

# 2010 DVFF Eastern Sierra Outing

Sept. 24-26, 2010

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The Eastern Sierra offers something for every level of fly fisher and the ability to try nearly every fly fishing tactic, from float tubing with streamers to using stealth and small midge droppers on rivers to dry flies on small creeks. This is an opportunity to try your skill at everything from possibly big trout in lakes and rivers to the well-educated fish of Hot Creek or the small-but-more-than-willing brookies of Rock Creek. Last year I and eight other DVFF members spent crisp autumn mornings and cloudless afternoons fishing waters ranging from Crowley Lake and Lake Mamie to the Upper Owens River, upper Rock Creek, Mammoth Creek and Hot Creek. During this time of year most of the crowds are gone and the aspens show a hint of yellow.



Pat Konoske's Big Crowley Lake cutthroat (Sept. 2009).

## Lodging

I have reserved two cabins at Tom's Place Resort, with beds for 12 people. Ten people have already signed up, and we can rent additional cabins (each sleeping 2 to 3 people) if needed. Cabins include a kitchen and bathroom. I must have payment for lodging by Aug. 11, 2009, and the amount will be determined by the number of attendees sharing in the nightly cost. (If folks are inclined to separately arrange for and share a cabin with others, that's fine. Just let me know.)

## Meals

It worked great last year for everyone to participate in supplying some aspect of the various meals. It helps maximize time on the water. Expect to be on your own for lunch, however. Back at the cabin we can throw together dinner. Most folks were keen on easy-to-grab-and-eat breakfast.



Debbie and her niece Crowley Lake brown.  
(Sept. 2009)

## The Fishing Format

It worked best the last two years — and minimized the impact on any single fishery — for smaller groups to plan their own destinations during the three days. After all, there are numerous opportunities to float tube any of the many area lakes, fish any of the rivers and/or small streams or even plan a day hike into some of the more remote waters. One suggestion includes fishing Hot Creek in the morning to hit the hatches and avoid afternoon winds, then either fish in the upper reach of Rock Creek Canyon or on the

Upper Owens through the afternoon and evening. Other waters accessible within an hour long drive of Tom's Place include McGee Creek, Saddlebag Creek, Saddlebag Lake, Lee Vining Creek, and the lakes and creeks in the June Lake Loop and the Mammoth area.

Our initial meeting spot will be determined closer to our arrival date but it may be best to meet at Tom's Place Resort to ensure that everyone can check it and drop off food and suitcases before heading out to fish for the afternoon and evening.

Like last year, I will be open to arranging a guide boat trip, probably on Crowley Lake, with Tom Loe, our January 2009 speaker. (A Lower Owens drift trip is a possibility, but that stretch fishes better in the cooler months.)

## Safety

We will be at high altitude, so water and sun protection are paramount. Bring and drink lots of water. Also, be equipped with sunscreen, a hat, and polarized sunglasses. Weather in the Eastern Sierra during September can present a wide range of conditions from warm summer-like days to wind, rain and cold. Be prepared with several layers and some type of rain gear. Expect cool evenings, cold nights and warm to hot days. Be advised that cell phone coverage is spotty throughout the area, so it is best to inform someone of your schedule for the day if you are going off on your own. If you plan to float tube, seek advice from those who have done so because the afternoon winds can come up suddenly and become quite powerful.

