

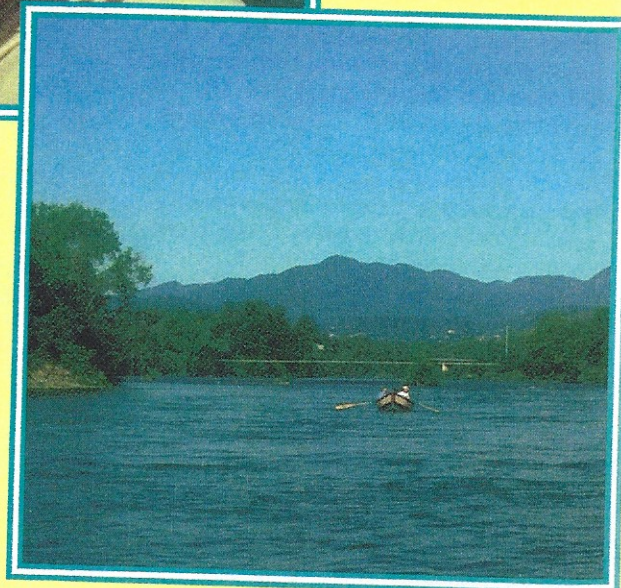
The 30 mile section of tailwater below Lake Shasta possesses one of the most underrated wild trout fisheries in California—and possibly the west!

Most residents fall into the 14 to 24 inch, one to three pound range.

Below Lake Shasta, the Sacramento is transformed into a serious river.

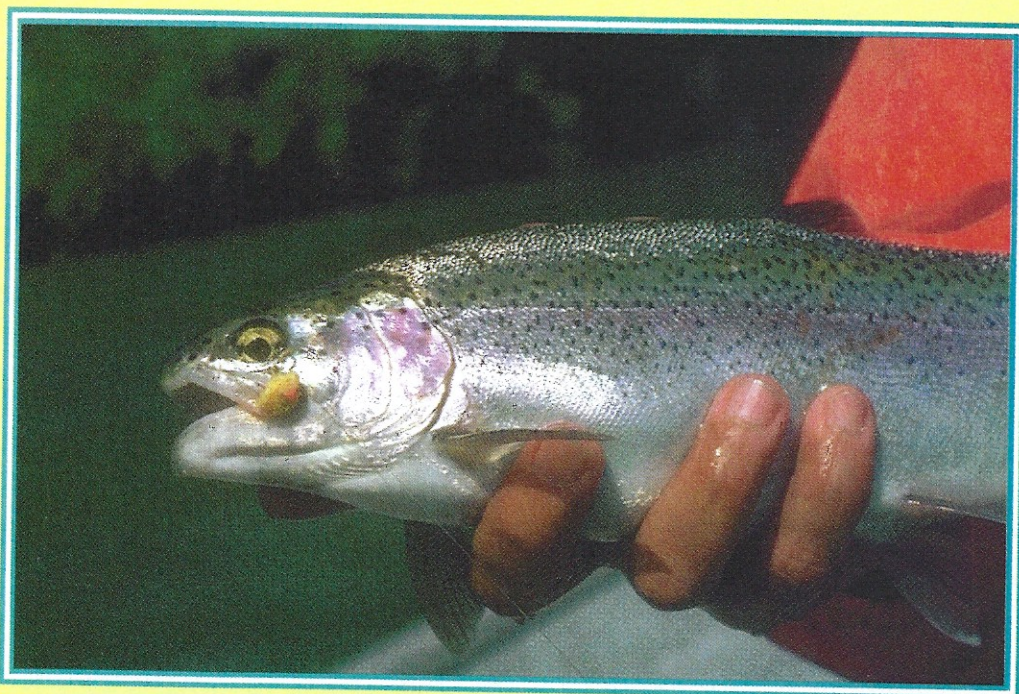
Don Vachini

Sacramento River RAINBOWS



A determined tugging sensation quickly gave way to a trio of aerobic cartwheels. Silvery droplets, caught in the sun's first light, spewed from the guided missile as it thrice exploded upward from its watery boundaries, each time careening forcefully back onto the surface, seemingly within the blink of an eye. Grudgingly coerced boatside and netted, the chunky, aluminum-sheened 15-inch rainbow displayed a faint rosy lateral while disdainfully eyeballing the Glo Bug stinging its lip. Seemingly unaffected by the previous battle in the swift current, it vigorously bolted back into the depths the instant its fins felt water.

