



Return to Silver Creek Sun Valley, Idaho

Story and Photos by
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Roger Lampman (L) and author on the Madison
about 1975

Sun Valley in early June was a sight to behold. Locals claimed it had been the wettest and greenest spring in memory, and that was easy to believe. On the short drive from Hailey to Picabo, the fields were lush and green through the valley of Silver Creek, perhaps the most beautiful spring creek on earth.

Passing the famous Purdy Ranch, fished frequently by Ernest Hemingway in his later years, we arrived at the charming log building that serves as the headquarters

of the Nature Conservancy, that fine organization which ensures the natural preservation of much of this splendid watershed and guarantees continued access to the general public. The conservancy cabin sits perched on the side of the gently molded, treeless sage-covered hills that surround the broad valley. After signing the visitor's log (and marveling at the international origins of perhaps half of the visitors) you may chat with the caretaker about conditions and hatches, then peer

through provided spotting scopes for rising trout. Whether trout are found or not, the plethora of song birds seldom seen elsewhere will keep you occupied and thrilled for hours. Bullock's Orioles, Western Tanagers, Kingbirds, shrikes and several varieties of raptors were spotted before my partner gently urged me to gear up and get going. Oh, yes! The unforgettable cry of the Sandhill Crane was heard among the pheasant calls.

It is small wonder that this idyllic



Bowman awaits a rise on lower Silver Creek.



A Silver Creek rainbow

Bowman playing a Silver Creek rainbow



valley became the favorite of the Hemingways, Ernest and his two angling sons, Jack and Patrick, but also Ted Trueblood (*Field & Stream* fishing editor and native Idahoan) and my friend Vernon “Pete” Hidy (disciple of the legendary Jim Leisenring and progenitor of the Cult of the Flymph). Silver Creek attracted these angling giants for a number of irresistible reasons: a large population of robust trout and fertile waters that produce prolific and predictable hatches of a multitude of species of mayflies and caddis. The mayflies range from the minuscule *tricorythodes* to the large and meaty green and brown drakes. When the emergence of these latter two coincides, the larger trout of Silver Creek forget their reclusive ways and rise with abandon. This was the state of things when Bruce Bowman and I found ourselves on Silver Creek in the lovely month of June.

Gazing across this gorgeous valley my mind drifted back to my first discovery of Silver Creek. To paraphrase Ian Tyson, I was “just out of the service, and lookin’ for some fun” and driving my VW bug from Southern California to New York City. Friends in Boise had introduced me to Pete Hidy, who shared his love of tying delicate wet flies in the traditional, organic manner. Flymphs he called them – a portmanteau describing an artificial fly representing the creature in its transitional moment from nymph to adult flying insect. Armed with a handful of his perfect creations, I was given directions and encouragement to try them on the jewel of a spring creek, Silver Creek.

Today the river valley looks pretty much as it did in 1973 except for the addition of the Nature Conservancy cabin, a few more parking turnouts and quite a bit more visitation. Then, I was a definite tyro – I did not even own a pair of hip boots! I roamed the lush, grassy banks in Frye boots and Levis casting a Fenwick Voyager with my first 12-foot, 6X leader, and by the end of my first day in Eden managed to land a beautiful sixteen-inch rainbow trout.

Fast forward to June, 2009. Bruce and I found ourselves in a fairly wonderful situation. Cool and overcast, conditions favorable for the emergence of good numbers of brown drakes (*Ephemera simulans*) accompanied by sporadic appearances of Western green drakes (*Ephemerella grandis*). In an earlier life, Bruce and I would plan, tie imitations and drive for 10 hours to the Yellowstone or Henry's Fork regions to catch these hatches, sometimes to miss them altogether. We considered ourselves lucky and blessed to find both of these mayflies on the water just at the time of our visit.

During the course of the next four days, we roamed the main stem of Silver Creek with its several tributaries and even passed a frustrating hour on the Sullivan Slough, a large crystalline spring hole where mammoth rainbows paraded past with maddening nonchalance.

Bruce and I were not properly prepared for these epic hatches. We had not

packed our duffel bags with those particular large boxes of Paradrakes, Paraduns and the other imitations of the large mayflies we found ourselves presented with. It was not totally an issue of poor planning (we were actually expecting to encounter emergences of the the more common *baetis*, Pale Morning Duns or possibly *callibaetis*, the Speckled Dun). These latter-mentioned bugs are commonly encountered in smaller sizes 18 to 14 at best, about a third the size of the big drakes.

We had not chosen the dates of our trip as we had in the past. In previous years, Bruce and I convened on Silver Creek when we got a call from Roger Lampman, our surrogate dad and fly-fishing mentor. On this occasion, Bruce and I had been summoned by Roger's daughters to take part in a memorial service for our surrogate dad. Bruce and I were encouraged to bring angling equipment and to fish the familiar waters the three of us had fished together so many times in the past.

In the days around the emotional streamside service, Bruce and I retraced the steps we'd taken with Roger – casting, occasionally catching, and reminiscing about wonderful, and frequently hilarious, times spent together. We wandered, unpressured, along Loving and Stalker creeks and down river to The Willows and Point of Rocks, searching for rising trout. And we found them.

The trout of Silver Creek had not grown foolish over the 30 years since my first exciting experience. Quite the contrary, they proved to be far more selective and wary, and Bruce and I spent long spans of time quietly kneeling under a scrub willow to finally make a careful cast resulting in a subtle wake announcing the departure of another Silver Creek sophisticate.

We *did* catch them, though. We found enough high-spirited rainbows that seemed to feel our size 10 Dark Cahills and Adams were a close enough match for the Brown Drakes. In addition, an absolutely gorgeous big brown came to hand on our last day of fishing. As I released this marvelous fish, I felt Roger's presence and approval. For after all, it was Roger who instilled in me the love of the split bamboo rod, and shared the passion for Pete Hidy's flymphs. Perhaps knowing it would be released, that lovely trout took my flymph, a size 14 Tup's Indispensible, to bring my return to Silver Creek full circle.



Michael Simon is a writer, watercolorist and a lover of trout and trout streams as well as the literature and tackle associated with them. His writing has appeared in *Art of Angling Journal* and *Atlantic Salmon Journal*. Simon's art has been shown at Crossroads of Sport, Madison Square Garden, Museum of the Rockies and the Catskill Museum of Fly Fishing. Please see more of Michael Simon's art: www.michael-simonanglingart.com.