

The Family's **ALL IN**

BY DON VACHINI

There are places all over the Golden State for family fishing fun. Here are some of the best.

Containing over 4,800 lakes and reservoirs, plus 30,000 miles of rivers and creeks, the Golden State has plenty to offer. In addition, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) stocks catchable trout in many of these waters, greatly augmenting their fisheries.

Thus blessed with myriad choices, planning a relaxing family camping trip with some decent fishing can make for a pleasant undertaking. However, in order to select a suitable destination, potential vacationers will find it wise to research what's available in order to meet everyone's collective needs. Certainly, much more information is readily available via Bing and Google web searches and, by spending a little time on the computer, plans can be made a lot simpler. In addition, the DFW has a website, www.nrm.dfg.ca.gov/fishplants/, that lists statewide waters slated for planting in real time.

One rule of thumb is to not make the family vacation entirely about fishing, especially if it's the initial one. Indeed, a trip combining sightseeing, hiking, bike riding or some family-oriented activity in addition to fishing, will of-

ten be remembered and enjoyed long after. Above all, allow time to enjoy the company of your family; the catching will come.

The following are a few suggested locations. Each has exceptional facilities, a variety of additional activities and great fishing.

BIG BEAR LAKE

Located under a hundred miles east of Los Angeles, this 2,900-acre impoundment, sitting at the 6,738-foot elevation in the San Bernardino National Forest, is an ideal south state base for family outings. Besides offering a chance to explore nature and enjoy a unique mountain experience, the lake's solid fishing prospects make it well worth a visit.

Largemouth bass, catfish and panfish are available but it is the heavily-stocked rainbow trout, plus some hefty holdovers from previous fishing derbies, that are highly sought after by most summertime visitors.

Panfish are usually found near the docks and pilings while bass frequent shoreline reeds and weedbeds.

During early spring and late-fall, boaters slow-troll flashers trailed by

nightcrawlers or minnow-imitating spoons through the shallows then go deeper for success during July through August. The area between Boulder Bay and the northwest shore is the most productive although the west end of the lake can be productive as well, especially for shorebound anglers using bait-and-wait tactics.

There are several campgrounds, ranging from primitive mountain camps to fully developed, resort-style facilities within walking distance of the water. Although none of the campsites have direct access to the lake, anglers can launch their boats at the East Ramp.

Groceries, tackle and supplies are readily available at any lake location. Contact (909) 866-3437 or www.bigbeardiscoverycenter.com for additional information.

Big Bear can get crowded at times. Must see side trips include the Moonridge Animal Park, with close-up views of wildlife in a controlled environment, and guided tours by Big Bear Off-Road Adventures. Contact the Big Bear Lake Chamber of Commerce (909) 866-4607 or www.bigbearchamber.com for additional activities.



A proud grandma, Pat Vachini, beams along with grandson Domenic and his first brookie, caught on a family vacation. ■ Photo by Don Vachini.

LAKE AMADOR

Nestled in the gold country foothills about 40 miles east of Stockton, this Mother Lode venue is not only dedicated to family use but outdoes any other fisheries in the area based on pure stocking numbers and sizes. In their private lakeside hatchery, the owners have developed their own unique Donaldson strain of trout (a cross between Coleman rainbow, cutthroat and steelhead, a.k.a. the Donaldson cutbow trout). They plant 150,000 pounds of Donaldson cutbows annually, which incredibly range between 2 and 10 pounds!

In addition to cutbow, rainbow trout along with largemouth bass, catfish and panfish are among the varied species housed at this 425-acre water with 13.5 miles of shoreline.

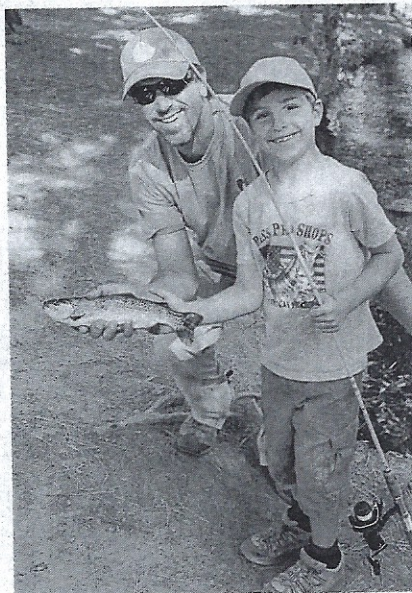
During the warmer months, huge bass and catfish are on tap. Bass anglers target trophy largemouth with surface offerings both early and late in the day in many of the secluded coves. Soaking worms and stinkbaits at the back of coves works for catfish and abundant panfish hover around the docks.

