

immediately assembled our gear to start fishing. Upper Twin Lake was very productive—streamers, yellow Humpies, and red nymphs yielded some of the most beautiful cutthroat trout we had ever seen. After a late lunch, we decided to hike up to Silver King to catch the grayling that had precipitated this trip.

Upon arriving, we soon realized something wasn't right: the water was like a sheet of glass, not a ripple to be seen, and as we studied the lake to decide where the best fishing might happen, we began wondering why not a single fish was rising for the many bugs on the surface.

We fished our way around lake, all three of us trying numerous flies in many different places without catching a glimpse of a single fish. The thought of winterkill was slowly working its way into my consciousness. Then on the leeward side of the lake, Tom and Shawn noticed about a dozen dead fish about 25 feet from shore.

We headed back to our camp to discuss the winterkill theory and have dinner and make plans for the following day. Not ready to give up on grayling, the next morning we climbed to Silver King, but the only life we found were the bugs and the occasional call of a white-tailed ptarmigan. Wistfully, we accepted the fact that Silver King Lake had winter-killed. We went down to the Twin Lakes and spent the afternoon catching more cutthroats before packing up for the early-evening hike down the valley to set up camp alongside Pine Creek. Wet wading the creek the next day, we caught countless small, wild trout.

A few days after returning home, Shawn called Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW) and talked to a biologist who had hiked to Silver King Lake three days after we were there, and confirmed it had winter-killed. Consequently, CPW restocked Silver King Lake with both grayling and cutthroat last fall. In a few years, the yearling-age fish that were stocked will be a catchable size, and in the meantime, Twin Lakes continues to produce fine cutthroat. We hope Mother Nature will hold off on the winter-kills for a while.



PHOTO BY JONATHAN HILL

Little Walker Lake, CA By Don Vachini

Grandson, Domenic, and I glimpsed our hike-in destination from the trail atop Sawmill Ridge. On this early-June morning, we'd shouldered daypacks and were following a primitive Inyo National Forest pathway, where Paiute Indians once left footprints. A half-mile downhill contour through mixed conifers and mahogany delivered us to 38-acre Little Walker Lake, nestled along the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada. Supporting a healthy and diverse wild trout fishery adjacent to the Ansel Adams Wilderness, this lightly-visited lake remains one of my favorites. My day's objective was to introduce it to Domenic.

Water from melting snow and ice from the northern slope of 12,296-foot Mount Lewis and the southern face of 12,764-foot Mount Gibbs gathers in Upper and Lower Sardine Lakes just outside the eastern edge of Yosemite National Park. From there, Walker Creek tumbles steeply some 4 miles down pine-, aspen-, and willow-shielded Bloody Canyon. The stream not only provides icy, yearlong sustenance to Little Walker Lake (7,936 feet), but also serves as brook, brown, and rainbow trout spawning and nursery habitat, enabling juveniles to add bulk before taking up lake residency. Farther downstream, the Walker joins Rush Creek, which enters alkaline Mono Lake near the town of Lee Vining.

