

Muddling Along Feb 7

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Strains of Rainbow Trout Used in Stocking Lakes in B.C. (Part 5)

In Part 1, I gave an overview of trout stocking in B.C. and had a look at the various strains that have been used historically. There were up to a dozen or so different strains that have been used over the year for stocking, but this has been reduced to four strains (Fraser Valley, Gerrard, Pennask and Blackwater) with some work on developing a fifth strain from Carp Lake north of Prince George. In parts 2,3 and 4, I looked at the Fraser Valley, Pennask, and Blackwater strains. In Part 5 we will examine the Gerrard strain.

Gerrard Rainbows

The Gerrard strain originated from trout living in Kootenay Lake but only those which spawn in a very limited area of the Lardeau River near where it comes out of Trout Lake. (at one time they also spawned in the Duncan River but that run was wiped out by the building of the Duncan Dam.) This in combination with changes in water chemistry of Kootenay Lake due to the dam building caused a decline in numbers in the spawning run from thousands of fish in the early 1900's to a few hundred fish by the 80's. A lake fertilization program which was begun in the early 1990's and over the next few years, the increased fertility led to increased plankton growth and subsequent increases in the kokanee population, the main food source for larger Gerrards. Trout numbers went from 400 – 800 adult spawners through the 70's to the nineties to a high of 1500 adults in 2013 but had dropped to 1200 by 2015. If the program is continued and a strong effort is made to regulate habitat degradation and the sports fishery, these magnificent fish should continue to survive and provide a quality fishery in Kootenay Lake.



A prime Gerrard Rainbow from Kootenay Lake.

Gerrard trout are noted for their large size and incredible fighting prowess. They are the largest strain of rainbows found in North America (and possibly in the world!). They are similar in looks to the steelhead with small black spots uniformly distributed along the back above the lateral line. The average size of spawners in the Lardeau (for 1986-96) was 9.1 kg (20 lb) for males and a smaller 6.9 kg for females.

Gerrard trout have been stocked in lakes throughout B.C. for over 100 years. The largest Gerrards recorded (unofficial) according to Biologist Ted Burns were giants of up to 50 pounds from Jewel Lake near Greenwood B.C. They apparently attained their huge size because of a nutrient rich lake which supported a large population of Lake Chub which were introduced into the lake at the same time as the trout. In subsequent years, the reports of such huge fish have dwindled down to where they are only of typical size for a small interior lake. Gerrards were stocked in a number of lakes which had populations of coarse fish and did quite well in some cases. In the East Kootenays, they were stocked in a couple of dozen lakes as fingerlings and monitored from 2007 up to 2012. After reviewing the results, biologists decided against continuing stocking programs and left the fish to fend for themselves. (many of the lakes did not have good spawning streams.). As of 2015, there were no more stockings of Gerrards in any of the East Kootenay lakes.

The prevailing attitude among fisheries biologists is that Gerrards should only be stocked in lakes which are large, deep and cool with productive populations of kokanee (modelled after Kootenay Lake). Other lakes which have similar large, piscivorous trout include Arrow, Shuswap

and Okanagan lakes. In central and northern B.C. there are populations of very large rainbows of a similar type in lakes like Quesnel, Babine, Stewart and Francois (although not the size of some of the Gerrard giants.) To maintain fish for future stocking programs, the Kootenay Hatchery at Wardner has a Gerrard brood stock program to generate eggs and fry for use.

Fishing for Gerrards in these large lakes is usually done using down riggers and similar gear to that used for salt water salmon fishing. (flashers and hoochies, spoons and plugs). In the winter months, the kokanee drift nearer to the surface and the large trout can be taken on bucktails cast or trolled shallow off a downrigger.

In smaller lakes where the Gerrard stock still survive (Moose (Alsis), Whitetail and White Swan to name some I have fished), they can be caught on similar gear to the Blackwaters which often inhabit the same waters. Leech patterns, streamers and larger nymph patterns work well. Early in the season, they can even be taken on chironomids!

Having had the privilege of catching some of these beauties on the fly rod (nothing over 5 lbs), I would say that pound for pound, they can outfight any member of the extensive group known as Rainbow Trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*).

In the final installment of this part of the series, I will take a brief look at Carp Lake trout and take a stab at explaining the meaning of the terms AF3N, triploid, diploid etc. To be continued!