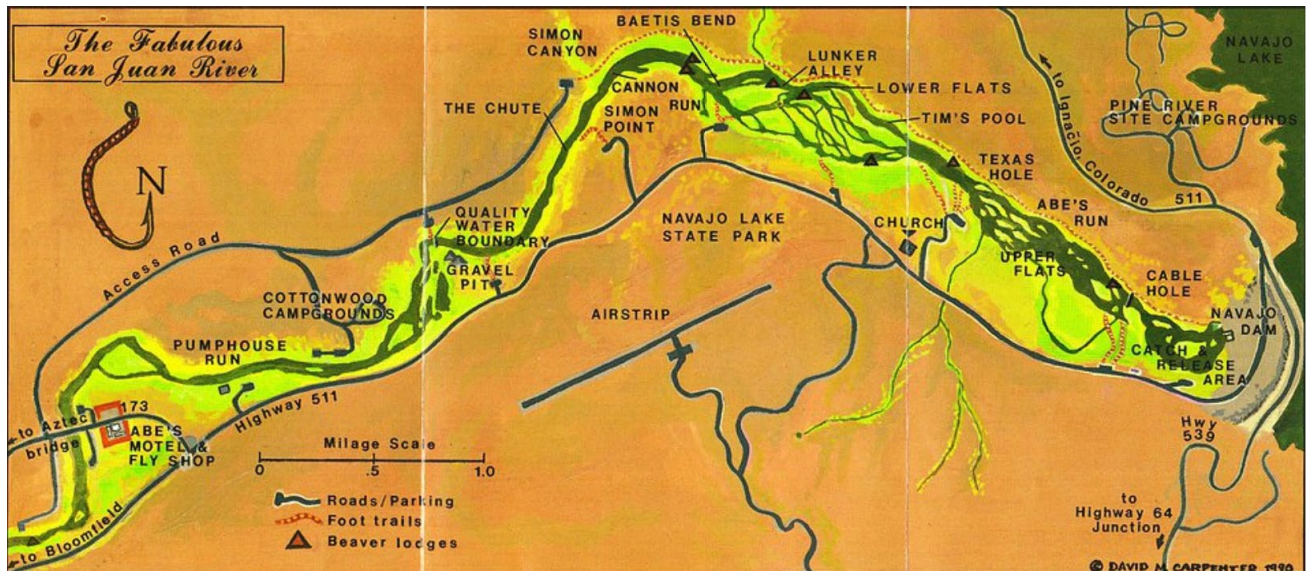


Fishing the San Juan River, NM

By Fred Smith - San Juan River Description, Flies & Basic Rigging

- I. I like to think of the river in five sections (see map below.)
 - a. The Braids, Upper Flats and Cable Hole area. This is the area upstream of the Texas hole. No boats allowed in this area.
 - b. Texas Hole, Kiddie Hole and down through Tim's Hole
 - c. Lower Flats, Baetis Bend to Simon Canyon
 - d. The chute to Cottonwood Campground
 - e. Cottonwood Campground to the Village takeout



- II. The river continues downstream from the Village take out for another nearly 20 miles of no access water, where while the number of fish diminishes the browns get big and aggressive. This water is float only and mostly done in the spring.
- III. The flow coming out of the dam is very cold. I wear breathable waders with light weight tights underneath.
- IV. The water is so cold that for the first mile or so of river below the dam the

insect life is pretty much limited to midges and aquatic worms. This is not to say that on occasion the fish, being opportunistic, will chase and take something else, but their normal diet is midges and aquatic worms. The wading is excellent, particularly in October when we will be there. In this upper section the midge patterns are generally black, gray and dark brown. Sizes 20 through 30 are the norm. I generally stick with 22 through 26 sizes. Remember that all hooks must be barbless.

- V. The life cycle of the midge goes through four stages but really, we only need to focus on three of those stages, larva, pupa/emergent and the dry/adult. The fish generally start rising to emergers when the midges begin to hatch. This normally occurs each day at between 9:00 am and 11:00 am and continue throughout the rest of the day until the wind comes up in the afternoon. Midge Larva, pupa/emergers and adult dry flies all will catch fish in this area. On the rod I brought is a Larva on top and an emergent on the bottom. Fishing the adult can be done with a Griffins gnat or since the midges are generally in a cluster a larger dead chicken works.



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- VI. Once you get to the Kiddie Hole just above the Texas hole you may begin to see Blue winged olives and possible pale morning duns later in the day. The flies are small and darker in color than one normally thinks of these insects in other western waters. A size 22 parachute Adams will often come close to matching these adult bugs and potentially offer some good dry fly fishing.
- VII. As you begin to move down the river the water begins to warm and the number of different types of bugs increases. Even in the Texas Hole you can catch fish on small dark brown foam wings that imitate the Baetis emergent. In the lower flats, RS2s, foam wings and very small pheasant tails work well. I really like to fish a size 20 pheasant tail on top with a size 22 Barr's emergent

trailing in the fast water of the lower flats.

- VIII. Of course, there is always rising fish in and around Baetis Bend. They are fun to chase either wading or floating. Technically tough fishing with small well-presented bugs but a good learning opportunity to cast to numerous rising fish.
- IX. Once you arrive at Death Row leeches and streamers can surprise with a large brown.
- X. The water from Simon Canyon down moves quickly and streamers cast directly across the river, then allowed to drift downstream until the line tightens, then a slow retrieve though the current may result in several hard hits and great runs. Throughout this portion of the river the selection of flies is much more like other similar western tail waters.
- XI. This section of river was vastly recontoured two years ago following a large blow out in Simon Canyon and subsequent filling the river with silt for nearly three years. New Mexico spent a couple million dollars in stream improvement and the fishing is just starting to come back now.
- XII. Beginning at the end of the Quality Water at Crusher takeout the water becomes much more familiar to those who fish other western waters. The flies used get bigger and while the fish are smaller it is not unusual to catch 10 or 12 fish between Cottonwood campground area and the village take out. Sometimes if there is a pale morning dun or baetis hatch on, #18 Compara Duns will catch fish after fish on almost every cast. Copper Johns, pheasant tails, and larger Barr's emergers work well down here.

Basic Rigging Illustration – See Below

