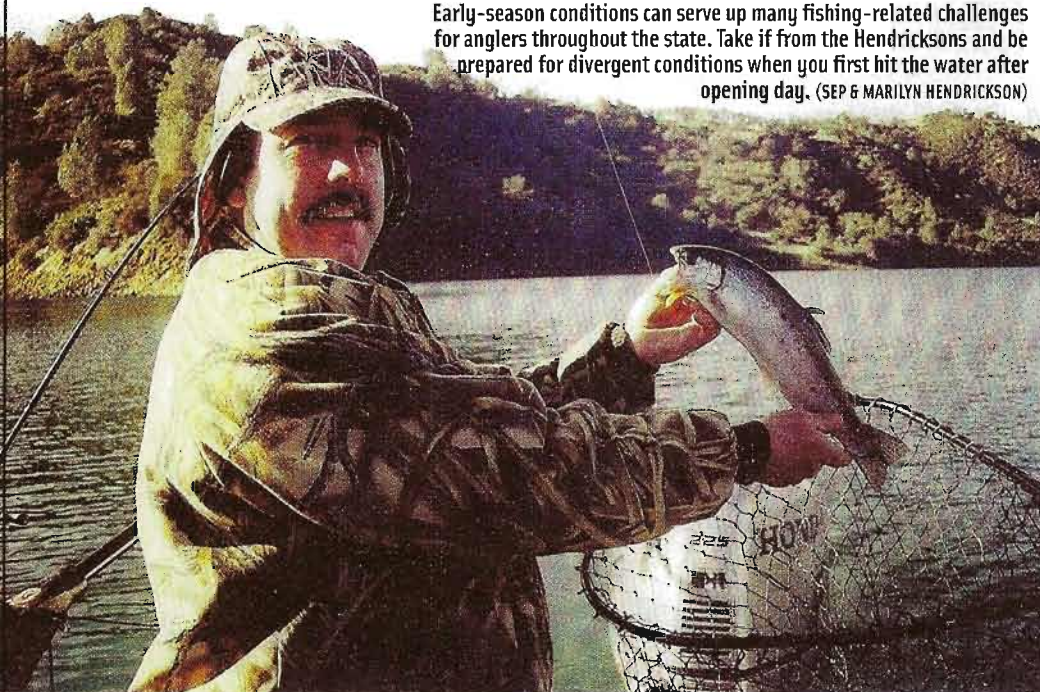




OPENING IN STYLE

IF YOU'RE GOING TO DO SOMETHING, TROUT BUM, DO IT RIGHT!

Early-season conditions can serve up many fishing-related challenges for anglers throughout the state. Take it from the Hendricksons and be prepared for divergent conditions when you first hit the water after opening day. (SEP & MARILYN HENDRICKSON)



VACAVILLE—Opening day of trout season has a special meaning for anglers. It's an event that brings fond memories of seasons past and recollections of times ... well, times just as soon forgotten for some of you.

Like the time one angler backpacked several miles into his favorite alpine lake with his slick new two-piece fly rod packed carefully in his back pack with 12 inches sticking out of the top of the pack, like dual CB antennas on a semi.

That angler slowly emerged from the tree-lined trail only a few feet from the water's edge. Numerous rings on the water indicated trout were already eagerly feeding on surface insects. With excited anticipation, the angler slid the back pack off his shoulders and observed that his two piece was now a four-piece rod of splintered graphite, dangling guides and shattered dreams, thanks to the assorted overhangs and branches

along the overgrown trail.

Just two years earlier, after a much colder hike in to the lake, that same angler and two ill-prepared friends were eager to share the action of opening day. They poked their heads from trees and trail to find only a vast, white expanse, frozen solid with eight inches of ice covering a lake full of hungry, holdover trout.

A frozen lake. No open areas. No fishing on opening day.

From the time of our childhood, we would anticipate the days leading up to the trout opener with eager anticipation. For weeks we'd fondle and reorganize our meager supplies of gold egg hooks, split shot and leaders. We'd open that jar of salmon eggs a hundred times, smell the eggs, roll them around with our fingers and close the jar again. We were ready.

