

Creekin' For Trout In SISKIYOU

Several snow-fed stillwaters along the east slope of the Trinity Divide create a wide selection of diverse Siskiyou County creeks and rivers teeming with hungry rainbow, brown and brook trout.

In the growing morning light, I proudly observed as my oldest son assisted his son in battling his

first trout. Under the pressure of a buggy-whipping ultra-light spinning rod, an 11-inch rainbow was grudgingly coaxed from a small swirling pool to net. Squeals of delight from 3 1/2-year-old Domenic echoed down the canyon, as grins, high fives and a family moment were shared!

It was early July and son Chris, grandson Domenic and I were working a roadside series of pools and rapids along the South Fork of the Sacramento River two miles above Lake Siskiyou. We were on a weeklong family camping trip, diligently sampling the creekin' opportunities of the southern Siskiyou County section of the Trinity Divide.

Paralleling Highway 5 from Lemoine to Weed, this rugged mountain sub-range, known locally as the Eddies, separates Trinity from Shasta and Siskiyou counties. Basically, waters flowing west drain into the Trinity River system while those on the east slope feed into the Sacramento River drainage.

In addition to a thriving wild trout population, area waters also benefit from heavy stocks courtesy of the nearby Mt. Shasta Fish Hatchery, according to Larry Hanson, a DFG associate biologist. "While rainbows dominate the lower creeks and river system, the headwater sections are heavily populated by brookies, with browns more of an incidental catch in any area," he said. "In addition to the regular scheduled weekly plants, surplus hatchery fish are routinely dumped in area waters as a bonus."

The Upper Sac emanates as snow and ice melt from nearby Mt. Eddy (9,038 feet), Boulder Peak (6,990 feet) and the granite crest line of the Trinity Divide. The three headwater forks of the Sacramento (the North, Middle and South) maintain their own identities while tumbling over a free-stone/boulder base. Dominated by vistas of snow-capped Mt. Shasta to the northeast, garnished with stands of pine, spruce, fir and cedar and coursing a fairly steep flood plain gradient, the waterways benefit from an abundant aquatic

by *Don Vachini*

smorgasbord and plentiful spawning habitat. "Anglers should expect predominantly

wild rainbows and brookies in the 6- to 10-inch range, although fish up to 14 inches are fairly common in the headwater sectors," Hanson said.

Numerous roadside turnouts along the South Fork are also heavily planted with rainbow catchables, and we brought my grandson here since it offered an excellent chance of quick success — a necessary ingredient for introducing youngsters to fishing. Moments after Domenic's salmon-egg offering bounced toward the tailout of the plunge pool, his rod tip dipped violently, and he was fast to his first trout. We hope it's the first of many!