A brief glimpse of snow-enshrouded Mount Shasta was afforded from mid-river while the droning roar of rapids made it difficult to hear normal conversation. Although thick brambles, willows and cottonwoods obscured much of the shoreline, cement, wood and steel structures—blatant signs of civilization—loomed beyond the foliage further up the noticeably-reinforced banks.



Bottom bouncing Glo-Bugs is often just the ticket especially from spring to early summer.

Joined by friend Terry Knight and guide Mike Jones, we were plying a section of the Sacramento River especially noted for its phenomenal rainbow trout, which also happens to lie directly within the city limits of Redding, California. The first eye-opening action of the day took

place minutes after rigging up, greatly inflating our hopes for a productive day's angling.

Officially known as the lower Sacramento, this river not only draws its

(Continued on page 48)

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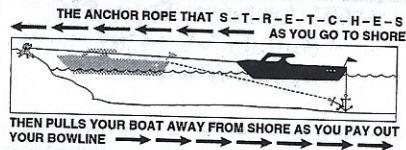


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Sacramento River Rainbows

(Continued from page 39)

lifeblood from Lake Shasta releases but has a lot to do with quenching thirsty valley farmlands. Although at the mercy of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the tailwater section from just above Redding through Red Bluff has quietly developed into a great resident rainbow trout fishery.

Untouched by the July 1991 chemical spill that decimated the fish population in the Upper Sacramento, a rushing, aggressive trout stream, the river below Shasta undergoes a drastic metamorphosis. Indeed, with flows now ranging between 4,000 to 10,000 cubic feet per second, it is transformed into a serious river. Actually, four dams control both flow and fish migrations along the river in Shasta and Tehama counties: Shasta, Keswick, the Anderson-Cottonwood Irrigation diversion (A.C.I.D.) and Red Bluff diversion dams. Between Redding and Red Bluff the fisheries include year-round trout plus winter salmon and steelhead. The Red Bluff diversion also presents an impassable barrier to the upstream migration of shad, striped bass and catfish.

While small numbers of steelhead migrate here and the state record 88-pound king salmon was taken from this sector, it is the feisty native rainbow trout which draws rave reviews. Unlike the federally endangered Chinook runs and dismal steelhead returns, the trout populations remain healthy and vibrant. According to Paul Wertz, Information Officer for the Department of Fish and Game's Region 1 office in Redding, river occupants are most likely progeny of trout from the upper Sacramento and McCloud rivers prior to Shasta Dam. There is also distinguishable scientific evidence that links these current inhabitants to steelhead stock. "Quite simply, any steelhead that doesn't leave this river for the Pacific Ocean is labeled a resident trout," he informs. "There are numerous fish fitting that description in the stretch above Red Bluff," he happily alludes.

Not only do these trout grow large thanks to plentiful food forms, conducive water temperatures and abundant spawning habitat, but their battles are reminiscent of their anadromous cousins. While smaller trout are more common in the diminutive feeder tributaries, the vast majority of the main river fish fall into the 14 to 24 inch, one to three pound range with specimens up to five pounds fairly common, according to Wertz.

Outside of monitoring steelhead takes and water flows, the management plan for them is to pretty much maintain the status quo. According to Wertz, the DFG favors the "natural genetic engineering" approach—leaving them alone and watch-

ing them adapt and thrive. "They certainly are a special resource," he beams.

