



# TECH BULLETIN

## SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

# BIG BEAR LAKE

## AN AMAZING TROUT & BASS FISHERY

Compiled from the Diaries and Logs of the Luhr Jensen Fishing Research Team.



### BY RONNIE KOVACH

Ronnie is the founder and owner of Ronnie Kovach's Outdoor Enterprises, Inc. including: "Fishing Expeditions TV"; Radio Fishing University KRLA 870, Los Angeles; FX Radio; FX apparel; angling books and publications as well as a comprehensive fresh and saltwater seminar series. He has written five best selling books on bass, trout and saltwater fishing and has over 500 articles and columns published in outdoor magazines including Bassmaster, Bassin', Western Outdoors, Pacific Fisherman, South Coast Sportfishing, Marlin, In-Fisherman, and Big Game Journal & Saltwater Sportsman.



tains to sample Big Bear's stellar rainbow trout fishery.

Except during a rare icing over, Big Bear provides Southern Californians with some of the best year round trout to be found in the Golden State. Bait dunkers, lure chuckers and trolling enthusiasts can score limit catches of Big Bear's fat, chunky rainbows.

But what many anglers overlook, is Big Bear's exciting bass fishery. Largemouths, as well as a smattering of smallmouth bass populate this seven-mile-long lake. There are numerous weed beds, boulder-strewn banks, coves, rocky jetties and boat docks that provide ample sanctuary for this budding alpine bass population. Bassin' at Big Bear is primarily an early spring through fall proposition.

Let's examine these two diverse mountain fisheries, discovering the best ways to catch both trout and bass.

### SPRING TROUTIN'

The early springtime period can usher in some of the best trout fishing at Big Bear, especially for a nice lunker or two! Watch for small schools of hungry rainbows tra-

versing the banks, looking for morsels of food that follow the ice thaw or the first major rainstorm.

These 'bows will not be overly aggressive because of the ice cold water. But they will attack a slow-moving lure presented on light 2- to 6-lb. test line while stalking the shoreline. One of my secret tactics over the years is to gently pitch a **Hot Shot®** or **Kwikfish®** plug from the bank on gossamer mono. Using a light spinning outfit, tie on a small 1/10- to 1/5-oz. Hot Shot or K3 through K7 Kwikfish. Next, crimp a medium-size lead shot about 18 to 30 inches above the lure.

Following the cast, either lure will seductively wiggle from side-to-side as it sinks, trailing behind the split shot. As you retrieve either of them, be sure to S-L-O-W down! Both the Hot Shot and the Kwikfish offer terrific action when retrieved ultra-slowly. Occasionally pause for a few seconds, and let the lure rest motionless. Often a big, lazy rainbow will be closely following the plug, only to bump into it on the pause. *Look out for a vicious strike!*

Spoon anglers will also find Big Bear to their liking in the early spring. The classic

Above the Southern California skyline, at 7,500 feet elevation, Big Bear Lake is a true alpine jewel. Year after year, throngs of Southland anglers make the weekend pilgrimage to the San Bernardino moun-

### BIG BEAR TACKLE



**Super Duper**® in 501, 502 or 503 size and #0131 *Brass/Red Head* or #0150 *Chrome/Silver Prism-Lite*® finish are old standards that still produce, especially on lethargic early season trout. Again, a S-L-O-W retrieve is absolutely essential.

Along with the Super Duper, fish the smaller **Hotrod**® wobblers. These are great little spoons with a nice wide side-to-side wobble, perfect for a slow-to-medium retrieve. Big Bear's rainbows will attack the Hotrod spoon in 1/6- to 3/8-oz. sizes in either #0050 *Nickel/Fire Dot* or #0165 *Brass/Fire Dot*.

Trollers should also maintain a slow, yet steady pace, running across the lake in the early spring. You can flatline troll a variety of lures including the **Krocodile**®, Super Duper or Hotrod wobbler in *Chrome* or *Brass* variations, keeping these spoons a few feet below the surface. Or, switch to a heavier spoon which will also perform quite well during the midday doldrums if it is allowed to sink and then retrieved through deeper strike zones. The key colors for this alpine lake are #0051 *Brass/Gold Prism-Lite*® or #0002 *Brass* in the **Cast Champ**® and #0034 *Hammered Brass/Fire Side Stripe* in the Krocodile.

Flatline trollers can also get into the act by pulling either **Bang-Tail**® or **Shyster**® spinners near the surface. If Big Bear's water temperature soars toward the 65° to 70° mark, take your artificial lures down deeper with either lead core line or a Luhr Jensen **Pink Lady**® diving planer.

Small, shiny spoons, in particular, troll well with the Pink Lady, including the ever-popular **Needlefish**® in #0074 *Frog/Brass Back*, #0023 *Bikini*, #0314 *Rainbow Trout*, #0068 *Grasshopper* or #0036 *Silver Shad* patterns for best results. If the water is roily and dark-colored from early season runoffs, use either #0002 *Brass* or *Half & Half Brass/Nickel* combination blades. Under bright skies and in clear water, switch to *Nickel* finish lake trolls.

### SUMMERTIME TROUT

Big Bear's 'bows will typically be up shallow and near the surface in the early morning during the warmer months, retreating to deeper water by midday and returning to the shallows in the later afternoon. This is a good time to catch them from the bank, a boat, or even wading by using small spinners. The Luhr Jensen Shyster spinner is perfect for these more aggressive fish.

