

# Burney Area

## Bruisers

by Don Vachini

**If the Pit River and Hat and Burney creeks, plus Baum and Crystal lakes, brim with planted and wild trout, then why aren't they overrun with anglers? Good question.**

My son, Matt, and I were knee-deep in Hat Creek, admiring Matt's girthy 2-pound rainbow. We were also pleasantly alone. Even though most of the nearby campgrounds were full, we plied less-traveled sectors to find trout and solitude during our three-day visit to the Burney area.

### THE FACTORY

Part of the massive Pit River drainage, the Burney area rests in what is known as the Intermountain Area between Mount Lassen and Mount Shasta. Once touted as the "Trout Capital of Northern California," this eastern Shasta County locale houses a quintet of trout waters offering something for everybody.

- Hat and Burney creeks offer a wealth of Department of Fish and Game rainbows and brookies
- Baum Lake turns out some impressive-sized browns and 'bows
- Adjacent Crystal Lake provides a wild card of potential catches
- Pit River is a topnotch, albeit challenging, wild brown and rainbow venue.

All of this within a 15-mile radius of the tiny town of Burney.

Steve Vaughn, owner of Vaughn's Sporting Goods in Burney (530-335-2381), said the region's volcanic influence created an ideal situation.

Hat Creek originates on the slopes of active Mount Lassen. Much of the flow percolates through igneous filters at icy temperatures.

Burney Creek likewise benefits from underground lava-tube aquifers. Along the banks of lower Hat, spring-fed Crystal Lake bubbles through basaltic fissures.

Leached minerals help generate prodigious weed growth, which in turn harbors prolific insect populations. Additionally, baitfish, crustaceans and midges offer a healthy menu for fast-growing, weighty trout.

The Crystal Lake Fish Hatchery plants sub-catchable, catchable and trophy-sized trout.

Although both Burney and Hat creeks have self-sustaining populations of rainbows, brooks and browns, they get DFG plants from April to mid-November. More than 29,000 rainbows and 20,000 brook trout are placed into Hat, while Burney receives 15,000 rainbows and 5,000 brookies, mostly between 3/4 to 1 1/2 pounds.

Baum Lake benefits from 16,000 browns and 20,000 rainbows, but also receives bonus plants of broodstock fish in the 3- to 8-pound range! *(Continued)*



*You'll even find a few brookies among the 'bows and browns in Hat Creek. Photo by Don Vachini.*

## UPPER HAT CREEK

Coursing through a thick, ponderosa pine and Douglas fir canopy, the 10-mile section of Upper Hat Creek along Highway 89 sits within Lassen National Forest boundaries and is open to any legal angling method.

The Upper Hat's volume rarely fluctuates, and its placid surface belies depth and underwater tendencies. Bait drifters need enough weight to get their salmon eggs or worms on the bottom. The offer must move naturally in the current. Follow the bait through the drift and be ready for a strike.

Spin-fishers will need to dredge Panther Martin, Rooster Tail or Vibrax spinners near downed trees, through pools or retrieve them upstream along undercut banks. Fly anglers drop size 14-16 Bead-head Copper John, Flashback Pheasant Tail or Bird's Nest nymphs or Stimulator, X-Caddis or Golden Stone attractor patterns.

"Wading and crawling through brush and seeking less-visited areas are all effective ploys here," Vaughn said.

Wading also allows a more efficient angle of presentation, while

steep banks make a landing net a good choice.

## BAUM LAKE

Open all year, this impoundment yields some eye-opening trout. A 24-pound brown is the lake record. Yet, Baum remains under-utilized. One reason is the thick weed growth, which chokes off a lot of open water and hinders casting. The other is its steady, slow-moving current.

Whether you use bait, lures or flies, the best locations are where Hat Creek enters at Hat 1 Powerhouse, as well as the pipeline from the hatchery and where the outflow from Crystal Lake enters. Here you'll find fish of all sizes. Inflate a night crawler or fish PowerBait floated 3 feet off bottom where the current subsides. Reel a baitfish-imitating Rebel, Broken-Back Rapala or a crawdad replica erratically twitched along the bottom to get a strike.

Fly-anglers use float tubes or prams as part of the fish-solving equation. They work size 12-18 Blue-Winged Olive, Yellow Stonefly or Sparkle Dun dry or subsurface Scud, Blood Midge

or Sparkle Pupa deep along the ever-present weedbeds.

The stream section between Hat 2 and Lake Britton, also called Lower Hat, is managed as a wild trout stream set aside under a special limit: two fish, 18 inches or longer. Barbless artificial lure regulations are also in effect.

## CRYSTAL LAKE

Not many anglers visit this Baum tributary. The DFG does not plant this water, but the lake supports a thin density of self-sustaining rainbow trout between 6 to 12 inches. Since part of its water runs through the hatchery's settling ponds, a few escapees supplement Crystal populations, while some Baum residents choose to negotiate the falls to enter. Limited spawning also occurs in the gravelly outflow.

According to Vaughn, its gin-clear waters keep trout wary, and shoreline tules make access difficult. You'll need both patience and stealth. He suggests walking the south bank and locating the rocky point where the light-colored, sandy bottom indicates the presence of springs.

"Using 2-pound line, a sliding sinker

## NEW SPORTS TECHNOLOGY

# New lure's catch rate may be too high for some tournaments.

**Out-fishes other bait 19 to 4 in one contest.**

**Uses aerospace technology to mimic a real fish.**

ORLANDO, FL— A small company in Connecticut has developed a new lure that mimics the motion of a real fish so realistically eight professionals couldn't tell the difference between it and a live shad when it "swam" toward them on retrieval. The design eliminates wobbling, angled swimming and other unnatural motions that problem other hard bait lures. It swims upright and appears to propel itself with its tail.

