

# Anglers' Guide to the LAKES AND STREAMS of FRENCH CANYON and HUMPHREYS BASIN

FRESNO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA



Big and Little French Lakes

PDF Courtesy of HighCountryFlyfisher.com

STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

## Anglers' Guide to the FRENCH CANYON and HUMPHREYS BASIN AREA Fresno County, California

This map was prepared by the Department of Fish and Game to guide anglers to the many fine trout waters of the French Canyon and Humphreys Basin area, and to acquaint them with information on management of the fisheries.

The area is located immediately north of the Kings Canyon National Park boundary in north-eastern Fresno County. It lies entirely within the High Sierra Wilderness area of Sierra National Forest and contains approximately 42 square miles of drainage originating in rugged granitoid glacial cirques and jagged peaks of the Sierran Crest. Piute Creek, draining both French Canyon and Humphreys Basin, is tributary to the South Fork of the San Joaquin River, joining it about seven miles above Florence Lake. The basins were originally stocked years ago by department wardens by transplant and by fish from the Cottonwood Lakes.

Since this area is dedicated to perpetuation of our state fish, the golden trout, anglers will find that except for an occasional brook trout only golden trout will be found in the waters of this area. There are approximately 67 lakes and perhaps seven streams in the basin. Here the angler will find some of the finest fishing and recreation to be found in the Sierra.

### ACCESSIBILITY

From Bishop (Highway 395) this area is mainly accessible by two routes—Pine Creek and Bishop Creek. It is a 4½ hour trip from Pine Creek Pack Station over Pine Creek Pass into French Canyon by the most direct route. From North Lake Pack Station on the North Fork of Bishop Creek it is a 3½ hour trip over Piute Pass to campsites at the Golden Trout Lakes in the middle of Humphreys Basin. The trail from North Lake, after paralleling Piute Creek through Humphreys Basin to its mouth, joins the John Muir Trail at the stream junction with the South Fork of the San Joaquin River.

From Fresno (Highway 99) the drainages are accessible by some 100 miles of paved motor road to Florence Lake. From there it is six hours by pack train to Hutchinson Meadow. At Hutchinson Meadow the trail divides, one branch going northeast into French Canyon (1 hour) and the other running east into Humphreys Basin, (one and one-half hours to the Golden Trout Lakes).

### CAMPING

None of the lakes described here have established campgrounds, although most of those below and even to timberline have reasonably comfortable sites for overnight or a day or two. Good camp areas may also be found along French and Piute Creeks. A number of locations have good camps built up and maintained over a period of years by local packers and by anglers and deer hunters. Owing to lack of firewood at the higher, rockbound lakes, camping is not recommended.

Larger meadows provide feed for stock for several days and a few of the smaller ones will support several head overnight. There is ample stock feed at Hutchinson Meadow and lower French Canyon; but feed is available only in moderate amounts elsewhere in the area and stock is likely to roam considerable distance.

In all national forests a campfire permit is a *must*. It may be obtained from any Forest Service officer or ranger station. The area is yours to enjoy, so please help to preserve it in its natural state by maintaining and leaving a clean camp and taking every precaution against fire.

### LAKE FISHING

Descriptive summaries are included in this guide on some 63 waters, of which 61 are lakes. They vary in size from one-quarter to 220 acres, together totalling about 490 surface acres.

Fifty-three lakes contain trout populations as follows:

- Golden in 44 lakes.
- Golden-Rainbow Hybrids in 2 lakes.
- Golden and Eastern Brook in 7 lakes.

Among the above, 10 lakes are now self-sustaining and need no further planting. Some of the newly planted lakes may be self-sustaining in several years. Other lakes require replanting occa-

sionally to maintain their populations. Eight lakes are barren and will not be planted at all because of unsuitable habitat.

