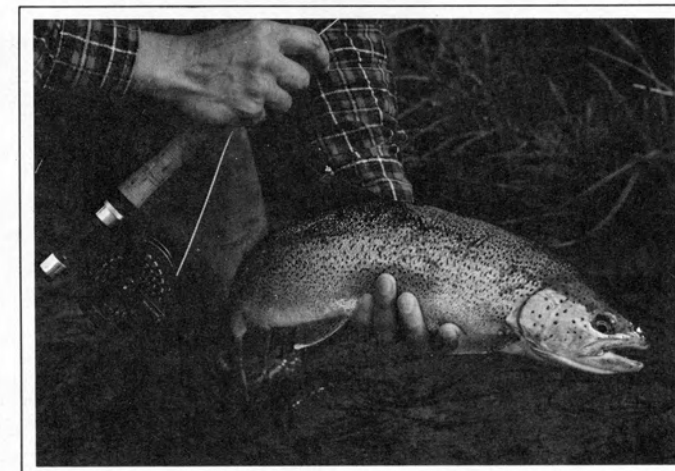


*For float-tubing fly fishers, action abounds.*

DAVE ENGERHETSON PHOTO



CHRIS FONG PHOTO

*Trophy trout like this magnificent rainbow readily come to the fly on many of the stillwaters in the Yellowstone area.*

# Yellowstone Stillwaters

MIKE LAWSON

**T**HE AREA AROUND YELLOWSTONE National Park for years has been the fly-fishing center of the country—and for good reason. Such rivers as the Henry's Fork, Madison and Yellowstone are among the finest in the world. But many anglers visiting our area are not aware of some of the fine lakes nearby, lakes that often are neglected.

Because of the float tube, fly fishing the lakes here has developed into an exciting sport. Before the float tube arrived on the fishing scene, a boat was almost a necessity but now, the stillwater angler has everything he needs right in the trunk of his car.

Lake fishing really comes into its own in mid-summer. Warm weather concentrates the fish, making them more accessible. Weed growth increases, making trolling and bait fishing nearly impossible in some areas. Large trout lie suspended near the weedbeds to feed on the numerous aquatic insects and small fish that live among the weeds. A belly boat enables you to work among the weeds where the fish are holding.

Some of the most consistent fishing in the lakes is subsurface, with sinking lines. There are so many different lines available with different sink rates that you can han-

MIKE LAWSON, a professional fly tier, angling instructor and guide, is the owner of Henry's Fork Anglers.

dle almost any situation. Generally, full-sinking lines are best but sinking-tips also are useful, especially when casting over weedbeds.

The most exciting fishing of all occurs when trout are feeding on the surface. Called "gulpers," the fish feed on mayfly duns and spinners at the lake surface. Pinpoint casting is the name of the game as you cast ahead of a gulper and try to get your fly where the fish will rise next.

Although fly fishing generalities can be applied to all the lakes in the Yellowstone area, the better lakes should be considered on an individual basis.

## Henry's Lake

HENRY'S LAKE, located on the Idaho side of the Continental Divide, about 18 miles south of West Yellowstone, is a relatively shallow lake, only about 25 feet in the deepest areas. Although it is a natural lake, a dam trebled its area. Henry's Lake is fed by numerous small streams and springs. There is a hatchery on the lake that for years supplied Idaho with most of the cutthroat trout planted in its numerous lakes and streams. The lake had enough natural reproduction for its own needs. Cutthroat populations declined drastically in the late '70s, but because of supplemental fingerling stockings and habitat restoration by the Henry's Lake Foundation, the future looks better than ever. The 1983 catch rates were the high-

est in 20 years and this year should be even better.

The shallow water and heavy weed growth makes Henry's Lake a fly fisher's dream. Cutthroat, rainbow-cutthroat hybrids, and brook trout all reach huge proportions. It's hard to find many places where you still have as good a chance to get a 5-pound brookie as you do here.

