

Webber Lake, CA By Don Vachini

With fragrant pine forest as a backdrop, my fly line softly kissed the glassy surface of Webber Lake. Accompanied by my son, Jason, on a mid-August morning, I was experiencing a heightened sense of anticipation, not only from the 9-inch cutthroat darting to inhale my fly, but from sampling a previously private, 150-year-old fish camp beginning a new chapter.

Surrounded by Tahoe National Forest lands and Sierra Nevada ridges, Webber Lake sits at 6,780 feet in a high mountain valley north of Truckee. Collecting snowmelt from 8,092-foot Webber Peak and 8,214-foot Lacey Peak, this natural 260-acre lake is the source of the Little Truckee River. Escaping flowage courses through both Stampede and Boca Reservoirs en route to the Truckee River, which terminates 33 miles later in Nevada's Pyramid Lake.

During the mid-1860s, Henness Pass Road became a well-traveled route for stagecoaches and freight haulers between Nevada's Comstock Lode and California's Mother Lode. David Webber's hotel and well-stocked trout lake became a popular stopping-off point. In the early 1900s, he sold the property to the sheep-farming William Johnson family and

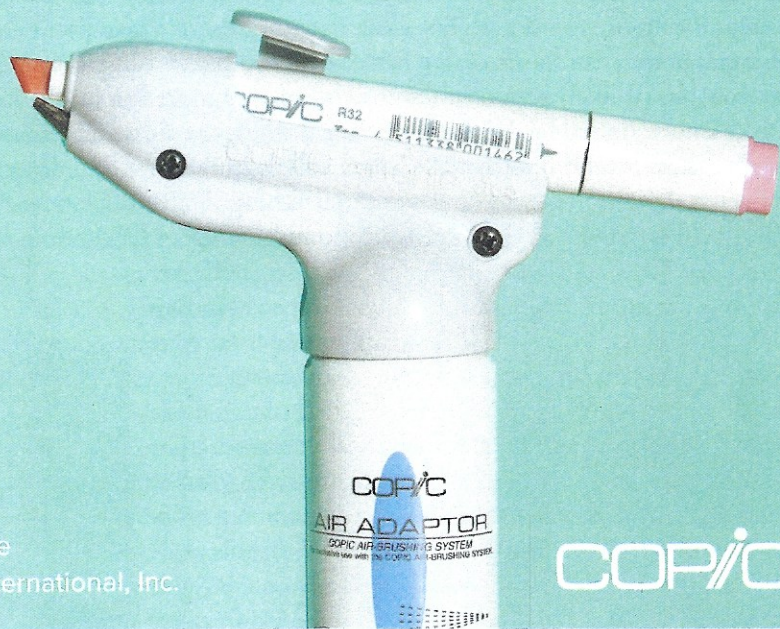
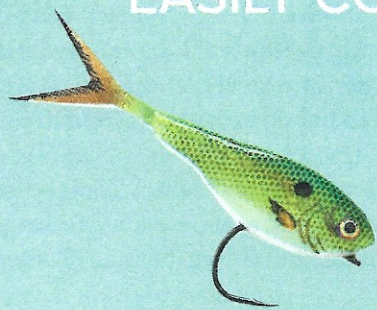


PHOTO BY DON VACHINI

the lake was leased to a private fish concession, which planted hefty rainbow trout for paying guests. Brook and brown trout were also introduced.

Six years ago, the Truckee Donner Land Trust (TDLT), www.tdlandtrust.org, purchased the 3,000-acre property from Clif and Barbara Johnson to preserve its wetlands and headwaters from development and ensure public access. While the surrounding terrain is now accessible, a pleasant piscatorial transformation is in progress beneath Webber's surface. The Lahontan cutthroat is native to the entire Truckee River basin, so the California Department of Fish and Wildlife is currently managing the lake

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as a trophy cutthroat fishery.

Fingerling and sub-catchable Pilot Peak—strain cutts, courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, were released into Webber during 2016–2017 under a put-and-grow plan. These piscivorous cutts grow fast, live long, and feed aggressively, so hopes are high that they will provide a quality fishery within a few seasons. In Pyramid Lake, Pilot Peak Lahontans reach more than 20 pounds.

Webber offers them plenty of food. Terrestrial insects routinely blow in from surrounding thick timber stands and Lacey Meadows; wide, food-producing shallows account for a healthy insect biomass, including *Callibaetis* mayflies, blood midges, and caddisflies; robust reddsucker, dace, and crayfish populations provide high-protein forage. Given these conditions, biologists expect the cutts to range from 14 to 22 inches, with fish over 10 pounds not an unrealistic expectation.

A canoe, kayak, pontoon, or pram is advantageous for getting to the deeper areas often preferred by the trout. A sinking line, heavy fluorocarbon tippet, and baitfish-imitating streamers retrieved in deliberate, strip-pause sequences through the deep channel entice larger fish.

From Interstate 80 in the town of Truckee, take California Route 89 north for 14 miles. Turn left onto Jackson Meadows Road. After 8.1 miles, turn left onto the signed road to Webber Lake (Hennes Pass Road), leading 0.25 mile to the lake. A 5-mph boat speed limit is enforced on the entire lake, which is open from the last Saturday in April through November 15 under general trout regulations. Contact Mountain Hardware and Sports, (530) 587-4844, www.mountainhardwareandsports.com, for current angling conditions.

Today, Hennes Pass Road still delivers adventurous visitors to this popular yesteryear destination. And if Webber's trophy potential is realized in a few years, be sure to hang on to your fly rod when plying its depths.

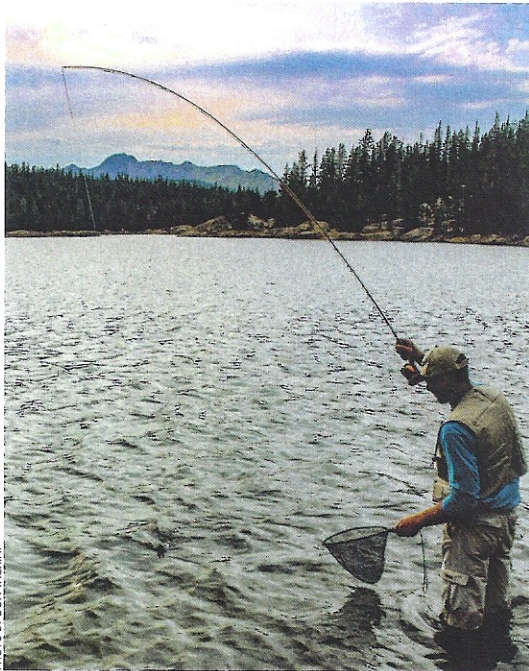


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An advertisement for Bitterroot Nets. The background is a collage of various fishing gear, including nets and fly boxes, with a focus on intricate woodwork and patterns. A central oval logo contains the text "Bitterroot Nets".

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