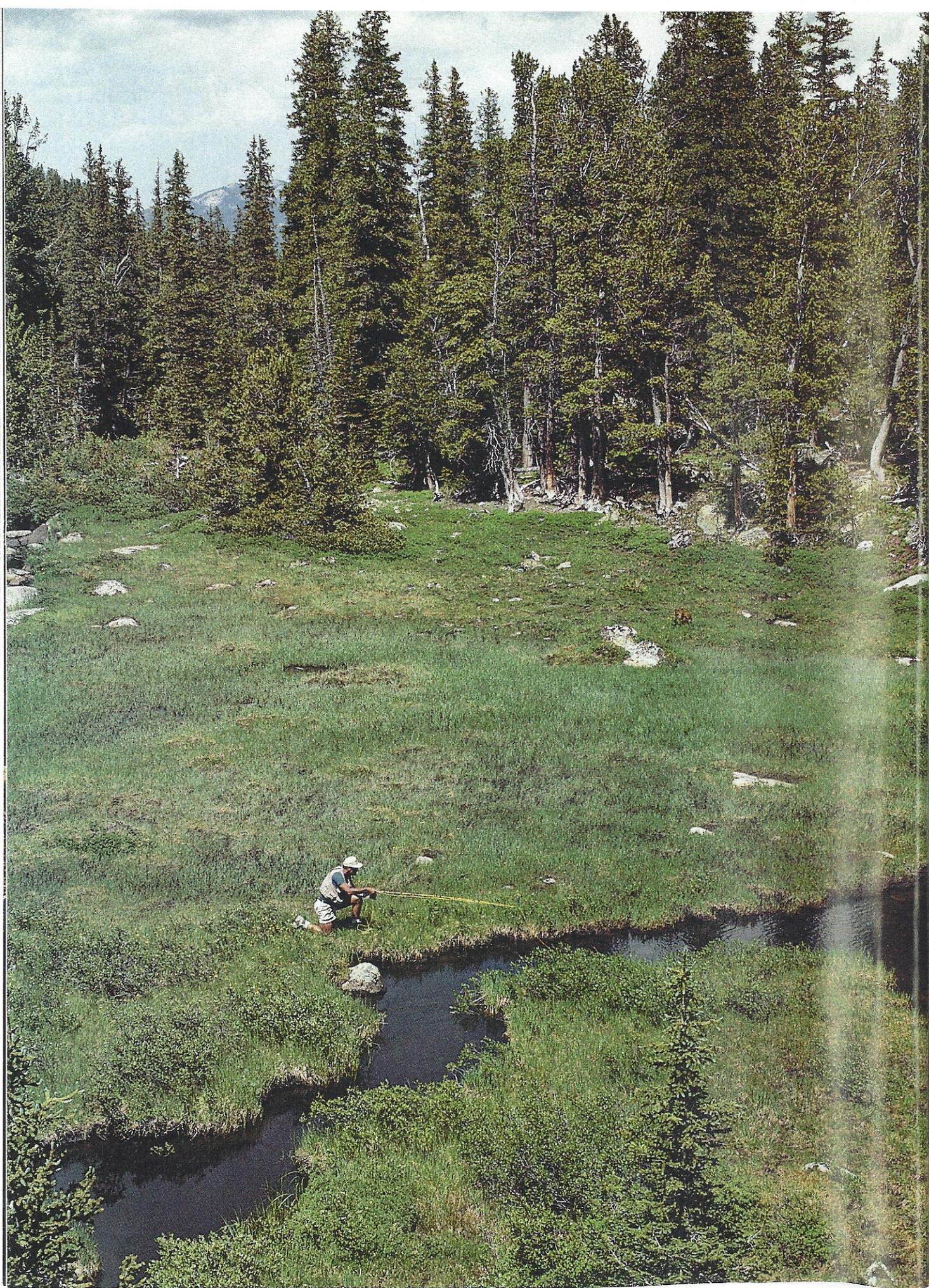
Although drifting bait with ultra-light spinning tackle is very productive on the gullible stockers infused into the pools and pockets near roadways, lure users should only target the deeper holes. Casting yellow, white or silvery Rooster Tail, Panther Martin, Mepps or Vibrax spinners upstream, letting them drift along the bottom with the current and then working them slowly through holding areas will often entice larger, more aggressive trout.

Personally, I enjoy the challenge of wild trout a bit away from the easy-to-reach sectors and often park and hike up or downstream of any bridge or culvert crossing. Here, working small nymphs while rock hopping, wading current and dapping offerings in tight spots will regularly fool brilliantly colored tenants from less-pressured locales. While most will rise to a well-presented dry fly, the vast majority of larger fish are caught indicator nymphing.

Without a doubt, the ability to "read" flowing water is critical in isolating its trout-holding stretches. Contrary to popular belief, I have found the faster pocket water, not the large pools, to hold the most fish on the Upper Sac. "The river rocks are loaded with insects which are constantly being whisked downstream," Hanson mentions. "The trout don't have to expend much energy to feed."

Caddis flies, mayflies and yellow stoneflies are present, and their nymphal stages make up a large portion of an Upper Sacramento trout's diet. Size 12 to 16 olive, tan and brown Elk Hair Caddis, Z-Wing Caddis, Beadhead Hare's

Picturesque headwaters and healthy numbers of trout await your fishing prowess in Siskiyou County. Photo by Don Vachini.



Ear, and Fox's Poopah are my favorite choices here, although the old standbys — Prince, Pheasant Tail, Peacock and Yellowjacket nymph patterns — are also worthy choices.

In addition to reading water, those anglers who can best imitate its insect forms and present them naturally enjoy the lion's share of success. Aggressive wading allows the angler to get in position to strategically place the fly in trout-holding water. With a short line, the offering can actually be placed in pockets and the line is held vertically out of the current's pull.

While undercut banks, drop-offs, gravel bars, riffles and incoming tributaries also provide quality habitat, I never overlook structure that alters or breaks stream flow. Where they offer shade and the chance to ambush prey, submerged tree limbs along banks are capable of holding some of the biggest trout.

As I approach the upper, more shallow reaches, short-line nymphing techniques become a bit more challenging. However, I find that by casting into whitewater then executing a

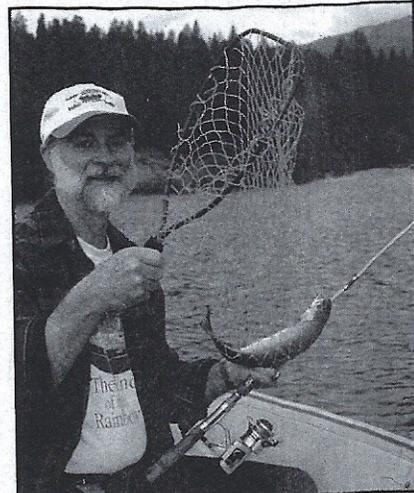
small but tight roll cast, the indicator is flipped upstream and allows the fly to drift naturally through the tailout.

