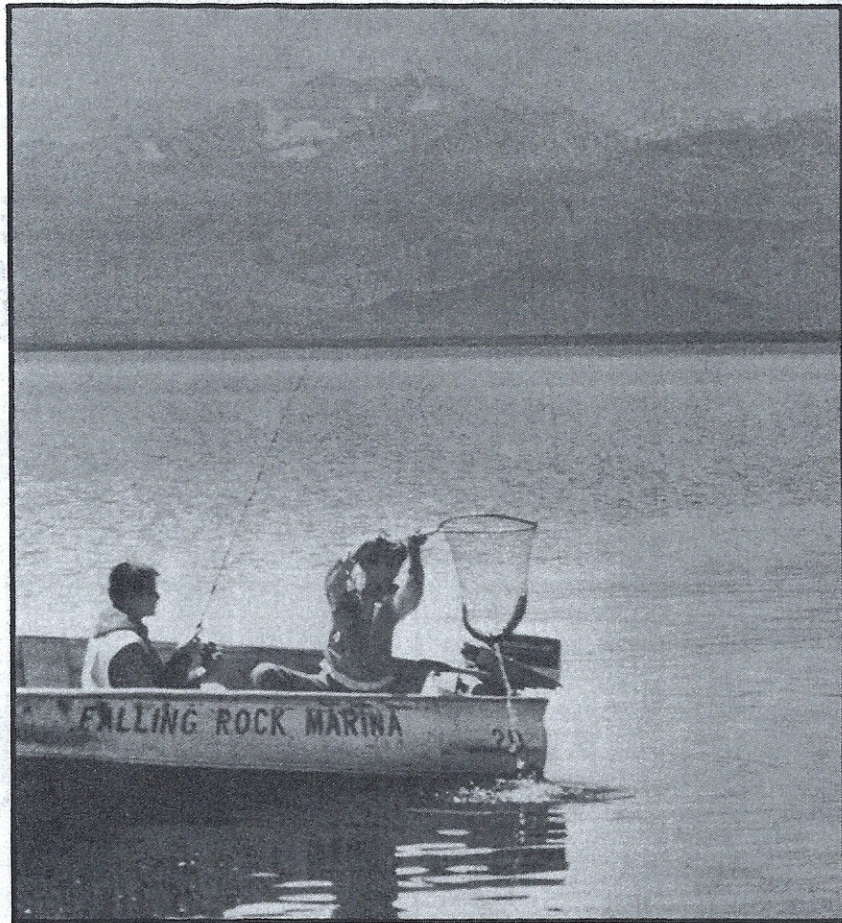


# Bridgeport's Trout Bounty



Early season trollers, working in 6' to 20' of water, take many rainbows.

*It's outstanding in the fall and spring*

*By Don Vachini*

**T**he snowline from not-so-distant peaks seemed to crowd the open, sage-covered shoreline of the lake. Even though the sun had risen well into the sky, icy temperatures kept us burrowing our hands into the sanctuary of down jacket pockets. Overhead, mewing seagulls broke the silence of the high desert air. We were one of perhaps twenty small boats which were either anchored or weaving intricately about the lengthy inlet channel.

Twenty minutes of working the surface with lures netted my son Jason and me two feisty rainbows of about 13

inches each. Light action spinning rods and reels matched with 4-pound-test line made up our rigging, which had been chosen for its sporting qualities. After a short lull, something snatched Jason's spinner and headed for parts unknown.

We were on California's Bridgeport Reservoir enjoying a brisk May morning a few weeks after the general trout season opener. Thoughts of a productive trout venture were becoming a reality. This northern Mono County lake, located on the outskirts of the town of Bridgeport at an elevation of 6,445 feet, lies approximately sixty miles south

of Lake Tahoe and eighty miles north of Bishop. Highway 395, the major north-south conduit connecting Reno and Los Angeles, bisects the town to provide easy access.

The Bridgeport area, which encompasses about a twenty-five-mile radius, is an angler's mecca, offering an outstanding variety of trout species and an appealing array of water types. Rainbow, brook, brown, cutthroat and golden trout, along with kokanee salmon, are found within the many scenic lakes, tiny alpine tarns, snow-fed creeks and brawling rivers. According to Rick Rockel of Ken's Sporting Goods in Bridgeport, the locale is truly "one of the finest outdoor recreation areas in the West."

