

**MAMMOTH FISHERIES SUMMER TRIFECTA:
HOT CREEK, UPPER OWENS, SAN
JOAQUIN... AND A LITTLE ON...
EAST WALKER & CROWLEY LAKE**

**WITH CHRIS LEONARD,
MAMMOTH HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER
AND FLY FISHING GUIDE**

Why fish the Mammoth area during summer?

- Closest world-class trout fishing to So Cal
- Air temps tend to be very comfortable
- Countless opportunities
- You can hit more than one fishery in one day
- Technically challenging fishing
- There's a lot of space to spread out
- Mammoth Lakes in summer is tons of fun

There exist countless fly fishing opportunities throughout Mono County during the summer months. The storied rivers of lore include Hot Creek, the Upper Owens, San Joaquin River, and the East Walker River. Crowley Lake is the Eastern Sierra's crown jewel.



What's it look like in the summer?





Hot Creek!!!
Where do we start? This is one of the most technically challenging creeks in the entire State of California, and you can fish it wearing street clothes and sneakers.

Hot Creek is relatively shallow – *most* of the summer – filled with ripples, pockets, undercuts, banks, rocks, vegetation, and everything fishy. It is ideal fish habitat.





There are three parts to Hot Creek -
The Interpretative Site, Hot Creek Ranch, and the Canyon.

Hot Creek Interpretative Site is a few hundred yards of public access water located between the hatchery and the Ranch. It has a couple of deep pools and plenty of ripple water stacked with trout. It's very technical, and super fun.





The Interpretative Site is tenkara water! The fish see A LOT of flies on this stretch of water. Tenkara fishing allows for a more natural presentation of bugs. In this photo, Mike is fishing (late spring) using a small black baetis wet fly with split shot relative to depth, and no indicator. He has about 2 1/2 feet of 5X tippet tied on the end of the tenkara line - using a tippet ring - to the fly. The split shot is about a foot above the fly. *This is deadly!* Don't tell anyone.



The Interpretative Site holds a lot of fish. It can be dry fly heaven during an impressive hatch but I find that I do most of my fishing there with wet flies. Just be observant of what is going on around you.

This part of the Interpretative Site that Isidro is working - on the other hand - is awesome for casting dries with a rod with a reel.



This photo demonstrates a plethora of various tactical opportunities.

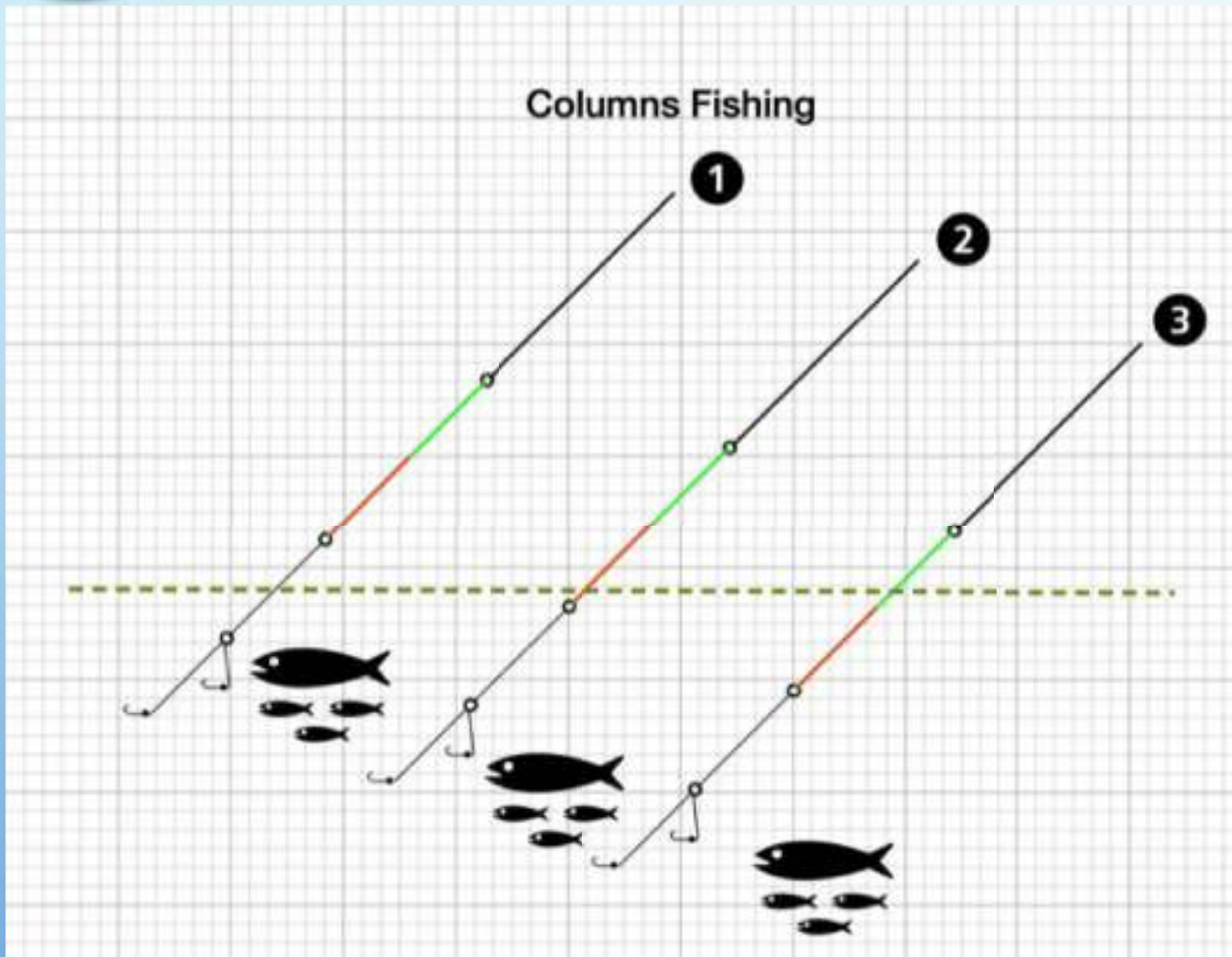


What flies?
I'll gladly answer that question, but keep in mind that **PRESENTATION** of fly is more important than bug selection. Trout don't eat what trout don't see, and they don't eat what doesn't look natural to them.



