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GETAWAY ON THE
YAKIMA RIVER

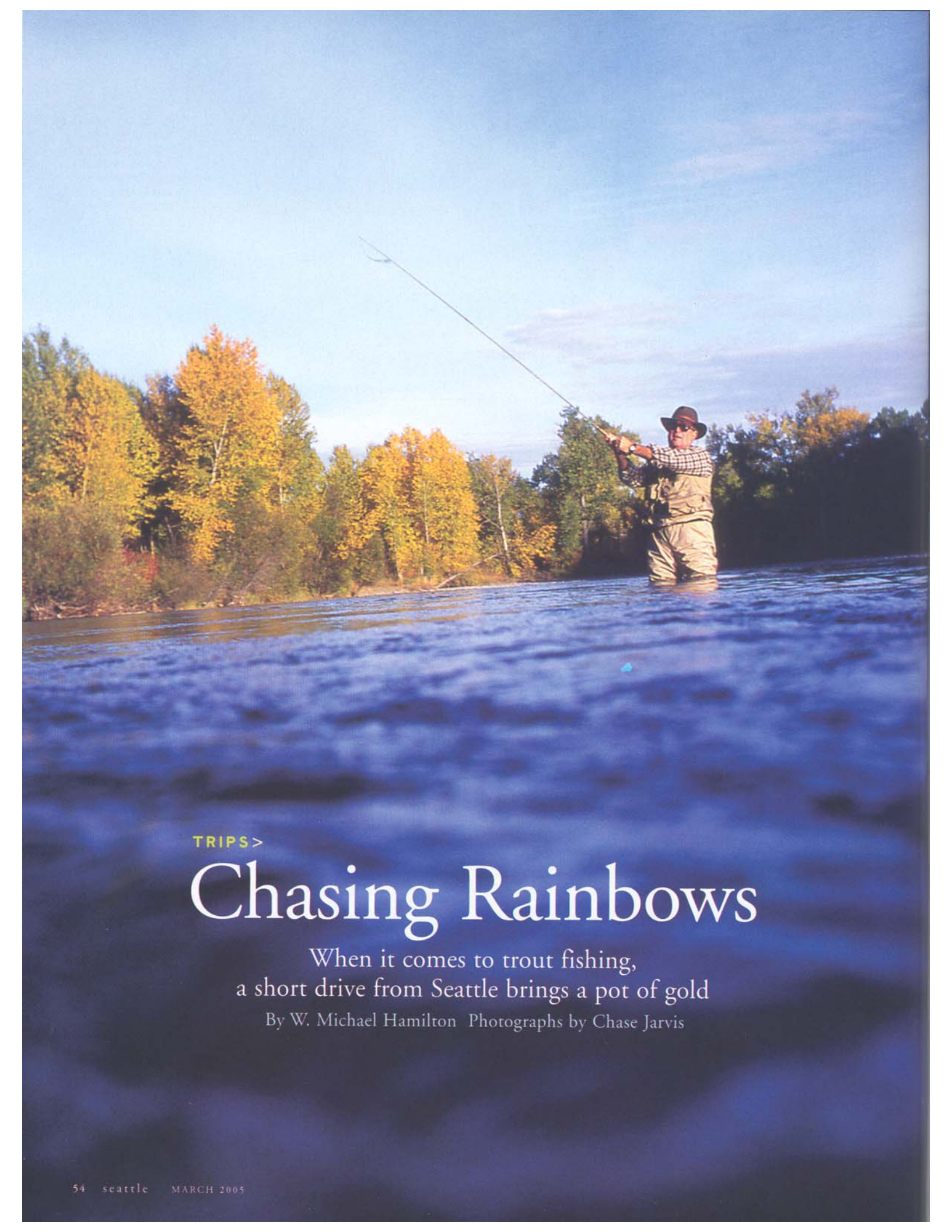
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A fly fisherman wearing a hat and waders stands in a river, casting a long line. The background features a forest with trees in autumn colors under a clear blue sky.

TRIPS >

Chasing Rainbows

When it comes to trout fishing,
a short drive from Seattle brings a pot of gold

By W. Michael Hamilton Photographs by Chase Jarvis

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THERE'S A DREAMY ROMANTICISM that surrounds fly fishing for rainbow trout, fueled in part by the movie *A River Runs Through It*, which memorably captured on film the fluid motion of casting and the natural beauty of wild rivers. Then again, the sport's image has always been one of serenity. Izaak Walton, the 17th-century angler conservationist known as the father of angling, called fly fishing "pure Zen" in his literary classic, *The Compleat Angler*.

