

# OWYHEE CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS

## JARBIDGE RIVER

<b>Date</b>	Early November, 2010	<b>Time</b>	All Day
<b>Location</b>	The Jarbidge River, ID	<b>Weather</b>	Clear
<b>Fish Species</b>	Redband Trout?	<b>Size Range</b>	8-10" a few to 12"
<b>Fish Caught</b>	As many as you want; a few fish from every hole		
<b>Flies Used</b>	Wooly Buggers & dry flies; small gold spinner on a spin cast rod		
<b>Techniques</b>	It didn't matter		
<b>Comments</b>	It felt like true wilderness in a scenic canyon that I suspect few have fished!		

The Jarbidge River in Southwest Idaho is truly remote and wild. In fact, many Idahoans have never heard the name let alone know where it is or how to get there. The canyonlands of the Owyhee, Bruneau & Jarbidge rivers along with Jacks Creek and a few other canyons were designated the Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness just last year. It harbors rare species such as Bull Trout, Redband Trout, Bighorn Sheep, Sage Grouse and Monster Muleys to mention a few.



A remote stretch of the Jarbidge River in the Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness of southwest Idaho

My brother Rick had planned to come up for the weekend to fish Steelhead in the Boise River but the release date got delayed. I told him to come up anyway to go on a fishing trip that he would never forget. I was itching to get one last adventure in before the snow flew and this was my perfect opportunity. My brother had the four-wheel drive truck and I had the long anticipated plan.

There was an unbelievable break in the weather. The high country was frozen so I set my sights on a high desert river that I had never fished. The Jarbidge River harbors rare native Redband Trout and the possibility of endangered native Bull Trout, both of which Rick has never caught and why he drove from Utah to go fishing.

The Jarbidge drains part of the high country of northern Nevada which dumps into the Bruneau River, which eventually dumps into the Snake River. It is known by kayakers for its thirty mile stretch of class IV & V rapids that only the experts dare chance. There is a narrow window in May in which there is enough water to kayak. There are only a few places to escape the narrow sheer-walled canyon. Once you leave land at the input there is no turning back and the only person that is going to save you is yourself. Even if you escape the canyon you have a long walk to the nearest seldom traveled road.

My plan had one big kink; accessibility! The high desert plateau is at an elevation of 5,000 ft. The roads are impassable when wet but they dry out quickly in the wind so I figured they'd be dry. Driving the long rocky dirt track across the desert without getting a flat tire was just one worry. I gambled on reaching the canyon floor once we finally reached the rim.

The Owyhee's are my favorite stomping grounds in the spring. I've never traveled to these remote canyons in the fall and I wouldn't dare step foot into these parts in the summer. It crawls with Rattlesnakes and the temperatures soar.

We left the house at 6:00am for the 3 hour drive to the rim. Pavement soon turned into gravel which eventually turned to dirt and rock. It got light about the time we left the gravel road. The road was actually a good road for the Owyhee's as long as it's dry. We saw a few herds of Antelope as well as a covey of Sage Grouse that spooked as we approached the rim. It was a great introduction to what was to come.



Antelope in the Owyhee desert

As we approached the rim a dark chasm in the distance began to appear. After arriving, we stretched our legs and walked over to the rim to see if we could hike to the river; otherwise it would be a long grueling hike down one of the side canyons. As we approached the rim, the canyon was bigger than anticipated. It was very impressive.



Looking down on the Jarbidge River

As we discussed our descent strategy we were reminded of the wilderness we were about to explore as we heard rock falling from the adjacent canyon wall. It wasn't long before I said, "Rick! Look at the Bighorn Sheep!" There were a half-dozen Bighorn Sheep halfway down the adjacent wall including two nice Rams.



Bighorn Sheep at the confluence of Poison Creek and the Jarbidge River where we descended the canyon

After watching the Bighorn Sheep, we discovered what looked like a faint trail. We packed our lunch and waders and were on our way to the small ribbon of water we could see at the bottom. As we hiked I told Rick that I was sticking with plan A. Plan A was to fish upstream as far as we could and hike back out. Plan B was to fish the first mile and hike 6 miles roundtrip up Cougar Canyon to explore the caves, slot canyon, cowboy rock and the arch. Plan B was going to take too long in this rugged environment.