Fly fishing is best near the mouths of the streams and at the springs. Public access is poor. There is a state park on the southeast corner of the lake which offers camping and boat-launch facilities, but because belly boaters must find access near where they intend to fish, the most popular float-tube area is Staley Springs. There is a lodge there which offers camping, cabins, and boat-launch facilities. There is also a public boat launch area just south of Staley Springs.

The Staley Springs area is popular because a large underground spring enters the lake and cuts a large channel through the weedbeds, and the trout congregate near this tunnel.

Fishing location is very important on Henry's Lake. If you've never fished it before, I suggest starting at Staley Springs and watch where others are fishing. If you're not in the channel you'll have a frustrating experience. There are many other good areas but most of the land around the lake is private and access is

*Continued on Page 55*



## Stillwaters...

Continued from Page 45

difficult. A boat is necessary to get to these other areas, and boat rentals are available at Staley Springs Lodge and Wild Rose Ranch.

Fly fishing Henry's Lake is almost all sub-surface. Medium- or slow-sinking lines are best because the water is shallow. Leeches and Woolly Worms are two of the most popular flies. Damselfly nymphs are effective in early July when these insects hatch. The lake also has a large population of scuds, so patterns to imitate them are popular.

Although fly fishing can be productive throughout the season, the better fishing usually begins in late June and continues through the remainder of the season. September and October can be particularly productive when the fish go on the feed in preparation for the winter ahead.

Henry's Lake is managed as a trophy fishery. Although there are no bait restrictions, the limit is only two fish. If you are interested in a 10-pound fish on a fly, Henry's Lake offers the best chance around.

### Island Park Reservoir

THE RESERVOIR LIES north and west of Harriman State Park. It is the source of the Henry's Fork at Box Canyon, site of the Island Park Dam. Like Henry's Lake, Island Park is a relatively shallow lake and offers many fly-fishing opportunities. Unlike Henry's Lake, access to the better fly-fishing areas is good and in most cases you can drive right to where you plan to fish.

Island Park is a man-made lake, fed on the north by the Henry's Fork of the Snake and on the west by many small streams and springs. It is primarily a rainbow fishery with some brook trout and kokanee salmon.

Over the last two seasons the reservoir has fished better than it had for years. Trash fish were eliminated in late 1979 and the lake was re-stocked with fingerling rainbows. The trout grew fast and five- to six-pound rainbows are common; the trout average about 17 inches.

The west end of the reservoir is the top fly-fishing area, reached by driving west from Harriman State Park over Green Canyon Pass, about a 10-mile drive on a good gravel road. There are long fingers and coves all along the lake with small roads out to most of the points. You can camp on some of the points and there is also a Forest Service campground available.

Fly fishing is good off most of the points and in the coves. The action starts in mid-June and continues throughout the season. Fishing leeches and Woolly Worms through the weedbeds is the most productive method. You'll need a medium- or fast-sinking fly line. Sometimes

Continued on Page 56

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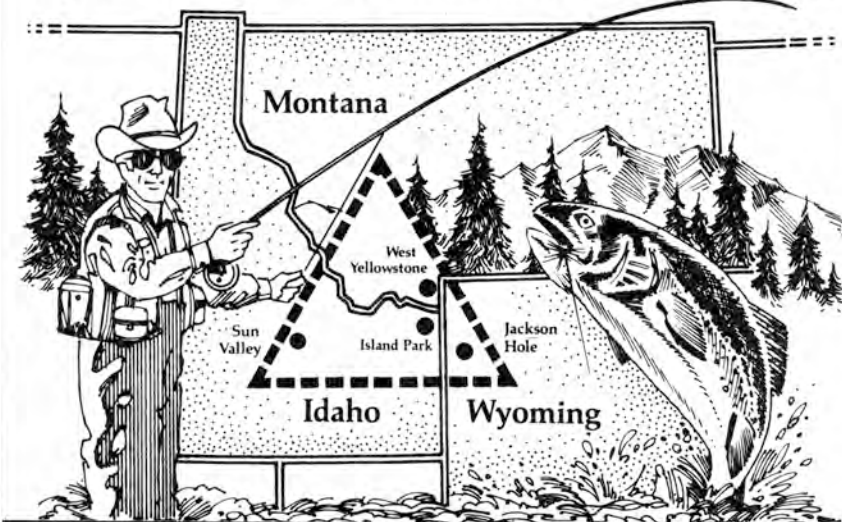
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## Stillwaters...

the strike is very soft, but as soon as the fish is hooked, hang on!

