

CALIFORNIA FAMILY FISHING

SUMMER IS A GREAT TIME FOR A FAMILY FISHING TRIP IN THE GOLDEN STATE. *By Don Vachini*

FAMILY-ORIENTED fishing vacations with a mix of side attractions often amount to memorable outings. Indeed, among its 30,000 miles of streams and over 4,800 still waters from north to south, the Golden State has a plethora of camping and fishing opportunities.

Although selecting a relaxing destination with decent angling is within definite reach, potential vacationers should conduct preliminary phone and web searches of suitable sites. Local agencies will readily give information on best local hotspots, appropriate tackle and other points of interest. The Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) website, www.nrm.dfg.ca.gov, lists up to the minute statewide planting schedules.

The following locations all have exceptional facilities, a variety of additional activities and, of course, great fishing!

BIG BEAR LAKE

This 2,900-acre impoundment sits in the San Bernardino National Forest 90 miles east of Los Angeles. Take Highway 30 from San Bernardino to the Highway 330 junction and proceed 28 miles to the lake. Big Bear's 6,738-foot elevation not only makes it a popular venue for city residents to escape the heat of the valley but also accounts for solid fishing prospects.

According to Dan McKernan, Big Bear's director of marketing and public relations, the lake houses largemouth bass, catfish and panfish in addition to rainbow trout. "It's a great place for the kids," he said.

Early-morning or late-evening fishermen tossing topwater plugs and poppers can persuade bass from the cover of shoreline reeds and weedbeds, while mid-day efforts include working shad-patterned plastics, dartheads and drop shot jigs in deeper structure. Panfish congregate around the docks where young anglers can dunk wriggling worms under a bobber with a fairly consistent rate of success.

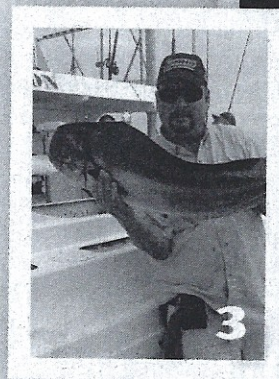
As summer approaches, resident trout seek deeper water. While bankside anglers can employ bait tactics using assorted colored Power Baits, boaters can slow-troll flasher/nightcrawler combinations or minnow-imitating spoons along the deep creek channel or dropoffs for success. "By far, the most productive spots are the west end of the lake, Boulder Bay and the northwest shoreline," added McKernan.

Several campgrounds with tackle, supplies and groceries are within walking distance of the lake and a boat launch is available at the East Ramp.

In addition to nature hikes, popular side trips include guided tours by Big Bear Off-Road Adventures and the Moonridge Animal Park. Contact (909) 866-3437 or the Big Bear Lake

CAMERA CORNER

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1 Anthony Winder shot this handsome elk at about 25 yards. **2** Jon Pedersen, 80, shot this 275-pound pig with his .257 Weatherby rifle in Alameda County in February of 2015. **3** Carlos Vallejo caught this nice dolphin fish near San Diego.

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The author's grandson, Domenic, fishes a backcountry lake up a Rock Creek trail.

Chamber of Commerce at (909) 866-4607 or www.bigbearchamber.com for additional information.

ROCK CREEK LAKE

Set at an elevation of 6,900 feet in the Inyo National Forest between Bishop and Mammoth Lakes, this small, 63-acre lake, formed by a dam on Rock Creek, features cold, clear water, a drop-dead gorgeous Sierra Nevada setting and 26 forest service campsites with an unimproved boat launch. It is reached from Highway 395 north of Bishop by taking the turnoff to Tom's Place and following Rock Creek Road seven miles to the lake.

Both the lake and Rock Creek below are heavily planted with rainbow catchables by the DFW and occasionally supplemented with private, Inyo County-funded, concessionaire trout ranging up to 5 pounds.

The trout tend to school and cruise parallel to the dam, along structure near the boat launch and where Rock Creek enters the lake. A light action spinning rod and reel loaded with 4-pound monofilament is perfect for retrieving shiny Rooster Tail, Vibrax and Panther Martin spinners; Little Cleo and Thomas Buoyant spoons or soaking PowerBait, worms or nightcrawlers. Probing red salmon eggs, with just enough split shot to allow movement in the current or through brushy pools and pockets in the creek can be a highly successful venture, especially for youngsters.

On the higher lakes and scaled-down

tributary creeks, fly anglers will find a 3- to 5-weight system matched with a floating line ideal for presenting dry Parachute Adams, Elk Hair Caddis and Green Mosquito patterns along with wet Caddis Pupa, Zebra Midge and Woolly Bugger combinations.

