



by Davide Fiorani

In 2004 I took my first trip to Colorado with some fishermen friends, starting a long series of adventures in this fascinating land.

Colorado offers different landscapes and breathtaking scenery: sometimes they can remind us of the Grand Canyon in Arizona as in the case of the Colorado National Monument Park near Grand Junction, or other times the Swiss mountains of the Bernese Oberland, passing through the area of Ouray.

Personally, I have always been fascinated by the origin of the name: Colorado comes from Spanish and was attributed to this state both for the river of the same name that crosses it, and for the colours that characterize its landscape, dominated by the shades of red of the rocks that draw its mountains.



I never liked organizing these types of trips with the idea of stopping one or two days in one place, then packing everything up and getting back in the car to grind out miles to reach another location. Unpacking suitcases and equipment again trying to “tame” time to be able to do as much as I could. Since then, I have adopted a slower and more profound approach: never hit and run, never forced stops, and paying particular attention to the signs!



I chose to dedicate myself to getting to know the places in greater depth, staying at least ten days in the same area, to fully immerse myself in all it had to offer. Some places I visited multiple times, and each time I discovered something new. In Colorado, there is so much water to explore that even local fishermen sometimes cannot provide precise directions to certain areas, simply because they have never been there.

Places and Waters

Colorado is a fishing enthusiast's paradise, and has become an increasingly popular destination in recent years, thanks to its impressive number and variety of year-round fishable waters.



In this country, streams and lakes where natural trout reproduction is encouraged are managed by the Division of Wildlife. These areas, which are not stocked with hatchery fish, offer anglers the opportunity to catch completely wild trout; these waters are known as Wild Trout Waters.



Additionally, sections of the rivers designated as Gold Medal Waters by Colorado Wildlife represent the highest quality fishing destinations. These waters must support a minimum standard of 60 pounds (27 kg) of trout, with at least 12 14" (35 cm) specimens, per acre (47 square meters). This designation is carefully considered and represents the highest quality aquatic habitat in Colorado and, in some cases, coincides with Wild Trout Waters.



Proper and adequate regulation is essential and necessary to preserve these waters: of over 9,000 miles of trout waters in Colorado, 385 miles are currently classified as Gold Medal Waters (as of August 21, 2024).



One recommendation is to be very careful in respecting private property, usually well marked along the borders with "Posted" and "No Trespassing" signs.



The first rivers I explored were those in the Gunnison Region of the Southwest. The Gunnison River was the first to win me over: the Gunny also has a 27-mile stretch of Gold Medal Water and Wild Trout Water, from the upper edge of the Black Canyon to the confluence with the North Fork of the Gunnison River



I then discovered real gems like the Taylor River, the East River, Lake Fork of the Gunnison River and more isolated streams like Cochetopa Creek and Cebolla Creek, where solitude and contact with nature are total.



Another remarkable river is the South Platte River, south of Denver, which boasts three 37-mile sections of Gold Medal Water. This tributary of the Platte River changes identity several times along its course. Among its most fascinating sections are the fast-flowing Cheesman Canyon and Eleven Mile Canyon, where the river resumes its course until it flows into Eleven Mile Reservoir.





Every corner offers new challenges. The incredible stretch called “Dream Stream” – a 3.8-mile tailwater that flows from Eleven Mile Reservoir and ends its slow flow in Spinney Mountain Reservoir – bewitches you with its apparent calm. There are trout of considerable size, that have learned not to be surprised.

Fishing the entire South Platte River would take more than a month!



Moving further south near the New Mexico border, the Conejos River flowing from Platoro Reservoir also offers 4 miles of Wild Trout Water from Aspen Glade Campground to Menkhaven Ranch.



This river runs through the canyon called “The Pinnacles” and then down again, collecting the tributaries of the South Fork and Elk Creek until it reaches Mogote after more than 40 miles. It is a tributary of the Rio Grande River, which it meets after another 52 miles. In the area, even a small stream like Elk Creek can be a pleasant surprise and offer an afternoon of fishing in the shade, immersed in a truly wild forest, in search of trout and char.



