

Fly Fisherman's Guide to Big Creek near the Chilcotin River

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Big Creek enters the Chilcotin river approximately 16 river-miles above the Fraser-Chilcotin confluence. Access to Big Creek is extremely difficult, and is typically only reached by rafting down the Chilcotin. Big Creek has a relatively high diversity of salmonids present, including bull trout, rainbow trout, and mountain whitefish. The different species of salmonids can be targeted using varied fly-fishing techniques.

The mostly piscivorous bull trout is most easily caught using streamer patterns that mimic juvenile salmonids and baitfish. Through "Hook and Line" sampling, we found the most effective streamer patterns for bull trout included Woolly Bugger and Zonkers. Bull trout did not seem to be particularly picky about the color of the streamer as long as it was presented in the correct way. Stripping, not dead-drifting the streamer was the best method for hooking into a bull trout. While bulls were, on average, the largest species found in Big Creek, they were not particularly exciting to catch: unlike the rainbows, the bulls preferred to "play dead" when hooked.

While bull trout were present in Big Creek near the confluence, rainbow trout and mountain whitefish were found in much greater numbers throughout the Creek. We found that dead-drifting weighted nymphs under an indicator or tight-lining nymphs to be the most successful method for hooking into rainbows or mountain whitefish. While not the most sought after species, the mountain whitefish were typically larger than any rainbows in the creek. Mountain whitefish ranged in size from 8-14", while most rainbows were in the 5-10" range, with the majority near the lower end.

The most effective nymph patterns were rubber-legs stonefly imitation or any medium to large stonefly imitation. Small mayfly nymphs such as flashback pheasant tails and assorted copper johns were also very successful with the rainbow trout of Big Creek.

Qualitative kicknet aquatic insect sampling and examination of fish stomach content indicates that rainbow trout and mountain whitefish are highly reliant on Stoneflies of the Perlid family and small mayflies of the Baetidae family. There were also numerous large perlid exoskeletons on the rocks surrounding Big Creek, indicating that a hatch may have recently occurred. Unlike the main channel of the Chilcotin, Chloroperlids, commonly known as yellow sallies, were not found in significant quantities in the creek. This may have been due to an earlier hatch. However, we didn't find any chloroperlid exoskeletons near the riverbank. Caddis flies, which we expected to find in moderate quantities, were nearly non-existent. However this may also have been due to a large caddis hatch before sampling.

Fly-fishing using a salmon egg pattern can also be successful in August and September, when Chinook salmon use Big Creek as a spawning ground and the resident salmonids key in on the highly nutritious eggs.

While the fish aren't particularly large and rarely rise to dries, the lower reaches of Big Creek provide an excellent place to fly-fish with spectacular scenery. If you're feeling adventurous, which you probably are since you've made it all the way to Big Creek, a hike upstream provides calmer and deeper pools that might just hold a hefty salmonid.

Tables and Figures



Figure 1. Perlid Exuviae on the shores of Big Creek.



Figure 2. Average sized Big Creek mountain whitefish.