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French Canyon



Suggested Flies for French Canyon area:
Eastern Sierra Hatch Selection

Dry Flies:

Parachute Adams #16-18
Olive Caddis #16-18
Royal Wulff #16-18
Yellow Humpy #14
Griffith's Gnat #16-18
Black Gnat
Henry's Fork Hopper
Chernobyl Ant
Mosquito
Bivisible

Nymph Flies:

Hare's Ear #16-18
Prince Nymph #16-18

Other Local Favorites:

Stillwater Flies:

Woolly Bugger #8-10
Mohair Leech #8-10
Matuku #8-10

Directions:

Two trailheads into the area. From the North, take Pine Creek Trailhead out of Round Valley, north of Bishop. It is 6.5 miles from the trailhead to Pine Creek Pass with a 3700 foot vertical gain. From the East, take Piute Pass Trailhead out of North Lake on Hwy 168 out of Bishop. It is about 3.9 miles from the North Lake Trailhead to Piute Pass with a 2000 foot gain and another 6 miles going down 2000 feet to Hutchinson Meadow. The closest Westside access is by way of Florence Lake, taking the South Fork of the San Joaquin to Piute Canyon.

Notes:

French Canyon or French Creek is a tributary of Piute Creek before it merges with the South Fork of the San Joaquin just above Florence Lake. The area includes numerous lakes all above 11,000 feet containing Golden Trout and Rainbow Hybrids. This area also lies totally within the John Muir Wilderness. Prior to 1950, most of the lakes within French Canyon were unnamed. The French derivations came from Ralph Beck from Bishop's Dept. of Fish and Game, who served in France during World War II. The area is generally available to fish between July and October. It is fairly open country with plenty of talus rock yet quite navigable. Winds can be substantial during the afternoons and the area is frequented by late afternoon lightning storms. The area is known for the Golden Trout which were planted within this area from the hatchery program at Cottonwood Lakes during the 1950's to 1990's. It was later discovered that most of these plantings were actually Golden-Rainbow hybrids which had contaminated the Cottonwood Lakes gene pool. You will find that the trout of French Canyon have a remarkable blend of colors. The high intensity UV light brings out a lot of the yellows and orange of the fish. The region has had a reputation of growing some of the largest Golden Trout within the Sierra.

Chalfant Lakes

From the Pine Creek Trailhead, starting at 7,400 feet elevation, you pass through a grove of Aspen, Birch, Juniper, Jeffrey Pine, and Red Fir. In about a mile, the trail merges with a mining road to the defunct Brownstone Mine. The mine is another mile further at 9100 feet elevation, so you would have climbed over 1700 feet within the first two miles of the trail. You will reach the John Muir Wilderness Boundary at the marker and it's another 1/2 mile before you are along the cascading Pine Creek below Pine Lake at 9800'. This trail covers the following areas:

Pine Creek: The creek has about 1 mile of fishable stream from Pine Lake to Honeymoon Lake with an elevation gain 450 feet. It drains the Granite Park and Lakes basin. The stream has good productivity and excellent spawning. Pine Creek contains both Rainbow Trout and Brookies.

Pine Lake: 19 acres at 9,942 feet. About 4 miles from the trailhead at 9,942 feet. The trail wraps around the northern portion of the lake. Pine Lake consists of Golden-Rainbow Hybrids.

Upper Pine Lake: 4.75 miles from the trailhead at 10,200'. Consists of Brookies and Rainbow Trout.

Honeymoon Lake: At 5 miles from the trailhead the trail forks. The left fork heads up to Pine Creek Pass. To the right fork, you will see Honeymoon Lake (1 consists of Brookies and Rainbow Trout).

Golden Lake: From Honeymoon Lake, you can travel off-trail about 1/3 mile to Golden Lake. It is about 400 feet higher than Honeymoon at a 10,850 foot elevation. Golden Lake consists of Golden Trout.

Granite Park: Continuing on the trail past Honeymoon Lake another mile you reach the beginning of a series of unnamed lakes amid a granite landscape. This Park. Each of lakes have Golden Trout and the lakes extend for about another 1.5 miles to the uppermost lake at 11,825 feet just below Italy Pass. This uppermost fishless but the lake just south of it at 11,625 feet has Golden Trout.

Off-trail from Pine Lake are two lakes of interest, **Birch Lake** (6 acres) which has been stocked with Lahontan Cutthroats and **Inspiration Lake** (10 acres) Golden Trout. Another off-trail group of lakes above Honeymoon Lake are the **Chalfant Lakes** which contain Rainbows.

