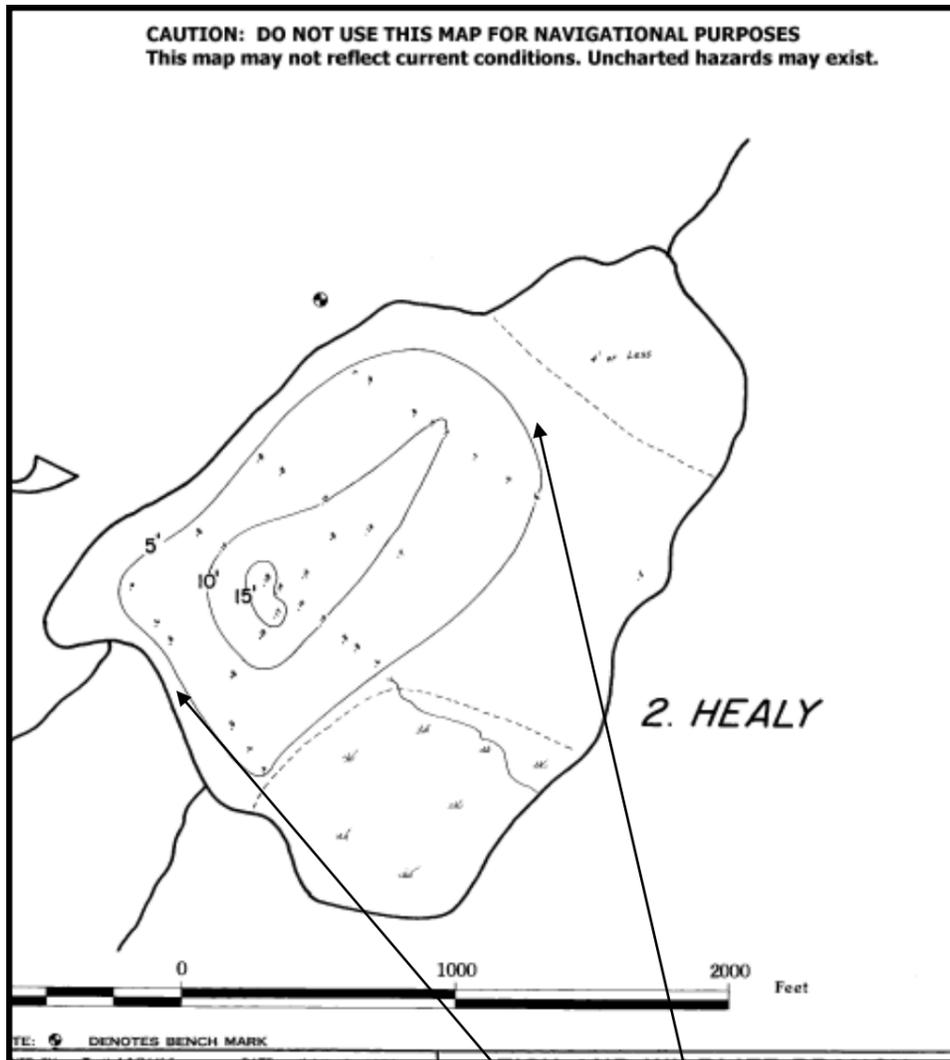
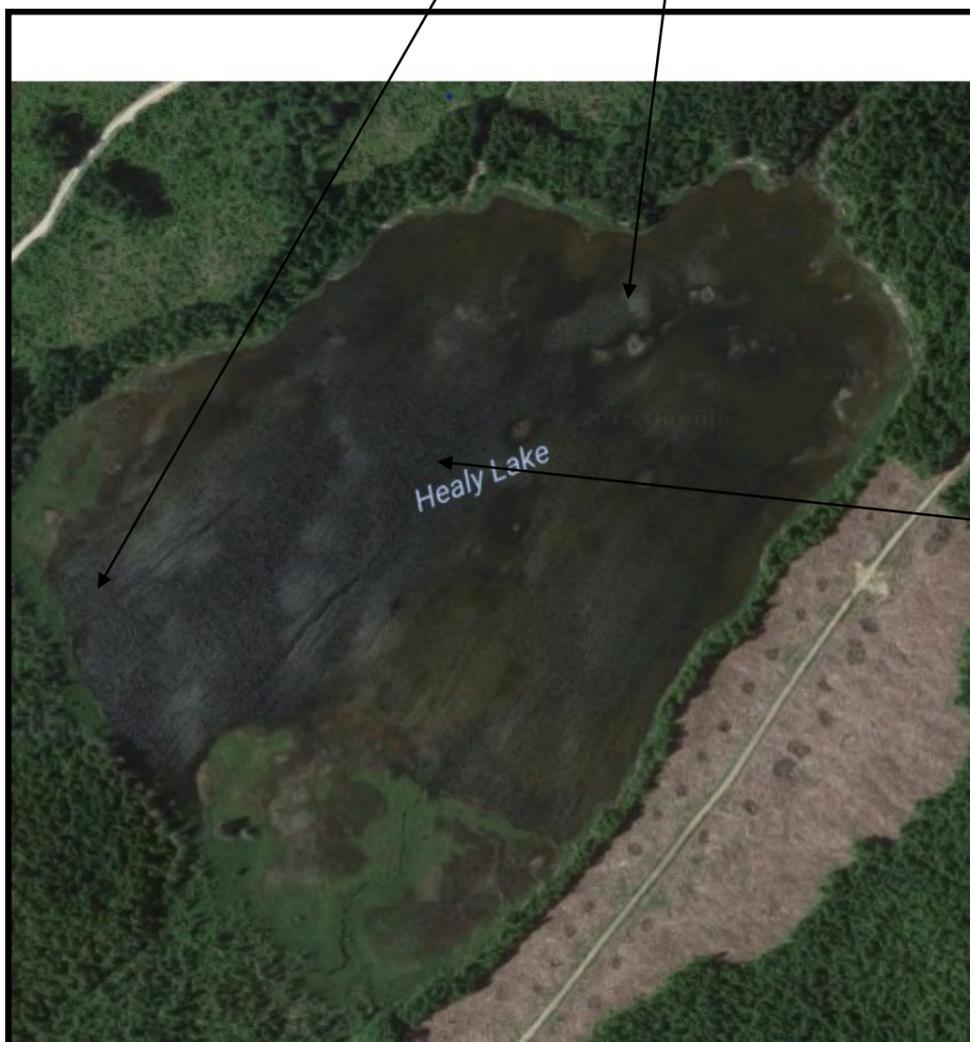