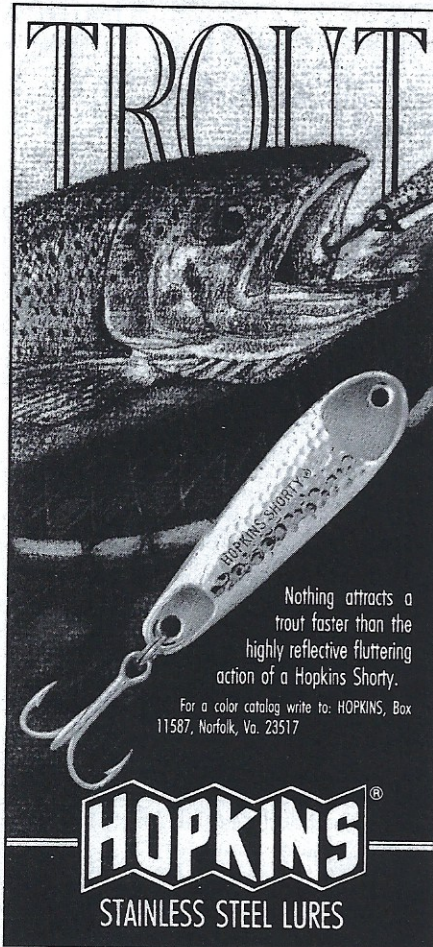
On this particular May morning, we launched at Posse Park and drifted approximately six miles, working copious sections all the way to our terminus point at the Cottonwood Riffle. While Jones is a firm believer that a boat opens numerous opportunities unavailable to shore anglers, he is convinced that a jet boat is the perfect craft for this river since it allows for repeat drifts. Indeed, on several occasions this particular trip, we nailed trout on the third and fourth try, sometimes landing two or more fish from the same run. "No doubt, a jet sled offers more chances at missed waters. When given a second or third chance, odds for success increase in the anglers favor," he smiles.

However, this stretch of the Sacramento can be an intimidating piece of water, primarily due to its voluminous flows. Heavy releases, especially late in the spring and early summer will commonly approach 10,000 cfs swelling it to vast proportions. When this occurs, things can get downright life-threatening if caught in the wrong current or location. For this reason, Jones, who has guided on the river for over a half dozen seasons, stresses boating know-how and safety. First time visitors should enlist the services of a reputable guide, preferably to learn how to safely navigate the water. "In any case, boaters should have a good command of their vessels and remember that the river can be very unforgiving," he cautions.

Jones' most productive time of the year appears to be early spring, before heavy irrigation releases begin. Starting in March a marvelous event begins. As surrounding valley temperatures rise, river temperatures increase to the point at which caddis larva begin cutting their way out of their cases and emerging to the surface as adults. The caddis hatch normally continues throughout summer until late September, normally commencing about noon and continuing through mid-afternoon. "At times, these 'blizzard hatches' are so intense that it is often difficult to breathe and fish at the same time," he advises.

While certain patterns are more or less productive at times, there are certainly no secrets. Since caddis is the most prevalent insect on the water, patterns imitating this prolific insect are the best choices. Bird's Nests, Elk Hair Caddis, Hare's Ear and Z Wing Caddis in sizes 12 to 14 are the most effective emerger patterns.

When enough emergers reach the surface, trout will start taking adults off the top, usually near late afternoon-evening. At this point, tailouts are where the majority of fish hold to feed on surface riding adults. The Elk Hair Caddis in sizes 10 to 14 is a common dry choice.



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While light greens and yellows are prime colors during the caddis emergence, the scenario changes dramatically during late fall and early winter. While most streams are off limits to anglers after November 15, "the Sac," as it is referred to locally, is available year-round. One compelling reason to fish it during the winter is because flows are diminished to the 4000 to 5000 cfs range, ideal for wading. Secondly, the river ecosystem now revolves around the Chinook salmon. Find the salmon and you will normally locate the trout lined up behind their redds in search of a highly relished, protein-rich, salmon egg meal which often drifts aimlessly downstream toward them. Care should be taken, however, not to disturb or walk over the fragile spawning beds.

River entomology also changes in the winter as *Calibaetis* mayflies replace the caddis as most abundant aquatic insects. Size 12 to 18 Pheasant Tail, Beadheads or Bird's Nests nymphs seem adequate although pink and orange egg patterns are also quite worthwhile winter patterns. Actually, when able to locate actively feeding trout behind salmon, just about any properly presented pattern seems successful.

For the wading fly angler, special techniques often pay off. While maintaining balance in waist deep flows is often a priority, a high stick nymphing technique usually serves me well. I try to keep as much line off the water and yet go as deep as possible, using a bright, visible strike indicator and added weight a foot or so above the nymph. I carefully follow the floating indicator with my rod tip and attempt to keep as much slack out of the fly line to ensure the fly is floating drag free. Nine- to twelve-foot leaders work for me.

It is quite common to get strikes as the offering is lifted to re-cast, so be poised to strike at any moment. The subsurface strike is usually aggressive and unmistakable but be prepared to set the hook quickly, for these wary natives will reject the offering at the slightest resistance.

