

# Tarry awhile at Fishing Camp, in Colorado's last best wilderness

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Caption +

LAKE GEORGE - "If you've tried three flies and still haven't hooked one of these guys," said Scott Tarrant, wading farther out into the Tarryall River, "remember what the old-timers say. Foam is home. Follow the bubbles."

"Sounds like a beer drinker's election slogan to me," said Josh, the group's self-appointed comedian, peering into the ripples swirling around a fallen tree trunk.

"Bet they weren't fly fishermen, either," said Scott, camp manager at Fishing Camp, a fishing lodge in Colorado's South Park. "Fishermen would know that a line of bubbles is where two currents meet. It's like a conveyor belt sweeping fish and floating insects together. "

Crossing the river that morning, off for an early run in the Lost Creek Wilderness, I was thinking more about Kit Carson and Jim Bridger than I was about trout. Best-known of the fur trappers and mountain men who explored the Rocky Mountains in the early decades of the 1800s, Carson and Bridger camped in the "mountain paradise" they called South Park and knew it well.

But if it hadn't been for an invitation to a wedding at the historic Broadmoor hotel in Colorado Springs, I wouldn't have been at Fishing Camp at all. Without my dad along, hiking to our favorite mountain streams, learning which fly to use and how to spot the eddies where the trout lurked, fishing wasn't the same.

Especially memorable were his stories, full of boyhood recollections about lake fishing in Wisconsin. There was the time he struggled to haul a bass into the rowboat and a mean-looking snapping turtle suddenly lunged up and grabbed it, nearly taking off his finger. Or the one about the raccoon family that poached the pail of bluegills he'd left outside for no more than 10 minutes.

After he was gone, the rods and reels went back in the closet for good. Five years later the wedding invitation arrived. And with it came two nights at the legendary Broadmoor, at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, a luxury vacation destination popular since the hotel opened in 1918.

Which is where I learned about The Broadmoor's newest venture, three backcountry camps inspired by the hotel's new owner, Philip Anschutz, a student and admirer of Western traditions and history. (Anschutz's Clarity Media Group owns The Gazette). With the Rocky Mountains right there in the hotel's backyard, the time was ripe for offering the kind of authentic wilderness and ranch experiences that adventuresome travelers say they want.

Accordingly, the Ranch at Emerald Valley, a cowboy-style outfit at 8,200 feet in the Pike National Forest, was the first to open, in 2013. Cloud Camp, at 9,200 feet on Cheyenne Mountain, opened the following year, in 2014. But for Anschutz, who told me he discovered Colorado during the summer vacations his parents organized, the idea of recreating an old-time fishing lodge, with a big front porch, pine plank floors, rustic log cabins to bunk in and family-style dinners, must have been percolating.

And there it remained, according to a spokesman in Anschutz's office, until the he was out for a drive and spotted an abandoned log cabin on a former homestead in South Park, the grassy valley that Western scholar and author Bernard DeVoto called a mountain man's "paradise, the last place in the mountains where the old life could be lived to the full." When a little digging indicated that the cabin, on 76 acres, was not only next to one of Colorado's top-rated trout streams but that 5 miles of the river frontage was private land, Fishing Camp became a reality.

For all its connections with The Broadmoor, Fishing Camp is wonderfully rustic, the kind of place where everyone feels at home. But spartan it isn't. The main lodge, originally a homesteader's cabin, is now restored, rebuilt, re-chinked, reroofed, enlarged and insulated. The lighting and electricity have been upgraded to current standards. Bigger windows let in light and an improved pine board floor resists muddy boots.

Seven small log cabins, each different and sleeping two to eight guests, have also been updated, with new chinking and insulation. The door frames are old, the doors and screens are new. The rooms were small; the new rooms have been rearranged to add more space. Some cabins have private baths; three of the smallest - like so many 1950s and '60s wilderness camps - share a single bathhouse. As for the wood frame screen door on my cabin, it swung shut with a comfortable "thunk."

With a limit of 22 guests at any one time, Fishing Camp's isolation, at the foot of the Lost Creek Wilderness, and its private stretch of river frontage really is "your father's fishing stream." You could spend all day walking along the bank, soaking up the scenery and the solitude.

For experts, the Tarryall's turns and twists offer enough eddies, pools, snags and white water to challenge any skill level. And though Tarrant and his guides are catch-and-release sportsmen by choice, "Fishing Camp is a stream-to-table resort," he says. If you yearn for that old-time taste of wild rainbow trout, just caught and fried in butter, just ask.

As for eager beginners, you won't be bored holding a rod and watching a fishing line that never wiggles. Tarrant, who can snare a trout nearly on command, is a repository of facts about the climate, stream action, native insects and when they fly, and what a trout thinks as it rests in a quiet eddy.

Clearly, luring a fighting rainbow onto a hook is what Fishing Camp is all about. But don't stay away just because you don't fish. Bring the family fisherman along, and while he/she is catching dinner, take the car and explore South Park.

If you don't want to hike, ask about four-wheel jeep trails into the Lost Creek Wilderness, where a network of trails go from one photo op to the next: eagles' nests, marshy meadows and half-ruined pioneer cabin sites. Wannabe cowboys can take a guided horseback ride at Tarryall River Ranch, just off the highway, 3 miles south of Fishing Camp.

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