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High Lakes Fishing Is Worth The Walk

BY HARRY MORSE

High lake fishing experience is one of the most memorable in Washington State. Wilderness scenery surrounding the lakes is always spectacular and this year the ice came off mountain lakes early, giving the fisherman and hiker a headstart on the high country.

High country lakes are popular summer retreats for the fisherman willing to spend a day or part of one walking into a remote lake. Rainbow, cutthroat, and eastern brook trout are the angler's quarry in most of the high lakes. Best of all they are eager biters during July and August. Most lakes are stocked by foot, horse, or airplane.

Wildlife Agent Chuck Kohls of Naches patrols many of the high lakes in his district from White Pass to Chinook Pass. Using horses and foot patrols, he ranges from 10 to 15 miles a day. This way Chuck covers most of the area between White Pass and Chinook Pass and can give the myriad of lakes a personal inspection and evaluate how the stocking program has worked during the summer season.

Over the past four years, Chuck has seen a steady increase in numbers of fishermen from the Yakima area. High lakes fishing is a unique type of experience which he feels draws fishermen back year after year and recruits new ones willing to put in a little extra effort. The thrill of landing a nice cutthroat trout with the Goat Rocks Wil-

derness or Mount Rainier in the background is hard to equal.

In July and August most successful fishermen hike from one to four hours to reach the wilderness lakes. Experienced anglers carry an assortment of flies, lures, and baits. Light tackle and a variety of fishing methods are the best ways to ensure success. If you can fish several lakes on a trip you increase your chances of success. Plan a loop route that includes several lakes. Fishing and camping at more than one lake is a real pleasure.

Vary Your Strategy

Versatility is the key to success in back country lakes according to Regional Fish Biologist Jim Cummins. Jim suggests anglers select routes that will allow them to fish several lakes and use two or three fishing methods. Flies seem to work best during the early morning and late evening periods while bait and lures can be successful throughout daylight hours. High country lake fishing is unpredictable as both Kohls and Cummins point out. They had checked fishermen at a lake one morning who swore there wasn't a fish to be had. Later that day they checked different fishermen on the same lake with fat 10- to 12-inch cutthroat trout.

With angler numbers increasing, high lakes fishermen need to be good conservationists. Keep-

ing more fish than are needed for the evening meal usually leads to wastage of a precious resource. Few of these lakes have self-sustaining trout populations. Because of this, the Wildlife Department recommends catch and release as a method to spread out and extend the enjoyment of the high lake fishery. If the fishing is good, try to keep, as part of the day's limit, fish which have been hooked in the eye or gill or that have excessive bleeding.

High lakes and alpine lakes are planted with fish on a rotating basis of two to five years. Tiny rainbow, cutthroat, or eastern brook trout are hauled into the lakes in 2-1/2 to 5-gallon containers. The fish range from one-quarter inch to three inches in length. Many fish plants are done by volunteers in both Western and Eastern Washington. They pick up the fish at a hatchery and transport them to the trailhead, then give the baby fish a horseback ride or a back pack into a remote lake.

Aerial plants for the high lakes are scheduled each August. Fish are loaded into the Wildlife Department's plane and flown over and dropped into numerous lakes. Regional Fish Biologist Jim Cummins says few fish are lost in the aerial drops. Using the plane, lakes can be planted that only the stoutest of hikers can reach.

A majority of the high lakes are planted with cutthroat trout. The eggs for these plants come

out of broodstock from Twin Lakes, west of Wenatchee. This strain of cutthroat has been remarkably adaptable to the austere conditions of high and alpine lakes. The rainbow trout which are planted come from the Mount Whitney strain in California which were developed specifically for the granitic basin and alpine lakes of California. Growth rates are slow for the trout. Lakes are icebound for up to nine months and nutrients are low. It takes up to five years to grow a catchable high lakes trout. A 15- to 16-inch trout will be eight to 10 years old.

Practice Wilderness Ethics

Because of the fragile nature of the wilderness, high

country visitors are encouraged to use the pack-it-in, pack-it-out philosophy. In the fragile alpine habitat, campfire rings and trails last far longer than the warmth of the campfire or the time saved by cutting across a switchback. It takes decades for plants to return to a man-made scar. People pressure on the high country lakes has increased and good conservation practices are absolutely necessary.

Yakima, Kittitas, and Chelan counties are blessed with over 400 named high lakes and 200 unnamed lakes. In Yakima County, Kohls recommends Twin Sisters Lakes, Lily Lake, and Swamp Lake in the Bumping Lake area. Dewey Lakes are popular off the Cascade Crest trail south from Chinook Pass off Highway 410. Cougar Valley area off the Little Naches River

and into the Norse Peak Wilderness area is a beautiful spot. Kittitas County is blessed with some spectacular lakes. Three fine lakes out of the Cle Elum Lake area are Deep, Spade, and Hyas Lakes. Chelan County's Enchantment Lakes, Snow Lakes, Lake Stuart, and High Colchuck Lakes are some of the most scenic alpine lakes in the nation. Fishing is rated fair but scenery is magnificent. These areas receive heavy use so weekday trips are best if you are seeking solitude.

Remember to check with the U.S. Forest Service before you go regarding trail or fire closures. Take with you the best trail and topographic maps available and plenty of film to record the high mountain beauty. *ww*

Below: Backcountry fishing offers both scenery and success. HARRY MORSE-WDW



