

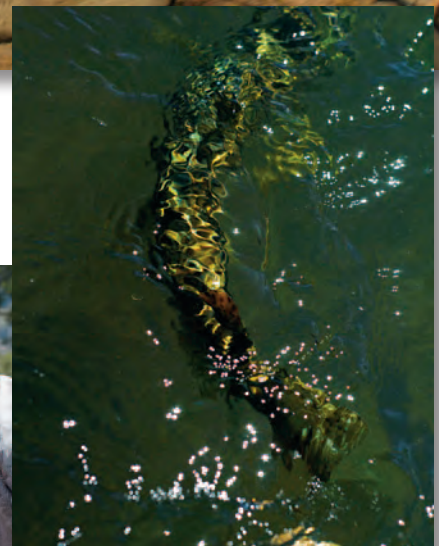
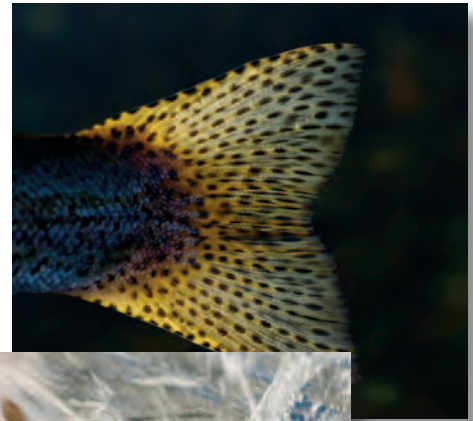
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Photos by Brian Grossenbacher.

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Photos by Brian Grossenbacher.