Curiously, the company may have designed it too well. Tournament fishermen who have used it said it's possible officials will not allow it in contests where live bait is prohibited. They claim it swims more realistically than anything they have ever seen. If so, that would hurt the company's promotional efforts. Winning tournaments is an important part of marketing a new lure.

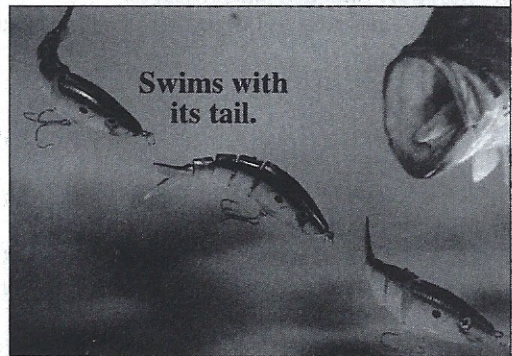
Fish would probably prefer to see it restricted. I watched eight veteran fishermen test the new lure (called The KickTail®) on a lake outside Orlando FL for about four hours. Four used the KickTail and four used a combination of their favorite lures and shiners (live bait). The four using the KickTail caught

41 fish versus 14 for the other four. In one boat the KickTail won 19 to 4. The KickTail also caught bigger fish, which suggests it triggers larger, less aggressive fish to strike.

The KickTail's magic comes from a patented technology that breaks the tail into five segments. As water rushes by on retrieval, a little-known principle called aeronautical flutter causes the tail to wag left and right, as if the lure were propelling itself with its tail. Unlike other hard baits, the head remains stationary—only the tail wags. A company spokesman told me this.

"Marine biologists will tell you that the more a lure swims like a real fish, the more fish it will catch. Well, the only live thing the KickTail doesn't do is breathe. It's always swimming wild and free. Fish can't stand it. We've seen fish that have just eaten go for the KickTail. It's like having another potato chip."

Whether you fish for fun or profit, if you want a near 3 to 1 advantage, I would order now before the KickTail becomes known. The company even guarantees a refund, if you don't catch more fish and return the lures within 30 days. There are three versions: a floater, a diver and a

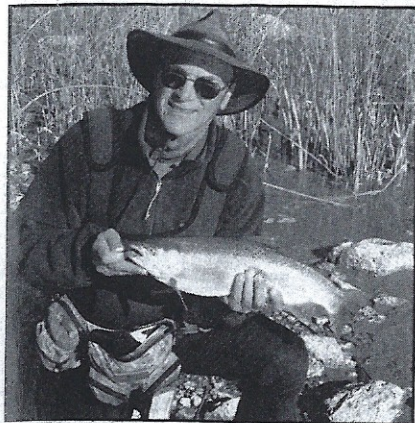


**New lure swims like a real fish--nearly triples catch in Florida contest.**

"dying shad" with a weed guard. Each lure costs \$9.95 and you must order at least two. There is also a "Super 10-Pack" with additional colors for only \$79.95, a savings of almost \$20.00. S/h is only \$7.00 no matter how many you order.

To order call 1-800-873-4415 (Ask for item # kts), or click [www.ngcsports.com/gear](http://www.ngcsports.com/gear) anytime or day or send a check or M.O. (or cc number and exp. date) to NGC Sports (Dept. KT-1537) 60 Church Street, Yalesville, CT 06492. CT add sales tax. The KickTail is four inches long and works in salt and fresh water.

KTS-8H © NGC Worldwide, Inc. 2009 Dept. KT-1537



Author Don Vachini fooled a 4-pound Baum Lake trout with a silver Kastmaster near incoming water. Photo courtesy of Don Vachini.

and patiently soaking an inflated night crawler can occasionally yield results here, but don't expect red-hot action," said Vaughn.

### BURNEY CREEK

The section coursing MacArthur/Burney Falls State Park is well known for its angling opportunities. While numerous park visitors pressure the

heavily stocked stretch within 100 yards of the footbridge, wary holdovers and natives become more prevalent well away from here.

The popular, 2-mile-long beat upstream from the falls to Big Springs is open to all methods of angling.

As with the Upper Hat, anglers working Burney's fast flows must be able to read water and present offerings along transition zones, seams, behind rocks, under overhanging brush and through eddies.

The most widely used and effective tactic for this stream is bouncing red or orange salmon eggs slowly along the bottom. Fly-fishers effectively ply Black Ant, Green Rock Worm and Tiger Midge patterns along surface or submerged weedlines.

The creek has artificial-lure, barbless-hook regulations. The minimum keeper size is 14 inches, and there is a two-fish limit.

Immediately below the falls, downstream to Lake Britton, you'll find plump browns and 'bows.

Vaughn recommends drifting a size 8-10 October Caddis with a size 14 Copper John dropper along the shelf

line where water funnels from the huge pool.

### PIT RIVER

Vaughn believes the section from the Pit 1 Powerhouse to the Highway 299 bridge is one of the finest wild trout rivers in the state.

Wide, swift and difficult to wade, its productive pockets and riffles tempt visitors with two distinct classes of rainbows and browns: those from 9 to 14 inches and bruiser specimens ranging from 16 to 24 inches.

The food chain includes aquatic insects, crawdads, snails, rough fish plus many fry and young fish.

You should be an excellent wader, have sturdy wading boots and a stout, reliable wading staff. Move slowly, maintain two points of contact and don't fish alone here, said Vaughn.

With visibility typically between 3 to 5 feet, aggressive fly-anglers find this river perfect for wading close to pocket water and either short-line or indicator nymphing.

Pit's wary trout hide behind boulders and dart to and from feeding opportunities. □

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