## Fly Suggestions

- Attractor/Stimulator Patterns [16-18]
- Baetis/BWO [20-24]
- Bead-Head Prince Nymph [18-22]
- Black Midges [20-22]
- Brassies (black or chartreuse) [16-20]
- Caddis Pupa Emergers (sparkle/olive) [16-18]
- Caddis Pupa patterns [16-20]
- Copper John (red) [18-22]
- Disco Midges [20-22]
- Elk Hair Caddis (brown or tan) [16-20]
- Griffith Gnats [18-20]
- Hares Ear (bead head) [16-20]
- Parachute Adams [16-20]
- Parachute Midges [18-20]
- PT Nymphs (black) [16-20]
- Royal Wulff (as indicator) [18-20]
- San Juan Worms (tan) [18-20]
- Streamers (olive or black) [16-20]
- Terrestrials (if warmer weather) [16-20]
- WD-40 [20-22]
- Zebra Midges (black and red) [18-22]

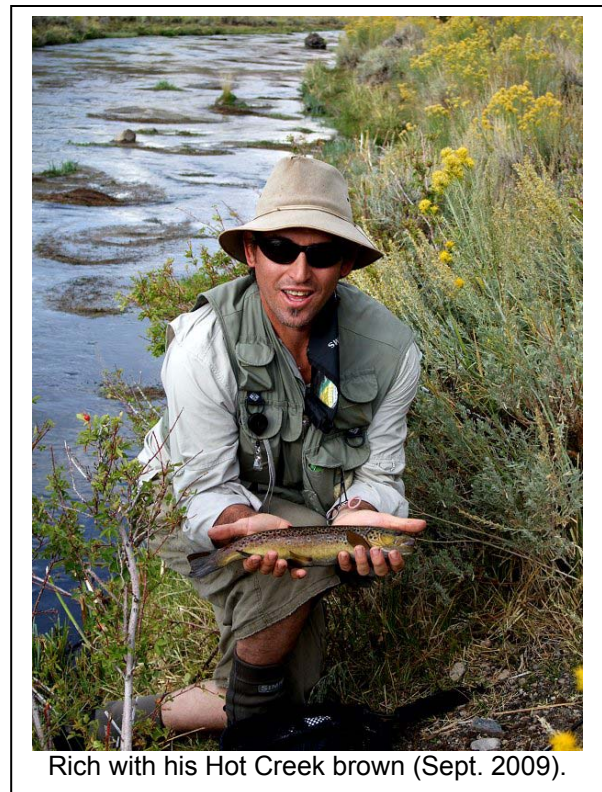
Plan on bringing the flies you may need, though there are shops in Mammoth and Bridgeport (Ken's Sporting Goods). The Crowley Lake Fish Camp also has a limited supply of flies and gear.

## The Waters

The waters of the Eastern Sierra are clear as water can get. While many waters are stocked, wild fish are prevalent in some areas. Rainbows predominate in many waters, but brown and brook trout are readily found. Below is information on specific waters.

### Hot Creek

While most folks will tell you dries are the way to go, Hot Creek is like most of the waters in this area in that it supports a great subsurface insect population. You'll get fish to slurp surface flies but the best action tends to be below the surface. Think bead head flies and a bit of weight. Dead drifting closer to the bottom with a tiny (20-22) black Midge or WD-40 pattern will get grabs. Other recommended flies include Brassies in black or chartreuse (16-20), Caddis Pupa Emergers in sparkle and Olive (16-18),



Rich with his Hot Creek brown (Sept. 2009).

Disco Midges (20-22), Baetis/BWO (20-24) and San Juan Worms in tan (Yes, tan.). Tactics usually require a small split shot about 8 inches above the bottom fly to weigh the line...but not so heavy as to get caught in the weeds or reeds. (Also go as knotless as possible to avoid weed-related problems.) Go small on tippet — 6X. From what I've been told by a few area guides, use a dry as an indicator, such as a Royal Wulff and do the math regarding your tippet to get the droppers as close to the trout's eyes as possible. Hot Creek can entail sight fishing, so it's imperative you correctly gauge the length of tippet from dry fly indicator to subsurface nymph to make the most of your first presentation. This distance will range from as little as 18 inches in shallower runs and up to 4 feet in deeper pools. Hot Creek may require patience, but the pay off can be a solid fish.

