

MAGNIFICENT PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAITS OF THE FLY FISHERS OF YELLOWSTONE

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# FISH & FLY

FOR THE ADVENTURE ANGLER



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Trout In  
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Sculpin Patterns



fishing the area. The first is “Explore.” Depending on conditions, some streams will be fishing better than others. If one isn’t working out, remember that almost every stream in the area holds nice brookies and browns.

Second, “Don’t fish used water.” Because of the great amount of fishable waters, don’t fish where you see other people. Simply drive over to the next bridge or stream.

And, finally, “Always have some Pink Squirrels in your box.” According to Rauch, this locally invented fly is a must.

“The Pink Squirrel will fish well any time of the year on any day,” he said. “You may be able to get them at the local fly shops, but you’re better off tying your own.”

Rauch was even kind enough to give FISH & FLY readers the special recipe, originally conceived by local legend John Bethke:

**Hook:** Shrimp / scud model, size 14  
**Thread:** Black UNI thread, 6/0  
**Tail:** Two strands of Krystal Flash  
**Rib:** Small red wire  
**Body:** Gray squirrel dubbing  
**Collar:** Pink medium chenille  
**Head:** Gold bead

## WASHINGTON

### Skwala On My Mind

**C**an you say Skwala? Go ahead. Give it a try. *Skwala*. Got it? If you pronounced it “Squaw-la” you go to the end of the riffle (that’s a clue). Now together: “The Skwalas are coming, the Skwalas are coming.” Ignore the weird look your wife just gave you and keep reading.

The Skwala stonefly has all the elements of a good mystery. Anticipation, uncertainty, elusiveness and rumors swirling around like dust devils on a hot August day.

“Dry-fly fishing in March?”

“Are you nuts?”

“Don’t you know it’s still winter, for crying out loud!”

“Where are the rising fish?”

Good questions. However, that’s probably why the Skwala is still one of the Yakima’s best-kept secrets. True, the cat is out of the bag on the Bitterroot, lower Clark Fork and Blackfoot rivers of western Montana, but the mystery still lingers on the blue-ribbon catch-and-release Yakima River in eastern Washington.

“The Skwala stone is a very important

hatch because it’s the first Big Mac, Double Quarter Pounder, Super Big Tasty meal of the season,” said Jack Mitchell, owner and head guide of The Evening Hatch Fly Shop in Ellensburg.

Just imagine how hungry you’d be after eating tiny midges all winter. The sight of an inch-long nymph floating by—that’s from antenna to tail—can get the trout’s attention the way a dead salmon interests a hungry grizzly.

When I talk Skwala fishing on the



Yakima with other anglers, they often complain that the hatch is a myth because they don’t see any adults flying around. They also want to know, “What does a Skwala look like? And, “What part of the Yakima River do I fish?” Okay, let’s take ‘em one at a time.

First, regardless of how many adults there are, the fish know that thousands of Skwalas are moving in the water column as the water warms. Trout make their living on eating what’s hatching beneath the surface.

Second, there are many examples of Skwala dry patterns on the internet (type in skwala dry-fly fishing) but few if any examples of the nymph. You won’t get much help from me here. I will tell you that the best nymph pattern I’ve ever seen on the Yakima is tied by Al Parks. I promised Al that I would never divulge his secret. You’ll have to track him down and ask yourself. All I can do is testify that it really works. Man, oh, man.

Third, plan on fishing the lower 35 miles of the Yakima between the Diversion dam and Rosa dam.

canyon and eagles up and down the river. Another plus: During the week, you’ll find the river practically empty of anglers.

Water temperatures start to inch up as spring approaches and the nymphs get active at around 38° to 40° Fahrenheit. The adults will generally hatch anywhere from the 40° to 46° mark. That’s when the switch goes on.

“I carry a variety of adult Skwala patterns in my fly box in sizes 8 and 10. I like to build my day around throwing dries, covering a lot of water. In the late afternoon and early evening, the females will return to the water to lay their eggs so the fish are more apt to be looking up,” said Mitchell.

Using his technique, I personally have had several 30-fish days on Skwala dries and I won’t tell you how many fish on nymphs (you wouldn’t believe me anyway). It pays to trust your guide.

Look for tailouts at the end of riffles and fish the slower pockets behind boulders. Also, don’t ignore the soft seams between nervous water. The Skwala is a typical stonefly in that it prefers faster, oxygenated water especially as water temperatures bump up.

