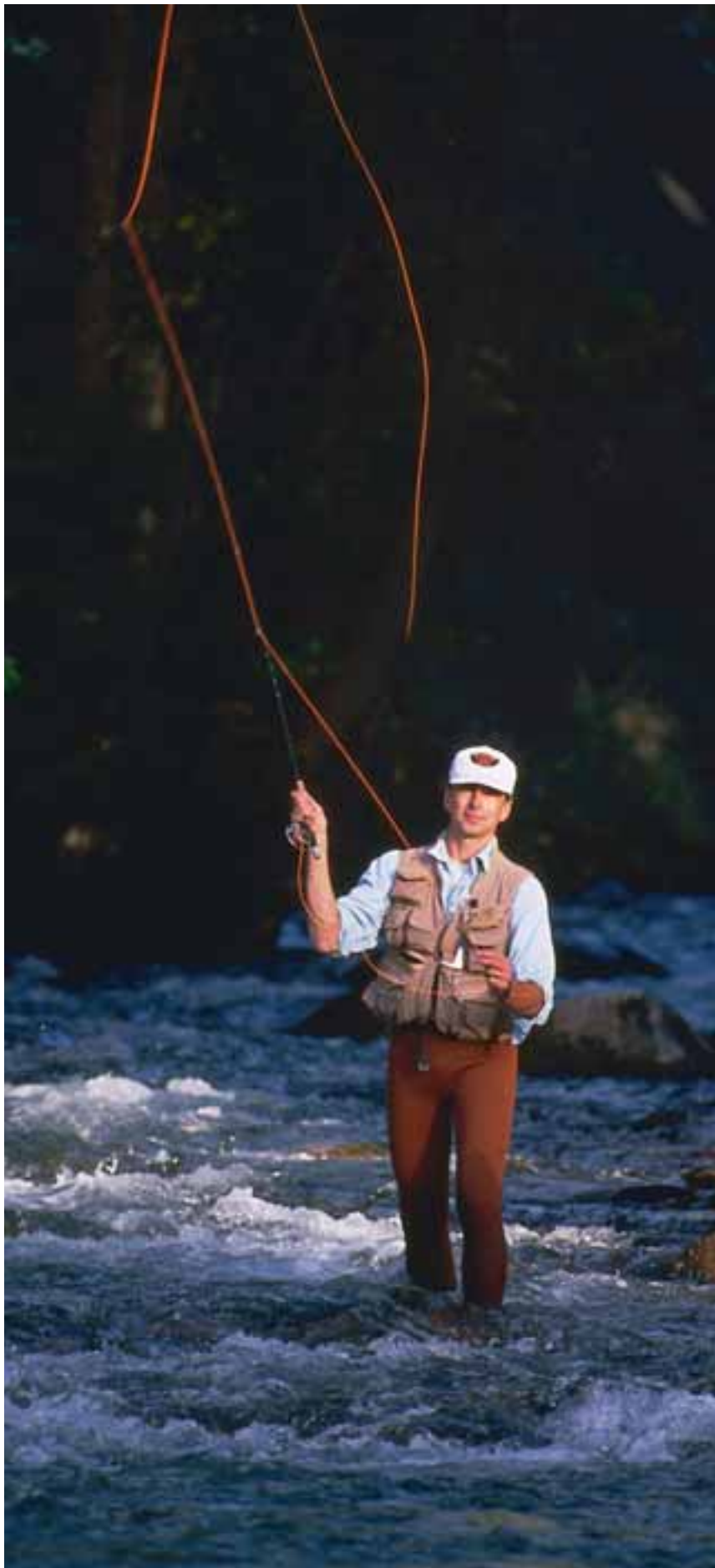
Man tames Nature only that he may at last make her more free even than he found her.

- Henry David Thoreau, 1849

W

What's good to know about the Roaring Fork River is that your bug will be a tough son of a gun. Healthy. Hardy. As delectable a lunch as any self-respecting trout could order up. What's good to know about the valley the river runs through, and the town in the valley that's home to the through-running river, is that the same class of goods that make for one tough bug and fish so well-fed they're downright smug, mean that here in the spectacular Rocky Mountains you can fish 'til the cows come home and still not get it. How come, you may well ask yourself, with these tough bugs, these smug fish, this valley, this town, I'm still around, since I could swear I have died and gone to heaven?

