

Muddling Along Jan 10

Strains of Rainbow Trout Used in Stocking Lakes in B.C. (Part 3)

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 part 2 I looked at the Fraser Valley strain that is (in most fisher's opinion) the least desirable of the trout strains. In Part 3 I will look at the Pennask Strain.

Pennask Strain Rainbow Trout



Pennask trout from the original stock at Pennask Lake between Merrit and Peachland, are quite small fish even at later ages. When they are released into lakes with no competing fish species and abundant supplies of invertebrate feed (any of many varieties of insects plus leeches, spiders, snails and more) they can develop to a large size (up to 10 pounds or more) in a fairly short time.

These fish are usually stocked in lakes where there are no other rainbow trout strains present and also no competing fish of other species. If other species are present, they do not fare as well as in the monoculture lakes. The world famous "Kamloops" Trout are mostly Pennask fish that have attained a much larger size in the insect rich waters of the Kamloops, Okanagan and Cariboo areas.

They can be recognized by their very sparse spots with most of them concentrated on the back and more heavily from the dorsal fin back to the tail. They can be quite chunky if the feed is abundant, but they will be slimmer than the Fraser Valley fish given the same conditions.

They also fight much more strongly than the FV fish, often taking to the air in a series of heart stopping leaps. For that reason, they are one of the most popular fish varieties for anglers to

pursue. They will eat other small fish but only when they get to be 3 or 4 years old. They are known for their ability to store fat over the summer through engaging in a feeding frenzy in the last few weeks before the lakes freeze up. This makes them good candidates for higher altitude lakes which spend many months under an ice cover.

They are mostly mid water foragers with one of their favourite foods being chironomid pupae. They also feed on Scud (fresh water shrimp), leeches and a variety of pupa and or nymphs of many aquatic insects including damselfly, dragonfly, caddis, mayflies, backswimmers as well as terrestrial insects such as ants, grasshoppers and also spiders.

The most popular early season method to use for these fish is the chironomid fished under an indicator in depths of water up to 30 feet. The best chironomids to start with are black body with a silver rib (with or without a white or gold bead head, black with a red rib or the chrome (silver body and red rib). It is useful to throat pump the first larger fish taken (over 15 inches preferably to lessen the chance of damaging the fish) and examine the chironomids seen for size and colour. The chironomids can also be fished on a long leader with no indicator (a coloured nymph tip helps in detecting subtle takes) or on a sinking line with a dead slow retrieve.

As the season moves along, the trout start feeding more on other insects and other invertebrates. As the hatches of insects start appear more commonly towards summer, some spectacular dry fly fishing can be had with these very acrobatic fish.

Pennask strain fish have been stocked in many lakes in Southern B.C. as well as in lakes as far north as Prince George . . . anywhere where the conditions are right for them (abundant invertebrate life and no other competing fish species.) If you are not keen on fishing chironomids, early fish will also take a variety of different micro leeches as well as dragon nymphs. Last spring, for the first time, I tried using booby flies in a variety of eye and body colours and found that the black body with white eyes and the olive body with white or green eyes seemed to be quite effective.

In the next installment, I will have a look at the Blackwater strain.