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| Date | Feb. 19 & 21, 2005 | Time | Mid-late afternoon |
| Location | N.F. Payette River - Cascade, ID | Weather | Cold, calm, mostly overcast |
| Fish Species | Mountain Whitefish | Size Range | 10"-15", mostly 10"-12" |
| Fish Caught | A dozen | | |
| Flies Used | Bead Head Pheasant Tail & Bead Head Hares Ear Nymphs (12-16 in size) | | |
| Techniques | Cast on a 45° angle upstream and allow weight to hit bottom and then, similar to a wet fly swing, apply a steady drag across the bottom slightly faster than the current toward shore. Apply just enough split shot 12"-18" above fly to tap across the bottom. You could also use sinking line and not use weights. | | |
| Comments | The secret to catching Whitefish in the winter is keeping the fly within a couple inches of the bottom! | | |

I thought I'd try some winter fishing while staying at our cabin on Presidents' Day weekend. I knew that Lake Cascade offered exceptional ice fishing but I was in the mood to fly fish, as always! I thought that I'd go see if I could find the Whitefish that my girls and I caught by the droves last fall.

I walked up to the bank to the location that I had fished last fall. The sun was shining just right so that I could see the bottom of the wide, slow, calm river bottom. I had never been able to see this clearly in the past. I could not believe my eyes. There were literally thousands of Whitefish stacked along the bottom of the river. It reminded me of a fish hatchery because the entire river bottom was covered with fish. It didn't take long to catch a fish. I would get bites (or snags) on nearly every cast but would lose most of them just after they would hit the fly. I still need to figure out what I am doing wrong when it comes to hooking Whitefish. They have small, tender mouths and I'm not sure exactly how they take the fly. I'm not sure if I needed to set quicker or slower or harder or softer.



Mountain Whitefish caught earlier in the fall

Despite all the misses, I still landed a lot of fish. They are strong fish and give a good tug on the line. I did catch one 14" Rainbow that jumped out of the water a few times and gave me a fun fight, especially for being winter. I threw all my fish back but a fisherman standing nearby told me that they were very good smoked. I thought I'd try it another time. I practice catch and release for the most part but have actually seen people that will throw Whitefish on the bank because they consider it a trash fish. Not me!

The one thing I didn't like about winter fly-fishing was my line constantly freezing to the eyelets of my fly rod. I actually fished on Saturday and Monday. I didn't have the problem on Monday because it was warmer but Saturday I had to break the ice every half-dozen casts. It also makes it harder to shoot line. Catching winter Whitefish can be a blast and it keeps me going until the spring Mayfly hatches unfold and the trout begin their feeding frenzy!