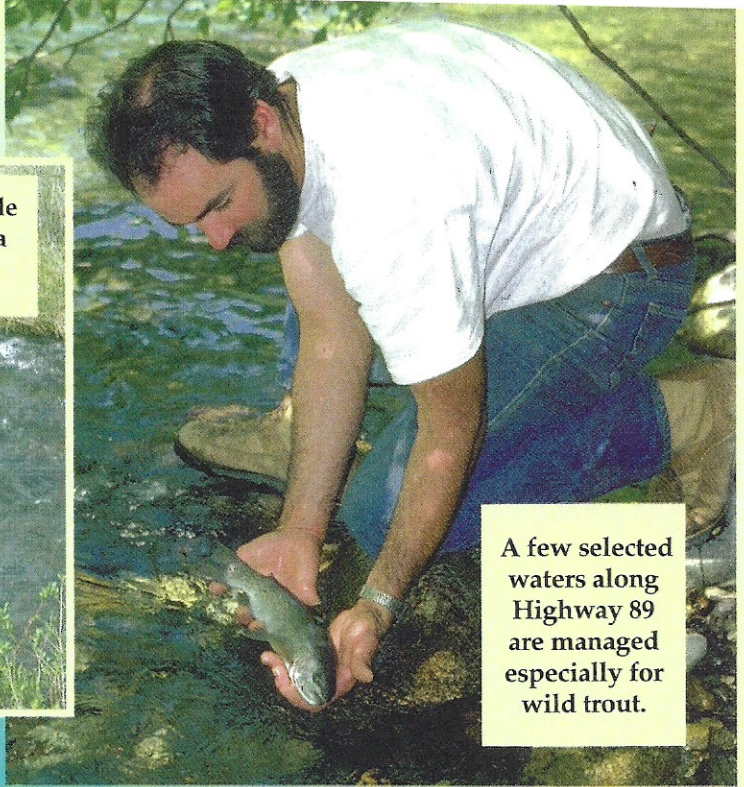


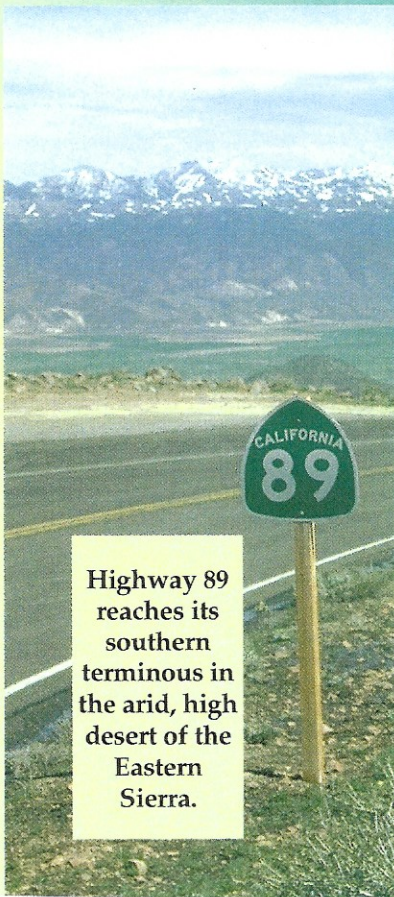
Several trouty rivulets run astride Highway 89. The author lands a nice specimen from one.