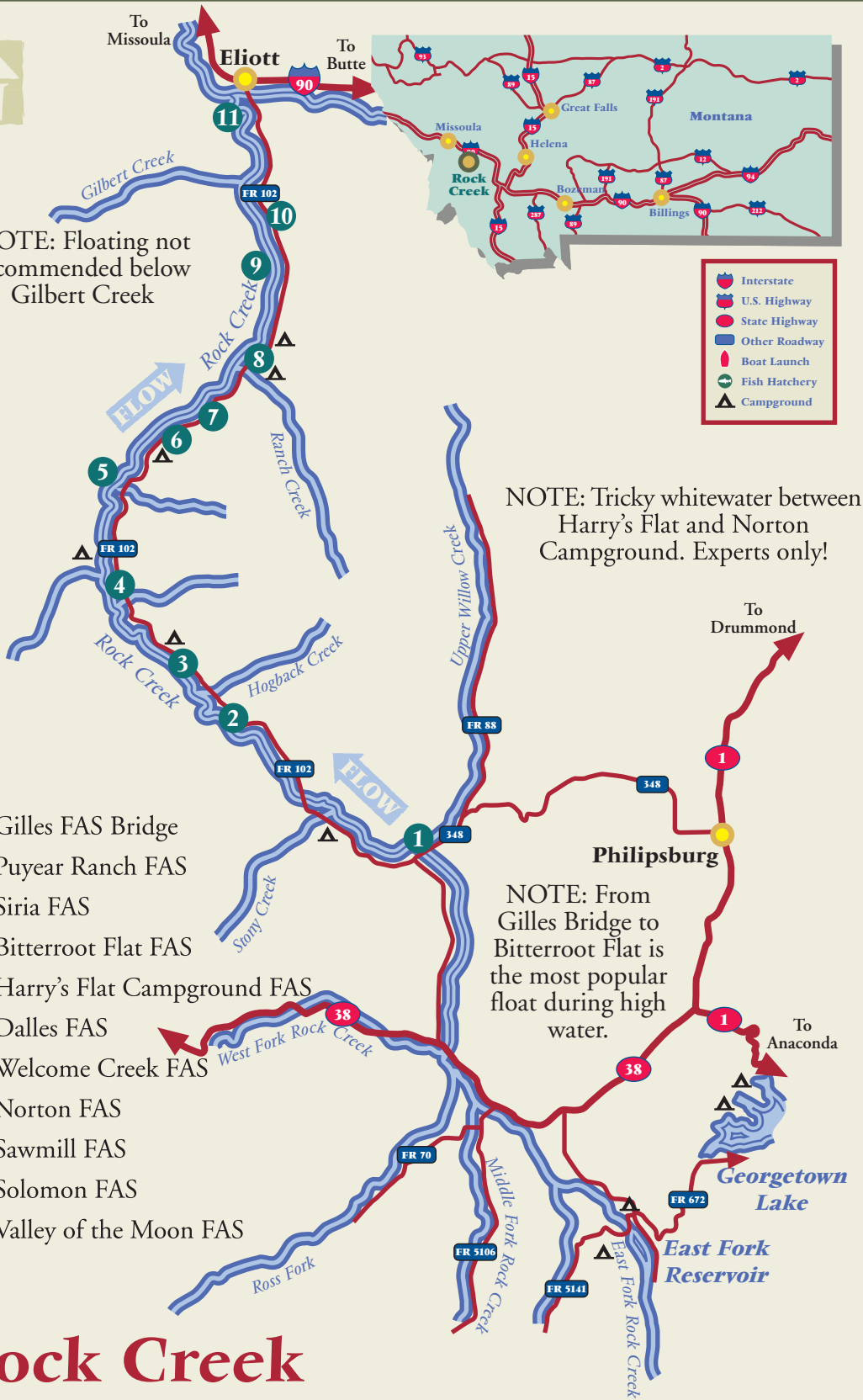


To Missoula
To Butte



NOTE: Floating not recommended below Gilbert Creek

	Interstate
	U.S. Highway
	State Highway
	Other Roadway
	Boat Launch
	Fish Hatchery
	Campground



NOTE: Tricky whitewater between Harry's Flat and Norton Campground. Experts only!

NOTE: From Gilles Bridge to Bitterroot Flat is the most popular float during high water.

- 1 Gilles FAS Bridge
- 2 Puyear Ranch FAS
- 3 Siria FAS
- 4 Bitterroot Flat FAS
- 5 Harry's Flat Campground FAS
- 6 Dalles FAS
- 7 Welcome Creek FAS
- 8 Norton FAS
- 9 Sawmill FAS
- 10 Solomon FAS
- 11 Valley of the Moon FAS

Rock Creek

Rock Creek

Rock Creek is the quintessential freestone trout stream in Western Montana. Careful regulations, limited development and ready access, all contribute to the allure of Rock Creek. Yet, when you add a healthy trout population and bountiful aquatic life, the picture is complete. From its modest beginnings between the John Long and Sapphire Mountains at the confluence of its East, Middle and West forks, Rock Creek tumbles 52 miles to the Clark Fork. Rock Creek is an excellent choice for anglers of all ability levels and is the best place around Missoula to view big game including bighorn sheep, elk, deer, moose, and less frequently black bear and mountain lion. Rock Creek is a perennial favorite to anyone who has ever wet a line in its rushing waters.

Rock Creek runs through National Forest land for much of its course and is paralleled by Rock Creek Road creating easy access for the wading angler. The river above Gilles Bridge is a slower moving meadow stream with 10"-12" westslope cutthroat and the occasional brookie. Most anglers concentrate on the section downstream from Gilles Bridge as the volume of water and size of the fish increases substantially. Rainbow trout become more prevalent as you continue downstream and the average size jumps up to 14". From Harry's Flat Campground to the confluence with the Clark Fork, the river becomes more of a brown trout fishery with riffle, run and pool characteristics. As a general rule, this is where the larger fish in Rock Creek are caught, partially due to a population of migratory browns that move in from the Clark Fork to spawn in the fall.

Types of Fish:

Brook, Brown, Bull, Westslope Cutthroat and Rainbow Trout, Whitefish.

Known Hatches:

March-April: Baetis, March Browns, Skwalas.

April-May: Green Drakes, Mahogany Duns, Baetis.

May-June: Caddis, Skwalas, Green Drakes.

June-July: Salmonflies, Golden Stones, Yellow Sallies, PMDs.

August-September: Tricos, craneflies, hoppers, PMDs.

Equipment to Use:

Rods: 4-5 weight, 8-9 feet in length.

Lines: Floating line for dries and nymphs.

Leaders: 7½'-9' 3-4x for nymphs, 9'-10' 4-5x for dries, 7' 0-2X for streamers.