NOTEWORTHY TRIBES

For creek aficionados, Hanson says the area contains a plethora of tiny, brush-enshrouded tributary streams that generally house diminutive, albeit pugilistic residents. "Augmented regularly with rainbow catchables, Wagon Creek is one of the more accessible brushy waters and, since it flows into Lake Siskiyou, offers a viable stream environment for both planters and natives entering from the lake," Hanson said.

Somewhat fragile but noted for tiny 6- to 9-inch native 'bows and non-native brookies, Scott Camp and Castle Lake creeks are good bets a half-mile away from intersecting roads, while Cold and Deer creeks involve a bit of scrambling to reach productive spots.

On these particular rivulets, which are often only 5 to 10 feet wide, I find it effective to scale tackle to the quarry. Although poking bait appears to be the best method of fooling residents, I



Drive-to Castle Lake is suitable for boat and shore anglers. Bob Krug caught this rainbow from a boat. Photo by Don Vachini.

regularly utilize a 2- or 3-weight fly system and stealthily work upstream, often crawling, while dabbling a size 16 dry fly on top of pockets from below. While frequently jigging, bobbing and skating the imitation often proves deadly, these wary natives are often just a misplaced step or rod shadow away from spooking.

HEADWATER LAKES

While myriad interconnecting arteriole streams originate from them, nearly two dozen Trinity Divide lakes, many serving as the headwaters of the Sacramento, are home to a full size range of aggressive rainbow, brook and brown trout. Whether reached via easy road, short scrambles over ridges or trails up to 4 miles, adventuresome anglers find these mid- to high-elevation crystalline tarns well worth the effort for some sizzling action.

Stillwaters such as Toad, Upper and Lower Gumboot, Upper and Lower Mumbo and Castle lakes are accessible via the family car, are liberally planted by the DFG and hold good supplies of stockers to keep bank anglers happy. While the gullible planters will often hammer hardware on these lakes, Power Bait, sliding sinkers and 4-pound line are perfect for those content with the waiting game.

For those hardy anglers who enjoy putting on a day pack and hiking, Hanson believes an abundance of

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THE SAC IS BACK!

Upper Sacramento River once again plays host to expectant trout anglers each summer between Box Canyon Dam and Shasta Lake for wild, native rainbows averaging 11 to 15 inches, with enough wary 16- to 18-inch brutes to keep anglers alert.

Large boulders and heavy flows create a classic big-water scenario, most effectively fished with aggressive wading. Anglers should target pockets, the edges of whitewater, mini-pools, bucket-sized holes and seams. For deeper water, use a small split shot 9 to 12 inches above the fly. Using a short line with a strike indicator, work the fly straight upstream or quartering across and with a drag-free float.

While the Humpy and Stimulator are excellent early- and late-day dry patterns, nymphs are prime here. Try weighted size 10-12 Pheasant Tail, Bird's Nest, Caddis, Stone Fly, Zug Bug, Hare's Ear, Rubberlegs and Copper John nymphs in tan-orange and dark brown-black shades.

Woolly Buggers, Muddler Minnows, Clouser Minnows and Deceivers in sizes 8-10 work for large fish. These are more effective when dredged deep through large pools or tumbled through seams and allowed to free-fall.

From Scarlet Way Bridge in Dunsmuir to the county bridge at Sweetbriar is open to all legal methods of angling with five trout daily. This section gets hatchery fish. Special regulations — artificial lures with barbless hooks and restricted take — govern the rest of the river. From Box Canyon Dam to Dunsmuir, all trout must be released; two trout may be kept daily from the Sweetbriar Bridge to Lake Shasta. Fishing season closes Nov. 15.

Two Dunsmuir fly shops specialize on serving Upper Sac anglers: Ted Fay Fly shop, 530-235-2969, www.tedfay.com, and the Dunsmuir Flyfishing Company, 530-235-0705, www.dunsmuirflyfishing.com. — Don Vachini

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opportunities exist for harder-to-reach trout. Ranging from two to 25 acres, Upper and Lower Cliff, Cedar, Porcupine, Upper, Lower and Middle Deadfall, Dobkins, Upper and Lower Grayrock, Echo, Upper and Lower Seven, Terrace, Timber, Scott, Heart and Little Castle lakes are noted for moderate to high densities of pan-sized brook and rainbow trout with a scattering of browns.