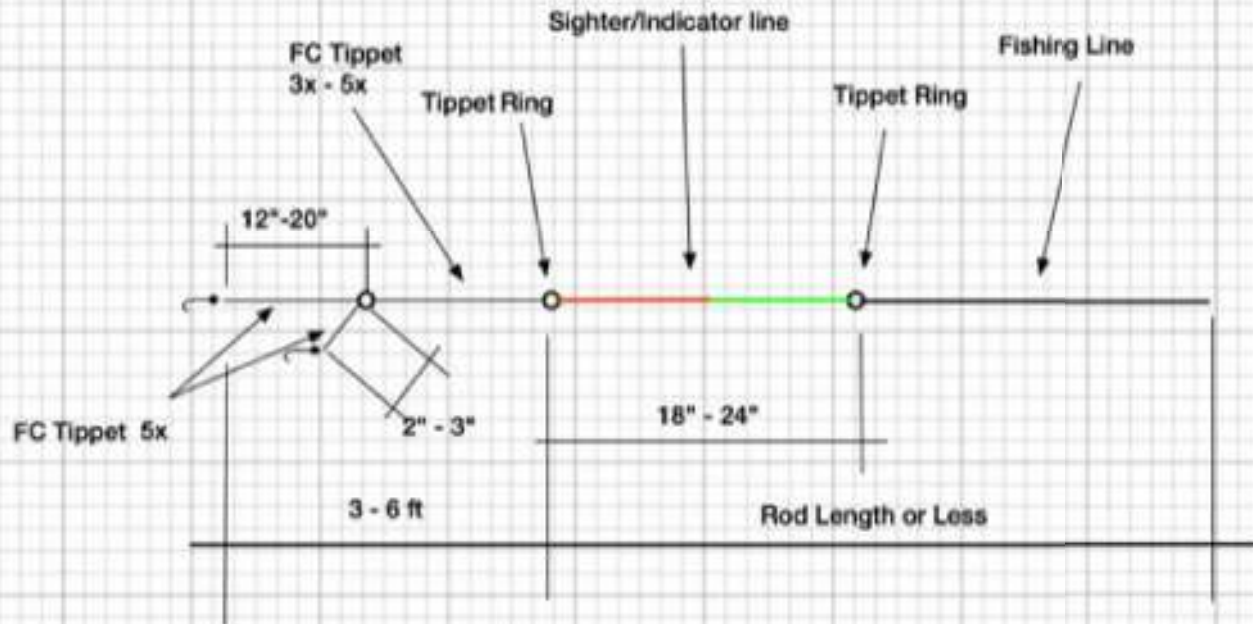
**Less
is
more.**





You can always fish two flies as well. This is how a tenkara dual wet fly rig may look for effectively fishing the Interpretative Site.

Picture Credit: Luong Tam



There are several ways to rig without an indicator. This system is how Luong Tam demonstrates that he rigs his tenkara rods when fishing without an indicator.



On a beautiful sunny day, don't think they won't rise and eat your dries off the surface if you see bug action.



Let's talk dries.

Dress
your
flies!





You can fish the Interpretative Site any time of day. I tend to find that the start of the day and the end of the day tend to be the most productive. Midday can be the most challenging. Sunsets here are mind-blowingly beautiful.

Overcast days are fantastic on the Interpretative Site. You don't cast a shadow on the water. Dry fly action can be fire. Don't discredit the wind. I fly fish wet bugs with my tenkara rod if it's blowing strong.



“El Rancho” – as Nate Wray calls it – is 300 acres of private water found between the Interpretative Site and the Canyon. It is traditionalist dry fly only, with very limited pressure.





This stretch snakes through a large meadow. It holds thousands and thousands of beautiful trout. Guests stay at spartan but comfortable accommodations on the property.



Pack your dry fly arsenal, and be prepared to read what's going on around you. The mentality on the Ranch was "It's all about the Caddis, stupid," till Bob Brooks managed it, and emphasized mixing it up with mayflies, gnats, tricos, midges, whatever works. Be creative.

Keep in mind that this advice I offer of fishing the Ranch applies to the other two parts of the Interpretative Site and the Canyon sections also, and vice versa.

A run like this is just screaming for a great dry fly drift. I'd start close from the inside bank, and work my way out combing the entire water. I would cast here with a rod with a reel to reach out and touch them.





Give them what they want. This includes hitting the far bank with hopper patterns in the middle of summer when they are present. I like to “bank shot” it, and have it “splat” the water like a real bug would.



Tom Petersen (left) is wearing mud boots in this photo. Not a bad choice of footwear for the Ranch, Interpretative Site, and lower part of the Canyon. Reid Linnastruth (right) was a Mammoth High School Fly Fishing Club member once – now a guide in the area.

The Ranch is an awesome stretch of water to fish. It books up months in advance. It's worth hitting if you haven't already – or again if you have!





The Canyon section of Hot Creek is another public access part of the fishery found below the Ranch and above the geothermally active area. It's second to none my most favorite fishery in the world.

I like to fish the same wet (and dry) flies here as at the Interpretative Site. Pick up a rock, and see what's under it.





This section tends to hold a lot of fresh water shrimp – scuds. It can be a great wet fly pattern to fish.



Along with tenkara, I'll fish this section with a Western rod with reel. This might mean a 10-foot, 4-weight without indicator or 9-foot 4 or 5-weight with indicator. If I use an indicator, it is usually thin white material – not a thingamabobber! Be a ninja!



Here's Alexis with a nice Hot Creek brown caught on a wet fly. Making Manny a bit jealous.

If you see these guys present, it usually means the caddis dry action is turned on.





