

Tailwater Trifecta: A Fishing Road Trip to Three Tailwaters Holston, White and San Juan

An Excellent Adventure in September/October 2021

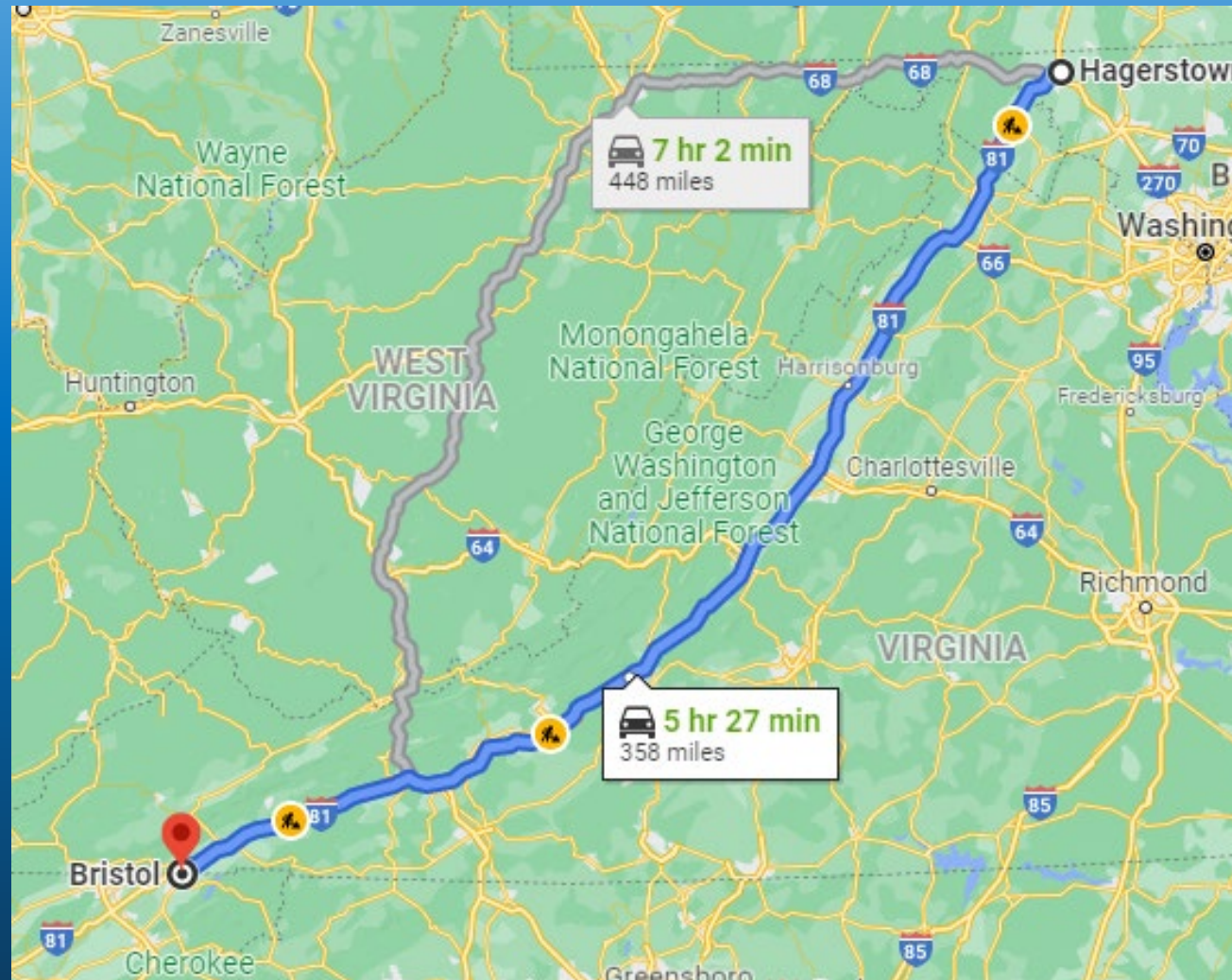
Noel Gollehon & Doug Hutzell

SVTU Meeting November 2021

The Road Trip to Tailwaters

- On September 21, 2021, Doug and Noel started our trip to visit three different tailwaters in the southern US
- We planned for months on places to fish, contacting guides and lodging.
- It was a grand road-trip, this is our story...

