

TOLL FREE 1-800-800-7724

**T**he Bay Area's backyard fishin' hole is back in business. Although drought, drawdowns and diminishing baitfish populations sent Lake Berryessa reeling during the early '90s, above-average rainfall has rejuvenated the lake. The prognosis for '98 translates not only to a full reservoir but to the potential for some incredible winter angling for trophy rainbow trout as well. We're talking fish consistently in the 2- to 3-pound class — and more!

As an added bonus, this water-storing impoundment tucked in the Coastal Mountain foothills above Napa is virtually equidistant between Sacramento and San Francisco — easy driving distance for many Northern Californians willing to brave the elements to wet a line.

Sizable trout? Uncrowded conditions? In the neighborhood of two large population centers? How so?

Probably the most significant long-range impact, according to Department of Fish and Game sources, was provided by the introduction of threadfin shad over two decades ago. This species does not compete with other species for food, reproduces prodigiously and has become the primary food source for the trout. During the winter, these plankton eaters move to the surface in huge numbers and make themselves available to the hungry trout that pursue them relentlessly.

While a food-chain relationship exists between the trout and shad, the catalyst that brings it all together is the phenomenon known as thermocline turnover. Bringing colder water to the top, this flip-flop usually occurs in late October and lasts until March. The trout fishing reaches its zenith from mid-December through February.

On an overcast morning last February, my son Jason and I donned down jackets and wool gloves to ward off the chill, and we were greeted by sloshes and splashes of hefty trout porpoising all around our boat. Preparing to cast, we shivered as much from excitement as from the cold!

On this particular trip, we had opted for ultralight rods and reels with 4-pound-test. To a size 6 hook we attached a live minnow with no additional weight and flipped it as far as we could. After an eternity-like 15 minutes, Jason's rod tip began a barely noticeable jiggle, and he watched line roll off his spool. Patiently waiting a few moments, he closed the bail, took up the slack and raised his rod sharply. Completing a pair of aerial pirouettes, the bruiser then concentrated on sounding tactics, but after its third drag-straining run, the silvery, deep-bodied 2 1/2-pounder was brought to net.

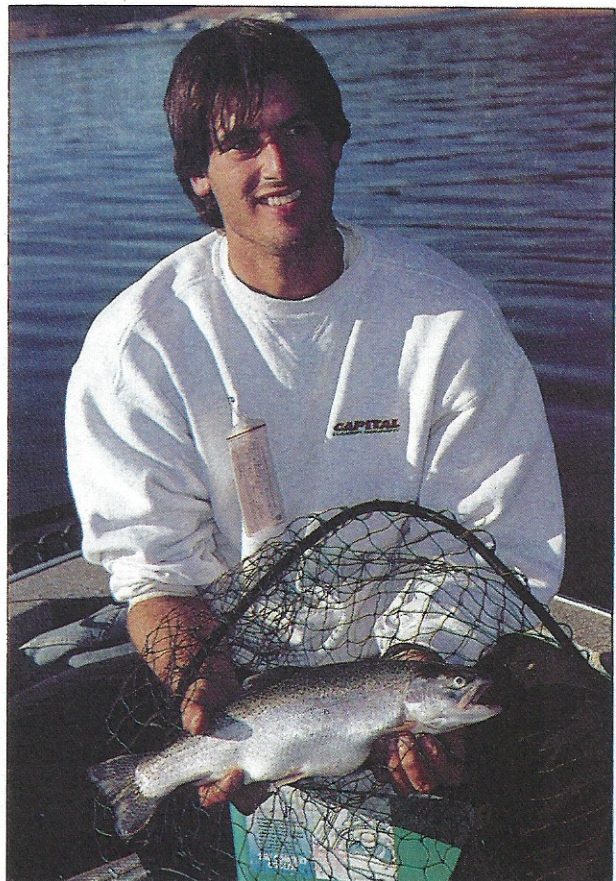
Before the rain started pelting us two hours later, we were each two fish shy of five-fish limits. All the rainbows were like peas in a pod — between 13 and 16 inches, sporting small heads and deep girths. They were characteristic of healthy, well-fed salmonids that had gained their heft rapidly! *(Continued)*