Middle of summer generally means really good caddis action. You'll find them hiding in the streamside vegetation when not in flight.

When you see this, it usually means hoppers are the menu du jour.



Don't let them eat your bug!
I've had them chase down my
hopper on the water.



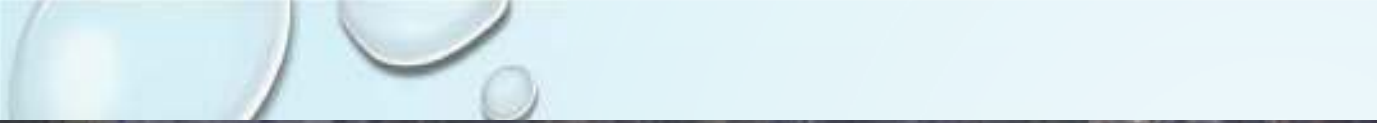
When you see these guys, it means you're getting your flies down low enough, you just drew 2's and 3's from the playing card deck instead of face cards.



When you see these guys,
be glad they're not rattlers.

Did you bring your
mouse patterns?





When you see this, you know that you are fishing the creek at the right time of day.



When you see this, you realize many people don't know how to fish Hot Creek.



He's standing right on top of the fish. It's a hard cast to make where he is, but I've landed fish right where he is in the same conditions.



And when you
see this, you
head back into
town for lunch.





The top part of the Canyon is one of my favorite parts during summer. There is room to spread out. It is also the widest part thus making casting dries to the far bank a very entertaining challenge.

The section at the first parking lot is a bit narrower than the top. Some of it is out of reach for tenkara fishing. My favorite rod for casting dries in the summer is a 7'9" 3-weight.





Reminder: Any trout in the world will eat a size-18 Pheasant Tail out of a river. This holds true of Hot Creek. “Less is more!”

The middle section between the two parking lots can be tons of fun.

I enjoy fishing hoppers and caddis patterns on this stretch, especially the far bank. It can be skinny water choked with too much vegetation for good wet fly drifts.

Especially, when the vegetation is full bloom in the heart of summer.





**Again, be
observant of
what fly to
use.**



The lower part of the middle section of the Canyon is dynamic – to me. It is probably the most technical part of the creek. Skinny water. Various currents. Hesitant fish. Test yourself here.



The very bottom part of Hot Creek is super fun. There are some monsters in the deep pool at the top. It is also quite variant in how you can fish it, and one of the more user-friendly sections.

I don't fish streamers often on Hot Creek, but they can be a productive method of fishing the creek. It really requires working the very few deeper pools on the water, like the one at the upper end of the bottom section of the Canyon.





Last Five Days
clicking on a station will display a chart of the last five days.

About this Data
Data contained herein is preliminary and subject to revision.



na - not available at this time

Access www.ladwp.com for a real time report of cfs flows. You want to find the “L.A. Aqueduct Conditions Report.” Look at this before you get on the road. Hot Creek is usually cranking for June and part of July after a major winter, but it calms down again. It generally fishes well all year round. This page also includes the Upper Owens.

Hot Creek can be fished at high flows around 200 cfs. Just expected a lot of heavily-weighted nymph patterns. My favorite is when it is flowing around 30 to 40 cfs. It flows around 11 or 12 cfs most of the year.



Extended Forecast for
14 Miles ESE Mammoth Lakes CA

 [Click here for hazard details and duration](#)



Check the weather before making the journey!
It is usually sunny, and beautiful. But, it is the Eastern Sierra. I prefer to collect weather information at www.noaa.gov.

Most summer days are perfect!

Detailed Forecast

Today

Sunny, with a high near 74. Breezy, with a west wind 15 to 20 mph, with gusts as high as 35 mph.

Tonight

Clear, with a low around 45. Breezy, with a west wind 15 to 20 mph, with gusts as high as 35 mph.

Friday

Sunny, with a high near 67. West wind 10 to 15 mph.

Friday Night

Mostly clear, with a low around 39. West wind around 10 mph, with gusts as high as 20 mph.

Saturday

Sunny, with a high near 67. West wind 5 to 10 mph becoming north in the morning.

Saturday Night

Mostly clear, with a low around 42.

Sunday

Sunny, with a high near 73.

Sunday Night

Mostly clear, with a low around 48.

Monday

Sunny, with a high near 73.

Monday Night

Mostly clear, with a low around 48.

Tuesday

Mostly sunny, with a high near 71.

Tuesday Night

Mostly clear, with a low around 44. Breezy.

Wednesday

Sunny, with a high near 69.

Hot Creek really is one of the world's greatest trout fisheries...





The Upper Owens River is the area's most forgiving river. It is located east of US 395 where Owens River Road crosses over the river. I like to fish above the bridge.

It is unintimidating (usually) as there is no structure to get snagged on with your back cast. It consists of several decent buckets and pools as well as ripple water and undercut banks. I look for fish in the entire stretch of it.



Smaller fish tend to hang out in the ripple water in the center of the river and along shallow banks, and larger fish tend to live in the deeper pools of the river. It is productive with dries, wet flies, and streamers.



Nick fed this nice brown a size-16 Red Copper John. Trout in the Upper Owens tend to be less selective than Hot Creek.



You'll catch these smaller wild rainbows all day long on dries.

The Upper Owens is fished best with a Western rod as you usually need to cast out to them a bit, and likewise you'll find that drifting your flies downstream a bit results in a strike.





When it's wet like this in the middle of summer, expect hoppers and caddis patterns to be super productive flies.

Also expect a lot of mosquitos. Pack the bug repellent.



I always prefer to fish the Upper when it is flowing at least over 100 cfs. Closer to 130 cfs.



Don't be intimidated by high flows. After 3 or 4 days of an increase in flows, it usually clears up a bit.



Wet wading in summer is the most comfortable option. It's too hot to wear waders.

I recommend nylon pants to keep off the bugs & sun, worn with a pair of thin socks, wading socks, and rubber-soled wading boots. Felt is slick on grass. It's like stepping on ice coming out of the river.