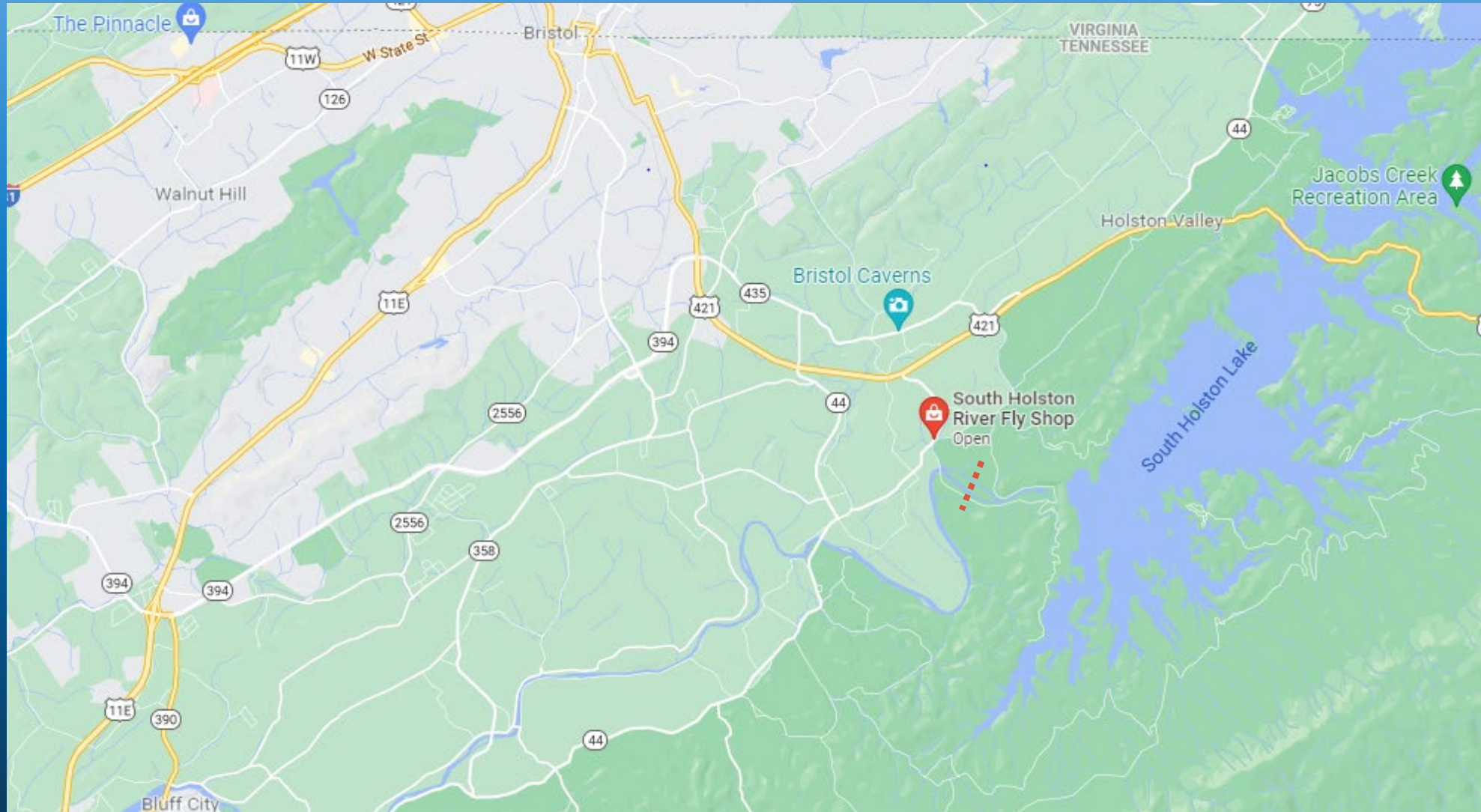
The Road Trip: Leg 1 Hagerstown to Bristol, TN



Bristol



South Holston Tailwater below TVA dam



South Holston Tailwater

About the size of the North Branch



South Holston Tailwater

Provide minimum flow with a 7.5 foot weir dam



South Holston Tailwater

At minimum flow the water is low—almost like a series of pools



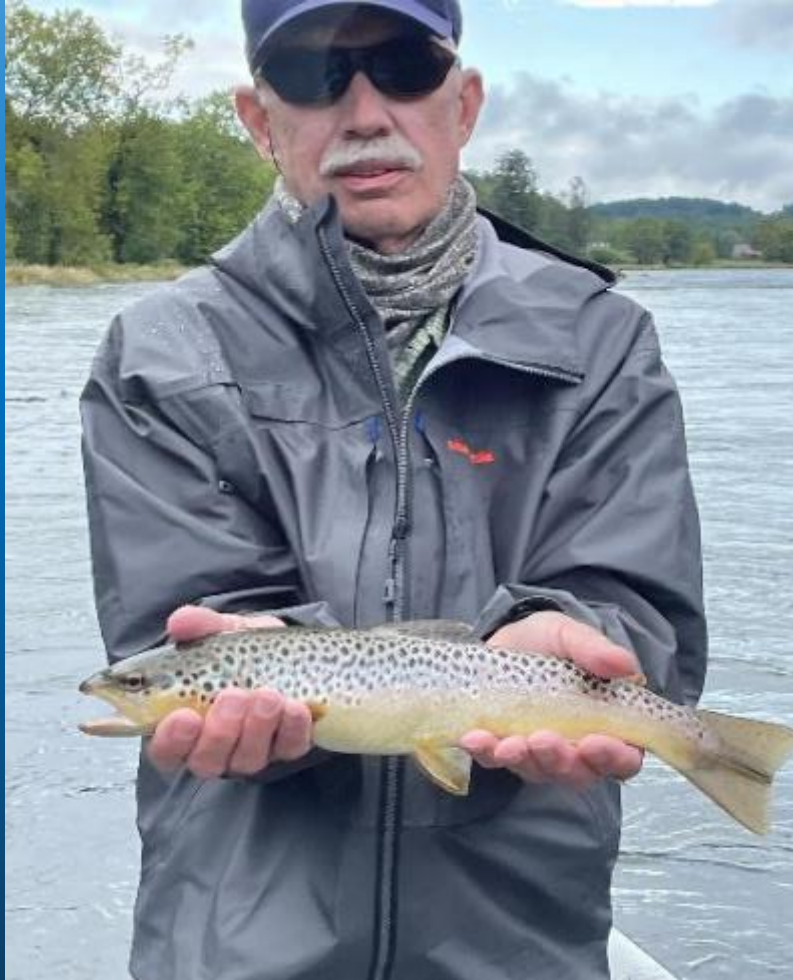
South Holston Tailwater

On a schedule set by TVA, the power generators are turned on and water levels come up several feet



