

TRUCKEE TROUTIN'

Of the thousands of people who pass through Truckee daily, most pass right by the area's excellent fishing opportunities without a second thought that might dissuade them from their eastward pilgrimage toward Reno's gambling houses and entertainment. However, many of these travelers would do well to become aware of the trout finning Truckee's waters because the odds of landing a trophy-sized trout are far better than those they'll face at Nevada gaming tables.

Encompassing nearly a 70-mile swath of the Tahoe National Forest, the Tahoe Basin harbors no less than six trout species. Rainbows dominate, of course, but the smorgasbord also includes brown, brook, mackinaw, cutthroat and golden trout. They reside in a variety of snow-fed lakes, streams and man-made impoundments, and thrive in specially managed waters.

TRUCKEE GAMBLE

The hub of this fishery, characterized by a convergence of semi-arid sagebrush and ponderosa pine forest, is the Truckee River. Originating from Lake Tahoe at Tahoe City, it snakes 35 plus miles in a northeasterly direction through a fairly open, evergreen-studded canyon before entering Nevada's high desert. From the border, it meanders through downtown Reno, terminating 80 miles north of here in vast Pyramid Lake.

According to Russ Wickwire, a fisheries biologist with the California Department of Fish and Game, the Truckee is an ideal trout stream. Forty to 70 feet wide, brush-lined and possessing an abundance of food forms, its huge boulders and rocks

Six species of trout plus kokanee salmon separate the Truckee area from most other fishing destinations in the Golden State. And with Reno just a skip across the border, it's a great place for a summer vacation.

by Don Vachini

form innumerable holding pockets and current deterrents. Wickwire says that the Truckee is equally popular with fly and spin fishermen, and remains a viable fishery noted for regularly turning out fish of ample proportions.

Rainbows are the mainstay of the fishery but browns exist in good numbers throughout all California portions of the river. Though statistics compiled by Wickwire reveal that most fish fall into the 9- to 12-inch range with good numbers of 13- to 14-inchers as well, there is no paucity of rainbows up to 5 pounds and browns approaching 7 pounds.

No doubt, Wickwire feels the excellent food base present in the river accounts for this proportional size range. Mayflies, stoneflies and caddisflies, crayfish, sculpins, Tahoe suckers and whitefish provide a high-

caloric forage base necessary for resident fish to maintain their proportional girths.

Closely paralleled by Highway 89 and frequently visited by hatchery trucks full of stocker trout, the river's most popular area is the 15-mile section from Tahoe City to Truckee. A variety of in-line spinners, red salmon eggs and worms bounced through structure cull good numbers of the newly infused trout.

Special regulations — a two-trout limit, 15-inch minimum size, and artificial lures with barbless hooks — are in effect in the heavily pressured wild trout section from Trout Creek in downtown Truckee to the Boca Bridge. Adventuresome anglers can opt for more privacy by exploring the canyon stretch below Hirshdale. Dubbed a classic "reading man's water," this less-visited section is best plied by aggressive wading and strategically placing weighted nymphs through the whitewater pockets between pools. Since fly penetration is crucial, this technique enables meaty size 6-8 Sculpin, Woolly Bugger, Clouser Minnow, Crawdad streamers or size 10-14 weighted Pheasant Tail, Hare's Ear, Bird's Nest or Black Ant nymph-style offerings to stay current-free and deep, where they are most effective.

Knowledgeable wading spin-fishermen, too, can use high-sticking to dab worms, crickets, crawdad tails or salmon eggs into fishy structure. Maintaining a slight tension to the line will help telegraph pickups. Spin anglers also wobble diving plugs and wide-bodied spoons through the mor-



Author Don Vachini prepares to release a wild rainbow trout he caught on the Truckee River. Photo courtesy of Don Vachini.

inaccessible deep holes and heavy flows. My personal best was a rosy-sided, 3 1/2-pound 'bow fooled by a bottom-bounced Thomas Buoyant near the state line.

SMALL-STREAM ACES

Originating from Lake Webber along Henness Pass Road, the Little Truckee River manages a decent head of steam as it traverses an open flood plain then flows through both Stampede and Boca reservoirs before entering the Truckee River near Hirshdale.