Mornings are most user-friendly on the Upper O, as the afternoon winds can make for challenging casting.



But wind also blows off the anglers.





Where you can
find islands on the
river, use them.
There are
generally fish
hiding in the pools
and undercuts on
the far side.

There is a lot of ultraviolet light at 7,000 feet elevation. Especially in the dead of summer. Compound that with reflection of the water, and you're gonna get burned unless you cover up.





Forest fires are an inevitable part of life in California. Wind direction determines how smoky the region gets during an active forest fire. I'm not going to lie to you and tell you it's worth fishing if the smoke is pea soup thick. A bit is tolerable, but keep it in mind when fishing in summer.



A bluebird day on the Upper Owens River is priceless. Pack some standard wet flies, a few caddis patterns, and some hoppers, and you're gonna have fun.



As for your presentation of bugs on the Upper, 5X tippet is fine. Split shot selection is important. You want bigger shot for deeper pools, and smaller shot for bankside drifts. Just read the water. As for your dries, just dress them with floatant, and get them to lead downstream the tippet.

It's not too terribly challenging a river to fish, and it can accommodate larger parties as it bends and bends and bends.



The prettiest river in the entire Eastern Sierra is the San Joaquin. It is found in an alpine setting. The areas around the campgrounds see a lot of pressure, but hiking a bit off the path reaps great rewards of not seeing people and finding fish that eat.



San Joaquin fishes best around 150 cfs. By August, it is usually flowing closer to 30 – 40 cfs. By October, under 15 cfs.

waterdata.usgs.gov

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GO

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Daily discharge, cubic feet per second -- statistics for Jun 21
based on 8 years of record [more](#)

Min (2014)	25th percentile	Median	Mean	75th percentile	Most Recent Instantaneous Value Jun 21	Max (2017)
50.6	64	149	428	804	916	1670

To get to the San Joaquin, you take a shuttle from Mammoth Mountain Main Lodge. This is ideal if you want to cover a lot of ground. You can get off the bus



at one stop and get back on it a couple miles down. Or, you can throw a float tube in the car and kick around Starkweather or Sotcher. Both these pretty little lakes are a lot of fun.



It is the most wind-protected lake in the region. Intermediate sink line and black bugger is all you need.

Starkweather is my favorite lake to float tube in the entire region.





The heart of the San Joaquin is the part near Devil's Postpile. It can fish really well.



I find a lot of brooks, browns, and bows in this section.





At the Devil's Postpile section, I like to work the river that runs along the meadow opposite the USFS information center.

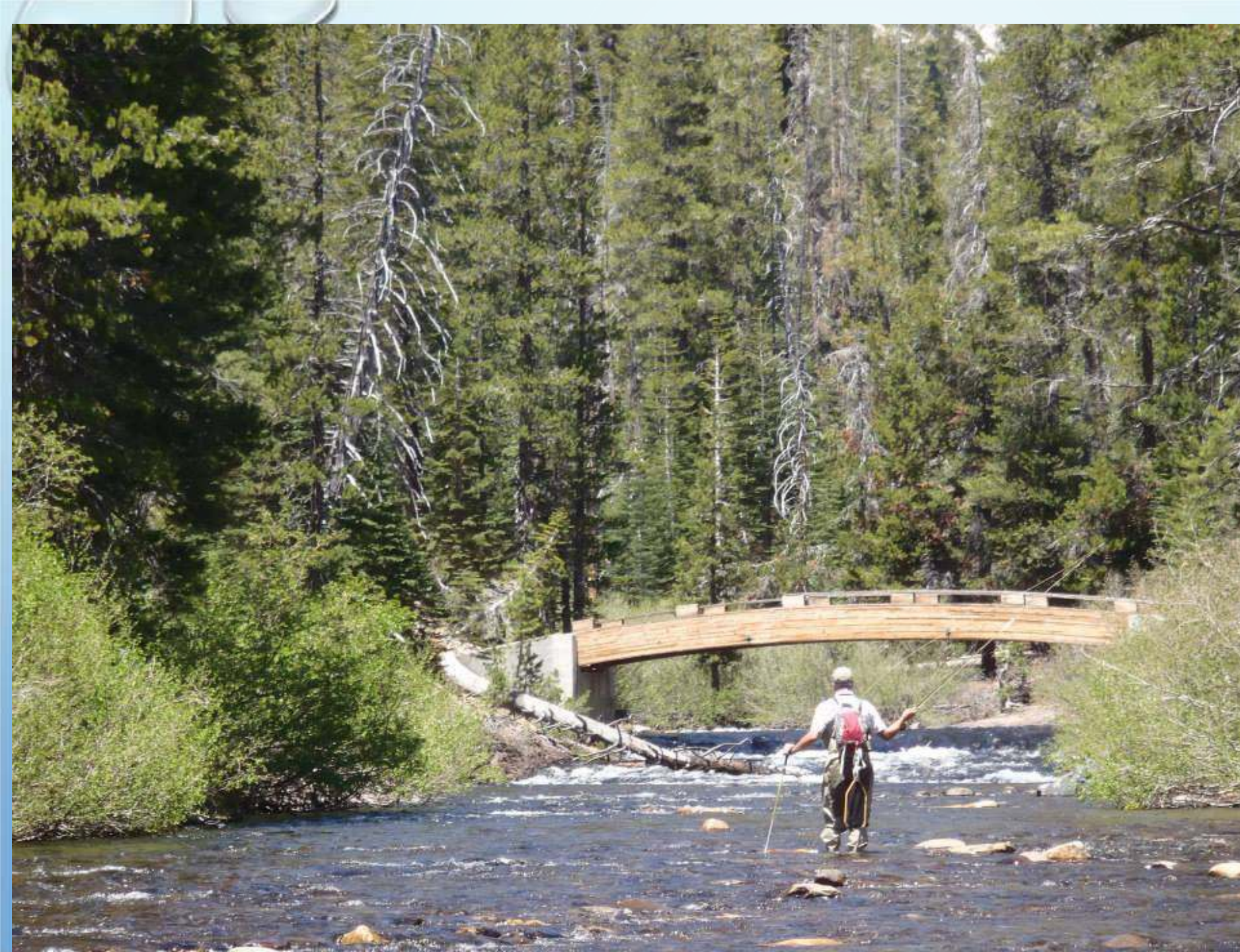


I don't consider the San Joaquin to be too technical a place to fish. I tend to find that they eat most flies if you show the fish the food.