*Thermocline turnover accounts for rainbows like this coming to the surface. The author's son, Jason Vachini, admires a well-fed 2-pounder. Photo by Don Vachini.*

## Berryessa's Wine Country Trout

*Once again enjoying abundant water stores and healthy forage populations, Lake Berryessa continues to produce vintage trout.*

*by Don Vachini*



Attesting to the quantity of forage available, the Eagle Lake strain planted here commonly averages between 1 and 3 pounds, according to DFG stats, with holdovers occasionally approaching 5 pounds.

Claude Davis, a retired guide who operated out of Markley Cove for nearly two decades, strongly feels that the drifted-minnow technique is probably the most effective way of taking winter trout. "The minnow resembles a wounded baitfish, so rigging is crucial. Hook it under the dorsal, not the lips. This way, it can swim naturally, and its flashing action is more attractive."

Rigged in this manner, the minnow usually tips off the trout's presence by swimming frantically to escape, causing a slight dance or movement in the rod tip. An ultralight- or light-action rod helps detect this sensation. We often refer to this as "the scared-minnow dance."

Davis suggests leaving the bail open and holding the line between two fingers to feel the minnow's movement. "This way, the trout feels less resistance and will ingest the bait, making for a solid hookup."

While winter trout can be taken at all hours, dawn seems to be the most feasible. "This is the best chance to take a big trout, because this is when they seem to be in the shallows and less wary. In early-morning hours, the minnow should be fished in 3 to 5 feet of water, then deeper as the day grows older," according to Davis. A clear plastic bobber is helpful in keeping the minnow at the desired depth.

Guide Jack Pinch, who took over Davis' beat a few seasons ago, plies for winter trout in a different yet effective manner. He feels that since trout and their food source are virtually located on the surface, top-line trolling can be a very successful wintertime procedure. While utilizing sonar to pinpoint baitfish concentrations, he maneuvers 1- to 3-inch shad-imitating lures along their fringes for his success. Top-producing lures include silvery Needlefish, Kastmasters, Pro Secrets, Z Rays, Krocodiles, Rainbow Runners, Double Dancers and Bingo Bugs. Broken-back Rapalas, Rebels and other minnow-imitating plugs also dupe their share of trout.

His basic technique involves crowding the shoreline and trolling at a fairly fast pace. "Most winter trout are taken in waters between 5 to 15 feet, and no more than 50 to 100 feet from shore. By moving at speeds around 2 mph, the trout must decide quickly and, when they do, usually smash the offering with vengeance," he confides. "A loosely set drag definitely helps prevent breakoffs."

Slow-trolling fluorescent red or green Humdingers or Crippures when conditions are murky often proves worthwhile. "While varying speeds between .5 to .8 mph and altering directions will often coerce a strike, a good number of hits occur while the boat is turning, as it probably appears the bait is getting away."

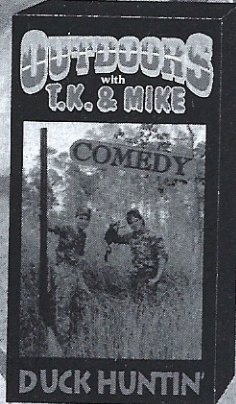
Light to ultralight rods and reels along with 4- to 6-pound line are sporting choices for presenting a variety of offerings.

No doubt the key to fishing Berryessa is locating the concentrations of shad, for the trout will not be far away. Large congregations of big rainbows work together to chase the bait into coves

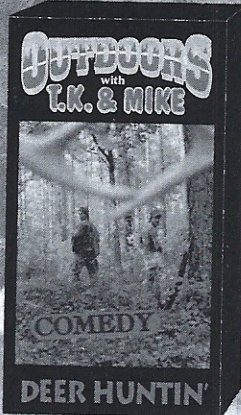
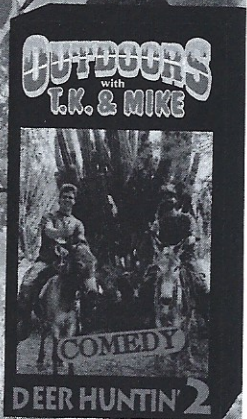
# HILARIOUS VIDEOS SWEEP THE NATION!!

