

# Henry's Fork - Railroad Ranch

## **Location:**

Henry's Fork River runs approximately 127 miles from Henry's Lake (N44.59711 W111.35330) to its confluence with the Snake River (N43.75267 W111.95776). The area is in the Eastern part of Idaho just to the South of West Yellowstone MT. The Henry is considered one of the best of the best Trout waters in the U.S. A lot of the access is privately owned so therefore getting to the River can be a bit of an issue. One of those places is Railroad Ranch near Island Park. (N44.33880 W111.46913) This is the central location about which this Article's author shares his experiences. There are references to nearby locations as such as Henry's Lake itself and to Box Canyon, a short but very productive run. See the Map of Access Points. Island Park lies along Hwy 20 which parallels the River. A nearby city is Idaho Falls, ID to the South which has air service.( N43.49264 W112.03574)

Other points of interest are the Box Canyon Boat Ramp is just north of Island Park. GPS 44 24 58.65N 111 23 42.33W. Railroad Ranch (Harriman State Park) is south of Island park along Hwy 20. GPS 44 19 40.58N 111 27 24.24.51W. Ashton Reservoir is further south at GPS 44 05 43.94N 111 29 38.40W. GPS coordinates are WGS 84

## **Description:**

### **Make a memory of your own on Henry's Fork**

By Brian La Rue

I started fly fishing at 11 years old. My dad really got into it and my brother and I followed suit. We grew

up visiting Yellowstone and fly fishing was just another way to maximize our fun. In my dad's research, he stumbled upon nearby Henry's Fork of the Snake at Railroad Ranch and we soon found ourselves as novices learning a lesson or two.

What a place to hone your skills? Fickle trout, delicate presentations and flat water-perfect for a beginner, okay maybe not. Oh well, not knowing how tough it was supposed to be, we still



managed good times with 12- to 14-inch trout with the occasional lunger to boot. We made lots of memories on Henry's Fork.



The Ranch will greet you with wide, flat water with so many fish feeding you'd swear it was raining. There are stretches nearing 60 yards wide. It's awesome to see heads and tails all over and just when you say to yourself, it seems like a lot a 12- to 14-inchers here, 10 feet away from you, head and shoulders come out of the water making a bowling-ball-sized splash! Was that a sea lion?

It will take perfect presentation to trick one of the big ones, just ask me, a veteran of 27 years of the Ranch or any guide in the area. Rarely will one of these monsters make a mistake, but if you're happy catching 12- to 14- inchers all day with a common 16- to 18-incher too, then Henry's Fork is for you. On this water, I always try to position myself behind weeds and often cast downriver at a 45-degree angle to get results. These fish see a lot of flies and they have a long time to study your offering so it's very important to not leader them.

Fall is a good time to fish the Railroad Ranch area near Last Chance and Island Park, ID. The season runs from June 15 through Nov. 30. October and November see great fishing and light crowds.

'Fishing remains strong right up to the closing deadline as blue winged olives, midges and smaller ants do well on the Ranch,' said Chris Andelin manger of the Trouthunter ([www.trouthunt.com](http://www.trouthunt.com)). 'If you fish Box Canyon or below the Ranch, carry an assortment of streamers. Baby rainbow patterns, something with olive and white, will do best. Your basic double bunny is a good place to start.'



If you do not have time to squeeze in a fall trip this year, start planning for an opener run to Henry's Fork. Adelin says the last couple openers have seen unbelievable conditions and sensational fishing. The opener is always festive with pale morning duns and terrestrial working. One of this writer's favorite flies after the season gets rolling is a Flav or a smaller green drake pattern. This fly is light green and seems to work wonders on the Ranch. If for some strange reason you find yourself on the water on an off day, Adelin says to carry some terrestrials like beetles, hoppers or one of my favorite ant patterns an Umpqua CDC ant.

If you prefer more character in the form of canyon water, quick runs and less challenging situations where trout will not have as much time to make a decision, well, the Box Canyon section of the Henry's Fork offers some classic, turbulent driftboat and wading water featuring rocky havens with loads of big trout.

The Box Canyon stretch runs about three miles and this is where you find swift, boulder-filled water. Stoneflies, assorted nymphs, caddis pupa and streamers work well here for the stretches' chubby rainbows. Most successful anglers nymph and streamer fish for big fish, but when the big stoneflies are out, most catch a monster or two on the huge dries. Take a float here in late spring/early summer and hold on.

Three miles doesn't sound like much, but experienced guides will get out of the driftboat here, walking it down stream, to get you in position for a chance at 5-plus-pound rainbows and don't be surprised if you connect with a bow pushing double digits. These are thick fish and they know how to pull.



'You can catch 16- to 20-inch rainbows all day in Box Canyon,' (N44.37520 W111.40776) added Adelin. 'We've seen rainbows to 27 inches in here, so there's always a chance for a big fish. 'There's another stretch of Henry's to consider as it's a great drift below Osborne Bridge if you want a sample

Ranch-like flat water and get taste of some boulder streamer fishing near Pine Haven.'



I like the 'lower river' as well. The Riverside Campground (N44.26683 W114.85009) is one of my favorite places to call home. Here you can enjoy pocket water fishing and a little wade action as driftboats ferry anglers down towards Ashton.( N44.07878 W111.49634) This is the place to escape with the family. Here you'll find friendly, riverside campsites and willing fish. I've never caught anything big here, but nothing beats waking up, walking down to the river and catching fish in a hurry. No hike, no drive?perfect for those evenings when you get into camp late or before you pack up and leave to head to the next spot.

Henry's stillwaters, whether you're talking Henry's Lake itself or Island Park Reservoir, can be unbelievable--- particularly Henry's for big fish in the fall. How about catching 2- to 8-pound rainbows, cutbows and even the

occasional brookie on streamers?

'Henry's Fork is centrally located making for an ideal launching point for fishing the area,' said Adelin. 'We've got the Henry's Fork behind the shop, South Fork over the hill, local lakes like Henry's, Hebgen, Quake, and that's not to mention the Madison, Firehole, and Yellowstone Park itself, you'll see the area is loaded with options.'

It's a great region to explore, so it's no wonder this area is loaded with fly shops, lodges and guides. This is trout bum territory. If you can't just sleep in a sleeping bag in the bed of your truck, try an Island Park, Last Chance, Swan Valley or West Yellowstone lodge located right in the middle of it all. Start planning today!

**Size:**

The whole river is about 127 miles of great fishing. The Box Canyon section is approximately 3 miles long. The Railroad Ranch area is over 10 miles long.

**Weather:**

Early season may be a bit cool with plenty of nice warm days. Summer is generally in the 70s and 80s. Fall cools quickly into the 50s. Rain is scattered but generally light. To see a good annual view of the weather in this area, go to;



**Fishing Seasons:**

The fishing season is from June 15 to November 30. Always check in with the DNR before you plan your trip.

**Tackle and Techniques:**

While most prefer a 5 wt rod, you can probably get away with a 3 wt, the advantage being that you can get a more delicate presentation. The disadvantage is when you are lucky enough to hook one to the monsters. Your 3 wt may be over matched. Standard spinner reels work well in this water as well. In particular, spinning lures are effective in this running water. Our suggestion is stick with a single hook spinner and keep the barbs pressed down. They are not needed in this kind o water.

**Editor's note:** *This article is adapted from an article originally appearing in **High Country Angler, Fall 2012.** [www.HCAmagazine.com](http://www.HCAmagazine.com)*

**Species At This Location:**

Trout Rainbow