

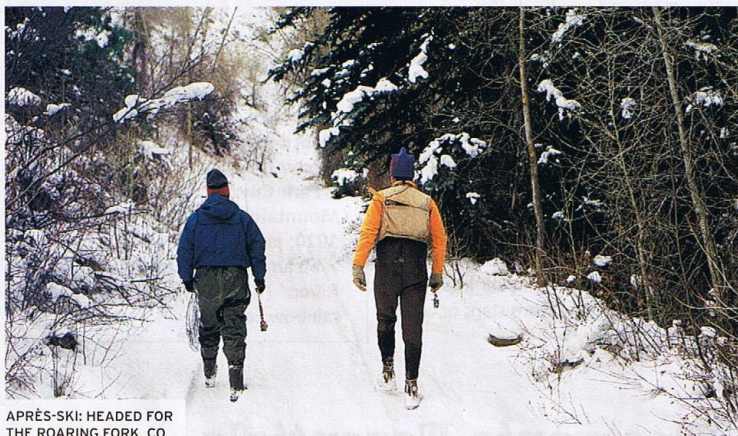
FIELD SPORTS

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PHILIP HANYOK

On a ski trip?
Don't forget your

Ski Town Trouting



APRÈS-SKI: HEADED FOR THE ROARING FORK, CO.

AFTER CUTTING THE morning's first tracks on the slopes, quads burning before lunch-time, I'm ready to call it a day—well, more precisely, a half-day. So I stop for a breather atop the mountain, admire the river valley below, and take a last run down while the late sleepers are on their way up the lifts. It's time for me to fish.

Great winter trout fishing is a strange-but-true perk of ski country. Not far from the well-known towns of the big West—among them Big Sky, Montana; Crested Butte, Colorado; and Park City, Utah—you can take a day or an afternoon off from skiing to catch trout in streams where flows and water temperatures run nice and steady. Plan your trip with an eye on the weather forecast—20-degree days are

hard to beat—and it's possible to catch trout during the most pleasant spells of winter. All it takes is a little knowledge of the rivers, a basic understanding of nymphing and some protection against the cold.

Dam Steady: Tailwater rivers, which

flyrod. After a morning on the slopes, it's time to hit the river.

flow from the bottoms of dams, seldom freeze, so their trout feed all year. The fish don't eat much; midges and nymphs are the main menu items, and on some rivers abundant Mysis shrimp from the reservoir above the dam can really fatten the fish.

My favorite stream is Colorado's Taylor River, about 18 miles from Crested Butte, where rainbows and browns over five pounds will take a dead-drifted shrimp, midge or nymph pattern. There are many more rivers throughout the West where the same patterns hold true—all within an hour or so of a major ski resort (see sidebar).

Ready, Set, Fish: I like an eight- to nine-foot, 6-weight flyrod and a simple reel with a floating line and a nine- to 12-foot 6X

Menominees for the Millennium

Now is prime time for catching a Great Lakes curiosity—the Menominee, or round whitefish, a silvery fish not often weighing more than a couple of pounds. What they lack in size, they make up for with challenge: Their mouths are about the circumference of your little finger. So use a No. 10 salmon egg hook, bait it with an egg, and fish it on the bottom around the piers and rocks of ports such as Green Bay, Duluth and Frankfort, Michigan, where Menominees are found during winter. Tip: A limber rod helps keep the hook from tearing free. Go ahead, keep some to eat—they're excellent, especially when smoked.—D.S.

PHOTO BY BRIAN BAILEY/PHOTOGRAPHERS ASPEN

leader. A longer rod allows me to mend line to get longer drag-free drifts. Split-shot, strike indicators, polarized glasses and gloves are other necessities.

The basic dead-drift nymphing technique works best for putting a fly in the fish's feeding lane—they won't move far for one in cold water. Last February on the Yampa River in Colorado, after my morning on the slopes in Steamboat Springs, I dropped my tiny midge larva pattern into a distinct current line with bubbles and foam gliding downstream at a pace slightly slower than the main current. An up-and-across cast put the fly in the water first, downstream of the strike indicator. The fly sank quickly and the indicator drifted naturally (drag-free) along with the foam, while I raised the rod to take up slack. The indicator came alongside a submerged rock and made an almost imperceptible twitch. Was it a rock or a fish? Didn't matter; I set the hook into a 12-inch brook trout.

In most streams, trout stay out of the main current and keep near the bottom where there are rocks and other obstructions along a feeding lane. I rig my leader with a small nymph at the end of the tippet, place a split-shot or two about three inches above the fly, and attach a strike indicator about equal to the depth of the water. If the fly ticks bottom occasionally, I'm in the zone. If it doesn't, I add weight.

Whenever the indicator hesitates, stops, twitches, or does anything unnatural, lift the rod tip sharply to tighten the line and set the hook if a fish has taken the fly. Striking this way might lift the indicator out of the water a bit but won't pull the fly from the water if the fish hasn't grabbed it. If you don't connect with a fish, let the fly continue its drift.

Water Hazards: Although the techniques are straightforward enough, some perils do go with the territory. Cold feet? Simply step into the snow. When you stand in the water, the pressure of the water on your legs and feet can restrict your blood flow, which can lead to a cold, numb feeling. Stepping out of the water allows your circulation to warm your lower body.

Deep snowdrifts, meanwhile, can make it difficult to get in and out of the stream. Fortunately, most winter trout rivers have trails that get packed by other anglers. If you're the lucky first angler to tread on fresh snow, test its depth with your wading staff or a stick. Take clues from the vegetation sticking out of the snow. No grass or sagebrush tops? It's probably at least knee-deep. Look for animal trails to follow. In a pinch, you can often crawl on the snow without falling in too deep. If you get stuck, lean into the snow and clear it from your legs, then back out using your previous steps or crawl on top of the snow. **SA**

Carve & Cast

For great winter trout fishing, check out the rivers within a reasonable drive of these ski resorts.

> Aspen/Snowmass, CO: **Frying Pan and Roaring Fork rivers.** Horizon River Adventures (888/462-4925; biyak.net).

> Big Sky, MT: **Gallatin River.** Gallatin Riverguides (888/707-1505; montanaflyfishing.com).

> Breckenridge, CO: **Blue River.** Breckenridge Outfitters (970/453-4135; breck.net/breckout).

> Crested Butte, CO: **Taylor and Gunnison rivers.** Three Rivers Fly Shop (970/641-1303; shopcrestedbutte.com).

> Ketchum, ID: **Big Wood River.** Silver Creek Outfitters (800/732-5687; silver-creek.com).

> Mammoth Lakes, CA: **Owens River and Mammoth Lake.** The Trout Fly (760/934-2517; thetroutfly.com).

> Park City, UT: **Provo River.** Jans Mountain Outfitters (800/745-1020; jans.com).

> Steamboat Springs, CO: **Yampa River.** (888/810-8747; buckingrainbow.com).