A Summer Wish



Jon Hollinger feels your pain over this conundrum. So he is happy to explain: This is Aspen, he will say. This is the Colorado town of consummate cool where summer brings fly-fishing so sweet that there is no treat as pleasing as flying-in for some one-on-one with the Roaring Fork. There's also the famous Frying Pan, not to mention those high-altitude lakes like Ivanhoe and Willow, and other select streams among Colorado's 6,000 miles of same, but that's not really it, he will say, it's more.

"This is Aspen," Hollinger explains. As a fly-fishing guide for 32 years and owner of Aspen Outfitting Co., which runs 1,500 guided wade and float trips a year into the fish-rich, Gold Medal waters of the Roaring Fork Valley and beyond, he is one who gets it. "Fly-fishing here is as exciting as you'll ever find. The big boon," he adds, "is due to the interesting mix."

It's a blend of crisp air, dazzling sun and riverbanks lush with Cottonwood, Aspen and Spruce. It's a jigger of culture thrown in, from art to dance to the all-around wow! of the annual Aspen Music Festival. It's the spice of posh restaurants, the sweetener of great shopping; it's taverns and wine bars and inns that after a perfect day on a perfect river make for evening hours of almost perfection. Stir it all together and drink up: a fly-fishing trip to Aspen is a most wonderful summer refreshment.

First there's the Roaring Fork. Wild

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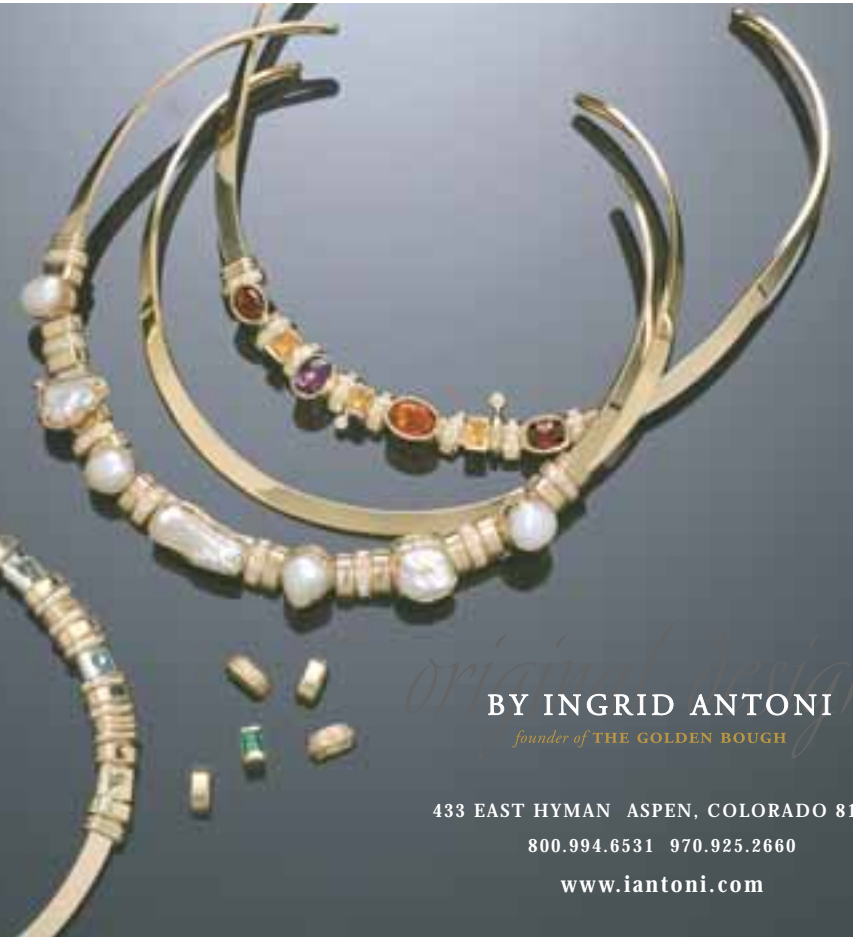
The art of the cast perfected (left) during an Aspen Outfitting-guided day of river delight; solitude, sun and challenge on the Roaring Fork make for a picture-perfect Aspen Flyfishing, Inc. outing (right).