From the Pine Creek Pass, you can reach:

Big French Lake: 59 acre lake at an elevation of 11,240 feet. Up to 58 feet in depth. It has a fair food source and good spawning. Go east off-trail from Pine for about .75 miles. This lake was aerially planted every two years. Consists of Golden Trout up to 15 inches and Rainbow Hybrids.

Little French Lake: 6 acre lake at an elevation of 11,350 feet. Up to 40 feet deep. Fair productivity and spawning. Go east about 1.4 miles from Pine Creek trail. Consists of Golden/Rainbow Hybrids.

Petite Lakes: Two lakes, 2 acres each, at an elevation of 11,480 feet. Up to 35 feet deep. Fair productivity but very limited spawning only in the lower lake. Go trail about 1.75 miles from Pine Creek Pass. Consists of Golden/Rainbow Hybrids in the lower lake, the upper lake is fishless.

La Tete Lake: 3 acres lake at an elevation of 11,500 feet. Up to 25 feet deep. Go east off-trail about 2 miles from Pine Creek Pass. Low productivity and spawning. Consists of Golden/Rainbow Hybrids.

Royce Lakes: 5 lakes above 11,400 feet. Must go off-trail to reach these lakes. Lake #1 (11,400 ft.) is about 1.4 miles southwest of Pine Creek Pass (11,100 ft) hike up about 300 feet in elevation from the pass and follow the contours to the lake. This lake is up to 20 feet deep. It has fair food and good spawning. Sub winter kill and loss over the outlet falls. First planted in 1953 with no success. Then, second trial planting made in 1959. Lake #2 (11,656 ft) is about 0.7 miles the first lake following the creek. It is up to 50 feet deep, with fair productivity but no spawning. First aerially planted with Golden Trout in 1953. Lake #3 (11,700 ft) than a 1/4 mile from #2 and has an ample depth. Poor food and no spawning. First trial planting of Golden Trout by air in 1953. Surveys in 1963 indicated that for the 16" range. Lake #4 (11,725 ft) is less than a 1/4 mile from #3. It is possibly over a 100 feet deep. It has a low basic fertility and poor spawning. Initial plan made in 1953 and surveys in 1963 indicated that many were over 18 inches. Lake #5 (11,775 ft) is also about 1/4 mile from #4 to the northwest and is thought 100 feet in depth. It has a low basic fertility and no spawning. Surveys in 1963 indicated many of the Golden Trout in the 12 inch range. Up until 2006, Lakes #2, 4 were stocked with Golden-Hybrids every two years. A survey in 2006 found that Royce Lakes were similar to Puppet Lake in size distributions. The good spawning between Lake #1 and #2 provides a reproductive source to the upper lakes (#3, 4, and 5) when adequate creek water exists.

Heading down Pine Creek Pass south for 1.7 miles, you can reach the following areas:

Elba Lake: A 17 acre lake at an elevation of 10,900 feet. About 1.7 miles south of Pine Creek Pass. This lake is up to 40 feet deep with fair productivity and spawning. Campsites are available along the eastern shore. Consists of Golden/Rainbow Hybrids, averaging 8" with some up to 12". Surveyed by DFG in 2006 and determined to be strongly self-sustaining.

Moon Lake: 18 acres at an elevation of 10,998 feet. About 2 miles south of Pine Creek Pass. Up to 50 feet deep with good productivity and good spawning. Golden/Rainbow Hybrids, averaging 8" and up to 12". Surveyed by DFG in 2006 and determined to be strongly self-sustaining. However, it is susceptible to winter kill.

L Lake: 37 acres at an elevation of 11,050 feet. About 2.5 miles from Pine Creek Pass. Trail ends at L Lake. The lake is up to 21 feet deep and has fair food and spawning. Consists of Golden/Rainbow Hybrids. 1963 surveys showed many of the Golden Trout in the 12" range and in good condition. It is subject to winter kill. been surveyed recently but has been determined as self-sustaining due to adequate spawning areas.

Steelhead Lake: 55 acres at an elevation of 11,330 feet. Go along the western shoreline of L Lake and follow the inlet creek up to Steelhead Lake. About 3.5 miles from Pine Creek Pass. Over 90 feet deep, it has fair productivity but sparse spawning. Consists of Golden/Rainbow Hybrids. Stocked every two years with Golden Trout.