While colorful brook and the occasional brown are found in the 20 or so still waters within a two-hour hike, this basin also contains trailheads for a trio of John Muir Wilderness backcountry destinations. Here, in the Hilton lakes, Mono Creek and the Treasure/Gem lakes drainages, adventuresome anglers can seek an audience with the rare, kaleidoscopic golden trout, a prize achieved by rigorous day-hikes or extended backpack trips. In addition, Rock Creek Pack Station, rockcreekpackstation.com has four-legged transportation.

There are five Forest Service camps located in the canyon. Contact White Mountain Ranger District at (760) 873-2500, or fs.fed.us, for information. There is additional lodging at Tom's Place (760-935-4239) or Crowley Lake RV Park (crowleylakerv.com).

Family activities include hiking, sightseeing, biking and horseback riding. Rock Creek Lakes Resort (Pie in the Sky) is famous for its pies.

CARSON RIVER

Draining the vast backcountry along the Sierra Nevada Crest, the popular East and West Forks of the Carson River provide abundant roadside options for

both planted and native rainbow trout throughout the Markleeville area. From Highway 395 in Minden, Nev., turn west onto Highway 88 for 14 miles. At Woodfords Station, turn left onto Highway 89 and follow it six-miles to Markleeville.

According to Todd Sodaro, owner of Todd's Bait and Tackle, (530) 694-2511, the East and West Carson rivers not only receive systematic infusions of 10- to 12-inch DFW rainbows and Lahontan cutthroat but additional private trophy trout, courtesy of the Alpine County and Fish and Game Commission.

Fly anglers fool 'bows and cutts flicking dry Stimulator, Mill Creek and Humpies or subsurface Bird's Nest, Flashback P.T. and Psycho Prince nymphs on the gentle, meandering meadow sections of the West Fork along Highway 88. Below Hope Valley, poking bait through brush or dapping flies over stepladder pocket water is more effective around the "seven bridges," between Faith Valley and Woodfords Station.

Spin fishermen dredge an assortment of spinners and baits through the deeper pools, runs and swirling eddies of the East Fork, which courses a wide, flood plain structure. Many anglers choose "hit and run tactics" driving along Highway 4/89, quickly sampling commonly stocked spots, then motoring to the next turnout. Others prefer to get away from people and wade up the steep canyon sections, working beadhead nymphs for chances at hefty holdovers or native trout.

Nearby waters include kid-friendly Markleeville Creek (huge concentrations of trout are often found under the town's two bridges), Indian Creek Reservoir and the Blue Lakes chain off Highway 88 above Faith Valley.

U.S. Forest Service and private campsites are available between Hope Valley and Woodfords Station. Contact Humboldt-Toiyabe NF-Carson Ranger District, (775) 882-2766, www.fs.fed.us. Grover Hot Springs State Park (530-694-2248, www.parks.ca.gov) is a noteworthy destination offering camping sites with hot baths, thermal-heated pool, hot showers and hiking trails. There are 26 tent sites and 50 RV sites with tents. Woodfords Inn, (530)

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694-2111, and The Creekside Lodge, (530) 694-2511, are solid places to rest your head next to good fishing.

Visit Woodfords Station, (530) 694-2930, a historic stopping point for legendary Pony Express riders or book a nature adventure in Hope Valley with Judy Wickwire of the Horse Feathers Fly Fishing School, sorensensresort.com.

LAKE ALMANOR

Formed by a huge dam on the North Fork Feather River, which gushes off the face of nearby Mt. Lassen, this massive, 28,000-acre water-storing impoundment ringed by lodgepole pine and firs offers a variety of species and take methods as well. From Highway 5 in Red Bluff, follow Highway 36 east for 44-miles to the junction with Highway 89. Continue east on Highway 36/89 to the lake.

Rainbow and brown trout, king salmon and smallmouth bass are present in the vast water. The DFW releases both fingerling and catchable-sized Eagle Lake-strain rainbows, 10- to 12-inch browns and both yearling and fingerling chinook, annually. These fish all have the potential to grow fast, according to fishing guide Doug Neal, www.almanorfishingadventures.com.

"Instead of catching lots of smaller trout, anglers are more apt to catch larger but less fish," he noted.

While anglers restricted to shore can score retrieving lures and soaking varied scented concoctions, Neal hinted that the use of a boat with good electronics is the key to consistent action. "Find the smelt (bait fish) concentrations and you'll find trout and salmon," he said.

