

Medicine Lake

A succinct overview that implies timing is everything

My son Eric and I made the long journey here to enjoy ourselves and catch fish. Two days of solitude and over 160 fish made the drive well worth it!

Alone on Medicine Lake; serenity of the mind.



It's strange to approach water as vibrant and beautiful as Medicine Lake and not see another angler. There was not a boat or soul in sight. The only sound was water lapping on the shoreline.

Fish on! Feeling the tug on Medicine Lake, a volcanic caldera in the Modoc National Forest Northeast of Burney.



I've had friends tell me they've spent hours on the water, never caught a fish and claim they are OK with that. Thankfully, I have fished here often enough to know that wouldn't be the case.

Special Water

Medicine Lake appears virtually untouched by human influence. Located far off the beaten path at an elevation of 6,700 feet, the 640-acre lake came into existence when a section of volcano collapsed thousands of years ago. As a result, from above, Medicine Lake looks much like Oregon's Crater Lake, and like Crater, it maintains a deep blue color, with its water coming only from snowmelt and rainfall. But that's where the similarity ends. Unlike huge and deep Crater Lake, it's a classically picturesque mountain lake holding a large number of brook and rainbow trout – the lake is best known by local fly fishers for its voracious brook trout – and is ringed by tall firs and pines. I return year-after-year in late fall to the stark splendor of the lake and its peaceful surroundings.

Medicine Lake Brook Trout



Technique

I prefer to nymph fish Medicine Lake. As in most lakes, the smaller fish there rise to take surface insects, while the larger fish feed in deeper water. I have caught many smaller fish using dry flies, but surface feeding requires energy that most big fish won't expend in order to chase a fly on the surface.

Medicine Lake fish tend to gather in schools and cruise the water in search of food. I fish close to the shoreline, because this is where the food is. Due to the water's incredible translucency, bottom structures are clearly visible. I wade and look for areas with weeds and deadfalls that fish can use for cover between cruising sallies. Whenever possible, while fishing I stay in the shadows.

Once I've located a fishy spot and am comfortable wading and navigating the lake's bottom, I shoot blind casts in fan patterns towards the lake's drop-off areas. In addition to seeking underwater structure for protection, lake fish prefer to congregate along these areas, where they have easy access to food and can dart back into the depths when spooked.

Another nice one.



Angling success at Medicine Lake can be achieved by getting your fly to where the fish are holding. A sinking line is an advantage. I vary the depth and the retrieve until I find a combination that works. The combination that worked well during this trip went something like this: after a 10-second decent my size 16 Red-Headed Stepchild Nymph sank deep enough for me to begin a slow, jerky retrieve that triggered a predatory reaction from the trout. Forget

using an indicator. Takes are hard and deliberate. If you enjoy fishing for aggressive fish, you will truly enjoy angling for brook and rainbow trout at Medicine Lake.

A small rainbow trout taken on a size 18 Peacock Caddis



Bent and bruised Beaded Red Thread after catching forty-plus fish.



Location / Directions / Notes

The lake is about a 1.5 hour drive northeast of the town of Burney. Outside Burney at the highway 299/89 junction, turn north on Highway 89 and go 34 miles to Harris Springs Road.

Make a right and drive on the paved road to Medicine Lake Road. Then simply follow the signs. Due to the elevation, the weather changes frequently. Always check weather conditions prior to departure. The most productive time of day is early morning. Late afternoon winds are an inconvenience and make fly fishing challenging. The lake is located within walking distance of campsites. The remoteness means you're likely to have the shoreline to yourself.

Other local attractions: Crystal Ice Cave Tours in Lava Beds National Monument (<https://www.nps.gov/labe/planyourvisit/crystalicecavetours.htm>) and other guided ice cave and lava tube tours (<http://www.mccloudoutdoors.com/trips/lavatubesicecaves.html>) out of McCloud, and Glass Mountain, an obsidian flow that flowed down the eastern side of the Medicine Lake Volcano.

