



PHOTO BY DON VACHINI

### Long Lake, CA By Don Vachini

**A**fter gaining nearly a thousand feet in elevation over a steady, 2-mile uphill pull, Bandon Parker and I crested a saddle and arrived at the outlet to Long Lake. Framed by majestic Sierra Nevada peaks, its mirror-like surface shined deep azure in the morning light and was pocked with several rise rings. Nothing seemingly had changed since my last visit more than 30 years ago. In that instance, my two backpacking partners and I hustled past this lake on our way over Bishop Pass. On a tight timeline to reach our intended golden trout destination off the John Muir Trail, we couldn't spare the time to even make a few casts to eagerly rising trout.

Finally last October, I invited Parker to join in the return trek. Fairly large for a backcountry water, 29-acre Long Lake originates between 11,682-foot Chocolate Peak and 12,237-foot Hurd Peak. Snowmelt is captured in surrounding bowl-shaped Margaret, Spearhead, and Ruwau Lakes, then filters into Long Lake, forming the headwaters of the South Fork of Bishop Creek. Escaping flows trickle into South Lake and below here, the South Fork joins the Middle and North Forks. The main stem Bishop then descends 18 miles to enter the Owens River past the town of Bishop.

Surrounded by sparse timber, Long Lake, at 10,751 feet in the John Muir Wilderness, holds a solid aquatic insect population, and is fed by perennial feeder creeks. The lake reaches a maximum depth of 85 feet. Brook trout abound amid a smattering of rainbows and browns. Many of the fish range from 10 to 12 inches, quite large for an alpine lake.

Although eager to sample the lake, Parker and I took a few moments to seek a higher vantage. As opposed to the numerous pothole-type lakes common to loftier elevations, Long Lake is elongated—hence, its name—with steep drop-offs very near shore. While its outlet area is fairly shallow, the upper two-thirds grow progressively deeper with submerged boulders and rock piles offering the fish plenty of structure-rich habitat. The lake's southernmost cove accepts the willow-choked South Fork of Bishop Creek, a prime spawning venue.

From the trail hugging the shoreline's middle section, we could see individual fish prowling the near-shore shallows a mere fin flip from the security of deep water. Here, an olive Woolly Bugger retrieved

parallel to a rocky, underwater ledge deceived a pair of silvery 10-inch rainbows.

Descending from Spearhead Lake, the inlet creek has gouged out a large, fan-shaped pocket well out into the lake and trout were visible all along its light-colored bottom. With plenty of backcasting room, our 9-foot, 4-weight rods were perfect for presenting size 14 and 16, beadhead Psycho Princes and Brassies deep through the water column. Each feisty brookie accepting our twitched offerings set the translucent shallows afire with autumnal hues.

When a slight wind chop distorted the surface, Copper John and Zebra Midge nymphs beneath high-riding, size 10 or 12 dry flies (Elk Hair Caddis, Stimulator, and Adams) proved effective on the lesser-wary trout. Upslope zephyrs regularly air-drop various winged terrestrials on the water, so ant and beetle imitations can also be attention grabbers.

To reach the trail to Long Lake, begin in Bishop and follow West Line Street (State Route 168) for 15 miles. Turn left onto South Lake Road and follow it 6 miles to the Bishop Pass Trailhead parking lot. Parchers Resort, (760) 873-4177, [www.parchersresort.net](http://www.parchersresort.net), offers cabins, supplies, and reliable trail and angling advice. The season is open from the last Saturday in April through November 1.

An invigorating day hike combined with the potential for three trout species makes Long Lake a rewarding destination. I know I don't plan to wait another 30 years before sampling it again.



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