

Indian Creek Reservoir, CA By Don Vachini

Nestled at 5,560 feet amid the sagebrush and sparsely forested landscape of Toiyabe National Forest, on the east slope of the Sierra Nevada, Indian Creek Reservoir enjoys a reputation for bragging-size trout. Appearing rather bleak and desolate, this 160-acre impoundment's forte is found beneath its surface. While it is home to both put-and-take and put-and-grow rainbow trout, a few sizable cutthroat and browns also fin its depths.

Although sometimes excessively pressured by consumptive anglers, the lake, located about 4 miles north of Markleeville, continues to provide the potential for rapid growth. Indeed, its abundant, resilient, and nutrient-rich food base includes varied bug life, either blown in from nearby conifers or originating below the surface in the form of zooplankton and forage fish: red-sided suckers, Tui chubs, and threadfin shad.

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) plants 5,000 catchable and 6,000 sub-catchable 'bows annually. To boost overall size, the Alpine County Fish and Game Commission provides supplemental stockings of trophy-size fish with an

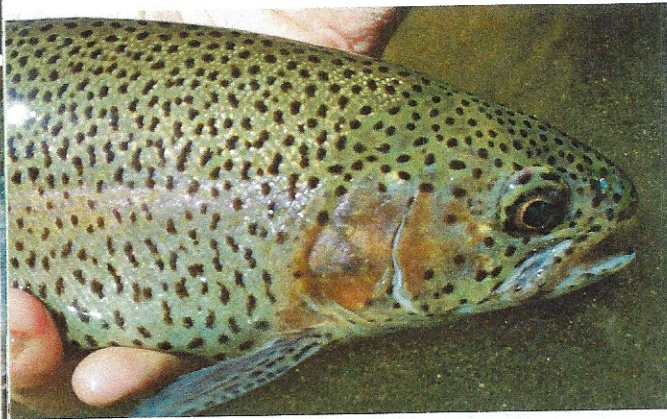


PHOTO BY DON VACHINI

additional 4,000 pounds of rainbows, half of them 14 to 16 inches long and the other half 4- to 8-pound trophy specimens

In addition, each season the DFW releases a few hundred surplus Lahontan cutthroat between 2 and 4 pounds to serve as brood stock. Deep-dwelling and favoring

the slightly alkaline waters, surviving holdovers commonly push 5 pounds by the following spring.

Brown trout were added to the mix between 2000 and 2002 to help curtail overpopulation by suckers. These well-fed predators, often referred to as "pigs," are usually only caught incidentally.

Wind and weeds make this still water both challenging and intimidating. During early spring, when the water is cold and clear, trout commonly patrol the shoreline at dusk and dawn. With plenty of casting room along the entirely open shoreline, anglers can easily fish to individual risers or fan-cast blindly through the shallow flats. Casting from the bank before wading helps avoid spooking nearby feeders.

As summer progresses, the water takes on a greenish tinge, weed and algae blooms arrive, and prodigious *Callibaetis* mayfly hatches alter the reservoir's dynamics. Anglers must now use a float tube or other craft to meticulously ply the fringes or small openings in the ever-expanding growth.

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A 9-foot, 4- to 5-weight system with a large-arbor reel with a reliable drag and intermediate sinking line is perfect for retrieving size 10 to 14 Woolly Buggers or a leech or sculpin streamer at varying depths during April and May. Later in the season, adjacent to weedbeds, a floating line efficiently presents mayfly-mimicking patterns, including size 14 to 16 tan or green Parachute Adamses, Quigley Cripples, and Elk Hair Caddises.

When not engaged on the surface, pods of trout feed heavily on the vulnerable, upward-swimming nymphs. Size 16 or 18 midge pupa patterns suspended under an indicator or Bird's Nest Nymph or Poxyback Scud—counted down on a sinking line and retrieved in 6-inch strips with plenty of pauses—become reliable. Extreme focus is required to detect soft strikes. Stout fluorocarbon leaders are essential for keeping hooked fish from the thick, underwater vegetation.

In addition to the steep dam face, where trout enjoy the proximity to deeper water, one of the most consistently pro-

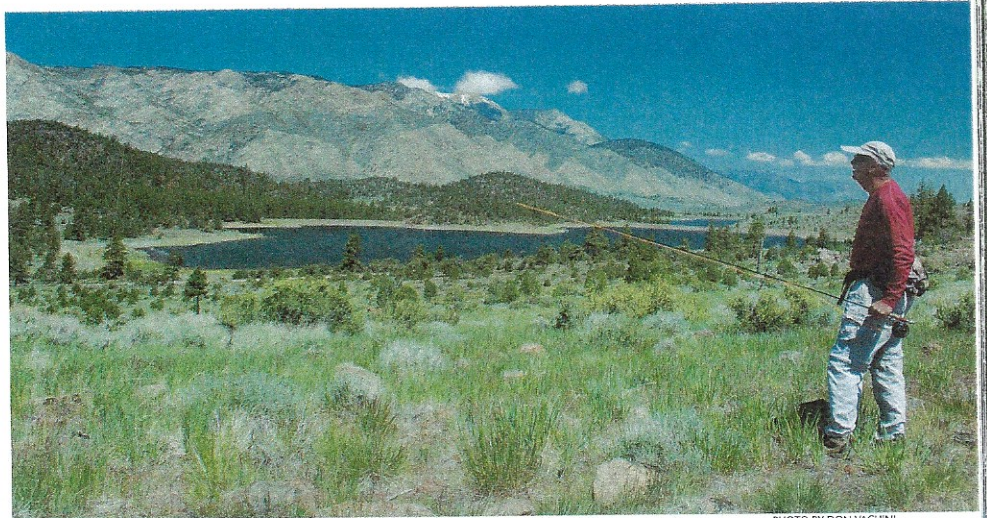


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ductive areas is near the middle of the lake, where a pair of aerators create oxygen-rich habitat that keeps resident trout close.

From US Highway 395 in Minden, Nevada, take State Route 88 south and west to Woodfords. Turn left onto SR 89 and drive 3.7 miles before making another left turn onto Airport Drive. After 3 miles, you reach a Forest Service campground that overlooks the water.

Supplies, friendly service, and limited meals are available at CJ's Woodfords Station, (530) 693-2930, www.woodfordsstation.com, while the Woodfords Inn, (530) 694-2111, www.woodfordsinn.com, provides a reasonably priced place to lay your head after a day's angling. Don and Liz Weirauch, owners of The Angler's Edge, headquartered in Minden, (775) 781-7112, www.theanglersedge.com, offer a reputable guide service, fly-fishing essentials, and expert advice.

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