For deeper action, try the **Bolo**® spinner in 1/8- to 1/3-oz. or the Bang-Tail in 1/8- to 1/2-oz. Let these sink into 20 to 30 feet of water and then wind them in with a fairly steady retrieve. Throw the Bolo in the #0057 *Fire Black Dot* finish and the Bang-Tail in #0074 *Frog Scale*, #0085 *White Scale* or #0068 *Grasshopper Scale*.

Try trolling larger spoons such as the Cast Champ or the standard Krocodile down the center of the western portion of the lake over deep channels. Surprisingly, during the summer months, Big Bear's rainbows will often eat a compact bass plug trolled at higher speeds. An intriguing alternative to conventional trout spoons and spinners is to troll a **Speed Trap**™ or 1/4-oz. **Hot Lips Express**® plug is a *Clearwater Flash* finish. But, day-in, day-out, it would be tough to match a set of Luhr Jensen lake trolling blades with a half section of live night crawler



dragged behind for limiting out on rainbows. The Model A **Ford Fender**®, **Dave Davis**® or **Cowbell**® troll are perfect for this. Any of these can be dynamite on big, marauding rainbows that are chasing baitfish near the surface! All of these trout lures can also be trolled with lead core line during the warmer summer months at Big Bear. Troll at four 8" colors for best results.

### FALL TROUTIN'

Some of the best trout fishing in the west can be found here from September through early November. The fish will be active, feeding to bulk-up for the cold winter. Spoons and spinners will produce, but with larger spawning fish on the prowl, now is the time to switch to larger lures for that trophy trout. Try free-casting with bigger Hotrod wobblers, Shyster and Bang-Tail spinners from either the bank or wind-drifting in a boat in open water.

Flatline trolling spoons and spinners will continue to account for many limits, as will slowly dragging the Cowbell "Baby" or 010 Dave Davis. With dramatic shifts in the weather, switch color finishes in the trolling blades, alternating *Nickel*, *Brass* or *Half & Half* models.

### SPRINGTIME BASS

Big Bear's bass population can be a real "sleeper" for the early season angler. Most of these fish will be caught from boats working rocky points, small isolated rock piles and submerged weed beds. Starting in late April or May, the angler armed with pork rind-tipped jigs in black or brown patterns, small earth-tone colored plastic worms, or tiny tube baits will often find outstanding largemouth action with a S-L-O-W presentation.

There will also be a scattering of smallmouths taken on these same offerings around the rocky shoreline areas. The bronzebacks will range from 2 1/2- to 4-lbs. and will be quite scrappy, even in this cold alpine environment. Likewise, Big Bear's largemouths look like fat, 1 1/2- to 2-lb. "footballs".

### SUMMER BASS

By midsummer, weed growth can be prominent at Big Bear. Conventional safety-pin-style spinner baits will work along these weed beds. But the inside trick is to fish a smaller spinner such as a Shyster or Bang-Tail with light line in the clear water. Don't be surprised if a solid 2- or 3-lb. largemouth races out from under the weed bed to inhale the tiny spinner!

Shallow-diving crankplugs often excel at

times when cast parallel to the weeds. Here, the Speed Trap with the reduced diving lip is the hot ticket. Chuck and wind it through the shallow weedy areas of the lake in #0570 *Crawdadd*, #0712 *Perch* or #0710 *Clearwater Flash* finishes.

Summertime also signals prime topwater action for Big Bear's largemouths. **Herb's Dilly**™ or a **Buzzer'd Buzzbait**™ are the perfect buzzbaits to work directly over the weedbeds. Be prepared for a nice largemouth to skyrocket up through one of the openings in the weeds to bushwhack these noisy buzzers. Fish them in basic *Frog*, *White* or *Chartreuse* skirts.

Big Bear's largemouths will also home in on more conventional surface plugs in the hotter months. The **Woodchopper**® is a classic prop bait that is an excellent bass catcher when fish are feeding on the surface. Throw the 3/8- or 1/2-oz. model in either *Frog* or *Perch* pattern. If the alpine bass want a quieter, more subtle surface plug, the **P.J. Pop**™ is exactly the right choice. Work it around the weed beds, boat docks and rock piles.

### FALL BASSIN'

As the water begins to cool, the bass may stage one late season surface flurry up through mid-October. The Woodchopper and P.J. Pop should remain excellent options. However, this is also a good time for working a **Power Minnow**™ in the clear shallows. Fish it on lighter 6- to 10-lb. monofilament and gently twitch and jerk this minnow-shaped plug near the bank.

Continue to throw small spinners such as the Bang-Tail and the Shyster along the weed beds and in the shallows until the water temperature drops below 60°.

With the onset of cold weather, switch back to slow-crawlin' lures like pig and jig combos, plastic worms or curl-tail grubs. Don't be surprised to find Big Bear's largemouth and bronzeback populations striking these bottom bouncing lures all the way down into 45° to 48° water. If you can withstand the arctic air temperatures, Big Bear's bass will often cooperate until the lake freezes over.

Ronnie Kovach's Fishing Expeditions  
can be reached by calling  
714-375-9888  
or by writing  
P. O. Box 3118,  
Huntington Beach, CA 92605-3118.