

World Class Triploid Rainbow Trout Fishing in North Central Washington

Fishing Rufus Woods Reservoir with Bait.

By

Anton Jones of Darrell & Dad's Family Guide Service

11-13-11 James Cato of Selah
with 9.2 pound Rufus Rainbow.
Photographer and guide was Jeff
Witkowski of Darrell & Dad's
Family Guide Service



Looking to hook into the trout of a lifetime? Then head to North Central Washington's Rufus Woods Reservoir! This reservoir is actually part of the Columbia River impounded above Chief Joseph Dam and is mostly known for its world class trophy triploid rainbow trout. It's home to the current state record and there is a good chance that the next state record triploid will be caught out of Rufus Woods as well.

The reservoir stretches from Bridgeport to Grand Coulee and is 53 miles long. The two best launch sites on the reservoir are on the Army Corp of Engineers property just above the dam and across and up the lake at the Bridgeport State Park. For approximately two-thirds of its length the reservoir runs east-west. The north shore past Bridgeport State Park is mostly Colville Indian Reservation land. The south side of the reservoir is a mix of public and private ownership. The Triploid Rainbow Trout fishery is completely dependent on a net pen operation located near the middle of the reservoir. The Colville tribe has an agreement with the operator to release approximately 2,500 fish per month into the system. These releases are unpredictably augmented at times due to accidents. The most recent excess release occurred during the heavy runoff in the spring of 2011 when heavy nitrogen build up near the pens would have caused fish to die if confined causing the owners to release a lot of fish. The high run off also caused net pens to break apart and an estimated 100,000 triploids escaped into Rufus Woods.

You can almost always get your two fish limit at Rufus, by either slip sinker fishing Pautzke's Fire Bait off the bottom or by fishing Pautzke's Balls O' Fire on a jig under a slip bobber. Sometimes it doesn't matter what you do, if you hit the lake with bait, they'll bite. Other times it can be more difficult. The devil is in the details. We will focus here on a few of those small details that will allow you to be more successful than most anglers when the bite is difficult.

So, what aspects of this fishery make bait fishing for these guys different than going to your local put and take pond to catch rainbows? The first is the environment. The second is a set of characteristics that make these fish different from diploid rainbows.

The environment of Rufus Woods has characteristics that position the fish differently than in most lakes. The first is variable flow, the second is temperature lag and the third is fertility. Because Rufus Woods is dependent on what comes out of Grand Coulee Dam, its flow can vary from nothing to very fast. The effect on leader length and the weight necessary to hold bottom can vary greatly. Rufus Woods water temps "lag" behind smaller bodies of water as it transitions through the seasons. Rainbow trout can tolerate water from 32 degrees to about 75 degrees Fahrenheit with a preferred temperature range is in the mid-fifties.

Rufus Woods has a well-deserved reputation for being a late fall / winter fishery. This is because it typically takes until November for its water temperature to drop below 60 degrees which really gets the metabolism of a rainbow trout going fast. This in turn makes them easier to catch. Ironically, in the spring when most anglers are eager to fish, Rufus Woods surface water temperature stays below 40 F which makes the triploids relatively inactive and difficult to catch. This is because of the constant infusion of 32 degree snowmelt water entering the system from the Columbia's upper watershed in Canada as well as from the mountains of North Central Washington. The increased turbidity of the water also makes spring on Rufus a difficult

time to fish. Keeping the ideal temperature range of the fish in mind can assist you in eliminating unproductive water and focusing your efforts where you are most likely to catch fish.

Fertility in Rufus Woods is greatest around the net pens because of the infusion of the pellets that feed the fish and the waste that comes from the fish. Other areas of increased fertility are where agricultural runoff and other water sources enter the system. Also, keep in mind that when the general water temperature is below 40 and well out of the triploids comfort range; they will seek areas where springs keep the temperature higher than the surrounding reservoir. The same thing occurs in late summer and early fall when the temperatures of the Reservoir water are above the Triploids comfort range. Because of these factors combined with the specific characteristics of the Triploid Rainbow, you have to tailor your location and presentation in some specific ways to consistently catch these fish.

The specific characteristics of these fish that need to be considered when determining location and presentation are the shape and limitations of the fish and its conditioned feeding pattern. First, because these fish are not streamlined and have relatively worn fins they will not swim as fast as non-net pen raised Diploid Rainbows. Slow your presentation down. Second, because they have been conditioned to eat hatchery pellets and they are slower they tend to not take bigger baits. We have cleaned hundreds of these fish over the years. Rarely will you find a fish in them bigger than a perch fry or stickleback (.75 to 1.5"). Far and away the most common stomach contents are hatchery pellets and snails. After that, midge larvae along with vegetation of all kinds are what you'll typically find. The biggest (and weirdest) stomach content I've seen is a dough bait jar in a nine-pound trout.

