

THE EAGLE LAKE BIBLE

PART I of II

INTERCEPTING EAGLE LAKE 'BOWS IN OCTOBER: TOOLS AND TACTICS, AND FAR MORE THAN JUST THE BASICS

We've logged over 32 years on the pristine waters of Eagle Lake, Northern California's premiere rainbow trout fishery. Consistently fishing any body of water gives you many a good lesson plus a working knowledge of what it takes to hook up with fish in the 3- to 7-pound range.

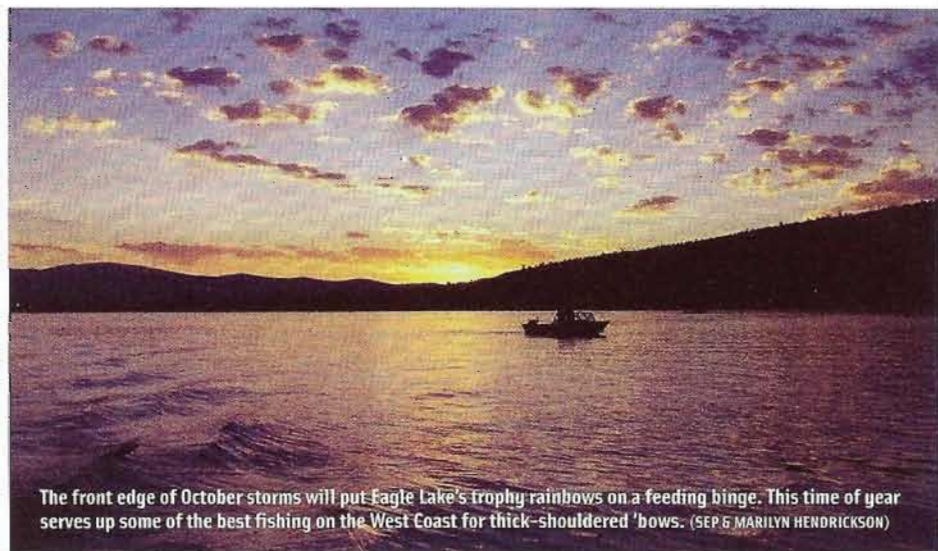
HERE'S HOW WE DO IT:

The difference between catching and fishing is a direct correlation between accumulated knowledge of the lake's makeup and fish behavior. It's equally important to know how to fish as when and where to fish. Some anglers figure they already know the basics, and simply get a line in the water. To connect with greater frequency and hook bigger, smarter fish, it takes much more than the basics to succeed. Understanding fish behavior and feeding habits will help to get tuned into the action.

The Eagle Lake environment:

Understanding their environment - and where, how and why they move within it - is another key for success.

Eagle Lake is made up of rocky shorelines, sandy beaches, underwater structure, vast areas of shallow water, tulle crowded shorelines, drop offs,



The front edge of October storms will put Eagle Lake's trophy rainbows on a feeding binge. This time of year serves up some of the best fishing on the West Coast for thick-shouldered 'bows. (SEP 6 MARILYN HENDRICKSON)

varying water temperatures and PH counts, and one significant seasonal creek, Pine Creek. The Eagle Lake Rainbow trout has a variety of food sources readily available: tui chub, redbside minnows, freshwater shrimp, leeches and aquatic insect life create the main food chain, with minnows and leeches offering the most protein.

Trout spend their time searching out and gorging on food supplies, then moving on to repeat the process in another part of the lake with yet another food source.

"Eagle Lake trout swim, eat and rest, and do very little else," points out retired DFG regional manager and biologist, Dr. Larry Eng.

THE WHEN-TO

Every fall, as days become shorter and

colder, Eagle Lake rainbows will feed heavily, building fat supplies in preparation for winter. Beginning in early October, they instinctively drop their guard to slam properly presented offerings fished in the right place at the right time. They binge on food sources that prefer the sun-warmed shallows, but can also be found in lesser numbers in deep water.

The onslaught of storms often triggers wide open bites but anglers need to be very cautious of rough water and boating conditions.

THE WHERE-TO

Hug the shoreline: Shallow shorelines become an increasingly popular place for trout to feed in October. They push minnows into the shallows and feed on circling schools of frantic baitfish. They

also feed on leeches in waters ranging from 18 inches to 6 feet deep.

Having the capability of intercepting rainbows feeding in these shallow waters, without spooking them, is another key to late season angling success.

Today's locators and fish-finding technology have given anglers a distinct advantage. With features such as GPS plotting, waypoints, underwater contouring and more, it becomes easier to find and stay near actively feeding fish. Not only does the locator look down below, it will also search out to the sides or out in front, enabling anglers to concentrate their efforts on more productive fish-holding areas.