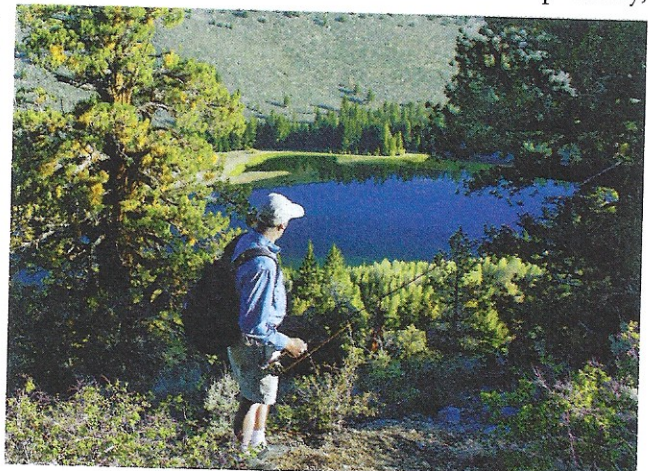


PHOTO BY DON VACHINI

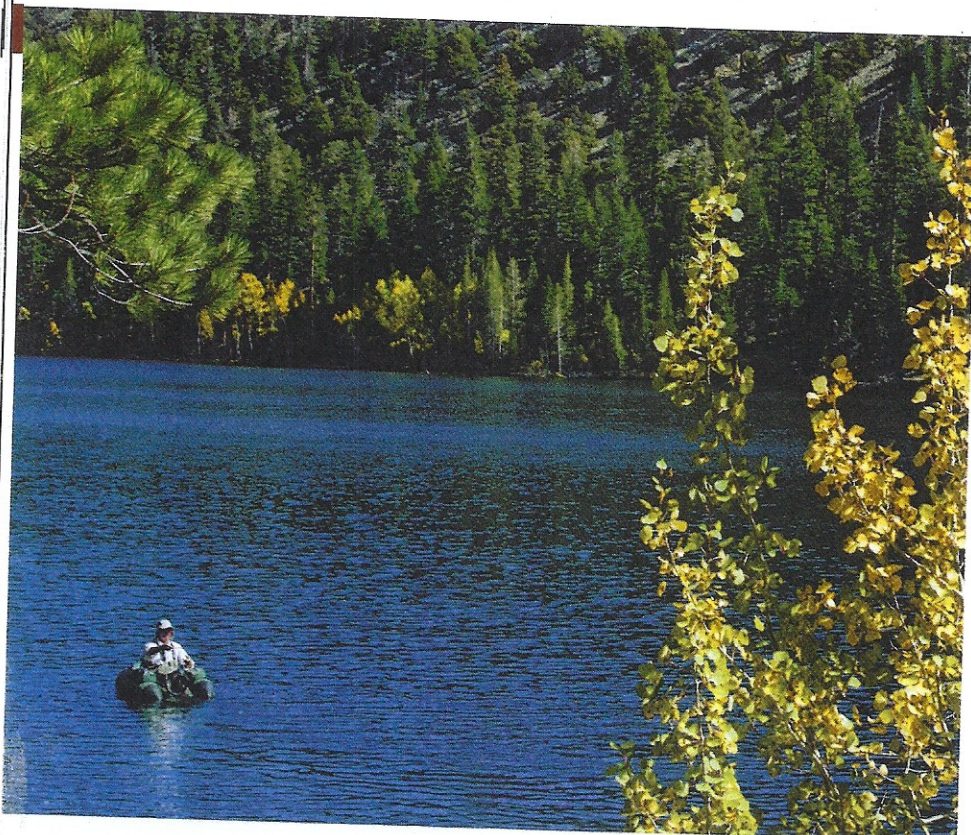


PHOTO BY DON VACHINI

To get there, drive south from Lee Vining on US Highway 395, take State Route 158 (June Lake Loop Road) 1.4 miles and merge onto Parker Lake Road. Veer right, following Walker Lake Road for 0.8 mile, then bear left and follow Sawmill Road 2.1 miles to the Mono Pass (north) Trailhead.

Along with self-sustaining brook and brown trout, the lake holds Kamloops-strain rainbows stocked by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW). According to James Erdman, an environmental scientist with the DFW's Bishop office, the lake is currently managed as a Kamloops brood stock refuge, with all brood fish having clipped adipose fins for easy identification.

"Existing regulations require the release of all fin-clipped rainbows. Future proposals under consideration include no bait and artificial/barbless status," says Erdman.

Once at the lake, we gravitated to the open inlet, a hot spot that routinely attracts brookies reaching 12 inches and 'bows approaching 3 pounds. Here, Domenic honed his distance-casting skills, repeatedly retrieving a cinnamon Woolly Buzzer across the expansive, sand-bottom delta. His successful introductory session yielded a pair of chunky Kamloops plus one gaudy brookie. On past inlet visits, I've had success using a Copper John, damselfly nymph, or Blood



PHOTO BY DON VACHINI

Midge dropper under a size 10 October Caddis or Parachute Adams.

During most of the season, reclusive browns, ranging from 15 inches to 5 pounds, hunker down among the deep, ebony structure along the timber-clad southern shoreline. It's a challenge to reach them, but a fast-sinking line with a 4X fluorocarbon leader effectively delivers meaty, size 8 or 10 Matukas, Clouser Minnows, or leech patterns (purple, cinnamon, or root beer). As October's chill triggers their spawning instincts, leviathan browns congregate near the inlet channel, becoming slightly more vulnerable.

Besides a small, off-limits section of private property along the lake's outlet, a thick coat of reeds lining the two coves and a boot-sucking marsh near the inflow require tedious approaches. Contour trolling from a float tube offers a feasible alternative to these shore-bound obstacles. Moreover, brush-laden Walker Creek up the canyon usually offers consistent action.

Blessed with stable populations of wild trout and a developing Kamloops management plan, Little Walker Lake should continue offering a tempting trout trifecta. Now properly introduced, Domenic is eagerly anticipating an engagement with a sizable brown or two.