*Directions:* From Hwy 395, 3.5 miles south of Mammoth Lakes turnoff (Hwy 203), turn east on to Airport Road. The first public section of Hot Creek, commonly referred to as "The Interpretive Area," is located just below the Hot Creek Hatchery and the confluence of Mammoth Creek. This short ¼-mile section has mostly flat smooth water with deep pools and is considered technical and challenging. To get to the main public area go past the airport and toward the fish hatchery but turn right before the cattle guard, then go 2.3 to 3.0 miles. Look for the two dirt parking areas along the road, access the creek by the trail.

## Mammoth Lakes Basin

*(Float Tube Option)*

The Mammoth Lakes area offers Twin Lakes, Lake Mary, Lake George and Lake Mamie. All four lakes receive regular plants of Department of Fish and Game trout. They also have received bonus plants of trophy-sized Alpers trout up to the 10 lb. range. (I don't know if those plants are on-going with Tim Alpers' move to Conway Ranch.) Nearby Mammoth Creek also offers rainbows and wild brown trout. The creek runs from the Old Mammoth meadow area to below Hwy 395 for about 10 miles.

*Directions:* Hwy 395 to State Hwy 203 through Mammoth. Follow signs.

## Rock Creek Lake

*(Float Tube Option)*

Another option for float tubers. I don't know much about it except that Rock Creek Lodge contracts for the planting of Alpers' trout in the lake. Streamers can get some of the bigger fish.

*Directions:* On Hwy 395, just south of Tom's Place, turn west on Rock Creek Road. Drive up the canyon approximately 8½ miles to Rock Creek Lake.

## Upper Owens River

During 2007, 2008 and 2009 this was a hot spot thanks to huge plants, a healthy resident trout population and, during the latter part of September, fish moving up from Crowley Lake to spawn. It was also good during 2008 in terms of numbers, with larger fish spread up and down the river. The best tactics include



Mike Rudd's 15-inch East Walker Brown. (Sept. 2009)

running midge rigs under an indicator, midges underneath a dry, terrestrials (in warmer weather), and streamers (olive) near undercut banks for the bigger fish. Midges need to be properly weighted to get down. Surface action can be very good. Good fly choices: Elk Hair Caddis in brown or tan, Hares Ear (bead head), Parachute Adams, Parachute Midges, Griffith Gnats, PT Nymphs (black) and Caddis Pupa patterns. Sizes should range from 16-20. If you pull streamers, consider a 3X tippet and keep your rod tip close to or under the water surface and hang on for a bigger fish.

*Directions:* Take Hwy. 395 then turn east on Benton Crossing Road. Continue until you cross a bridge at the Owens River about 5 miles later. Take the first dirt road to the north, or left, past the bridge, and con-

tinue along this road until you come to a series of gates. The dirt road parallels the river for the most part for several miles. There are turnouts along this road. (Some people prefer the upper regions at the very end of the road. Here the road ends at a small parking area near an irrigation canal and a fence crosses the river, protecting private waters upstream.) Be warned, a barbed wire fence spans both sides of the river (erected with help from Trout Unlimited and Cal Trout to keep cattle out of the watershed), and there are very few entry points.

## Lower McGee Creek

Lower McGee Creek is a prime example of an Eastern Sierra freestone stream offering resident rainbow and brown trout as well as fish running up to spawn. It flows into Crowley Lake, and its lower section is slower moving and meandering, meadow-type stream. It offers plenty of riffle-pool areas and undercut banks. It requires a trek downstream (as far as you want to go) as it should be fished upstream with a spring creek approach. (You should stay close to the streambed to avoid bogs!) Long leader tapered to a 6X tippet is the rule. Much like Hot Creek, a dry/dropper combo may be the best choice. Running streamers through the pools can entice bigger fish. McGee supports caddis, midge and may flies hatches all season. During warmer (summer-type) weather dry fly action can be good with caddis and callibaetis patterns. Any of the flies listed for the Upper Owens River and Hot Creek would be good choices for McGee. (*Note:* One of my fishing friends highly recommended fishing downstream from the confluence of Convict Creek and McGee Creek as it was “hot, hot, hot” last year.)