South Holston Tailwater

We found the fishing to be much better with higher flows



South Holston Tailwater

We found the fishing to be much better with higher flows



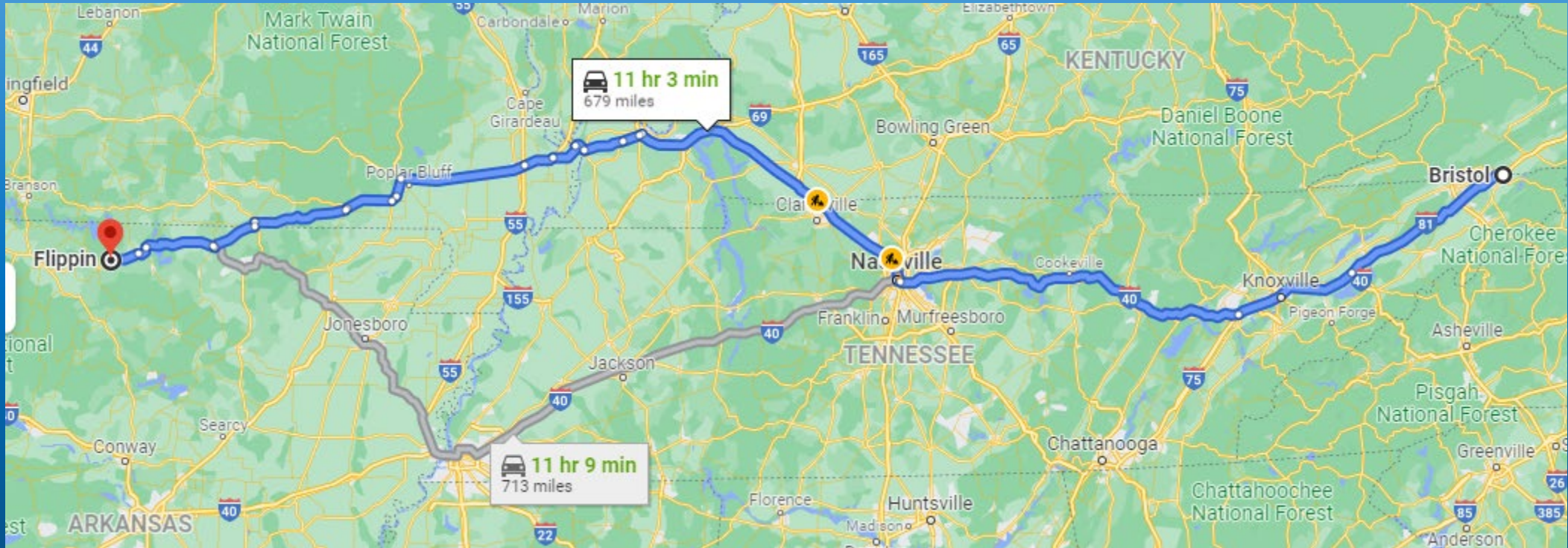
The Road Trip: South Holston Summary

- We fished with guides. It would be a hard river to wade (access and changing water flow)
- There is a stream about 30 miles to the south (Watauga) that is more suited for wading
- We fished with 2 different guides out of the South Holston Fly shop
- Day 1 in the rain, a combination of dry flies and nymphs, we brought 25-30 fish to the boat
- Day 2, nymphed all day, and also netted about 25-30 fish
- More rainbows than browns with sizes up to 12-14 inches
- At fly shop recommendation, we stayed at the Bristol Hotel in town, but lots of rentals along the stream.

