

Honeymoon Lake, CA

By Don Vachini

Standing guard above 10,400-foot Honeymoon Lake, jagged spires and sheer edifices, bathed in alpenglow, testified to the harsh formation of this Sierra Nevada landscape while pesky trout distracted me by smacking my offerings with abandon until darkness forced me to retreat to my tent.

Located high in the John Muir Wilderness near the headwaters of Pine Creek, this underfished 10-acre lake is often referred to as an “in between” water: anglers approaching it on foot are often exhausted after a steady 5.5-mile climb from the Pine Creek Trailhead and just want to recover; horseback travelers usually ride on by, aiming for well-traveled Pine Creek Pass and golden trout destinations still miles away.

Ice and snowmelt fill nearby Golden Lake, the two Chalfant Lakes, and the neighboring trio of Granite Park Lakes sitting above timberline. Their overflows collect downstream in Honeymoon. Its spillage, in turn, becomes a major contributor to Pine Creek, which gains volume through Upper and Lower Pine Lakes before crashing down the deeply-incised canyon between Mount Tom and the Wheeler Crest to finally meet the Owens River.

Despite being on the cusp of golden trout country, Honeymoon is noted for brook and rainbow trout. According to Jim Erdman, a fisheries biologist with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, rainbows from the Chalfants and brook trout from the creek below Granite Park wash downstream into Honeymoon. “It is the influx of juvenile trout from creeks above and below the lake that contribute to healthy, self-sustaining densities of both species,” he explains.

Cold, deep, and surrounded by timber and scrub willows, the lake supports a smorgasbord of aquatic insects in addition to winged terrestrials carried upslope on rising air currents. There is just enough bug life to support moder-

ate growth in the trout yet allow for healthy competition among them. “Most Honeymoon trout grow fairly rapidly and generally range from 9 to 12 inches,” says Erdman.

Fish routinely cruise along steep drop-offs and gouged channels near inlets where they can feed yet remain only a fin flip away from the protection of deep water. Midday fish will periodically partake of size 14 and 16 beadhead nymphs twitched slowly at various depths. While dry/dropper tandems are always good bets, nothing beats the morning or evening surface-feeding sessions when practi-

cally any well-presented dry fly has a chance.

To reach the trailhead, drive 12 miles north from Bishop on US Highway 395 and follow the Pine Creek Road west for 10 miles to the dirt parking lot at Pine Creek Pack Station. Beginning at 7,431 feet elevation, the trail ascends along a moderate to steep course through Jeffrey pine and quaking aspen. After passing Upper Pine Lake, the path parallels Pine Creek before approaching the Pine Creek Pass/Italy Pass Trail junction. Take the right-bearing Italy Pass route a few hundred feet to Honeymoon Lake. For those spending the night, one of the best campsites—called the “honeymoon suite”—overlooks the water from a bench above. Numerous day-

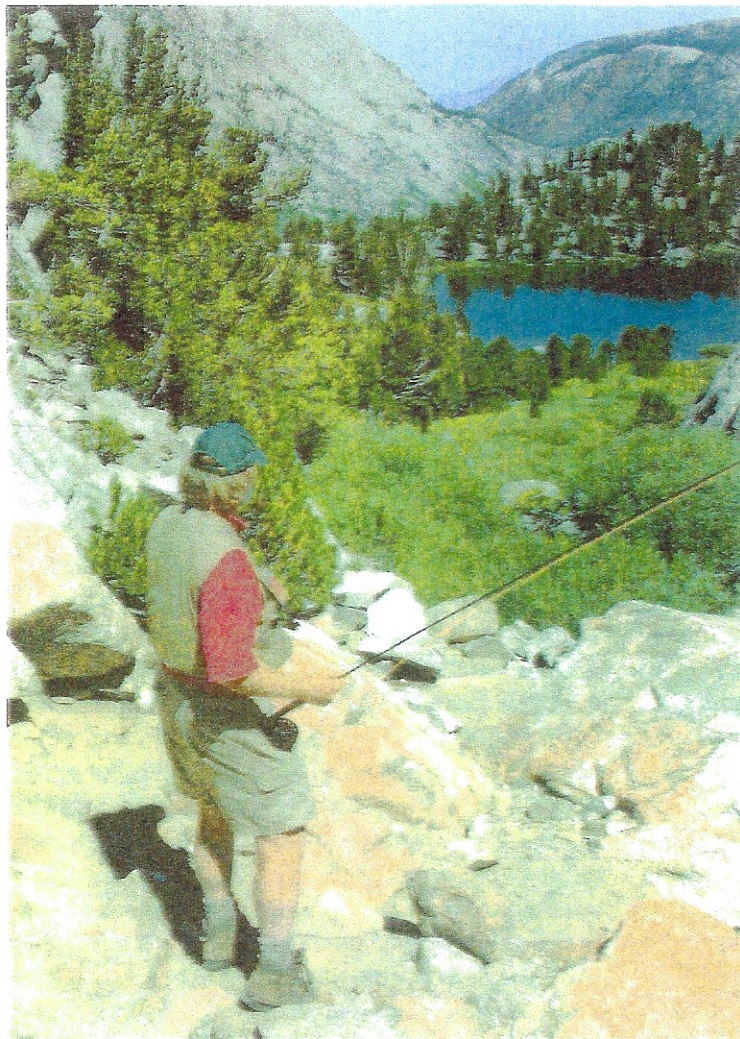


PHOTO BY DON VACHINI

hike options include venturing cross-country to Golden Lake, mountain-goating over the low saddle to the Royce Lakes chain, continuing along the Italy Pass Trail to the appropriately named Granite Park Lakes, or scrambling to the Chalfant Lakes.

Brock's Fly Fishing Specialists, (760) 872-3581, www.brocksflyfish.com, is a good source of angling information. Contact Pine Creek Pack Trains, (760) 387-2797, www.owensvalleyhistory.com/pack_stations, for trail information or to book a trip to the lake—or beyond. Necessary wilderness permits are available at the White Mountain Ranger District in Bishop, (760) 873-2500. Remember to treat all water and carry plenty of bug repellent.