Heading north a little, we find the majestic Rio Grande River, with 17 miles of Gold Medal Water. This great river requires respect and preparation to be tackled to the fullest.



Next to it is the South Fork of the Rio Grande River, a beautiful tributary that winds through woods and small canyons, before joining the main course near the town of South Fork.



A little further west of the Conejos River you will find the Animas River, with even 4 miles of Gold Medal Water near Durango. Maximum respect also for this imposing river, which hides large prey and can give you “the fish of the trip”.



Its tributaries, such as the Florida River, promise a lot of fun. The slightly more distant Los Pinos River, where there are 2 miles of Wild Trout Water, Dolores River, San Juan River, San Miguel River and Piedra River will put you in a state of pleasant difficulty in deciding where to fish the next day.



My favourite places

Returning to Colorado is an almost irresistible call, which is renewed year after year. Each trip is different, each experience is new and enriches the memories and emotions experienced in previous trips.



Since 2004, I have returned fifteen times, for a total of 305 days, often traveling alone. Each time, a deep sense of belonging is renewed in me. My bond with these places has become so intense, that I now consider them "my places".

But it is in Central Colorado, between the valleys of the Fryingpan River and the Roaring Fork River, that I can say I have found my soul place.



Here I break with everything: I settle into a single log cabin and go fishing for at least three weeks, immersed in breathtaking beauty and the peace of nature.



I do it alone or with local people, who I have had the pleasure of meeting over the years and who have become my friends.



This passion that unites us leads us to share experiences, skills and notions that have also helped us grow together. Every year we find new spots to fish, we discover other places for the following year, we compare techniques and even improve our flies.



Fryingpan River

The 48-mile Fryingpan River has its most famous stretch in the tailwater below Ruedi Reservoir, a 14-mile segment classified as Gold Medal Water, ending its run at the Roaring Fork River in Basalt. The Pan flows through a narrow valley, past brick-coloured rocks that blend harmoniously with the green of the plants and low vegetation.



In autumn, birches, poplars, oaks, blackthorns and sagebrush transform into an explosion of colours: from light yellow to brown, through mustard and flame red, which are sprinkled among the green of the Colorado blue spruce pines and the red of the rocks.



Then, at the beginning of October, if the night decides to give you an early dusting of snow, the following morning, with the sun making its way, the valley lights up. The clouds open up and slowly thin out, revealing a clear, blue sky, a blue that gives you a feeling of purity and that you admire from almost 2000 meters above sea level: the entire valley comes to life, lighting up.



The water, as clear as gin, flows over a bed of stones that fade from green to red, embracing rocks with iridescent hues. The whole thing creates a painting of colours that seems like an irresistible invitation to dive in.

You can't wait to get out, grab your fishing rod and become part of that painting.



From late spring to late autumn, during the warmest hours of the day, the Fryingpan offers incredible simultaneous hatches of insects: BWOs, PMDs, caddis, midges and, of all, the undisputed queen, the spectacular Green Drake.



When this large mayfly hatches, even the big fish abandon hesitation and come out of their lairs to hunt this mayfly.

You have to be there, ready to seize the moment, where you know that big trout is, yours!



Roaring Fork River

The Roaring Fork River is a different story: it is a river with a changeable character, capable of transforming and changing its face many times along its majestic path. The most interesting stretch extends for more than 40 miles, descending from Aspen all the way to Glenwood Springs, offering a variety of breathtaking scenery and exciting challenges. There are no hatches here comparable, in size, to those of the Pan: it's all about the hunt!



Formerly called Thunder River, a name that evoked the thunderous sound of its current, the Fork boasts both Gold Medal Water—12 miles from the confluence with the Crystal River to the confluence with the Colorado River—and Wild Trout Water, which extends for 7 miles from near Aspen down to the Woody Creek Bridge.



This incredible river allows you to use all the different fly fishing techniques and sometimes it is better to tackle it with two rods to be able to fish it appropriately and profitably.



