

Exploring Summer Stratification at Lake Camanche

by Jack Naves

During the heat of the summer, I'm usually busy chasing bass or kokanee at local foothill reservoirs. But on August 4th, I had a rare mid-week opportunity to fish with Rich Crispi of TW Fishing Guide Service to search

sonar units will also be able to detect the temperature zones – or at least the plankton blooms that form at the thermocline layer. Rich used his sonar unit and a 'search and destroy' method to find the thermocline Lake Camanche.

Rich met me at the fish cleaning station at 5:30 am and we were on the water before the sun was even up. There were some fresh rumors about kokanee being caught at the lake, which haven't been planted there since 1995. We figured that we would try targeting trout as the primary species, and hope for a few kokanee if we could find them.

Rich guided us out to the main body of the lake near the dam where we started trolling. Rich has four downriggers on his boat, so we were able to target four different depths to see where the fish were feeding. He instructed me to set my two rods at a depth of 50' and 60' respectively.

Rich's rods were set at 45' and 65', so we had a nice coverage of the water column where he suspected the thermocline layer had formed. The plan was to try to find a pattern and then focus on the zone where the fish were feeding. However, before I could even get my second rod down, my deep rod got slammed!

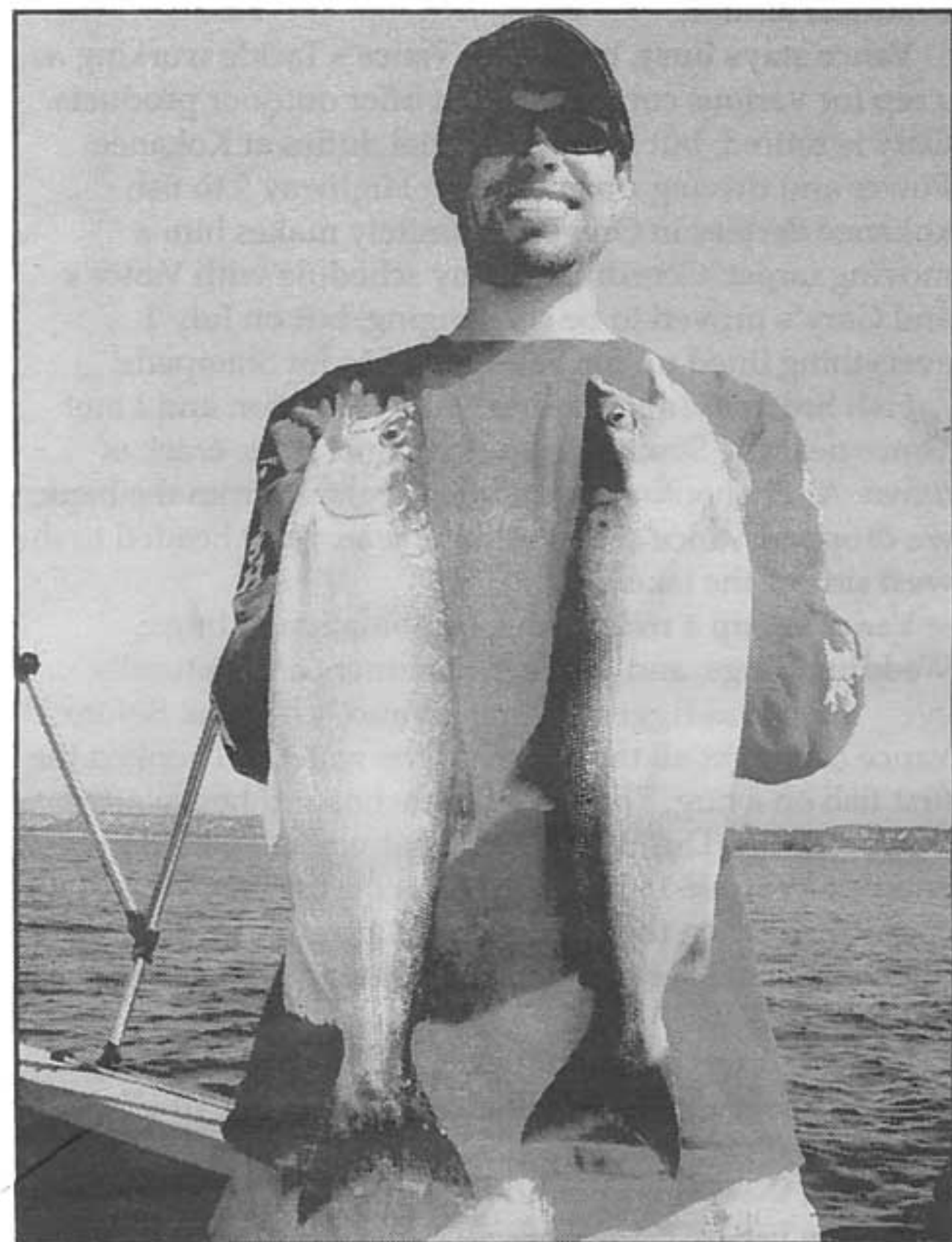
I slowly reeled the fish up to the boat, but just before it was within reach of the net it made several hard leaps and shook the hook. We both thought that it looked like a kokanee, but it was too dark to be sure. We had two other fish come unbuttoned, and then Rich was able to land a nice rainbow trout that hit at a depth of 45'.

