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Fish Sniffer

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Sacramento River



Map Feature See Page 14

34 Years
Serving
Sportsmen

VOL. 35 - ISS. 24

Nov. 11 - 25, 2016

SEE OUR NEW BAJA
ROUNDUP SECTION ON
PAGE 27

Our
34TH
Year

"The Magazine For West Coast Sportsmen!"

The Shasta Lake Fall Trout Derby: Fishing in a Hurricane!



John Brassfield of Auburn with a nice limit of rainbows taken during the Shasta Lake Fall Trout Derby.

Photo by PAUL KNEELAND,
Fish Sniffer Staff.

The 17th annual Shasta Lake Trout Derby took place on the weekend of Oct. 15-16. The anglers were welcomed to a very full lake — only about 70 feet down from the top. We have seen it much lower in the spring! As always, The Fish Sniffer was honored to help sponsor this fun event, put on by the Shasta Lake Business Owners Association.

I fished with my good friend John Brassfield, owner of the Trucksmart stores in Rocklin and Auburn, in the Fish Sniffer's 21' Rogue Jet Coastal. We arrived at Sugarloaf Cottages Resort in Lakehead on Thursday evening and greeted the rest of our party: Bruce Wicks and

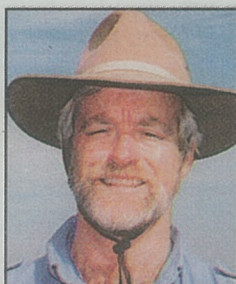
Al Fiske of Foresthill and Dave Barsi of Oak Run and Steve Fistler of Clear Lake. We settled in to our comfortable cabin,

and had cocktails and a steak barbeque as we made plans for our Friday of pre-fishing.

The weather for the weekend didn't look good — lots of wind and rain were being forecast for most of the north state. Friday morning we launched the boats from the Forest Service ramp and headed out with an overcast sky and a 15 mph breeze blowing in from the south.

John and I started fishing at Marshmallow point and trolled north past the mouth

of O'Brien Inlet. We were marking lots of



GONE
FISHING
by Paul Kneeland

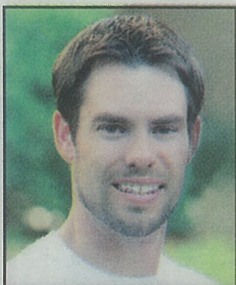
Right Place, Right Time for Sacramento Salmon

When fishing for migrating salmon in the Sacramento Area, timing is as important as just about anything. As we all know from experience, you can't catch fish when there aren't any fish to be caught.

I experienced this firsthand during the third weekend of September. On Sept. 17 and 18, I took a couple of half-day trips to my favorite salmon trolling grounds in the Sacramento metropolitan area. Though I tried my best, there just didn't seem to be any fish around. We ended the weekend without as much as a grab.

The following weekend, I hit the road again, as the call of the screaming clicker was too much to resist. As I eased my rig onto Interstate 80 in the pre-dawn morning, the Otis Rush song, "Right Place, Wrong Time" came onto the radio. I chuckled out loud, as this was a fitting title for my two previous trolling adventures. I was hoping that my upcoming voyage was going to be more of a 'Right Place, Right Time' kind of affair.

After launching the boat in the Sacramento River with my dad on Sept. 25, I started to prepare our gear. I've wanted to try a new trolling technique ever since reading Dan Bacher's article last fall on using Brad's Super Bait Cut Plugs with Captain James Netzel of Tight Lines Guide Service.



WHAT'S HOT
FRESHWATER
by Jack Naves

My dad and I set up two rods with cut plugs behind flashers. On our other two rods, we employed Silvertron spinners, which we've been using with great success for years.

In my boat, the two side rods are set back shorter than the rear rods to avoid tangles. Because of this, these rods catch more fish because they present the lures to the fish first. We ran the experimental cut plugs on the side rods. I figured that if we caught more fish on the spinners, it meant that the salmon had passed up on the cut plugs.

Our first trolling pass produced nothing, so we shot upstream and started trolling back downriver. About halfway down our



This huge hooked jawed Chinook smashed a Brad's Super Bait Cut Plug lure. Jack Naves was trolling the Sacramento River near Freeport on September 25 when the big fish hit.

Photo by JACK NAVES, Fish Sniffer Staff.