Muddling Along December 24, 2016 Panther (Healy) Lake



Two favourite areas to fish are near the inlet streams at the SW end of the lake and towards the outlet stream at the NE end of the lake.



The area along the edge of the Thule beds which mark the boundary of a large shallow weedy area is really good producer of fish during the time when the damsels are staging and hatching off. Cast a damsel nymph or a dry fly towards the Thule beds and retrieve toward the boat.

Panther Lake is a small mountain lake reached by travelling on Nanaimo Lakes Road past first and second lakes and taking the first turn after the fourth lake turnoff heads out across the Nanaimo River. The road is highly variable in its conditions but is usually accessible to a 2 wheel drive vehicle with good clearance. I wouldn't recommend that anyone try to go into the lake without first going in with a guide who knows the way. The worst part of the road is the 50 yards from G main down to the launch site. Any vehicle with a bit lower clearance has to travel carefully to avoid scraping parts of the undercarriage on the rocks. The launch area has a small stream running through it most of the year, so a pair of waterproof boots is essential to launching your watercraft.

Panther is open only on the weekends in the spring and fall and most of the best times to go in are in the spring and fall hunting seasons. At those times, anyone can go through the gates as long as they sign in with the staff at the first gate. At times when the gates are locked, the IWFF have a key that allows them access when it is closed to other users (unless they have an agreement with Timber West Forest Company).

The lake is overall very shallow (20 ft at the deepest) and most fishing is done in water from 5 to 15 ft deep. For that reason, most fishing can be done with a floating line with a dry fly or a bead head nymph on a long leader. At times, a full sink line of Type 2 -4 is useful if you wish to troll and the fish are hanging around in deeper water.

Wild rainbow trout are the only species present in the lake and average around 13 to 14 inches in size with the occasional 15 to 17 fish being taken. Stories exist of trout in the 20+ inch range, but there have been no reports of fish that size for a dozen years or so. What they lack in size, Panther lake rainbows make up for it in abundance and in sheer fighting prowess. A 12 inch fish from Panther will take longer to land than a 16 inch fish from the lakes in the urban Nanaimo area, making long runs with plenty of aerial acrobatics!



Early in the season within a few weeks after ice off can be a good time to use chironomids, but legally, an indicator is not allowed (the lake is fly fishing only and catch and release only) so chironomids have to be fished "naked" or on a full sink line. Good colours are black body with red, silver or gold rib and a gold, silver or black bead head. Sizes 12 to 16 will usually produce lots of fish. Andrew's chironomid emerger also works well fished on an intermediate sink tip. Nymphs and wet flies of various kinds work well early in the season and later as well. Good choices are damsel and dragon nymphs, small woolly buggers (in olive or dark colours), olive leeches with gold bead head. Booby flies work very well fished on a sinking line and retrieved quickly . . . Be prepared for savage strikes with booby flies! Don't go any larger than a size 8 with your flies and think sparse rather than bulky. Be sure to remember to crimp your barbs or use barbless hooks. This is a catch and release fishery and we want the released fish to have a chance to come back as larger fish the next time we go in!

Panther Lake looking to the southwest.

Fishing in the spring tends to produce a fair number of "kelts" (fish which have spawned and returned to the lake to feed up again). These fish can be quite aggressive in taking the fly, but don't put up quite the same battle as their friends who skipped the spawning urge that year. By the fall, the majority of fish are in great shape again because of the abundant food in the lake.

On the last few trips before the lake becomes too warm to fish, there can be some great caddis hatches and good fishing with a dry fly (elk hair caddis, parachute adams, tom thumb . . . To name a few). Body colours can range from olive, to tan, to cinnamon to gray. Don't be afraid to try a dry fly at any time of the year . . . Panther Lake fish are famous for their willingness to take a floating fly! I always keep a light rod rigged up with a small dry fly to pick up and cast to a rising trout!



15 inch fat Panther rainbow