Heading off-trail from the end of the trail at L Lake. You can head south about .5 miles with a 300 foot gain and reach a number of lakes:

Star Lake: 40 acres at an elevation of 11,400 feet. About 3 miles south of Pine Creek Pass. Must go off-trail at L Lake. It is up to 40 feet deep with fair food and spawning. Consists of Golden/Rainbow Hybrids. Stocked every two years with Golden Trout. Star is another lake within the region with a reputation for large Golden Trout 16 inches.

Puppet Lake: 51 acres at an elevation of 11,220 feet. About 3 miles south of Pine Creek Pass. Must go off-trail at L Lake. Up to 17 feet in depth. Consists of Golden Trout.

Golden/Rainbow Hybrids. Initially planted in 1953, surveys in 1963 found Goldens up to 5 lbs. It has good productivity but no spawning. Puppets are stocked every year but stocking may be discontinued due to an enhancement program for the Mountain Yellow-legged Frog. It has carried a reputation of having some of the largest Goldens within the Sierra.

Paris Lake: 25 acres at an elevation of 11,160 feet. About 3.5 miles south of Pine Creek Pass. Must go off-trail at L Lake. Up to 35 feet in depth, the lake has productivity and sparse spawning. Initial planting was 1953 and 1963 surveys had some Goldens up to 17 inches. Consists of Golden/Rainbow Hybrids. Last stocked with Goldens in 2000. Population has been determined to be self-sustaining.

Alsace Lake: 53 acres at an elevation of 11,060 feet. About 4 miles south of Pine Creek Pass. Must go off-trail at L Lake. Up to 60 feet deep with fair productivity and limited spawning. Consists of Golden/Rainbow Hybrids. Last stocked with Goldens in 1994 and determined by DFG to be a self-sustaining population. Most of the Goldens are in the 8 inch range.

Chevaux Lake: 7 acres at an elevation of 11,000 feet. About 4.5 miles south of Pine Creek Pass. Must go off-trail at L Lake. Up to 25 feet deep with low productivity and sparse spawning. Consists of Golden/Rainbow Hybrids. Last stocked with Goldens in 1976 and is strongly self-sustaining. Most of the Goldens are in the 8 inch range.

Heading south along French Canyon for about 3.0 miles the trail forks to the west and goes about .6 miles towards Merriam and LaSalle Lakes:

Merriam Lake: 20 acres at an elevation of 10,950 feet. About 4.7 miles from Pine Creek Trail. Up to 80 feet deep with fair productivity and spawning. Consists of Golden/Rainbow Hybrids up to the 15 inch range.

LaSalle Lake: 8 acres at an elevation of 11,700 feet. About 6 miles from Pine Creek Trail. Follow the creek from Merriam Lake to LaSalle. Possibly up to 75 feet in depth. It has poor productivity but fair spawning. First planted in 1954, 1963 surveys showed Goldens up to 11 inches. Consists of Golden/Rainbow Hybrids. Stocking has been discontinued and it is being managed as fishless.

Going over Piute Pass about 8.25 miles from the North Lake Trailhead, you can go off-trail about .6 miles north along the creek drainage up to:

Knob Lake: 12 acres at an elevation of 10,000 feet. About 8.8 miles from the North Lake Trailhead. Possibly 40 feet in depth. It has fair productivity and sparse spawning. Consists of a small population of Golden/Rainbow Hybrids.

Fishing Regulations (Effective March 1st, 2021)

Lakes within French Canyon:

Open all year. No restrictions. 5 trout per day. 10 trout in possession

All Lakes and Reservoirs in Inyo and Mono Counties (except Bridgeport Reservoir and tributaries; Convict Lake; Crowley Lake; George Lake; Grant Lake; Grant Reservoir; Horseshoe Lake; June Lake; Lundy Lake; Mamie Lake; Mary Lake; Rock Creek Lake; Sabrina Lake; Silver Lake; South Lake; Twin Lakes (Mammoth); Twin Lakes Reservoir; Upper and Lower (Bridgeport); Virginia Lake, Lower and Upper):

Open all year. No restrictions. 5 trout per day. 10 trout in possession

All creeks and tributaries:

From the last Saturday in April through November 15, 5 trout daily bag limit, 10 trout in possession; and, from November 16 through the Friday preceding the last Saturday in April, 0 trout bag limit, artificial lures with barbless hooks only and trout must be released unharmed and not removed from the water.

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