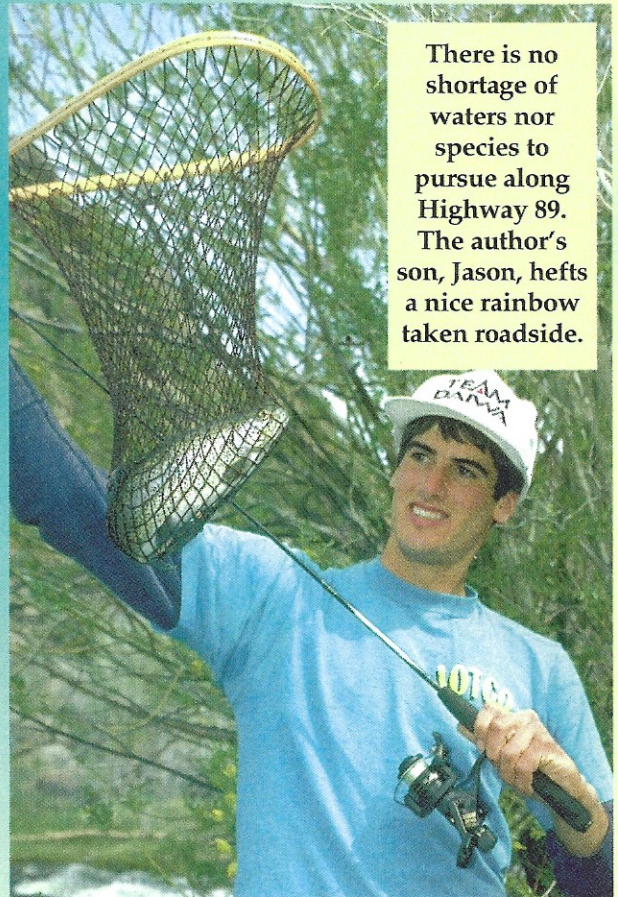
A few selected waters along Highway 89 are managed especially for wild trout.

Highway 89

Traversing a pair of mountain ranges and over two dozen waters, this well-used roadway has trout around each bend!



Highway 89 reaches its southern terminus in the arid, high desert of the Eastern Sierra.



There is no shortage of waters nor species to pursue along Highway 89. The author's son, Jason, hefts a nice rainbow taken roadside.

Don Vachini

T

he pleasant gurgle of rapidly moving water soothed my senses as it echoed through the pine-studded canyon. From my perch on a streamside rock, I watched the gangly teenager, firmly braced against the current, carefully toss his weighted nymph into a quiet swirl behind a partially exposed boulder. On the subsequent drift, the strike indicator vanished and his fly rod was instantly transformed into a vibrating, parabolic arc. Periodically struggling to regain balance on the slippery, rock-strewn bottom, he continued an ear-to-ear grin as he calmly led a frisky, 12-inch rainbow to net. *(Continued on page 50)*

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Highway 89 (Continued from page 40)

Before the morning shadows were chased from the riverbed, my son, Jason and I had released a mixed bag of rainbows and browns ranging up to 13 inches while engrossed in absolute solitude. However, upon scrambling a dozen or so steps up the steeply-inclined bank, the whooshing din of vehicles rapidly whizzing by reminded us we were astride one major strip of asphalt.

The two of us were plying the Truckee River a few miles below Tahoe City, enjoying some leisurely, drive-to angling. Over the three day weekend in July, we intended to sample a 30-mile section of California's Highway 89 where it bisects the North Lake Tahoe region. According to our pre-trip research, there was neither a shortage of waters to work nor species to pursue along this causeway.

While healthy populations of trout exist away from civilization, there is no reason to overlook the bountiful drive up fishing available along some of the state's more notable roadways. In fact, when it comes to trouty destinations, Golden State's Highway 89, alternately flanked by conifers and featureless sage, becomes the main artery to the heart of some fabulous mountain trout angling.

Imagine, if you will, a 350 mile long strip of macadam coursing a pair of mountain ranges, an active volcano, one national park, six state parks and a plethora of national forest campgrounds in addition to paralleling two wilderness areas. Indeed, from the time it departs Interstate Highway 5 south of Mt. Shasta City until it reaches its southern terminus at Highway 395 in the arid, high desert of the Eastern Sierra Nevada near Topaz, significant trout waters seem to appear around each bend. While rainbow are the dominant members, brown, brook, mackinaw and cutthroat trout plus king and kokanee salmon reside in the more than two dozen snow-fed streams, lakes, man-made impoundments and specially managed waters adjacent this blacktop two-laner.

