

a small yarn indicator, and some of the browns would inspect or strike at my indicator. After one brown chomped solidly onto my yarn ball and bent my rod momentarily, I switched to a bushy dry fly; but, alas, I could not match whatever bug the trout thought my yellow yarn was imitating. I rerigged with a heavy Prince Nymph and a Higa's SOS and contentedly resumed hooking 10- to 12-inch browns from the deepest holes. The depth of holes varies enough that I have decided to use my Euro-nymphing rig (long rod, long thin leader, and no floating indicator, but rather a colored monofilament indicator) next time to probe the depths better.

Any time of year, Thistle Creek is a reliable fishery and is a quick-and-easy half-day destination for anglers along the Wasatch Front.

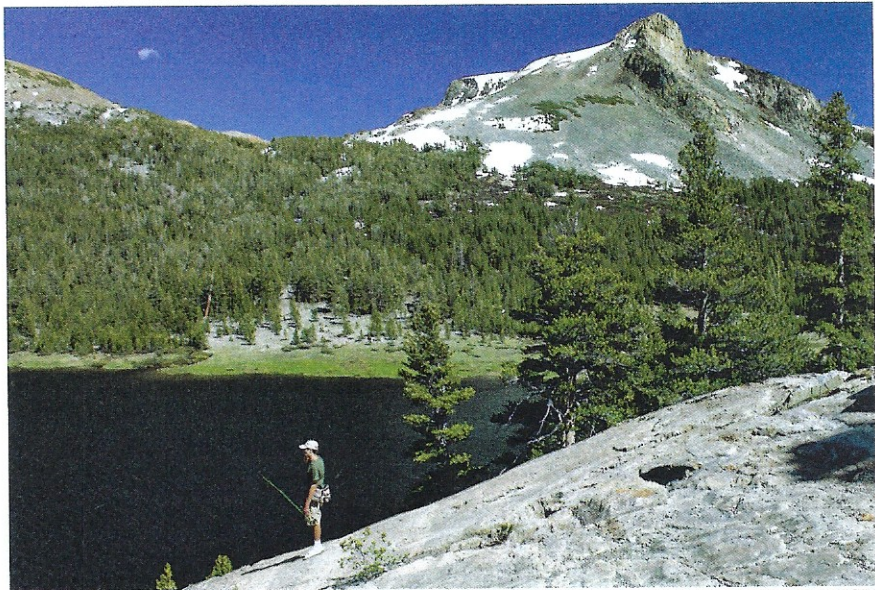


PHOTO BY DON VACHINI

### Tioga Lake and Creek, CA By Don Vachini

**M**ount Dana peered stoically over my right shoulder, its face bathed in alpenglow. As the breeze died, the lake's glassy surface was punctuated by increasing rise-forms as trout began feeding in earnest. As I unhooked a gaudily attired brookie in the fading light, my trance-like focus was distracted by car headlights across the lake.

On this mid-June evening, my grandson, Domenic, and I were enjoying the magic hour at Tioga Lake's pristine inlet. The vehicular traffic reminded us that this scenic Inyo National Forest setting is adjacent to California Route 120 near the eastern entrance to Yosemite National Park, which accommodates over 4 million visitors annually.

Fed by snowmelt from 13,053-foot Mount Dana and escaping flowage from the quartet of Dana (aka Glacier) Lakes to the southeast, this jewel sits at 9,600 feet in elevation along the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada crest, immediately below Tioga Pass. Despite auto convoys passing by it, the 73-acre lake gets surprisingly little angling pressure. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife annually stocks it with more than 35,000 half-pound rainbow trout, along with a few hundred in the 2- to 4-pound range. Brook trout up to 10 inches are self-sustaining.

Surrounding timber and consistent upslope wind provide an adequate bug buffet for finned residents. Basic size 12 to 16 dries are ideal: Mosquito, Elk Hair Caddis, Purple Haze. Ant and beetle patterns are often effective, and beadhead Pheasant Tails, Bird's Nests, Zebra Midges, Copper Johns, and Woolly Buggers work well for fishing subsurface.

