

# Lake Pardee's Mixed Bag

*The opportunity for anglers to catch both salmon and trout makes this West Slope foothills reservoir a particular springtime favorite.*

*by Don Vachini*

My numb fingers fumbled to fasten a tiny lure to the second downrigger as I kept eyeballing the depthfinder to survey a narrow submerged river channel below us. And just as I finished with the lure, my other rod dipped violently. Sizzling line off the reel and going airborne twice, the fish was surely more than any ol' hatchery rainbow!

This particular early-April morning found me with Gary Miralles, owner of the Shasta Tackle Company, trolling the lengthy Mokelumne arm of Lake Pardee, a place we'd chosen as an escape from an armada of boats near the dam that forms this impoundment on the upper reaches of the Mokelumne River. Pardee, 2,000 acres in area and boasting 43 miles of shoreline, sits on the Western Slope of the Sierra foothills less than an hour's drive from Stockton. The "Jewel of the Mother Lode" sits amid pine and oak forest, and possesses a good forage base in its deep, cold water. Although the East Bay Municipal Water District does not permit water-skiing, powerboats or swimming here, the agency does provide camping and boating to complement its angling diversity.

According to Art Wilcox of the Lake Pardee Recreation Area, a number of strategies are used to keep management of the lake focused on fishing. While some natural recruitment takes place in the feeder streams, the bulk of the trout fishery is maintained by the Department of Fish and Game and private hatchery plantings, while the California Inland Fisheries Foundation handles kokanee salmon under Project Kokanee guidelines.

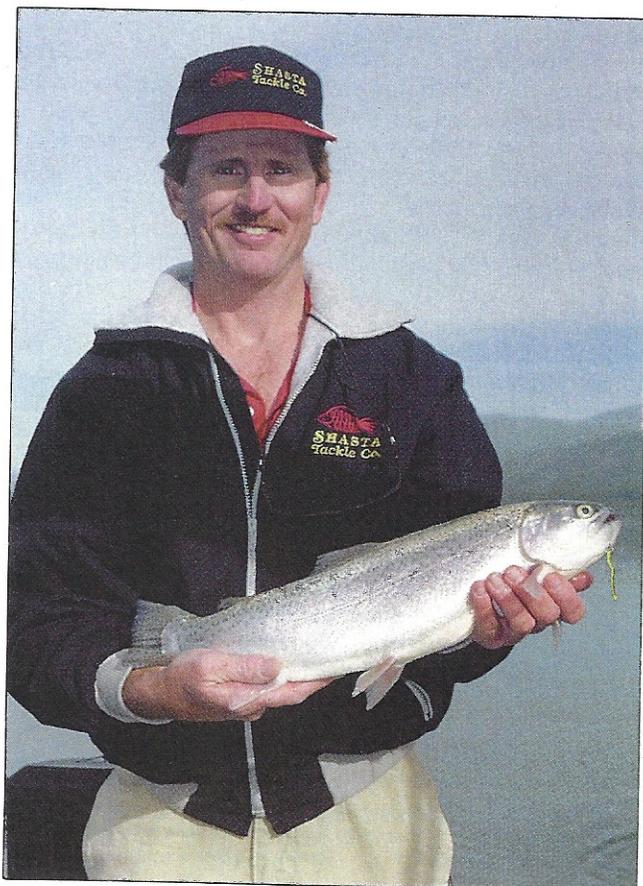
The DFG plants over 60,000 pounds of hatchery trout throughout the season, and Pardee is liberally stocked with hefty-sized rainbow trout via the private sector. "Most of these trout fall into the 12- to 15-inch range and tip the scales at a pound or above, but fish approaching double digits are common," Wilcox said.

## **BANK ON IT**

A great number of the stockers remain bunched near the shoreline and are susceptible to a variety of bank-side endeavors, leaving the early season pretty much a bait-

angler's dream. "Many of the tons of trout deposited never leave the launch cove area," says Wilcox. "Casual and serious anglers can be reasonably assured of action there."

Shorebound anglers enjoy success near the dam, by the picnic grounds, at Rec Cove and near the marina. Immediately after a plant or in the diminished light of early or late day, 1/4- to 1/2-ounce silver Kastmasters, Thomas Buoyants and Crippures are extremely productive on these most gullible of (Continued)



*Gary Miralles admires a 4-pound rainbow taken from Lake Pardee's Mokelumne arm. Photo by Don Vachini.*

fish. They soak an assortment of colored and scented Power Baits or inflated night crawlers paired with a sliding sinker and worked 15 to 20 feet from shore. Shoreline conditions can be crowded. That's when boaters drift or anchor 40 to 50 feet offshore in this cove and cast toward shore, either to soak baits or to toss hardware.

### TROLL FOR TROUT

Trollers cover the most territory to locate active fish. In the early spring, surface water temperatures hover near the mid to low 50s, so working the top 5 to 8 feet of water is best.

