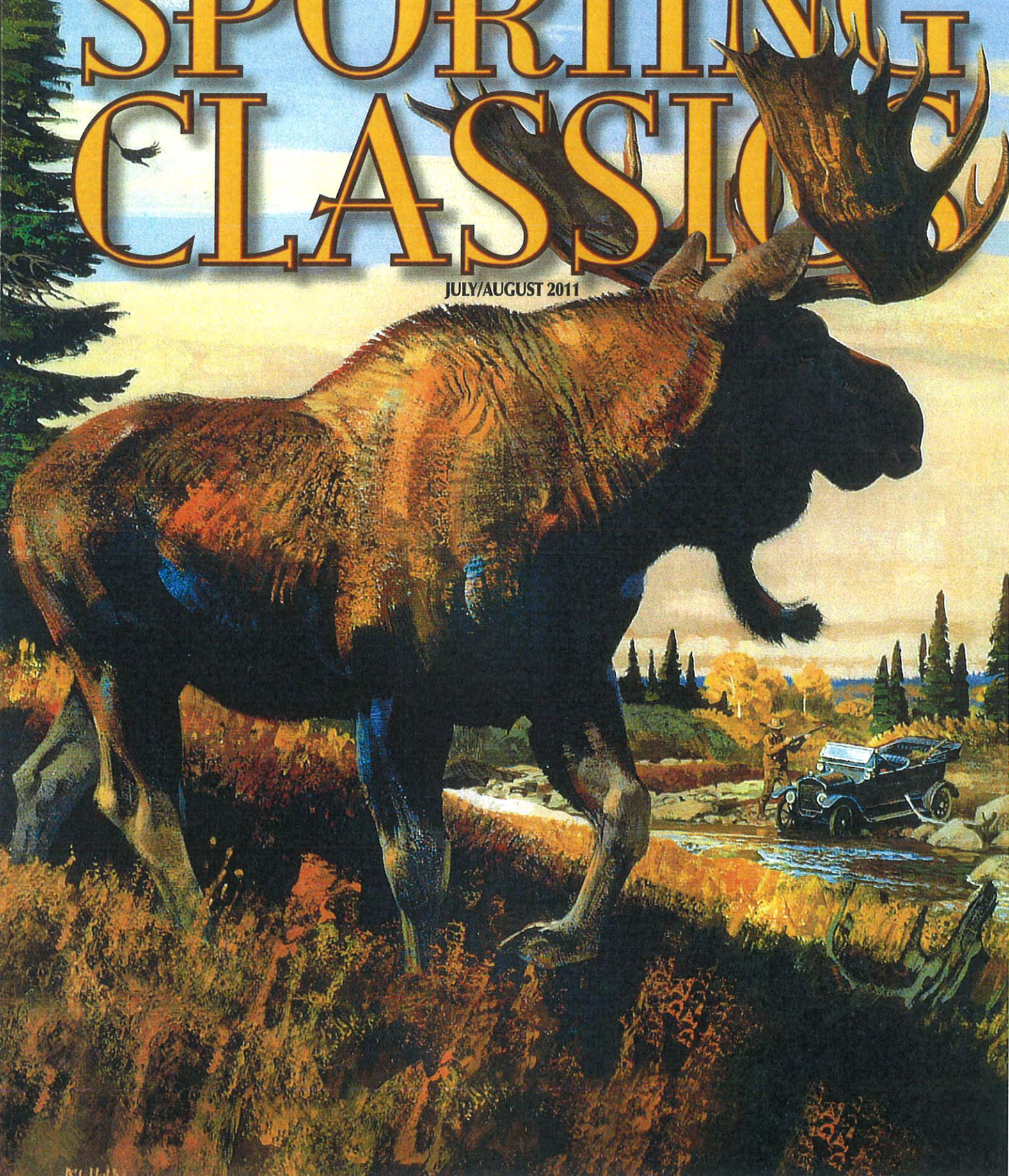


SPORTING CLASSICS

JULY/AUGUST 2011



Fly Fishing

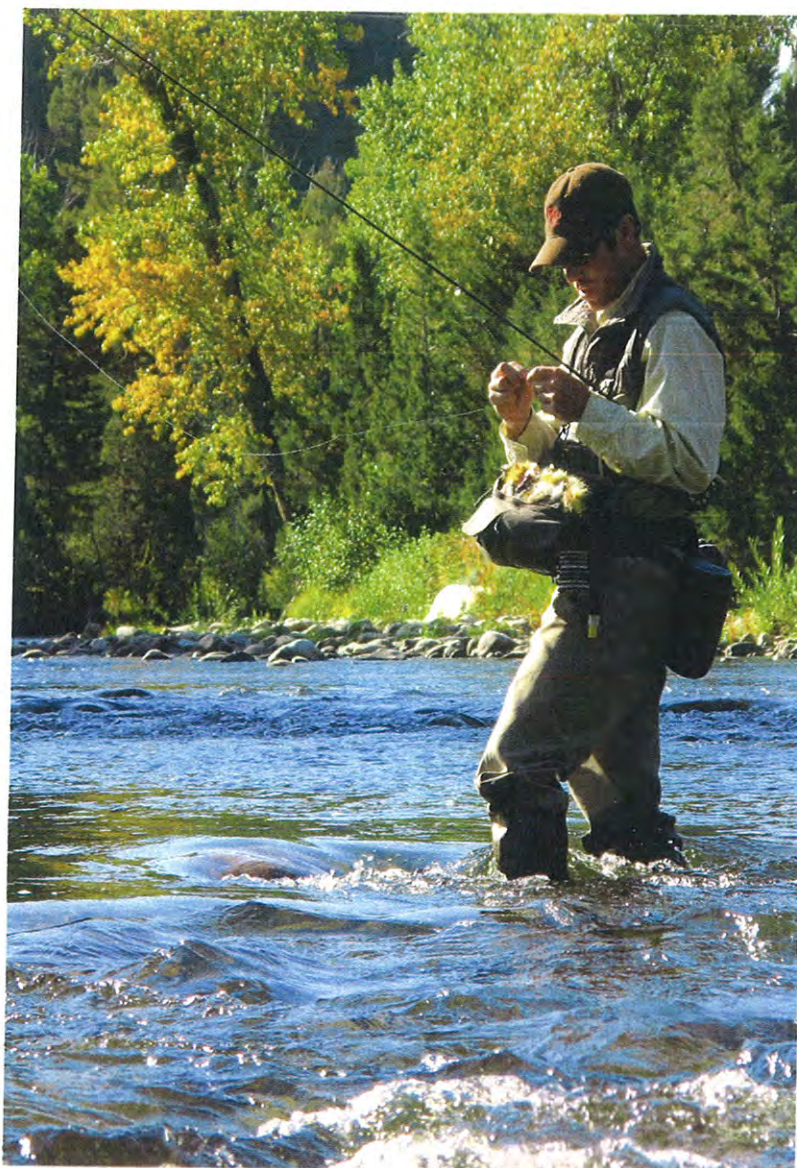
By Todd Tanner

I woke up in a dark tent with Rock Creek whispering in the background. For a second or two I wasn't sure where I was or what had pulled me from a sound sleep, and then I heard it again – a bull elk screaming his primal challenge to the star-sprinkled Montana night. My wife Molly rolled over on her side of the queen bed and asked if everything was okay. I told her I was fine; I was just listening to the elk bugle. In a few minutes we were both back to sleep.

Molly and I spent a long weekend at The Ranch at Rock Creek this past September. The ranch enjoys excellent fly fishing right out the front door, but it's not your typical angling resort; not even close. For example, our tent – or what they called our “canvas cabin” – was truly luxurious, with a screened-in wooden porch, artisan-crafted beds and furniture, table lamps, an elegant gas heater, wireless service for phones and laptops, and a beautifully finished wooden floor. There were even guest robes and slippers waiting for us when we arrived.

At the same time, the ranch offers

At The Ranch at Rock Creek, you and your significant other can enjoy a romantic getaway and some of the very best fly fishing in Montana.



TODD TANNER

Activities Director Hank Welles enjoys an autumn morning on Rock Creek.

a whole host of activities besides fly fishing. There's horseback riding, mountain biking, hiking, archery, and sporting clays, just to name a few, while you'll also find a four lane bowling alley, a couple of billiards tables and an intimate movie theater.

Which means your better half will have all sorts of fun things to do while you explore four miles of gorgeous private water on Rock Creek.