Rich marked some plankton on his sonar unit down at about 50', and we also saw lots of fish hanging out at a depth of 55'. It didn't take us long to figure out that this was most likely where the thermocline layer had formed.

We focused our trout offerings at depths of 40' and 50' and set some kokanee rods down deeper. For trout, Rich suggested using small spoons behind dodgers. For kokanee, we used spinners and hoochies tipped with corn. Rich kept the boat speed between 1.3 and 1.7 mph, but he noted that he likes to speed up a little faster when trout go on the bite.

We had steady action, catching and releasing several trout throughout the morning. By about 9:00 am, the bite really slowed down. That's when I picked up the mystery fish.

I hooked a fish at 50' deep that immediately started ripping line out against my reel's drag. I thought that it might be one of the huge rainbow trout that lake management plants during the



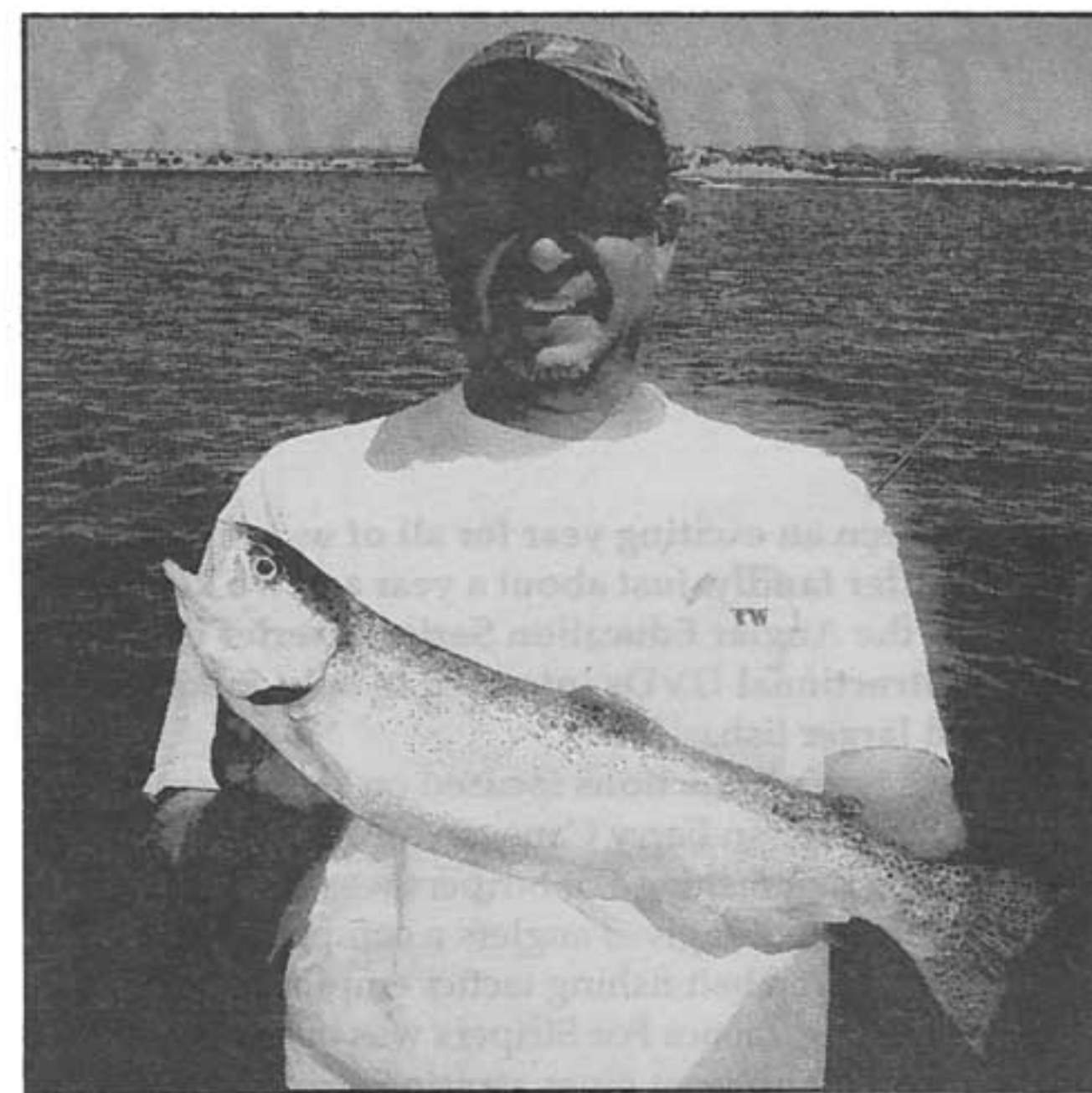
Kokanee were in short supply when Jack Naves visited Lake Camanche on August 4, but that didn't stop Jack and Rich Crispi from boating these beautiful sockeyes.

