

Virginia Lakes Trout

This small cluster of lakes tucked near the gateway of a vast wilderness will offer you not only spectacular scenery and easy access but four trout species as well.

Releasing a small brookie that had intercepted my fly, I gazed about at the awe-inspiring setting. The tiny lake appeared as a mirror, reflecting granite spires, some of which were illuminated by the sun's early light. The higher peaks were snow-shrouded, and stands of pine and aspen smacked of stark, virgin wilderness.

On this particular morning, I was plying Red Lake, a small jewel in the Virginia Lakes crown. Virginia Lakes is a broad name for a cluster of 10 small, gemlike lakes situated within a short distance of each other, about 20 miles south of the town of Bridgeport. Tucked around an elevation of 9,000-10,000 feet along the jagged Eastern Sierra Crest, they are fed by perpetual glacial melt and seepage from towering Mt. Excelsior, Mt. Black and Dunderberg Peak — at elevations of 12,466, 11,794 and 12,374 feet, respectively. While four of the lower lakes lie in the Toiyabe National Forest, the rest are in the adjoining Hoover Wilderness along the north-eastern entrance to Yosemite National Park.

The Bridgeport area is probably one of the finest and most varied trout angling meccas in the West. Sky-scraping peaks ribboned with trout-laden streams and emerald alpine lakes

Author Don Vachini prepares to release a magnificent rainbow back into Virginia Creek. Photo courtesy of Don Vachini.

by Don Vachini

tower over the lush, meadow-rich Bridgeport Valley, which houses several trophy fisheries. The Virginia Lakes, on the fringes of this 20-mile radius, are especially notorious for a variety of pan-sized trout. This collection of waters is popular not only because of its scenic splendor but also because anglers can fish the creek and lakes essentially without having to move camp.

Of the 10 lakes in this high-altitude chain, Trumbull and Big and Little Virginia lakes are the most accessible and, thus, the most popular. Because a paved road leads right to their doorsteps, almost everyone who visits the area wets a line in them. Despite heavy angling pressure, these lakes meet the challenge and are highly productive. This trio possesses abundant food forms and witness nearly ideal water conditions all year. The Department of Fish and Game stocks them weekly during the season with the catchable rainbows that make up the bulk of the yearly take.

Since Mono County operates under a general trout season (from April 30 through October), these waters are closed for the winter, giving holdover trout a chance to put on heft. "Many rainbows are planted after the season closure and again just before it opens," said Rick Rockel of Ken's Alpine Sporting Goods in Bridgeport. "This makes for some productive early-

