



PHOTO BY DON VACHINI

McLeod Lake, CA

By Don Vachini

Popular as a winter ski destination and summer mountain bike course, the Eastern Sierra's Mammoth Mountain also holds nearly a dozen trout-filled still waters along its southern slopes. Often overlooked in favor of larger bodies of water infused with trophy-size rainbow trout, 9-acre McLeod Lake not only offers a quick escape from crowds, but also maintains a special fishery solely for Lahontan cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki henshawi*).

Located in the Inyo National Forest just outside the town limits of appropriately named Mammoth Lakes, McLeod (9,250 feet in elevation) thaws by late June and remains open through mid-November. It offers steady angling, a picturesque setting, and requires a refreshing uphill hike to reach—yet one which won't leave you bedraggled and puffing.

As part of an ongoing 1984 Cal Trout project (dubbed Martis II) designed to expand catch-and-release waters throughout the state, McLeod Lake continues to receive Lahontan cutthroat plants, according to Curtis Milliron, a California Department of Fish and Game fisheries biologist in the Bishop office. "Lahontans are generally gullible, fast growing, and long living, traits that make them made-to-order for nonconsumptive angling."

Special regulations require barbless

hooks and fishing is catch and release. Cutt populations are augmented under a put-and-grow philosophy whereby 3,000 4- to 6-inch fingerlings are added annually to the previous tiers of holdovers. "With calculated numbers to prevent stunting, residents will generally range between 6 and 14 inches," says Milliron.

Because the lake's entire shoreline is accessible, anglers must study McLeod's underwater topography in order to be successful. Sparkling clear and shallow along its fringes, the bottom drops off rapidly to depths of 30 feet. Most trout prefer to hang out near these drop-off zones where they can easily retreat to the safety of deeper structure. Older, deep-dwelling cutts inherently tend to follow flies for long distances. Strategically, lengthy casts and slow, fluttering retrieves parallel to dark-shaded shelf lines often provide the magic combination. Anticipate subtle takes, often as the fly sinks.

Timber surrounds the lake and afternoon breezes from nearby Mammoth Pass often distribute a variety of terrestrials and winged insects into the water. During these instances, the Lahontans routinely stalk the choppy shoreline, enjoying this buffet. Surface activity usually commences during early- and late-day glass-off periods.

Containing springs, minimal obstructions, and a gradually-sloping bottom, the deeper, west end of the lake has, for me, been consistently more

productive for larger, 9- to 11-inch fish. On one recent visit to McLeod, when my purple leech pattern abruptly stopped on the sandy bottom, I initially assumed I was snagged and gave a reactionary pull on the line to free the fly. However, a pair of deliberate tugs told me differently, and a brief but dogged subsurface tussle surprisingly produced my biggest McLeod resident to date—a sleek, silvery 16 incher.

Two- through 4-weight rods combined with either floating or sinking lines are ideal. Most dark-colored nymph patterns work here to some degree, with size-14 to -18 bead-head Prince Nymphs, Pheasant Tails, and Hare's Ears wise choices. For variety, cast caddisfly dries, Parachute Adams, or *Callibaetis* dun patterns to rising fish, or offer a combination dry/dropper with a nymph for the dropper. While shore anglers can slowly strip size-10 and -12 Woolly Buggers or leech patterns along submerged structure on intermediate or sinking lines, a float tube enables a more advantageous angle to probe the depths.

From U.S. Highway 395, take the Mammoth Lakes exit (California State Route 203) and follow it through the town of Mammoth Lakes. Continue on Lake Mary Road for approximately 5 miles to its end at the paved Horseshoe Lake parking area. Hike the 0.5 mile trail to the lake. Rick's Sport Center, (760) 934-3416, provides up-to-the-minute information regarding hatches and fly selections.

Port Aransas, TX

By Danno Wise

Located on the northern tip of Padre Island, less than three hours by car from San Antonio or Houston, Port Aransas is a quaint community offering excellent fishing opportunities both in the bay and along the beachfront. In addition, "Port A" features a variety of other vacation activities, including shopping, excellent dining, museums, golf, and a vast array of hotels, condos, and beach houses. This combination makes Port Aransas a prime angling