



On a cool, October morning, Brandon Parker and I arrived at a tiny impoundment framed in golden aspen trees and tucked high in Bishop Creek Canyon. As we approached the reservoir's inlet channel, anticipation ran high because something large was obviously disturbing the surface.

The expansive Bishop Creek watershed originates from several majestic Sierra Nevada peaks, with snowmelt from four 13,000-foot-plus-high summits—Mounts Emerson, Lamarck, Darwin, and Goode—collecting in South, Sabrina, and North Lakes. In turn, these headwaters feed the South, Middle, and North Forks of Bishop Creek, and they are all part of a unique water-manipulation project, initiated at the turn of the 20th century. In 1908, a dam constructed on the Middle Fork created a 6-acre diversion reservoir, which gathers a second source of flowage via the South Lake pipeline. A portion of water from appropriately named Intake 2 (at 8,094 feet in elevation) is then diverted into a large Southern California Edison pipe for both hydroelectric generation and deployment. Below here, the remaining Bishop Creek rushes another 16 miles down canyon through the town of Bishop and into the Owens River.

Recipient of icy water and surrounded by timber, and a viable spawning tributary with ample aquatic insect life, Intake 2, within the Inyo National Forest adjacent to California

State Route 168, supports wild brook, brown, and rainbow trout. Most typically range between 7 and 10 inches. However, the main draw for anglers is the prodigious number of 10- to 13-inch rainbows stocked during the summer months by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. In addition, private concessionaires augment these stockings with plenty of 2- to 8-pound specimens.

By late September, stockings cease, air temperatures drop, fall foliage garnishes the landscape, and the summer crowds vanish. Such was the case on our recent visit. Parker shot a long cast to the inlet's opposite edge where the water seemed to bulge, but only served to spook a brown trout that rushed away, pushing a large wake. The trout's butter-yellow flank caught the emerging daylight as the fish dashed to safety. Extremely spooky and reclusive, a few such 2- to 3-pound apex predators reside here. And, as they commonly patrol back and forth between Intake 2 and the Middle Fork, unwary stocked rainbows are staples in their diet.

Whether summer, when pods of stockers run a gauntlet through elbow-to-elbow gear anglers, or fall, when wild trout take center stage, moving water remains the key to success here. The pipeline's underwater entrance at the dam delivers highly-oxygenated flows but also creates conflicting, quirky currents. Dredging weighted, size-14 through -18 BH Hare's Ear and Pheasant Tail Nymphs in and out of this high-degree-of-difficulty turbulence demands sharp focus and hair-trigger reflexes. Parker and I kept our wits about us and were rewarded with a pair of silvery holdover rainbows.

In contrast, the incoming, willow-lined Middle Fork channel affords ample wading and casting room before it rapidly falls off to depths of about 30 feet. After a brief dispute with a pied-billed grebe to settle fishing rights, we began working structure lower in the water column with size 8 through 12 BH and tungsten-head Woolly Buggers, Matukas, and leeches in a variety of shades. As our flies slowed and bounced over ledges, some were heartily hammered by aggressive juvenile browns, each displaying the intensity of their future predatory prowess. Carry both floating and sinking lines for fishing Inlet 2, which can be efficiently worked either from shore or float tube. The season runs from the last Saturday in April through November 15.

Inlet 2 is located 16 miles southwest of Bishop on SR 168 (West Line Street in Bishop), just past the South Lake Road turnoff. Small Inlet 2 Campground (Inyo National Forest) has 11 first-come first-served campsites, along with five walk-in campsites. Nearby Bishop offers all services (see www.bishopvisitor.com).

