## **Indian Peaks Wilderness**

#### Nederland, Colorado

We started talking about this trip before my buddy Stewart even packed to move to Colorado, I've always wanted to go but never knew how I would get there if a fly fishing club didn't take a trip! Stew did the homework and said we should fly fish the Indian Peaks Wilderness, I'd learn later that he couldn't have picked a better spot!

I started hiking with my backpack loaded down with old school books that my OCD won’t let me get rid of, finally found a use for them! Running the stairs leading to my basement for a half hour to hour at a time, their slickness helping with balancing my center of gravity underweight.

Time as it always does flew leading up to the trip, I prepared well, I invested in the proper gear, packed, unpacked and repacked a dozen times, I felt great, but anxiety always leads me think I could have done more. Nevertheless, I was in Colorado adjusting to the elevation gain from Louisville, we had a day after the night I arrived to walk around and shop for our trip. Instead of a good night sleep we stayed up packing and unpacking our gear while watching fly fishing videos to get hyped about the hike ahead.

We left out as the sun light started to creep up the flat horizon behind us as we drove from Boulder into Netherland and up to the trail head off 4th of July road. It was cool, the sun had a long time to go before it crept into the valley and we were off. A handful of breaks, mentally fighting off the hunger and self-anger of not stopping for breakfast on our drive.

It felt like longer, but a little more than 4 hours and we were past Jasper Lake heading to choose a camp site at Devils Thumb Lake more than 5 miles and 2200 feet in elevation from the trail head at 9,000ft. After setting up, which Stewart did most of as I recovered, we headed off to get water and wet a line.

It wasn't more than a couple casts before one of us hooked into our first Devils Thumb Lake outflow creek Cutthroat trout! We weren't focused on refilling the water bottles as this small but deceptively deep creek held a ton of cutthroat eager for a dry fly! Every few feet they were lined up from left to right filling the width of the creek ready to catch any food source! Top water all day, it was my type of paradise!

We were lucky with the weather avoiding any storms and wildlife while fishing the lake and creek for the two days we were at Devils Thumb. We bushwhacked in thick brush which could have easily led to jumping an animal, there were moose and bear signs everywhere! We caught plenty of cutthroat trout, ate like kings, had fresh water for days and high hopes for part two of our adventure, when we hiked down in elevation to Jasper Lake.

Jasper was about 500 feet lower in elevation but by the third day, I felt well-adjusted and didn't find myself winded while we backpacked to our next camping location. It didn't hold the glamorous views the site at Devils Thumb did, but it worked and was out of the no camping zone. We set up camp quickly and were on the water in no time, with plenty more back casting room we were bombing caddis to the fish and having top water success! We spent more time switching water logged flies that were submerged when the brookies dove deep, these fish were healthy and fought harder than most trout I've caught of similar size.

We spent our last full day at Jasper Lake by circling the entire lake from the dam counter clockwise easily bringing 20+ fish to hand each, all top water! We fished the entire time breaking for a quick shore bath and lunch when an afternoon storm pushed in. We were lucky and only experienced one very light afternoon storm during our 5 days out! Camping wasn't bad, having the inflating pads and choosing a good location we slept well, we had our bear bag system and by the 4th day our meals times felt somewhat routine, aligning with the beginning and end of the days.

The trout start to blend together and the thought of should we have attempted the hike to Storm Lake enters the mind, but the satisfaction of numerous gorgeous fishes to hand dissolve those doubts fast. The experience, now a few months later, has blended into one awesome memory and anticipation for the next journey which Stewart and I have agreed to attempt to fly fish the Indian Peaks wilderness annually! The hike down was double time, my lungs were adjusted and feeling great, we made good time getting down from Jasper in just a couple hours.

We encountered our first and only large wildlife on the hike down, we stopped on the trail to let a couple and their dogs pass. After a couple moments of adjusting our gear and hydrating we noticed they hadn't moved at all. After a few awkward moments of silence, they signaled us to pass them first and as we broke the tree line to our right, less than 50 yards away was a nice looking mature bull moose!

The couple’s huskies were dying to bark but for some reason, which we are glad, they didn't and we, with whistles and trekking poles at the ready, crept by on the trail as the bull continued to eat away at the trees. We made it to the bottom to find the 4th of July weekend was in full force, the parking area was nuts, Boulder creek heading into town was insane and the cool 70 degree Lake weather we were used to enjoying was back up to the 90s!

I flew to Louisville the morning after we hiked out, everything on this adventure was smooth sailing! The only hiccup was Frontier losing my bag on my return trip. It was returned and in the same condition I packed it, but it took about a month and a half.

**Equipment & Notes**

* I took a ton of stuff but kept it under 40lbs, I managed to find a rod tube that could fit two 4wt rods and some foam
* I took my 9' Sage and [9' TFO Mangrove](https://tforods.com/mangrove-fly-rods/) rods. [Sage 2250](https://www.sageflyfish.com/product/specialty/click-series) reel loaded with [Scientific Angler Mastery MPX](https://www.scientificanglers.com/product/mastery-mpx/) 4 wt line
* I packed a streamer box and a medium box loaded with dries and a few nymphs
* #14-16 Adams or Caddis was the go to!
* We grabbed a bunch of [Backpackers Pantry](https://www.backpackerspantry.com/) meals, power bars and a few other snacks. We used a [MSR water filter](https://www.msrgear.com/water) and had a UV light but its batteries died the first day