

The Pit River at the James Black Powerhouse

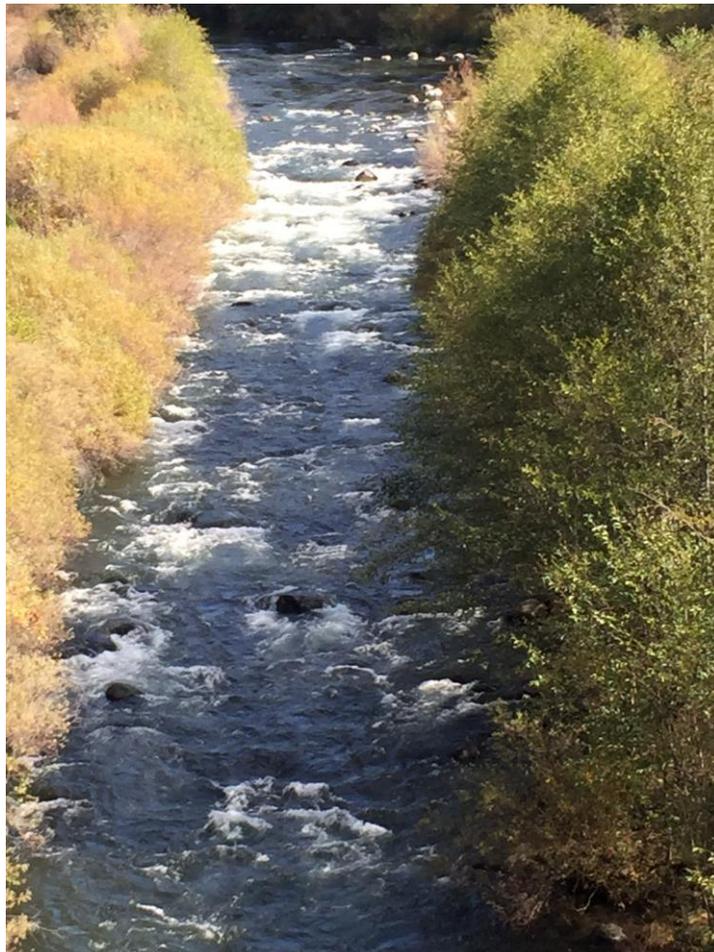
Warning: the wading can be tough. Very tough.

We got somethin' in this territory called the Missouri boat ride.

— *The Outlaw Josey Wales*

I didn't realize I was in trouble until I approached the center of the river. I positioned myself against the current in as narrow a profile as possible, took deliberate steps, and did not proceed until I had solid footing. Regardless of my efforts, the strength of the current was too much for me. Before I took another step, the rocks and gravel beneath my feet washed out, and just as suddenly, I was whisked away. Welcome to the Pit River!

The Pit River, where trout can be large, but the wading is tough.



Same As It Ever Was

I first fished the Pit River in 1982. At the time, I was an employee of PG&E and learned of it while researching company hydrofacility maps. When I finally got a chance to visit the river, I became fascinated with the water upstream from the Pit 5 and James Black Powerhouses. The trout I caught there were consistently enormous, my largest a 28-inch rainbow.

Friends and I would leave San Francisco Friday after work, arrive, roll out our sleeping bags next to the river, awake at sunrise, and fish all day. Come the next Friday, we'd do it again. The fishing trips were productive; time after time, they resulted in day-long catches of what we fondly referred to as football-size wild rainbow trout 18 to 23 inches in length. The Pit became my number one trout-fishing destination and in some respect still is.

Release of a football-size rainbow trout during a trip to the Pit 5 reach.



Much has been written about how the Pit River has changed over the years. Modifications made to the river by PG&E and increased flows have eliminated my favorite pocket water and pools. Still, new formations exist in the river where fishing is just as productive.

Additionally, a 2014 Federal Energy Regulatory Commission fish-monitoring report confirmed what I already knew: this section of river is special. According to the study, surveys of catchable trout conducted by professional guides in the Pit 3, 4, and 5 reaches suggested that the Pit 5

Reach typically yields the largest trout. This is what keeps me and other anglers coming back. The river is strong, healthy, and challenging to wade, but definitely worth the effort.

Adventurous anglers can be rewarded. A salmon-size rainbow trout caught adjacent to PG&E's James Black Powerhouse.



Technique

Almost all of my fishing on the Pit is with Nymphs, and my favorite is a black Rubber-Legs Stonefly. Price Nymphs and black APs are also excellent choices. My outfit consists of a 9-foot 6-weight fly rod with nine-foot leader. Success comes by high-sticking, heavily weighting your fly and getting it down deep. I begin my day fishing under the bridge near the James Black Powerhouse and then work my way carefully upstream.

The river is made up of almost unlimited water pockets and pools to explore. Come prepared. I fish the Pit with a solid wading staff and cleats, and I affix a pair of soccer shin guards to the outside of my waders to soften contact with large rocks. The shin guards also play an important part when landing a fish. Due to the combined strength of the fish and the current, once a fish is hooked, an angler will often have to walk with it to avoid being broken off. Shin guards lessen the inevitable rock abrasions that occur because you are concentrating on landing your fish, not necessarily watching where you are going.

Safety First

Should you lose your footing while wading, as I did, try to remain calm. Do not fight the current. During my frightening episode, I immediately positioned myself to float on my back with my feet facing downstream. This way I could protect my head, and my legs could act as shock absorbers to lessen the blow if I came into contact with a rock. I also extended my head and arms as far out of the water as possible. I have participated in several swims from Alcatraz and consider myself a strong swimmer. However, I know my limitations, and the thought of making it to shore was short lived.

Instead, I saved my strength and focused downriver, searching for an opportunity. When I noticed that the river was making a turn, I swam for the corner and arrived at shore forty yards from where I started. And yes, I was still holding onto my fly rod.

My point here is not to scare anyone, but instead to remind you that our passion sometimes unintentionally places us in compromising positions. While fishing the Pit, be careful, and remember to wear a wading belt. That day I made a poor decision, but being prepared and keeping a cool head prevailed.

A beautiful and healthy Pit River rainbow trout.



If You Go . . .

Pit 5 and the James Black Powerhouse are approximately 60 miles east of Redding. From Highway 299, turn left onto Big Bend Road. Take Big Bend Road 14 miles until it intersects with

Pit 5 Powerhouse Road. Turn left onto Pit 5 Powerhouse Road and proceed approximately 4 miles. At the river and to the right, just before crossing the bridge, there is a dirt road that will deliver you to the old Pit school site. Take it and look to the left for what appears to be an old playground. Park on the asphalt. Remnants of paint outlining a basketball court are still visible.

Anglers should avoid fishing the flat-water sections of the river, because these tend to be habitat for large concentrations of pikeminnows and hardheads. And as with most rivers, anglers who fish adjacent to easy access points or close to parking areas are entering highly pressured waters. Fishing these locations tends to be less rewarding.