

# Around the Southwest

News, Views, and Piscatorial Pursuits



PHOTO BY DON VACHINI

## Crystal Lake, CA By Don Vachini

With nearly 20 productive lakes concentrated within a 6-mile radius of its center, the town of Mammoth Lakes literally defines its name. Indeed, among these Inyo National Forest still waters, sitting in the shadow of hulking Mammoth Mountain, anglers can choose between hatchery rainbows in highly accessible and heavily-planted lakes as well as exceedingly wary browns. Or they can strap on day packs and hike to nearby lofty tarns for brilliantly-attired brook, cutthroat, or golden trout.

On one visit, I laced up my boots and began hoofing it up the steep trail above the Lake George parking lot. The 50-minute ascent to the timbered bowl set at 9,990 feet left me huffing and puffing, but the sweat equity was definitely worth it. Fed by yearlong snowmelt from 10,328-foot Crystal Crag and the Mammoth Crest, 12-acre Crystal Lake holds moderate numbers of wild golden trout. Most run 8 to 9 inches, but a few reach 12 inches.

Understanding of the lake's underwater topography and the golden trout's unique habits goes a long way toward determining tactics—and success. While the north side drops off steeply and is a bit more difficult to reach, the gently sloping southern shoreline, along with the willow-enshrouded inlet, comes alive with rising trout early and late in the day.

But when the sun is high in the sky, the fish become reclusive, residing at depths down to 35 feet, and are quite difficult to entice. Use sinking lines, long casts, and



PHOTO BY DON VACHINI

slow retrieves. Some goldens will hammer a fly violently just as it climbs over the edge of a drop-off shelf. Don't give up on a cast too soon, though, because sometimes a golden will follow the fly a substantial distance and finally grab it near shore.

The sharply-descending, submerged structure around the tiny island in Crystal Lake is a magnet for deep-dwelling goldens. A float tube gives you an advantage because you can troll the contour of the island.

With deeper sections of the lake difficult to reach from the bank, my favorite low-light locale is the fan-shaped, log-jammed outlet. Here, the slightly moving water has gouged out a noticeable pocket. With each iridescent golden hooked

during the magical light of early day, I marveled at their thrashing, which set the translucent water on fire with flaming orange and vermilion hues.

While timber surrounds this lake and predictable hatches of black caddisflies, green midges, and stoneflies provide solid nourishment, fortuitous afternoon upslope zephyrs from nearby Mammoth Pass often airdrop additional varieties of winged insects and terrestrials. Just after such deposits, trout routinely stalk the choppy shoreline. Twitching ant, beetle, or hopper



atterns usually rings their dinner bell. For this work, you need a floating line, of course, and 2- to 4-weight rods are ideal. Many other effective patterns include the following: Psycho Prince, Flashback Pheasant Tail, Bird's Nest, Madam X, Parachute Adams, E/C Caddis, Copper John, Brassie, Zebra Midge, Elk Hair Caddis, Rubber Legs, Light Cahill, and *Callibaetis* patterns. A dry/dropper combination—a midge pattern suspended below a size 12 dry—can be very effective.

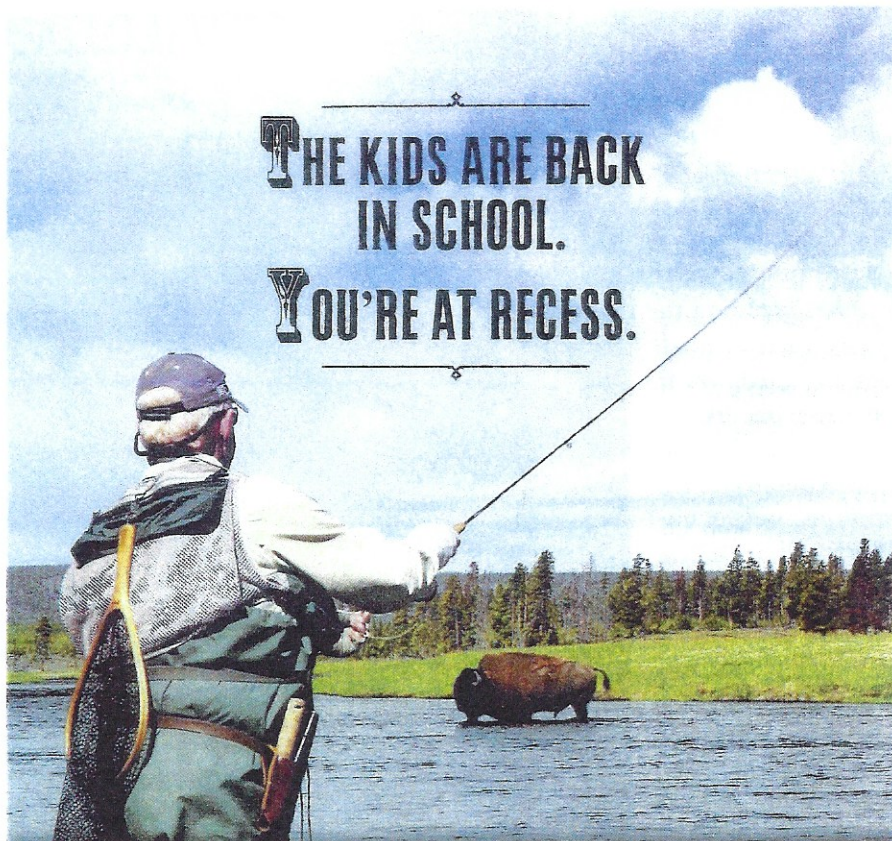


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To reach the signed trailhead from US Highway 395, take State Route 203 west through Mammoth Lakes, veering left where it becomes Lake Mary Road. Continue 3.9 miles and follow the signs to George Lake. Numerous Forest Service campsites are nearby. For lodging and dining options from fine to frugal, contact the Mammoth Lakes Visitor's Center, (760) 934-2712, [www.visitmammoth.com](http://www.visitmammoth.com). Reliable information, tackle, and guide services are offered by Kittredge Sports, (760) 934-7566, [www.kittredgesports.com](http://www.kittredgesports.com); Rick's Sport Shop, (760) 934-3416; and The Troutfitter, (760) 924-3676, [www.thetroutfitter.com](http://www.thetroutfitter.com).



**Roaring River, CO** By S. Seth Davis Stringing fly rods in the chill of early morning, I was eager to get started and generate some body heat. My wife and I quickly climbed out of the shroud of fog that cloaked Horseshoe Meadow. The first rays of the day provided welcome warmth upon my face. The trail was spectacular in the early morning light, ablaze with yellow aspen and burnished mountain



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