The most heavily populated (and productive) sections are in the deeper, lower third of the lake, between the campground and the outlet. Here, recent planters

tend to school and circumnavigate the edges of deeper water. Flicking a beadhead Woolly Bugger parallel to the shore and retrieving along the noticeable shelves or sight-casting ahead of visible cruisers often pays dividends. Most locales are fairly open and allow for unrestricted casting; roll casts or a float tube come in handy where timber encroaches the bank.

Strong afternoon zephyrs necessitate a 9-foot, 4-weight system to cast a dry/dropper setup upwind. Bobbing in the chop, the surface fly causes the submerged nymph to gyrate enticingly.

Either washing down from the Dana Lakes or ascending from Tioga, moderate densities of brook trout gravitate between lower Dana Creek and the inlet. Here, Domenic utilized stealth and dapping skills on the brushy creek, but as darkness neared, he moved to the fan-shaped channel. With Mount Dana and me observing, his barely visible Mosquito was repeatedly assailed as it rode atop the slowing current. It was fun to watch, and all the better for sharing the amazing scenery with family.

Steep and strenuous, trail-less scrambles will test your endurance (and sanity) if you intend to explore the feeder Dana Lakes. Tioga Creek below the lake meanders into a wide unnamed pond before cascading rapidly downhill, then courses through a gentle meadow before entering Lee Vining Creek. Stocker 'bows are common in the vicinity of the cabins at Tioga Pass Resort (located along the creek about a mile north of the lake); the winding meadow sections can produce diminutive char along the undercut banks. Short, controlled casts, keeping the fly in sight, and low-profile tactics work best on this pleasant but challenging 0.5-mile stretch. An 8-foot, 2- or 3-weight rod, floating line, and dry or nymph patterns provide an effective setup.

Both lake and creeks are open from the last Saturday in April through mid-November. Either or both can be reached from the town of Lee Vining along US Highway 395. Turn west onto SR 120 and continue 11 miles to the lake. Just look up—Mount Dana will point the rest of the way. Tioga Pass Resort, [www.tiogapassresort.com](http://www.tiogapassresort.com), has basic dining and supplies with cabins and Forest Service campgrounds nearby. Contact the Lee Vining Chamber of Commerce, [www.leevining.com](http://www.leevining.com), for additional lodging and dining options.

## Native Gila Trout in Arizona Rescued Following Frye Fire

By Arizona Game and Fish Department

In late July, hiking steep trails wearing full fire gear and often with backpacks holding aerated buckets of fish and other gear, an Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD)-led rescue team salvaged fish from two populations of Gila trout from the ash-blanketed slopes of Mount Graham. These rare trout are native to Arizona and New Mexico.

During the aftermath of the 48,000-acre Frye Fire, the 13 biologists and wildlife managers from AZGFD and Mora National



Fish Hatchery transported 79 Gila trout from Ash Creek and 111 from Frye Creek in good health to the Mora National Fish Hatchery located northeast of Santa Fe, New Mexico. The rescue came just before monsoon season when summer rains are likely to send ash flows toxic to fish down waterways following high-density wildfires such as the Frye Fire. Gila trout, listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, are one of two native trout species in Arizona, along with the Apache trout.

"Populations restored in isolated headwaters are unfortunately vulnerable to the risk of post-fire flooding, making our salvage efforts critical," says Tracy Stephens, AZGFD native trout and chub coordinator. "We could not have done this without the efforts of the Type 2 Incident Command Team, including USFS and BLM personnel from throughout the Southwest Region that coordinated our efforts and ensured our safety."

In 2012, the nearly 300,000-acre Whitewater-Baldy Fire—the largest fire in the history of New Mexico—burned through nearly half of the existing Gila trout streams and fish were eliminated from six of the eight streams that were within the burn area. Gila trout were evacuated from three streams following the fire, including Spruce Creek. Those fish from Spruce Creek were transported to Ash Creek, where last week they once again were salvaged.

The South Diamond Creek lineage of Gila trout was introduced into Frye Creek beginning in 2009, and this wild population was the first to open to catch-and-release angling for Gila trout in recent Arizona history. All Gila trout rescued last week are being held at Mora National Fish Hatchery. The fish from Frye Creek will be used to supplement the South Diamond brood stock. The fish from Ash Creek will be held at the hatchery until an alternative stream is identified, or if conditions in the creek are deemed suitable for the fish following post-monsoon evaluations.