Fly Fishing the “Lost Sierra”

By Mike Pease
- Fly fishing guide and instructor since 2014.
- Founder of Feather River Fly Fishing School at Greenhorn Ranch
- Walk & wade guiding in the Plumas National Forest (“Lost Sierra”) and in the Sacramento region.
- Received Orvis endorsement in October 2016
Where is the “Lost Sierra?”

Approximately 2.5 hour drive from Sacramento and 1.5 hours from Reno
What to consider? Where do you begin?

- First time or beginner – consider signing up for a class/school or hiring a guide to get started.

- Intermediate or Advanced – talk with fly shop or guide about some of the best places to try (more to say about this...)

“Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all.”

— Helen Keller, The Open Door

tags: carpe-diem, challenges, enjoy-life, life, risk-taking
What to consider? Where do you begin?

• Stream or Lake?

**Popular Streams**
- Middle Fork of Feather River
- North Fork of Feather River
- East Branch of NF Feather
- Spanish Creek
- Nelson Creek

**Popular Lakes**
- Lake Davis
- Lake Almanor
- Bucks Lake
- Lakes Basin (many)
- Frenchmans

*Note – as of 3/1/21 all the rivers above EXCEPT NF of Feather are open year round for catch & release fly fishing.*
What to consider? Where do you begin?

• Easy Access or Remote?

**Easy Access**
• Drive up for the day and fish the MF of Feather near Graeagle or the NF of Feather along Hwy 70
• Consider staying in Graeagle or Quincy at a motel, lodge or AirBnB. Greenhorn Ranch has a lodge, chuck house, evening entertainment & STOCKED POND!

**Remote**
• Tent or RV camping in a Plumas Nat’l Forest campground
• Hiking into one of the rivers or Lakes Basin lakes
• Backpack, camp and fish
What to consider? Where do you begin?

Equipment Basics

Streams
• A 8.5 or 9 foot, 5 weight fly rod, floating fly line, and 9’ leaders is a good all around way to get started
• Common dry flies: elk hair caddis, parachute adams
• Common nymphs: prince, copper john, pheasant tail

Lakes
• Float tube or kayak in order to get around
• Same rod as above up to a 6 weight, approx. 10-12’ leader
• Same flies as a above and include midges and damsel flies

Let’s break it down a bit & see some pictures!
The Middle Fork of the Feather River
Wild & Scenic River (1968)

- 108 mile freestone river that begins in the eastern Sierras and ends in the west into Lake Oroville.
- Three distinct zones – Recreational Zone, Scenic Zone, and Wild Zone
- Variety of fish including browns, large & smallmouth bass, carp, and rainbows
- As of 3/1/21 is open YEAR ROUND to catch & release fly fishing
Recreational Zone - Beckwourth to Sloat Bridge (approx. 65.4 miles)

• Easiest Access of the three zones – find a bridge!
• Rainbows, more browns than the other zones & some smallmouth
• Can fish for carp in the flats in the Portola area
• Graeagle has restaurants, golf, 2 breweries, lodging, shopping, music
A couple of fish from last season...
Fly Fishing the Middle Fork

Scenic Zone - Sloat Bridge to approx. Nelson Point (approx. 9.7 miles)

- Beautiful scenery
- Access via walking the train tracks
- Mostly rainbows with a few browns
- Some remote parts requiring hiking
- Somewhat affected by fire of 2020
Fly Fishing the Middle Fork

Wild Zone - Nelson Point to Lake Oroville (approx. 32.9 miles)

- Very remote requiring long steep hikes with some 4x4 access
- Mostly rainbows with a few VERY big browns
- Pacific Crest Trail crosses this section
- Lots of rattle snakes
- Class 5/6 rapids
- Somewhat affected by fire of 2020 – not yet seen the damage
Fly Fishing the Middle Fork - Tactics

Hatches & Flies

- **Spring/Early Summer** – Golden Stones, Mayflies & Caddis – Try size 8 Orange Stimulator with a size 14 beadhead prince nymph or red copper john as a dropper; Try EC Caddis during an evening caddis hatch with poopah 18” off the bend of the hook