with the winter runoff, "this stream really rips, roars and flushes so it's always really fresh," says Hollinger. Read that *pristine*. "That's the beauty of it. Wild trout are like a canary in a coal mine – very sensitive to the environment." Given they won't survive in any but unspoiled waters and given Aspen's rip-roaring Roaring Fork, this situation makes for fishing that is "extraordinary!" says another local guide, Kenny Smith, owner of Aspen Fly Fishing, Inc. "Very healthy water sheds that support predictable insect hatches...well, all you've got to do is read the signs the river is giving you, base your technique on what you see and hey, suc-



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Fortune favors the brave (top) when venturing out in the pristine beauty of the Roaring Fork Valley (below).

cess!" And with cold local waters among the best in Colorado, where ideal habitats thrive for rainbow, brown, cutthroat and brook trout so large they qualify as trophies, success fishing Aspen is far from a sometime thing.

"Every day is a great day," enthuses Hollinger, as long as you remember, "fortune favors the brave. Try that extra 10 feet on a 60-foot cast, venture those extra steps deeper into wading water." In other words, encourage the pros, chuck the timidity, lose the intimidation and just get out there, fun-loving flyers, and fish.

After all, you're going to want to, big time. From Willow Lake 11,705 feet high in the Maroon Bells-Snowmass wilder-

ASPEN-PITKIN COUNTY AIRPORT / SARDY FIELD (ASE)

AIRPORT DATA

Elevation: 7815'
 Runways: 15/33 7004'
 Approaches: GPS, RNAV, VOR/DME
 ATIS / ASOS: 970.925.9168

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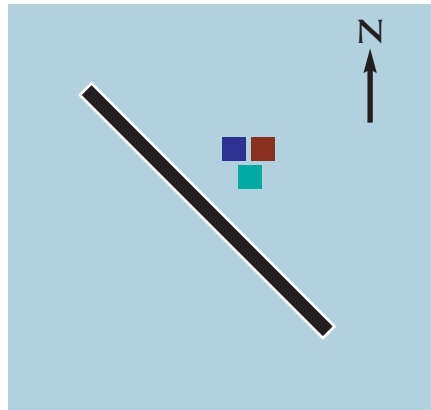
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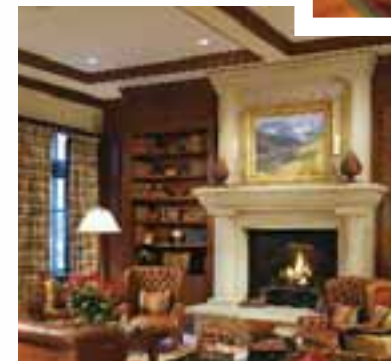
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Hotel Jerome's J-Bar

Historic bar in an historic hotel. An Aspen classic. Main and Mill streets, 970.920.1000

R-Bar in Renaissance Hotel

Like the J-Bar, this has universal appeal; live music on occasion. 304 E. Hopkins St., 970.925.2402

Bentley's at the Wheeler

Elegant English-style pub. 328 E. Hyman Ave., 970.920.2240

Red Onion

An Aspen landmark, the town's oldest bar & restaurant. 420, E. Cooper, 970.925.9043

Lobby Lounge at the St. Regis

Cozy, quiet, an elegant mountain cabin ambiance.

Whiskey Rocks (also at the St. Regis)

Hip and stylish lounge
315 E. Dean St., 970.920.4699

Ute City Bar & Grill

Also an Aspen landmark, where the mood is always happy. 501 E. Hyman, 970.920.4699

Roaring Fork Tavern

Sports bar-plus with two satellite dishes and 10 TVs. 215 S. Galena St., 970.920.9666

Cigar Bar

Puff away among the gentleman's club ambiance of overstuffed chairs; large selection of wines, ports, cognacs and martinis. 315 E. Hyman, 970.920.4244



