

Fishing for fun on Cline Ranch

John D. Rankin, Correspondent | Posted: Friday, August 10, 2012 10:15 am

Trailhead: 39 20'5"N, 105 52'8"W, 9,668 feet

West end of wildlife area: 39 20'10"N, 105 53'33"W, 9,817 feet, 1.5 miles

Hiking Distance: 3.1 miles

Park County's newest public fishing stream is in the Cline Ranch State Wildlife Area, five miles west of Jefferson on the northwest side of U.S. 285. Having a short schedule this week, I thought an easy walk along upper Tarryall Creek was just the thing. I brought along Karen for company, and her dog Scamp to liven things up.

We pulled off the highway within view of the 194 mile marker on U.S. 285. An old historical marker, erected in 1933, is visible from the highway; it tells of the gold fields upstream from the ranch. Other signs at the highway told us that we were at the wildlife area. As we approached the old Southwest-style ranch house, we found another sign: "Tarryall Ranch - 5110 Acres - Foster Cline, founder - Don Hamilton, lessee."

In the 1960s I was in the same year of 4-H as Don's sister Twila, and met Don one summer. The Hamiltons lived in that Southwest-style house and called the spread the Silverheels Ranch. He was a big kid in 4-H, and I was a little kid, and we were both in the group that went to the fairgrounds in Fairplay to clean up after the county fair. Being the big kid, he was saddled with telling all the little kids what to do. He found me doing something, but not very much, and asked if I was working hard. Of course, I said yes. Don stopped dead in his tracks, looked at me, then raised his eyes to the heavens and prayed out loud, "Forgive me, Lord! I've made a liar of the boy!" If Don never sees the pearly gates, it ain't entirely his fault.

We drove past the ranch house, and took up one of the four parking spots. There are four fishing areas called "Beats," and four parking spots, one for each Beat. Where you park determines where you fish, and you don't have to worry about tangling lines with other fishermen. Parking spaces for Beats 3 and 4 were taken, and we parked in Beat 2's spot. Another car came just as we started to walk; they were delighted to know that they could fish in both Beats 1 and 2, as no one else would be fishing there.

We went through the pedestrian gap in the fence, and walked up the road, headed west. It wasn't really a road, but a line of travel that had been driven on enough that vehicles had killed the grass in the two tire tracks.



Entrance to Cline Ranch SWA

The entrance to Cline Ranch State Wildlife Area is marked with the new green and white sign and the old historical marker. Mount Silverheels is the high peak in the photograph, and Little Baldy Mountain is to the left and in front of Silverheels. (Photo by John D. Rankin/The Flume)

It was a clear, calm, warm day. Our view ahead was up Tarryall Creek, of course, toward Mount Silverheels and other peaks and ridges in the South Park Range. To our right was a former pasture or hay field, and to the left were many bushes and a few trees along the creek. We walked along the road for a ways, and came to a sign announcing an "Angler Access Path," and another telling us that Beat 1 had ended and Beat 2 had begun. Our walking wouldn't disturb any fishermen in Beat 2, so we headed toward the creek.

The bushes started out small and got bigger as we went. There were lots and lots of wild iris, past blooming, and other blooming flowers, plenty of bugs and a few butterflies. I was pleased to find that I was not bothered by mosquitoes, then or for the whole hike. The bushes got thicker as well as taller, but weren't so thick that we couldn't navigate through them. After much meandering, we came to the creek. It meandered as it went through the bushes, too.

Scamp has seen and walked through small streams, but this was the first that he had seen flowing water that was deeper than he was tall. He went down to the water's edge, and walked along, headed to a steeper, slippery slope. Karen said, "I don't know if he can swim." With one step on a soft and muddy spot, BLOOP! in he went, washing downstream. Just as quick, his natural instincts got his dog paddle going, and he swam right back. And stayed clear of the deeper water from then on.

We walked upstream along the creek, finding views of Little Baldy, Mount Silverheels and Volz Mountain through the bushes. When we reached a sign for Beat 3, we went back to the road. Beyond the green plain of South Park, we had views of Whale Peak, Mount Evans, and North and South Twin Cone Peaks. Coming out of the bushes, we found another party, of five, walking away after a morning of fishing. Scamp had to meet them; it's surprising how hard a small dog can pull on his leash. This party's departure left Beat 3 open, so we went back into the bushes and to the creek for a bit more. Scamp would wade out in shallow water, but he wasn't going swimming again.

We returned to the road and walked it to a fence at the west end of the wildlife area. Our return trip was mainly in the plain. We went north to another fence, and headed back east. There was a portion of ground that was about a foot higher than the ground around it, so we went to check it out. It turned out to be dirt and rock dug out of a series of what looked like holding dry ponds. Each pond had water gates to control the flow in and out. It was probably a flow regulation system for an irrigation ditch.

The walk across the plain was pleasant but uneventful. There were a few flowers to see, quite a few big white and brown mushrooms, and lots of green grass with bugs that scattered before us. Scamp was kept busy trying to catch them. We took another walk through the bushes in Beat 2, and then headed for the parking area.

If you're not going to fish, it would be better to visit Cline Ranch State Wildlife Area on a weekday, when it's less likely to be filled with fishermen, and you won't be hogging a fishing beat. Alternatively, you could park just off U.S. 285 and walk in; it's not far. The views are spectacular, and the walk is relaxing. And entertaining if you've got the right company.