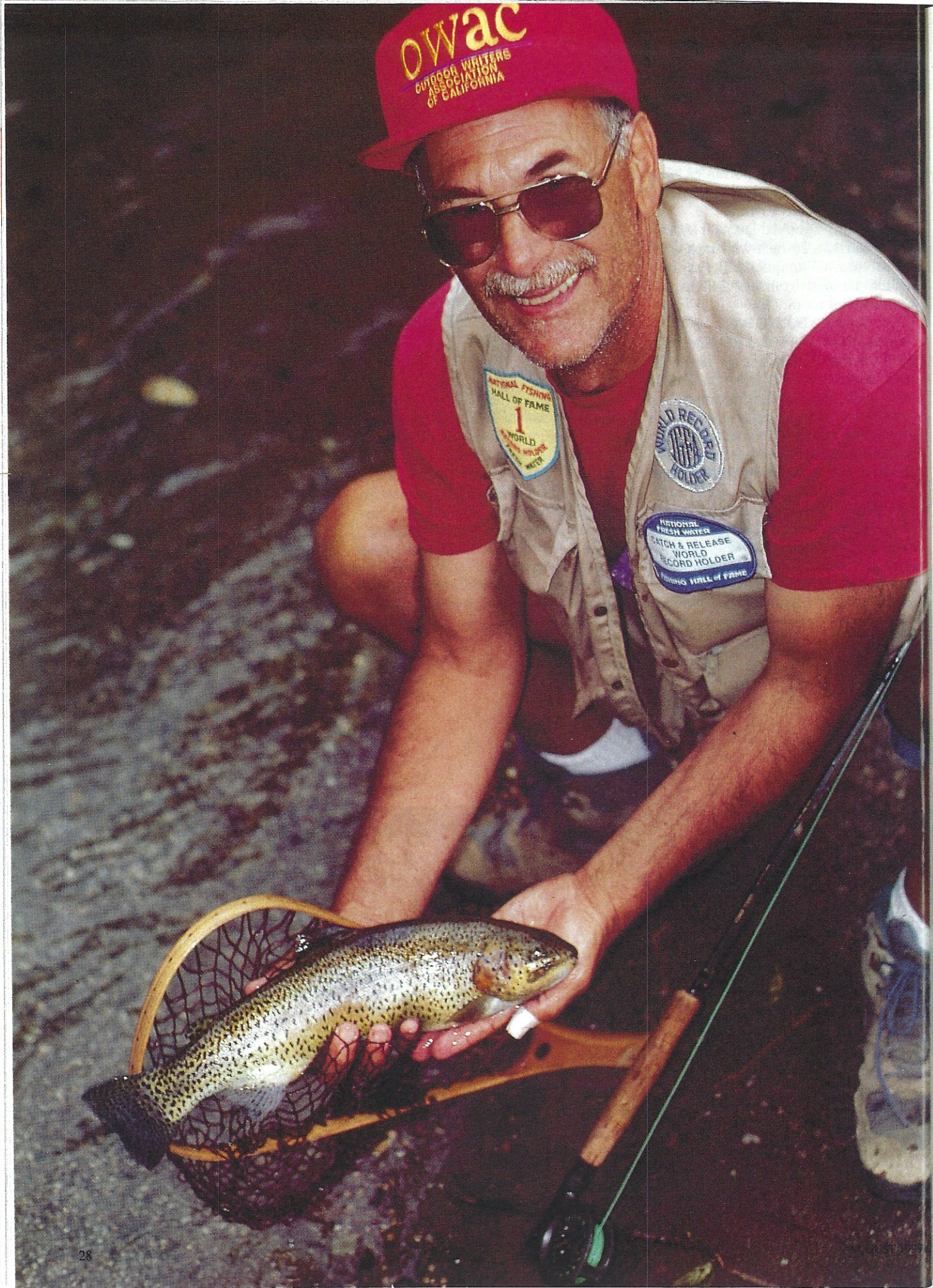
season angling."

TRUMBULL LAKE

The lowest of the lakes, at an elevation of 9,300 feet, Trumbull sits in the shadow of Dunderberg Peak, which dominates the mountainscape. Fed by underground seepage and springs, it tends to be slightly cloudy, making many wary of its potential. For this reason, most people opt for scented baits fished on the bottom. A variety of Power Bait and Sierra Gold, in addition to red salmon eggs and worms, will work well here. I also find "noisy" spinners like Rooster Tails, Panther Martin, Vibrax and Crippures very effective in the murky water. A popular way to explore the entire shoreline, which is marshy on one side and rockbound on the other, is by means of a float tube. The reedy shallows are best for brookies; stocked rainbows generally frequent the steep incline of the rocky sections.

BIG AND LITTLE VIRGINIA LAKES

Over the ridge a few hundred yards from Trumbull sit the two glamour lakes of the chain. Clear, cold and shallow — only 15 to 20 feet at its deepest — Little Virginia sits at an elevation of 9,450 feet alongside the lodge and a few cabins; it is an excellent bet for fly-fishing, especially early and late in the day. When the glass-off takes place, trout often feed so heavily it appears to be raining. Productive flies include Royal Coachman, Mosquito and Black Gnat in sizes 12-



Thi

Rele
inter
awe-
appe-
spire
by t
peak
of p
virgi
Or
plyin
Virg
is a
sma
sho
mile
Tuc
10,
Sier
glac
Mt.
Dur
12,
spe
lako
For
Ho
eas
Par
J
of
ang
scr
lad
—
Au
rel
int
Do
AU

14. While brook and brown trout are commonly enticed on wet flies in the shallows, their rainbow brethren are frequently taken along the talus bank opposite the lodge, where an underground spring seeps in among the submerged rocks.

Although flies and lures are effective in this trout haven, salmon eggs, worms and Power Bait are mainstays here.

Some of the best action occurs right in the middle of this water, and where the marshy inlet winds its way through a submerged channel.

In addition to the rainbows, between 500 and 1,000 pounds of catchable browns are usually released into Little Virginia sometime in the fall. "Some of these are 'ripe' and will spawn naturally in the creeks," noted Rockel.