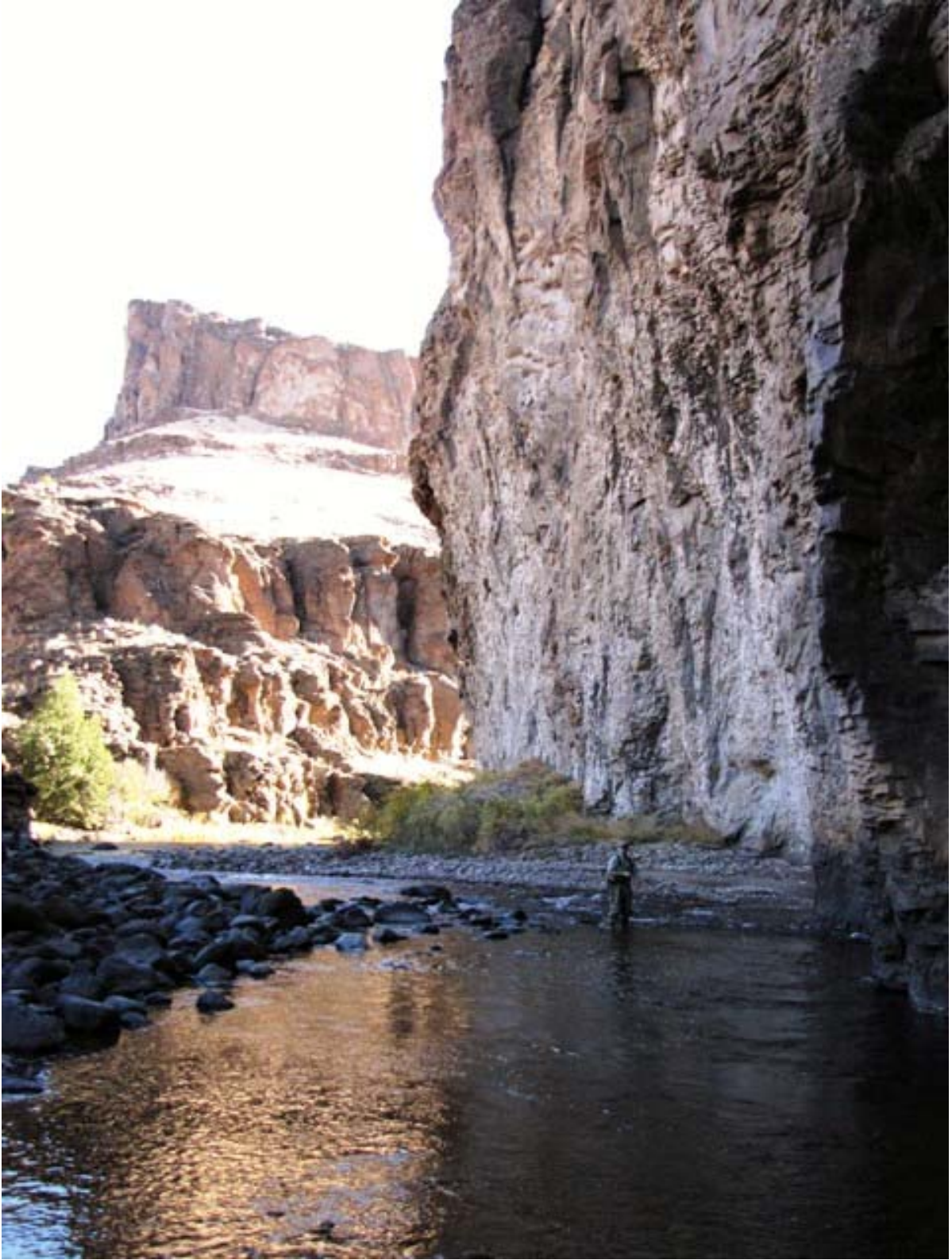
At the bottom, we found ourselves at a long deep hole at the base of large cliffs. My curiosity grew as I put my fly rod together and tied on a fly. I wasn't quite sure what to expect as far as how good the fishing would be or what species we might hook into.

I tied on a Woolly Buggar to start things off. It wasn't long before I hooked into my first Redband Trout of the day or so I presumed.