Mt. Shasta, signifying the southernmost limits of the Cascade Range and Mt. Lassen, which commences the lengthy Sierra Nevada chain, dominate the waters within the nearly 100 mile gap between. Eternal snow and ice melt trickles deep into the bowels of these hunching edifices, once hissing with sulfur vents and steaming fissures spewing molten rock, and collects. Traveling via underground aquifers, springs and seeps emerge, funneling into a network of swelling rivulets and ultimately provide rippling muscle for bouncy creeks and rivers within the Intermountain Area. The McCloud River plus Burney, Hat and appropriately named Lost Creek

certainly typify this land of fire and ice as all tumble moderate gradients over igneous beds and, thanks to icy, subterranean flows and a sometimes-thick forest canopy, run a near constant 44 to 48 degrees.

Other noted volcano-origin waters on the southern shoulders of Lassen include the North Fork Feather River and Mill Creek near Mineral.

Continuing its 180-mile journey through such North Sierra mountain communities as Greenville, Quincy, Graeagle, Sattley, Sierraville, Truckee, Tahoe City, and Markleeville, the trout turnpike connects waters of the North and Middle Fork Feather, Little Truckee, Truckee, and the East and West Carson rivers, further enhancing its roadside reputation. While a few of these Blue Ribbon waters receive life-blood flow from natural or man-made lakes, the majority are heavily dependent on surface snowmelt recruited from a vast backcountry famous for some of the deepest snowpack in the state. In stark contrast to the Burney Basin's virtually unwavering flows, these are brawling, flood plain types gushing over freestone bases and range anywhere from 70 to 110 feet wide.

Tributaries Spanish, Indian, Sagehen, Donner, Taylor and Markleeville creeks, scaled down mini-versions of the main rivers they feed, offer testimony to some thoughtful select-cut logging practices as well as pleasant angling possibilities.

Some little known seemingly obscure glorified rivulets also fall under highway jurisdiction. A self-proclaimed "creek freak," I often seek these out for a pleasant, change of pace. I have found Guernsey, Greenhorn, Wolf, Cold Stream, Prosser and Alder creeks plus a few "unmentionables" to be proportionately productive. Though frisky six- to eight-inch natives are more often the prize, I once witnessed one of my teen-aged sons pry a hook-jawed, two-pound brown from a tiny brush-infested creeklet no more than four feet wide.

Keeping shadows off the water, deftly crawling up on a pool, picking bait through brush or under a logjam and drifting a worm along an undercut bank are pretty much mandatory skills on these oft-neglected, diminutive flows.

It is no secret that sections close to the roadway would soon be depleted were it not for healthy numbers of planted trout. Of the five Department of Fish and Game Regions statewide, a pair (Region 1 in Redding and Region 2 in Rancho Cordova) service 89 in its entirety, accounting for nearly a quarter million catchables per season. According to Paul Wertz, Information officer with the Region 1 office these weekly infusions not only help ease the camper/roadside applied pressure but serve to maintain some decent angling as well. "While most catchables average

between 1/3 to 1/2 pound, a few up to two pounds are often included in a shipment," he informs. "Taken from fast water, these larger fish often come as a pleasant surprise to anglers," he happily adds.

Since the tanker trucks only deliver these trout to the areas of easiest access, this translates to bridges, roadside turnouts, public spur roads and campgrounds. In-the-know car-anglers need just drive to a likely spot, pull over and begin fishing.

When traveling 89 in pursuit of planters, I lean heavily toward spinning gear. A four-piece, ultra-light 6-1/2 foot spinning rod and reel loaded with two- to four-pound line is my favorite since it is ideal for either quickly breaking down for the trunk or left rigged in the back seat while in transit. Bait fishermen will find that hatchery-reared trout readily crave salmon eggs or prepared baits in various colors and scents.

In addition to hatchery-infused quarry, the more isolated sections found varying distances up or downstream from easy access will often yield some impressive wild rainbows along with scatterings of browns and brookies as well. When in pursuit of these natives, I usually don waders and work with a fly rod. Besides allowing more room for backcasts, wading affords me opportunities and approaches unavailable to those shore-bound.