One of the great joys of fly fishing is the simple pleasure of being outdoors. I'll trade the stress and grit of the inner city any time for the solitude and beauty of a trout stream.

Washingtonians are lucky. A little more than 100 miles due east of Seattle, on the dry side of the Cascade Range, the Yakima River—bordered in different places by dense forests, rolling farmlands and desertlike canyons—offers fly fishers the year-round opportunity to catch *Salmo gairdneri*, the rainbow trout.

My favorite stretch of the river to fish is known as the lower canyon. Rushing, twisting and turning through spectacular basalt cliffs stained with ochre-colored lichen, the run provides the best habitat for trout. Strong and feisty, the fish are vigorous feeders and will cruise from the safety of undercut banks to snack on a variety of insects such as Skwala stoneflies, March Browns, Pale Morning Duns and Caddiflies. (There's little doubt that half the fun of fly fishing is discovering a new world of bugs with downright weird names!)

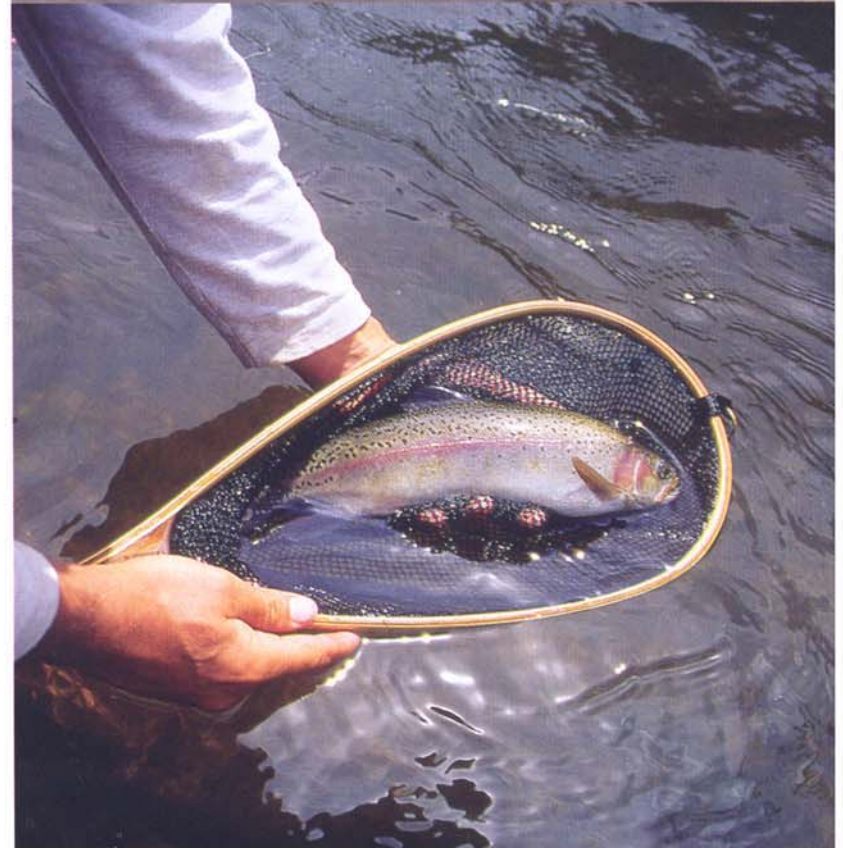
Easy access to the lower canyon begins just five miles outside Ellensburg, a college town that makes a perfect base camp with its six blocks of historic Victorian buildings and access to hiking, wildlife viewing and even wine tasting. From Ellensburg, you can book a guided trip or grab supplies before heading out on your own.

You don't have to be an expert to fly fish the Yakima, especially in the lower canyon. Many anglers park along the canyon highway that parallels the river to "wade-fish" on their feet. Another technique is to float the river in a drift boat, casting toward the bank. Both approaches catch fish, but if you are a newcomer to the sport, it's a good idea to take a lesson from a professional like Jack Mitchell.