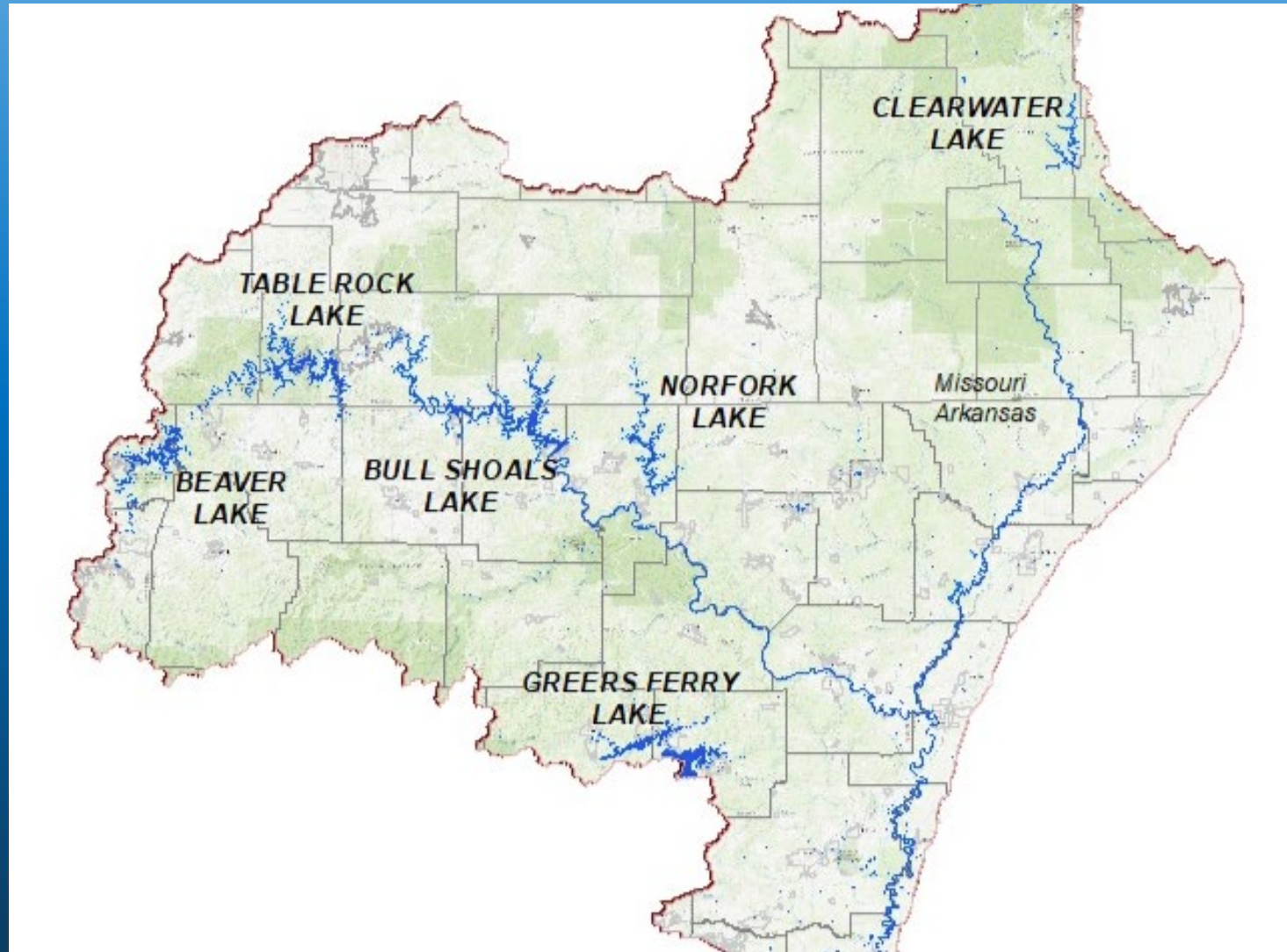


The Road Trip: Leg 2

Bristol, TN to Flippin, AR



White River Basin



Bull Shoals Tailwater Below USACE Dam



Bull Shoals Tailwater: The White is a Large River



Bull Shoals Tailwater: The River

The dam runs at least one power plant for flow



Bull Shoals Tailwater: The Boats

Most guides use a 17-foot johnboat with jet outboard and oars



Bull Shoals Tailwater: Day 1

Accessed the White at Wildcat Shoals



Bull Shoals Tailwater: Day 1

Accessed the White at Wildcat Shoals



We were not impressed. Catching fish this size was not what we thought the White was known for.

Bull Shoals Tailwater: Day 2

Accessed the White from Cedarwood Lodge



Bull Shoals Tailwater: Day 2

Flew upstream



Bull Shoals Tailwater: Day 2

We could tell this day would be different!



Bull Shoals Tailwater: Day 2 Double Browns on hoppers!



Bull Shoals Tailwater: Day 2

Boated four large browns on hoppers



Bull Shoals Tailwater: Day 2

And some good sized rainbows too!



And our attitude about the White changed!

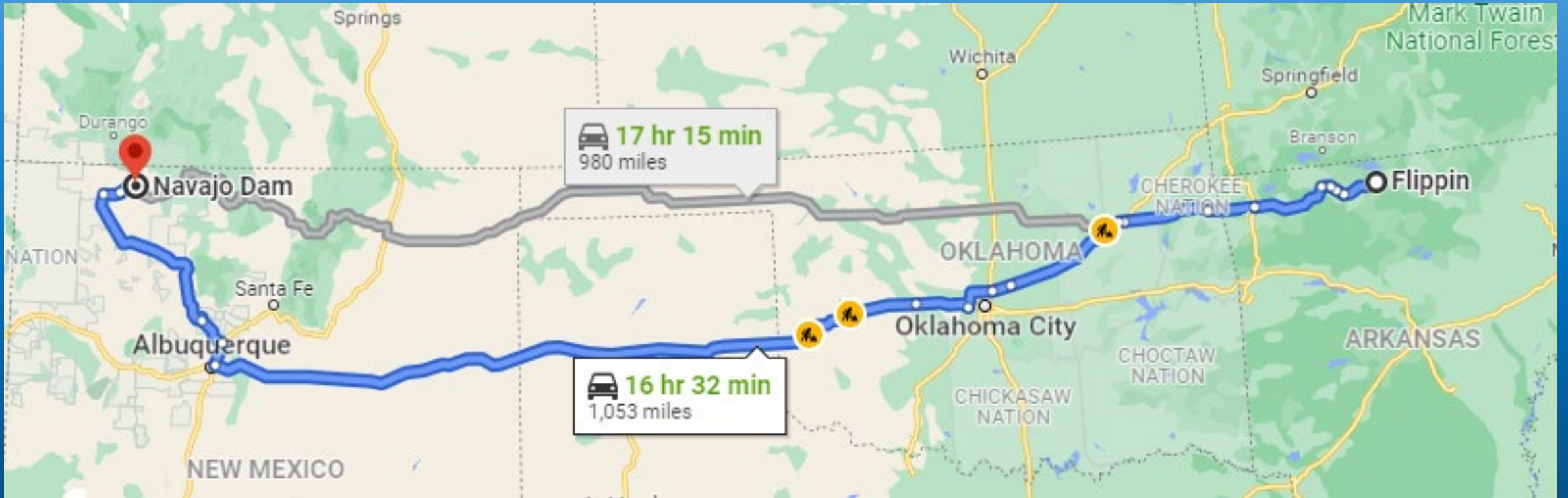


The Road Trip: White River Summary

- We fished with guides, it would be impossible to wade this river (access and changing water flow)
- Day 1, from Wildcat Shoals, purple or ruby midge under a caddis soft hackle all day, 30+ fish to the boat, 2 browns <12" and rainbows up to 14" but most 10"
- Day 2, #12 hopper from morning to 2:00 pm brought in 4 big browns and 20 or so rainbows 12-16"
- Shifted to purple beadhead nymph under a beadhead caddis pupa and boated 40 rainbow in 2 hours most 12"
- We stayed at the Cedarwood Lodge
- There are several lodges, some rentals along the stream, but very limited restaurants near Flippin



