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# Fish Sniffer



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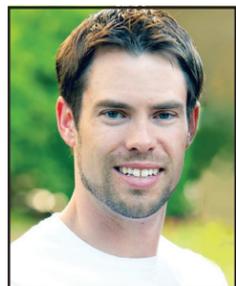


"The Magazine for West Coast Sportsmen!"

## Toughing it Out for Winter Trout

For us die-hard trout trollers, winter can be a tough time. We see good planting numbers at the foothill reservoirs, but reports can be spotty. Heavy rains will muddy up reservoirs, making soaking Power Bait a better option than trolling at most locations. For those of us determined to troll, what are the options?

Lake Camanche is located just downstream from Lake Pardee. It's fed by controlled flows that keep the main lake from getting muddy, even after a big rain storm.



**WHAT'S HOT**  
by  
**Jack Naves**

After several weeks of heavy rains, I made a last-minute plan to hit the water on December 30.

High rivers and cold water temperatures convinced me to switch my plans from fishing the delta, to instead trolling for trout at Lake Camanche. I hadn't fished Camanche in about a year, so I reached out to the one guy that knows trout fishing at the lake better than anybody - Robbie Dunham.

Robbie is the trolling guru of Lake Camanche, and he guides on the lake under Koke Machine Guide Service. When he said he was free to join me on a last-minute invite, I scrambled to get the trolling gear dusted off. My rods sitting in the garage were still set up for kokanee, so I had to do some late-night rigging to get ready for the trip.

The next morning, I was on the road by 5:00 am, twisting through the hilly terrain of gold country. I reached the Lake Camanche north shore facility near Ione at about 6:30 am. It was still dark out, and really cold! The lake had been rising from recent



**Robbie Dunham of Koke Machine Guide Service hoists two steelhead-quality rainbow trout at Lake Camanche on December 30. These fish will put on an acrobatic display when hooked, and the firm orange fillets provide excellent table fare when properly prepared back at home.**

Photo Courtesy of Jack Naves

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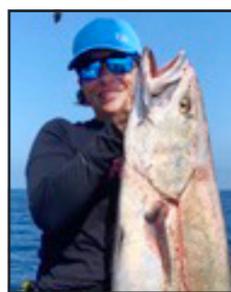
## Linging in the New Year on the Flying Fish

This season was a tough one to put lingcod on the deck on the central coast of California. Boats were lucky to land a couple on a trip, and typically none for most of the season. As it goes with certain seasons as the fish move in and out the fish counts reflect either banner years of lings

or a mere fraction of the previous year's numbers and sometimes a few years of smaller counts of lings in a row. As it has been in this area the last couple of years.

However, this year's counts did not intimidate Captain Wayne Bilcha of the Flying Fish from targeting these sought after catches on the second to last day of the 2021 rockfish season. There was a method to his reasoning...the anglers he had onboard that day. In November Jon Takahashi, owner of The Fishing Armory, booked this charter on the Flying Fish. He sent out his invites and filled the trip, with very experienced anglers.

When Captain Wayne checked out the manifest for the trip, he approached Jon and suggested with the amount of talent on board that we head for the shallows and attempt to catch limits of lings. Something the Flying Fish hasn't accomplished in two years. Why did Captain think we could do it now? He had already done his homework and scouted out the area, but what he discovered is the lings were not biting the typical



**GONE FISHING**  
by  
**Amy Wellenkamp**

ganoin setup with shrimp flies and squid, they were going after the swim baits. Now Captain Wayne had a boatload of experienced anglers who could wield a swim bait and catch these gators so he wanted to go for it.

I was very pleased to learn the news about us targeting these shallow water lings as Ernie Marlan was onboard with me that day. We hadn't fished a trip together in this region

where we specifically targeted lingcod in the shallows. I had been sharing stories with him about this being my favorite style of rockfish trip and now was able to share this experience with him. We set up our strategies and tackle the night before, rigging our light rods, adding plenty of swimbaits and a few jigs to our tackle backpacks. We were ready.

Arriving at the landing in time for the sunrise, and the fishing buzz was in the air. Seeing familiar faces and meeting new anglers, we were all excited to get out on the water. Once



**Amy Wellenkamp was fishing aboard the Flying Fish and using a Madame Lure Nubula Colored Sand Dab swim bait with a 3oz jig head when she caught this lingcod.**

Photo Courtesy of Flying Fish Sportfishing

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## STAFF TACKLE

### What We're Using



**Ernie Marlan** - fished the Central Coast beaches for surf perch and halibut. He was able to catch some quality surf perch on a 9ft Phenix Trifecta 6-12lb teamed up with a Van Stall reel spooled up with 20lb FINS Windtamer Braid. The lure of choice was a Calissa Jerkbait in sardine color.