Mitchell, owner of The Evening Hatch Fly Shop and Guide Service in Ellensburg, has been guiding all levels of fishers on the Yakima since 1988, from first-timers to diehards. "Many of our guests have never fly fished before," says Mitchell. "So just being on the river with a fly rod in their hand is huge. Watching them land their first wild rainbow and seeing a big smile spread from ear to ear is why I keep guiding."

With glowing sunsets, soaring eagles, the snow-laden peaks of the Stuarts as a backdrop and trout leaping from its waters, the Yakima River offers fly fishing that more than lives up to the sport's image. This place might be a mere two-hour distance from metropolitan Seattle, but it's a lifetime away from the urban cacophony of noise and distractions. **S**

Opposite page: Wading into fly fishing serenity on the Yakima River. This page, top, the author's collection of flies; a rainbow in hand after a day on the water





Glowing golden canyon walls provide a scenic backdrop for fly fishing on the Yakima

Yakima River Journal

SEASONS: The Yakima River offers almost 70 miles of year-round catch-and-release fly fishing. During spring and fall, the river receives less angling pressure, but it's tough to beat wading in your shorts and shirtsleeves on a warm summer day. Fishing in the dead of winter can be good, but be sure to prepare for cold, cold and colder.

WHERE TO FISH: The upper Yakima River flows from Lake Easton to the Cle Elum River confluence. It borders many private ranches, so fishing access is limited. From west Cle Elum to the Diversion Dam at the town of Thorp, about 22 river miles, there are many places to "fish off your feet" (this refers to wading), especially in spring and fall. From June to August the river is best fished in a drift boat, because the river runs high to irrigate thousands of acres of farmlands in the Kittitas Valley. Below Thorp the river meanders through Ellensburg and features multiple islands and braided channels. It's an excellent area to wade and fish, but parts do run next to I-90. Just outside Ellensburg, the lower canyon provides 22 miles of easy access to the river ending just above Roza Dam.

OUTFITTERS: **The Evening Hatch Fly Shop and Guide Service in Ellensburg** (2308 Canyon Road, Ellensburg; 866.482.4480; theeveninghatch.com) offers guided half-day and full-day float trips year-round. Take Ellensburg's Canyon Road exit from I-90 (exit 109) and turn left on Canyon Road; look for the fly shop about a block south on your left. You can buy gear here, if you don't have your own.

DINE: Fresh seafood, lamb, fabulous salads, delectable homemade desserts and a charming Art Deco atmosphere make the upscale **Valley**

Café (105 W Third Ave., Ellensburg; 509.925.3050), open for lunch and dinner, a surprising find in downtown Ellensburg. The Valley Café also offers a deli/wine-and-espresso bar next door to the main restaurant, featuring pastries, box lunches and some of the best espresso in central Washington. Elsewhere, pasta, pizza and barbecue joints abound.

DIGS: **The Inn at Goose Creek** (1720 Canyon Road, Ellensburg; 800.533.0822; www.innatgoosecreek.com) offers 10 themed rooms ranging from sports to Christmas. The rooms are spacious with goose-down comforters and spa tubs. In town, near the Central Washington University campus, the **Meadowlark Guest House** (606 N Main St., Ellensburg; 888.699.0123; kittitasvalleyinns.com/Meadowlark) built in 1887, is a beautifully restored Queen Anne Victorian home featuring two large, sunny suites with luxurious bedding.

SIDE TRIPS: Downtown Ellensburg offers six blocks of historic turn-of-the-century Victorian buildings filled with art galleries, museums, jewelry stores (many feature one of the rarest gemstones in the states, the Ellensburg blue agate), interesting antiques and locally owned clothing and gift shops. A 30-minute drive south from Ellensburg on I-82 brings you to premier Washington wineries, including Wineglass Cellars, Portteus Winery, Tefft Cellars and Columbia Crest Winery, with most tasting rooms open daily (Wineglass Cellars is open Friday to Sunday). For hiking, head to Long's Pass and come face-to-face with majestic Mount Stuart. To get there, from I-90 east, take the Highway 970 exit (right after the S Cle Elum exit). Turn right onto Highway 970 and drive five miles to North Fork Teanaway River Road (on your left after crossing the river). Drive to the end of the Teanaway Road (23 miles), where you'll find the trailhead.