The Road Trip: Leg 3 Flippin, AR to Navajo Dam, NM

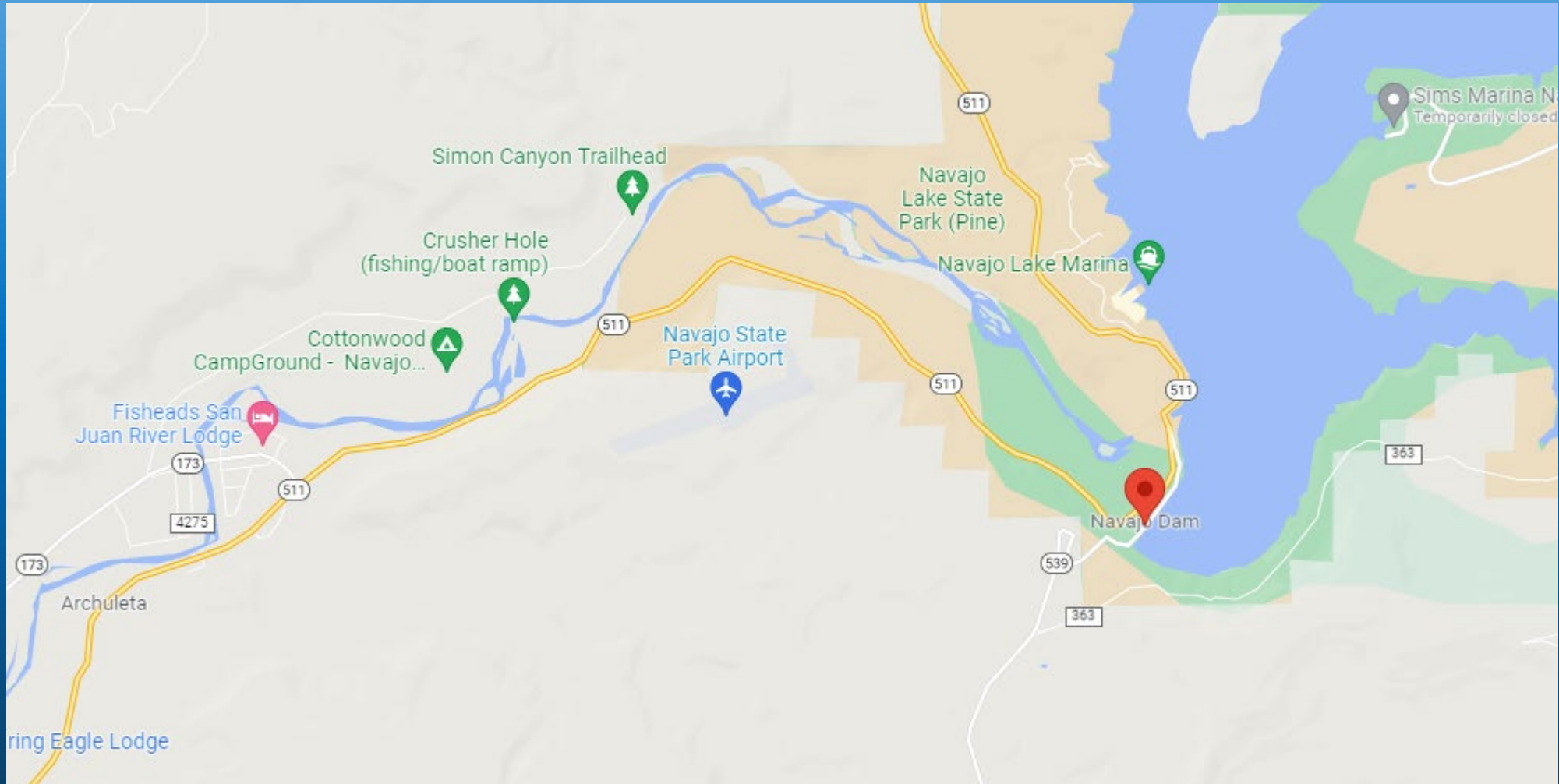


Note that Flippin AR is about half way from Hagerstown to the San Juan NM

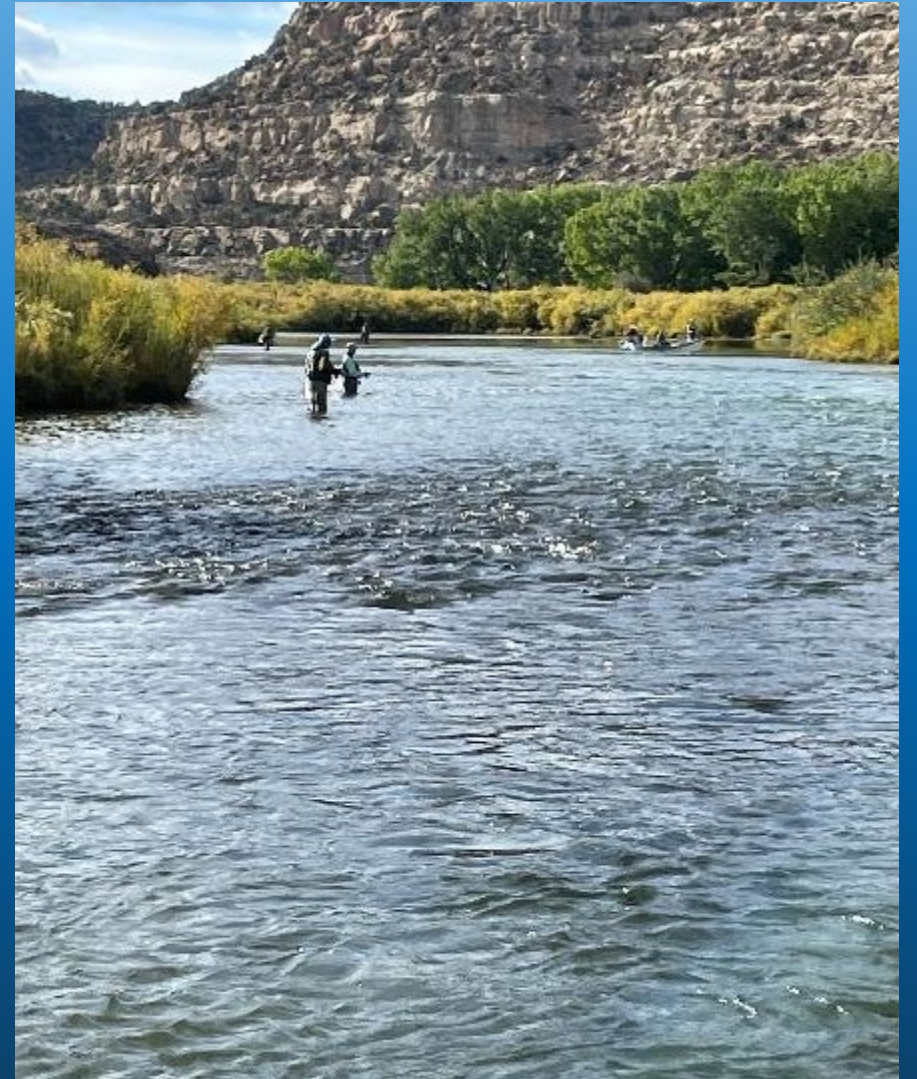
San Juan River Basin



Navajo Dam Tailwater below BoR dam



Navajo Dam Tailwater: The River



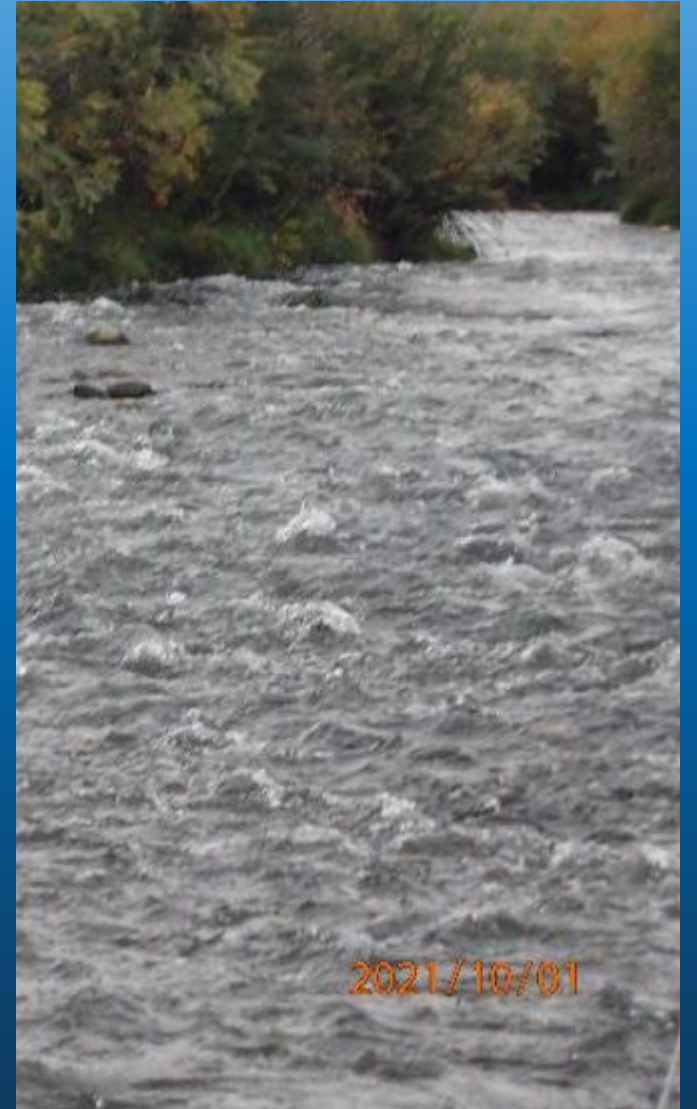
The crowd gathers!