Wild rainbows of 7 to 14 inches make up the water's main fare, although each season a scattering of browns up to 3 pounds are taken in

less-pressured locales. Hiking about 3/4-mile away from Highway 89 to an especially isolated, brushy section, I watched my son, Matt, fling half of a night crawler alongside a partially submerged logjam with his fly rod. The water sprayed up violently as a 17-inch brown felt the hook's sting. Five of the seven trout we landed in that half-day were browns in the 10- to 12-inch range — all taken from undercut banks, protected eddies or extremely brushy sections away from the main flows.

On the stretch between Stampede and Boca, special 12-inch maximum, two-fish, barbless-hook regs apply to protect especially vulnerable wild spawners.

Other solid Tahoe Basin bets include brush-laden Alder, Prosser, Cold, Donner and Sage Hen creeks, challenging tributaries for stream gamblers willing to play a hunch for pan-sized 'bows, browns or brookies. For those who accept the challenge of cumbersome brush, low flows and poor visibility, stream skills include stalking, maintaining low visibility and reading scaled down water.

When working these diminutive waters, I approach each pool crouching

and try to locate trout before casting. Then, I work the feeding seams, fringes and pockets thoroughly with short, drag-free casts. Following the fly in shade and across currents are additional risks.

These small rivulets are easily fished with size 12-16 nymphs or dries; their trout are not usually finicky. While a Hare's Ear, Birds Nest or Beadhead nymph or Parachute Adams or Hare's Ear dry are suitable choices, spin anglers find success poking a variety of baits through brushy sections.

TAHOE MACKS

The figures on Lake Tahoe are staggering. A massive body of water that stretches 12 miles in one direction and 22 miles the other way, this high-altitude jewel sits at an elevation of 6,229 feet, is over 1,600 feet deep and its azure water is the 10th clearest in the world. Equally popular for its shoreline casinos as it is for its mackinaw, it has 10 charter guide services available for this species.

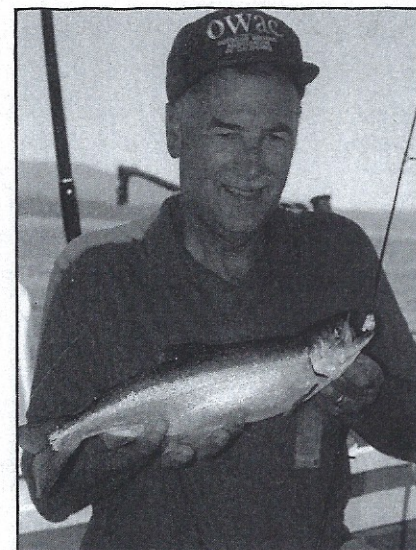
Downriggers, lead-core line and depths of 100 to 300 feet are common practice for the big macks, which commonly run from 4 to 12 pounds and occasionally approach 20. Drifting live

minnows with light line is also a deadly method, especially when they enter the shallow shoals to spawn during mid-June. Although the current 37-pound, 6-ounce state record laker was taken via this technique in 1974, a more advanced technique, which not only increases success but release rates as well, involves graphing the productive shelves and ridges where these char lie and then jigging vertically for them. Once located, they seem to have an almost insatiable appetite for flashy jigs. Dacron line with a short 4- to 5-foot fluorocarbon leader allows for a surer hookset, especially in depths over 100 feet.

DONNER'S TRIPLE OPTION

Near the city limits of Truckee sits Donner Lake and its namesake creek, which is a tributary to the main Truckee. Named for the ill-fated Donner Party, this 800-foot-deep water is home to rainbows, browns and mackinaw over its pea-shaped, 3-by 3 1/2-mile dimensions.

Planted bays supply the main fare for bait-dunking campground visitors, and specialized boaters dredge the 100- to 200-foot depths with lead-



Stampede Reservoir kokanee could soon reach state-record proportions. Photo by Don Vachini

core line or jig vertically for lakers up to 18 pounds. Dedicated anglers also catch elusive browns by erratically towing and ripping large surface plugs. Six- to 9-inch minnow baits in shad or brown finishes and attached to side planers 100 to 200 feet behind the boat seem to produce best at first and last light.

