

Fly Fishing Lassen Park and adjoining Areas

By Tom Maumoynier

I have had the opportunity to teach the sport of fly fishing at the Drakesbad Guest Ranch for several years. I have met some wonderful people at the Ranch, mostly beginners who enjoyed learning a new way to enjoy the outdoors. I own The Lake Almanor Fly Fishing Company in Chester (181 Main Street) and have lived and fished the area for over twenty years; the Lassen Park and Caribou Wilderness are near and dear to my heart. I have known many local old timers that have given me some great information on how it was in days past, and leads on places to venture to in the southern most portions of the Cascades.

The area is blessed with many streams and lakes that hold wild trout; I say wild because the Park has not planted fish since the 80's. These fish are generally smaller but what they lack in size they make up in beauty. There are rainbows, browns and very colorful brook trout that inhabit the surrounding waters.

My favorite fly fishing is from Drakesbad Guest Ranch, south and south east to Caribou Lake via Caribou Wilderness. That region encompasses approximately one hundred thousand acres with an average elevation of six thousand nine hundred feet. The best accesses are, Drakesbad through Warner Valley, Juniper Lake, Hay Meadows and Caribou Lake; a good web site for maps and directions is, www.Sherpaguides.com. This end of Lassen Park and Caribou Wilderness gets less pressure than the well traveled part by the main entrance on route 89.

Because of the elevation the best time to fish is mid June until September; these three and a half months one can explore countless lakes. As with almost everywhere most of the better fishing includes a hike of some sort and this is no exception. Most hikes are no more than five miles, which passes nicely because of the diverse scenery.

The longest stream is King's Creek which can be reached by heading up to Drakesbad Guest Ranch, the stream itself is mostly pocket water with some small runs. All local varieties of trout inhabit the creek; they are very colorful and eager. Lake fishing is the main fair, with large diverse lakes such as Snag and Horseshoe to small intimate lakes like Gem, Teal and Jackey. If the fishing is slow or there are other people around it is just a short walk to the next opportunity for a new pristine lake; it is all about exploration.

The fly fishing equipment I would recommend would be a three or four weight rod seven to eight and half feet long, a four piece rod is best for packing. A floating line would be used the majority of the time but a slow sinking line is a real help in the lakes. Leaders seven and half feet to nine feet long tapering to either four or three pounds will fool trout. A packable float tube and light weight waders would cover most all that is needed to enjoy fly fishing. As far as flies just your basic assortment that includes adams, mosquito and humpy's for dry flies and timberline emergers, small wooly buggers and leeches in various colors would be great wet flies. Always bring bug spray, sunscreen, a head covering, rain gear and water; they make some great water filters that will save on weight. Maps and GPS will let you safely explore a lake that is off the main trails. I hope this will help to motivate you to get out and explore this little known part of California. Please use barbless hooks and catch and release to protect this self sustaining resource.

See you on the trail, Tom!