### STREAM FISHING

As in most other High Sierra drainages the streams provide a considerable addition to the lake fisheries. Fullest angling use of all reaches of French Canyon and Piute Creeks is recommended; and the small sections of tributaries above and particularly below the lakes should not be overlooked for much good fishing.

Except for eastern brook in Piute Creek, the stream fisheries are predominantly golden trout with an occasional golden-rainbow hybrid. The latter are reminiscent of so-called "steelhead" rainbow plants years ago into both drainages.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Since 1942 the Fresno County Sportsmen's Club and California Department of Fish and Game have conducted annual cooperative lake and stream surveys in the High Sierra, in eastern Fresno County. Most of the information in this guide is based on this work and the surveys in 1950 and 1951 by Department Biologists William A. Dill, Elden H. Vestal, Scott M. Soule, Ralph V. Beck, Robert O. Ekwall, and Dana R. Abell. Notes and angling information have been contributed from time to time by members of the Sierra Club, anglers, packers, and department wardens. The accompanying guide map was developed from the latest Sierra National Forest and U. S. Geological Survey maps, aerial photographs, department base maps and field observations. It was prepared by Cliffla Corson for this anglers' guide.

### FOR BETTER FISHING

In cooperation with sportsmen the department is trying to manage the state's trout fisheries to provide the best possible angling for the greatest number. In order to carry out proper management, accurate information about individual waters is required. This is obtained through special surveys of the lakes and streams.

The principal objective of this work is to learn whether or not we should stock a water and, if so, in what way. The size of a lake and its richness in natural food are very important, for they

determine to a large extent the number of fish which should be planted. Overstocking results in large numbers of stunted fish which are too small to provide good sport. Under-stocking results in a few large fish which are hard to catch. In between lies the happy medium wherein correct stocking allotments provide maximum numbers of nice-sized fish in good condition.

One of the purposes of anglers' guides is to call attention to under-fished areas, in order to increase fishing pressure where that is desirable and to take full advantage of the available trout crop.

### NATURAL SPAWNING

A knowledge of natural spawning in a lake is also important. Often when spawning is good, satisfactory angling can be maintained with a single initial stocking of trout, which will subsequently breed naturally and produce all the fish the lake can support. Many of our high mountain lakes, however, have no spawning areas at all and must be stocked regularly if there is to be any fishing. Others are intermediate, requiring occasional light stocking to augment inadequate natural reproduction.

Golden trout require running water for successful spawning. Conditions favoring natural propagation by goldens occur in the small inlet or outlet complex of most French Canyon-Humphreys Basin lakes normally in June and July and hatching often occurs until September. Frequently, under relatively light angler use, only a few yards of fairly good spawning gravels are required to sustain an individual fishery.

### ANGLING AND HUNTING REGULATIONS

Angling and hunting are permitted in the area in accordance with state fish and game laws. The latest angling regulations are obtainable at offices of the Department of Fish and Game, the U. S. Forest Service, and from most sporting goods dealers.

A good sportsman takes only as many trout as he can use and uses what he takes. Trout he can't use he carefully releases and returns to the water. He may even remove the barbs from his hooks to do less damage to the fish he does not intend to keep.

## FRENCH CANYON

The French Canyon lakes lie almost entirely at timberline or above in rugged, alpine, glaciated granite country. Ice-carving and weathering have produced numerous benches and rocky ledges, open glacial flats, scours, rough talus slopes, and precipitous cliffs. Since all of the lakes lie above 10,000 feet there is little vegetation. Conifers are dwarfed and scattered, tundra-like meadow areas are more restricted and lakeside clumps of willow, labrador tea, and mountain heath are sparse. A characteristic of all the lakes whether they lie on open bench or in glacial cirque is their generally granitic, rocky, often boulder-strewn shorelines, with sand and silty bottoms and low basic fertility. Individually, the waters may be characterized as follows:

1. **Alsace Lake.** Elev. 11,060; 53 acres; 60 feet deep; fair productivity but limited spawning. Golden trout to 8 inches fairly abundant. Easily fishable. Needs occasional small air plant of golden.