For me it was love at first sight: exciting to face those fast waters, broken by the rocks that create the pocket waters, fishing the currents dry hunting or letting the fly drift close to the bank downstream. Or with a nymph, probing the holes and the currents. And again, the adrenaline of casting a streamer, in the evening, or under a sky full of clouds or in the rain, with the hope that the big trout will come out of their dens to hunt.



Fishing for it from a boat is also a great way to discover and learn about the waterway, while also providing the opportunity to access areas that are otherwise difficult to reach.



This way, you can stop and fish a spot in peace while wading, and then move back downstream by boat and discover a new spot.



There are rainbows with fantastic colours!



In the middle-lower areas of this river, I noticed a significant presence of large stoneflies: with the first shadows of the evening, fishing with a generously sized stonefly can provide unexpected encounters.



Colours always dominate: the different types of environments that you find along the Fork bring with them different hues that accompany this freestone river (it has no dams or artificial basins along its course). The Fork transforms from a mountain torrent near Aspen, to a valley river at the end of its course in Glenwood Springs, at the confluence with the Colorado River, where it is possible to tackle it even with two-handed rods.



Eagle River

Mike and Stan introduced me to the lower reaches of the Eagle River, between Gypsum and Eagle, before it flows into the Colorado River.



The Eagle is also a freestone river, and from the confluence of Gore Creek in Vail to its confluence with the mighty Colorado River, it is considered Gold Medal Water.



The Eagle also offers hatches of different insects and is also interesting to fish for dry.



We have often encountered situations where the fish remains active on the surface for a long time, and landing a 50cm rainbow or brown in those situations is not uncommon, on the contrary!



Its slow meandering and flowing, alternating with fast scrapings, offers different situations and scenarios to try your hand at.





I've had great days on the Eagle, catching great fish and often staying out late, promising myself that this would be the last cast, the last current or the last hole to fish.



Colorado River

I have fished sections of the Colorado River both downriver and upriver by wading. I haven't travelled far from Glenwood Springs: upriver I have fished past Glenwood Canyon and downriver I have fished near New Castle.



I have always fished almost exclusively with streamers and nymphs. The Colorado River, already from its confluence with the Roaring Fork, transforms into an imposing waterway that requires respect and attention.



Upstream from Glenwood Springs, you can follow the river on the Glenwood Canyon Hiking Biking Trail. This convenient bike path makes it easy to get from one spot to another when wading, especially when spots are far apart, without having to walk on the rocky banks of the river.



In the Colorado River you can really encounter large trout and the equipment must be adequate. There are browns with fantastic colours and rainbows that have incredible strength and never give up.



Meetings and shared passions

Over the years, I have met some amazing people here who share my passion. Every day we spend together is an adventure, where we share techniques and experiences, savouring the time spent on the river with friends like Warwick, Jordan, Stan and Mike, Marty, Dylan, Trey, DJ and many others.







I also had interesting encounters with the local fauna and some even became good cabin neighbours....



".... but I did not get too friendly with others!



Evenings around a table at the ranch of friends Warwick and Robyn or those with the guides of the Frying Pan Anglers in Basalt for a beer...



...also spent tying some flies or simply planning to go hunting for that nice fish you saw a few days ago.



All this in a state of subtle euphoria waiting for the night to give way to a new day full of discoveries.



A love that never ends

Every trip to Colorado is unique, different and always unforgettable.



Every time I return, I discover new destinations, face new challenges and let myself be surprised by the beauty of this land.



No matter how much I plan, Colorado teaches me to let my spirit of adventure guide me, finding beauty not only in places, but also in people and the moments spent with them.



For me, it is more than a destination. It is the place where waiting is coloured with hope, where my heart always finds a new reason to return: a deep connection with nature, the places and the people I meet along the way.



Journeys that enrich the soul, fuel and renew the passion and desire to explore.



The connection I have developed with these places and people fuels a bond that is renewed each time. It beautifully captures the sense of adventure, calm, and wonder that Colorado inspires in me, enhanced by the vivid details of the landscapes and rivers I have explored. It is an authentic discovery of the intimate connection to a place that has become a part of me.



And every time, it seems to me that the last trip was the most beautiful one.