Besides the hatchery 'bows, which usually run 8 to 14 inches, some lunker browns also inhabit the lake. "A few 2- to 5-pounders are caught each season, usually early or late in the season," said a beaming Rockel. "A couple of years back, a dead 12-pounder washed up on shore."

Big Virginia, the largest lake in the



Moat Lake's self-sustaining population of golden trout is enough to provide for a fishery, but catch-and-release should apply. Photo by Don Vachini.

group, sits a few hundred yards above the lodge at an elevation of 9,770 feet. Since it is so big (by alpine standards), the trout tend to scatter over all parts of the water. Rainbows are the most common species taken here, but browns

and brookies thrive, too. A very deep lake, it is most conducive to soaking bait from shore, though rowboats, canoes and float tubes are put to use as well. A variety of baits soaked on the bottom with a sliding sinker will

DREAM SCOPE

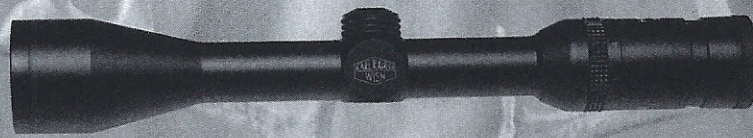
THINKING ABOUT A NEW RIFLESCOPE?
CHECK OUT KAHLES... THE NEWEST RIFLESCOPES!



3-12X56 MM

Kahles, of Vienna, Austria, has just introduced a line of 30MM and 1" riflescopes that you ought to compare, spec. for spec., with fine scopes like the LPS® Vari-X III® or Monarch® before you decide to buy anything. You'll find the Kahles prices highly competitive (in many cases lower), and you'll also discover the awesome, premium Kahles performance.

Unlike most brands, Kahles grinds, polishes, and fully multi-coats its' own optical glass. The one-piece, 1" alloy tubes are nitrogen purged six times before they're finally sealed.



3-9X42 1" American Hunter

All Kahles scopes are fogproof, shockproof and waterproof/submersible. There's even a full *Limited Lifetime Warranty to back it all up.

If you are a serious hunter and have big dreams, you owe it to yourself to check out Kahles now... and have your dreams become reality this season.

For more info, call 800-426-3089 or visit www.swarovskioptik.com.

KAHLES
A Swarovski Company

*Warranty card must be postmarked within 30 days of purchase from a Kahles dealer. Entire product must be returned with warranty claim by registered warranty holder.

® Leupold, LPS and Vari-X III are registered trademarks of Leupold & Stevens, Inc. Monarch is the registered trademark of Nikon, Inc.



usual
"Alth
take
fools
fishe
addit
seem
two."
Be
are t
bows
of tro
and
prop
erage
spec
doub
Be
spots
out c
shelf
below

Ar
this
depre
Altho
lake
hype
most
find
dapp
wher
out i
16 B
head
near
Whil
delic
futili
idea
zeph

For
from
taine
Hoo
about
Blue
of 9
lake
wild
on u
Sn
the r
since
marl
brusi
the
Alth
or d
prov

AUG

usually take the greater portion of fish. "Although worms and night crawlers take their share, Power Bait probably fools the greatest number for bait fishermen," suggested Rockel. "In addition, inflated 'crawlers always seem to account for a nice brown or two."

Besides the DFG plants, both lakes are the beneficiaries of Alpers rainbows, a special privately-grown strain of trout noted for their monstrous size and fighting qualities. "These well-proportioned beauties generally average between 3 and 8 pounds, with specimens commonly surpassing double digits," enthused Rockel.

Be it bait, lures or flies, the best spots for action are the pair of gouged-out channels near the two inlets and the shelf line along the sloping shoreline below Red Lake.

RED LAKE

An additional feeder to Big Virginia, this tiny water is tucked in a small depression at the 9,850-foot elevation. Although food is plentiful, this scenic lake harbors a population of small but hyperactive brookies and rainbows, most of which average 6 to 8 inches. I find it a pleasant retreat for tiny flies dapped over brush near the outlet, or where twin rivulets feed the gouged-out inlet. From my experience, size 14-16 Black Ant, Black Gnat and bead-head nymphs are very effective worked near the fringes of any moving water. While frequent winds can make delicate fly presentations an exercise in futility, a fly/bubble combination is ideal for defeating the swirling zephyrs.