Dry-fly fishing can be excellent on Island Park Reservoir but it is often unpredictable. Morning hours are best, before the wind comes up, as the big rainbows cruise the coves and near the weedbeds, rising to numerous mayfly duns and spinners. These fish can be a real handful on light tackle. Imagine a six-pound rainbow smashing through the weeds on a 5X tipper! The fish usually aren't selective about fly patterns. Accurate casting is much more important. A #14 or #16 Adams will take fish when they're rising. I've also found that a small nymph, twitched in front of a cruising trout, is very effective.

### Hebgen Lake

HEBGEN LIES NORTH of West Yellowstone just outside of Yellowstone National Park. Public access to the best fly-fishing areas is good.

Although wet-fly fishing can be productive, the main attraction here is dry-fly fishing to cruising fish. The "gulper" fishing gets going in early July with the hatches of Trico and *Callibaetis* mayflies. August is the top month.

The most popular area is the Madison Arm at the east end of the lake. The access is good on either side of the Madison River from Highway 191. The South Fork Arm and the north shore along Highway 287 are also good fly-fishing areas.

The fishing starts soon after sun-up and continues until early afternoon. The fish will be rising to Trico and *Callibaetis* mayflies. Sometimes the trout travel in schools and it will try your nerves as you wait to intercept them as they cruise toward you. The trick is to watch the riseforms carefully and determine in which direction the fish are traveling and how fast. Make the cast to the anticipated spot and wait. When the fish takes, it's an excitement that's hard to describe.

Hebgen Lake has a good population of rainbows and browns with some cutthroat. Most of the fish run 15 to 18 inches with an occasional 20-incher. The browns usually hang close to the weedbeds while the rainbows prefer more open water. This is a productive lake and the fish are in excellent condition.

### Hidden Lake

HIDDEN LAKE IS ONE of a series of lakes which lie on the Gravelly Ranch between Centennial Valley and the Madison River Valley in Montana. Wade, Cliff and Elk lakes nearby also are worth fishing.

Access is from Highway 20, south of Henry's Lake in Idaho. It's about a 25-mile drive on a good gravel road over Boot Jack Pass, a beautiful drive across the Continental Divide and through the Red Rock Bird Refuge.

Boat rentals, Montana fishing licenses,



lodging and camping are available at Elk Lake Camp. You'll need to carry your float tube about a half mile from the parking area at Hidden Lake.

Hidden Lake offers good wet-fly fishing with sinking lines. Parts of the lake are deep, and a fast sinking line is advisable. Best patterns include Woolly Worms, leeches, and damselfly nymphs. Late summer hatches of *Callibaetis* can produce some very exciting dry-fly fishing.

Most of the fish are rainbow trout which average about 14 inches but four-pounders are not uncommon.

### Yellowstone Lake

THERE ARE SO MANY GOOD fly-fishing lakes inside the park that I could write an entire piece just on that fishing alone. Lewis, Grebe, Trout, Heart, Beula, and Fish Lake are just a few. Yellowstone Lake deserves special mention, however, because it offers so many opportunities for the fly fisher.

Located in the middle of Yellowstone National Park, Yellowstone Lake is the largest body of stillwater in the area. The entire north shore is accessible by road while the remainder of the lake must be reached by boat or on foot. Boats with motors are not permitted on the south arms of the lake.

