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American River Map Feature

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Fish Sniffer



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STAFF TACKLE

What We're Using

The Trip of a Lifetime in your Own Back Yard



Kirby Desha of Lincoln shows off a 48-inch, 37-pound sturgeon he landed in Suisun Bay on Friday, December 16. The hefty fish inhaled a 6/0 Owner K Hook baited with live ghost shrimp and pile worms in 26 feet of water on the incoming tide.

Photo by Jack Naves

We all dream about saving up enough money for the fishing trip of a lifetime. Alaska, Baja, or Panama would certainly be costly, yet fun trips with lasting memories. But what about finding the trip of a lifetime right here in Northern California? Nuggets like these are waiting to be discovered on any given day, you just have to be lucky enough to dig one up.

This past December 16, I planned a typical delta fishing trip with Kirby Desha of Lincoln, CA. As usual, we left my house before dawn and trekked our way southwest to the familiar launching ramp at Lower Sherman Island.

Although the drive wasn't bad, fog suddenly surrounded us to the point where I had a hard time finding the pay station! Still being almost pitch dark outside, we launched and crept away from the ramp using GPS and shadows to navigate by. Some duck

hunters asked to follow us across the shipping channel, and I was relieved to get safely across in such low visibility.

Suddenly, a noise like a honking car horn appeared from the shipping channel behind us. High up above the ground fog, we could see a bright white light passing by. The object under the light was shrouded in mystery by the heavy fog. Was it a ship? A sailboat mast? A chugging tugboat pushing a barge? We had no idea, but were



WHAT'S
HOT
by
Jack Naves

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Great Fun at Baja's Hotel Palmas de Cortez

A group of friends and I took our annual trip to the Sea of Cortez and the East Cape of Baja to the beautiful Hotel Palmas de Cortez.

I was joined by Bridget Looney, my brother Ken Kneeland and Mary Mihm from Merino, Colorado, and John Brassfield and Helen Rowell from Auburn for the 5 day trip. We arrived at the airport at Cabo San Lucas about 2 pm where we met Ken and Mary who had arrived an hour earlier. We were greeted by our driver and ushered to a nice air conditioned van for the one hour drive north to Los Barrilles.

Hotel Palmas de Cortez is known as the "Gem of the East Cape" for good reason. The rooms are large and spacious, and all are nicely air-conditioned. The bathrooms are large; all done in natural tile, and feature a huge glassed in shower with room to share with 3 or 4 of your closest friends! There are two swimming pools, with the largest being an "infinity" pool that appears to overflow right into the sea.

We found our rooms, settled in for a moment, and then all met down at the palapa bar overlooking the beautiful Sea of Cortez. We toasted our good fortune for being in one of most pleasant places on earth, surrounded by good friends, and planned our fishing excursion for the next morning.

Breakfast starts at 6 am, so I was up and making sure everyone was up and getting ready by 5:30. We met in the



GONE
FISHING
by
Paul Kneeland



John Brassfield shows off his first ever striped marlin with the help of the captain and mate.

Photo by Paul Kneeland, Fish Sniffer Staff

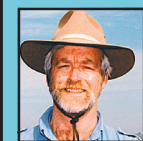
huge dining room just as it was getting light in the east. Breakfast was buffet style, with bacon, sausage, eggs, fried potatoes, French bread, your choice of toast, coffee, fresh fruit and juices and more. Then we headed down to the boats, approximately 75 yards from the hotel pool! As we walked to the dock where several boats were being loaded, I noticed that the normally calm sea had a pretty good breeze blowing even this early.

The six of us boarded the 28-foot cruiser "Rude Boy" and met our captain and mate. The boats had been fishing a large

CONTINUED ON PG 28



Ernie Marlan fished for lingcod aboard Phenix Sportfishing out of Port San Luis. He caught his limit of lings while using a sardine colored 4oz Ahi Jig. He used a Phenix Black Diamond rated 10-30lb teamed up with a Shimano Tranx loaded with 50lb FINS Braid and a 25lb GAMMA fluorocarbon leader.