2. **Blanc Lake.** Elev. 11,260; 3.7 acres; 15 feet deep; poor productivity and poor spawning. Barren. Unsuitable for trout; will not be planted.

3. **Chevaux Lake.** Elev. 11,000; 7.3 acres; possibly 25 feet deep; low productivity; fair natural propagation; golden trout to 8 inches abundant and lake is partially self-sustaining. Occasional supplementary plants required.

4. **Elba Lake.** Elev. 10,900; 17 acres; possibly 40 feet deep; fair productivity and spawning. Contains golden trout and golden-rainbow hybrids in good numbers up to 12 inches. Requires occasional booster air plants of fingerling golden.



South Half of French Canyon Toward Pilot Knob





Upper Petite and La Tete Lakes (foreground)

5. **French Canyon Creek.** Elev. 9,525 to 11,620; 6 miles long; high montane, cascading to rapid "brook" with mostly open, turf-lined banks; good pools and fair shelter; good natural propagation and stream entirely self-sustaining with golden and golden-rainbow hybrids averaging about six inches.

6. **French Lake, Big.** Elev. 11,240; 59 acres; 58 feet deep; fair food and good spawning; golden trout up to 15 inches. Increased use requires biennial plant of fingerling goldens.

7. **French Lake, Little.** Elev. 11,320; 5.5 acres; about 40 feet deep; fair productivity and spawning. Barren but reserved for golden. One plant may suffice.

8. **La Salle Lake.** Elev. 11,700; 7.7 acres; possibly 75 feet deep; poor productivity but fair spawning. Barren prior to initial test plant of golden trout made in 1954. Contains some goldens to 11 inches. Requires occasional replanting.

9. **La Tete Lake.** Elev. 11,500; 2.6 acres; 25 feet deep; low basic fertility and no spawning. Barren and unsuitable for trout; will not be planted.

10. **"L" Lake.** Elev. 11,050; 37 acres; 21 feet deep; fair food and spawning. Golden trout up to 12 inches fairly common and in good condition. Subject to local winter kill and planted very occasionally with fingerlings to support restricted natural propagation.

11. **Lorraine Lake.** Elev. 11,225; 7.7 acres; possibly 25 feet deep; poor food and spawning. Initial plant of golden trout made in 1953.

12. **Merriam Lake.** Elev. 10,950; 20 acres; 80 feet deep; fair productivity and fair spawning. Golden present up to 15 inches in ample numbers and no planting required with recurrent light angler use.

13. **Moon Lake.** Elev. 10,998; 18 acres; 50 feet deep; good productivity and good spawning. Contains a good population of golden trout up to 12 inches. Golden-rainbow hybrids may also be present. Subject to occasional winter kill. Occasional replanting required.

14. **Paris Lake.** Elev. 11,160; 25 acres; 35 feet deep; poor productivity and sparse spawning. Barren prior to initial trial plant of golden fingerlings in 1953. Contains some goldens to 17 inches. Occasional replants required.

15. **Petite Lake, Lower.** Elev. 11,460; 2.8 acres; 35 feet deep; fair productivity but very limited spawning. Barren. Reserved for golden trout only and trial plant of fingerlings when available.

16. **Petite Lake, Upper.** Elev. 11,480; 1.8 acres; possibly 30 feet deep; fair food but no spawning; barren. Too small and poor to plant.

17. **Puppet Lake.** Elev. 11,220; 51 acres; 17 feet deep; good productivity; no spawning. Initial plant of golden fingerlings made in 1953. Goldens to 10 inches fairly abundant, with some to 5 pounds.

18. **Roget Lake.** Elev. 12,300; 3.3 acres; 10 feet deep; poor food and no spawning; subject to winter kill. Received trial plant of fingerling goldens in 1959.