The Rocky Mountain town of all-season excitement offers an apres-fish scene that never fails to please



ness to the phenomenal Frying Pan River, which flows from Reudi Reservoir to Basalt in a jump-for-joy effusion of rainbows and browns, Aspen waters offer waders and float fishers alike "the opportunity to hook and land trout that pound for pound are among the greatest fighters in the world," in the words of one guide. However, fish here are smart and wary, it is said. They can easily spot the offerings and efforts of the inexperienced and unadvised. Ergo, if you want "to put together the pieces of the complicated puzzle it is to fool a fish," says Smith, it's a good idea to explore Aspen's lakes, reservoirs and streams accompanied by a super-knowledgeable local guide, some of whom have special access to awesome waters on private land. Or not. Laughs Smith: "It's always okay to come home fishless. A good day on the river is not about numbers" – 2 fish or 10 fish or 40. "It's about getting soaked-up by the river environment" – the solitude, the beauty. What's more, says Hollinger, supposing

Making contact with fish is just the frosting on a beautiful cake.

It's another great part of the Aspen experience.

your numbers aren't shabby after all, "there's something very primordial about hooking a fish – feeling the strength, the shaking and jumping. You're connecting with something so wild and so beautiful." Followed by all the "sensible little things" that make for a careful release, of course. If you're going to be good at the sport, "you gotta love the fish," cautions Hollinger, who does.

So wild and so beautiful. It's not too much of a stretch to conclude that Aspen the town is too. "Such quality fishing in such close proximity to, well, everything," says Smith, is what makes fly-fishing here so much more. In summer especially. Aspen's sophisticated mix of sublime dining, glittering nightlife and friendly mountain-town fun merely slips into something more comfortable once the winter snows melt: its winning warm-weather personality.

Take the Aspen Music Festival (June 20-Aug 17). This is nine weeks of musical blast had by virtuosos and aficionados of it all, classical to jazz to avant garde. From violin concertos of Beethoven to *Béatrice and Benedict* of Berlioz, the festival enlivens Aspen's Benedict Music Tent, Harris Concert Hall (world renown for its swell acoustics) and historic town venues like the Wheeler Opera House (www.aspenmusicfestival.com). Theatre in the Park (970.925.9313) graces Grant Park with contemporary plays, while Aspen Filmfest (Sept 30-Oct 5) "continues to keep alive the best of Aspen traditions," says the Aspen Times: "achieving excellence without succumbing to pretension." These and other cultural tra-las mean that like Hollinger says, "making contact with fish is just the frosting on a beautiful cake. It's another great part of the Aspen experience." An experience that come summer in the dazzling Rockies can be practically, magically perfect? Sure bet. It's just as you thought: this is heaven.

For more information on flyfishing Aspen, and Colorado in general visit:

- www.aspenoutfitting.com,
- www.aspenflyfishing.com
- www.aspentroutguides.com
- www.fishcolorado.com
- www.dnr.state.co.us
- www.ufish.com.regions/_co.htm