**Paul Kneeland** - fished Pyramid Lake with John Brassfield of Trucksmart stores in the Fish Sniffer Rogue Jet 21 Coastal. They caught Lahontan cutthroat trout to 9 1/2 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 and Lyman plugs in brown and blue/white colors and Silver Horde spoons behind Vance's Cannonball flashers, trolling off Canon Downriggers at 10 to 30 feet deep and 2.7 mph.



**Dan Bacher** - fished for rainbow trout at Folsom Lake. 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 and 1/8 oz. gold and black Panther Martins.

## GONE FISHING

continued from page 2



This chunky rainbow trout slammed an orange Arctic Fox tube fly trolled at Lake Camanche on December 30. Jack Naves tips his flies with one-inch long pieces of night crawler to add some extra enticement. These flies can be trolled slow, or up to 3 miles-per-hour when weighted or clipped to a downrigger wire. A small Wigglesfin disc is run directly in front of the fly to impart action to the lure.

*Photo courtesy of Jack Naves*

storms, and we were able to carefully launch at the bottom of the main ramp in twilight.

Robbie had been on the lake a few days earlier, so he directed me to his hot spot. He had quickly been able to put over a dozen trout into the net during his previous trip, so I figured we would start getting hookups as soon as we had our lines wet.

For those of us who have fished for winter trout, we know that it's not quite that simple. In fact, during the first couple of hours, we only had one hit that didn't stick. Thoughts of "I should've fished the delta" were creeping into



Contemporary anglers will often discard the tastiest part of the trout – the skin. Scaled, dried, and scored trout skin will add a flavorful element to your dish when seared in a hot pan. Be sure to look up a crispy-skin recipe the next time a trout enters your cooler.

*Photo courtesy of Jack Naves*

my head. Was this going to be another one of those 'scratch bite', or 'lucky to get a few trout' days? No...I knew that with this guy in my boat, something was going to click at some point.

Sometimes you have to slow down and troll grubs or night crawlers when cold water temperatures make trout finicky. On this day, the water temperature was holding at 51 degrees, not too cold to troll fast in my book. We decided to cover lots of water, and trolled between 2 and 3 miles-per-hour all day. It was a gamble, but it allowed us to explore more of the lake.

We had been trolling diving plugs like Rapala Floating Minnows and Scatter Raps both top-lined and on side planers. With the lack of success, we deployed two of the downriggers to

start probing different lake depths. One of my favorite trout offerings is a small orange Arctic Fox tube fly behind a small Wigglesfin disc. I tie tandem size 2 octopus hooks behind the fly similar to a kokanee lure. On the front hook, I nose-hook a one-inch section of night crawler.

Although some may snicker at the use of bait, I'd rather grind out trolling with bait than go home empty-handed. We started testing out depths on the two downriggers, setting them anywhere between one foot down to seventeen feet of depth. By about 9:30 am we still hadn't landed a fish, so I made my way to the back of the boat to stretch my legs. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see the starboard downrigger rod pumping in the rod holder.

I quickly spun around, and soon had the rod in my hands. Robbie netted the fish like you would expect an experience guide to do, and we finally had our first fish in the box. Despite breaking the ice, the slow winter grind continued. We knew it was going to be one of those days where you just had to tough it out until the bite turned on.

Finally at noon, the downrigger rod at seven-foot deep got a nice rainbow trout. We quickly set the second downrigger to the same depth. Just like magic, the downrigger rods lit up, and we boated five nice rainbows within an hour's time. A less experienced angler might have bolted for the ramp at lunchtime, but our combined knowledge and perseverance had paid off. It seemed like seven-feet was the hot depth, so Robbie quickly busted out a small box of bullet sinkers in different sizes.

Each compartment of the box was labeled with weights organized by size. Again, this was something that separates the guides from the weekend warriors. Within minutes, the Rapala rods were rigged with bullet sinkers in front of their leaders.

Robbie was letting out the first of the two Rapala rods when he immediately got slammed. That fish came off, but a few minutes later his side-planer violently surged towards the center of the boat, and we had another nice rainbow in the box.

The subtle shift of only a few feet in depth made all the difference in the world. At 2:00 pm the bite went crazy, with hookups on downrigger, side planer, and top line rods all at the same time. We were finally dialed in!

We finished out our limits and were headed to the docks by 2:30 pm.

For your next outing, don't throw in the towel if the going gets tough. A subtle speed or depth change can make all the difference in the world. Once you start getting bit, copy the hot setup on the other rods and work the area over. Seven feet deep at 2.2 mph was our hot ticket on that day, but next time it may be something totally different. Sometimes it's just a matter of knowing that the fish will turn on at some point. You won't catch trout in the parking lot.

If you want to beat the winter trout learning curve, or just want an action-packed day of trolling, visit kokemachineguideservice.com or call 209-712-6611 to book a trip. Robbie can also be reached on Facebook @kokemachineguide-service. He will be offering trips at Camanche, Lake Amador, and Lake Pardee once it opens on February.

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