19. **Royce Lake No. 1.** Elev. 11,320; 8.8 acres; 20 feet deep; fair food and good spawning. Subject to winter kill and loss over outlet falls. Initial trial plant of golden made in 1953 apparently unsuccessful. Second trial plant made in 1959.

20. **Royce Lake No. 2.** Elev. 11,620; 32 acres; over 50 feet deep; fair productivity but no spawning. Trial air plant of golden made in 1953. Goldens to 8 inches now abundant. Requires occasional replanting.

21. **Royce Lake No. 3.** Elev. 11,670; 10 acres; ample depth; poor food and no spawning. Trial air plant of golden trout fingerlings made in 1953. Some now present to 16 inches. Will require occasional plants to sustain.

22. **Royce Lake No. 4.** Elev. 11,725; 73 acres; possibly 100 feet deep; low basic fertility and poor spawning. Initial air plant of golden trout fingerlings made in 1953. Goldens to 18 inches now fairly abundant. Occasional planting required.

23. **Royce Lake No. 5.** Elev. 11,770; 41 acres; possibly 100 feet deep; low basic productivity and no spawning, but capable of supporting a fishery with occasional stocking. Initial plant of golden fingerlings made in 1953. Goldens to 12 inches now present.

24. **Rust Lake.** Elev. 11,570; 4.1 acres; 25 feet deep; fair food and fair spawning. Goldens to 10 inches abundant. Occasional replanting required.

25. **Star Lake.** Elev. 11,400; 40 acres; 40 feet deep; fair food but limited spawning. Goldens to 7 inches abundant, with some to 16 inches.

26. **Steelhead Lake.** Elev. 11,300; 55 acres; over 90 feet deep; fair productivity but sparse spawning. Golden trout present but not abundant. Requires occasional air plant of fingerlings to sustain.

27. **Unnamed lakes (2) on north tributary of Big French Lake.** These two small rockbound tarns (one-quarter and one-half acre) are unsuitable for trout and will not be planted.

## HUMPHREYS BASIN

Like French Canyon to the north, Humphreys Basin is a broad, mostly open, glaciated granite basin lying astride or above timberline. From the sparsely wooded lower end of the area at 10,000 feet elevation there is first a gradual then rapid increase in climb to the bare, rocky, wind and snow-swept ridges at the head of the basin 3,000 feet higher. Little vegetation will be found at the higher lakes other than small willow patches and tundra meadow areas. Glacial slicks, jumbled talus slopes, boulder piles, and generally ice-carved and weathered high montane terrain characterize the basin as a whole.

Individually, the waters may be characterized as follows:

1. **Cony Lake.** Elev. 11,480; 3 acres; 15 feet deep; fair productivity and spawning. Replanted with fingerling golden trout in 1960 after chemical treatment in 1959 to remove stunted eastern brook trout.

2. **Desolation Lake, Big.** Elev. 11,381; 220 acres; 65 feet deep; low basic fertility and poor spawning but enough to support lake. Golden trout are reported to average 14 inches and fish up to 20 inches may be taken occasionally. Fishing in this large cold lake is sporadic and angling success varies considerably from day to day. Reserved solely for golden trout; requires biennial planting to sustain fishing.

3. **Desolation Lake, Little.** Elev. 11,150; 28.6 acres; 21 feet deep; low fertility and poor spawning. Small population of golden averaging eight inches has persisted here for years, supported by limited natural propagation in inlet and fish from Big Desolation Lake above. No need for planting.

4. **Forsaken Lake Tributary to Big Desolation Lake from East.** Elev. 11,500; 3 acres; 10 feet deep; low productivity and poor spawning. Small population of golden trout to 12 inches. Occasional restocking required.



