

KID GUIDE

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A HIGH SCHOOL KID HAD REACHED OUT TO HIM ABOUT HIS STREAMER ADDICTION

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AND PHOTOGRAPHY

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WE WERE DIVING BACK TO ENNIS, MONTANA, FROM A SOLID DAY OF FISHING IN YELLOWSTONE. THE DAY HAD BEEN FILLED WITH MOSQUITO-INFESTED HIKES AND FEISTY CUTTHROAT ON STREAMERS. FULLY SATISFIED, WE SPED DOWN HIGHWAY 287 PAST THE MADISON RIVER'S MOONLIT RIFFLES. WITH THE SOUNDS OF A FLY-FISHING PODCAST FILLING THE CAR, COURTNEY AND I DISCUSSED WHAT THE NEXT WEEK WOULD HOLD. THIS WAS OUR THIRD SUMMER TO BE ROAD-TRIPPING THROUGH MONTANA AND WE WERE READY TO MOVE ON TO UNEXPLORED TERRITORY.

EXCLUSIVE



Childlike enthusiasm in all its glory.



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We were diving back to Ennis, Montana, from a solid day of fishing in Yellowstone. The day had been filled with mosquito-infested hikes and feisty cutthroat on streamers. Fully satisfied, we sped down Highway 287 past the Madison River’s moonlit riffles. With the sounds of a fly-fishing podcast filling the car, Courtney and I discussed what the next week would hold. This was our third summer to be road-tripping through Montana and we were ready to move on to unexplored territory. As we discussed options and shared possibilities, he found a new message on his Instagram feed. A high school kid had reached out to him about his streamer addiction and offered to show us around his

neck of the woods for a few days. Neither of us knew anything about the Whitefish area, only that it was tucked under the Canadian border, far from the grassy banks of the Madison where the salmon flies had just left town.

Over fireside beers, we went back and forth about the six-hour drive north. The kid was fishy, for sure, and he had pictures of big rainbows, bull trout, and buttery browns scattered between typical high school photos on his Instagram feed. As we zipped up the tent for the evening, we decided to pack up the car and head north at sunrise.



Opposite: Marty and Courtney debate fly selection during the Green Drake hatch. Above: Looking for the next likely holding water and swapping stories.



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With six hours on the road, there was plenty of time to guess what we were getting ourselves into. Was this kid for real? What was the river going to be like? Did we bring the right flies? As we turned down the final dirt road and began our 50-mile journey into the wilderness, the afternoon rain combined with the dirt-road dust, to coat my car with a nice patina. Upon arrival, we stretched our legs, set up camp, and made our bear spray handy. The campsite was wedged between wilderness areas on a cliff overlooking the confluence of two remarkably beautiful rivers. We stood high above the deep pool watching west-slope cutthroat rise to the passing insect life.

of the car with a buff around his neck and fly rods of every weight spilling from the tailgate. The three of us exchanged pleasantries and shared a few stories from the summer, but eager to get on the river, our conversations did not last long.

The three of us crossed the crystal-clear tributary near camp, and started our way up the far bank of the river. Before we had passed the first run we could see fish coming completely out of the water to take Green Drakes drifting in the current. As we stood on bankside cobbles, Marty shared some insight on fly selection and we each decided on a fly for the evening.

We kept one eye keenly fixed on the structure hanging off the bank as we finished cinching our knots. Almost predictably, the fish showed themselves in the current. Their slow rises through the water column and playful explosion through the surface of the river had the three of us eager to test our fly selection.

Opposite Clockwise: Strong, healthy fish coupled with lightweight gear make for exciting times. The Edgevale Cast Iron shorts getting run through the dryer. Courtney checks his knot after a few fish and preps his fly for another dance down the river. Below: My weapon of choice when chasing fish with dry flies. The Butterstick is magic.



We had come a long way, plowing through unfamiliar territory, deep into the wilderness to meet some high school fishing nut we really knew nothing about. To say I was a little skeptical would be an understatement, but the smell of pine and fresh rain coupled with the rising trout and solitude, had allowed my expectations on the rise.

Just as we strung up our rods and thumbed through our dry-fly boxes, Marty showed up in what appeared to be his mom's old Suburban. A true Montana kid, he bounced out



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Within a few casts, Courtney held a healthy westslope cutthroat in hand. After a few photos we let it head back to its watery home. From there, both Marty and I pulled nice fish from the same run. The kid's casting was clearly born from experience and lots of time spent on the river after school. Over the next hour or so, the three of us traded fish, and shared laughs at the enthusiasm of their rises. For every fish we landed, there would be two missed due to our overly-eager hook sets. After a brief rainstorm, the river clouded and fishing slowed significantly. Once the water changed in a few minutes, from gin clear to chocolate milk, we knew this evening on the river was over. We retired to the campfire for the night and hoped the river would clear by morning.

We woke to better water conditions and Marty took us further upriver. His experience on these waters was impressive, considering he was heading into his senior year of high school. The bottom was easily visible, but the cutties were tucked deep under the bank-side structure. Our kid-guide pointed out some likely holding spots and if you looked long enough, you would see their classic rise.

WORDS BY TYLER GRAFF

A good drift with the right fly would yield results. The fish only got more eager as we moved upstream. We had landed some really nice fish during the evening hatch and the sun began to slide behind the mountains of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area. Campfire dinners were calling us and Marty needed to head back home to make it in time for his curfew. Nobody wanted to upset his mom! We walked back down to the campsite, traded flies, and promised to send each other some photos from the two days we were chasing trout. A campfire was started while Marty reluctantly climbed back into the Suburban to start his journey home.

Without cell service and plenty of fish to keep us entertained, we had not touched our phones in days. No Instagram, texts, or emails, and it felt good! However, without the Marty connection through social media, it is unlikely Courtney and I would have visited this corner of Montana, tucked far away from our phones glowing screens. More importantly, we met a hell of a fisherman, even if he had yet to turn eighteen.

Below: Marty's having too much fun, even when he's missing hook sets. Opposite Clockwise: Admiring nature's work. Untouched wilderness and healthy rivers make for some special fish. Marty plays guide and nets another feisty cuttie. A West Slope Cutthroat headed home.