Flies to Use:

Dries: Parachute Adams #12-20, CDC Green Drake #10-16, Parachute Stone #10-12, Stimulator #4-16, Skwala Stonefly Dry #10-12, Elk Hair Caddis #10-16, Foam Yellow Sally #12-18, Sparkle Dun #16-18, Rusty Spinner #16, PMX #10-14, Turk's Tarantula #8-10, Royal Wulff #10-16, Ants & Beetles #12-20.

Nymphs: Olive Hare's Ear #10-14, Brook's Stone #2-8, Black & Orange Rubber Legs #2-8, Poxyback Stone Nymph #6-16, Kaufman's Gold Stone #2-12, Bitch Creek #2-8, Brown Stone Rubber Leg #8-10, Trico Nymph #18-22, Copper John #10-16, Prince Nymph #10-16, Lightning Bug #12-18, San Juan Worm.

Streamers: Woolly Buggers #4-8, Muddler and Clouser Minnow #4-8, JJ Special #4-8, Shenk's Scuplin #4-8.



Rock Creek's course through National Forest land creates excellent access for wading anglers. Photo by Brian Grossenbacher.



*Anglers enjoy the fall baetis hatch on Rock Creek.
Photo by Brian Grossbacher.*

Rock Creek is best known for its prolific salmonfly hatch that kicks off between late May and early June. The word is out on this hatch so expect to share the water with plenty of fellow anglers. Giant golden stones also begin to appear about the same time as the salmonflies, and provide a longer window of “big bug” dry fly fishing, often into July and with some reduction of fishing pressure. If you enjoy less crowded conditions consider early and late season.

Rock Creek enjoys a full season of dry fly action beginning in late March with the skwala stones, and March browns. Cloudy days in April offer excellent baetis hatches, and the summer is rife with salmonflies, giant golden stones, yellow Sallies, spruce moths, terrestrials, and excellent attractor fishing. Baetis return again in the fall, along with great streamer fishing, and the occasional October caddis. Nymph fishing with large black stoneflies such as the Kauffmann’s stone #2-4, or the brown stone rubber legs (#8-10) is productive year-round. Nymph fishermen should remember to overweight their flies to get them down deep through the fast pockets of Rock Creek. If in doubt, fish a nymph rig as Rock Creek provides some of the most consistent nymph fishing found in Montana.



Be sure to catch the salmonfly hatch on Rock Creek.
Photo by Brian Grossenbacher.

When to Fish:

Rock Creek fishes well with streamers and nymphs year-round. However, there is consistent dry fly fishing from late March through the middle of summer. If you don't mind crowds, then go for the famous Salmonfly hatch in late May to early June.

Seasons & Limits:

The standard fishing regulations for the *Western* fishing district apply. Please check the *Montana Fishing Regulations and Etiquette* section.

Exceptions to Standard Regulations

From the confluence of the East and West Forks (Near Phillipsburg) to the mouth:

Combined Trout: 3 brown trout daily and in possession, none over 12 inches. Catch-and-release for rainbow trout and cutthroat trout.

Artificial lures only, except anglers 14 years of age and younger may use bait.

Extended season for whitefish and catch-and-release for trout open December 1 to third Saturday in May with artificial lures and/or maggots only.

Closed to fishing from boats July 1 through November 30.

Nearby Fly Fishing:

Clark Fork, Bitterroot, Blackfoot.

Accommodations & Services:

Rock Creek Fisherman’s Mercantile & Motel (406-825-6440: www.rcmerc.com) offers two cabins and a six-room hotel, plus fly fishing expertise to boot.

Although the name may fool you, the Big Horn B&B (406-859-3109: www.bighornmontana.com) is located on Rock Creek and also offers a private cabin a short drive from Philipsburg.

There are multiple camping sites all along Rock Creek, including Norton, Grizzly, Dalles, Harry’s Flat, Bitterroot Flat, Siria, and Squaw Rock.

Rating: 9

Rock Creek is Western Montana’s quintessential freestone trout stream and is hands-down the most consistent nymph fishery in the area year-round. Rock Creek also offers excellent streamer fishing throughout the year. Add to that an exceptional dry fly season in June/July, a noticeable lack of development, and frequent sightings of bighorn sheep, elk, deer, moose, and even black bear and mountain lion, and you’ll understand why Rock Creek offers a true Montana flyfishing experience.