The Big Springs Cove, the Westside jetties, the A-Frame, and the incoming North Fork and Hamilton Branch channels are always hotspots for bank and float tubers after patrolling 'bows and browns. Boaters should vary between fast or slow trolling Cop Car-shaded Needlefish, red and gold-hued Speedy Shiner or silvery Kastmaster spoons over the submerged riverbeds on the main body of the lake at varying depths. When winds arrive, Neal advises to get off the water.

Smallmouth bass are taken with gold-hued Rebel or Rapala plugs plied parallel to rocky dropoffs along the eastern shore and the dam.

The Locherman Canyon section of

the North Fork Feather above the lake remains a little-known place to wade for wary native 'bows and wily browns in solitude. Nearby venues include the Caribou Wilderness backcountry, McCoy Flat Reservoir, Butt Valley Reservoir and Butt Creek.

Besides day hikes, bicycle riding, bird watching and exploring Lassen Volcanic National Park's Bumpass Hell, nearby attractions center around the tiny town of Chester, www.plumascounty.org, with a far range of amenities.

Both Forest Service and PG&E campsites are located around the lake providing plenty of lodging. With over 105 tent sites and group camps, Almanor North and South Campground is one of the most popular venues, while PG&E-operated Rocky Point provides a series of four locations offering 130 tent sites. Contact Lassen National Forest, Almanor Ranger District (530-258-2141, www.fs.fed.us), or PG&E Land Projects (916-386-5164, www.pge.com/recreation).

LAKE SISKIYOU

Sitting in the shadow of majestic Mt. Shasta, this 430-acre impoundment was created by Box Canyon Dam on the upper Sacramento River. From Highway 5 in Mt. Shasta City, take the Central Mount Shasta exit to the stop sign and turn left to Old Stage Road. Bear right onto W. A. Barr Road and cross Box Canyon Dam. Two miles later turn right at the resort entrance.

Built for recreation, this 3,300-foot elevation lake remains full and frigid all summer and gets heavy usage from swimmers, wind-sailors and slow-speed boaters in addition to fishing.

The nearby Mt. Shasta Fish Hatchery provides heavy doses of both catchable and put-and-grow rainbow and brook trout which grow quickly in the cool water temperatures and bountiful nutrients. Amid these species, an occasional brown will appear.

Siskiyou's underwater structure pretty much dictates a boating approach for day use efforts. Adult boaters, accompanied by kids, can opt to tow green-hued Humdinger or Crippure spoons or jointed Rapala or rainbow-shaded Rebel plugs over the submerged river channel, parallel to the steep, rocky shoreline or coves and points of land. Anchoring and

drifting floating baits where the main Sacramento River or Wagon and Cold creeks enter the lake can also be "fishy" propositions.

Magic time for bank anglers comes at dusk when large trout and smallmouth bass begin feeding voraciously in the shallows on prolific Caddis hatches, their concentric rings overlapping like interlocked Olympic circles. Methodically twitching Woolly Bugger, Rubberleg or October Caddis patterns behind a clear plastic bubble, youngsters (and adults) can take full advantage of these bigger denizens as they let down their guard in the dimming light.

Stream fishing for native rainbows up to 12 inches is available on the North, Middle and South forks of the Sacramento above Siskiyou along North Fork Road. Assisted by his dad, Chris, my then four-year-old, grandson, Domenic, caught his first trout while bouncing a salmon egg into a North Fork pool. Now, 10 years later, he uses a fly rod and weighted nymph to pursue native 'bows on this classic water. Nearby still waters include Castle Lake and the Trinity Divide backcountry.

Siskiyou Resort has 150 campsites with full or partial hookups for RV's in addition to 225 sites for tents and 30 cabins, which are just right for multi-aged, family camp outings. Amenities include an excellent swim beach, horseshoes, free outdoor movies, bike riding and boat rentals. Contact Lake Siskiyou Camp Resort: (530) 926-2618 or (888) 926-2618.

For Forest Service campgrounds, inquire at Shasta-Trinity NF, Mount Shasta Ranger District: (530) 926-4511, www.fs.fed.us.

Side attractions include Mt. Shasta Fish Hatchery, (530) 926-2215, the oldest operating hatchery west of the Mississippi, which is open to the public and offers Kid's Fishing Days in June or following the Everitt Memorial Highway to its end on the slope of Mt. Shasta for some great lookouts or day-hike access to Panther Meadows. Train whistles echoing the canyon remind all of local railroad towns, prompting a visit to the Railroad Park Resort in Dunsmuir, (530) 235-4440, rpark.com. Information is available at Shasta Cascade Wonderland Association, (800) 275-5555, shastacascade.com. ■