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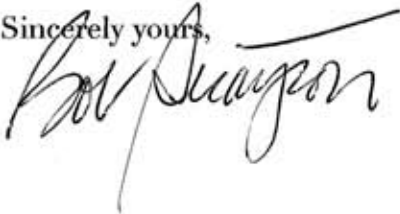
Dear Tom and DeeAnn,

Forgive the delay in getting to you this draft -- which we promised in September -- of our fishing experience on the East Gallatin River.

As with all good intentions, ours became mired in an effort to have third parties more familiar with the river than we are give us their input. This resulted in what many authors call the "ping pong effect." I ping you for information, and you pong back with questions about intent, content and metaphysical matters. We were able to get it sorted out and produced the enclosed draft. There is consensus that it represents accurately both the opportunities and the challenges of the river in a balanced fashion. As for our personal views, you know what they are, as we are coming for four nights in September to brave the river's twists and turns and go after all those beautiful fish.

Hope you have a happy Christmas and a fulfilling New Year. Please give our best to Wayne, who so ably assisted us last year and added immeasurably to our enjoyment of your wonderful ranch.

Sincerely yours,



Encl: Draft of Fishing the East Gallatin River

cc = Bob Ford

The East Gallatin River is a rich meadow stream that originates in the Bridger and Gallatin Mountains near Bozeman, Montana, and flows west – at times in exceptionally serpentine fashion -- for 37 miles through historic Gallatin Valley to join in Manhattan, MT, with the main stem of the Gallatin River. Ten miles further downstream, the Gallatin merges with the Madison and Jefferson Rivers in Trident, MT, to create the headwaters of the Missouri River.

During much of its course, the East Gallatin flows through private farms and ranches that largely limit the angler's access to several public bridges and easements. Most such access points are located in the Belgrade area.

The river's topography in many sections poses wading, floating and egress challenges for even the most resourceful angler. Most of the river's bank is clay-like soil that has eroded into a sheer wall that rises several feet above the water level; dense overhanging willow and brush cover makes wading and casting from these banks nearly impossible. The river's depth varies substantially, from large deep pools to wide gravel bars only two- to three-inches deep that make the use of McKenzie boats, rowboats and belly boats impractical. Low-draft vessels such as canoes, kayaks, pontoon boats and rafts can float, but require continuous care and attention because of dangerous hydrodynamic flows. In many stretches, the river twists in tight turns that cause current streams to bend sharply and race from bank to bank at high speed, easily sweeping an unmindful craft into steep banks or under thick overgrowths. Further, much of the river is isolated from any source of assistance in the event of difficulty. Few homes or people are near the river, and dense brush and groundcover make getting from the river to safety problematical.

These conditions moderate as one approaches and fishes an eight-mile stretch through the Twin Rivers Ranch property to the river's junction with the main stem of the Gallatin near Nixon Bridge in Manhattan. Much of this stretch offers increasingly wadable sections and water conditions found on classic trout streams.

Despite its perils, the East Gallatin is an attractive destination. Lack of fishing pressure has produced a fish population that in many sections of the river is exceptional. The three principal gamefish species are rainbow and brown trout and whitefish. Most fly-fishing shops in the greater Bozeman area document many instances of hook-ups with large fish and/or large numbers of fish. During certain hatches, like trico and baetis hatches, observers on bridges or other viewing points often see hundreds of fish working within their limited field of vision.

The river produces occasional 20-inch-plus browns and rainbows to anglers who fish appropriately where such fish hold. More common are days of 20-fish hook-ups, with fish averaging eight to 16 inches in length. Much of course depends upon the weather (cloudy is better), the hatches (there are many), and the presence of terrestrials (ants, beetles, hoppers) to supplement the food chain. And, though the float trips are challenging, well-prepared anglers can and will find many excellent places to stop and fish legally in the river itself, since accessing private land from a river, except at designated points, is not permitted in Montana.

Recently, two guests at Twin Rivers Ranch explored by small Avon raft approximately seven miles of private, rarely fished sections of the river from Spaulding Bridge to the far end of the ranch property. The weather varied from bright and sunny (poor fishing) to hail and rain (with exceptional baetis hatches). Over a three-day period, including one bright day when only three fish were caught, the party caught and released more than 50 trout ranging from 7-to-18 inches (both species) and several whitefish larger than 20 inches, using streamers, buggers, nymphs, beadheads, emergers and dry flies. This occurred despite that fact that they were exploring the river (and avoiding its risks) and fished less than half of their time on the river. The group identified numerous places in the river where wading is possible on large gravel bars, by islands or other stream divides, and along stretches of bank where shelves, sandbars and casting room are available. During one five-mile float in the midst of an afternoon-long baetis hatch, the anglers reported seeing thousands of rising fish the entire length of their float.

In summary, the East Gallatin offers excellent fishing opportunities that come with several substantial challenges. There is consensus that the river holds an excellent fish population, but requires searching except during steady hatching periods. Guides discourage anglers from floating because of the degree of difficulty in boat handling, fishing/casting effectiveness, and haul-out. For adventurers, there are good "in-the-water" fishing spots, but they tend to be spread out, and floats of necessity are long and involve tricky navigating. A few "walk-in," "wade-in" or "rod-fee" access sites can be found around the town of Belgrade and near and below Nixon Bridge. Several miles of premiere private water is accessible to anglers who wish to rent one of the several fishing cottages and lodge at the Twin Rivers Ranch.