

## Woods Lake and Woods Creek, CA

By Don Vachini

The predawn sun was barely a glow as I glimpsed the glasslike surface of Woods Lake. Set amid smooth granite and surrounded by pine, fir, and alder forest, the lake had a serene, backcountry feel to it—and, thankfully, a few rise forms.

Located at the end of a signed spur road 2 miles off California State Route 88 near Carson Pass, this 16-acre gem rests at 8,200 feet in El Dorado National Forest along the border of the Mokelumne Wilderness. Snowmelt from the hunched shoulders of 9,585-foot Elephants Back and nearby 10,381-foot Round Top feeds both Winnemucca and Round Top Lakes, and their escaping creeks provide sustenance to Woods Lake, nearly a mile below. From here, outflowing Woods Creek tumbles downhill less than a mile to enter Caples Lake, a large storage impoundment.

Woods Lake provides enough aquatic and terrestrial-born food for its rainbow and brook trout to reach about 10 inches. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife augments these populations with modest stockings of 10- to 12-inch rainbows. Occasional holdover rainbows grow even larger. The brookies, fewer in number, are self-sustaining, having washed down from Winnemucca Lake.

That crisp July morning, my son, Matt, and I followed the well-worn trail surrounding the shoreline, gaining easy access to a variety of trout-holding structure. Bypassing the shallow, funneled outlet, we hiked toward the sounds of water cascading off the jagged, rocky cliff

face. From above the most prominent inlet, we watched a half-dozen trout patrolling in a circuitous pattern. An inquisitive water ouzel watched as Matt slipped a tandem rig into a turbulent seam. Moments after the offerings slowed, a silvery, 10-inch wild rainbow lit up the ebony depths while attempting to dislodge the dropper nymph. Amid this mild commotion, the ouzel flitted to a less congested location.

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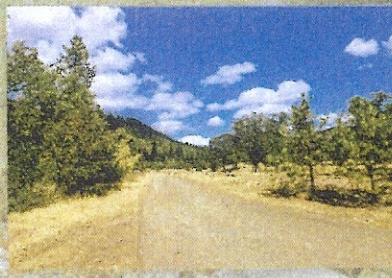




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During our hour-long session the action matched the cycles of insects with periods of fish activity. Oxygenated infusions and insects washing in from above kept the trout congregating in the neighborhood of the submerged ledge stretching between the two inlets.

Most of the time, 5X tippet is perfect for presenting size 14 through 18 caddisfly, midge, ant, and mosquito patterns. Comparaduns, Humpies, and Renegades will deceive active feeders early and late in the day. However, the most universally effective setup pairs a beadhead nymph (Bird's Nest, Copper John, Prince) under an Elk Hair Caddis, Mosquito, or Parachute Adams. Fish the tandem in the inlets, over drop-offs, and in the shoreline shallows.

Guarded by stunted willows and home to truncated residents that seem obligated to ingest whatever food form happens to fall in their lap, Woods Creek bounces steeply down from the lake in relative anonymity. The most efficient early-season tactic is to use short-line presentations to drift a beadhead nymph through swirling eddies, seams, and pockets; dancing a tiny dry becomes a solid strategy when flows ebb.

From Jackson, follow SR 88 east for 70 miles to the Woods Lake Road turnoff. The season runs from the end of April through November 15, although the access road can open late or close early. Woods Lake Campground, (530) 622-5061, [www.fs.usda.gov/recreation/eldorado/recreation/?recid=78528](http://www.fs.usda.gov/recreation/eldorado/recreation/?recid=78528), and Woodfords Inn, (530) 694-2111, [www.woodfordsinn.com](http://www.woodfordsinn.com), in Markleesville, offer lodging options. Though certainly not trophies, the feisty rainbows and bejeweled brookies of the Woods Lake–Woods Creek complex present refreshing challenges for serenity-seeking anglers.

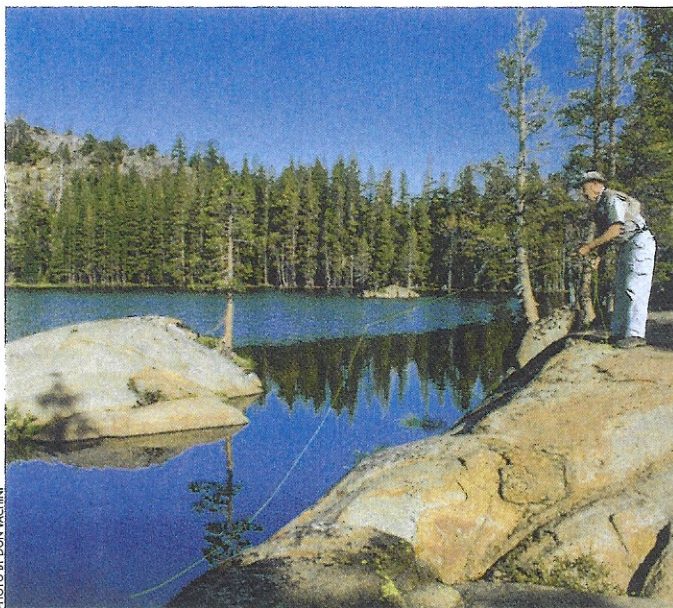


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