

Blind angler hooks into sport

■ Travels 'extreme trail' to reach prime fishing spot

By RACHEL PETERSON
Staff writer

The Cody region is abundant with hiking, pack trips and fishing opportunities, as well as tour guides for just about any outdoor activity.

And after returning from a six-day, 26-mile pack and fly fishing trip, tourist Estelle Condra says the region fulfilled her desires.

"I had a marvelous experience," she adds.

Condra, who became blind due to a hereditary ailment about 17 years ago, takes two or three "venture trips" each year, attempting feats a blind person might avoid.

Theresa Lineberger of Butte Creek Outfitters said in the past Condra has gone whitewater rafting and rock climbed.

Her recent trip in Cody was another journey.

Chip Andrews, Condra's fly fishing guide from North Fork Anglers, says he was skeptical at first because of the "extreme trail" they traveled into the Thorofare region of Deer Creek.

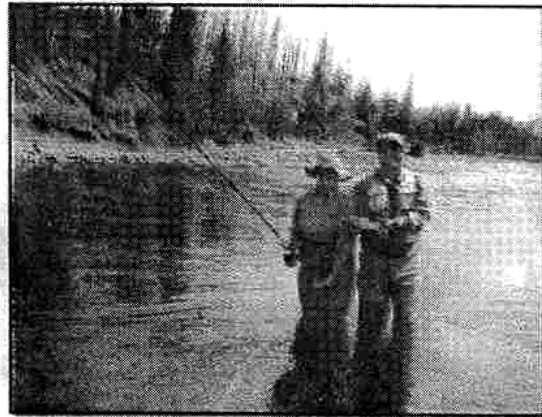
But Lineberger says "she did great."

Lineberger, whose husband Ron led the pack trip, said a few additional precautions were taken to ensure Condra's safety and enjoyment.

"Ron modified a few things in how we operate," Lineberger said. "She wore a helmet and was led in and out by him. He was in awe of her abilities."

Andrews says Condra's fishing experience was a success as well, but he was not completely surprised.

"Fly fishing is a sport of feeling the rod work," Andrews said. "Of course her sense of feel is keen. She picked it up quicker than most people I teach."



Estelle Condra, a blind woman from Nashville, Tenn., and guide Chip Andrews display one of the trout she caught during a recent fly fishing trip in the Thorofare (Courtesy photo).

Condra confirmed Andrews' observations.

"The whole experience is so tactile and exquisite," Condra added. "I could feel the fish bite and flutter at the end of the line."

In addition, Condra and Andrews agree the trip was educational.

"Chip ran my hands over a fish," she said of one of her two hooked trout. "I had no idea trout have no scales. It was one of the most pleasurable moments."

Condra also changed her views on the sport.

"I never wanted to catch a fish," she said. "It seemed so cruel. But when I felt and then released the fish it became an intellectual, first-class experience."

Andrews also gained

from the trip.

"It was interesting to watch how she perceived the world," he said. "She listened closely when I described the colors and parts of the fish. It was a real eye-opener to see how the world is looked at by someone else."

It was a real eye-opener to see how the world is looked at by someone else.

Chip Andrews,
North Fork Anglers