



MONTANA FLYFISHING CONNECTION, LLC

SOUTH FORK OF THE FLATHEAD – PLANNING & PACKING GUIDE

TRIP OVERVIEW

The South Fork of the Flathead is known in the fly fishing world as the Mecca for dry-fly Cutthroat Trout fishing. Located in the 1.5-million-acre Bob Marshall Wilderness, America's first ever designated wilderness area. The South Fork is formed from the junction of Danaher Creek and Young's Creek and runs for 45 miles due north, fed by dozens of small tributaries, where it exits the wilderness near Spotted Bear Ranger Station. Our trip itineraries take you to the best water in the wilderness area and will take you to the deepest, most remote area of the "Bob."

Fly-fishing on the South Fork is known to be some of the best in the world. Due to the South Fork's wilderness isolation, the river and its tributaries remain lightly fished, and the result is that the quality of the fishery is as good now as it was many decades ago. Skilled anglers can catch over 100 fish per rod on good days, but it is common for each boat to land 40+ native cuts a day. These Cutthroat Trout range in size, but there are many in the 12 - 18" range, and they love to rise to dry flies! The South Fork is also one of the only places where an angler can catch the native Bull Trout. The South Fork Drainage is the largest stronghold of these native Char in the Lower 48 states. These lurkers act like an anadromous species, migrating upstream every July from Hungry Horse Reservoir. Lucky anglers have brought Bull trout more than 30 inches to hand. Legal fishing season for Bull Trout usually closes on July 31.

Because the South Fork lies within the Bob Marshall Wilderness, special regulations and permits apply. There are only a few Commercial Outfitting Permits on the river, and we are lucky to have an exclusive relationship with one of these outfitters.

FLOAT TRIPS

South to North Itinerary. "South End" trips begin in Missoula. On the first morning we will pick you up at your hotel and transport you to the Lodgepole Pass trail head north of the town of Ovando (about 1.5 hours from Missoula). The first day ride takes us to Young's Creek. Day 2 requires a half day ride down to Big Prairie. The Float trip then carries us 4 days north to the Meadow Creek trailhead. Airfare should be into Missoula and out of Kalispell for this trip.

SE to North Itinerary. "South East" trips begin in Great Falls. On the first morning we will pick you up at your hotel and transport you to the Benchmark trail head west of the town of Augusta (about 1.5 hours from Great Falls). This trip lands us on Danaher Creek for the first night's camp. Day 2 requires a half day ride down to Big Prairie. The Float trip then carries us 4 days north to the Meadow Creek trailhead. Airfare should be into Great falls and out of Kalispell for this trip.

****There are several ways to customize or upgrade each of these itineraries****

- There may be a private charter flight at the beginning and/or end of the trip to eliminate several hours of driving.
- There are some wilderness boundary lodges near the trailheads that you could stay the night before to eliminate long travel days on the first morning of your trip and to add to the experience.

****Please let me know as early as possible if you would like to explore these options****

WADE FISHING TRIPS

Benchmark to Lodgepole - "Roving" Wade trip

Roving trips eliminate the floating part of the trip and focus on the smaller upstream waters of the Southfork drainage that most anglers just ride by and wish they could fish.

It is important to remember that the nature of a roving trip is that you will ride into the wilderness to access amazing trout fishing, moving camp several times during the trip so that you can access several different rivers/streams and then you will ride back out. Since you are riding in and back out of the wilderness, there is roughly twice as much time in the saddle as the standard float trip itinerary.

The challenge of these trips is to find the balance of maximizing fishing time and fishing as much new water as possible. Getting to new water requires packing up and moving, and you can't fish while you are riding. The only way to add more fishing time is to "layover" in the same camp for more than one day. Yet, with less moving, you will end up fishing some of the same pools more than once, or do more hiking each day out of camp to reach new water. With that in mind we feel the following itineraries are the best.

Starting at the Benchmark Trailhead west of Great Falls;

Day 1 – Ride into camp at Basin Creek confluence with the Danaher

Day 2 – Layover and fish Danaher Creek

Day 3 – Move camp and ride to Big Prairie on the Southfork of the Flathead

- Fish in the afternoon upon arrival

Day 4 – Layover and fish Southfork at Big Prairie Area

Day 5 – Move camp and ride to Young's Creek near the "Hole in the Wall"

- Fish in the afternoon upon arrival

Day 6 – Layover and fish Young's Creek

Day 7 – Ride out of wilderness to Lodgepole Trailhead

This trip can be run in the opposite direction from Lodgepole to Benchmark. The itinerary is very symmetrical, so it can literally just be flipped. Airfare should be into Great Falls and out of Missoula, or vice-versa.

The best way to improve this itinerary is to add a day and make it an 8-day trip. This then allows you to do a double layover at Big Prairie on the Southfork (or one of the other camps), which really adds some rest from the horses and an extra day of uninterrupted fishing.