Some of my favorite San Joaquin flies include...

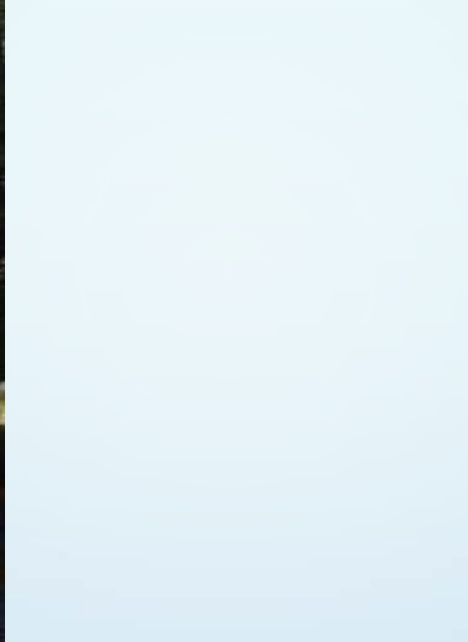




One of my
favorite
places to cast
dries...

I enjoy hiking
above Upper
Soda Springs
Campground till I
get far enough
away from the
campground area
that I find fish that
tend to eat my
bugs a couple
casts into the
game.





Scott wet wading and working some of the waters upstream of Soda Springs.



My best advice is this... the more you are willing to bushwhack a bit, the more you are going to find fish that don't see a lot of pressure.





Keep your eyes open for deep pools that see shade protection from the rocks.



The flora around the San Joaquin is unlike anywhere else in the Eastside.





If you're lucky,
you'll come
across wild
green onions
along the river
in the middle
of summer.
They are great
in omelettes.



The section around
Panorama Campground
fishes well but also gets a
lot of pressure.





But it fishes well when the snowmelt run off hasn't stopped yet, and it has decent flows. There are some nice fish in it.

** Go Bruins!!!*

This is a typical SJ wild brown trout that I fooled with little more than a size-18 Yellow Stimuli.





Family-
friendly
fly
fishing.





One of my favorite sections to fish is down by the pack station.

Park at the parking lot, and head down the trail. Make your first right and walk to the river.





There is some really good water down there with deeper runs, and fish that eat both wet and dry flies. It's a bit of a walk, but worth hitting.



The best milkshakes in the entire Eastside are found here...



They make really good sandwiches, also. The tuna melt is my favorite.



“Fish the East Walker,” they said.



“It will be fun,” they said.



Now you're
trophy buck
hunting...



... when most days on the East Walker end like this.



But I've had several successful trips to the East Walker. Let's chat about the first stretch, the famous "Miracle Mile."





This beautiful stretch of water begins at the bottom of the dam outlet. It runs to where it crosses under California 168. It's a relatively gentle flow until it reaches the highway where it picks up more of a gradient. I fish it with and without an indicator, and dries when they are surface feeding.



The river begins at “The Glory Hole.” I usually fish it with a sink line and big streamer. Don’t get “tunnel vision” and stay here all day. It’s worth hitting. There are some lunkers up here. Be very careful wading! Bring a wading staff.

I feel this is safe to wade around 150 cfs.

Create [presentation-quality](#) / [stand-alone](#) graph. [Subscribe to WaterAlert](#)

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Daily discharge, cubic feet per second -- statistics for Jun 19
based on 97 years of record [more](#)

Min (1924)	25th percentile	Median	Mean	75th percentile	Most Recent Instantaneous Value Jun 19	Max (1963)
32.0	176	241	311	362	675	1220

Gage height, feet

Most recent instantaneous value: 4.85 06-19-2019 05:30
PDT

After an impressive winter, the EW is always cranking. This is great, as it flushes the river out, and gives the fish a rest. I like to fish it between 150 and 300 cfs. Anything under 150 cfs seems like skinny water to me. I may move down below the bridge. It gets treacherous over 300 cfs. It should be closed from August 1 to Labor Day – it isn't – but should be. Water temps soar in August, and those fish are depleted oxygen. It is also just not fair to the fish to harass them the dead of winter at 22 cfs.



There's some really fun water just below the Glory Hole. Usually knee to mid-thigh deep at 150 – 300 cfs. Fairly safe to wade. A lot of pocket water. I like to also work flies under the brush on the far side. Here is Chris Powell with his first fish on the fly rod ever.



Some favorite wet (and dry) flies for the EW...

Like always, split shot size is imperative on the East Walker. "You gotta get it in *'the zone.'*"





Mike is fishing a 10-foot, 4-weight here. This is a great rod for fishing the Miracle Mile under an indicator. The most effective technique here is to quickly stack mend your line after your first initial cast to allow your weighted flies to drop down into the zone quickly. I wouldn't fish a rod any lighter than this on the EW. 3X to 5X tippet depending on time of year and water clarity. If you're going to high stick this section, an 11-foot, 5-weight switch rod will do the trick.



Streamer fishing on this section can be a hoot. I throw big bugs like a Double Bunny or articulating fly. You're best fishing a 9-foot, 6-weight with a sink tip in t-7 to t-10 range.

Doesn't have to be long.



Short leader 1X to 3X.




If I could take only four dries to the East Walker, they'd be an Elk Hair Caddis, EC Caddis, PMD, and Callibaetis Cripple. All in the 16/18 size range.



My favorite stick for casting dries on the East Walker is a 8.6 or 9.0 5-weight.





And if you are a self-imposed sadist, you can tenkara fish on the East Walker. I've seen fish pull the entire line off a tenkara rod here.





