

The Mid

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IT'S THE TAIL END OF WINTER IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA AND I'M STANDING ON A LADDER ON THE SHORES OF A LAKE IN WESTERN NEVADA WONDERING HOW I GOT HERE. THERE'S A STIFF 15 MPH HEAD WIND WITH INTERMITTENT HAIL AND RAIN. I'VE BEEN STARING AT A BOBBER NEARLY CAPSIZING AS IT ROLLS OVER THE INCOMING WAVES, WAITING FOR IT TO DISAPPEAR UNDER A WHITE-CAP BEFORE I OPTIMISTICALLY SET THE HOOK.

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Morning sunrise on the lake waiting for fish and admiring the beauty of the reservation.

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It's the tail end of winter in Northern California and I'm standing on a ladder on the shores of a lake in Western Nevada wondering how I got here. There's a stiff 15 mph head wind with intermittent hail and rain. I've been staring at a bobber nearly capsizing as it rolls over the incoming waves, waiting for it to disappear under a white-cap before I optimistically set the hook.

I'd heard stories of Pyramid Lake and the trophy Pilot Peak Lahontan Cutthroat Trout that lurk in its depths but never had too much interest in still water fishing. I mean...I've fished the high mountain lakes of the Sierras but that's an entirely different game. Pyramid Lake sprawls nearly 188 square miles and plunges to depths of close to 350 feet, it's huge, to say the least. So when I saw photos of people standing on ladders fishing chironomids, I wasn't exactly rushing to pack my 7wt.

With that said, our winter here in California has been uncharacteristically wet. Coastal Steelhead rivers have been blown out most of the winter, predictable tailwaters are muddy, and battling high surf in hopes of surf perch doesn't always inspire Aaron (my local fishing buddy) when planning a four-day trip. So, when spring break came and it was time for the two of us to head out of town, we thought we'd give The Mid a shot.

WORDS BY TYLER GRAFF



With a few days to learn the lake, we started at dawn, just a few feet from our tents. With a leech and a tadpole paired with a full sink line, it was time to start double hauling the bugs out over the drop where the big fish tend to prowl. After a thirty-second countdown, I started to strip my flies back to the beach. Strip, strip, pause... boom, first cast and there was a healthy 23" cutthroat at the end of the line. In nearly any other situation a fish of that size would have me pumping my fist and cracking a beer in celebration. However, this lake is different. A fish that size is pretty average for the Summit Lake strain in this lake and the Pilot Peak variety have recently been caught at a size closing in on the 30lb mark. That's right, that's no typo, thirty pounds!

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Opposite: Standard fishing equipment right? Right: The switch rod makes for a versatile tool at the lake.
Below: A pretty typical two-foot Summit Lake strain Lahontan Cutthroat.





Clockwise: Aaron admiring some of the photos at Croeby's Lodge. Countless fish stories have been told at this local watering hole. Chironomids are usually on the menu when you visit "The Mid". This guy showed up one evening and promptly hooked a 16lb Pilot Peak fish. Netting it wasn't easy!



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The line-up can be busy at times, respect the locals (The anglers and the fish!)

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WORDS BY TYLER GRAFF

The next few days were a lot of fun. With relatively easy access and one local watering hole, the lake is has a pretty social atmosphere. Maybe it's the boredom of standing on a ladder or maybe the folks here are some of the most welcoming I've fished with. Either way, we met buddies from the Eastern Sierra, the California foothills, and the locals showed up in droves.

Over the course of a few days, we tried a few different beaches, all with similar success. Lots of fish in the 20-25" range came to the net. The forecast for the last day wasn't looking good though. We fell asleep to some pretty stiff winds and rain beating at the side of our tents.

The next day, we drug our ladders down to one of the more popular beaches and set up for a long day in bad weather. My hopes were high but the first few hours were filled with thoughts of packing wet gear and the five-hour drive looming ahead of us. Just then, the hail subsided and the clouds parted, giving way to a few rays of sunlight. My bobber dipped just under the

surface. Within seconds I could tell it was a fish of different proportions. Big head shakes, a run into deeper water, followed by some good old-fashioned bulldogging side pressure. After a few minutes, there was thrashing water and a net straining beneath the weight of one of the largest trout I've had the pleasure of grappling with. Aaron handed me the net and grabbed his camera for a few clicks of the shutter. At about 10lbs, the fish wasn't easy to handle. I lowered its blocky head into the alkaline waters and with a quick flick of the tail, she was gone, back to the depths of the lake to eat chironomids and chase tui-chubs.

That's really all it took, I'm kind of hooked. Although I wouldn't say that I'll ever become an avid still water angler, Aaron and I already have a list of lakes we're going to hit this Fall, but Pyramid stands alone. In my mind, not even Jurassic Lake can compare to this place. Where else do you have a shot at landing a 30lb trout?

Below: You can't help but feel how special this place is when you visit. It's hard to describe with words. Opposite Clockwise: The colors of the fish can be as stunning as the sunrise. The bobber rig works but stripping leeches, streamers, and boobies is a lot more fun. Bad Weather = Big Fish.