The hub of this area is Bridgeport Reservoir, which offers some outstanding rainbow and brown trout angling in the spring and fall. Prior to 1920, the East Walker River, bolstered by several snow-fed tributaries, ran through the open, meadow-filled Bridgeport Valley on its way to Nevada and Walker lakes. In 1924 a dam constructed a short distance east of town created the two-mile by five-mile water storage impoundment. While the dam cut off access to spawning habitat from below, its water releases provide irrigation for parched farmlands. The regulated flows also result in ideal conditions for the management of a wild trophy brown trout fishery for approximately 14 miles downstream.

Three main tributaries — the upper East Walker River, Buckeye Creek and Robinson Creek — plus their arteriole streams, all collect melt from massive, show-capped Sierra Nevada peaks and flow between ten to twenty miles to feed the lake. The inlet area is bordered by an expansive, lush meadow resembling a velvet carpet while the remaining three shores are rimmed by the low, rolling Sweetwater Mountains which appear stark and harsh in comparison.

As unspectacular as the shoreline scenery appears, the lake's cold waters produce some exciting thrills as we were finding out first-hand. After intercepting Jason's Kastmaster, the trout made a few deep, drag-sizzling runs in the direction of mid-lake. However, without any obstacles to hinder the battle, the big brown soon tired. After a couple of surface rolls and splashes which doused us with icy spray, the bruiser came to net. Even in the mesh, the trout bulged with confidence, thrashing and nearly flipping out of the boat. More than likely a hold-over, the 20-inch rainbow topped three pounds!

After taking a few more rainbows, we

headed back to the marina. While cleaning our fish at the station, we noticed a similarity in all the anglers' stringers. All held silvery, thick-bodied fish with well-defined fins. According to Rockel, the lake is notorious for kicking out trout of large size as they find the habitat to their liking. "A very healthy and abundant food supply is one reason for the phenomenal growth," mentioned the local fishing guru.

While the water is cold, the lake itself is shallow on the upper fringes between the channels. These shallow flats warm fast and aquatic weed growth becomes prodigious as summer approaches. Fresh-water shrimp and scuds abound, forming a healthy food chain and making the reservoir "the most fertile lake in the Eastern Sierra," in Rockel's words.

The season established by the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) also has a bearing on Bridgeport's large trout. Mono County still follows the general trout season pattern, opening the weekend of April 30th and closing October 31st, according to Bob Iselin, manager of the Hot Creek Hatchery. "This six-month closure allows trout to grow at a fast rate without being harvested," he commented.

Usually just before closure, the hatchery plants large numbers of surplus trout in Bridgeport. Approximately 5,000 broodstock rainbows are planted in addition to several thousand good-size catchables. Most of the broodfish run two to five pounds when planted, so they reach sizeable proportions by the following spring. Small wonder the trout opener is so heartily anticipated and attended on the lake. After an undisturbed winter's reign, the rainbows are fat and sassy.

It is not uncommon to have snow surrounding the shores for the April opener or be hit by an early spring snow shower while on the lake. Despite the cold weather, the fishing is usually always red-hot with many ten-fish limits showing up among early-season anglers.

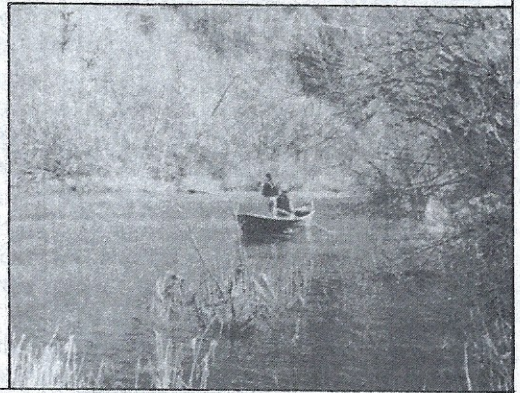
As the summer progresses, weed-growth covers much of the upper lake. By late August the creek channels, which offer the best bet due to moving water, become choked with stringy weeds, snarling both casts and prop shafts. At this time, bait fished near the bottom is the only feasible method as fishing slows noticeably. The lake level is drawn down steadily, baring much of the upper end.

