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Huge Berryessa Kokanee Reward Persistent Anglers

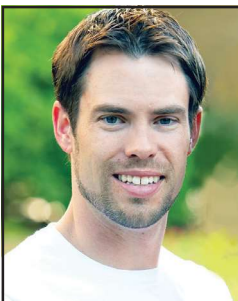
As we approach the tougher months of kokanee fishing, the reward on some lakes will be drag-ripping, trophy-sized footballs. Easy limits will not be the norm, but are you willing to risk a tough bite for the chance at a twenty-inch kokanee? When I don't have my sights set on Kokanee Power derbies, there is a big bull's-eye on Lake Berryessa.

Being only about ninety minutes from my house, choosing to fish Lake Berryessa this time of year is pretty much a no-brainer for me. The lake typically kicks out the biggest kokanee in the state. An elusive twenty-inch kokanee is swimming around out there right now, and I'm not going to pass up my shot at it!

Will your next trip to Berryessa yield a twenty-incher? I've already seen three confirmed fish over nineteen inches landed this year. In recent weeks, I've been able to make three trips to Lake Berryessa. While we haven't been able to put quick

limits into the boat, we have been able to land several fish approaching eighteen inches. One of these trips kicked off early on a Friday morning with my kids Grace and Adam.

On Friday May 28, we got an early jump and had several fish in the boat right off the bat. It was not a hot bite by any means, but we grinded it out until 12:30 pm when the kids went for a swim back in Capell Cove. We had ten kokanee in the box, and the size was good. Six of the fish were over 16 inches, with two of those measuring over 17



WHAT'S HOT by Jack Naves



Grace Naves poses with a 17" kokanee she landed at Lake Berryessa on June 26. The fish slammed a size 1.5 glow-belly Hot Spot Apex in fluorescent pink behind a 4.5" teardrop dodger. The fish was caught at 45 feet deep trolling 1.6 miles-per-hour.

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The Great Crew On The New Eldorado III Put Limits Of Salmon On The Boat



Fish Sniffer reader, Charles Brooks from Esparto, nailed this healthy king salmon while fishing with the New Eldorado III. Photo Courtesy of Ernie Marlan

The salmon season opener in the San Francisco region did not disappoint. The charter boats have been putting up easy limits and most private boaters have as well. These amazing fishing reports inspired me to book a trip with the New Eldorado III out of Berkeley, California.

I will tell you all about the amazing fishing but first I need to take some time and tell you that the crew stole the show. Captain Shawn was behind the wheel and the two deckhands were Scott and JR. I have fished on a lot of charter boats and it is rare to see the captain, and two deckhands work together as closely as these three do.

Trolling for salmon on the ocean requires a tremendous amount of work for the deckhands. Preparing baits, keeping lines from getting tangled, untangling lines, tying leaders are a few of things that they do. I was most impressed watching the deckhands clear lines for anglers to eliminate tangles when another angler was hooked up on a fish. Over and under. Then under and over and



GONE FISHING by Ernie Marlan

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What We're Using



Ernie Marlan - fished with the New El Dorado III for salmon. Trolling anchovies proved to be productive with 46 salmon caught for 23 anglers. Ernie used custom rod built by C4 Custom Rods teamed up with a Okuma Tesoro spooled with 50lb FINS braid.



Paul Kneeland - fished Pyramid Lake with Joe Novelly, Steve Pestone, Paul Saviez and Brian Lockshaw in the Fish Sniffer Rogue Jet 21 Coastal. They caught Lahontan cutthroat trout to 10.4 pounds, using an Okuma 8'6" SST steelhead Rod with an Okuma Cold Water SS line counter reel loaded with 10 lb test Soft Steel line. They trolled 4 inch Silver Horde spoons in orange/Chartruese and Yakima Bait Mag Lips chartreuse with red dots, off Canon Downriggers at 25 to 45 feet deep and 2.7 mph.



Dan Bacher - fished for rainbow trout at Loon Lake in the Crystal Basin. He used a Berkley Ugly Stick GX2 6' 6" medium action spinning rod, teamed up with a Shakespeare GX235 spinning reel filled with 6 lb. test P-Line CX Premium Fluorocarbon Coated Line. He fished with rainbow Berkley PowerBait, nightcrawlers and 1/8 oz. gold and black Panther Martins.

WHAT'S HOT

continued from page 2

inches.

After speaking with several anglers fishing that day, I learned that most had struggled to land between only one and four kokanee. In our boat, we had employed some new trolling techniques that helped to kick our fish total a little higher.

