

## North Fork Cache Creek, CA

By Don Vachini

Mention fishing in Lake County and most aficionados assume you're talking about Clear Lake and its world-renowned largemouth bass. Indeed, there is so much focus on this massive body of warm water that a nearby trout stream basks in relative anonymity.

The upper courses of North Fork Cache Creek gather runoff from several Coastal Range peaks within Mendocino National Forest. Flowing nearly 10 miles through the Bartlett Springs Valley prior to entering Indian Valley Reservoir, this section depends entirely on rainfall, and because the flows diminish and warm rapidly, the creek offers only a very limited, early rainbow trout season. However, in the 3.5-mile stretch below the reservoir, the creek is reborn in mandated flows and slices through a steep canyon surrounded by nearly 75,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management and state- and county-managed land. After crossing State Route 20, about 6 miles below Clear Lake, the North Fork joins the main branch of Cache Creek, the outflow of Clear Lake.

The Yolo County Flood Control & Water Conservation District has administered the reservoir's water since its creation in 1976, making it a key factor in the lower stream's success. This 4,000-acre impoundment not only serves to irrigate agricultural land in the Sacramento Valley 35 miles downstream, it also provides ideal, year-round habitat for the North Fork's native fish.

Generally 20 to 30 feet wide, the creek offers nice runs, riffles, and some deeper pools as it descends over a moderate gradient. This lovely little tailwater is home to both rainbows and browns. Prior to 2005, the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) regularly planted catchable-size Eagle Lake rainbows. According to Rick Macedo, a fisheries biologist with the DFG's Region 2 office, "Although stockings ceased, surviving holdovers continued to propagate."

Macedo recently electroshocked most of the waterway. The resident

rainbows are wary, skittish, and many generations removed from a hatchery birth certificate, and his findings revealed primarily small, 7- to 10-inch 'bows in the creek's lower courses near the access road, with individuals approaching 13 inches living farther upstream. In addition, thin densities of wild brown trout (initial DFG plants were made in the late 1970s), often seeking the cooler water near the dam, range from 6 inches up to 3 pounds.

However, as Macedo points out, canyon conditions can be challenging: brush-infested shorelines, manzanita- and chaparral-choked trails, steep terrain, and the presence of rattlesnakes keep would-be anglers away and allow trout to prosper. The 1,000-yard section immediately below the dam is closed to angling.

The North Fork's season runs from the last Saturday in April through mid-November. The best window of opportunity to fish it is typically between early spring and late July, when the flow from the reservoir is heavy, the current is fast, the surface temperature hovers between 55 and 59 degrees, and the depth averages knee- to thigh-high. That is also a time to exercise caution if wading—the current can be stronger than it appears.

The canopy of low oak, willow, and cottonwood trees, along with the rapid flow, generally dictates small-water tactics. I find that a 9-foot, 3- to 4-weight rod with a 9-foot, 6X leader is perfect for high-stick or indicator nymphing. I attempt to strategically place a size 14 or 16 beadhead or weighted Pheasant Tail Nymph, Bird's Nest, or Copper John along fringes of fast water, maintaining tension while dredging it through pockets, seams,

or eddies. Deeper pools are best approached with a size 10 yellow or white Crystal Bugger.

As July segues into August and midday air temperatures commonly reach the high 90s, limited bug activity can offer fair dry-fly action along the clear riffles and tailouts. While size 14 and 16 Adamses, Blue-Winged Olives, and Humpies are as good as any pattern, ants and hoppers are always wise choices. A size 16 Copper John dropper under a size 14 Adams can double your chances.

The North Fork is located between Ukiah (US Highway 101) and Williams (Interstate 5), which are connected by State Route 20. A designated parking area provides access. The Featherbed Bed and Breakfast Resort, (707) 274-8378, [www.featherbedrailroad.com](http://www.featherbedrailroad.com), is a unique place to rest your head after a day on this nearby water.

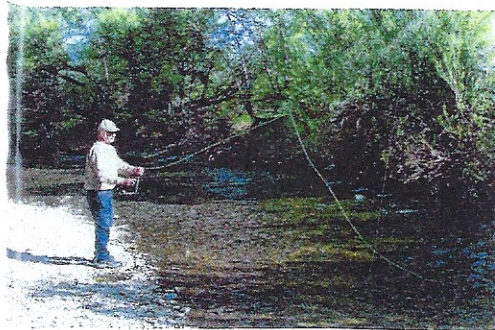


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