Crescent Lake Offers A Chance To Catch Trophy Lake Trout

by Scott_Staats

For some people, fishing is a hobby. For Steve Kroll, itâ€™s a passion. While most other anglers seek the plentiful kokanee at Crescent Lake, his goal is trophy lake trout (also known as mackinaw). So far heâ€™s caught six fish over 30 pounds.

Kroll has mackinaw fishing down to a science. Twenty years of fishing the lake has perfected his technique. He can read the lake like a book and is familiar with every cove and even the subtle changes on the bottom.

To begin our first troll, he lined the boat up with a point jutting out into the lake and far enough out where we could look over the first ridge to the north. That put us in water about 120 to 140 feet deep. Then he had me aim the boat toward a clearcut on the mountain ahead until we reached another landmark farther down the lake. Meanwhile he constantly worked the downriggers, adjusting our lures to keep them just a few feet off the bottom where the big lake trout hang out this time of year.

At 8:45, the lines were down and we began fishing. The day before Kroll landed five lake trout in less than two hours and assured me it shouldnâ€™t take long to get the first hit. Five minutes later, one of the rod tips began to dance. Grabbing the rod, the game of give and take began, with me doing most of the giving and the fish doing most of the taking.

24-pound Lake Trout at Crescent Lake. Photo by Scott StaatsKroll could tell the fish weighed over 20 pounds by the way it fought. Just when I thought to be gaining on the fish, it would make a run and more line would scream off the reel. If this was a contest about which one of us would tire first, I believe I lost the first round. My left arm, wrist and side began to ache after the first 15 minutes passed.

As I played the fish, one thought kept surfacing -- Iâ€™ve definitely lost more big fish than Iâ€™ve landed and hoped this wouldnâ€™t be another one of â€œthose days.â€• I didnâ€™t care if it took all day to get this fish to the boat; I was determined not to lose it.

The fish eventually tired enough for me to gain some line and came into view about 40 feet down in the crystal clear water. As it came toward the surface, I realized I had hooked the largest lake trout of my life. Kroll usually grabs the fish at the boat but for this one he stood ready with the net. By the time the fish filled the net, 50 minutes had gone by and I havenâ€™t felt that tired since landing my last sturgeon on the Columbia River.

The fish weighed an even 24 pounds and measured 36 Â½ inches. Anglers are allowed to keep one fish 30 inches or longer and I decided to keep this one. The meat is as pink as salmon and just as tasty.

â€œSince this is depth-controlled fishing, downriggers are a must,â€• Kroll said. â€œThe strike zone is anywhere from three feet to 20 feet off the bottom this time of year.â€•

He explained that the bigger fish look for zones of cooler water so they donâ€™t burn energy. This occurs at about 90 feet in Crescent Lake. According to Kroll, fish on the bottom are inactive but youâ€™re bringing a food source right to them and since they donâ€™t have to burn any energy, theyâ€™re usually hit your lure.

Scent is also important when fishing for lake trout. Kroll puts Pro-Cure on his lures and flashers. He uses 13- and 15-pound weights on the downriggers to keep the lures near the bottom.

Flashers and Hoochies are an effective setup. Photo by Scott Staats â€œIn the past I only fished with Flatfish, which is a proven method but Iâ€™ve found that using flashers is even more productive,â€• Kroll explained. Behind the flasher he uses a lure called a Hoochie. The flasher attracts the fish in the clear water, perhaps resembling a small school of kokanee. He prefers short leaders (12 to 18 inches) to transmit the action and uses 20-pound line and 50-pound leader.

â€œMore often than not, these lakers are attracted to wide-wobbling lures,â€• he said. â€œWhen that flasher goes out to one side and stops for a split second, itâ€™s just like dangling a piece of string in front of a cat; they canâ€™t stand it and will strike.â€•

After finally boating that first fish, the lines were back in the water for only five minutes when the second hit came. We took turns landing the next three fish, which weighed between 8 and 12 pounds and also put up a good fight. These fish were quickly released at the side of the boat.

Kroll said anglers will usually have to catch 50 lake trout before they land one over 20 pounds. In my case, I believe I had to lose 50 big fish over the years before finally landing one.

Kroll can be contacted at 541-410-0616.

Scott Staats is a fulltime outdoor writer who has lived in Central Oregon the last ten years. His articles have appeared in local, regional and national publications.

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