Though the majority of the trout encircle Pardee's lower third, a fair portion will relocate along the narrows where moving the Mokelumne inflow adds another dimension. "Establishing residency as holdovers, some of these fish will approach 3 to 5 pounds and offer a more sought-after prize," offers Wilcox. This is where Miralles and I hooked the hefty 'bow that behaved more like a runaway freight train than a hatchery fish. Finally subdued and netted, the mint-bright 18-incher tipped the scales at nearly 4 pounds! The four fish we landed there that one morning were all over 2 1/2 pounds.

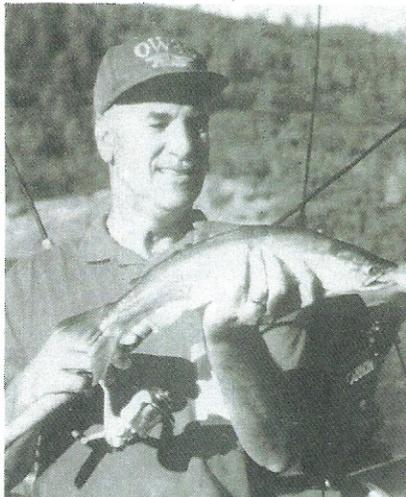
Boaters should run their offerings just above the fish, since these trout commonly silhouette their targets against the light of the surface.

With the trout near the surface, trollers here maneuver flashers and 'crawlers or fire tiger Needlefish, Midge Wobblers, fluorescent orange Rainbow Runners, Super Dupers and green Rooster Tails. And even more options work on occasion for trollers: top-lining threaded night crawlers, frog and yellow Needlefish, R-Lures, Bingo Bugs, Rapalas and Rebels. Watermelon, copper/pink or pearl white dodgers with red dots are suitable.

Wilcox suggests that trollers cover the area from the main boat ramp out toward Tom Sawyer Island, along the face of the dam, Porcupine Point, the south arm of the Mokelumne and Bernice's Cove. "Working the Narrows, around Deer Island, Woodpile Gulch and the mouth of the Mokelumne are also solid bets," he said.

### THE OCCASIONAL BROWN

On an overcast morning, I was working a small plug along a rocky section of the dam. While a fish's initial tug



*Fewer planted kokanee should lead to bigger salmon at Pardee. Photo courtesy of Don Vachini.*

was solid and satisfying, the fish preferred to wage war on the bottom. Fifteen inches long, rotund and deeply spotted, the bronze battler managed to fix me with a haughty stare before being released.

Most assuredly, though highly elusive and extremely wary, early-season browns sometimes cruise Pardee's shoreline searching for small baitfish or planters. They are apt to be coaxed during morning or evening shadows.

### TROPHY KOKANEE?

The burgeoning kokanee population, courtesy of 50,000 annual fingerlings via Project Kokanee, provides diversity, appeal and, most recently, size to Lake Pardee salmonids. While April trout will be at or near the surface, kokes will run from 40 to 80 feet deep. As I trolled along the main river channel this past season, my sonar detected a huge concentration at 75 feet, and almost immediately, a solid hookup ensued, as well as an unexpected bonus. Upon approaching the boat, the silvery missile turned psycho, repeatedly taking my rod tip to the water on several last-gasp bursts before the net corralled it. Criss-crossing over this gigantic mass provided numerous spirited battles as well as a half-dozen landlocked salmon, all but two approaching a pound; the odd pair out went 2 pounds apiece!

Indeed, Wilcox predicts, this year's average size will continue the upward size trend, because fewer fish are now planted. "With fewer fish in compe-

tion for the available food, individual fish should grow much bigger," he said.

These landlocked sockeye salmon prefer tiny, bright lures such as fluorescent red or orange No. 10 Wedding Rings, R & K spinners, Weedick Nites, Kokanee Kandy, white Sep's Pro Secrets with a 4/0 dodger, or Kokanee Bugs tipped with a kernel of white corn worked on a downrigger. Scents such as Smelly Jelly and Pro Cure in anchovy, sardine or shad may increase the number of strikes. Since these diminutive salmon are notoriously fragile-lipped, a smooth-operating drag and a long-handled net will help add to your success.

Often preferring a morning bite, kokanee salmon tend to school in huge concentrations. The mouth of the Mokelumne River to Deer Island, its channel, the south arm buoy line and along the dam are good initial choices. When one is caught, boaters commonly zigzag through concentrations for wide-open action.

"Put only 10 to 15 feet between the offering and the downrigger ball and you can spin a tight circle to stay with the school," Wilcox advises. "A set of large flashers on the downrigger weight is also a good idea."

Whether operating from boat or shore or in pursuit of trout or salmon, an ultra-light rod and reel loaded with 2- or 4-pound-test is very sporting.

---

### FOR YOUR INFORMATION

---

No special regs apply to Pardee, but the lake is closed to angling from the end of November to February. The bag limit for combined trout/kokanee is five per day with 10 in possession. A current fishing license with a two-rod stamp allows for optimum options.

Nearby trout waters include the Mokelumne River upstream from the lake, Camanche Reservoir just below Pardee, and Lake Amador with its giant cutbows located just a few miles to the north.

A campground, boat ramp, boat rentals, boat storage, marina and grocery store are available. Visitors need to pay access and fishing permit fees. For fishing conditions, contact Wilcox at the Pardee Recreation Area, (209) 772-1472. □