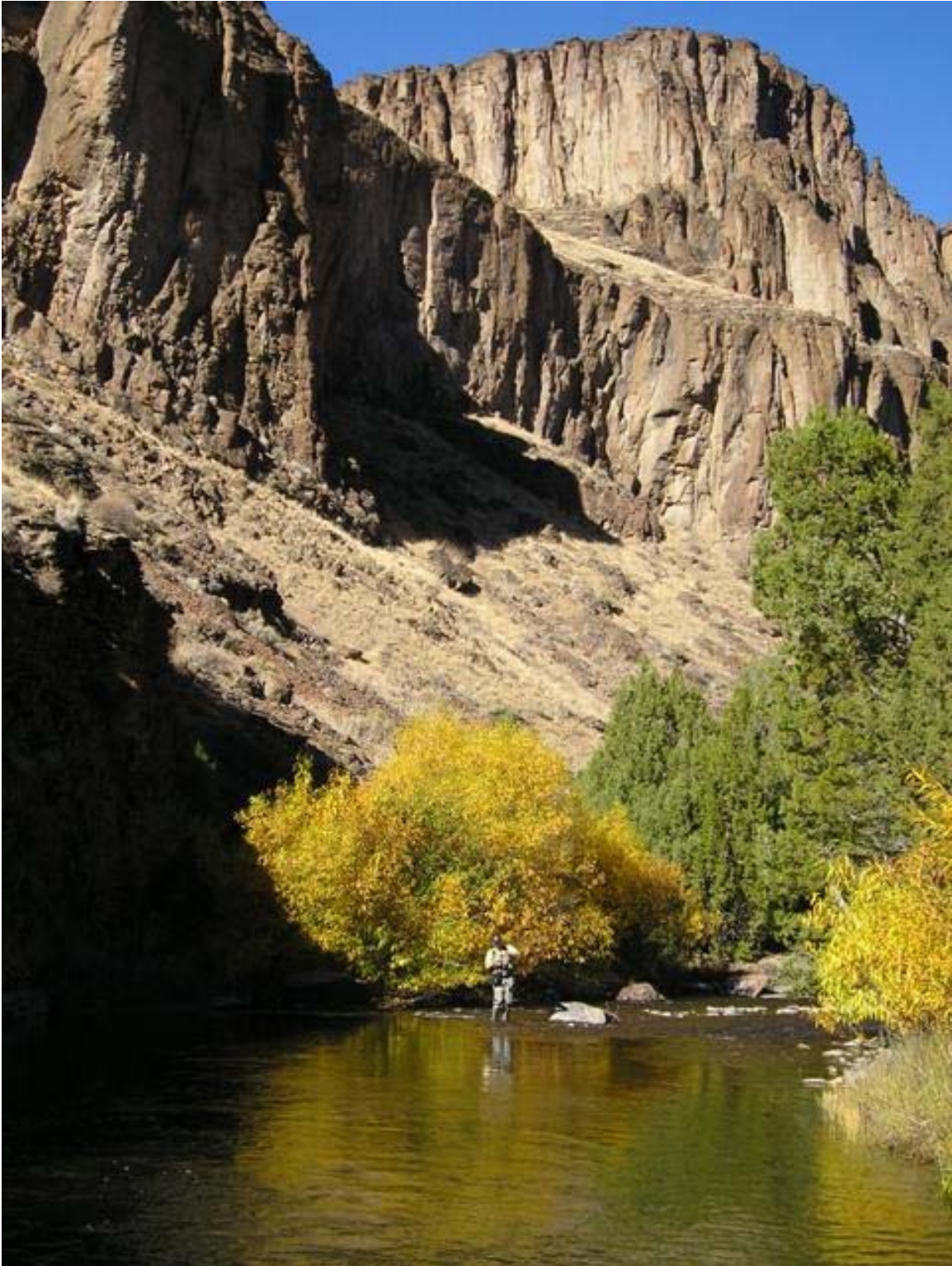
The Columbia River Redband Trout *Oncorhynchus mykiss gairdneri*, a subspecies of Rainbow Trout *Oncorhynchus mykiss*, is native to Owyhee canyon drainages. It is generally similar in appearance to the Rainbow Trout but can be differentiated by more orange-red around the lateral line, larger and rounder parr marks, and distinct white tips on the anal, dorsal and pectoral fins. The Redband's ideal habitat is clean, cool, relatively small and low gradient streams but is capable of enduring water temperatures up to 75-80°. I believe this river was tainted with planted Rainbow Trout at one point so I'm not 100% positive that what we were catching are Redbands. Planted fish are sterile but I'm not sure if that has always been the case. Anyway, I can't tell them apart. You decide?