But fish can be landed tenkara fishing the EW. I hosted a tenkara clinic May 2018 on the EW, but mostly because it was the only river fishing at the time.



It can be done.


** These are
brave souls.*

When you move down to the bottom part of the Miracle Mile, you get into some nice bends. Here “the Professor” gets into a trout on a PMD during the late evening - his dog “Walker” watches.





“Matuka Joe”
Contaldi and
“the Professor”
working the
water of the
Miracle Mile.
on a brilliant
summer day.

A decorative graphic in the top-left corner of the text area, featuring several translucent water droplets of varying sizes on a light blue background.

Below the bridge
is “the Canyon.”
Here you start to
see more pocket
water which
makes for really
fun indicatorless
fishing. Pack the
wading staff. It
gets moving over
150 cfs.



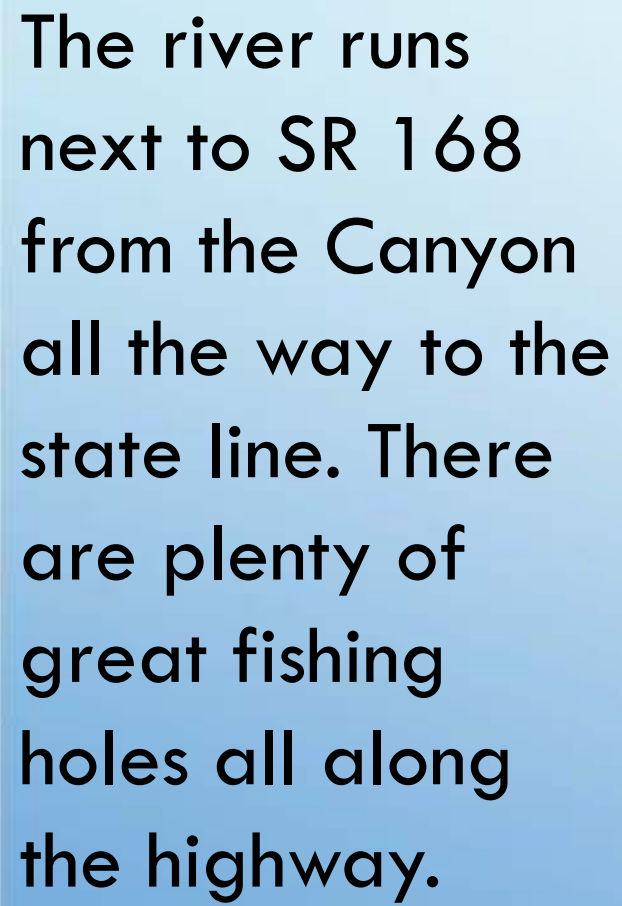


I've done some damage here with Rubber Legs. It's great pocket water. I might fish a Prince Nymph under a Rubber Legs under enough shot to get it all down. High stick heaven.

Where would I find the fish?



* Appropriate response: *"In the water."*



The river runs next to SR 168 from the Canyon all the way to the state line. There are plenty of great fishing holes all along the highway.





Nevada, baby!!!



While requiring a Nevada fishing license to fish, the Nevada section of the East Walker is one of the prettiest fisheries in the Eastern Sierra.



Rosaschi Ranch is public access fishing located off the highway. To get there, head into Nevada and make a right on the dirt road that points to Hawthorne. I like to drive to the bridge.





This meadow area is super quiet. While you can fish it the same way as the Miracle Mile, my preferred method is stripping streamers as there is a lot of streamside vegetation to contest with.

I've done just fine here dead drifting a purple bugger on a clear intermediate line then stripping it back slowly.





There are some quality trout in the Nevada section of the East Walker.



I find that the dry fly fishing improves even further down the road at “the Elbow.”





To me, fishing “the Elbow” is like taking a trip to Mars to hunt trout. It’s amazing how strikingly different it is than up the road.





“Red” with a typical
Elbow brown.



On a glorious summer day, I'd feed this guy a PMX dry.





There's a bit of Nevada culture found back there.



The Elbow is also home to some various forms of wildlife that you might not expect to see back there. But, know it's there.





It's worth
checking out.
Trust me.



The landscape at the Elbow is unlike anything else in the Eastern Sierra. Ken's Sporting Goods in Bridgeport sells Nevada day licenses.



Bridgeport is the county seat for the region. It's a pretty cool little town. It's worth kicking around. I also like fishing Robinson Creek a few miles southwest of Bridgeport - along Twin Lakes Road.





High Sierra Bakery will feed you in the morning. My favorite lunch/ dinner dish in town is a plate of fish tacos from the Barn.



Ken's Sporting Goods is the timeless outfitter in town. Famous for "the morgue" out front.



Like Mammoth, July 4 is a big celebration in Bridgeport.



One word.
Two syllables.

Crow-ley.

You're not getting out of here today without seeing a photo of these two showing off the double hookup on my boat on the lake.

Ask Marshall and Michael next time you see them about the day that the three of us went out on my boat.



For years, I hated the idea of fishing Crowley. Contaldi invited me out on his boat all the time when I worked in his shop. I thought bobber fishing was dumb. Mindless. Boring. Then I went to Clearwater Lodge Guide School in 2014. Tom April said, "You need to buy a boat." I replied, "I'm not buying a boat." Three weeks later, I bought a boat. True story.



The Facebook logo, consisting of the word "facebook" in white lowercase letters on a dark blue rectangular background.

facebook

What do you need to get really good at finding fish on Crowley Lake? An active social media account. I wish I was kidding, but I'm not. There isn't a single fishery in the Eastern Sierra as exploited on social media as Crowley.

