

Around the Southwest

News, Views, and Piscatorial Pursuits



PHOTO BY DON VACHINI

Silver Creek, CA

By Don Vachini

En route to a mid-July getaway, my son, Matt, and I drove along the East Carson River with throngs of anglers seemingly stationed at every available spot. Yet, only a few miles past this heavily-pressured water, we were happily immersed in the solitude of Silver Creek, seeking a potential trout trifecta, with nary a soul in sight.

Draining snowmelt from a vast backcountry along the east slope of the Sierra Nevada crest near Ebbetts Pass, Silver's primary headwaters emanate from Lower Kinney Lake at 8,506 feet and nearby Kinney Reservoir. It also gains sustenance from Raymond and Noble Creeks while tumbling 9 miles down a canyon through the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest to enter the East Carson.

Tenacious, 6- to 8-inch brook trout find the nearly inaccessible upper sections coursing through a steep canyon to their liking. Ranging up to 12 inches, rainbow and cutthroat become the dominant residents in the middle and lower reaches, which have a more moderate gradient and more fishable structure than the loftier haunts.

In addition to wild brook and rainbow trout, this Alpine County creek is periodically stocked with 10- to 12-inch rainbows and Lahontan cutthroat. Historically, Lahontan cutts reached gargantuan proportions—up to 40 pounds.

For centuries, their annual spawning forays from sea-like Lahontan Lake took them into the upper East Carson River and its tributaries, including Silver Creek. However, in just under 75 years, dams, the introduction of nonnative trout, and gross overharvesting ushered them on a path toward extinction. During the past few decades, they have been the beneficiaries of a daunting, federally assisted program to reintroduce them back into their native ranges.

According to Todd Sodaro, of the Alpine County Game and Fish Commission, Silver Creek is also stocked privately with 1- to 2-pound rainbows, with a few 3- to 5-pounders included in the mix. "The



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highway bridge crossings, Silver Creek Campground, and the section near its entrance into the East Carson provide easy access and draw the most attention," he says.

However, to me, the real adventure on this intimate stream lies in pursuing the wilier, holdover 'bows and cutts. Wet wading and short, tight casts, or dapping, under a thick willow, alder, and pine canopy are typical tactics. Pushing aside brush and maintaining constant contact with flies fished into tiny pockets, seams, and plunge pools is the usual routine. Given the tight quarters, anglers are well-served with short rods—say, a 7-foot, 3- or 4-weight. Effective flies include a variety of popular patterns, in sizes 14 through 18: Elk Hair Caddis, Stimulator, Adams, BH Prince Nymph, Copper John.

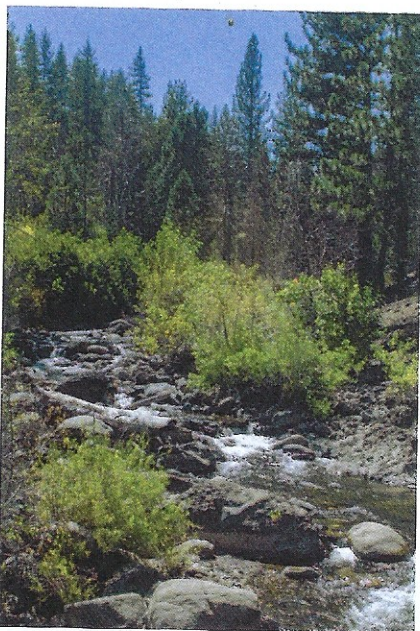


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From US Route 395 in Minden, Nevada, drive south on State Route 88 for 14 miles to Woodfords. Turn left onto SR 89 and continue through Markleeville, California, to the SR 89/4 junction. Go right and follow SR 4 for 2.4 miles to the creek, which is open from the end of May through November 15. Markleeville's Creekside Lodge, (530) 694-2511, www.creekside-lodge.com, and Woodfords Inn, (530) 694-2111, www.woodfordsinn.com, offer lodging.



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