Fall signifies another season on the lake. The early October landscape is now painted with vivid yellows and oranges among the mountain evergreens as aspen and cottonwood trees take on their autumnal hues. Wrinkles are now evident

## 300' NESTUCCA RIVER FRONTAGE

At Beaver, Oregon — year 'round salmon, steelhead and trout fishing just 2 hours from Portland. 2,700 additional feet of exclusive river access easement includes popular hole between 2nd & 3rd bridges. 15-year-old 2-bedroom home with fireplace and insert sits at end of paved road on an acre plus. Room for drift boat launch. 15 miles from Pacific City dory fishing. \$49,500. Owner will consider contract terms. **Call Karen Leighton — (503) 775-7700.**

**PROFESSIONALS 100 REALTORS**  
6901 S.E. Lake Road  
Milwaukie, OR 97222 — (503) 653-9720



# invader®

## DOWNRIGGERS

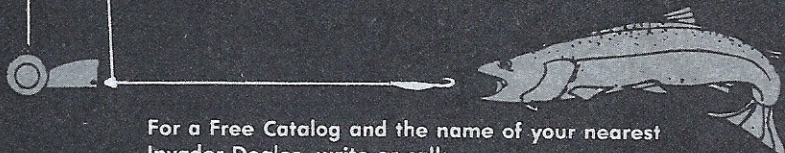


A nice catch of salmon caught at 30' with Invaders by Capt. Jack Van Loon and Guests on the S.W.A.T. out of Grand Haven, Michigan.

When the Big Ones go down, you've got to invade their deep water sanctuary or go home empty handed.

Invader Downriggers get you there with deadly, controlled depth trolling that puts the lure in front of the fish, no matter how deep they go.

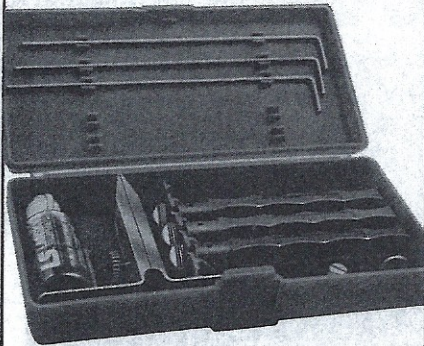
Whether you own a salmon charter boat or fish for walleye in your outboard, Invader has a downrigger to fit your game plan.



For a Free Catalog and the name of your nearest Invader Dealer, write or call:  
INVADER DOWNRIGGERS, Div. of K-Line Industries  
315 Garden Ave., Holland, MI 49443 Phone (616) 396-3546

## For every sportsman who knows a good knife's worth

Sharpen every knife you own to a professional edge, at the exact angle you select. Angle selector guide insures consistent honing angle. For hunting, fishing, camping and household use. In compact, carry-everywhere sturdy case.



### Standard kit contains:

Custom carrying case, knife clamp, 1 coarse stone, 1 med. stone & 1 fine stone all on holders, 1 oz. Lansky Honing Oil, 3 guide rods, extra long thumb & front screws.

### DeLuxe kit contains:

All of the above plus an extra coarse stone & an ultra fine stone on holders & 2 more guide rods.

DEALERS PLEASE INQUIRE



P. O. BOX 800, BUFFALO, NY 14221 U.S.A.

## BOAT PLANS

CATALOG S2 (REFUNDABLE) US Funds Only  
ALASKAN RIVERBOATS: 16' FOR STEELHEADERS  
DRIFTBOATS: 13' (FOR PICKUPS) 15' (OUTBOARD WELL)  
20' SURF DORY  
DUCKBOATS: 12' (W/TRANSOM) 15' (DOUBLE ENDED)

15' PLY CANOE  
MANY MORE!!

FERNWOOD, Dept. S, Box 2005, Lynnwood, WA 98036

on the snowless, granitic faces of the nearby Sierra spires. Tinges of the coming winter are manifest early and late in the day. The lower third of the lake now becomes the hot spot. While boat anglers owned the edge through summer, shore fishermen now enjoy a slight advantage as late season trout tend to cruise the shallow bays and points of the "narrows."

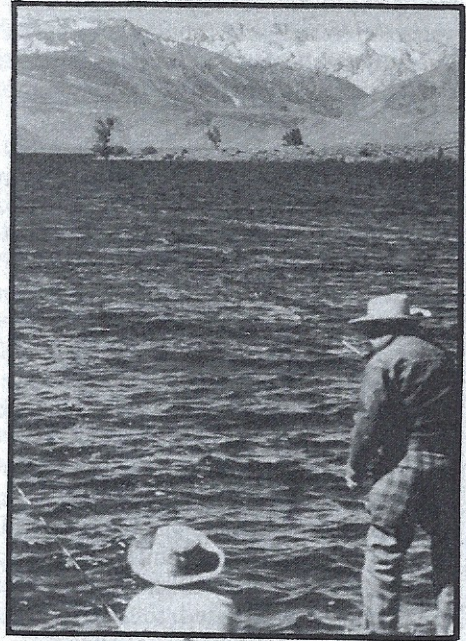
My 17-year-old son Chris and I were here to spend a few relaxing days in early October. Choosing a rocky point of land near the dam, we set up shop. While Chris soaked red salmon eggs, I tried a No. 2 Mepps Black Fury, previously a very successful lure here.