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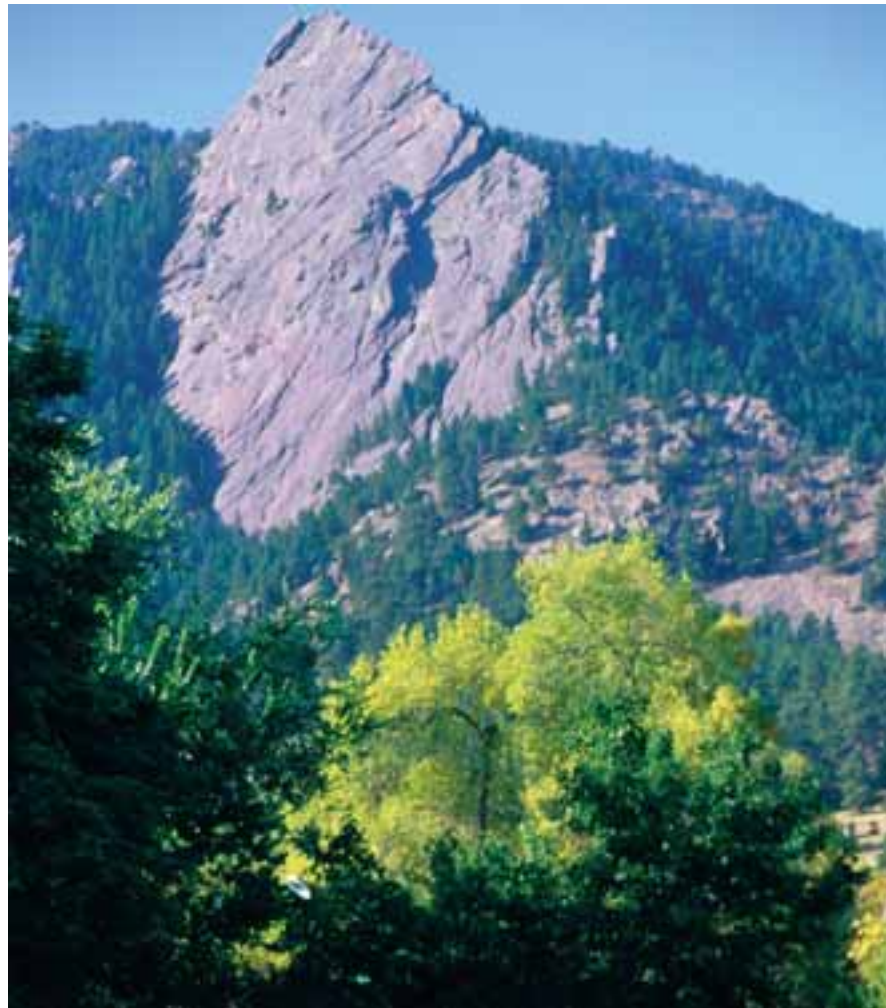
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More COLORADO Fishing



Aviators angling for some angling in the Denver area should pick Jeffco Airport (KBJC): within an hour or so of the Denver metro area is plenty of fly-fishing sublime. Gold Medal streams like the South Platte River, a legend for its 4000 to 7000 fish per mile, and other local reservoirs, lakes and rivers that trip the trout fantastic are easily accessed for a morning or more of Rocky Mountain wow.

How so, wow?

Just hear how excited they are, the guides at Boulder's Rocky Mountain Anglers (www.rockymt anglers.com). *The bite is on!* they say of the Arkansas River. *Conditions are perfect*, they observe of the "Big T," or Big Thompson River below Lake Estes. *The Buttes are hot*, they report from the Delancey Buttes. And as far as the South Platte River below Cheesman Reservoir goes, *the canyon has been the best bet down this season*. From the "extraordinary" lake fishing at the Sylvan Dale (guest) Ranch, popular with Boulder Fly Fishing Guides, Inc., another local outfitter and guide service (www.boulder-flyfishing.com), to the "fish up to 20 inches found in your front yard" at Platte River Cabins, another Fly Fishing Guides trip, the Jeffco-close options for an outing that rates mean one thing:

Now's the time! they're yahooing at Rocky Mountain Anglers.

And you gotta know, they've got tips.

"Fish the pockets along the edges with a dry/dropper rig like a Stim with a Copper John," they say of Boulder Creek, which runs through Boulder Canyon and into town, where the après-fish scene is splendid – lots and lots of bars and restaurants; oodles of art galleries and more, all sure to amuse you silly. "You should start to see some gulpers on dry damsels," they advise of fishing Delancey Buttes, "the damsel emergence has started." Bring your Madame X to the Arkansas, pack your Midge larvae to the Blue River below Dillon Reservoir and remember: "anything with a head head is the hot fly on the Big T."

See? Those who routinely fish Boulder-area waters think you, too, will thrill to the local gifts like Rocky Mountain National Park, a mere 40 minutes from downtown. Home to a large population of Colorado's state

fish, the Native Greenback Cutthroat, as well as a complete array of rain-bows, browns and brookies, this park has it all: small streams to brawling freestone creeks to secluded mountain lakes where you and your family can find fly-fishing bliss.

Then at day's end back in your comfy room in Boulder you can gaze upon the dramatic Flatiron Mountains that stand in granite greatness outside and happily think to yourself: *Aspen is super, true. But Colorado trout likely won't care if I catch – and release – them from here because really, Boulder is oh-so-swell as well.*

Excuse us, but *swell?* local guides are likely to say. To their mind there is only one right word for the entire experience: *Hot.*

Visit www.coloradofishing.net for further info, topo maps and access maps and guides. ✕

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