

Fast-Water Fly Fishing

By Ryck Lydecker

The Middle Fork of Idaho's Salmon River winds through the largest federal wilderness area outside Alaska—and its cutthroat trout are just as wild



Fly angler Chuck Sundby “lost count” of the trout he caught and released in six days of Middle Fork drift boat fishing.

Until last June, the prospect of drift boat fishing had conjured up images of meandering down a placid river on a lazy current, casting a dry fly to quiet pools. But that's hardly the sight that appeared under my four-seater Cessna 120 as it came in for a washboard landing at tiny Thomas Creek airstrip.

This is the heart of Idaho's Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Area and there was nothing calm about the whitewater twisting around the campsite below and building strength for the rapids a mile or so downstream.

Among the big rubber rafts hauled out on the gravel bar, I caught a glimpse of what I came for, a McKenzie River drift boat, my ticket to sample fast-water fly-fishing for native cutthroat trout on the Middle Fork of the Salmon River as it flows through one of the deepest gorges in North America. Its un-dammed waters wind northwest for 106 miles,