Paul Kneeland fished Lake Camanche with John Brassfield of Trucksmart stores in the Fish Sniffer 21' Rogue Jet Coastal. They caught rainbow trout to 17 inches using an Okuma 8' Kokanee Black composite rod with a Okuma Convector low profile line counter reel loaded with 8 lb test Soft Steel line. They trolled Gulp and Power Bait 2 and 3 inch grubs in white and chartreuse off the Canon Downriggers from 8 to 15 feet deep at 1.6 mph.



Dan Bacher fished for rainbow trout in the South Trout Pond at Lake Camanche. 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 garlic chartreuse Berkley PowerBait, 1/8 oz. gold and black Panther Martins and 2/5 oz. gold/red stripe Little Cleos.

WHAT'S HOT continued from page 2

relieved to be clear of the area. The dispersing fog slowed our westward journey, but we finally arrived at the fishing grounds: Sturgeon Alley, Suisun Bay, CA.

A fog-chilled breeze added a slight chop to the water as gray light illuminated our view. With sturgeon rods baited and cast, Kirby's outside rod suddenly sprang to life during the initial onset of the incoming tide. "REEL, REEL, REEL! DON'T STOP!" I shouted, as Kirby's rod bent down hard. He winched it close to the boat, when a massive armor-plated dinosaur abruptly launched airborne ten feet in front of me.

SPLASH!!! The leaping sturgeon sent icy water droplets into my bibs as Kirby worked the fish into the net. It was his first ever keeper sturgeon, so he decided to use one of his three sturgeon tags to retain the fish. With the fish securely tagged and roped-off at the side of the boat, he cast out his striped bass rods only to catch a ten-pound striper moments later! I had high hopes with such an abundance of early success, but instead we were greeted with quiet rods for many hours to come.

With no bites to keep me occupied,



Kirby Desha of Lincoln filled his striped bass limit with this fish just as the sun was setting on Friday, December 16. The fish was caught in 24 feet of water using chicken livers near Chain Island on the west delta. This area sits in a pocket between the Montezuma Hills and Mount Diablo. It is a top location to fish for stripers during fall and winter months.

Photo Courtesy Jack Naves

I cast my gaze to the portside horizon where there was some upheaval going on. A California sea lion captured a fish and was thrashing it about on the surface. I sternly warned Kirby to keep a close eye on it, as his prized keeper sturgeon was still tied to the outside of the boat. Prime taking for any hungry sea lions in the area! Kirby initially thought I was joking about the sea lion stealing his fish, but the warning proved to be proper foreshadowing.

After the tide turned to outgoing and still no action, we pulled lines and travelled southeast to deeper waters near Pittsburg, CA. My plan was to give the spot 45 minutes, and if it didn't produce, we would make a move. The sturgeon, however, didn't waste any time, as my portside rod had action right away. I noticed some short pumps on the rod tip, and quickly jumped into a crouching position behind the rod.

With my left hand firmly gripping the reel knob, I squinted down my rod like a marksman peering down the barrel of a rifle. TAP-TAP, the rod tip shot down a few more times. I was reeling as fast as possible when the drag started slipping and the rod doubled over.

"It's on", I grunted, as I pulled the rod out of the holder and continued to gain line. Kirby had the net ready, but I told him to hold off as an undersized sturgeon came flopping to the surface. With a quick twist of the barbless hook, the released sturgeon shot off in a flash.

I had just cast out when I hooked another sturgeon. This fish came off, but a few minutes later I hooked yet another sturgeon! The tide was picking up steam. About ten minutes into the fight I was gaining line and had the fish directly under the boat. I was thinking that we were about to limit out on sturgeon when the day took an unexpected turn.