Where to fish: The "no-brainer" location is of course the net pens. Not very creative or original, but it can be very effective. Just remember that while it is ok to tie up to the support lines, it is not ok to tie up to the pens themselves. This is where the most readily available food source is present in the form of hatchery pellets to concentrate the fish. Remember the fish are there to feed on pellets that escape the pens. Therefore, your best bet is to fish the bottom below the pens. This can be extraordinarily deep for rainbows. Most of the time we are pounding away at water depths of 75 to 95 feet.

However, it is not necessary to run to the net pens to catch triploid trout by bait fishing. Use your eyes to locate the spots. Primarily, you are looking for concentrations of surfacing fish to find those locations. Secondly, look for water entering the system. Remember the shallower the water that the fish are hanging out in, the spookier they will be. While a stealthy approach to the pens is completely unnecessary, some of these other shallower locations require a quiet approach or a significant stand-off distance. Since this is a 51 mile long reservoir, there are plenty of potential hot spots for you to discover and make your own. It is unnecessary to crowd

in with other anglers. There are fish concentrated in a variety of obvious and not so obvious locations. As an extra bonus, locating those spots can provide you with the opportunity to see a variety of wildlife as well as give you that satisfaction that comes from being a pioneer instead of a follower.

When it comes to bait trying to “matching the hatch” is futile. There are just too many pellets. Instead you want to use something that attracts them with a smell that is similar to but distinct from the hatchery pellets. Use Pautzke’s Fire Bait in pinks and green. You will want to use enough bait to encase a single #6 hook completely. You only need to leave the hook exposed when the water temperatures drop below 40 degrees making it difficult for the hook point to exit the bait into the fish. Fish a leader of two to eight pound test mono of at least four and a half feet in length. This will allow that Fire Bait to rise above the weed tips and be visible to the fish. Another effective bait combo is to use good old Pautzke’s Balls O’ Fire salmon eggs floated with a marshmallow.

You will need to lengthen the leader from there to compensate for increased flow. If the flow is negligible you can fish the more common 3/8oz to 1/2oz slip sinker. You must increase the weight as the flow increases to find and hold bottom. I’d be prepared to go all the way to 3 or more ounces when flow is heavy. Another subtle alteration of your presentation that can increase your bite rate when there is significant current is to add a small Mack’s Lure Smile Blade above your hook with a bead between the blade and hook knot. That slow wobble can provide just the right amount of vibration to appeal to the fish.

Another thing that we have found is that 90% of our bites occur within the first 5 or 10 minutes of a cast. If you haven’t gotten bit within 10 minutes of casting, I’d recommend that you retrieve your bait, check it and recast.

If you are seeing significant surface activity and not many fish on the sonar, a reasonable alteration would be to change to a baited jig and slip bobber presentation. If you do this, I would recommend that you go small. Use jigs that vary from 1/8th oz to 1/32nd oz for best effect tipped with coon shrimp cured in orange or pink Fire Cure or a kernel or two of Fire Corn. I would recommend either Mack’s Lures Glow Getter Jigs or Worden Lures Maxi-Jigs. Again, when there is sufficient current going to turn it, a Mack’s Lures Smile Blade above the jig can increase your effectiveness.

So, what the heck is a triploid trout? Well, it’s a trout that has had its chromosomes altered. This is accomplished by taking eyed eggs and treating them in either a warm water bath or a pressure bath. This causes one of the chromosomes to split thereby creating a fish with three (triploid) rather than the normal two (diploid) chromosomes. The end result is a sterile fish. This means that triploids do not go through a spawn cycle. Instead, they just continue to eat and

grow. Think steer, not mule. In other words a triploid is a sterile rainbow not a sterile hybrid. Since they do not go through a spawn cycle and all the food that goes into them is turned into growth and waste with nothing diverted to reproduction their size potential is much greater than a regular diploid rainbow. The state record rainbow of 29.6 pounds was a triploid that came out of Rufus Woods Reservoir. The world record rainbow of 43.6 pounds was a triploid that came out of Lake Diefenbaker in Saskatchewan. Average rainbows caught range from 2 to 6 pounds. Since they are raised in net pens before being released into the system, their fins (particularly the dorsal and tail fins) shows wear. Because they are triploids and well fed, they have a much less streamlined shape than a diploid rainbow. This shape, resembling a football, adds to their fight as the girth of the fish in heavy currents makes them fun to catch on light gear.

Keeping the few above-mentioned principles in mind should help you become more consistently successful in bait fishing for Triploid Rainbows at Rufus Woods.



11-8-10 - Bobby Loomios; Darrell & Dad's Family Guide Service guide, Andy Byrd and Pat Salokay with a nice four guy Rufus Limit. The author was the photographer and fourth angler.

1-866-360-1523 or Antonj@aol.com

www.darrellanddads.com