

California: Milton Reservoir/By Don Vachini

Tiny Milton Reservoir sits amid thick pine cover at an elevation of 5,695 feet in Tahoe National Forest, 34 road miles from Truckee. Constructed during the mid-1960s, this sparkling 15-acre jewel carries a reputation as a challenging brown trout fishery.

Originating as snowmelt and seepage from 7,418-foot Findley Peak and nearby Bald Ridge, Woodcamp, French, and Pass Creeks, along with Dam Fine Spring, gather in vast, 1,000-acre Jackson Meadows Reservoir along the west slope of the Sierra Nevada. The Middle Yuba River spills from the reservoir's dam, then flows 1.5 miles northwest to reach Milton Reservoir, a regulating impoundment. Below Milton, the river continues its westward descent down a deep, difficult-to-access canyon before eventually entering the main Yuba River below New Bullards Bar Reservoir.

During the early 1980s, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) added Milton Reservoir to its wild trout program. In 1993, it 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 prodigious numbers of non-game bullhead catfish in the reservoir, CDFW mandated a two-trout limit with none over 12 inches, and limited fishing to single barbless hooks and no bait.

This aesthetic still-water fishery currently maintains wild populations of both browns and 'bows, with most fish ranging from 10 to 14 inches. Larger *Salmo trutta* specimens, between 16 and 19 inches, are uncommon, and a few browns from 5 to more than 10 pounds haunt these waters. With cold year-round flows, ample aquatic vegetation, a healthy and varied insect endowment, plus high-calorie forage, browns can grow fast.

Typically, fishing is best from mid-May through July and late-September through October (the reservoir is open

from the last Saturday in April through November 15). During late spring, rainbows ascend the short section of the Middle Yuba above Milton for recruitment purposes; browns do so in the fall.

The inlet's moving water proves to be a key gathering point for residents of all sizes. Although shore anglers can reach this structure, a float tube, small pram, or paddleboard is advantageous. Hugging the stalky weeds while dining on midges, mayfly emergers, and caddisfly pupae, juvenile trout attempt to remain unnoticed by the highly piscivorous denizens. Suspended under an Adams, flying ant pattern, or *Calibaetis* mayfly dun pattern, a size 14, 16, or 18 orange, olive, or gray-hued beadhead Brassie, WD-40, or Zebra Midge, maneuvered against the marshy-edged fringes with a 4- or 5-weight system, is a deadly tactic for catching energetic pan-sizers. When probing the moving water for larger fish, keep your flies deep and the indicator matching the speed of the water. Where the flow ebbs upon entering the channel, let the weighted fly bounce along the gravelly bottom.

Hefty loner browns remain the main attraction for many anglers fishing Milton Reservoir, but these fish are finicky, fickle, and deep. If targeting the reclusive hook-jaws is your bag, use a 7- or 8-weight rod with a high-density sinking line to dredge the depths, sporting a minnow-imitating yellow, brown, or purple Zonker, Muddler, Matuka, or Articulated Leech. Presenting parallel to shorelines that drop off rapidly or erratically trolling along the edges of the deeper channels can tempt a heavyweight to burst from the safety of the depths to smash an imitation. Towing a pair of in-tandem streamers can also bring the promise of a strike. Early and late in the day,

taking advantage of shadows, are prime times to pursue Milton's midsize residents. The larger fish will sometimes abandon their senses during the magic hour before dark, when they prowl for bite-size surface feeders. Don't expect red-hot action on this fishery. Do relish an opportunity to match technical wits with some wary and well-educated browns.

To reach Milton Reservoir from Interstate 80 in the town of Truckee, drive 14 miles northwest on State Route 89, then turn left (west) onto paved Henness Pass Road (aka Dog Valley Road) for 17 additional miles to the dam at Jackson Meadows. For current road conditions and information, contact Mountain Hardware and Sports, (530) 587-4844, www.mountainhardwareandsports.com.