BLUE LAKE

Following Virginia Creek upstream from Big Virginia Lake, the maintained trail quickly crosses the signed Hoover Wilderness boundary and, after about a hundred yards, approaches Blue Lake, which lies at an elevation of 9,900 feet. None of the wilderness lakes are planted, so self-sustaining wild fish make up the catch from here on upstream.

Smallish brook and rainbow trout are the main attraction at this lake, which, since it is so accessible, bears the marks of overfishing. The shoreline is brushy and snag-filled; for this reason, the inlet/outlet remains the hotspot. Although tiny Mosquito patterns, wet or dry, early or late in the day have provided brief flurries of action, this is

probably the least productive of all the chain lakes. However, since it is but a short hike from the trailhead, a float tube allows anglers to ply water that most have trouble accessing.

COONEY LAKE

Three-quarters of a mile up the trail, one encounters the granitic-encircled lake named for prospector J.P. Cooney. At 10,200-foot elevation, it possesses an abundance of colorful *Salvelinus fontinalis* to go with its sparsely timbered terrain.

Early in the season, just after ice-out,

tiny spinners or spoons fitted with single barbless hooks prove to be very popular. However, as they feel the sting of steel, most residents seem content to only dine on size 14-16 artificials as the season wanes. Spawning habitat is adequate past the outlet, and sheer granite walls on one side give the lake a rockbound appearance. Adventurous anglers who don't mind the scramble can experience better action on the headwall side of the water away from the well-beaten

Continued on page 60

Genuine SCENT KILLER® works best!

Spray SCENT KILLER® on your hunting clothing to eliminate human scent.

100% Money-back Guarantee:
If you are not satisfied with any product we make, send back the empty bottle along with receipt and we will refund your purchase price, no questions asked. Refund amount limited to suggested retail.

Insist on genuine SCENT KILLER®... don't settle for an imitation



SCENT KILLER® is totally odorless... some imitators have a detectable odor and if you can smell it the deer can smell it!



SCENT KILLER® prevents odor-causing molecules from forming a gas so they can't travel through the air to the deer's nose!

See more deer, get closer shots... 96.9% of the hunters we surveyed rated SCENT KILLER® the most effective scent elimination spray they've used!

Look for the Wildlife Research Center® logo... it's the brand hunters count on!

Also from Wildlife Research Center



Autumn Formula: Scent Killer® with a slight smell of dirt and leaves added

Unscented Clothing Wash Powder - Kills Human Odor

For our catalog of scents & scent elimination products: please call:

1-800-655-7898 or (612)427-3350

Or write to:
Wildlife Research Center, inc.
1050 McKinley St.,
Anoka, MN 55303

www.wildlife.com

WILDLIFE RESEARCH CENTER®
The brand hunters count on™



Unscented, Anti-Bacterial Liquid & Bar - Body Soaps

Scent Killer® Quart Combo with Filled 4 oz. Field Bottle

BEST VALUE

• STEEL BUILDINGS FACTORY DIRECT •

SUMMER CLOSEOUT

SAVE THOUSANDS ON SELECT SIZES

25x34 • 30x46 • 40x56 • 50x116



SAVE UP TO
60%
ON STEEL
BUILDINGS



- 20 Year Guarantee
- Build it yourself
- 100% Useable Space
- Financing Available

**AMERICA'S
BEST
SELLING
BUILDING!**



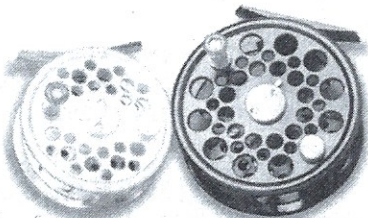
CALL NOW FOR A FACTORY PRICE
LIST AND FREE PRODUCT GUIDE
1 800-463-6062



EVOLUTION FLY REELS

The best materials, most precise machining and the highest quality control all become part of the MARADO Evolution families of fly reels. They are as much a trophy to the fly fishermen who use them as the fish they catch.

Choose from the familiar traditional double click pawl drag in the Evolution or a modern anti reverse actuated friction drag found in the Evolution FX reels.



Send \$2.00 for a complete catalog to:

MARADO Inc. phone 253-395-3355
19247 80th Ave. S. fax 253-395-9594
Kent, WA 98032 www.marado.com

VIRGINIA LAKES ... Continued

foot path.

FROG LAKES

Ascending a steep switchback 200 feet or so brings glimpses of a tiny but verdant meadow basin near the pass. Resembling a trio of small ponds, the Frog Lakes mark the headwaters of Virginia Creek and contain a moderately healthy population of diminutive but active brookies.