As surface temperatures cool, anglers work along the dam, the ramp cove and the spillway in pursuit of huge cutbows along with the DFW infused rainbows, which are typically around a pound or more. Whether from boat or shore, action can be steady as Amador's private hatchery infuses thousands of pounds of hefty trout weekly during the winter months.

The private campground offers 100 individual campsites and 16 group sites with centrally located toilets and showers under a mixed canopy of oaks and pines. The lake provides a boat ramp with rentals and a one-acre pond in the campground for swimming and there is also a full-service restaurant and store with an ice-cream counter, pool tables and supplies.

No water- or jet-skiing is allowed and no motorcycles or fireworks are allowed in the campground. Call (209) 274-4739 or www.lakeamador.com for more information.

Nearby attractions include gold country mine tours and water skiing at Lake Camanche. Contact the Amador County Chamber of Commerce (209) 223-0350 for additional options.



Creek enthusiasts will find Hat Creek loaded with trout. Here, the author's son Chris and grandson Dante show off a typical planted rainbow. ■ Photo by Don Vachini.

JUNE LAKES

Composed of four azure stillwaters and a connecting creek, the area known as the June Lake Loop offers additional options for various near and far backcountry waters. Loop waters are reached by turning off Highway 395 south of Lee Vining onto Highway 158 (aka the June Lake Loop), which skirts all four lakes. Tucked against the serrated spine of the Eastern Sierra just south of Yosemite National Park, this locale offers dramatic mountain scenery, numerous camping and lodging options, spectacular vistas and crystal-clear waters, providing a magnificent backdrop for any outing here.

With so much to look at, it's often difficult to concentrate on the fishing, which remains just as spectacular as the scenery. Plenty of campgrounds exist around the lakes, which are all heavily planted with rainbow and Lahontan cutthroat trout. The cuts offer a unique opportunity to land an exotic subspecies. Remnants of prehistoric Lahontan Lake formed during the last ice-age, these fast growing, long living trout are a real prize in June and Grant lakes.

Heavy doses of weighty rainbows make up the bulk of the fishery along with introduced cuts and wily native browns.

June Lake visitors commonly rent boats and either troll deep or drift PowerBait along the deep, northwestern shoreline.

Tiny, 64-acre Gull Lake is best worked from shore, casting shiny lures or soaking PowerBait on the bottom.

Silver Lake contains some heavy brown trout, which stay deep during the summer.

Grant is the last lake of the chain and houses huge, albeit reclusive browns, which ascend connecting Rush Creek to spawn during the fall. Boaters towing rainbow-imitating lures and plugs through the deep creek channel occasionally score on the biggies, although most common catches are the planter and holdover rainbows.

Backcountry trailheads are located out of Silver Lake and lead visitors to the John Muir Trail and Ansel Adams Wilderness. Popular choices for either backpackers or horsepackers, this wilderness is noted for its crystalline lakes and streams housing brook and rainbow trout or gaudily-attired goldens for more adventurous anglers intent on ascending higher toward the clouds.

For the day hiker, Parker and Walker lakes are reached by driving short spur roads above Grant Lake, followed by short-to-medium jaunts for wild browns, 'bows and brookies.

Plenty of campsites, RV hookups, cabins, motels and boat rentals abound in the June Lake Loop area. The June Lake Chamber of Commerce, www.junelakelopp.org provides area contact information.

Nearby attractions are the tufa towers at Mono Lake, www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=514, Yosemite National Park, (209) 372-0200, www.nps.gov/yose/, driving tours to Glass Mountain and horseback rides from Frontier Pack Train, (760) 648-7701, www.frontierpacktrain.com, located adjacent to Silver Lake.

SHASTA LAKE

The state's largest man-made body of water covers 365 miles of shoreline and holds 29,500 surface acres when full. Bisected by Highway 5, this picturesque impoundment north of Redding is easy to reach and remains extremely popular for water skiing, houseboating, camping and

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fishing. Even though it is one of the state's most popular fishing destinations, it rarely disappoints as it contains an abundance of both coldwater and warmwater species, which always seem on the bite!