About two bites into an apple, Chris's rod tip danced vigorously and he hustled to play the fish. Soon he beached a scrappy, mint-bright 11-incher. Within minutes we had collected three more nice rainbows as a school had obviously been passing by. We weren't alone either. An elderly couple a short distance away produced a stringer of eight, all caught on Velveeta cheese, while they relaxed in their lawn chairs. Cheese is a very common and effective bait among Bridgeport anglers.

While salmon eggs and cheese are most successful, worms and night crawlers rate second best. By using a sliding sinker with any of the above, trout tend to inhale the bait and become firmly hooked. An occasional brown trout is caught, usually by dunking inflated night crawlers in the deeper water near the dam.

The late season period also signifies

another angling phenomenon. Large, wary browns, some of which are in the ten- to 20-pound range, lurk in the reservoir and choose this time to ascend the three main tributaries and their feeders to spawn. While very few of these trophies are caught in the lake, they become more vulnerable in the streams. Many times anglers trying these creeks for small trout find themselves undermatched. A fisherman's tale of "something big that just broke off" usually signifies the angler has tied into a lake-run lunker. Robinson Creek at the outlet from Lower Twin Lake is a prime fall brown holding area.



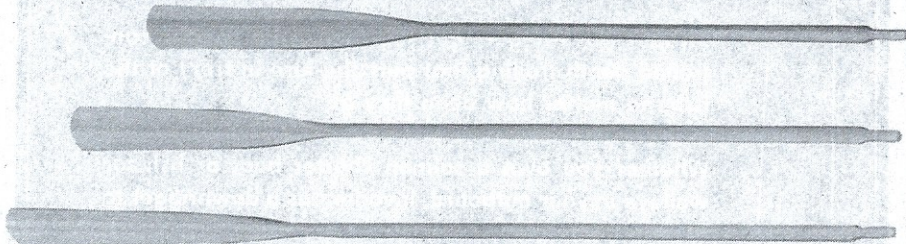
Shore angling becomes more popular as weed growth takes over the upper lake.

On this particular weekend, Chris and I were guests at the Creekhous Motel, which sits right on Virginia Creek, a lengthy East Walker feeder. This roadside section is heavily planted with catchable rainbows by the DFG. A very brushy stream, it also contains fair numbers of pan-size browns and brookies. It offers a nice, relaxing place to fish.

While Chris napped, I headed a few hundred yards upstream of the motel to a swift channel broken by two huge boulders. Swirling my No. 10 Woolly Worm into a large, deep pocket brought a slight tap. Expecting a ten-incher when I set the hook, I was surprised to feel the welcome jolt of a bigger fish. Luckily for me, it chose to stay in the area, darting all over the 15-foot pool. I pressured it heavily and much to my surprise, I quickly netted a thick, bronze-hued brown approaching two pounds!

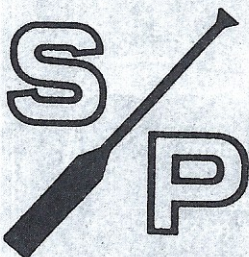
Heavily laden with milt, it was obviously a spawner on a mission so I swiftly released it to avoid further damage. Over

## LAMINATED WHITEWATER OARS



### THE ULTIMATE WOODEN OAR FOR WHITEWATER BOATING & RAFTING

- Exceptional quality
  - Straight or tapered shafts
  - Proper flex and balance
  - Lightweight
  - Reasonably priced
  - U.S. made
  - 8' - 12' lengths
  - Comfortable grips
  - Finished
  - Tested
  - Available locally
  - Optional rope wrap
- 18 years of quality canoe paddle mfg. experience!  
See Product Review in the April-May '84 STS, page 54.



### • OARS & PADDLES •

Ralph Sawyer SAWYER PRODUCTS  
P.O. Box 624, Rogue River, Oregon 97537  
Check your local river supply shop or call (503) 582-1350

a delicious home-cooked meal that evening, Dennis Nichols, owner of the Creekhous Motel, mentioned more about the large, fall browns. Apparently the small creek doesn't deter the lake spawners from entering it. "I have seen several large browns heading upstream right behind the cabins," beamed Nichols.