- **Summer** – Nymphing with sz. 10 black stones w/midge dropper off the bend of the hook during the day & caddis dries in the evening; terrestrials like grasshopper, ants and beetles

- **Fall/Winter** – For mayflies try a size 14 to 18 Parachute Adams with a sz 18 flashback PT as a dropper, 18” off the bend of the dry; also try sz. 16-18 rusty spinners

Water temp. is important – below 50 degrees it’s very challenging, high 50’s to low 60’s is ideal, 63-70 look for bubbles for oxygen and/or feeder creeks and streams with cold water.
The North Fork of the Feather River
Driving “The Canyon” (Hwy 70)

A National Scenic Byway – Beautiful!!!
Early History – The first Americans – the Mountain Maidu

1821 – Captain Luis Arguello – Names “Rio de las Plumas” or “The Feather River”

1850 – Gold Rush & Beckwourth Pass is “discovered” by James P. Beckwourth

1909 – Completed construction of the “Feather River Route” by Western Pacific Railroad
- brings fisherman, hikers & tourists to the area

1908-1960’s – “Stairway of Power” is conceived & constructed (4,350’ drop in elevation)
- 3 dams/reservoirs, 5 powerhouses, tunnels, penstocks

1937 - Completed construction of the Feather River Highway (Hwy. 70)
- designated a National Scenic Byway

1967 – Construction of Oroville Dam is topped out (tallest dam in US)

1970 – Last passenger train through the Feather River Canyon (once a year exception)
Fly Fishing the North Fork

Lake Oroville to Cresta Power House

- Difficult Access
- Flows controlled by Poe Power Dam
- Access off of Big Bend Rd.
Fly Fishing the North Fork

Cresta Power House to Rock Creek

- Lot’s of hydro manipulation
- Least explored by me
- Currently exploring fishing in the reservoirs – could be a bonanza! - or not!
Fly Fishing the North Fork

Rock Creek to Bucks Creek Powerhouse

- Lot’s of hydro manipulation
- Good riffle below Bucks Creek Powerhouse
- Rock Creek is a pretty stream with small wild rainbows, challenging hiking/wading
Fly Fishing the North Fork

Bucks Creek Powerhouse to Rock Creek Dam

- Favorite section, approx. 7 miles, lots of river to explore
- Easiest access at the old elementary school & campground (closed)
- Careful to check with PG&E regarding once per month high flows for kayakers.
Hatches & Flies

• Spring/Early Summer – Stoneflies, Callibaetis Mayflies & Caddis – Try size 8 Orange Stimulator with a size 14 beadhead prince nymph as a dropper

• Summer – Nymphing with brown Bird’s Nest during the day & caddis dries in the evening

• Fall/Winter – With a light rain the BWO’s hatch so try a size 18 Parachute Adams, also try swinging Wooly Buggers
Fly Fishing the North Fork - Flows

• Fishes best at around 175 - 390 cfs

• 2016 – 2019 was tough! – often in the 450-500 cfs range, but still able to get fish.

• 2021 & 2022 flows were great! (fingers crossed for 2023 😊)

• USE A WADING STAFF!!!
School opened in June, 2014 with one day clinics throughout the summer. School was branded and given its own website summer 2017.

Each summer has evolved into more offerings and expanded programs which this season included 3 sessions of 2 or 3 days for beginning anglers in June.
Recently changed ownership & is being remodeled and rebranded to have fly fishing as a main attraction!
Got One!!!
MF of Feather is also the classroom for days 2 & 3 of the Feather River Fly Fishing School.
Classes for Spring/Summer 2023

Feather River Fly Fishing School offers a variety of classes ranging from 1 to 3 days long as well as some special events. See our 2023 schedule below!

Session 1 (1, 2 or 3 days): June 5-7
Session 2 (1, 2 or 3 days): June 11-13
Session 3 (1, 2 or 3 days): June 19-21

Cost is $600 for each day/night of instruction, lodging and meals. For those not staying at the ranch the cost is $400 per day.
I am partnered with Emerger Strategies to lower my carbon footprint, become carbon neutral, and find other ways to lessen my impact and improve the environment.
Questions and/or Comments?

Thank you!!!