Rainbow and brown trout along with king salmon and kokanee provide the bulk of salmonid action while largemouth, smallmouth and spotted bass are present in abundance. Bluegill, sunfish and crappie along with catfish and sturgeon make up the rest of the fishery.

Trout and salmon anglers troll spoons or nightcrawlers on the main body from the dam to the I-5 bridge or along the middle of the Sacramento, McCloud and Pit river or Squaw Creek arm channels.

Bass anglers will ply submerged brush, rocky points or rockpiles in the Pit arm for largemouth while smallmouth and spotted bass can be found just about anywhere near structure.

Protected coves and docks house panfish near the top and catfish deep along the bottom.

Houseboat and boat rentals are available at numerous marinas. While numerous private campgrounds around the lake offer boat rentals, supplies and meals, those wishing to rough it a bit more will find a small amount of U.S. Forest Service campgrounds. For information, call (530) 275-1589 or visit www.shastalakecamping.com.

Lake Shasta Caverns and the Carter House Natural Science Museum are worth a family visit. For more adventure, drift the Sacramento River below the lake, plan an off-road excursion or visit the Sundial Bridge and the Turtle Bay Exploration Park in nearby Redding.

The Shasta Cascade Wonderland Association (SCWA); (800) 275-5555; www.shastascadewonderland.com, is a bountiful source of area information.

BURNEY BASIN

The area between Mount Shasta and Mount Lassen, both ancient volcanoes, is collectively referred to as the Inter-Mountain Area. There is year-round, icy water gushing from aquifers networked deep underground, abundant food sources and of course, a trout hatchery to supply the quarry, making this Eastern Shasta County area an ideal



The author holds up grandson Domenic's hefty largemouth bass, caught along a lakeside dock.
■ Photo by Don Vachini.

family summer vacation spot.

The hub of this family-based activity is the town of Burney and its nearby offerings to include the Pit River, Hat and Burney creeks, Crystal, Baum and Britton lakes.

Reached from Highway 5 via Highway 299 from Redding or by Highway 89 from Mt. Shasta City, this area was once referred to as the unofficial "Trout Capitol of Northern California." Indeed, with the Crystal Lake Fish Hatchery keeping visitors happy by supplying copious amounts of trout and, with so many venues available, the moniker still fits.

Rainbow, brook and brown trout predominate although a few waters also house large and smallmouth bass and panfish populations. Practically every type of angling style can be enjoyed, from dunking bait to flipping flies in pursuit of wily natives.

Creek enthusiasts will find Upper Hat Creek heavily planted along several Highway 89 campgrounds while Burney creek offers bountiful plants through town and in the 2-mile-long section above Burney Falls. Red salmon eggs drifted through holes and pockets routinely fool the gullible rainbow and brookies. Cassel Forebay's gin-clear flows are a venue popular with dry fly, lure and bait anglers alike.

Anglers visiting Baum Lake should work the moving inlet waters enter-

ing from both Crystal Lake and Hat Creek for wily natives and planters. The Lower Hat, located below Baum, is a challenging fly fisherman's mecca with special regulations.

Lake Britton is a solid bet for a warmwater fishery including smallmouth bass and panfish. Worms under a bobber along any brushy shoreline structure is great for resident bluegills while plugs worked deep along rocky dropoffs often produce feisty smallmouth. The man-made impoundment is also popular for swimming, water-skiing and boating.

In addition to hundreds of campgrounds and picnic areas, the Burney Basin also contains motels, RV Parks and rental cabins. Contact the Burney Chamber of Commerce (530) 335-2111, www.burneychamber.com for additional assistance while the SCWA can provide detailed travel information. Steve Vaughn, (530) 335-2381, a retired fishing guide and tackle-store owner, continues to provide up-to-date local angling information.

Nearby attractions include MacArthur-Burney Falls Memorial State Park (530) 335-2777; www.macarthurburneyfalls.com, which offers abundant camping, hot showers, a store and supplies. Others include the Crystal Lake Fish Hatchery, Subway Cave at Old Station and Lassen Volcanic National Park; (530) 595-4444; www.nps.gov/lavo/. □