Fished for six days, guided trip for two every day



Hooking up in Texas Hole



Hooking up in Texas Hole



We successfully wade-fished most of the time



We successfully wade-fished most of the time



We successfully wade-fished most of the time



We successfully wade-fished most of the time

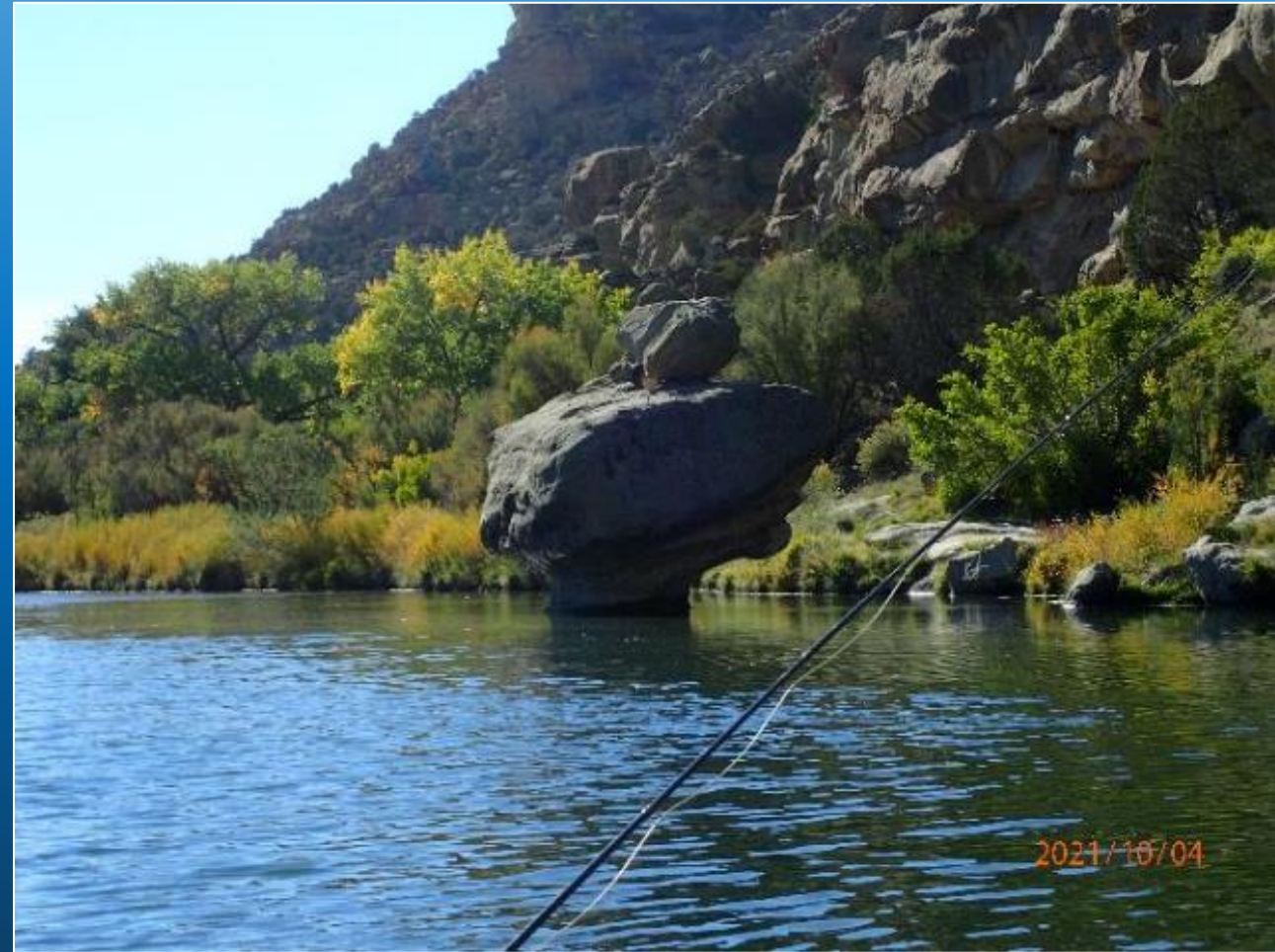
This one on a dry!