Photo courtesy of JACK NAVES, Roseville.

for trout holding in the thermocline layer of Lake Camanche.

You see, during the summer months most of our foothill reservoirs stratify into a series of distinct temperature layers that hold fish at different zones in the water column. The thin middle layer, which is called the thermocline, has the right balance of water temperatures and dissolved oxygen levels. The condition attracts plankton, baitfish, and of course...trout! The water stays this way until the fall when it 'turns over' and the layers dissipate.

Once you know at which depth the thermocline layer has formed, it makes finding summer trout a lot easier. If you can afford one, you can buy a temperature meter that attaches to your downrigger ball. Most



Rich Crispi pulled this beautiful square tailed rainbow out of Lake Camanche's thermocline while trolling on August 4.

Photo courtesy of JACK NAVES, Roseville.

winter months. When Rich netted the fish, we noted that it wasn't a trout but indeed a fat 16" kokanee salmon!

Although the rumors about kokanee in Lake Camanche were true, the action the rest of the day was pretty slow. We continued to catch plenty of trout up in the thermocline layer, but I was only able to land one other kokanee salmon.

Despite the fact that we only landed two kokanee in about nine hours of fishing, the trout were ready and willing to bite. We picked up plenty of trout during the day, releasing all but one. Rich kept a nice holdover rainbow that hit a spinner behind a dodger. This fish had a nice square tail and was mostly copepod free.

Copepods are naturally occurring crustaceous parasites that attach themselves to the skin or gills of infected fish.

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They cause small round sores that look like red felt, so many people give infected fish the nickname of 'furry trout.'

These parasites are harmless to humans as long as you properly clean and cook your catch. Most people are deterred by the appearance of fish infected with copepods and release them anyway. Copepods thrive during hot summer months, but are absent during the winter when the water is cooler. I usually just remove the skin from my fillets so there is no evidence of copepods when it's time to eat.

One of the lessons I learned from Rich is that trout can still be found during the heat of the summer - you just have to go deeper to find them. Having four downriggers like Rich has on his boat makes it really convenient.

Alternatively, lead-core line can also be used, or you can just add some sinkers about 16" above your dodgers to get down to the thermocline layer. These methods just take a little more experimentation to get the depth figured out. Rich's experience fishing foothill reservoirs and quality gear helped us to spend more time catching and less time experimenting.

We ended our trip at 3:30 pm with about a dozen trout and two kokanee under our belts. Throughout the day, Rich was able to teach me lots of new stuff about fishing. It was a great learning experience, and a fun day of fishing all rolled into one.

If you are interested in fishing Lake Sonoma, Lake Berryessa, New Melones, Lake Pardee or Lake Camanche, be sure to contact Rich Crispi. He can be reached at TW Fishing Guide Service (415) 259-7071 or email him at richardcrispi@comcast.net.

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