But first let's take a step or two back. While I write about some pretty amazing places for *Sporting Classics*, I tend to visit establishments where the guests eat, sleep and breath fly fishing. And though there's nothing wrong with that – I've been known to eat, sleep and breath fly fishing myself – Molly is more of a hiker and a biker than an angler, so she usually stays home while I'm off on a fishing trip.

Consequently, I've been keeping an eye open for angling destinations we can both enjoy; places that offer exceptional food and wine, first class amenities and the kind of

interesting activities even the most discriminating non-angler

would appreciate. Enter The Ranch at Rock Creek.

I don't know many people who'd expect to find a world class resort on a dirt road 20 miles past the tiny town of Philipsburg, but The Ranch at Rock Creek is every inch of world class. From the main lodge, with guest quarters fit for royalty and captains of industry, to the dining room, which features great wines and remarkable cuisine, to the scenery, which is pure Montana with an

abundance of forested ridges, aspen groves and lush meadows, the Ranch takes a traditional Rocky Mountain archetype – the guest ranch – and infuses it with a degree of sophistication and luxury you rarely find in such an iconic western landscape.

Molly and I arrived at the ranch on a Friday afternoon in late September, stowed our gear in our canvas cabin, and then had an extraordinary dinner in the

main dining room.

The next morning, after wandering up to the lodge for breakfast, Molly headed off on her own while I hooked up with Hank Welles, the ranch's activities director, to explore Rock Creek. Hank is a talented angler, and he took real pride in showing me around one of the finest streams in western Montana.