Yellowstone cutthroat are the only trout species available, and they average about 15 inches long with the maximum size about 18 inches. The lake averages 140-foot deep so most of the trout feed near the shore. In early summer the fish also follow the shoreline to locate their spawning streams. Some of the best fishing is near the mouths of these streams.

Wet-fly fishing is most productive. The cutthroats are far from selective and almost any pattern will work. The main trick is to find fish and get the fly to them.

### Sand Creek Ponds

FOUR SMALL LAKES in the Sand Creek Game Management Area are worth mentioning. This area is located west of Ashton and north of St. Anthony, Idaho. Best access is by gravel road, off Highway 20 near St. Anthony. These lakes contain good populations of rainbow and brook trout.

Like most lakes, the best fly fishing occurs later in the season after the weeds are up. This is a popular area with the locals but the pressure slacks off as the season progresses.

Leeches, streamers and nymphs fished with a medium-sinking line produce the most consistent fishing. There is some excellent "gulper" fishing during the morning hours as well. Large caddis hatches in the evenings produce some explosive rises and exciting dry-fly action. Most of the trout range in the 12- to 14-inch range but 20-inchers are common. Each year some trophy-sized brookies are taken in these small lakes. The Sand Creek Ponds have a no-motors restriction, making them ideal for belly boating.



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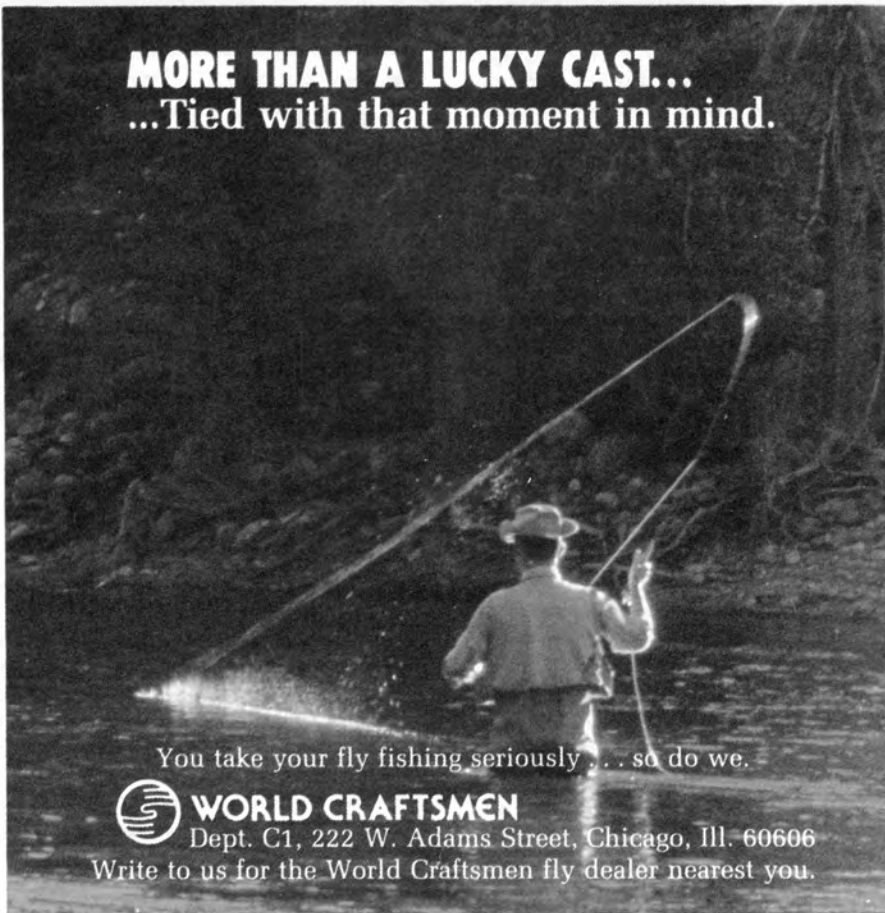