While each of the rivers or streams along 89 have their own distinctive angling atmospheres, fishermen who can read water fluently will have little trouble discerning productive pools, pockets, back eddies, edges or seams on any of these. Although the ability to read water and aggressive wading are basic for most wild trout advocates along 89, I have found fly penetration into the water to be the main key. On any briskly-moving water, trout will choose the path of least resistance, continually holding behind rocks or boulders where the current is somewhat subdued. By dapping a weighted nymph behind boulders and holding the rod high, the wading angler can keep the offering deep and current-free. In this often deadly, high sticking technique, the fly is presented near the trout's mouth and it, in turn, expends very little energy pursuing the tidbit.

Entomologically speaking, fly tossers along Hwy. 89 can't go wrong with size 10 to 14 Caddis, Hare's Ear, Black Ant and Pheasant Tail nymphs in light tan to dark olive colors. Used with a seven to eight foot, four- or five-weight fly rod and floating fly line equipped with a strike indicator this setup is very practical for me. A few tiny split shot a foot or so from the fly keep it near bottom and within the strike zone.

Lakes Almanor and Tahoe, a pair of expansive, high altitude jewels bordered

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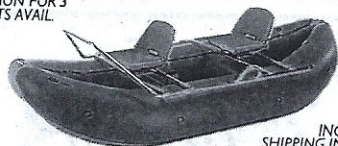
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by the trout causeway, are more reminiscent of inland seas. Although bank anglers casting the usual assortment of baits and lures on these conifer-rimmed waters will occasionally score, both lakes demand the use of a boat with electronics and specialized tactics to score consistently. Enlisting the services of a guide, especially for first-time visitors, is highly advisable.

Utilizing fish finders and trolling flasher/worm combinations or minnow-imitating lures along submerged river channels are just the ticket for fooling Almanor's rainbows and lake-reared king salmon. While the Eagle Lake-strain rainbow seem to prefer Needlefish in bikini, frog and rainbow patterns, surface plugs trolled late in the fall or just after ice-out manage to dupe some leviathan-sized browns. Six- to nine-inch Rebels and Rapalas in rainbow finish probably resemble easy-picking planters to these hungry predators. Springtime is right for three- to five-pound king salmon which are often taken on cut anchovies drifted on the bottom along the Hamilton arm.

Equally as popular for its shoreline casinos as it is for its deep-dwelling mack-inaw, Lake Tahoe is over 1600 feet deep and possesses the tenth clearest waters in the world. Numerous charter services are available on both north and south shores for those wishing to try their luck of the piscatorial variety. While downriggers, lead core line and depths of 100 to 300 feet are common practices for mining these deep-swelling char, which commonly range between four and twelve pounds, my favorite deepwater method involves graphing productive shelves and vertical jigging for them with light tackle. Once concentrated schools are located, they seem to have a nearly insatiable appetite for flashy Apex or Diamond jigs worked up and down among them. Dacron line with a short monofilament leader allows for a surer hookset especially in depths over 100 feet.

Ever have the urge to drop a line in a fish hatchery—legally? I definitely felt like I was dreaming as I repeatedly stripped a marabou streamer parallel to the shoreline weeds at Heenan Lake last fall. Autumnal yellows splashed surrounding stands of hardwoods while the crisp, mid-October air warned of the impending fall. At that precise moment, however, my buggy-whipping four-weight fly rod hinted of something massive on its payoff end. Indeed, after a dogged, subsurface tussle, I coaxed an impressive lunker, to shore. Exhibiting a bronze-ish caste and flaring its species-identifying flaming orange mandibles, the cutthroat was a clone to the two others released within the hour: 20 to

To locate campsites, access points or additional options, break out the Forest Service maps and familiarize yourself with each section of Hwy. 89. To obtain maps contact the USFS at 630 Sansome St., San Francisco, CA 94111, (415) 705-2870.