Out of nowhere, line started peeling off my reel at a hurried pace. At first, I thought it was a huge sturgeon that finally realized that it was hooked.



This quality ten-pound striped bass was caught by Kirby Desha on Friday, December 16 in Suisun Bay. The fish was caught using a 25-pound test P-Line CXX leader tied to an 8/0 Gamakatsu inline octopus circle hook. The bait of choice was chicken livers.

Photo Courtesy Jack Naves

But that scenario didn't make sense, since I had already fought the fish for over ten minutes. I frantically watched my line disappear as the fish shot towards the southern shoreline.

The reel's level-wind was zipping back and forth in a blur. I was getting close to the end of my thousand-foot spool of line! I could see black-diamond-patterned strips of color showing through my bright-yellow line as the spool was becoming visible. I put some thumb pressure

on the spool in desperation, and that's when we both heard a blowing exhale like a bloated surfacing whale.

Off in the hazy distance, we saw a large dark creature break the surface like something out of Lock Ness. It was so far off that we couldn't even tell what it was by sight. However, I knew exactly what it was. "Sea lion!", I gasped, realizing that it was about to thief my sturgeon. At this point, I cranked the drag down as tight as possible. The hook pulled free, and the beast slowly made off with its catch.

As I was reeling in, a massive fish jumped directly behind the boat. I looked down, and my other rod was pegged to the water. In all the commotion, we hadn't noticed that my second rod was hooked up on yet another sturgeon! Ten minutes later, I had the undersized sturgeon measured and released. At that point, we both agreed to leave the marauding sea lions alone and finish up the day striper fishing in a new location.

Fishing was slow. As the sinking sun slipped behind Mount Diablo, the sky glowed yellow as Kirby's rod buried down. His second and final striped bass rounded out his

full limits for the day. Although I had come up blank as far as keeper-sized fish, the memories of a rare trip like that will be kept for a lifetime. Kirby shared fish fillets and entertaining stories as we made our way back through the same darkness we had emerged from. Sleep came easy that night, with thoughts of ghost ships, armor-plated dinosaurs, and seven-hundred-pound monsters dancing in my head.

GONE FISHING

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a couple good photos of the leaps, and when the captain and mate brought the beauty aboard, John was beaming in the middle of the photo!

The Sea of Cortez is one of the premier saltwater fishing destinations in the world. And Hotel Palmas de Cortez is a beautiful hotel that caters to the needs of the fishermen and their wives. In addition to the wonderful fishing, they can provide you with kayaking, whale watching, scuba and snorkel diving, ATV rentals, horseback riding, golfing or a visit to their Spa de Cortez for wonderful massages, aromatherapy and more. If you haven't been to the hotel for a while, you will see many improvements they had done in the last couple of years. There is a new bar on the south end near the restaurant, two big propane powered fire pits with seating all around and overlooking the beach, more seating near the seawall and much more. For more information on Hotel Palmas de Cortez, visit their website at www.vanwormerresorts.com, or give them a call at (877) 777-8862.

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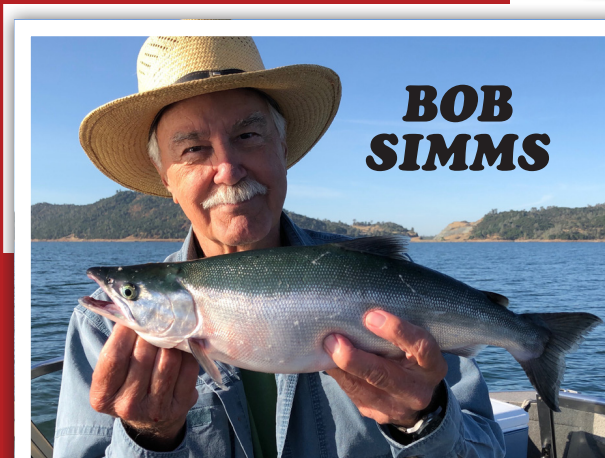
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