Again, there are several "add-ons" to customize or upgrade any of our wilderness trips

- There may be a private charter flight at the beginning and/or end of the trip to eliminate several hours of driving.
- There are some wilderness boundary lodges near the trailheads that you could stay the night before to eliminate long travel days on the first morning of your trip and to add to the experience.

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South Fork of the Flathead River - Horseback Pack In / Float Out Trip

PACKING

A soft bag or nylon duffel bag up to 15" diameter so that it can be stuffed into our dry bags or packed on horses. ***If you plan on traveling with a hard-sided bag or a bag with rollers, you must pack another simple soft duffel inside to repack into as roller bags cannot go on the mules.

PERSONAL ITEMS

Sleeping Bag – preferably a 20 Degree down bag that is compressible

Small camp pillow / or inflatable pillow

Day pack, waterproof for gear you might need on the river. (You will carry this with you each day.)

Toilet kit (small)

One bath towel and two hand towels. (quick dry microfiber camp towels recommended)

Flashlight or headlight with extra batteries

Heavy drawstring trash bags (2)

"Cottonelle" or other brand flushable wipes. (great for the latrine or a quick "sponge bath")

Hand sanitizer

Camera with extra battery (optional)

Small binoculars (optional)

Sunscreen, insect repellent, polarized sunglasses

Personal spirits (beer and wine are provided)

RIDING PORTION

One pair of jeans (that you do not intend to wear again after the horseback portion of the trip)

Long sleeve shirt (a little heavier than fishing weight) You may brush against branches, etc.

Pair of sturdy hiking boots, but not too aggressive of a sole. (you want to be able to get in and out of stirrups, but also be able to jump down and walk for a while – Cowboy boots are not recommended, unless you wear them regularly)

Wide brimmed hat - Straw cowboy hat, fishing hat, etc.

Bandana, or "Buff" brand style face cover to help with dust

Optional – very small "Fanny Pack" style bag to hold sunscreen, camera, etc. while on the horse (Saddle bags will hold a few essentials)

Some choose to wear gel-padded cycling shorts under their jeans to help stay comfortable in the saddle

Also, if you have knee problems, it is helpful to wear neoprene sleeve knee braces

RIVER PORTION

Polar fleece sweat shirt or wool sweater

Polar Fleece hat (nice to sleep in if it gets cold)

Ball cap/fishing hat

A warm jacket even in August

A pair of polypro long underwear - These are essential in spring and fall

Smartwool Socks

Shorts or a swimsuit

River sandals or wading boots (river is extremely slippery - felt is highly recommended over non-slip rubber)

Before July 20th - Breathable chest waders. Chest waders with a raincoat will keep you dry! (Optional - if you choose not to bring waders, a quality rain suit is a must)

Two long sleeved shirts (fishing type)

Two pairs of pants (The quick-dry, zip-off leg pants are nice)

Good rain gear!!!! (If you are wet you will be miserable! If there is one thing you don't overlook, this is it. If you have been waiting to buy a nice Simms jacket, this is the year to do it!)

One pair of dry shoes for around the camp. (may be same or different from riding boots)

FISHING GEAR

Polarized sunglasses

Wide Brim hat (same as above)

Small Day pack/ dry bag (same as above)

Small Fly Vest/chest pack (should fit in above day pack)

Fly Rods – 1 to 2 rods, if you bring one, it should probably be a 9' 5wt. if you bring two, you could bring a 5wt and a 6wt, or add a 4wt, (most of the fishing will be with dry flies, but if you intend to fish for Bull Trout, you may want to bring the heavier 6wt+ for streamers)

Having listed all the above, please try to keep your gear as light and compact as possible due to limited space on the rafts and horses.

We provide all camping equipment including a tent for each two guests, the highest quality cots, inflatable Therma-Rest pads, heavy rubberized dry bags for your belongings and floatation vests. We also supply terminal fishing tackle including flies, tippet, etc. Non-alcoholic beverages and dinner wine will be provided. Liquor bar is not provided, but you are welcome to BYOB. Dry bags are also provided for each client, allowing you to pack your gear in waterproof bags and keep your clothing safe and dry on the river.

NON-ANGLING ACTIVITIES AND OPTIONS

While the South Fork is a great angling adventure, non-anglers will no doubt enjoy the trip just as much. Wildlife is abundant throughout the river corridor. Deer, elk, the occasional black bear or mountain goat, eagles and other birds of prey, migratory songbirds search the bushes and the sky for an unsuspecting stonefly. A mid-day hike in the foothills may be rewarded with the treasure of a “shed” elk or deer antler. Although this is grizzly bear country, they are rarely seen. Hiking, eating great food, reading and – above all – relaxing in one of the lower 48’s most remote places are all important elements of this trip.

INTERNET / COMMUNICATIONS

There is no wireless or cell service in the Wilderness. Each trip will have a satellite phone, and/or a US Forest Service radio that can be used to contact rangers in the event of an emergency. If you anticipate needing any communication during the trip it is highly recommended that you rent a satellite phone of your own.

If you have any questions, please contact:

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