Rock Creek winds through the ranch property for miles and we caught trout – mostly west slope cutts and browns – in all the deeper pools and in the soft water against the cottonwood-lined banks. You'd be hard-pressed to find a prettier stream, or one with more character. It's a true gem, and those Rock Creek trout are gorgeous.

Hank and I finished up just past noon and a little while later I met Molly in the dining room for lunch. Afterwards she headed off for an archery lesson while I grabbed my 5-weight and aimed myself towards a handsome section of water we'd bypassed that morning.

I'd like to tell you that my solo afternoon on the creek was good, but I'm afraid that would be an understatement. It was incredible. I started throwing a tan elk hair caddis, thinking that it might be a reasonable facsimile for either a spruce moth or an October caddis, and the trout acted as if I'd started ringing the dinner bell.

For the better part of three hours almost every decent cast to the deep water on the far bank resulted in a fat, healthy cutthroat. And on those occasions when a handsome native cutt didn't inhale my dry, it was because a beautiful wild brown beat him to it. It was the best dry fly fishing of the year, and I suspect our dinner companions that evening wondered why I couldn't stop smiling.

Even better, I wasn't the only one having a fantastic time. Molly couldn't get over the incredible food and wine – the bison, in particular, was out of this world – and the staff was so warm, friendly and helpful that we






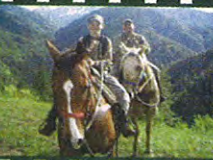

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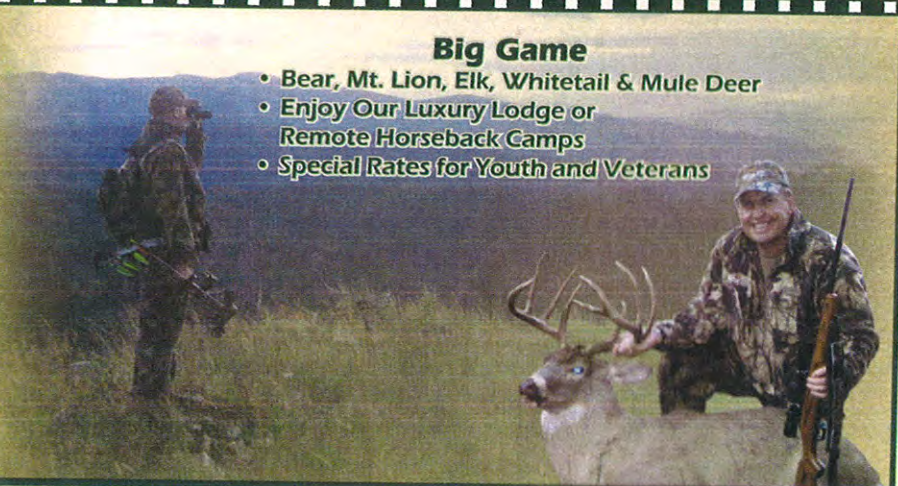
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started questioning whether any human being could possibly deserve the attention our hosts were lavishing on us. (We didn't warrant such exceptional service, but we sure didn't complain.)

The following morning Molly went off on a scenic hike while I teamed up with Hank to try a couple of the ranch's trophy ponds. We caught plenty of trout, including some real dandies, and I couldn't help but think it a bit unfair that such promising still-waters were situated so close to Rock Creek. Where do you focus your efforts? Of course if you're a guest, that's a moot point. You can split your day between a truly idyllic stream and a handful of great ponds, with plenty of time left over for a horseback ride or a round of sporting clays. And for those so inclined, there's also a spa, swimming pool, hot tub, a couple of western-style bars, the aforementioned movie theater . . . the list goes on and on.

When it comes right down to it, the ranch is one of the most impressive fishing destinations in the West. Rock Creek is wonderful and the ranch offers truly exceptional lodging, dining and amenities. Even more importantly, the entire staff – from Activities Director Hank Welles, to General Manager Kerry Hing, to the good folks who wait tables, pour drinks and attend to your every need – surround you with genuine Montanan warmth and hospitality.

If you're looking for a new place to visit this summer, the ranch definitely deserves your consideration. And if you're vacationing with that special someone, The Ranch at Rock Creek should be at the very top of your list. ❄️

Note: In addition to their new 5-stand, 11-thrower Mallard Gulch sporting clays course, the Ranch will offer guided bird hunts this fall on 1,200 acres of native cover, supplemented with barley, wheat and pea food plots. If you're so inclined, you'll be able to target Hungarian partridge, pheasants and chukars over your guide's pointers and retrievers.

Call (877) 786-1545 or visit www.theranchatrockcreek.com.



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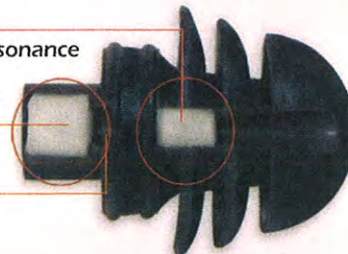
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