

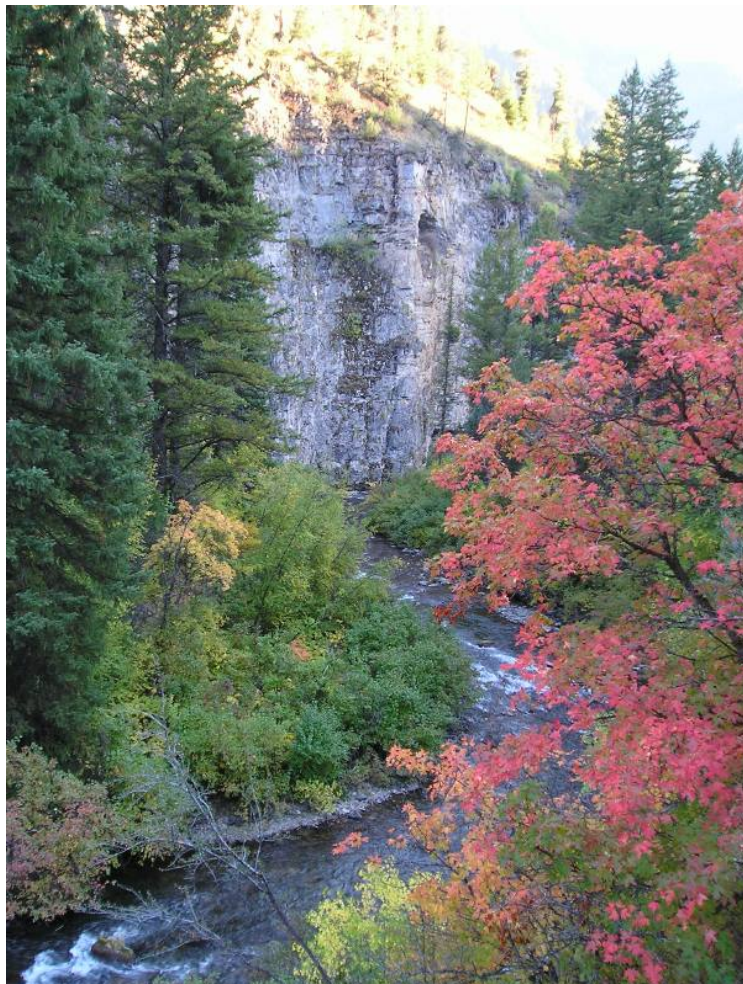


Date	Late September 2007	Time	Afternoon
Location	Lower & Upper Palisades Lakes Swan Valley, ID	Weather	Calm & clear
Fish Species	Yellowstone Cutthroat	Size Range	Mostly to 12"; A few to 15"
Fish Caught	Many Yellowstone Cutthroat		
Flies Used	Royal Wulff, Grasshopper		
Techniques	Dry Fly fishing		
Comments	I caught my first Yellowstone Cutthroat! Nice place for a Blast-n-Cast!		

The trail to Upper and Lower Palisades Lakes starts at the Palisades Creek Campground. The lower lake is 4 easy miles and another 3 easy miles to the upper lake with a short moderate climb. The canyon was starting to show its beautiful fall colors which are a tradeoff for the brilliant color show of flowers earlier in the year.

You can reach Palisades Creek Campground by driving east out of Swan Valley past Irwin on Hwy 26. You'll see a sign for the campground a few miles before the Palisades Dam. It is a 2 mile good dirt road to the campground and trailhead parking. No parking fees.

Palisades Creek is a tributary to the world renowned South Fork of the Snake River. It is a very important spawning stream for native Yellowstone Cutthroat and is not open to fishing until July 1st due to this reason. I have fished the Blue-Ribbon South Fork of the Snake a few times from the bank and have always caught Brown Trout. I was really looking forward to catching my first Yellowstone Cutthroat.



It took me about 1:15 to reach the 6131' lower lake at 4 miles which is just over a 500' elevation gain from the trailhead. I walked across the bridge at the outlet and walked up the west side of the lake. The lake was shallow on the west side and I didn't see any fish. I decided to continue up the trail rather than walk to the other side of the lake where it was deeper.



Lower Palisades Lake

I decided that I would fish the lower lake on the way back and plus I wouldn't have to carry my fly rod to the upper lake. This held true until I saw a fish in a small spring fed pond just north of the lake. Out came the fly rod. I just couldn't resist. One cast and it swam from the bottom of the pool up to meet my fly. Fish on!



I hiked up the trail until I came to a cabin at Chicken Springs named for all the grouse that inhabit the area. I could have easily shot my limit of grouse along the trail especially in the evening. It would be a great hike for a blast-n-cast!

After eating lunch near the cabin I continued up the well signed trail to the upper lake at 6633'. The last section of the trail climbs 400' in a little less than a mile and just over 1000' from the trailhead but it wasn't too bad with the switchbacks. I reached the lake and it was beautiful and much larger than I anticipated at 16,000 Acres and about a mile long. I started by fishing the outlet.



Near the outlet of Upper Palisades Lake

I tried a few casts but the wind was blowing and I knew it was difficult for the fish to see my fly. I decided to walk around the steep bank just above the water and look for fish swimming near the edge. It wasn't long before I saw a fish. I cast my fly out in front. The fish rushed to the fly. Fish on!



I continued targeting fish along the bank and there were plenty of them and all were easily enticed to sip my fly. Excellent fishing! I caught fish consistently for the next hour before I decided to hike up to the inlet and fish some of the coves. By the time I reached the inlet it was just over a 15 mile round-trip hike.



Hiking along Upper Palisades Lake

The coves were great fishing but the fish didn't seem to fight much. They would get hooked and just flop around and not tug much. After catching many fish I decided just to target the larger fish. The largest fish I caught was in the 15-16" range.

After getting my feel I decided to head back down the trail. It was a great day and the evening brought out a lot of wildlife. I saw many grouse and a few Pika in the rocks which surprised me. I also saw a moose and its calf at the lower lake on the way back.

I decided to skip the fishing at the lower lake since I had caught so many trout but I did try a few casts in the creek on the way down. The creek produced a few small Cuts but nothing to brag about. This is one of the more popular hikes in Eastern Idaho so you may want to consider going during the week or after Labor Day to avoid the crowds. It was a beautiful hike with the autumn leaves and crisp fall weather. It would be a great place to take the kids because it is an easy hike especially to the lower lake. Several bridges along the trail also make it so your feet don't get wet. Enjoy it, you'll like it!



Moose at lower Palisades Lake

Fall colors along the trail