Little Desolation Lake



Lower Golden Trout Lake

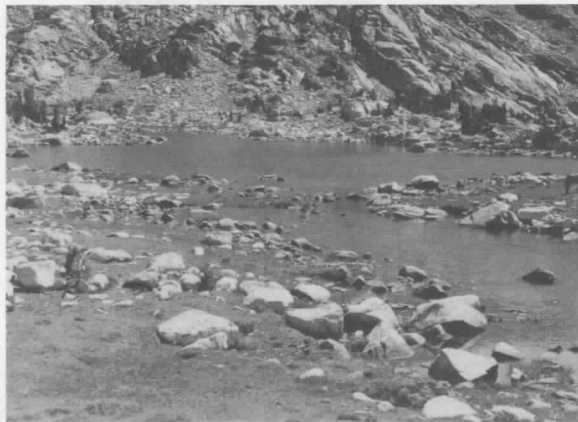
5. **Golden Trout Lake, Lower.** Elev. 10,775; 23.8 acres; 26 feet deep; good food and excellent spawning; contains plentiful self-sustaining fishery of 3 to 9 inch golden in good condition. No need to plant. Often excellent fishing may be found in the stream below this lake.

6. **Golden Trout Lake, Upper.** Elev. 10,820; 4.4 acres; 15 feet deep; highly productive with excellent spawning in inlets. Contains nice golden trout fishery with fish averaging 8 inches; no need to plant.

7. **Hidden Lake No. 1.** Elev. 11,650; 6 acres; 50 feet deep; poor food and spawning. Received initial trial air plant of golden fingerlings in 1955. Contains small population of goldens 6 to 16 inches. Requires occasional restocking.

8. **Hidden Lake No. 2.** Elev. 11,845; 5 acres; 30 feet deep; poor productivity and spawning. Small population of golden trout present. Occasional replanting required.

9. **Hidden Lake No. 3.** Elev. 11,870; 2 acres; 30 feet deep; low basic fertility and poor spawning. Initial air plant of golden fingerlings made in 1955, but believed either barren or with very few fish now.



Upper Golden Trout Lake

10. **Hidden Lake No. 4.** Elev. 11,900; 7 acres; 50 feet deep; low basic productivity and poor spawning. Barren prior to initial air plant of golden fingerlings in 1955. Either barren now or very few trout present.

11. **Honeymoon Lake, Lower.** Elev. 10,440; 16 acres; 35 feet deep; good productivity and good spawning. Contains a plentiful golden trout fishery; fish plentiful to 9 inches. Self-sustaining and no need to plant.

12. **Honeymoon Lake, Upper.** Elev. 10,825; 20 acres; 45 feet deep; poor productivity and spawning. Golden trout up to 8 inches present in limited numbers. Requires occasional air plant of fingerlings to sustain.

13. **Humphreys Lake No. 1.** Elev. 11,800; 12 acres; 50 feet deep. Contains eastern brook trout and some goldens. Will be chemically treated and restocked only with golden trout when conditions permit.

14. **Humphreys Lake No. 2.** Elev. 11,827; 5 acres; 15 feet deep. Eastern brook present with limited golden trout population. Reserved for golden trout.

15. **Humphreys Lake No. 3.** Elev. 12,000; 6 acres; 25 feet deep. Good numbers of large eastern brook trout; some goldens may be present. Will be treated and restocked only with goldens when conditions permit.

16. **Knob Lake.** Elev. 11,000; 12 acres; possibly 40 feet deep; fair productivity and spawning. Small population of goldens sustained by occasional planting.

17. **Lobe Lake, Lower.** Elev. 10,725; 2.5 acres; 20 feet deep; fair productivity and fair spawning but lake subject to winter kill. Contains small number of golden trout up to 12 inches. Reserved for occasional air plant of golden trout fingerlings.

18. **Lobe Lake, Upper.** Elev. 10,900; 5.75 acres; 30 feet deep; fair productivity but sparse spawning. Small population of golden up to 10 inches sustained by occasional air plant of fingerlings.

19. **Lost Lake, Lower.** Elev. 11,530; 12 acres, 70 feet deep; low basic fertility and no spawning. Barren prior to initial trial air plant of golden fingerlings in 1953. Now has good population of goldens sustained by occasional air plant.