When surface action commences, I attempt to stalk individual risers rather than arbitrarily fan the water. I switch to a dry pattern and work it on a dead drift. On a surface take, it is best to let the fish turn with the fly before lifting the rod tip gently.

While many anglers prefer to work hooked trout by snubbing and stripping in fly line, I have found it more feasible to

work the fish directly from the reel. A smooth, well operating drag is a necessity for their swift and powerful runs are more equivalent to fresh run steelies than trout.

Whatever time of year one is fishing, the key ingredient in fly fishing this hefty water is either presenting the offering just off the bottom or right on top—no in between. A 5- or 6-weight outfit used with floating line can easily work flies four to six feet under an indicator or topside. While I favor an eight-foot fly rod for this

City Limit Access

While most prime stretches of trout water snaking through downtown Redding are best reached by boat, there are a few notable locations within city limits where shoreline anglers will not only find productive riffles but reasonable access as well.

Caution must always be taken when wading a water of this magnitude. Beaches will often be determined by the size of releases and many areas vary week to week, day to day.

Following are a few of the more accessible sections found within a stones throw from this bustling metropolis:

Above the Lake Redding Dam is a wide stretch of water which is best reached by the River Trail. North side access is from Harlan Drive while south side access is via Riverside Drive. The river is broad and deep here but some wading is available from the south side.

Bridge access is best from the River Trail parking lot with some additional parking under the railroad trestle.

Besides foot entry, Caldwell Park access also has a boat ramp. Although wading is not feasible here some outstanding sections occur below the Market Street Bridge.

In addition to providing another launch ramp, Posse Park is an ideal section for fly fishing with many trails through brush offering limited access.

Turtle Bay Trail can be reached by parking at the concrete structure across from the Convention Center and walking 1/3 mile to the river.

Turtle Bay East can be reached by driving to the end of Bechelli Lane and following the numerous foot trails to the water.

Cypress Street Bridge—Henderson Access: From Cypress Street take Hartnell and then the first possible right. Follow past the Goodyear Store until road ends. Several trail choices are available.

To reach the Cypress Street Riffle, park on Marina Drive and take the sidewalk to trail.

Bonnyview Bridge, the last of the "city limit" spots, has a launch facility and abundant parking for all vehicles. The small beach under the bridge and upstream from here offer good bank fishing for all types of angling.

water, a 5 or 6X tippet is probably the standard modus operandi for nymphing while a 4X is more appropriate for surface risers.

Jones parts with a few tips which should improve boater's odds considerably. Whether experiencing high or low flows, the trout are always there and can be taken in all conditions. Much the same way an adept creek anglers fluently reads trout structures, Jones skillfully identifies and probes submerged cover. It is no secret that trout seek shelter behind boul-

ders, rocks, sunken logs or any other current-detering obstacles which breaks heavy flows. "Riffles emptying into pools and seams are also top trout lairs," he imparts. "However," he continues, "...the most common mistake anglers make is failure to identify and work this holding water, especially during heavy releases."

During the optimum spring hatch periods, Jones opts for spinning tackle rigged with pencil lead sinkers and Glo Bugs. On our productive May morning we found bottom bouncing these "yarn-flies" to be just the ticket.

"It is important to maintain a light tension on the line while guiding the offering with the rod tip," he imparts. "Try to feel the rhythm of the bottom and set the hook on any peculiar action," he continues.

With Jones positioning his boat to allow for natural presentations, we methodically worked over several types of holding structures, usually with gratifying success. Along one particular run, a thick, willow sweeper partially obscured a likely looking, deep-blue swirl. A side-arm flip cast caught the slot with just the proper ingredients—deep and under the branch. KAWHAM! My rod was instantly bent double like a croquet hoop, but I managed to set the hook. At first, the "submarine" stayed deep, surging through all parts of this hole, then hastily darted into mid-river to stage a stirring, current-enhanced battle. When it finally cooperated, Jones scooped it into the net. Of the dozen trout we landed in our four hours, this five pounder was our second largest fish of the day!

Since the offering should be a foot or so off the bottom, snags are to be expected. "About with a motor also allows for the un snagging option since one can move above the

hangup and often save re-rigging," Jones prudently admits.

