

FISHING, FAMILIES & FUN

Article by Don Vachini

California offers plenty of great fishing waters, and most anglers have their favorite spots to cast for trophies. But with temperatures warming up and the school year winding down, this is the perfect time to focus on a different kind of destination: the best locations for a family fishing trip. The goal this month is to find waters where your kids can actually catch fish, and perhaps enjoy some fun diversions along the way. Here are a few places where you can make some memories. ▶



WHILE THE invigorating scent of fresh air, dramatic mountain

views and the taste of s'mores remain important components of a family campout, selecting a location with the availability of fish is integral. Indeed, the angling success of trips often rests in the capable hands of the statewide California Department of Fish and Wildlife fish hatcheries and their timely planting regimens.

Besides a variety of side activities, the following destinations include heavily planted waters to ensure a reasonable chance at success, especially for children. To help, the CDFW website lists up-to-the-minute statewide planting schedules.

BIG BEAR LAKE

Year in and year out, Big Bear Lake remains an ideal base for Los Angeles-area families wishing to combine cool mountain scenery with excellent fishing. From San Bernardino, follow Highway 30 east to the Highway 330 junction then proceed 28 miles to the lake.

Sitting at the 6,738-foot elevation in the San Bernardino National Forest, this 2,900-acre impoundment with 22-miles of shoreline houses rainbow trout, largemouth bass, bluegills and crappies.

Bi-weekly trout plants by the CDFW, along with trophy-sized 'bows approaching 5 pounds, courtesy of the Big Bear Chamber of Commerce, make

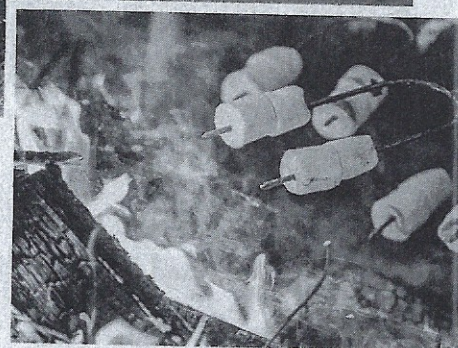


this one of the most heavily stocked lakes in the state and account for steady action from late spring through fall.

Specializing in "group option" trips, guide Curt Dills of Fish Big Bear Charter Service (www.fishbigbear.net) operates family fishing sessions, which are great opportunities for both kids and adults to fish together.

Boaters trolling flasher/nightcrawler combinations or minnow-imitating spoons along the fringes of the deeper channel between Boulder Bay and the northwest shore score consistently. The west end of the lake is most popular with bait-and-wait shore anglers.

The Golden State has no shortage of locations for enjoying a family fishing outing. There's sure to be a spot that fits your family's vacation needs.



Frequenting shoreline reeds and weedbeds, largemouth bass respond vigorously to surface poppers or topwater plugs during early- and late-day hours. Worms under bobbers or jigs off the docks can provide action-packed panfish action for youngsters.