20. **Lost Lake, Upper.** Elev. 11,540; 61 acres; over 100 feet deep; low basic fertility and no spawning. Barren prior to initial air plant of golden fingerlings in 1953. Now has good population of goldens to 16 inches sustained by occasional planting.

21. **Lovejoy Lake (also called Packsaddle Lake).** Elev. 10,653; 41.6 acres; 21 feet deep; good food and good spawning (mainly in outlet). Contains a nice golden trout fishery with fish averaging 8 inches, some to 14 inches. Occasional replanting necessary.

22. **Marmot Lake.** Elev. 11,740; 8.6 acres; 25 feet deep; fair food but poor spawning. Stocked with goldens in 1960 after chemical treatment in 1959.

23. **Muriel Lake.** Elev. 11,328; 62 acres; 54 feet deep. Good population of golden trout and eastern brook trout. Planted regularly to sustain fishing.



Piute Creek

24. **Paine Lake.** Elev. 11,020; 30.6 acres; possibly 60 feet deep; fair productivity but sparse spawning. Golden trout up to 9 inches present in good condition. Requires occasional air plant of golden fingerlings to sustain.

25. **Piute Creek.** Elev. from 8,400 to 12,400; 12 miles long; cascading to rapid, small cold stream draining all of Humphreys Basin; good basic productivity with excellent spawning. Contains golden and eastern brook trout. Entirely self-sustaining and no need to stock.

26. **Ramona Lake.** Elev. 10,720; 25 acres; 50 feet deep; fair food but poor spawning; isolated. Golden trout present in limited numbers. Reserved for golden with an occasional air plant of fingerlings to sustain.

27. **Square Lake.** Elev. 11,240; 4.2 acres; 30 feet deep; good food but poor spawning. Replanted with golden trout in 1961 after chemical treatment in 1959 to remove eastern brook trout.

28. **Tomahawk Lake (mis-named Mesa Lake).** Elev. 11,300; 32.9 acres; 30 feet deep; fair productivity and fair spawning. Contains a few large eastern brook trout. Now reserved for golden and initial air plant made in 1955.



Tomahawk Lake

29. **Vista Lake.** Elev. 11,150; 27.2 acres; 30 feet deep; good productivity but poor spawning. Contains eastern brook up to 14 inches. Now reserved for golden with initial air plant made in 1955.

30. **Wahoo Lake No. 1.** Elev. 11,180; 12 acres; 30 feet deep; fair productivity but poor spawning. Eastern brook plentiful to 11 inches. Restocked with golden trout in 1960.

31. **Wahoo Lake No. 2.** Elev. 11,300; about 5.5 acres; possibly 15 feet deep; fair productivity but no spawning. Barren until 1960 when it was stocked with golden trout.

32. **Wahoo Lake No. 3.** Elev. 11,340; 4.5 acres; shallow and subject to winter kill. Not recommended for planting.

33. **Wedge Lake.** Elev. 11,380; 4 acres; possibly 25 feet deep; fair productivity. Barren; reserved for golden and will need occasional small plant of fingerlings to sustain.

34. **Unnamed Lakes (2) East of Cony Lake.** These two small lakelets (one-half to three-quarter acres) are unsuitable for trout and will not be planted.

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### **Leave a Clean Camp and a Dead Fire**

#### **WHEN YOU GO CAMPING . . .**

- Bring out with you everything that you took in.
- If fires are allowed, burn all papers, cardboard, boxes, and other burnable material. If fires are not allowed, carry this refuse out with you when you break camp.
- Open both ends of cans and flatten them out for a less bulky load.
- Bottles and jars are lighter when you leave than they were when you arrived at camp. Take them out with you.
- Don't leave a campfire unattended.
- Be sure your campfire is out when you leave.

**Keep California Green and Golden.**