We successfully wade-fished most of the time



But fishing is only a part of the experience



But fishing is only a part of the experience



But fishing is only a part of the experience



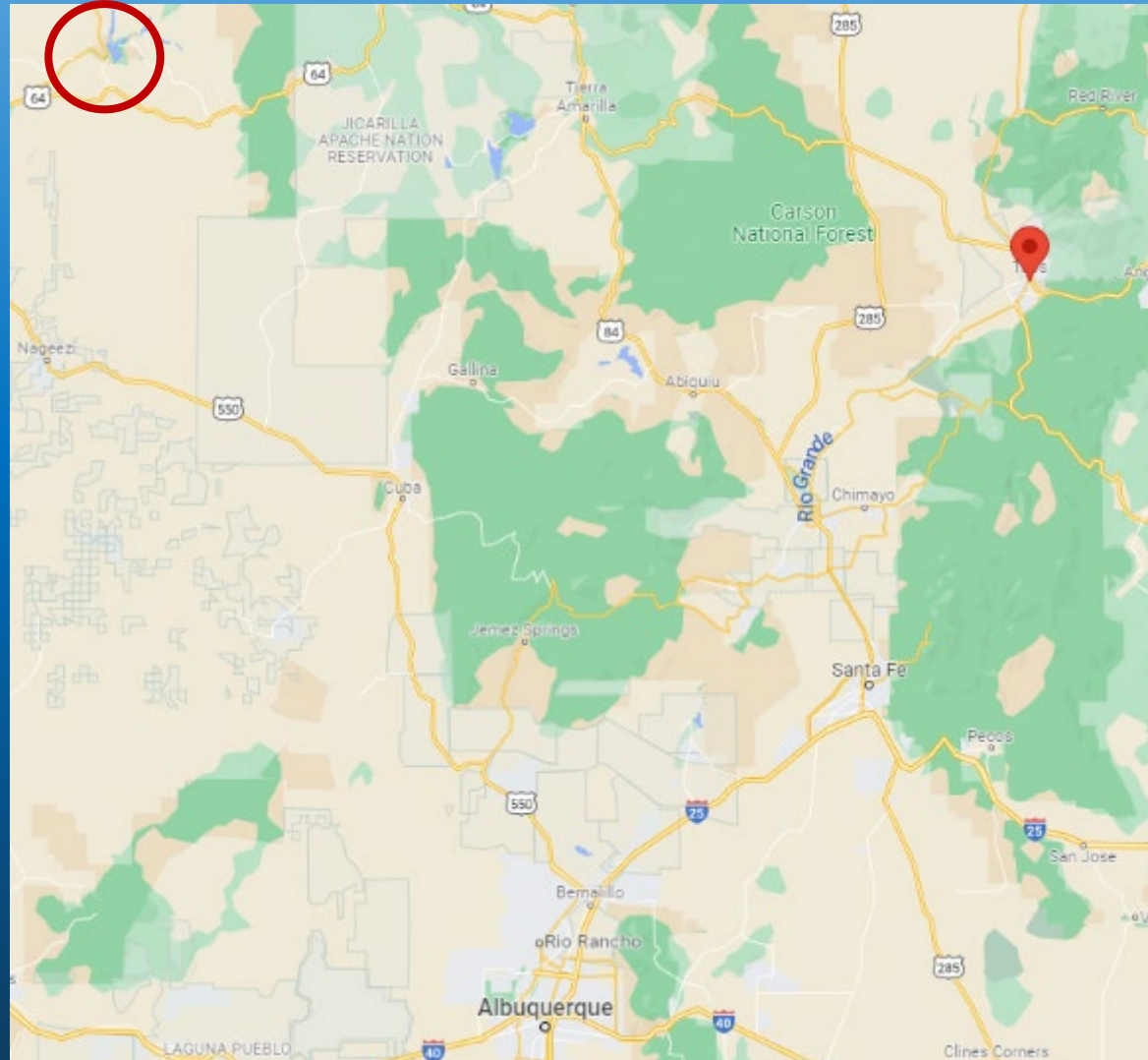
The Road Trip: San Juan Summary

- We fished mainly on our own with guides a day or two. Most of the San Juan is accessible (State Park).
- Every person caught fish every day they fished.
- More rainbows than browns, up to about 20 inches
- Some BWO dries but mostly BWO emergers, and nymphs in the afternoons.
- The San Juan is a midge river, larva (#18 and 20), pupa (#24 and 26) and emergers (#22, 24 and 26).
- We stayed at the Octagon Inn, lodging is limited as are restaurants.