Rod? Check. Reel? Check. Line? Check. Tackle? Check. Heck yes, we were ready

...or were we? How about a net? How about a weather report? How about knowing the water conditions before you get there? Do you have a plan or are you just "going"?

Opening in style: The trout opener remains to this day a celebration of the outdoors...family...and tradition. Whether tent camping beside Robinson Creek near Bridgeport, sleeping in a camper along the Sacramento River near Dunsmuir, sharing a crowded, odiferous motel room with four or five buddies in Bishop or Burney Falls, or sharing the bed of a pickup with some friends, we're resigned to the fact that restless sleep and clock-watching will count down those final hours before opening day.

We do it because opening day is the first opportunity to focus on waters untouched since the season closed the previous fall. Fish have had five months of no angling pressure and that alone should signal you to go!

Let me offer a little advice: If you're going, GO PREPARED! Be ready for anything, because that's exactly what Mother Nature can dish out that time of year: A-N-Y-T-H-I-N-G. Be prepared for all the fishing variables you may encounter, too. With warmer temperatures, our streams and rivers will begin flowing and may be running high and off color during the opener. Our high-elevation lakes can be off color too especially near incoming streams or rivers.

Early-season cheat sheet: If you encounter conditions less than ideal, it's imperative to adjust your plan of attack. In high-running, off-color water conditions, stream anglers may find it hard to get strikes on surface flies or deeper running emergers. The trout's vision is limited in these conditions as your offerings float

by on the surface or roll along the bottom. The use of baits improves anglers' odds by adding scents to the mix.

Typically, opening-day anglers will drift small pieces of nightcrawlers or salmon eggs in all the typical haunts. The scent aids trout in locating and feeding on your offering. Appealing to the fish's senses is important.

The senses of smell, sight and vibration can all work in the anglers favor and early season anglers will have to appeal to as many of the fish's senses as possible. Small spinners like Panther Martins or Luhr Jensen's Shyster are perfect for small-stream applications. First, they're available in a wide variety of colors for good contrast and visibility. Second, the spinner blade turns in the current and as it is retrieved, generates fish attracting vibrations. Third, you can liberally apply scent to spinners to create a scent path in the water thereby increasing your odds of hook ups.

You'll need a variety of colors, light and dark, bright and dull finishes, too.

Anglers should use gold lures or blades when fishing streams or trolling lakes in off-colored water or dark, over-cast situations. Whether lake fishing or walking your favorite trout stream, silver blades and lures are best in clear-water, bright-sunshine conditions.

Adjust for the cold: In lakes it's no different. You'll be running your offering on the surface or just below. Your favorite lures or baits will work there too, just like always, but it's important to remember that lake water is very cold right now, especially with all the snow melt and runoff we will be experiencing.

Fish will move slower in the cold waters of spring and may seem lethargic, but, they're ready to feed. You'll need to slow your presentation. Flashers and a threaded 'crawler are hard to beat anytime, anywhere. Keep trolling speed below 2.0 mph and vary your speeds widely from .5 to 2.0 mph. Speed changes often are the trigger for a strike from a trout that has been following your offering. Changing speed also changes the depth of your offering and more importantly it also changes the fish-attracting action and vibrations.

Early season = willing fish: Lakes and streams that closed in November of last

year sat idle for nearly five months and trout are relaxed, active and feeding. Warming spring weather brings the thaw and subsequent run-off. Anglers can expect to find lakes, creeks and streams well stocked by the California Department of Fish and Game with catchable sized rainbows running 12 to 14 inches. The lakes and streams will hold good populations of larger holdover trout and big browns. Insect populations and stream and creek-

side vegetation is flourishing which translates into cooler water, more food and bigger stronger healthier fish.

This all adds up to excellent trout fishing opportunities. Whether you're walking the creeks, fishing from shore, trolling or tossing your favorite spinner, lure or fly, you can count on fantastic scenery, angling camaraderie, cold weather and plenty of fish.

Just BE PREPARED and DO IT RIGHT!