For reliable sources of information by area, contact the following:

McCloud Area: Shasta Cascade Wonderland (800) 4 SHASTA

Burney Basin: Steve Vaughn (916) 335-2381

Lake Almanor: Lassen View Resort (916) 596-3437

Truckee: Randy Johnson (916) 525-6575

Lake Tahoe, North Shore: Mickey Daniels (916) 583-4602

Lake Tahoe, South Shore: The Outdoorsman (916) 541-1660

Hope Valley: Bruno Huff (209) 258-7304

Markleeville: John Sparks (916) 694-2201

22 inches long and approaching three to four pounds!

Tucked in the high desert sage, pinon and aspen country near Monitor Pass, this 130-acre impoundment serves as a refuge for this endangered Lahontan subspecies, referred to as "salmon-trout" in an 1844 account in explorer John C. Fremont's journal. The DFG takes 2-1/2 million eggs annually from this nutrient-rich water which features mega-abundant zooplankton, scuds and leeches in addition to predictable caddis hatches—solid reasons why lake residents consistently average 17 to 24 inches and three to five pounds!

To prevent overstressing inhabitants at this "hatchery," the water is only open on weekends during September and October. Other times, you just have to dream of the fishing!

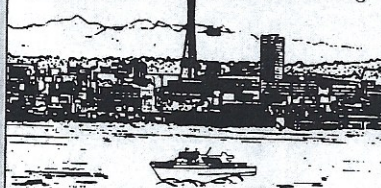
Besides Heenan, Manzanita Lake, the two mile section of Lower Hat Creek and

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the East Carson River below Hangman's Bridge have also gained acclaim for special fisheries managed exclusively for wild trout. By their very heritage, residents of these non-consumptive waters prove extremely selective and hard to fool. However, productive sessions usually occur when anglers have selected the right patterns along with the right times to present them. Carefully plying size 14 to 16 Adams, Cahill, Mosquito, Elk Hair Caddis and Gray Hackle Yellows at dawn's first light or dusk when they feed will sometimes illicit a favorable response. I also find it best to stalk or hunt individual fish rather than fanning the water in hopes of coercing a feeder.

Obviously, Highway 89 provides a myriad of choices. Whether opting to work a brushy rivulet, trying for planted rainbows along a roadside turnout or accepting the challenge of a special fishery, anglers who fish along this mountain motorway realize why it is California's major superhighway to trout.

Nearby Options

While more than two dozen roadside waters are touched by 89, plenty of nearby options exist, usually under 20 miles. Generally-overlooked McCloud Reservoir, the last known vestige for California Dolly Varden (now Bull Trout), currently houses some tempting wild rainbows up to five pounds while the Ah-Di-Nah section of the river below the dam is a noted special fishery under a reservation system.

In the Burney Basin, Fall and Pit rivers plus tiny Baum Lake boast some impressive, albeit leader-shy citizens while Clark Creek, a tumbling Lake Britton tributary, is excellent for early season planters.

The North Fork Feather River, tributary Warner Creek and the Hamilton Branch all contain feisty native and lake-run rainbows and browns, some very sizeable. The steep Feather River canyon below the dam provides some excellent hike-to browns.

Besides trout-laden Jackson Meadows and Milton Reservoirs, Stampede, Boca and Prosser Reservoirs are located north of Truckee on short spur roads, while tiny, 70-acre Martis Lake, located four miles east of Truckee, currently produces trophy browns and rainbows under no-kill regulations.

Indian Creek Reservoir, a productive early season water for portly broodstock rainbows and Pleasant Valley Creek, a stocked, flies-only water, are a pair of Markleeville waters of marked contrast.

In addition to these nearby waters, 89 also brushes near a pair of wilderness trailheads. While Thousand Lakes is primarily noted for pan-sized rainbows, heavily-impacted Desolation is dominated by brookies along with scattering of kaleidoscopic goldens. □

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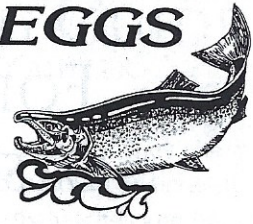
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