North to South: Eagle Lake's entire



north end is shallow. From Pelican Point and the Youth Camp, water depth runs between 6 and 10 feet. Areas such as Big Troxel, Buck's Point, Ranch House, Castle, the airport tules and cinder pits are the most productive areas of the north end, and traditionally hold the biggest numbers of large rainbows.

To the south, the deeper summer-time angling waters of Eagle's Nest, Shrimp Island, Wildcat Point, Miners Bay and the marina also hold trophy trout, but not in the numbers found in the north end. —**Sep & Marilyn Hendrickson**

Marilyn Hendrickson with a typical Eagle Lake rainbow, which will be found in shallow water near the northern shoreline throughout October. (SEP & MARILYN HENDRICKSON)

THE HOW-TO

Stealth mode: We use the Minn Kota Terrova 36 volt, 101-pound-thrust electric motor to move our 20-foot Jetcraft into shallow water. The Terrova is equipped with a co-pilot system that wirelessly controls speed, direction, auto-pilot and on/off from anywhere in the boat. This stealth approach, trolling ¼ to 4 mph, allows us to enter the feeding zone.

Avoid trolling alongside or near boats using gas engines, as they may churn up the water and spook fish, scattering chances of a trophy.

Sideplaners get terminal tackle into places boats can't troll, allowing anglers to present offerings from 10 to 50 feet to the side of the boat, plus get in tighter to areas where fish would not expect a trolled offering to be found. They also spread lines out, keeping potentially tangled lines apart.

Shallow running: Topline this time of year, with offerings in the top 10 feet. We purchase a second rod stamp and run two rods - one each on a sideplaner, 30 feet to the side and 50 feet back - two more rods on our Scotty downriggers, running at 3 and 6 feet deep, 100 feet behind the boat. As the sun rises over the mountains, it may be necessary to drop deeper. In calm water, fish will drop down from the surface to 20 feet, to protect their eyes from the sunlight.

Downriggers will be needed to get down with accuracy. If it's choppy, the sun's rays will be deflected and fish will be nearer to the surface. Top quality rods and reels designed for use with 4- to 8-pound test quality monofilament fishing line, make the battle more en-

joyable and increase odds of success. Change speed and direction frequently to maximize the amount of surface area covered and the depths explored.

Eagle food: To imitate the primary food sources of minnows and leeches at Eagle Lake, use the scented two-inch trolling grubs by Sep's Pro Fishing. White mimics the lake's minnows, brown and black imitate leeches, and watermelon green, amber, orange and cinnamon cover the gambit of other minnow-imitating colors. Placing a single red Berkley Power Egg in front of the grub can make a difference in the number of strikes - this might appear as a bleeding, wounded minnow, or maybe the color contrast triggers the strike - either way, it increases the action.

Always use scent. Pro Cure's Trophy Trout Gel, made from tui chub minnows (found naturally in Eagle Lake) with powerful amino acids, create a scent path in the water and mask human scent, causing these rainbows to hang on a little longer, because it tastes and smells good. There aren't any nightcrawlers onboard our boat: they're too messy, and grubs work better and last longer.

Additional Options: There are other effective techniques and terminal tackle:

- Never overlook the old Eagle Lake favorite, a bare-threaded nightcrawler, slow trolled at a leech's pace - so slow, it's almost drifting.
- Small silver-and-gold lures like Luhr Jensen's Needlefish in the frog, redhead, bikini and cop-car patterns work well, especially when trolled near rocky points and drop-offs where minnows like to hide.

- Fast-trolling Rapalas at 2-4 mph is also a favored technique and allows an angler to cover more surface acres searching for fish. Troll Rapalas Husky Jerks in the 3- to 4-inch size in silver/black or orange/gold. They come equipped with fish-attracting rattles and are a deadly offering this time of year, most likely because of their natural appearance. With 100 feet out behind the boat you're fishing from 3 to 8 feet deep (depending on trolling speed). You're targeting fish waiting in ambush, and hoping for an impulse strike as the lure passes by.

- And for those of you too stubborn to change or experiment - "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" - use the old tried-and-true crawler or favorite minnow-imitating lure behind small flashers or dodgers to entice the 'bows to strike. Just make sure you've got plenty of scent on your offering.

Final October thoughts: It's easy. All you have to do is be in the right place, at the right time, with the right speed, right action, right vibration, right size, right depth, right color, right scent, with good quality equipment and state-of-the-art electronics. Add to that your angling skills and acquired knowledge, and you'll do just fine.

There's nothin' to it.

Next issue: As late fall and early winter begin to tighten their grip on Eagle Lake in November, tactics and locations change. The Eagle Lake rainbow become slow and lethargic in the cold water. Flyfishing, still fishing and finesse trolling tips and techniques coming next month in part II.