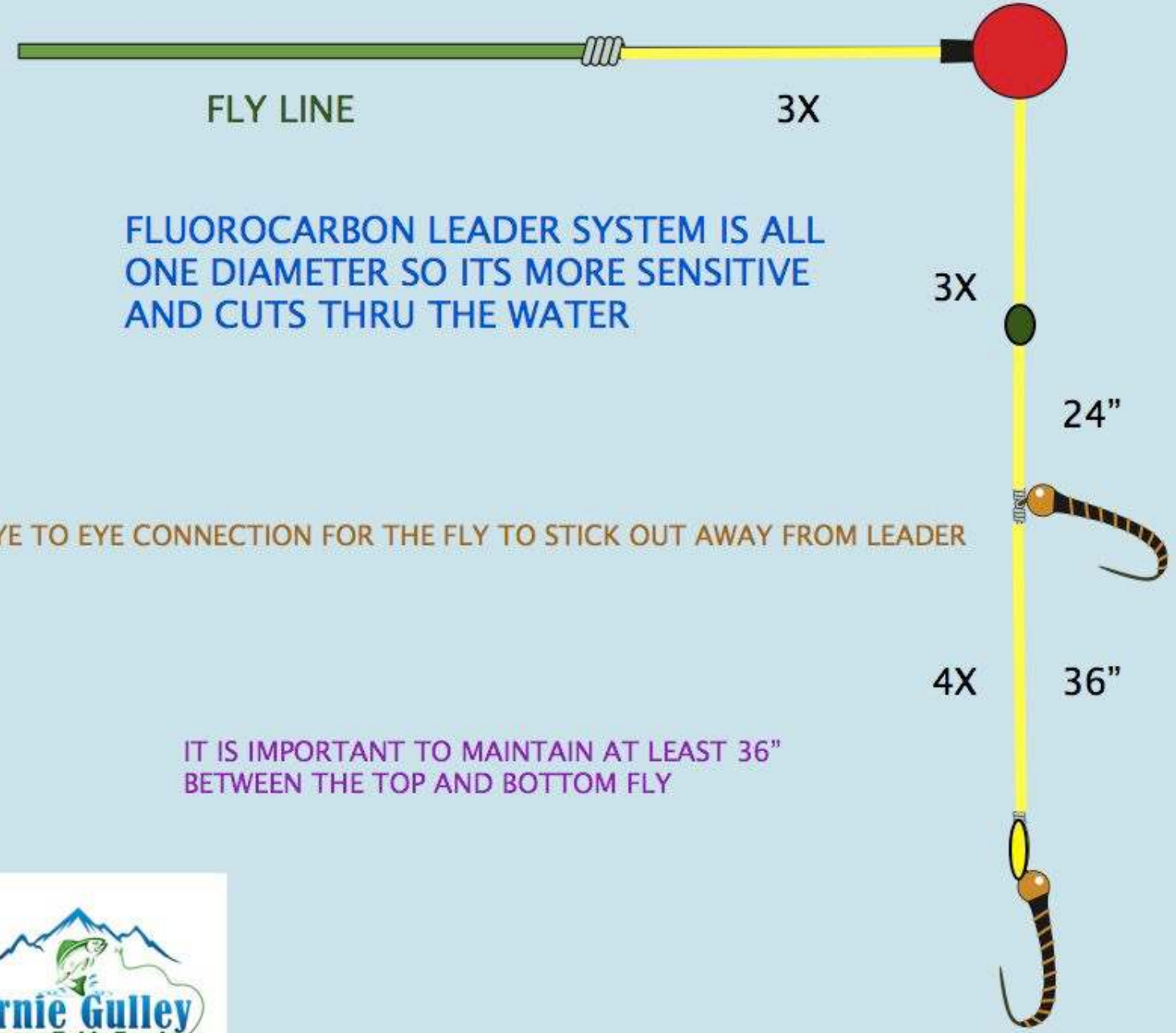
If you can get good at reading the background of fish photos, you can identify where the fish are. I'm one of the few people I know who lets Crowley fish photos get stale before I post them. But... there are some general basics...





This diagram – credit to Ernie Gulley – identifies how Ernie would rig for fishing shallower water on the lake.

STANDARD INDICATOR SETUP USED FOR UP TO 12 FEET IN TUBE 15 FEET IN A BOAT



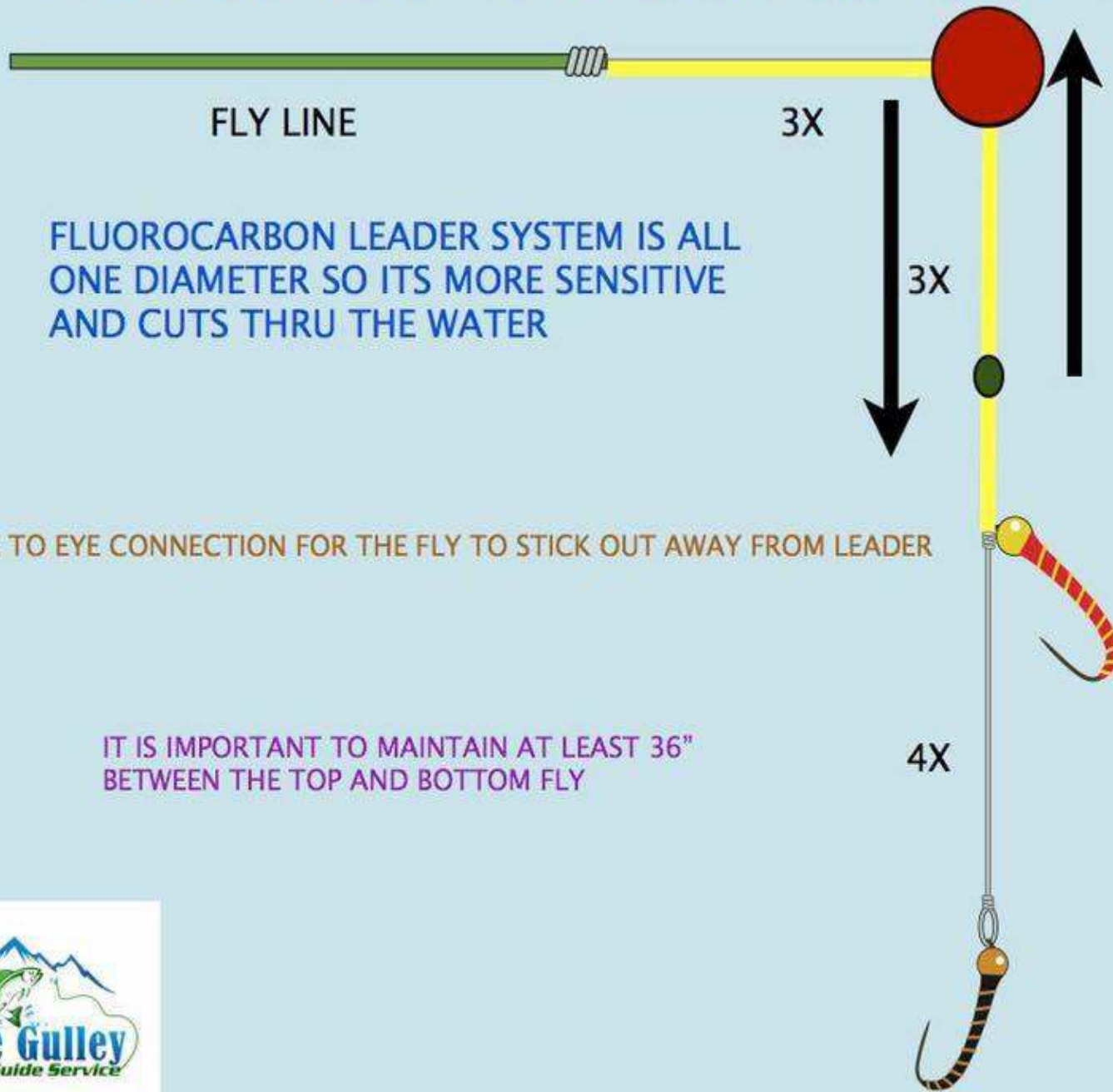
FLUOROCARBON LEADER SYSTEM IS ALL ONE DIAMETER SO ITS MORE SENSITIVE AND CUTS THRU THE WATER

