

Prosser Creek Reservoir and Prosser Creek, CA By Don Vachini

Momentarily lost in thought while taking in the soothing babble of Prosser Creek, I tried to envision what had happened here almost 170 years ago in this infamous slice of the Old West. In 1846, the Donner Party headed westward from Missouri, bound for California. Arriving near Verdi, Nevada, much later than anticipated, they opted for a shortcut to avoid the steep segment of the Truckee River Canyon. The proposed route would take them north through Dog Valley, then south across the Little Truckee River plus Prosser and Alder Creeks. A few miles later, they would rejoin the main trail near Truckee.

The only problem was they encountered deteriorating weather and mistakenly took a dogleg off the trail at Prosser Creek. Traveling aimlessly, they got caught in a major storm and hunkered down. The rest, as they say, is history.

Indeed, the aspen- and pine-shrouded section of Prosser bouncing past me on this day was close to the final resting place of the Donner Party. Flowing down Carpenter and Eber Valleys after gathering snowmelt from the eastern slopes of 9,103-foot Castle Peak and 9,015-foot Basin Peak, the north and south forks of Prosser Creek converge in Tahoe National Forest. Tumbling briskly for 6 more miles, the main stem skirts Prosser Hill, crosses under State Route 89 near Hobart Mills, then enters Prosser Creek Reservoir, forming a diverse, one-two angling combination.

The 734-acre reservoir benefits from ample cold-water infusions, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife stocks it liberally with 10- to 12-inch rainbows. Holdovers approaching 3 pounds provide extra thrills, and wild 'bows and browns persist by spawning in feeder creeks. An intermediate line becomes necessary when afternoon winds buffet the surface. The chop allows the use of a stout tippet, and leech or minnow imitations retrieved parallel to shore (either with or against the zephyrs), or perpendicular from deep to shallow, can be quite effective. During calm periods, use a small boat or float tube and troll weighted streamers deep through the submerged creek channel, along littoral zones, or across points of land.

Trout of all sizes gravitate to the inflow of Prosser Creek. Visible rises usually occur during fading light conditions, and a dry/dropper tandem is effective in the slightly moving current. When I last visited the reservoir, a two-year drought had reduced the pool to well under a third of its capacity. Fish were concentrated in the "bathtub" area, cruising circuitous routes along the steep shoreline, then across the face of the dam. Dredging meaty marabou streamers, Matukas, and Zonkers throughout the water column proved highly successful on the schooling planters. The reservoir also holds smallmouth bass, and they often prefer crayfish or sculpin imitations twitched upward along the dam's riprap face.

Upstream of SR 89, Prosser Creek's 8- to 10-inch brook, brown, and rainbow trout are most populous in the stream's more intimate, secluded stretches that are guarded by dense timber, fallen trees, and brushy cover. Creep up very carefully on prime water and peek over the branches, and you're likely to see trout just a few feet away. I did just that on my last trip, and then, kneeling low, gently dropped a little attractor pattern on the water, and was rewarded with a feisty brookie. I successfully repeated the tactic around fallen logs, in shaded seams, and in deep little pockets, finding trout

eager to race to my fly.

From Interstate 80 in Truckee, travel north on SR 89 for about 0.5 mile. Turn right onto Prosser Dam Road and follow it 4 miles to the dam. Or, continue on SR 89 for 3 miles and turn off where the creek crosses under the roadway. Four U.S. Forest Service campgrounds are located around the lake; supplies and lodging are available in Truckee. Mountain Hardware and Sports, (530) 587-4844, www.mountainhardwareandsports.com, provides angling information.

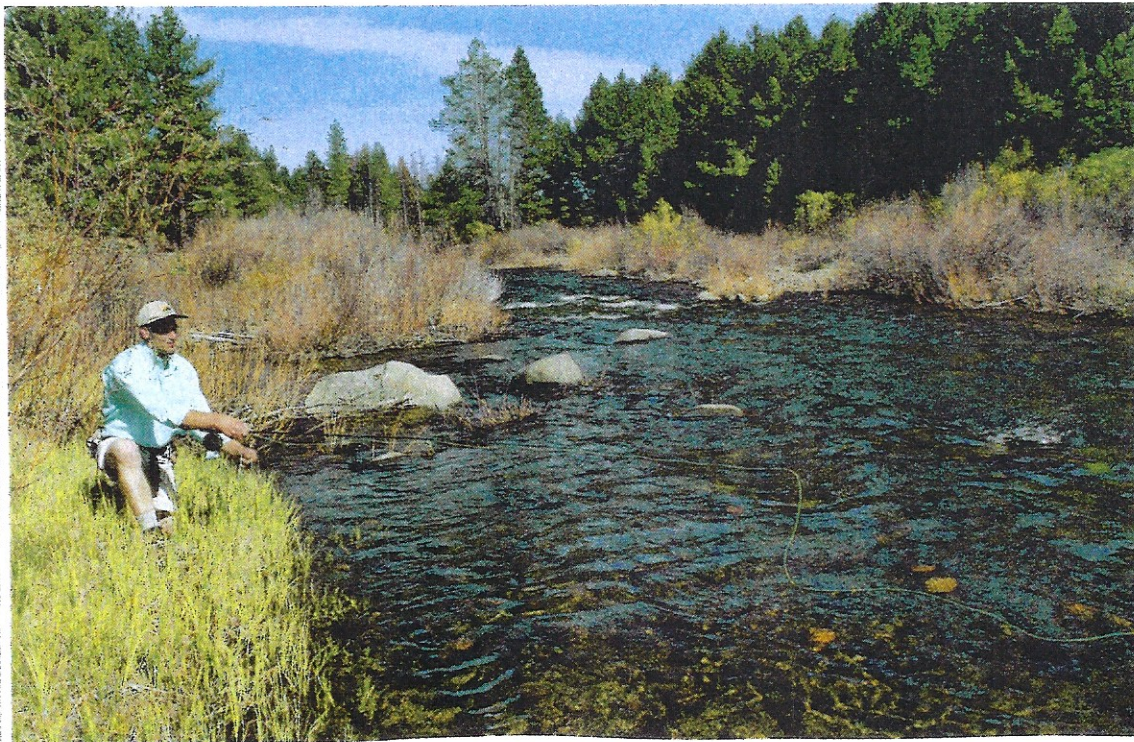


PHOTO BY DON VACHINI