The rapidly descending south shoreline is very rewarding as is the boat ramp area, where the DFG regularly plants the lake with catchables.

BOCA, PROSSER PROSPECTS

Two other manmade impoundments north of town are noted for fine angling throughout the season, including some red-hot late summer action for holdovers. Boca and Prosser (both at 5,700 feet) are heavily dependent on weekly plantings of hatchery fish and are very popular with local fishermen. Because stockers tend to cruise the shoreline, coves and contours, bank anglers prefer soaking night crawlers, worms, red salmon eggs/marshmallows and an assortment of dough baits. Four-pound line and sliding sinkers are best for this type of waiting game.

Boaters utilizing sonar with downriggers not only locate fish but their depth as well. Look to the channels and the dam area, which are always prime spots for holdover rainbows and an occasional brown,

MARTIS TROPHIES

Martis Lake is situated four miles east of Truckee via Highway 267 at an

KOKANEE — THE BIG JACKPOT

With a dazzling cornucopia of trout species finning in Truckee-area waters, it's easy to overlook kokanee salmon here. However, thanks to some innovative management, this landlocked salmon is rapidly gaining in stature throughout the Tahoe Basin.

While Boca Reservoir and Lake Tahoe house healthy numbers of *Oncorhynchus nerka*, Stampede Reservoir is home to the region's biggest kokanee. Rick Kennedy of the Tight Lines Guide Service says the fish's average size at Stampede has escalated rapidly in recent years once fishery managers started limiting their numbers.

By August each year, Stampede kokanes typically range in the 15- to 18-inch, 1- to 3-pound category, and a few reach 20 inches, breaking the 4-pound plateau and challenging the state record of 4 pounds, 13 ounces!

Kennedy uses downriggers to fish with Sep's Dodgers in watermelon, midnight madness, crystal persuasion and copper/pink, and a leader no more than four times the length of the dodger. Spoon-wise, try size 1 to size 2 Needlefish in bikini, frog and rainbow patterns; Kokanee Kandy in double scoops (two spoons run in tandem) in orange/yellow or pink/white; and Uncle Larry's spinners in purple tiger, copper pops, fire tiger and perch. Black and red Kokanee Bugs or Ted's Bugs are especially good during August. A single kernel of shoe-peg corn on the tip of the hook and jelled scents in shad, anise or sardine enhance the odds of a hookup.

Normally found between the 30- and 70-foot depths, this super-aggressive sockeye is sportingly fought on ultra-light rods and reels with smooth drag systems. High-resolution electronics help pinpoint huge schools of the plankton feeders along the dam, around islands, Jay's Cove, and the deep channel near the confluence of the Little Truckee, Sage Hen and Davies creek arms. — *Don Vachini*

elevation of 5,957 feet. Don't let its desolate appearance fool you. Martis once served as a refuge for the rare Lahontan cutthroat.

It eventually became the Golden State's pilot catch-and-release lake and still operates under regulations that restrict anglers to using barbless hooks for catch-and-release fishing. It's also now known for trophy-sized Coleman and Eagle Lake rainbows, a pair of strains noted for rapid growth and pugnacity. Some brawny browns approaching 5 to 6 pounds also call Martis home.

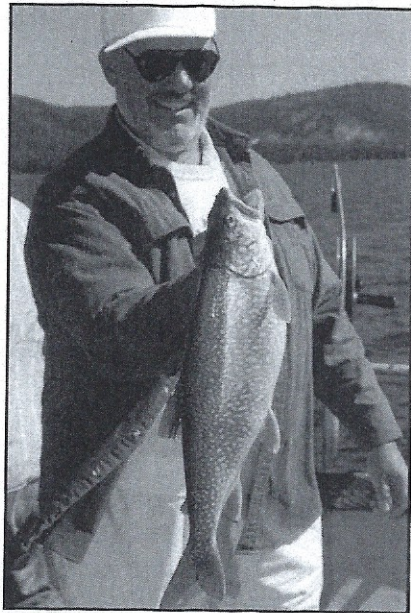
While this shallow, 70-acre, flood-control impoundment has predictable hatches (including damselflies and caddisflies), it is the *Callibaetis* mayfly, which emerges from late spring through August that provides a significant menu for trout. Size 14-18 Adams, Cahill, Comparadun and Deer Hair Caddis patterns in light to olive shades are excellent dry imitations while black, brown and tan Pheasant Tail, Bird's Nest and brown, white and purple Leech and Woolly Bugger patterns, twitched deep along the sandy inlet channel, are suitable subsurface counterfeits.