You'll bust a gut laughin' at these two Alabama rednecks!

TO ORDER PLEASE SEND \$15.00 PER VIDEO PLUS \$4.50 SHIP TO:



OUTDOORS WITH T.K. AND MIKE P.O. BOX 1915 AUBURN, AL 36831



What started off as a joke has escalated into world wide sales for these two fire fighters turned comedians. Outdoors with T.K. & Mike will leave you holding your side from the time you push play until you watch them again. These FAST PACED, ACTION PACKED, Videos are the HIT of the Party!!!



WHOLESALE INQUIRIES WELCOME

(CANADA & OVERSEAS ADD \$10.00) (ALABAMA RESIDENTS ADD 7.5% SALES TAX)

(MC/VISA)

1-800-949-8515

DEER

BASS

DUCK

TURKEY

DEER 2

ELK

and to keep them cornered for considerable lengths of time while dining on them. One can zero in on the more productive spots and be reasonably certain of finding himself in the midst of action. As Davis states, "Once you find the pantry, you'll find the fish!"

Although certainly not limited to these regions, hotspots for winter anglers are centralized in the lower one-third of the lake nearest the dam. These include Skiers Cove, Peekaboo Point and Markley Cove, plus points of land that drop into deep water such as the Farmhouse, the mouth of Cappel Cove, Steele Park, the Island and Spanish Flat. Trout can frequently be taken while drifting alongside the covered docks in the marinas. Shad seek the protection that these structures offer, and trout bore right in after them, hot on their trail.

On some occasions, rainbows can be observed chasing bait right on the surface, creating a foaming mass. Repeatedly casting silvery lures or streamer flies into this frenzy can often produce some jolting results. Care should be taken to keep the boat on the fringe of this mass to

avoid spooking the whole congregation. To take advantage of this short-lived action, it is wise to have a separate rod and reel rigged and ready to go at a moment's notice. A two-rod stamp allows the option of using both rods at once.

---

***Large congregations of big rainbows work together to chase the bait into coves and to keep them cornered for considerable lengths of time while dining on them.***

---

While some bank-fishermen are successful in areas such as the Oak Shore Day Use, Cappel Cove Launch, Spanish Flat, Markley, Portuguese and Putah coves, a boat offers the flexibility to follow the trout.

Whether you prefer trolling, drifting minnows from a boat or the bank, Berryessa's notable rainbow trout fishery appears comparable to the award-winning Napa Valley wines that are produced nearby — they just seem to get better and better with age!

---

#### FOR YOUR INFORMATION

---

Although the trout season is open all year here, anglers will need to display a current '98 fishing license.

Several full-service marinas, which include boat launch and bait and tackle, are found along the west shore. They include: Rancho Monticello, (707) 966-2188; Steele Park Resort, (707) 966-2330; Spanish Flat Resort, (707) 966-7700 (which also offers a gas dock, boat rentals and camping); and Markley Cove Resort, (707) 966-2134 (which also includes a guide service, boat rentals and gas dock).

Guide Jack Pinch can be reached at (707) 966-1911.

From San Francisco, Berryessa is a drive of slightly under two hours; the trip is even shorter from Sacramento. From San Francisco, head to Napa. Follow Highway 121 north, take a left on Highway 128 and proceed along the Berryessa-Knoxville Road to the west-shore marinas. From Sacramento, travel west on Highway 128, and you'll arrive at the dam. Continue on the Berryessa-Knoxville Road. □

TURN YOUR REEL INTO A TOW TRUCK.



SpiderWire Premium Braid is perfect for yanking the biggest bass out of the deepest cover. It's five times stronger than mono with near-zero stretch. It is the strongest, thinnest, most sensitive line in the world. Period. Feel the power of Premium Braid and be convinced. SpiderWire has the line to give you the maximum fishing edge.