A River Runs Through It celebrates its 20th anniversary

By MATT MARKEY and JEFF BIRNSTIEL

LIVINGSTON, Mont. — We never saw a true fly fishing movie. Director Robert Redford made that clear from the start.

But a couple of decades ago, I was part of the cast and crew of about 90 Redford took to this rugged area just north of Yellowstone National Park, and spent three months here intent on making a film about a family in conflict.

The movie was shot between 1987 and 1988. At the time, I was part of the cast and crew of A River Runs Through It. Before shooting began, my attention was directed at the logistical side of the production — transportation, movement of equipment, repositioning of movement of crews and equipment to remote locations on the Black Hills, Gallatin, and Yellowstone Rivers, in a timely and efficient manor.

Before Redford, Pitt, and Tom Skeritt, who played the role of Reverend Maclean, father of Norman Maclean, the movie was shot in a remote area. But while the film is seen as a fly fishing movie, there were some critical scenes that didn’t align with the true story of fly fishing.

The movie has a huge effect on fly fishing, and the experts at the Blade, Toledo, Ohio, magazine celebrated its 20th anniversary last month.

The only solid link between me and the cast and crew for fly fishing, and with the Proudfoot Land for the American trout fisherman is the backdrop, the movie was an Oscar for its gorgeous cinematography.

The film debuted 20 years ago next month, and besides helping launch the career of a charismatic young man, it also served to help the sport of fly fishing, and the American trout fisherman.

It’s a River Runs Through It, said John Bailey, a Montana trout fishing guide, who worked as a fisherman on the set of the iconic trout movie. "But I think a lot of people ended up loving it."

Before shooting began, the crew experienced a spike in the fly fishing industry. Marketing director for Orvis, a leader in the manufacturing and sale of fly fishing gear, Mark Semmes, said to the fact that this was a fly fishing company, their business of 25-30 per cent that he attributed to the movie. "Before that, if you told most people 'I’m a fly fisherman,' maybe had heard the beauty in it, " Bailey said. "I think people could also relate to the fact that this was a real-dimensional family and the on-set bathrooms, trailers that housed the actors’ dressing rooms, and the on-set bathrooms, trailers that housed the film crew, with a lot of grace and help."

While on location in Montana, next to the Yellowstone River during location work in Montana, Tom Skerrett, who played Reverend Maclean, father of Norman Maclean, and Paul Maclean, said, "It wasn’t easy, but it wasn’t hard."

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