



TECH BULLETIN

NEW MEXICO

HERON LAKE

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

Located about 100 miles north of Santa Fe just off Highway 84 in northern New Mexico and set among the tall ponderosa pines of the Mora Valley, Heron Lake is the only lake in the country that is fed from waters on the wrong side of the Continental Divide. Because water is brought across the divide, through miles of underground tunnel, this makes for one of the longest and most costly water diversions in the country.

The lake is named after Kenneth A. Heron, an engineer who, in the early 1900s, developed a diversion system proposal similar to that which became a reality when the project was completed in 1971.

Situated 7,200 feet in elevation, the 5,900 acre lake is deep and cold, making it an ideal habitat for lake trout, German brown, rainbows and kokanee salmon. Heron has been designated a "quiet lake" where motorboats may operate at no more than trolling speed. The park itself teems with wildlife such as deer, elk, turkey and bear, among others. Other activities include nearby hunting, scenic railway rides, swim-

ming, water skiing (El Vado Lake), horseback riding and wintertime ice fishing, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling.

The park has a variety of campground areas. Most have improved camping sites, several with fresh water and electricity available. Other areas have more primitive camping sites, some accessible only by boat. Additionally there are several nearby lodges that provide more comfortable accommodations.

year life cycle, ending after spawning. During spawning season, Department of Game and Fish personnel collect the milt and eggs to maintain stocks throughout the state. Natural reproduction of kokanee in New Mexico is negligible, thus making populations within the state mainly dependent on Heron Lake stocks.

Kokanee are schooling fish, so finding them is easier with a reliable fish locator. They normally school from 20 to 90 feet deep, depending on the thermocline. The preferred technique is

20-POUND LAKERS AVAILABLE!!

KOKANEE

Kokanee are the most targeted sport fish in Heron Lake. Their fierce fighting qualities, pound-for-pound, make them number one, not to mention that their scarlet flesh makes excellent table fare!

Kokanee are actually landlocked sockeye salmon. Like their ocean-going relatives, they have a three- to four-

usually deep trolling, although jigging is also productive at other times. Downriggers and lead lines are the basic tools of serious anglers. A lure such as a *Super Duper*[®], *Needlefish*[®], *Hus-Lure*[™] or *Kokanee King*[™] towed 10 to 30 inches behind a *Jensen Dodger*[™] or a *Les Davis*[®] *Herring Dodger*[®] works very well. Sometimes tipping lure hooks



HERON LAKE TROLLING /JIGGING TACKLE



with a kernel or two of corn can double your catch. Trailing lures 10 to 50 feet behind a downrigger ball seems to be the best technique. Varying your speed and occasionally turning can sometimes trigger strikes on slow days.

Once schools of fish are located, it's generally a good idea to mark the area with buoys and then make multiple passes. Lead line is a popular method of getting your lure down where the fish are. Lead core line of 14- to 18-lb. test is recommended, keeping in mind that line drop is approximately 5 to 6 feet a color. Using this combination, try varying depths until you get a strike and/or land a fish. Remembering that color (depth), continue to go back to it as long as you're still getting strikes.

A good hint in knowing the right trolling speed is to watch the tip of your rod for a slow, steady dipping or throbbing motion. An occasional pull will sometimes trigger a following fish to strike.

LAKE TROUT

The only viable lake trout (mackinaw) population within the entire state of New Mexico is in Heron Lake. Other lakes have been stocked, but have not yet produced them. Heron is the southernmost lake in the northern hemisphere to maintain a healthy stock of these large predators. Here there is an opportunity to catch a real trophy fish; not of five or 10 pounds, but upwards of 20-plus pounds. In order to survive, lakers need cold, deep, clear waters. They prefer temperatures between 39 and 60 degrees. No one has ever claimed that lake trout are difficult to catch. The difficulty lies in finding them. Once a school is located, success is usually a combination of proper presentation and luck. The common saying is that 90 percent of the fish are in 10 percent of the water. Finding that 10 percent and staying there is the trick.

One of the problems with lakers is that they are opportunistic feeders. They will feed on whatever food is available,

be it crustaceans, other fish, insects or even plankton. A few downrigger techniques commonly used are trolling with lures such as a K14 or larger **Kwikfish**[®], a **Power Minnow**[™] or with **J-Plugs**[®]. Other trolling producers include rotating flashers such as the **Abe & Al**[®] or **Coyote Flasher**[™] with a trailing #3 1/2 Needlefish or **Coyote**[™] Spoon. Try the Needlefish in #0188 **Glo/Fluorescent Green Stripe**, #0979 **Fire Tiger**, #0580 **Chartreuse/Fishscale**[™] or #0314 **Rainbow Trout** finish. The fish-catching finishes for the Coyote Spoon are #0188 **Glo/Flo Green "H&H"/Nickel "Back"**, #0580 **Chartreuse/"Fishscale**[™]/**Nickel "Back"**, #0878 **Hot Banana (Chart/Fire Red "Tiger" & "Tail**[™]/**"Crystal"** and #0022 **Nickel/Neon Blue "H&H"**. Note that these are also great lures and finishes for catching large German brown trout.

Lake trout will wait in ambush around various submerged structures, humps, a ridge or a reef with the safety of deep water in close proximity. Trolling a lure within inches of the bottom through these structures will often initiate strikes. Making multiple passes through these areas, changing your lure every few passes will greatly improve your chances of finding the forage that these predators prefer.

Sometimes a more subtle technique such as jigging is in order. The idea is very simple and can be extremely effective if the conditions are right. When the water is calm and there is not very much boating traffic to spook fish, that's when jigging is most effective. Bounce the jig off the bottom while keeping a tight line. Most bites are in the form of a subtle tug, so a sensitive rod is an essential item. As for the jig assortment, a variety of large spoons such as **Crippled Herring**[®], **Krocodiles**[®] or **Deep Stingers**[™] in a wide variety of colors are all excellent choices.

HERON LAKE TROLLING TIPS

Here are some techniques you can use to make trolling easier, more fun and more productive.

1. TROLL SLOWLY: Big fish will not expend any more energy than necessary to catch a meal. Also, most lures will not perform correctly at fast speeds. The best advice is to troll s-l-o-w-l-y -- the slower the better.

2. VARY YOUR SPEED: While slow is the password, this does not mean slow all the time. A lure running through the water at a constant speed, at a constant depth and giving off the same vibration pattern will not catch many fish . . . there's just nothing to indicate an easy meal is available or that something is in trouble. Slowly, yes, but adjust your speed every few minutes to change the lure's speed and vibration pattern.

3. WORK IN "S" CURVES: Consistent trolling results require that you do everything possible to keep from running in a straight line. We recommend an "S" pattern because each time the troll and lure are on the inside swing of the boat, the lure will drop deeper and slow down. On an outside turn, it will speed up and rise. With each turn you will impart a different action to the troll and trailing lure, signaling "Meal Time" to nearby fish.

TACKLE & FISHING INFORMATION

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Henry's True Value 505-588-7443
Heron Store 505-588-7436

ACCOMMODATIONS

Stone House Lodge 505-588-7274
Coopers Lodge 505-588-7801
Brazos Lodge 505-588-7707

BOAT RENTALS & EQUIPMENT

J. R. Boat Rental 505-588-7274
Heron Store 505-588-7436

LOCAL GUIDES

B & M Guide Service 505-588-5123
J. R. Guide Service 505-588-7274
High Country Guide Service 505-588-7674