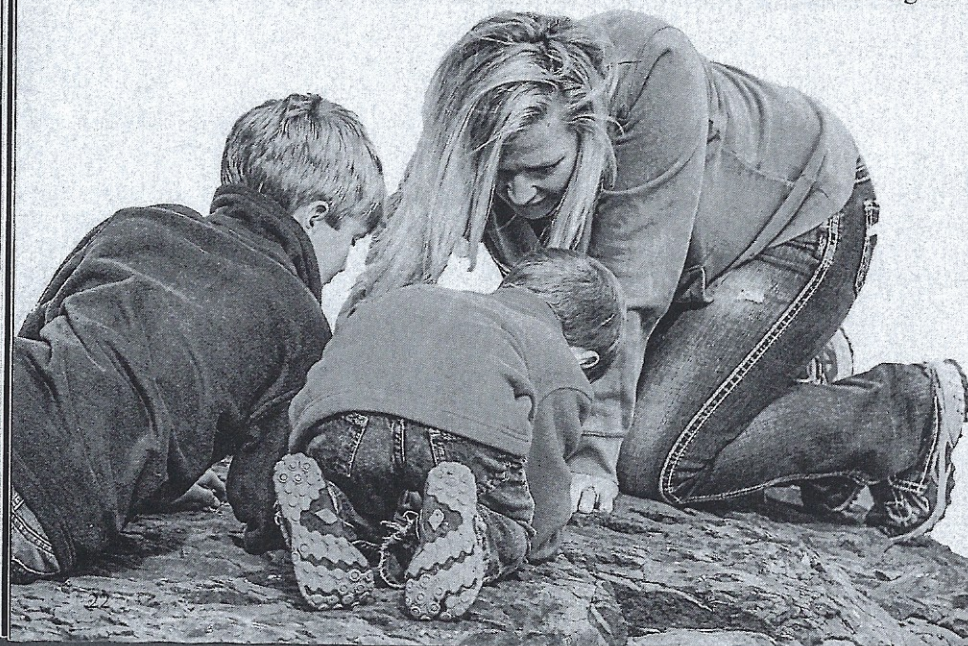
ALONG THE WAY

Numerous San Bernardino National Forest Service and private campsites, ranging from primitive to fully developed, resort-style facilities, are available within walking distance of the lake. Contact either the Mountaintop Ranger District, Big Bear Ranger Station (www.fs.fed.us) or the Discovery Center (www.bigbeardiscoverycenter.com) for additional information.

The Big Bear Marina provides recreational boat rentals of all sorts. Trailheads to the Pacific Crest Trail, a golf course and bike park are nearby. Side trips include tram rides at the Snow Summit Ski Resort, guided tours by Big Bear Off-Road Adventures and the Big Bear Alpine Zoo.

COLLINS LAKE

Nestled at the 1,183-foot elevation in



the foothills northeast of Sacramento, 1,600-acre Collins Lake offers a popular trophy rainbow trout program, along with a viable fishery for largemouth and spotted bass and sunfish.

Steady CDFW plants of half-pound 'bows plus additional pen-raised fish at the marina docks are augmented with bonus trout in the 5- to 8-pound range from Oregon. A special fee is charged to fish, but tagged trout worth up to \$100 spice up the ante a bit.

From February through May, shore anglers typically do well retrieving Phoebe and Kastmaster spoons or soaking assorted Power Baits near the dam. When rising summer temperatures drive trout deeper, boaters locate the thermocline at 32 degrees and then troll silvery spoons for success.

Summer anglers drop-shotting Senko worms or pulling rattling crank baits through structure on the east side of the lake can regularly score on hefty bass. Youngsters suspending worms and small jigs under bobbers can occasionally dupe an unsuspecting largemouth.

On a recent early summer day, I watched twin, 16-year-old grandkids, Domenic and Sophia, daintily twitching tiny dry flies alongside some shoreline brush. Their successful session included nearly a dozen small bluegills — and wide grins for both.

ALONG THE WAY

The Collins Lake Recreation Area (www.collinslake.com) has well-groomed campgrounds around the lake in addition to rental cabins, lake-side tent sites and RV trailers available well into the summer months. In addition to a concrete boat launch, a large rental fleet including fishing boats, patio boats, paddleboats and kayaks is available. Water skiing is permitted in the lower half of the lake during the summer.

CARSON RIVER FORKS

Draining a vast backcountry along the Sierra Nevada Crest, the popular East and West Forks of the Carson River offer abundant roadside options for bountiful planted trout.

Along with systematic CDFW infusions of 10- to 12-inch rainbow and cutthroat trout, the Alpine County Fish



The author's grandkids, Domenic and Sophia, selecting which fly to use.

and Game Commission, adds 'bows ranging from 2 to 10 pounds from late spring through the November closure.

East Fork gear anglers successfully dredge an assortment of baits and Vibrax or Rooster Tail spinners through the deeper pools of its flood plain structure along Highway 4/89. Adventure-some fly tossers often aggressively wade into the steep canyon sections, working meaty streamers for hefty holdovers or wily native trout.

More creek than river, the sedate West Fork meanders gently through Hope Valley along Blue Lakes Road. Here, its meadow sections are popular with dry fly enthusiasts presenting size 16-18 Stimulator or Humpy patterns for 'bows, brookies and cutts.