The fingerlings judiciously planted via DFG aircraft in these backcountry waters benefit handsomely from a generous food supply, to which their well-proportioned torsos will often attest. Blessed with a heavily wooded environment, icy snow-fed water and bountiful aquatic and terrestrial insect life, these lakes dictate a wide arsenal of fly patterns. My fly box for Trinity Divide trout includes a variety of size 12 to 18 patterns from ants to Zug Bugs. Nymph selections Callibaetis, Woolly Buggers, leech, midge larva, Damselfly, Beetle and Emerger are all very effective. Specifically, I favor Copper John, Hare's Ear, Prince, Bird's Nest or Pheasant Tail nymphs

AREA LODGING

While U.S. Forest Service campsites are abundant in the area, the private Lake Siskiyou Camp Resort (530-926-2618) offers RV hookups and cozy cabins in addition to numerous tent sites.

Nearby Mt. Shasta City (800-926-4865) and Dunsmuir (800-386-7684) offer motel lodging as well as private and state-operated camping facilities. Castle Crags State Park (530-235-2684) offers camping by reservation.

For backpacking and camping information, contact the Shasta-Trinity National Forest Headquarters, www.r5.fs.fed.us/shastatrinity, 530-246-5222, or the Shasta Cascade Wonderland Association, 530-246-5222, www.shastacascade.org.

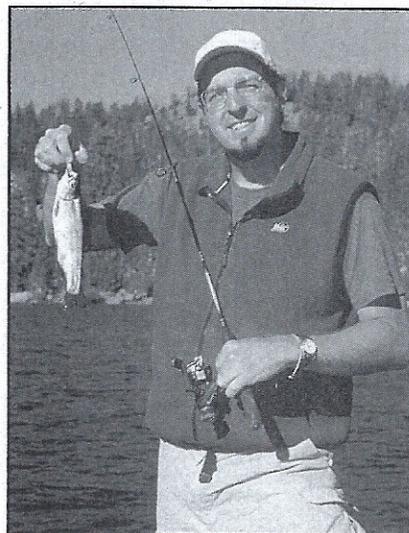
General lodging information is available from the Siskiyou County Visitors Bureau, 800-446-7475, www.visitsiskiyou.org. — Don Vachini

while my top dry selections include Adams, Elk Hair Caddis, Hopper, Flying Ant, Mosquito, Royal Wulff and Griffith's Gnat. A 4- or 5-weight matching setup paired with a selection of floating, sink-tip and full-sinking lines is a very sporting and efficient system to present these and other imitations.

Although their shallows and nearby meadows possess an abundance of natural food, most nutrient-rich waters with spawning feeder streams contain large numbers of stunted specimens, so most salmonids and char found here will be under 10 inches. However, according to Hanson, there are a few exceptions, with holdover fish approaching 14 inches or more. While pointing out that waters with submerged creek channels, deadfalls, large boulders and steep drop-offs are notorious trophy hangouts, he feels that lakes with minimal or no spawning coupled with abundant food provide the formula for hefty squaretails. "It is not unusual for lakes with extremely low densities to produce fish up to 18 inches and approaching 1 to 2 pounds," he says. "The real secret is finding them."

Jason and I located one of these gems a few seasons back while exploring a remote ridgeline south of Mt. Eddy. Steep talus slopes, tall pines and scrub willows surrounded it. We had worked a deep shelf for nearly an hour without success. However, as the weather deteriorated and skies blackened, a brace of iridescent, deep-bodied 15-inch brook trout let down their guard before heavy droplets forced a hasty retreat.

While scouting these waters from a higher vantage point often helps to visually pinpoint inlets, outlets, shoals, channels, drop-offs and other structure that hold concentrations of trout, the top stillwater technique remains staying out of the quarry's window of vision. Whether working the littoral zone, plying incoming or exiting water, or probing a meadow section, a hands-and-knees approach is often a wise decision. In addition, the westerly breezes that commonly whisk through here in the afternoon tend to funnel insects toward the eastern shore, so anglers should work the



Taron Hensley tussled with this Mumbo Lake rainbow after it hit his Bingo Bug. Photo by Don Vachini.

foam line where fish routinely line up to feed.

Despite the extra weight, many visitors opt to pack in float tubes in order to gain a slight advantage, since one of the easiest ways to catch stillwater trout here is to troll small wet patterns on a sinking line. Since many of the takes are gentle, stay in contact with the fly and keep the rod tip right next to the water to prevent slack line and avoid missed strikes.

If working from shore, an ultralight spin outfit is very efficient for fan-casting a variety of diminutive, size 0 to 2 attractors to include Vibrax, Panther Martin, Mepps and Rooster Tail spinners along with Kastmaster, Needlefish, Z-Rays, Crippures and Humdinger spoons or diminutive yellow, orange or red Bingo Bug plugs. A fly/bubble combination adds length to casts, and since almost every bug you are imitating will swim a bit then pause to rest, a twitch-twitch-pause retrieve will often elicit a strike.

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Whether stepping out of a car and wetting a line, wading a prolific trout stream or hiking a short distance to try for solitude, creek trout in southern Siskiyou County is at a premium in July. □

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