Reclamation Wasted
\$32 Million on
Klamath Irrigators
See Page 12



Spotlight on
Conservation

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STAFF TACKLE

What We're Using

Paul Kneeland - fished the Lake Shasta Trout Derby with John Brassfield of Trucksmart stores in the Fish Sniffer 21' Rogue Jet Coastal. They caught rainbow trout to 2.75 pounds using a new Lamiglas Kwik Series 8' light action Composite trigger stick rigged with an Daiwa ICV15 Accudepth level wind reel loaded with 8 lb test Yozuri Hybrid line. They trolled golden perch Acme Kastmasters and black shad Trout Apex lures on the surface and at 30 deep and 2.2 mph off the Canon Downriggers.



Cal Kellogg - focused on deer hunting this week. For hunting in eastern Tehama County's lava country, Cal utilized a Remington Model 700 in 7mm Remington magnum. For optics, Cal employed Leopold binoculars and a Vortex Ranger 1000 range finder. Other gear included a Leatherman Wave multi-tool, Lowa Renegade waterproof hiking boots and Grunden's Gage zipper fly raingear.



Wes Ward - targeted shallow fall bass at Camp Far West Reservoir with WarBaits Swimjigs. Casting into flooded weedlines with a Lew's 6.4:1 BB1 Speed Spool Reel on a Cousins RAZE Mag Bass rod, the jigs were slow rolled near the bottom. A 12# P-Line Fluorocarbon leader tied to 30# Power Pro Hi-Vis braid allowed for solid hooksets.



yards of 50 to 65 pound braided line is a must.

Terminal tackle and rigging for diamond backs is simple and straightforward. Since sturgeon are notoriously light biters a sliding sinker rig is at the heart of the terminal set up. To begin rigging, pass the main line through a plastic slider sleeve and then attach a large lock snap swivel. Since sturgeon frequent areas with heavy current and you want the bait stationary on the bottom pyramid sinkers from 3 to 10 ounces are the preferred weight.

In the old days, 40-inch wire leaders tipped with two large Kahle hooks were standard fair among sturgeon anglers. Today, most sturgeon enthusiasts prefer short 18 to 20 inch leaders constructed of 80 or 100 pound test monofilament.

Sturgeon are strictly bottom feeders. If your bait is pushed off the bottom by the current a sturgeon won't take it. Using a short leader lessens the chance that the current will raise the bait off the bottom. For added insurance, I like to place a ½ ounce egg sinker or bullet weight on the leader above the hook.

In times past, anglers routinely utilized a pair of hooks while sturgeon fishing, but these days we are restricted to using a single barbless hook.

I use 8/0 Gamakatsu or Owner octopus hooks with the barbs removed. These hooks are exceptionally strong and sharp. Sturgeon have a tough leathery mouth and an ultra sharp hook is important.

Now that we've gotten the rod, reel, and terminal gear out of the way it is time to discuss sturgeon baits. Mature sturgeon eat a variety of morsels including marine worms, clams, shrimps, crabs, snails, and dead baitfish.

In days gone by, grass shrimp, ghost shrimp, and mud shrimp were the only options for the serious sturgeon hunter. Today those baits are still productive and popular, but there are other highly effective choices that have come to light.

One of the problems with using shrimp baits is that they are expensive and highly attractive to non-target fish. Meaning you'll have to deal with a lot of nibblers stealing your bait while waiting for Mr. Sturgeon. Having said

that, shrimp remain the best choice when fishing in the north bay below the Benicia Bridge.

In Suisun Bay and the Delta shrimp remain popular baits, but lamprey eel, salmon roe, and threadfin shad have all become recognized sturgeon slayers. During the fall and early winter uncured salmon roe is hard to beat with eel coming in a strong second.

Eel is my hands down favorite bait. It is very durable and the sturgeon gives the rod a strong pump when they try to suck it off the hook.

Some anglers feel a rod balancer is a critical piece of equipment that will dramatically increase the number of bites that result in hook ups. Other anglers go with standard rigid rod holders. When fishing from my own boat I prefer using balancers.

A balancer is simply a Y-shaped rod holder that the rod sets in teeter-totter fashion. When a sturgeon picks up the bait the rod dips without the fishing feeling resistance. When the rod dips and stays down, you know the bait is in the sturgeon's mouth and then it is just a matter of slamming the hook home.

The best tackle and bait won't put sturgeon in the boat if you don't locate fish. To do that you'll need a high-resolution sonar unit that is capable of showing fishing holding tight to the bottom. Cruise areas that feature drop offs, ledges, holes, and clam beds, looking for large fish holding on or near the bottom. Sturgeon move with the current, so when some fish are marked you'll want to anchor about 125 yards down current and get your bait on the bottom quickly.

Sturgeon can be caught at any stage of the tide day or night. However, the action is typically most consistent during periods of strong tidal movement. Finding productive sturgeon spots is a matter of scouting. Once you locate an area that holds fish mark it on your GPS, so you can return to it with confidence.