Always one to experiment, I've been trying some new trolling methods this year. In addition to downriggers, I've been trying different ways to top line for kokanee late into the season. I've been testing a new electric rod holder called the 'Smart Jigger'. It has produced 16 to 17 inch kokanee while top lining without a downrigger.

The device pivots a built-in rod holder up and down while trolling. It allows the user to record a set pattern that repeats. I set one rod to stay still for about ten seconds, and then it makes a sudden pump to trigger strikes. The other rod is programmed to slowly pump the entire time. Both have caught kokanee, so the best way to assist trolling is yet to be determined. It's something that I'm going to keep experimenting with for sure.

Alternatively, you can top line without the machine and manually pump the rods or leave them still. This season at Berryessa, I have caught fish without downriggers around 50 feet deep using 3 ounce snap weights. The weights were clipped 50 feet in front of my dodgers, while letting out a total of 200 feet of line. As the fish drop deeper into the water column, either longer setbacks or heavier sinkers will be needed.

Top lining two rods with a total of six rods out is not a great move for beginners. Setback lengths, turns, and speeds all have to be closely monitored to keep tangles at a minimum. Be prepared to catch more fish, but you will also be dealing with more tangles as well.

My next Berryessa trip took place on June 19 during Father's Day weekend. This is the weekend each year that I get to subject my entire family to getting up at 2:30 am to go fishing. In this case, the super early start paid off, as the fish were biting before sunrise. After getting three in the box and losing several, they shut down until about 11:00 am. A little after noon, we switched gears in the heat and dragged the kids around the



This thick kokanee pushing 18 inches was taken on Lake Berryessa on June 18 by Jack Naves. Fish like this will continue to grow, giving us a legitimate shot at 20 inch kokanee this summer.

lake on the tube.

We ended that trip with nine in the box, but once again the quality was great. We had five kokanee over sixteen inches including two seventeen-inchers. At this point, I was convinced that the twenty-incher was right around the corner. I planned to go back the following weekend.

The night before my following trip, I spoke to Rich Crispi of TW Fishing Guide Service over the phone. He had great success that day, putting two limits of huge kokanee into the boat for his clients. He was able to give me some pointers, and remarked that, "Some days, you just have to have the right combination."

The following day was June 26,

and this time it was just my daughter Grace and I. Even though we could only run four rods, I made the decision to run one of my rods as a top line on the electric 'Smart Jigger' rod holder. It paid off, but I just couldn't close the deal as back-to-back hookups came off. The second was one of those heartbreaking losses right at the net, and I could tell that the kokanee was at least sixteen inches if not more.

Luckily it was not a derby, so the drop-to-your-knees pump-your-fist-at-the-sky devastation enactment wasn't necessary. We trolled on, and around 9:30 am the fish finally turned on for about 45 minutes. After the fish shut down, the final bite came at

10:48 am while I was on the phone with Rich giving him a live report.

Some days the lake will deal you the infamous 'Berryessa Beat Down', and you just have to give in or grind it out. We swam in the near 80 degree waters just after noon, capping a seven fish trip. One fish was just shy of eighteen inches, with one other going over seventeen. The thick meaty fillets made for great table fare during a family barbeque the following week.

During my recent trips, the fish have been holding between 45 and 65 feet deep. We have been focusing on the main lake near the Big Island, but Berryessa is a huge lake. I would expect that at some point soon the kokanee will either move further north or transition into the narrows. We typically run 4.5 inch teardrop-style dodgers at 1.6 miles-per-hour. The lures behind the dodgers have varied between Apex-style plugs to spinners. This includes the 'Assassin' Dakota-style spinner blades. For me, running these spinners with a pink blade and alternating pink and blue beads is a Berryessa standard.

Early in the morning before the sun is up, I like to run the glow-belly Apex-style lures in fluorescent colors like orange or pink. Once the sun comes up, I start to dive into blues, purples, and chrome-based plugs. You have to just keep experimenting, as on some days squids or smaller Apexes will be the ticket.

If you are up to the challenge, Berryessa, New Melones, or possibly Lake Shasta will be the places to try for trophy-quality kokanee the rest of this summer. If you want numbers, Bullards Bar, Boca, or Stampede will reward you with likely limits but possible launching issues. Regardless of where you will be fishing, remember to check ramp statuses the rest of this summer as dropping water levels take effect. I hope to see you out there with some twenty-inch kokanee in your coolers.

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