Stocked trout often stack up under the Highway 88 bridges near Picketts Junction, and these are great locales for kids from tot to teenage to enjoy angling action. Below here, the river is heavily shrouded by timber as it descends rapidly while traveling under the "five bridges" downstream. Anglers are pretty much relegated to delicately poking bait into frothy pocket water to avoid the snag-happy branches in this steeply-cascading canyon section.

ALONG THE WAY

Plenty of Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and private campgrounds are available in the area. Contact the Carson Ranger District, Woodfords Inn (www.woodfordsinn.com) and Creekside Lodge (www.creekside-lodge.com) are solid places to rest your head next to good fishing.

Visit Woodfords Station, a historic stopping point for legendary Pony

Express riders, peruse the Leviathan Mine site, photograph Hangman's Bridge, book a nature walk in Hope Valley at Sorensen's Resort (www.sorensensresort.com) or relax in hot mineral baths at Grover Hot Springs State Park (www.parks.ca.gov).

JUNE LAKES

Tucked against the serrated spine of the Eastern Sierra just south of Yosemite National Park, June, Gull, Silver and Grant lakes along with connecting Rush Creek, form the June Lake Loop.

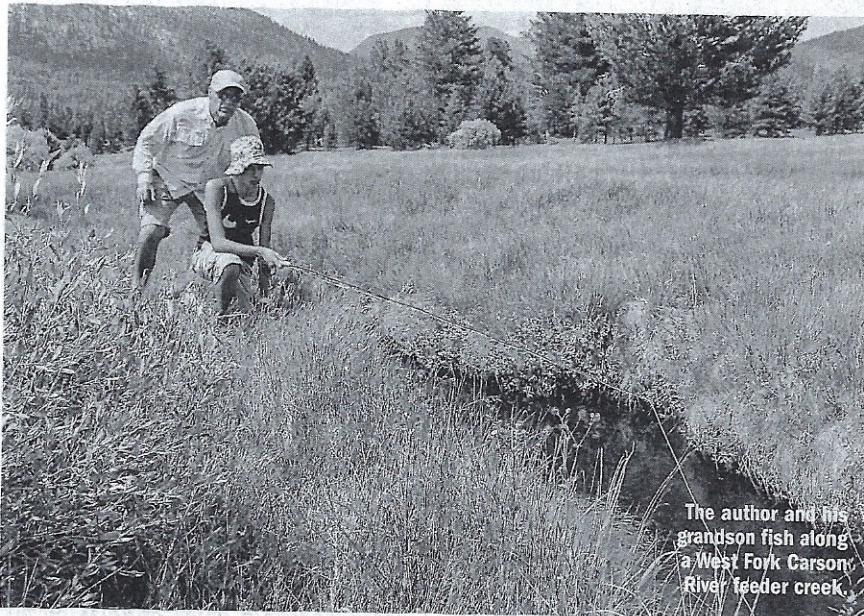
The fishing can be as spectacular as the scenery. Heavy doses of rainbows make up the bulk of the catch along with put-and-grow cutthroat and wily brown trout. The CDFW accounts for over 225,000 half-pound rainbows plus hundreds of 4- to 6-pound brood-stock trout in these five waters. Private concessionaire shipments of 5- to 12-pound trophies help keep adults and kids of all ages happy.

While tiny Gull Lake is best fished from shore, June, Silver and Grant lake visitors commonly rent boats and troll rainbow-or brown-hued Thomas Buoyant or Tasmanian Devil spoons deep through the submerged creek channel or anchor and drift various baits off structure points. Day in and day out, patient shoreline anglers achieve the most success floating various scented baits just off the bottom.

Youngsters bouncing red salmon eggs along the undercut banks of Rush Creek often entice willing planters.

ALONG THE WAY

Plenty of campsites, RV hookups,



The author and his grandson fish along a West Fork Carson River feeder creek.

cabins, motels and boat rentals abound in the area. Contact the June Lake Chamber (www.junelakeloop.org) for additional information.