Before you embark on your first sturgeon fishing adventure be warned that it's an additive sport revolving around hours of meticulous waiting and moments of adrenaline pumping excitement. Land that first keeper and you'll never be the same!

WHAT'S HOT FRESHWATER:

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

run, I heard the "zzz-zzz-zzz" sound I've been waiting to hear all season.

"Fish on," I yelled as I jumped out of my seat. My first hookup of the season, and the fish had hit the experimental cut plug rig! My dad grabbed the net, and I led the fish to the side of the boat.

We quickly learned that the long leaders associated with the cut plug rigs makes the netting process a little bit tricky. I lifted my eight-and-a-half foot rod as high as I could, and my dad scooped the silvery salmon into the net. The fish was a bright seven pound female, and it still had a few scales intact.

During our next pass downstream, my dad hooked a salmon that came off after a few seconds. The fish had again grabbed the cut plug setup. It was proving that salmon were grabbing the cut plugs at first sight.

At the end of the pass, we were just about to turn around when my clicker started screaming. I picked up the rod, and the fish just kept on going. "It's still taking line," I relayed to my dad. A moment later, the fish went completely airborne, flipping out of the water like a large-mouth bass would do.

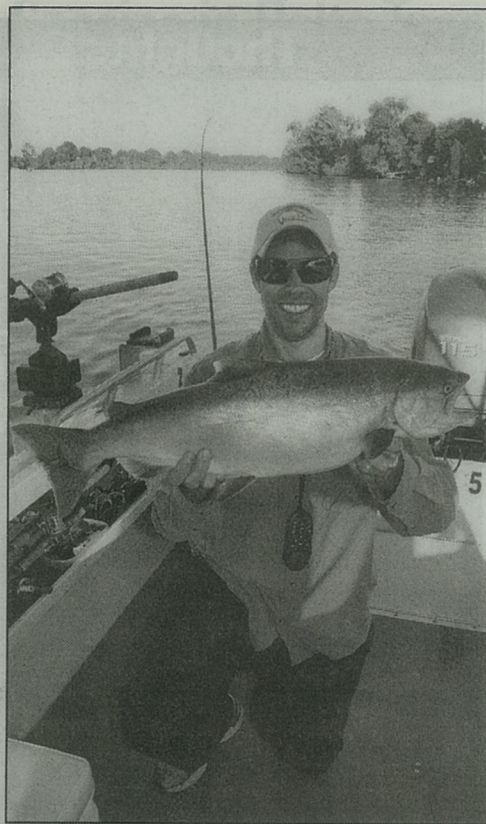
I could tell it was a male by the reddish coloring, but I didn't think it was huge, just because the big males don't usually go flying out of the water like this one had done.

The salmon went airborne two more times and took us out into the middle of the river. This fish was really putting up a battle, so I used my electric trolling motor to head back upstream towards the surging salmon.

With one last heave, I lifted the salmon to the surface, and my dad slipped the net underneath the fish. I couldn't believe the size of the fish, considering how many times it had leaped completely out of the water. The fish went 23.5 pounds, the biggest salmon I have caught in a number of years. It will make for a great fish in the smoker.

Later that morning, our last fish of the day earned its freedom by busting a hole through my landing net as we lifted it into the boat. That was definitely a first in my book, but we weren't too disappointed since we already had two nice fish in the cooler. I've had that net for years, and it looks like it finally needs some replacement netting.

Aside from some new netting, I'll definitely be picking up a few more cut plugs at the tackle store. While spinners will always have a



Jack Naves had a big day trolling the Sacramento River on September 25 landing several kings including this beautiful chromer.

Photo by JACK NAVES, Fish Sniffer Staff.

place in my book, cut plugs are something that I will continue to experiment with this fall.

After my trip, I spoke with Captain James Netzel of Tight Lines Guide Service about using cut plugs. He said has been using them with great success since last fall.

James said he runs his cut plugs 36 inches behind an 11 inch agitator fin flasher, which is basically a large plastic spinning dodger. He likes to keep his speed between 3.2 and 4 miles per hour trolling downstream, so the flasher rolls about one time per second.

He runs the flasher a few feet behind a standard spreader setup, and uses a dropper weight in the ten-ounce range. James utilizes 9.5 to 10.5 foot rods to aide with the netting process. He stuffs the cut plugs full of canned tuna every 20 to 30 minutes.

As autumn progresses, the good days will outnumber the bad days for salmon fishing in the Capitol City region. October is my favorite month, but fish will be present in the system all the way until the closure in December. Now it the time to get out there and play the odds of hooking one, be it by spinner or be it by cut plug.

Host: SEP HENDRICKSON

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