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California Kokes

STAMPEDE RESERVOIR

Stampede has been a popular fishing lake now for decades, and anglers from all over the state come to troll its water for big trout and kokanee. On the east side of the Sierra Nevada near Truckee at 5,400 feet, Stampede offers a great opportunity to escape the summertime heat.

Fish averaging 16 inches and weighing 2 pounds can usually be caught by mid May on Wedding Ring spinners and Kokanee King spoons.

Rick Kennedy of Tight Lines Guide Service says his No. 1 setup is a black and yellow Ted's Bug behind a Sep's watermelon dodger. Sam Lage of Sambo Tackle & Custom Rods in Concord reported limits using white Ticklures there last June.

Look for kokes to be down 10 and 30 feet in the Sage Hen and Davies arms in May, and schools around the main body as the season progresses.

Take the Hirschdale Road exit from I-80 and turn left to the dam on Dog Valley Road. Continue over the dam to the campground and boat ramp.

BUCKS LAKE

Beautiful Bucks Lake located in the Plumas National Forest at 5,000 feet is the smallest lake listed here but probably has the highest kokanee density. Thirty- to 40-fish days can be had at Bucks on kokes ranging from 13 to 15

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inches.

Most all of the popular koke lures work well here. However, lures in various shades of green seem to be preferred by the small salmon over other colors. Try the chartreuse (green) Wedding Ring spinner, and spoons such as Needlefish and Kokanee Kings in frog patterns.

Fishing

Limits can be had by June but wait until July and August for heavier fish. Kokanee should be at 10 to 30 feet deep in June in the Bucks Creek arm and the mouth of Mill Creek.

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Bucks is a great weekend (or week-long) camping destination. Take Highway 70 through Oroville and into the scenic Feather River canyon and to Quincy; turn right on Bucks Lake Road to access the boat ramp. Campgrounds are on the west side of the lake and at Mill Creek.

BULLARDS BAR RESERVOIR

In the foothills northeast of Marysville, Bullards is another high-density kokanee lake with easy limits common to most koke anglers.

Fish up to 15 inches are usually caught by the end of July on a wide variety of lures (with or without attractors) in pink, orange, and white fluorescents. You'll catch kokes here if you tip your offering with white corn and put it in the fish zone.

Although limits are possible by the end of April, fish Bullards in July to early August for concentrations of the largest kokes of the season. Fish at this time of year will be down 30 to 70 feet. Kokanee are found near the dam, the Little Oregon Creek finger, Mill Creek cove, and up in the North Yuba River arm.

From Marysville take Highway 20 to Marysville Road or take Highway 49 through Grass Valley/Nevada City and turn left on Marysville Road. A free public ramp is at the end of Dark Day Road. You'll find a campground off Marysville Road.

SHAVER LAKE

Northeast of Fresno and above 5,000 feet in the Sierra National Forest, scenic Shaver Lake produced kokanee to 15 inches in 2003.

Kokanee Power Angler Of The Year Gary Coe and his wife, Nancy, did well there last year using Shasta Tackle's pink Kok-a-nut trailed behind a sling blade

ABOUT KOKANEE

Kokanee were introduced to California as forage to enhance trout fisheries. While their protein resulted in larger and faster-growing trout in those lakes, it also produced an entirely new sport fishery.



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dodger. Coe says another productive lure for him there was an Uncle Larry's Blue Tiger spinner. He says green, pink and even blue lures work well early in the season.

Look for Shaver to produce limits by June, but wait until July and August for larger fish. Look to the north end of the lake by the dam, out in front of the boat ramp and the east end of the lake early in the season. Coe says to look for kokanee 20 to 40 feet deep in June, and 50 to 70 feet by August.

From Fresno take Highway 41 north to Highway 168 east. Campsites are available at Camp Edison. Travel through the campground to find a free public boat ramp.

LAKE TAHOE

Reports from Tahoe guides indicate that Tahoe kokes usually average 14 to 15 inches by August. However, in 1995 reports had kokes up to 24 inches and I've heard rumors of recent catches weighing 3 pounds.

As with other lakes of gin-clear water, lures in differing shades of green are productive. Try Wedding Rings or Uncle Larry's spinners in chartreuse, and green spoons such as Needlefish, Sockeye Slammers and Apex. Go with chrome or green dodgers.

By August kokes are usually schooled up outside of Taylor and Tallac Creeks in the south end of the lake. Look for kokes to run 30 to 90 feet deep. Only 4-stroke motors are allowed on Tahoe.

The nearest public boat ramp is at Cave Rock, Nev., on Highway 50. Call ahead for camping reservations at Camp Richardson off Highway 89 (south shore).

HELL HOLE RESERVOIR

Down in the Rubicon River canyon in the El Dorado National Forest, Hell Hole Reservoir is a coldwater lake that should kick out limits by the end of

Unlike trout, kokanee can be caught all summer in hot temperatures without any loss in meat quality. In fact, meat quality usually peaks at the end of summer or by the time they start to turn their characteristic red spawning sheen. (Kokanee is a word in a Native American language that means "red fish.")

In California most kokanee live to 3 years of age before spawning and dying. In rare cases these salmonids live four years.

Kokanee are in more than a dozen California lakes, thanks to organizations Kokanee Power and Project Kokanee, which raise money and team up with the California Department of Fish and Game to plant millions of kokanee fingerlings each year. -- Bill Lentz

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June. Fish it in August/September for larger fish up to 15 inches. Look for fish to be down only 30 to 40 feet then.

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Greens lures are best here. Try spoons and spinners in chartreuse. Kokanee here seem to prefer lures with a lot of action, making small Flatfish and Apex's work well also. I caught limits of kokes there in August 2003 using No. 1 fire tiger Needlefish behind chrome dodgers. The dam area, north side of the lake (near Cottonwood Creek), and the narrows are good trolling spots.

From I-80 take the Forresthill exit to Foresthill Road Drive over the dam at French Meadows Reservoir and continue to Hell Hole. From Georgetown take Wentworth Springs Road (it's paved now) and make a right on Hell Hole Road 5 miles pass Stumpy Meadows. Continue down to a camping area and free public boat ramp.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

For more information on kokanee lures mentioned in this article, contact the following manufacturers:

French Ticklure kokanee and trout spinner, 530-409-9720, or send \$24 for a dozen assorted colors to Cat Creek Productions, P.O. Box 107, Greenwood, CA 95635; Uncle Larry's Spinners, P.O. Box 601923, Sacramento, CA 95860, 916-482-0433; Sep's Pro Fishing, P.O. Box 5356, Vacaville, CA 95696-5356, 707-449-8413; Shasta Tackle Company, P.O. Box 488, Bella Vista, CA 96008, 916-275-2278; Vance's Tackle, P.O. Box 4045, Citrus Heights, CA 95611-4045, 916-725-2383; and Sambo Tackle & Custom Rods, 2228 Concord Blvd., Concord, CA 94520, 925-689-1534.

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