

Baum Lake

An overview of how to fish this lake, which has a current

While most lakes are standing bodies of water where fish constantly move in search of food, Baum Lake has a current that brings food to the fish. Here you'll find classic spring creek and tailwater conditions, along with an abundance of aquatic plants and insects. The lake's streamlike qualities result in anglers successfully fishing it as they would a wider version of Hat Creek. Productive angling can be found virtually anywhere there, but especially in the current and wherever water spills into the lake. Fly fishing from a floating device is particularly popular.

Focus for Success

My first visit to Baum Lake began like a scene from a spaghetti western. I stood on the lake's shore, lit a cigar, and stared intently out at the water. The fly tied to my leader was still buried into the cork of my rod handle when a companion asked, "Aren't you going to fish?" A moment later, I spotted and made my way towards a classic rise that broke the water's surface about ten yards to my right. Unbeknownst to me, that event set the tone for how I fish anywhere. I take time to watch and observe.

In this regard, Baum Lake provides a great education and is a favorite place for me to take individuals just getting into fly fishing. Few fly-fishing schools or casting clinics can compete with the on-the-water knowledge you'll acquire by fishing Baum Lake. And best of all, the enrollment fee is just the cost of a fishing license.

Two of the lessons I learned from the Baum Lake schoolyard are how to fish the hang and how to read the rise. Fishing the hang is a presentation technique I use when nymph fishing at Baum Lake. As I let my line sink and then strip it in, I have observed trout repeatedly following my fly. To work this to my advantage, at the end of a retrieve, I raise my rod and pause prior to recasting. The hang frequently will induce a trout following my fly to take it.

As for reading the rise, we've all heard this phrase, but do most of us really understand it? Here's a simple breakdown. A trout rise on Baum Lake is an announcement. If you pay attention, it will indicate the type of insect or the stage of the insect on which the trout is feeding. This will not only provide you with an idea for which fly to use, but more importantly, it will tell you how to fish it.

During gentle or subtle rises, trout sip an insect from the water's surface. All that appears is a dimple, followed by small rings. When you come across this on Baum Lake, fish your fly at a dead drift.

A bulge rise is just that: you'll simply notice a bulge on the water's surface. The trout does not show itself, and this is often an indication that it is feeding just below the surface on emerging nymphs.

A rise where the trout leaves the water or creates a splash is an indication that it is chasing something just out of reach. Hence, fish a dry fly.

A classic Baum Lake head and tail rise.



Gear and Strategy

A 9-foot 4-weight or 5-weight fly rod works well at Baum. It will provide ample casting distance and allow an angler to overcome high embankments on the back cast. Throughout the day, I switch between two spools on my reel. One contains floating line and a long leader for precise presentations. I use this setup whenever I see fish rising. The other spool is loaded with a clear, slow-sinking intermediate line I use while prospecting. This gives me control over depth. When fishing nymphs, success is consistently tied to the depth to which you present your fly, along with a slow retrieve.

Regardless of which line you're using, try to identify what bugs the trout are taking. Due to the lake's soft bottom, I prefer to fish Baum Lake from a kayak, rather than trying to wade it, and I have had experienced repeated success throughout the year by casting dry gray emerger

patterns along the tules that line the shore. Other successful fly patterns include Micro Mayfly nymphs, Pheasant Tail nymphs, Callibaetis cripples, and midges.

Additionally, the lake is one of California's better winter trout-fishing destinations. Crystal Lake Hatchery personnel make frequent visits to Baum Lake and ensure the lake is well stocked with brook, brown, and rainbow trout. Occasionally, brood trout in the 5-to-10 pound range are planted. The hatchery fish quickly adjust to a diet of insects and grow rapidly. Consider combining a winter visit to Baum with a trip to the Pit River. I like to fish Baum Lake during the morning hours and then spend my afternoons on the Pit, directly below Lake Britton Dam.

Field Notes

Baum Lake, located in the Cassel area of Shasta County, is open year-round. Fishing is consistently good from the shore or from a pram, kayak, float tube, or pontoon boat. Gas motors are not allowed. The pristine habitat and environment are delights to birders and photographers and offer ample opportunities to view wildlife. Food and lodging are available in the nearby town of Burney.

To get to Baum Lake, from Burney head northeast on Highway 299. Turn right onto Cassel Road. Proceed two miles and then go left onto Baum Lake Road. The lake's entrance will be on your left. I recommend you also stop by Crystal Lake Hatchery, which is adjacent to Baum Lake and well worth the visit.

Baum Lake is generously stocked with trout, and sometimes the plantings include large broodstock fish. The lake is fishable year-round.