While some anglers prefer to dupe residents with nightcrawlers and salmon eggs, a growing number of anglers opt for other strategies. Curtis Minoletti, who operates the TNT Guide Service, employs backtrolling techniques, working plugs such as Hot Shots, Wee Warts, Tadpollies and similar plugs deep through holes and likely structure. In this popular steelheading technique, fish are often teased or irri-

tated into striking. "When worked as close to bottom as possible and imparted with just the right action, rainbows of any size will smash them. Most fish taken this way will be holding in six to eight feet of water," he adds.

Besides locating the abundant holding water and tantalizing his quarry, Minoletti experiences a slight edge by utilizing the new high density, polyethylene braided lines with his lures. Combining high-test strength with thin diameters, such monikers as T.U.F., Iron Thread, Spider Wire, Kevlar and Ultra-Max, are ideal for the big flows of the Sac. This line's thread-like size not only allows a more natural lure action but its sensitivity (less than 2% stretch) enables a surer hook set.

Yet another trick involves the use of a side-planer, a small plastic device that clips onto the line and pulls laterally in the current, allowing bank anglers to present lures through hard to reach mid-stream lies. These are best suited for working slow pockets and runs with constant bottoms.

Light or ultra-light rods and reels fished with six-pound line is a perfect set-up for this large river, according to Minoletti. "Light tackle not only increases the odds of a hookup but allows anglers to get the most out of the ensuing battle."

Although the limit is one fish per day, most guides practice catch and release, thus doing their part to maintain a strong river stock. While barbed hooks are prohibited, current regulations also mandate a steel-head punch card on this section, even for rainbows. Anglers will need to record the number of fish they catch, including those released. The DFG assumes that all trout over 16 inches are steelies and must be set free.

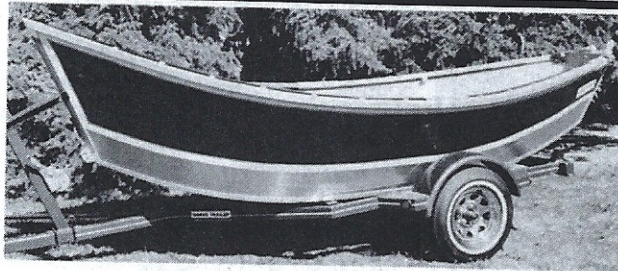
For further local information, contact the Shasta Cascade Wonderland Association (800) 326-6944. For current river conditions or guide services contact Curtis Minoletti (916) 628-4057, or check the ads in this issue.

A self-sustaining trophy trout fishery which can be utilized by bait fishermen, lure anglers and fly fishers alike, the section between Redding and Red Bluff also carries the potential to yield 20 to 30 trout in a hard days fishing. Probably its greatest attribute, however, is its quality wild trout, many of which top five pounds and mimic pugilistic steelhead. I, for one, can truthfully attest that while a good number of these rainbows reside right in the middle of town, they are certainly no city slickers on the battlefield!

For additional access information and up to the minute tips contact The Fly Shop, 4140 Churn Creek Rd., Redding, CA 96002, (916) 222-3555. A detailed Sacramento River map is also a valuable asset for stream-side access. Contact Stream Time, P.O. Box 991536, Redding, CA 96099, (916) 244-0310. □

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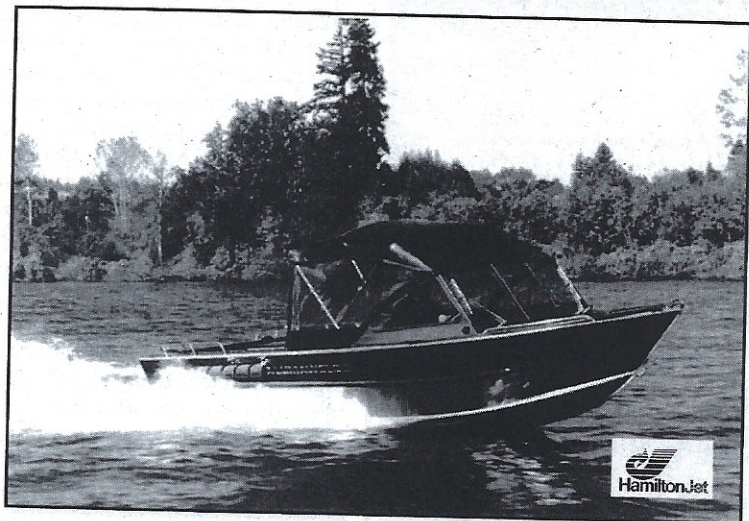
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