



Finding & Fishing Pocket Water by Andy Asadorian



"Pocket water" is one of the most misused terms for describing trout habitat. It is by definition a deep riffle or run studded by boulders ranging in size from bowling balls to Volkswagens. Most often the turbulence from one rock or boulder intersects the turbulence of other rocks or boulders. These pockets can be found in almost every western trout stream from freestone rivers to tail waters to spring creeks. They offer trout not only shelter, but also great places to feed.

Pocket water may look inhospitable with water churning and frothing everywhere, but actually all of that disturbance creates breaks in the current and consequently adds oxygen to the water making for some of the best water in the river. These pockets are often passed over by unknowing anglers when there could potentially be a fish behind every rock. Even in the heat of summer when some say a river may be unfishable because of high

water temperature, oxygenated pocket water may still fish great.

When fly fishing pocket water I usually start at the bottom of the run working my way to the top. Trout position themselves head up facing the current, so by starting behind them I can sneak up without giving them the chance to see me. I also move from one side of the river to the other hitting all the areas where a trout could be. Giving three to six casts to a particular pocket then moving on. By wading the entire run I need only to make casts of twenty feet or less, sometimes casting only the leader.

Since you usually fly fish pocket water with such short casts, I typically fish a seven to ten foot leader tapered to 3x to 5x. The species of fish you are targeting and the size of flies you are using will determine the line weight of your rod. For trout I use an eight and a half to nine foot rod

for a four to six weight line. The use of a weight forward floating line will allow you to fish a variety of set-ups. When fishing pocket water a studded pair of felt bottom wading shoes can be worth their weight in gold. A wading staff can also be very helpful in maneuvering around these submerged boulder fields. I usually always wear waders when fishing in pocket water. The water can be uncomfortably cold even in ankle deep water.

One of my favorite ways to fish this type of water is shallow water nymphing. For this technique I use a weighted nymph then place an indicator or indicator fly four feet above the nymph. Casting directly upstream and slightly over my target will allow my fly to get down into the targeted area. By stripping in line with the speed of the current your line will stay taut making it possible to detect a strike. For flies, try standard nymphs like Pheasant Tails, Copper Johns, Hares Ears, and Prince Nymphs. I also use sculpin and leech patterns by themselves or with a dropper fly twelve to sixteen inches behind the sculpin or leech.

Pocket water also offers exciting dry fly fishing that can be fast and furious. Time of year and temperature of both air and water will determine your dry fly fishing. The summer months of July, August, and September offer the best chances for good pocket water dry fly fishing while in the Rocky Mountains. Again a standard selection of flies such as Royal Wulfs, Adams, and Humpies in sizes twelve through sixteen. Terrestrials can also prove to be very effective in the heat of the summer. Stick to the smaller hopper patterns, even if you see big hoppers on the banks since trout seem to eat smaller patterns more readily. Try the hopper dropper technique with one of the previously mentioned nymph patterns twelve to twenty-four inches below your hopper. An effective way of presenting your dry fly to the pocket is to use an upstream cast very similar to the cast in the shallow water nymphing technique.

In your quest for pocket water you may find yourself in some of the most beautifully scenic settings imaginable. Your fishing experiences in pocket water could be so impressionable that they may stay with you the rest of your life.

Fly fishing pocket water is great for inexperienced and experienced anglers alike. Anglers that are new to the sport will benefit from this kind of fishing because the casts are short, and mending is not as crucial because of the short casts. Since the water is broken on the surface a precise presentation is not as important as getting the fly where it needs to be. Just flip your fly out there and keep a tight line. Experienced anglers can look at fishing pocket water as practice, or a chance to try out new techniques such as Polish nymphing (which by the way is the most efficient way I have found to fish pocket water).

Last summer I had the chance to take one of the best anglers in the world fishing. Since his expertise is nymphing I decided to take him to the Box Canyon on the Henry's Fork because that area of the Henry's Fork offers some wonderful chances to fish pocket water. This guy was incredible! I had never seen anything like it in my entire angling career. He showed me how to thoroughly work this kind of structure, he calmly and systematically left no stone unturned. He fished roughly fifty yards and probably released no less than thirty fish. I was floored. After an hour or so of practice I felt fairly comfortable with the new technique and proceeded to catch more fish than ever before in the Box, but I was not fishing behind him that's for sure. I do not think a heron or cormorant could catch a fish behind this guy.