Nearby attractions include day hikes around the lakes, tufa towers at Mono Lake, Yosemite National Park, driving tours to Glass Mountain and horseback rides from Frontier Pack Train (www.frontierpacktrain.com) located adjacent to Silver Lake. Popular with both backpackers and horsepackers, the trailhead out of Silver Lake connects to the John Muir Trail and the Ansel Adams Wilderness, home to vividly-attired brook and golden trout.

LITTLE LAKES VALLEY

Composed of upper feeder lakes, Little Lakes Valley and lower Rock Creek, this popular Eastern Sierra Nevada drainage runs the gamut from drive-to waters, low impact walk-in lakes to vertically challenging probes.

Snow melt from a trio of 13,000-foot peaks gathers in the upper echelon Gem and Treasure lakes, forming the headwaters of Rock Creek. Their escaping flows filter through Long, Box, Heart, Marsh and Mack lakes before entering Rock Creek Lake.

Huge numbers of CDFW rainbows, supplemented by private Inyo County-funded concessionaire trout ranging up to 8 pounds, keep campground residents at both Rock Creek Lake and along roadside Rock Creek

well-occupied.

The pathway above the Mosquito Flat Trailhead gently segues into the John Muir Wilderness where 15 Little Lakes Valley stillwaters are easily reached with light effort. According to Jim King, fishing guru at Rock Creek Lakes Resort, these waters are excellent choices to introduce young folks to backcountry angling. A fly/bubble setup, probing assorted, size 14-16, black, brown or green, beadhead Bird's Nest, Psycho Prince or Flashback nymphs parallel to underwater ledges or across inlets and outlets, is ideal for targeting their truncated but willing brook, rainbow and brown trout.

Sturdy anglers willing to climb nearer to the clouds can pursue the Gem's willing brookies or seek an audience with kaleidoscopic golden trout by enduring a taxing, two-hour trudge to the in-tandem Treasure lakes. Still other options include backpacking over Mono Pass for extended forays.

ALONG THE WAY

There are numerous Inyo National Forest Service campgrounds situated along Rock Creek canyon. Lodging is available at Rock Creek Lakes Resort (www.rockcreeklakesresort.com), Tom's Place (www.tomsplaceresort.com) or Crowley Lake RV Park (www.crowleylakerv.com).

Rock Creek Pack Station (www.rockcreekpackstation.com) can provide four-legged transportation for either

day rides or backcountry sojourns.

INTERMOUNTAIN AREA

Located between Mt. Lassen and Mt. Shasta, the Intermountain Area's mainstay water is Upper Hat Creek. Characterized by cold, spring-fed flowage from deep aquifers, thick pine forest growth and healthy bug life, this fertile, Eastern Shasta County stream flowing along Highway 89 remains a highly popular, kid-friendly venue to set up family camp and fish.

"Trout central" is reached from Highway 5 via Highway 299 from Redding or by Highway 89 from the city of Mt. Shasta.

The 15-mile section of Upper Hat in the vicinity of Old Station is the greatest beneficiary of the nearby Crystal Lake Fish Hatchery. Prodigious numbers of gullible rainbow and brook trout approaching 2 pounds, and occasional brood specimens approaching 5 pounds, are infused weekly.

Pretty much any method of angling works on this creek with myriad personalities. Youngsters and oldsters using light-action spinning rods and 4-pound monofilament can work Panther Martin spinners through deep, azure pools or tumble salmon eggs through swirling eddies and moderate gradients. Accomplished fly-fishermen wade and employ high-sticking and short line presentations while working the seams between currents with weighted Zebra Midge, Serendipity or Caddis nymphs to account for some hefty surprises.

ALONG THE WAY

Multiple Shasta National Forest campgrounds occur along Highway 89. The town of Burney contains motels, cabins and RV parks. Nearby attractions include Lassen Volcanic National Park, Subway Cave at Old Station, the Crystal Lake Hatchery and McArthur-Burney Falls Memorial State Park. In-park Burney Creek and nearby Baum Lake are noteworthy alternatives; Lake Britton offers swimming, water skiing and wakeboarding. Contact the Shasta Cascade Wonderland Association at www.shastacascade.com or the Burney Chamber of Commerce at www.burneychamber.com. ■