Anglers seeking a challenge can attempt to present dry flies to rising dimples. Although any fish approaching 9 inches would be a true trophy on any of these tarns, they compensate by smashing offerings and giving a good account of themselves on a 3-weight system and gossamer tippets. Despite their small size, these lakes are actually a fair bet, since most hikers — probably more intent on ascending nearby Summit Pass on the way to Yosemite's backcountry — bypass them.

A GOLDEN OPTION

A side trail branches off to the right a short distance above Blue Lake. Three years ago, I took this side path and, chest heaving and lungs searing, ascended the steep talus switchback for almost two miles. Sitting in a glacial cirque, reflecting a panoramic view of jagged granitic crags, was crystal-blue Moat Lake, which, at an elevation of 10,900 feet, is the highest of the Virginia Lakes.

After 20 minutes of fruitless casting, my Mosquito fly disappeared in a brilliant swirl, partially tipping off my adversary. Following a brief skirmish, I admired its cadmium, yellow and flaming orange hues as the golden trout gleamed like a precious gem in the morning sun. Observing the golden dart back into its azure domain, I momentarily savored my reward for having hiked the demanding trail up to this lake.

Ranging between 5 and 8 inches, Moat's self-sustaining goldens make up a rewarding if somewhat fragile fishery. Although not abundant, fish always seem to be patrolling in or near the outlet shallows and dine readily during early- and late-day shadows. Beneficiaries of marginal spawning habitat in the tiny rivulet flowing out of the lake, these brilliant shafts of light are probably best appreciated under nonconsumptive guidelines — to be admired only!

VIRGINIA CREEK

Virginia Creek, a small but prolific trout stream, passes through seven of these lakes, then thrashes and gurgles its way 18 miles downstream to enter the East Walker River near Bridgeport. Along the way, it picks up muscle from Dunderberg, Dog and Green creeks.

Browns, along with the ever-present brook trout, dominate the more inaccessible sections, while planted rainbows make up the bulk of the catch near the roadways. "Throughout its whole course, Virginia Creek is loaded with trout," says Rockel.

Some pleasant and memorable surprises have come from this brushy creek. A few seasons ago I landed a foot-long brookie from a snag-filled pool between the two Virginia lakes, and a year later, my son, Matt, caught and released a bronze-cast brown over 2 pounds about a mile below the lakes. My most recent experience occurred this past June as I hiked upstream from Highway 395 a half-mile above a series of brush-infested beaver ponds. Expecting another nimble pan-sizer, I drifted a size 14 Black Ant under a willow sweeper and into a swirling eddy. My rod was nearly jolted from my hands by a pair of vicious tugs subsequently followed by several frantic figure-8s. Although the spirited give-and-take lasted perhaps five harrowing minutes, I managed to maintain the needed pressure to net the vigorous battler, which measured a full 18 inches and easily approached 3 pounds! After a quick revival session, it was released to finish spawning.

According to Rockel, this lends credence to the belief that many of the lake's larger specimens use this stream to spawn. "It is one of the main tributaries used by both Bridgeport Reservoir 'bows and browns on their reproductive rituals," he said.

TACKLE

Since trout in these high-altitude lakes and streams are basically small, tackle geared accordingly provides a sporting match. An ultralight spinning rod and reel with 2- to 4-pound-test line or a 3- to 4-weight fly rod with floating line are excellent choices. On many of the higher, wind-blown lakes, a fly/bubble setup is more practical because it allows for longer casts than with a fly rod. In some cases, stream or

lakesid
render
Goo
Panther
Needle
and Bi
those a
fish, w
ticket,"
For t
in the I
Accord
Black A
on are
Jassid,
olive H
black c
terns v
added.
Link
the Vi
appear
pursuit
gullible
trophy.
accessi
indeed
FO
Ther
gear res
Lakes
fall und
five pe
angling
Ken's
932-77
No n
any of
pram,
Rowbo
lodge.
Ther
campsi
wilderr
those p
wildern
For ad
Bridgep
7070.
To r
Highw
18 mil
six mil
road. T
is loca
providi
wilderr
(760) 8

lakeside brush and trees practically render a fly rod useless.

Good lure choices include small Panther Martins, Vibrax, Rooster Tails, Needlefish, Crippures, Humdingers and Bingo Bugs in sizes 0-2. "For those anglers who just want to catch fish, worms and Power Bait are the ticket," suggests Rockel.

