

Non-Resident Sport Fishing Without Ticks, Snakes

COMMUNITY JUNE 2007
SPORTS NEWS VOL. 22 #288 P. 5

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I am a bass angler at heart, anytime my wife lets me go out and I am not too far behind at work. I head out to one of our many smaller lakes or rivers not dominated by the big run-and-gun bass boats: Umstead State Park, Eno River, Falls Lake's Beaver Dam are some of my favorite spots.

I prefer to work the banks in the hunt for largemouth bass, in places where bass boats and gas powered motors are prohibited; Falls Lake State Park has several areas cordoned off where motor boats are not allowed, and canoes, kayaks and john boats with trolling motors are the only types of watercraft plying those areas. I think the bass know where these specific places are and like to take their chances with the bank and kayak anglers—avoiding the fast bass rigs. In some respects, one gets the advantage of the abundant and big bass that populate Falls Lake without the pressure. The area called "the beaver dam," has excellent bank fishing, which often yields quality fish. I also enjoy fishing for croaker and spots on Bouges Inlet Pier and trout fishing on the Oconaluftee River. I fancy myself as an angler who can adapt to the situation, find the fish and be patient.

On a recent family trip to Northern California,

I wanted to go after the elusive brown trout and the less elusive stocked rainbows, and was happy to trade in the stained impounds of the Piedmont for the crystal-clear water of the Sierra Nevadas. I packed my old three foot, six inch Ugly-Stick. It was not exactly the smooth casting, high performance rods and reels that I have grown accustomed, but for trout I wanted scale down and lighten up. Plus, I had to get it into my duffle bag and on the plane.

Having no trout tackle, I went to get my license and stock up. The Grass Valley K-Mart was stocked with an array of flies; inline spinners, salmon eggs, and host of trout bait and tackle. I had quite a choice. So, I chose two speckled Panther Martins and a two rooster tails. Compared to North Carolina, there sure was a paucity of plastic worms and number one offset shank hooks, but I could not help myself. I found my favorite watermelon shade of Gary Yamamoto plastic worms and a half dozen rather large 2 aught wide-gap hooks—just incase.

The next afternoon, I traveled the South Fork of the Yuba River. I just knew I was going to catch a trout. Wading and walking down the river, I was warned by the rangers and some locals to stay to

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the right of the river, because eventually it empties into Lake Englebright and it's a long swim if you are on the wrong side. In order to stay to the right, there were times when I had to actually swim. It was a bit of an adventure and not many trout. The crystal clear water means that the trout can see you and you can see the trout. Every time I would make a cast, I could see small trout spook and dart in the opposite direction—a little discouraging. As I made my way down the river, it began to open up into very wide gravel shoals that looked like a Martian landscape. The pools got deeper, but the bank got steeper too. I decided to make my way back up to the top trail and walk until I found an opening. Eventually, I found a beautiful calm pool, just below some rapids. As I descended the rather steep 60 foot incline from the trail to the river below, I could see fish. I could tell they were not trout. They were smallmouth bass, and there were about a dozen of them ranging from what looked like 1 to 3 pounds. As I made my way down, slowly, carefully, and quietly, I was amazed. It was if I was looking down on the big aquarium at the BassPro Shops in Concord (NC). I snipped off my Panther Martin, and hooked on my big green

Gary Yamamoto. No weight, just a hook and a worm. Still 20 feet up on the side of the steep bank. I cast the worm into the rapids and let it float gently and natural down into the pool. Instantly, three or four, smallies took a look at it and another one snatched it. I waited a second and set the hook and quickly reeled her in. She was beautiful—Golden brown, with almost a yellow tint. Obviously, I have sight fished before, but nothing like this. It was like fishing in an aquarium. Another long cast away from the big boulders that provided cover in the placid pool. I worked the worm back toward the school. No takers. I tossed the worm onto one boulder, waited a second, gave it flip and it hopped the 2 feet off the rock and into the pool with out making a splash. Instantly, I felt the tell-tale "tug tug" and waited for the third tug to set the hook—another fine fish. Eventually, all of the fish became wary of this green invader, but I was able to pull four fish out of that school before the whole lot took off down stream. It was awesome and I surely got a chance to see how fish react to a plastic worm. I had to run because my dad was picking me up at the Bridgeport Covered Bridge. As I hiked the mile-long trail between Englebright Lake and the bridge, I was reflecting about how I cannot get away from bass fishing, even when I try. Although I did not land a single trout, I sure enjoyed the two days of bass fishing in Northern California. As I was descending to the visitor center of the South Yuba River State Park, I mused, bass fishing from the bank in California might even be better than doing it in North Carolina; at least I do not have deal with snakes, ticks, and chiggers. Just then, I saw a sign at the head of the hiking trail; it explained that "Rattle Snakes and Mountain Lions are important members of our ecological community," it warned hikers to be aware and alert for these—only in California—members of the community. Wow! Chiggers, ticks, and even our copperheads somehow did not seem so bad.

Editor's Note: Lee D. Baker is associate professor of cultural anthropology at Duke University. He is a noted author, award winning teacher and an avid bass angler.