"Most are in the ten- to 15-pound range but a few real lunkers usually show near season's end," he continued.

Spring snowmelt normally fills the reservoir to its 4,400-surface-acre capacity by June. According to Rockel, the best action at this time is from boats. "They (boats) afford access to the prime spots, namely incoming water," he said.

Falling Rock Marina, just past the airport, is a full service marina which provides boat rentals, launching, tackle, current hot spots and a fish cleaning station.

Early in the season, anglers should patrol the inlet bays. Trollers or spin fishermen should work in six to twenty feet of water while bait dunkers should fish just off the bottom. An array of Panther Martin, Rooster Tail and Mepps spinners in the 0-2 size range are very effective from boats.

Though East Walker and Buckeye bays are excellent early hot spots, Rainbow Point also produces well. The bot-

tom here is sandy all along shore. "Trolling Rapalas, Rebels and flasher/crawler combinations will take large numbers of early season fish near the surface," informed Rockel. "Needlefish and Kastmasters towed behind blades or keel sinkers work well deep," he added.

Still fishing with an assortment of baits becomes more popular as the weeds increase and the water level drops. Trolling the dam area where the water is deep and weedless produces a mixed bag of rainbows with a few browns later in the season.

The area, with a multitude of scenic and angling offerings, is truly one of my favorites whether I visit in the spring, summer or fall. While a tour through the town of Bridgeport still shows remnants of yesteryears' gold and silver activity, today's treasure lies finning in the town reservoir. Here, thanks to wise DFG management and a plethora of nutrients and forage, Bridgeport trout are measured in pounds instead of ounces. The very fact that anglers can consistently tangle with active two- to five-pounders makes it one of the finest trout impoundments in the Eastern Sierra.

For those seeking more information on the area, contact Rick Rockel at (619) 932-7707. □

## SAMPO FISHING FACTS #

# 9

When you're going trolling for tonnage, then this is the kind of snap you should have on your Sampo ball bearing swivels. We only put them up in #5 and #6, each with solid, stainless steel welded rings. Leader just spirals into place on the corkscrew snap, and it stays in place 'cause it takes a thumb to get it off.

You don't use pliers with this snap, either. Try 'em, they're available nickel plated or dead black. They work. And they keep Americans working. Sampo is the only ball bearing swivel made in the USA. If you can't find them, write to us and we'll try to get you some.



**SAMPO—the only ball bearing swivel made in the USA.**

Sampo Division of Rome Specialty Company, Inc., Barneveld, New York 13304, (315)896-2815

# ALASKA BAIT CO.

## FRESH CURED SALMON ROE

Successful fishermen know the value of having a good supply of fresh-cured salmon roe on hand. Take your share of the trophies home with our premium salmon roe skeins. Drifted, plunked, or trolled, these mature, bright-red eggs will milk . . . cast after cast.

Try our new vacuum-packed product — same proven cure in a convenient new package. Once opened, simply keep cool and airtight to insure freshness.

Now you can make the choice . . . you'll be glad you did!



## IRRESISTIBLE! NEW VACUUM PACK

YOUR  
CHOICE

CHUM ROE  
SILVER & KING ROE MIXED  
PINK ROE

ORDERS SHIPPED UPS FROM:

ALASKA BAIT CO.  
P.O. Box 655

NORTH BEND, OREGON 97459

All orders shipped same day received

ALASKA BAIT CO. GUARANTEES SATISFACTION OR RETURN ROE FOR YOUR MONEY BACK!

Clip coupon or send same information on separate sheet.

All prices include shipping.

1 lb. — \$6.50/lb.

2-5 lbs. — \$5.75/lb.

over 5 lbs. — \$5.50/lb.

Canadian orders add \$3.50

(U.S. Funds) per order.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

List in order of preference — 1, 2, 3:

_____ Chum roe (large)	_____ lbs.
_____ King & coho mixed (med.)	_____ lbs.
_____ Pink roe (small)	_____ lbs.

Vacuum  
Pack

DEALER INQUIRIES INVITED  
QUANTITY SUBJECT TO STOCK ON HAND

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Enclosed

FREE! TWO PRE-TIED EAGLE CLAW EGG LOOP LEADERS, PER POUND ORDERED!

Check  Money Order