For the fly-tosser, most dark patterns in the 10 to 16 size range will produce. According to Rockel, Mosquito and Black Ant patterns prove most reliable on area waters. "However, Beetle, Jassid, small grasshopper, yellow or olive Humpy, tan caddis, emerger and black or brown Woolly Bugger patterns work extremely well too," he added.

Linked by diversity, the waters of the Virginia Lakes Chain certainly appear to have it all. Whether the pursuit is of willing planter rainbows, gullible brookies, wary browns, a trophy Alpers or a golden, these easily accessible, interconnecting waters indeed offer something for everyone!

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

There are no special regulations or gear restrictions on any of the Virginia Lakes or Virginia Creek. Bag limits fall under the general statewide limit of five per day, 10 in possession. For angling information, contact Rockel at Ken's Alpine Sporting Goods, (760) 932-7707.

No motorized boats are allowed on any of this chain of lakes, but a light pram, canoe or float tube is ideal. Rowboat rentals are available at the lodge.

There are abundant national forest campsites around Trumbull Lake or wilderness sites along the trail. For those planning an overnight stay in the wilderness, a free permit is mandatory. For additional information, contact the Bridgeport Ranger Station, (760) 932-7070.

To reach the resort and lakes, take Highway 395 south of Bridgeport for 18 miles to Conway Summit and then six miles up the paved Virginia Lakes road. The Virginia Lakes Pack Station is located just below the trailhead, providing horseback entry into the wilderness. They can be reached at (760) 867-2591. □

15 Functions • Broadhead Tip Assemblers • 1/8" 3/32" 9/64" 7/64" Modified Allen Wrenches • American/Metric Ruler • Mini-Flashlight Loop • Medium Screwdriver • Clip Blade

MINIMASTER
ARCHERY TOOL

The MiniMaster™ Archery Tool is the only mini-sized multi-purpose tool designed specifically for tournament archers and bowhunters. Make quick bow, rest and sight adjustments, change tips or tighten three & four blade broadheads with ease. Made from 100% stainless steel and finished in ADVANTAGE® camo or brush stainless, the MiniMaster Archery Tool is conveniently small in size, but big on function.

Lifetime Warranty

Industry's First All-In-One Archery Tool

For a FREE brochure call:
KutMaster™
Master Knife & Tool Makers®
820 Noyes Street, Utica, NY, 13503-1527
800-888-4223 • Fax: 315-733-6602

ADVANTAGE
FOUR CAMO/BURGE PATTERNS IN ONE

3 & 4 Blade Broadhead Removal Wrenches • Locking "L" Device (90° or 180°) • 15 Functions • American/Metric Ruler • Mini-Flashlight Loop • Medium Screwdriver • Clip Blade • Bottle Opener • Cap Lifter

NEVER RAKE AGAIN! **NEW**

INTRODUCING THE INCREDIBLE
Cyclone Rake®

**EFFORTLESSLY REMOVE LEAVES...
...TALL WET GRASS...EVEN LAWN DEBRIS!**

...10 times faster than raking, blowing and hauling when you use the revolutionary CYCLONE RAKE®

Patents Pend.

You'll never dread field or yard clean-up again once you use the Cyclone Rake®. 5HP engine driven vacuum-mulcher hitches to any riding mower. You can easily *sweep and pulverize tons of leaves, acres of grass cuttings, pine cones, sticks and more* with 10 times the lifting power of mowers. Power mulching reduces volume 5 to 8 times. 200 gallon capacity lets you *whiz through huge areas without stopping*. Automatically bag for curbside pick-up or power unload to your compost heap even over a wall or right up a hill! And when you're done, *it folds flat without tools for compact storage*. Affordable for home or business.

Unique design folds flat for easy storage. It even hangs on the wall!

So, **WHY STRUGGLE** with rakes, mowers, blowers, or mulchers that jam and clog?

Mail the coupon at right for **FULL INFORMATION** about the amazing **CYCLONE RAKE!**

TOLL FREE 1-(800) 918-9353

YES! Please rush me FULL INFORMATION on the revolutionary CYCLONE RAKE® and special pre-season sale prices.

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

MAIL TO: WOODLAND POWER PRODUCTS, INC. Dept. GF899
©1999, Woodland Power Products, Inc. 72 Acton St., West Haven, CT 06516