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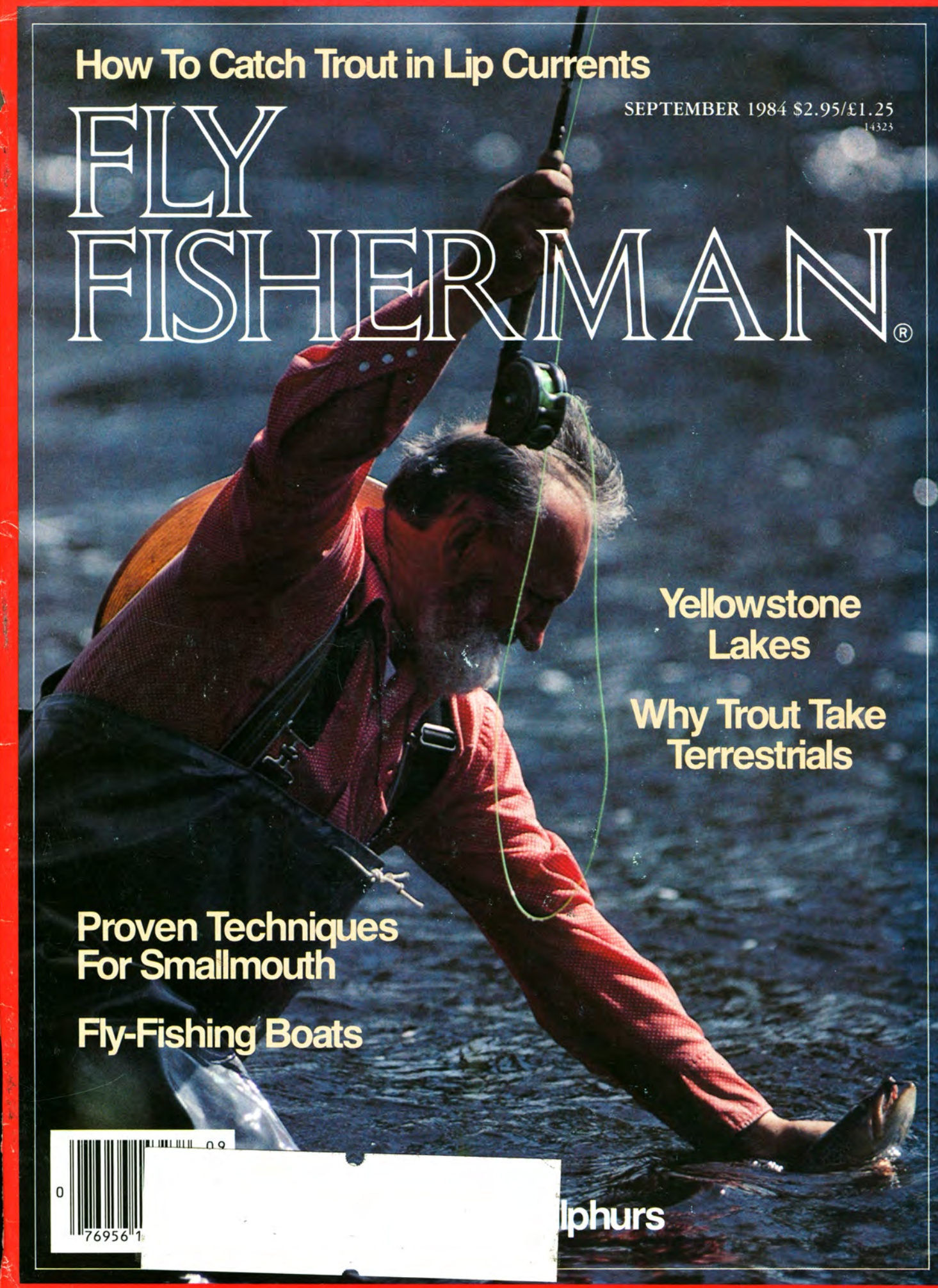
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