EYE TO EYE CONNECTION FOR THE FLY TO STICK OUT AWAY FROM LEADER

IT IS IMPORTANT TO MAINTAIN AT LEAST 36" BETWEEN THE TOP AND BOTTOM FLY



SLIDING "DEEP WATER" INDICATOR SETUP USED FOR UP TO 25 FEET



And this diagram – also credit to Ernie Gulley – identifies how Ernie would rig for fishing deeper water on the lake.



The fish in Crowley see a lot of flies. There is some truth that midge selection matters. Just be observant of what is going on around you.



Midges tend to be bigger earlier in the season.



There is value to tying your own original patterns for Crowley. Show them something that they haven't seen yet.



Generally speaking, the lake opens up strong every year. It gets progressively better throughout May, and well into summer. Later in summer, when the daphnia hatch shows up or the lake “turns over” fly fishing can shut off – but neither scenario usually lasts long.



It's a kid-friendly fishery, as my young nephew Matt demonstrates here. He's had glorious days on the water.



The draw to Crowley – aside from the incredible setting – is that this is where the trophy trout live. You can have some wonderful fights with fish on this lake.

It's home to cutts, browns, bows, and...



“Crowley chicken” – as some of us call them in these here parts. Sacramento perch are the only fish I kill. They are a pain to clean, but the meat is neutral and makes for excellent fish tacos.



As for finding fish the old-fashioned way, look for shelves and structure in the shallower water at the start of the season. Then, look for cold water coming into the lake.

*Where in the lake did I take this photo?
And... what's with the tail on this fish?*



The truth of Crowley is it's a big lake. It usually fishes well in multiple locations, and it's big enough that there is plenty of room to spread out. It's best to give space, and be given space in return.





A good lunch is a couple slices of pizza at the Crowley Lake General Store.



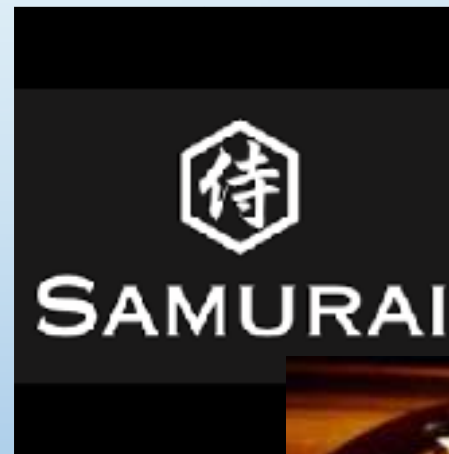
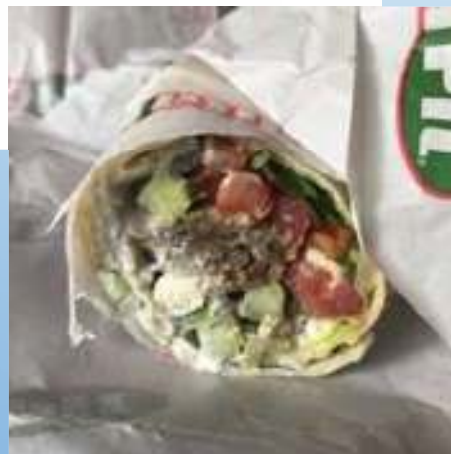


The largest town in the area, Mammoth Lakes has a lot of lodging options for every budget, and several summer festivals.





There are dining options for every palate and every budget.





Summer in Mammoth is all around a really, really fun time. Unlike anywhere else in the world.



www.kittredgesports.com

Kittredge Sports in Mammoth Lakes has a healthy fly selection. Kittredge Sports carries everything else you need. Traditionally a ski outfitter, it operates as a fishing and hiking shop in the summer. The staff is always cordial and professional. It opened in 1963 as an archery outfitter, but expanded from there.



Thank you for attending today.
I can be reached at 818.288.3271.
I guide through Kittredge Sports.
Available weekends and holidays
during the school year, and most of
summer. Please feel free to reach out to
me anytime. I hope to see you on the
h2o.

Chris Leonard.