*Directions:* McGee Creek is located off Highway 395 near the town of Crowley Lake and about 4 miles north of Crowley Lake. There are signs on both sides of the highway pointing to McGee Creek. Access Lower McGee by turning east on the McGee Creek Road exit and driving about 100 yards to a dirt parking area. You must park and walk towards Crowley Lake, following the creek. Go through the gate by the fence and head north towards the lake. You will see the creek ahead if you stay on the small dirt road. It is about a 2 mile walk to the lakes edge. Stick close to the stream bed to avoid bogs.

## Saddlebag Creek & Saddlebag Lake

This is a small freestone creek running from Saddlebag Lake to Lee Vining Creek, near Tioga Pass, the entrance to Yosemite National Park. More solitude can be found from Saddlebag Lake downstream to the hike-in campground. This creek, usually no more than 3 feet deep or 10 feet wide, requires stealth. Keep a low profile and rig up with the appropriate tippet. Attractor patterns can work well for the wild brookies. Rainbows are stocked downstream.

Saddlebag Lake, during the fall, can offer sight fishing for fish cruising near the shore. It can also offer float tubing opportunities.

*Directions:* From Hwy 395, take Hwy 120 (Tioga Pass Road) west. Drive about 9¾ miles to Saddlebag Lake Road, turn right (only direction) onto Saddlebag Lake Road (dirt). About 1½ miles down Saddlebag Road are turnouts and a hike in campground. Park here and hike down to the creek. To access the lake, continue all the way up Saddlebag Lake Road.

## June Lake Loop

The lakes of June Lake Loop — June Lake, Gull Lake, Silver Lake and Grant Lake — and Rush, Reverse and Alger creeks, are about a 45-minute drive from Tom’s Place Resort. They can be a good bet for catching something as they are stocked and easily accessible. The Loop definitely does not offer a “wilderness experience,” but can offer good fishing. Rush Creek is regularly planted. From Grant Lake Dam to Mono Lake, Rush Creek is covered by artificial-lure, barbless-hook, catch-and-release only regulations. Reverse Creek is between Silver Lake and Gull Lake.

*Directions:* Off Hwy 395, take Hwy 158, which loops back to 395, passing all of the lakes.

## Rock Creek

*(Section directly below Rock Creek Lake)*

This can be a good place for someone new to the hobby to practice casting, a little bit of wading, hooksets (both surface and subsurface), and the playing of wild trout, albeit it small brook trout of 8 to 10 inches. Casting close to the reeds may net you a small wild brown. This is a slower section of the creek, hugged by reeds on either side but with plenty of room for your backcast and, last time I was there, plenty of willing brookies. Go with a dry/dropper of a 3 wt. rod. My best late afternoon flies tended to be size Copper Johns in red or Zebra Midges in black or red (both in sizes 18-22) underneath an attractor or stimulator (16-18). As twilight begins, switch the dry to a Elk Hair Caddies (16-18). And when you're having so much fun that you don't want to leave, even though it's getting a bit dark, switch to a dry mosquito emerger pattern or anything with a thin body and fine hackle. You'd be surprised. (*Note:* Upstream from this section are various pools and rapids that may be home to some larger rainbows. You can also fish downstream on Rock Creek, which passes campgrounds and a lodge. This area receives plants of rainbows.)

*Directions:* On Hwy 395, just south of Tom's Place, turn west on Rock Creek Road. Once you reach the campgrounds, the creek can be found on the south side of Rock Creek Road. To reach the small section of Upper Rock Creek, drive up the canyon approximately 8½ miles and part in the parking lot for Rock Creek Lake. Gear up and head south (past the bathrooms) on a trail leading down to the creek. Veer slightly east (to your left) through a small picnic area. Walk downstream a short distance until you see an open area bordered by grass and reeds.