Fishing the first hole on the Jarbidge

As we made our way upstream we both found that it wasn't rocket science to catch these fish. We pulled at least a couple fish out of every hole.



Fishing another hole on the Jarbidge



Scenes from the Jarbidge



After catching several fish I tied on a small Elk Hair Caddis. Dry flies in November? Why not, after all it was T-shirt weather! The fishing wasn't as fast but I had plenty of fish rising to my dries.



Rick had caught his fair share of Redbands and was hoping for a Bull Trout to add to his species count. Although there are many other species reported to inhabit the drainage, all we caught were Redbands.

It was time to call it good for the day. I wanted to get back to the gravel road before dark. I figured setting up the tent before dark was a long shot. Our plan was to drive down to Jarbidge Forks on the Nevada border near Murphy Hot Springs. We planned to fish another stretch of the Jarbidge the next morning. Come to find out, it could have been a possibility to set up in the light if we didn't get a flat tire along the way.

The flat tire greatly hindered our planned route for the way home. We had planned to cross through northern Nevada on the back roads along the upper Bruneau River and come out on the highway at Grasmere. The other option was driving on paved roads back to Twin Falls. We put off that decision until we were finished fishing for the morning.

We fished where the west fork and east fork combine to join the Jarbidge at the input. We also hiked about a mile downstream from the road. It was more of the same as far as fishing on the Jarbidge goes; we caught more Redbands. The fishing was a lot slower but

that was expected for a more accessible area. The canyon was also a lot wider and not as deep. The wilderness section was much more exciting and faster fishing.



Fishing near Jarbidge Forks

It was now time to make a decision. We decided the flat tire was a fluke since it happened on a nice stretch of road. It looked like a nail had made the hole while passing through Murphy Hot Springs. We decided to chance it and take the back roads through the Humboldt Forest of northern Nevada. We first made a short side trip to the ghost town of Jarbidge, Nevada. It was a unique place to say the least but far from abandoned. It was definitely worth seeing as were the hoodoos along the way.



We made our way through the forest on the windy road. We passed a few Elk hunters along the way. The view of the peaks jutting from the Jarbidge Wilderness was quite a sight as were the canyons of the upper Bruneau.

As we approached civilization we decided to make one last stop below the dam at CJ Strike Reservoir for the chance at a big Rainbow. It is also a great place to catch a Sturgeon, which is on both of our lists, but we didn't have the gear. The only highlight from fishing CJ Strike was seeing a rare Common Loon diving for Crawdads near the dam. Rick may not have agreed but he stopped fishing to take a picture for me anyway.



I think he was wondering what happened to his older brother when he picked up his binoculars instead of his fly rod. I told him that I wasn't going to get deep enough with my fly and that this was a birding hot spot. "So is that why you brought me out here?" he said. "Yes and No", I said, "A good fisherman would have had a big Rainbow by now"! "That is a bunch of bull", he exclaimed. "No", I said, "That is what you are going to catch next year on your adventure with me to Big Creek."

I think this was the kickoff trip, starting a new era for Rick and I, in the search for big Bull Trout. I realize they are endangered and they will be in the water when I take the picture before I release them unharmed. The search for Golden Trout has brought us some great memories together. That era ended when we caught our dream 19"- 20" Golden in the Wind Rivers of Wyoming last year. I think Backpacking 20 miles on the last day may have had something to do with ending the golden era as well.

The search for Golden Trout all started on our first adventure in the White Clouds. We ran across a cliff face to escape an avalanche created by Mountain Goats crossing above. It was also on that same trip that he and Justin laughed for the last ten miles of the trip as I darted several times into the woods to relieve my flu symptoms. I'm sure glad Justin had wet wipes! They also laughed when I had to use my raincoat inside my tent to keep the raindrops from hitting me in the forehead. What a trip!

How about the time when we survived the night of the big storm in the Bighorn Crags that burned over a dozen homes in Boise on its way to greet us! Luckily, I had a new tent from my experience in the White Clouds the previous year. And last but not least, how about last year in the Wind Rivers when it was a contest to see how fast we could use the bathroom to reduce the number of welts the Mosquitoes would leave on our rumps. Those memories are what it's all about.

Hey Rick, I look forward to next July at Big Creek in the River of No Return Wilderness when I can say "Now that is a bunch of bull!" Until then, happy big fish dreams!