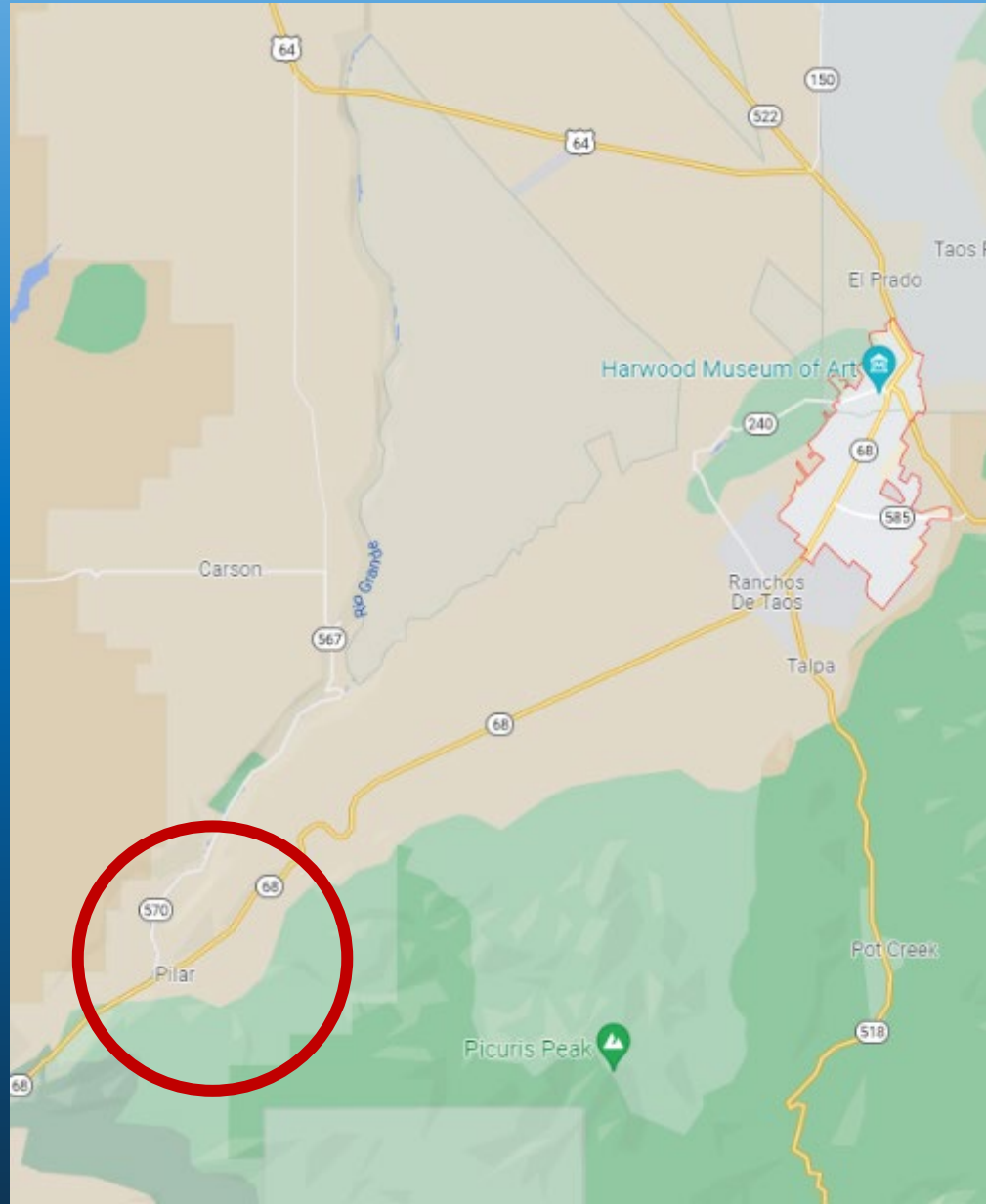


The Road Trip: A side-stop Taos, NM

San Juan



Taos area – We fished Rio Grande at Pilar



Taos Area – Why Pilar?



Rio Grande at Pilar



Rock Dancing on the Rio Grande



Rio Grande at Pilar



The Road Trip: Rio Grande Summary

- We fished with a wade guide one day and on our own a day
- Access at Pilar is easy, limited access in the canyon
- Catching was tough on our trip! Need to hit the Rio Grande at the right time to catch many fish
- We stayed in Taos, plenty of motels and restaurants
- Taos is a tourist destination and is priced accordingly



Details

- Tailwater focus so flow on all streams is managed
 - South Holston in Tennessee
 - TVA dam – flow changes are announced
 - Flow is managed for lake levels both on the SoHo and downstream. Power is secondary.
 - Min flows provided by a secondary structure (Weir dam)
 - White in Arkansas
 - USACE dam – flows for power production are not announced
 - Flow is managed for both lake level and power production.
 - Min flows provided by continuous operation of one power turbine
 - San Juan in New Mexico
 - Bureau of Reclamation dam – flow changes are announced
 - Flow is managed for downstream irrigation and environmental needs. Power is secondary.
 - Min flows provided by constant release

Details

- Trip
 - On the Road 22 days total
 - Fished for 12 days on three different tailwaters plus the Rio Grande
 - South Holston in Tennessee
 - White in Arkansas
 - San Juan in New Mexico
 - Drove almost 5,000 miles
- Cost
 - Fuel/truck \$800 roundtrip
 - Lodging \$60-\$80 per person per night
 - Food \$10-\$25 per person per day
 - Guides \$250 per person per day plus tip

Details

- Fishing
 - Caught Fish on every river we fished!
 - South Holston in Tennessee
 - Saw a few larger fish. We caught fish up to 12-14 inches.
 - White in Arkansas
 - Caught 19-21 inch browns on hoppers. Up to 16 inch rainbow on hoppers
 - Nymphing up to 14 inch rainbows few browns.
 - San Juan and Rio Grande Rivers in New Mexico
 - San Juan up to 20 inch browns and rainbow, many 16-18 inches.
 - Rio Grande a few 10-12 inches
- Flies
 - The common tailwater theme is midges #20 - #26.
 - Some BWO patterns on the SoHo and San Juan
 - Some Caddis patterns on the White

I had to add this picture...

Randy Dwyer of PPTU fished the San Juan a week after us with the same guide we used for 5 days and caught this 33" brown



It was a great trip!
We even found a distillery on our way home



Thank you for attending this SVTU virtual
event

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