*Note:* The following are more likely to be fished during your trip into or out of the Eastern Sierra:

## Green Creek

There are a couple of possibilities for Green Creek. One section flows alongside the dirt road leading to Bodie. The upper reaches of the creek, as well as Dynamo Pond, can be reached from this area as well. The creek is a small meandering water that receives plants of rainbows and may offer wild brown trout.

*Directions:* To access the first section take Hwy 395 to the Bodie Road turn off. I don't think there are turnouts on Bodie Road, so you may have find parking off of Highway 395 and walk. (*The following is approximate. Please consult your map.*) To access the second section, take the dirt road near the Bodie Road turnoff to the west. This road maybe a bit south of Bodie Road. Follow this road west to Green Lakes Road. You should see the creek from the road. If you reach Dynamo Pond, you've gone too far.

## Little Walker River

This is a small to medium creek that, depending upon your desire for wild or stocked fish, requires either a bit of walking or an adventurous trek into the woods. Following the directions below, you can head upstream of the bridge for predominately wild fish or downstream for predominately stockers. This creek has plenty of riffles and deeper pools, with plenty of room for the few who visit it. Little Walker offers both wild and stocked rainbows with a few small wild brown trout. Watch your casting; there are plenty of opportunities to get snagged. Some pools allow for standing behind small trees and dappling a fly on the surface. (During September 2006, I pulled a 12 inch rainbow out of a pool no more than 3-feet wide and about 4-feet long and maybe 3-feet deep, and landed another decent fish out of the end of some riffles.)

*Directions:* From Highway 395 in Bridgeport, drive approximately 16 miles west to Little Walker Road (Forest Service Road # 066 — an unpaved road with washboard ruts — also marked as route to Obsidian Campground). Turn left on Little Walker Road and drive approximately three miles to the campground.

## West Walker River

Small, classic freestone river with riffles and pools. Easy wading and casting during the fall. The West Walker is home to relatively opportunistic fish (stockers and wild). Another part of the West Walker referred to as the canyon section is followed by Highway 395 north of the Highway 108 intersection.

*Directions:* From Highway 395, driving west on Highway 108 (Sonora Pass Road) about 4 miles to the Marine Corps Winter Training Facility. Shortly after the base (about 1 mile) will be a sign on the left indi-

cating parking for the Pickle Meadow Wildlife area and trout habitat. Park in the dirt parking area. The river will be obvious. Fish downstream of the parking area. (I have also found one to two fish in the pools alongside the parking area.)

## **East Walker River**

The East Walker River may be one of the finest moving water trout fisheries in the Eastern Sierra. A large contingent from our group fished this river on the way to and from Tom's Place, and everyone landed a brown. It can be great fishing during the mid morning and late evening.

The prime section is located below the dam of Bridgeport Reservoir, making it a tailwater fishery. This section is heavily guided and fished, but there are several more miles of river below this section in California that are far less fished and can be just as good or better. The East Walker can be more "technical" than other nearby waters. The East Walker has a reputation for huge browns. However, this river experiences problems during low snow pack seasons, particularly during the summer and fall. Ideal releases are 175 to 225 cfs. Dry dropper bead head combos are good choices for lower flows. There are opportunities to fish caddis and may fly patterns all year.

*Directions:* North of Bridgeport on Highway 182.

## **Conway Ranch**

This is the aquaculture facility where Tim Alpers (now with Inland Aquaculture Group) raises his famous trout. The ranch offers its Trophy Float Tube Pond for catch and release fishing of big Alpers rainbows. It's available by reservation only, with waders and float tubes provided (to keep the ranch free of Quagga mussels and mudsnails). Last I heard, the cost was \$50 for three hours/three people, though I haven't confirmed those figures. Raven Angeles at (760) 914-6446 can provide information and take reservations. (Rumor is that the ranch will have a non-float tube/fly fishing venue opening sometime during 2010.)