Float tubes are very handy early in the season but a small pram is best late in the season when prodigious weed growth becomes an ally of the trout and deterrent for light tippets. Wind-drifting a size 18 Pheasant Tail dropper tied 24 inches below a size 16 Parachute Adams elicited a pair of pleasant rainbow explosions from the weedbeds on one memorable trip a few years back.

PYRAMID'S SALMON-TROUT

Though indigenous to the Tahoe Basin, the Lahontan cutthroat now occupies less than 1 percent of its former California/Nevada range. Aside from remnant populations in Independence Lake and the Upper Truckee River, the region's best bet for trophy cutt action remains Nevada's Pyramid Lake, a vast, highly alkaline desert sea and historic home to the threatened *Salmo clarki henshawi*.

Explorer John C. Fremont's journal in 1844 referred to Lahontan cutts as "salmon-trout" — an obvious reference to the species' ability to grow quickly to 15- to 20-pound status, with some individuals exceeding 60!



Tahoe's deep, nutrient-rich waters grew this 7-pound lake trout for George Carl. Photo by Don Vachini.

Artificially spawned at lakeside hatcheries, Pyramid specimens today normally range in the 14- to 18-inch category with plenty of 18- to 24-inchers pushing 6 to 10 pounds.

Besides a Pyramid Lake Indian Reservation fishing permit, fly and spin anglers will need lengthy casts under cold, windy conditions to effectively reach the sandy dropoffs where 16- to 24-inch cutts cruise. After making a 50- to 60-foot cast, allow the offering to sink and begin an erratic return to include short jerks, slow crawls or zigzag retrieves in 4- to 12-inch bursts. Since this gullible subspecies notoriously hits very close to shore, it is prudent to follow each retrieve all the way to the rod tip.

An 8- to 10-foot, 7- to 8-weight outfit provides the backbone for necessary distance casts, while green, black and purple Woolly Buggers, Articulated Leech, Clouser Minnows and Black Marabou combined with shooting heads, sinking lines and 15-pound tippets are favorites of fly-tossers. Trolled or cast deep-billed plugs in greenish tints work well when paired with a 7- to 9-foot light-to medium-action spin outfit.

WILDERNESS TRIPS

For small but feisty brook trout, Wickwire recommends that you fish a vast array of scenic lakes in the popular Desolation Wilderness.

"The best action will usually occur early in the season, shortly after ice-out, although late season is good, too," he said.

Two of my sons, Matt and Chris, and I backpacked near the headwaters of Meeks Creek and enjoyed virtually nonstop action on a past August trip. The ravenous, pan-sized squaretails of Hidden and Shadow lakes vehemently hit nearly every size 14 Mosquito, Renegade or Black Gnat we sent their way.

Also of renowned brookie fame, Crag, Fontanilis, Genevieve, Gefo and Totem lakes are productive Desolation waters with bountiful *Salvelinus fontinalis* populations.

The vast wilderness setting adjacent to Lake Tahoe's west shore offers other surprises, too, as we found out the following morning. Strapping on daypacks, we scrambled off-trail to ascend a demanding, talus ridge. Crag-framed edifices and remnant snow patches guarded our Phipps Lake destination. My first hookup came seconds after my tan caddis touched the surface. Gingerly coaxed into the shallows, the wriggling 7-incher flashed iridescent blends of cadmium, lemon yellow and flaming orange, leaving little doubt as to the its golden trout status and making the difficult trip worthwhile!

Whether opting for fly or spin tackle, keeping a low profile and long casts retrieved parallel to shore are proven tactics. Tiny size 14-18 Caddis, Adams, Mosquito dry and AP, Beadhead and foam Beetles, or size 00-2 yellow/orange in-line spinners are popular choices.

According to Wickwire, Alta Morris, Cathedral, Clyde, Cup, Gertrude, Island, Jabu and Saucer are other Desolation Wilderness lakes that contain goldens. □

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