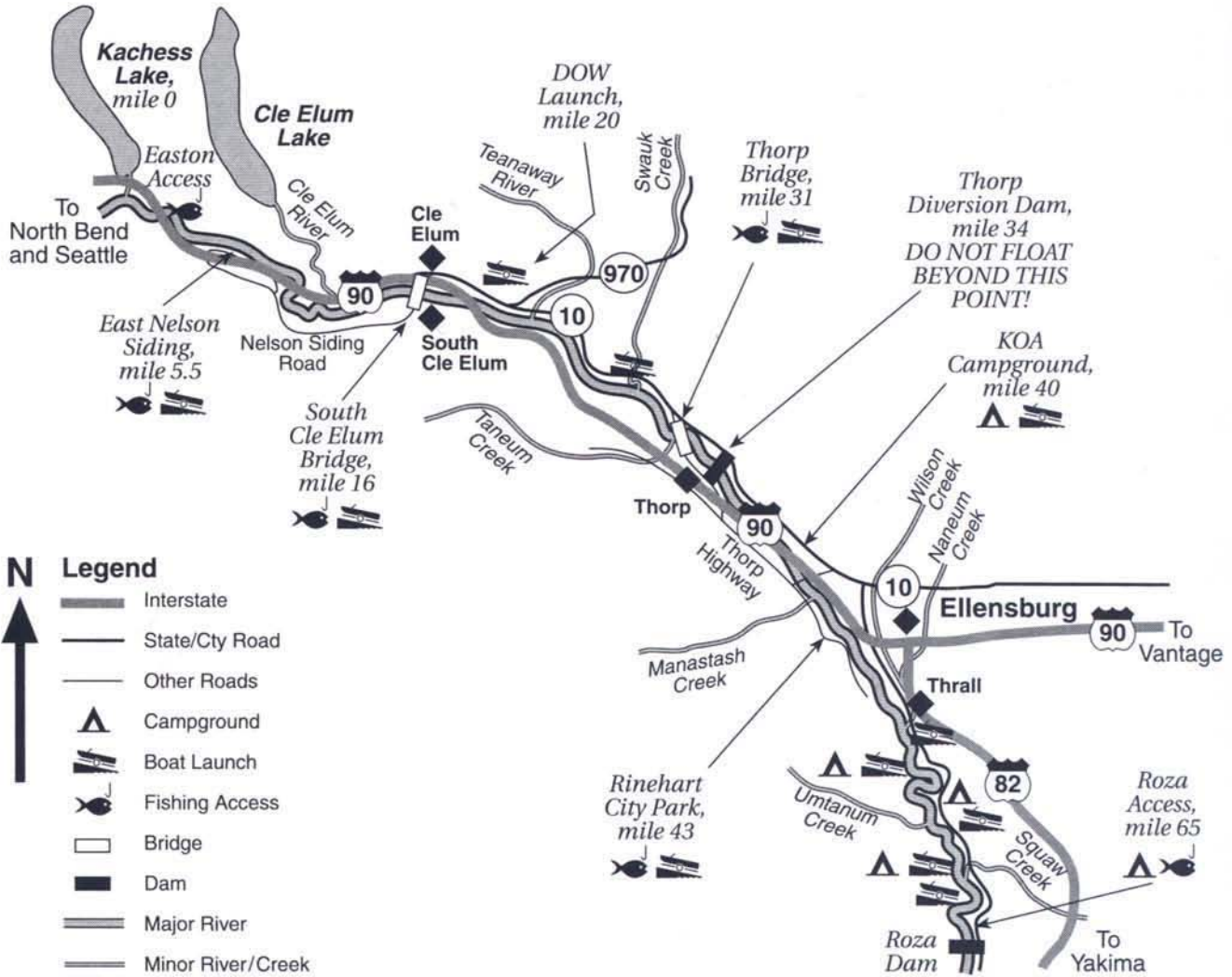
Whether you wade or float, get on the water by 10 a.m. Plan to get off around 5 p.m. Reaching the Yakima River canyon is only a two-hour drive from Seattle on Interstate I-90 over Snoqualmie Pass to Ellensburg. So it makes for an easy day trip over and back.

Take a few minutes to stop by one or more of the area’s fly shops for a free cup of coffee and an earful on the Skwala fishing. You might learn something. You might even run into Al and see his Skwala nymph stuck in his hat!

So let’s set the record straight. The Skwala hatch is the real deal. It’s not prolific like the Mother’s Day caddis hatch, yet it is an important “food festival” that kicks off a new season each spring on the Yakima River. Mystery solved.

—W. Michael Hamilton

# Yakima River





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