

Milton Reservoir, CA By Don Vachini

Tiny, 5,650-foot-elevation Milton Reservoir sits amid thick pine cover in the Tahoe National Forest, 34 road miles from Truckee. Constructed during the mid-1960s, this sparkling 15-acre jewel is a challenging brown trout fishery. Snowmelt and seepage from 7,424-foot Findley Peak, as well as Bald Ridge, several creeks, and Dam Fine Spring gather in 1,000-acre Jackson Meadows Reservoir. Its outflow—the Middle Yuba River—runs 1.5 miles into Milton Reservoir, a regulating impoundment. Below here, the river continues its westward descent 30-plus miles down a deep, hard-to-access canyon before entering the main Yuba River below Bullards Bar Reservoir.

During the early 1980s, Milton became part of the California Department of Fish & Wildlife's wild trout program. In 1993, the reservoir was drained, reconstructed with three deep channels to improve habitat, and restocked with various strains of brown and rainbow trout. To allow the bigger, more predatory browns to biologically curtail nongame



bullhead catfish, regulations permit anglers to keep only two trout, and none over 12 inches. Single barbless hooks are required and bait is prohibited.

Browns and 'bows both reproduce naturally, with most residents from 10 to 14 inches. However, elusive big browns—16 to 19 inches but also a few reaching double-digit weights—lurk in these waters. Cold, yearlong flows, solid aquatic vegetation, a healthy and varied insect endowment plus high-caloric forage help browns to reach such sizes.

Typically, the best times are from mid-May through July and late September through October. During late spring, rainbows ascend the short section of the Middle Yuba above Milton for recruitment purposes; browns go in the fall.

The inlet's moving water is a key gathering point for fish of all sizes. Although shore anglers can reach this structure, a float tube, small pram, or paddleboard is definitely advantageous. Hugging the aquatic weeds while dining on midges, caddisfly larvae, and other insects, juvenile trout attempt to remain unnoticed by the highly piscivorous denizens. Suspended under an Adams, Flying Ant, or Callibaetis mayfly dry, an orange, olive, or gray beadhead Brassie, WD-40, or Zebra Midge, maneuvered against the marshy fringes works well for pan-size trout.

When probing the moving water for larger residents, keep the offering deep and the indicator matching the speed of the water. As the flow ebbs upon entering the channel, let the weighted fly bounce along the gravelly bottom.

Hefty loner browns remain the main attraction here, but they tend to be fickle and deep. Target them with a 7- or 8-weight rod, fast-sinking line, and a minnow-imitating yellow, brown, or purple Zonker, Muddler, Matuka, or Articulated Leech. Fish parallel to the shorelines, which drop off steeply, or erratically troll along the edges of the deeper channels. Towing a pair of in-tandem streamers can also draw strikes. Early and late-day shadows are prime times to pursue Milton's midsize residents. The larger denizens sometimes abandon their senses during the magic hour before dark, when they prowl for bite-sized surface feeders.

From Interstate 80 in the town of Truckee, drive 14 miles northwest on State Route 89, then turn left onto paved Henness Pass Road for 17 additional miles to the dam at Jackson Meadows. From the right of the dam, follow the dirt road. While four-wheel drive is not needed, a vehicle will need to negotiate plenty of washouts and high-center areas slowly on the 1.5-mile descent. Open season runs from the last Saturday in April through November 15. For current road conditions and information, contact Mountain Hardware and Sports, (530) 587-4844, www.mountainhardwareandsports.com.

Don't expect red-hot action on this tailwater fishery. Do relish an opportunity to match wits with some wary and well-educated browns.

