

» NEW BOATS, MOTORS & ELECTRONICS FOR 2008



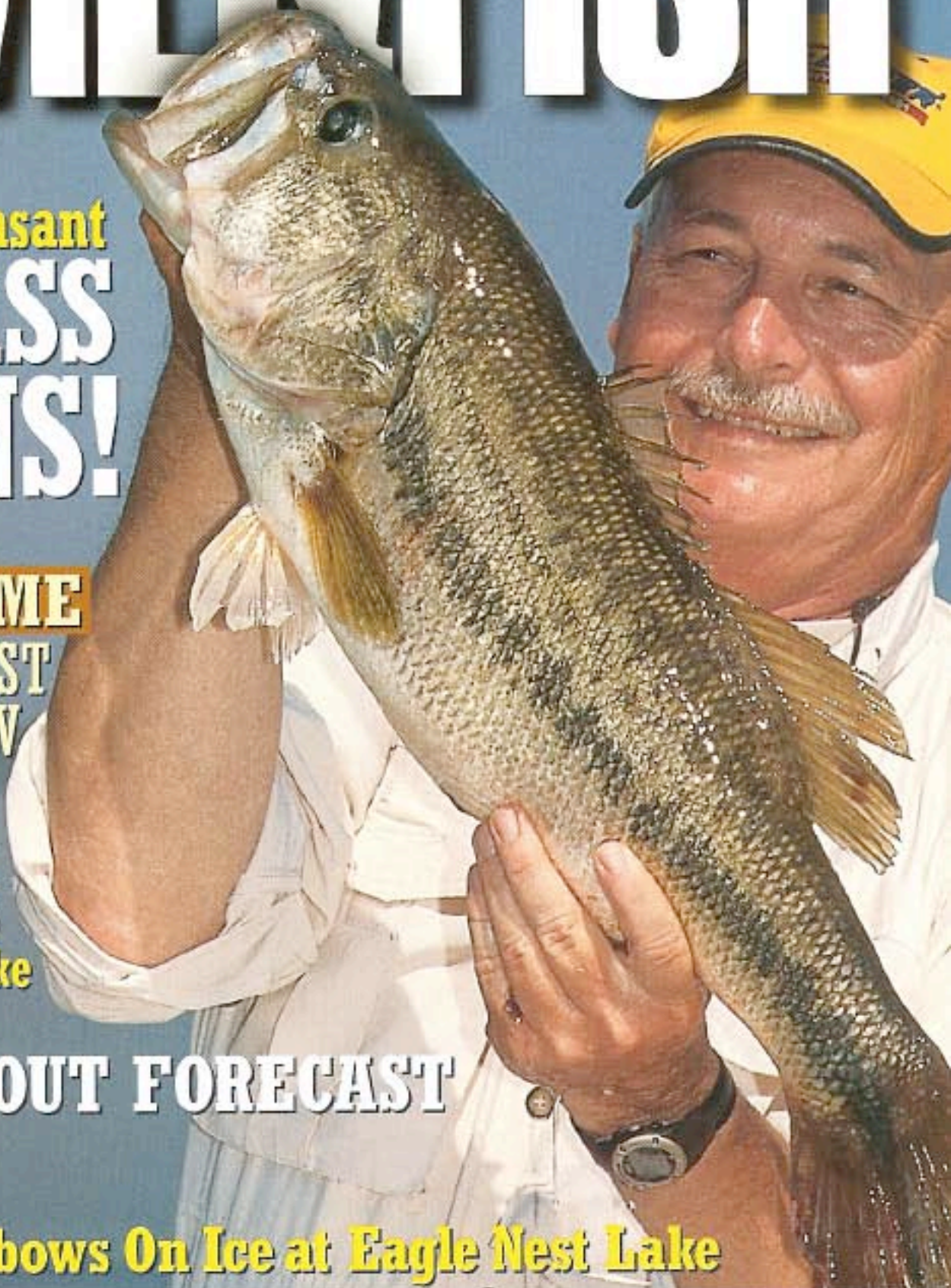
Rocky Mountain GAMER & FISH™

Arizona's Lake Pleasant
**3 BIG-BASS
OPTIONS!**

TAILWATER TIME
COLORADO'S HOTTEST
TROUT RIVERS NOW

**COLOSSAL
CUTTHROATS**
Nevada's Pyramid Lake

2008 UTAH TROUT FORECAST



RMgameandfish.com

FEBRUARY 2008

\$3.99



Rainbows On Ice at Eagle Nest Lake

PLUS » FISHING COLORADO'S PRE-RUNOFF HOTSPOTS
» BE A BROWN-BAGGER: TROPHY TROUT TIPS

PLEASANTLY SURPRISED

BY TONY MANDILE

Popular Lake Pleasant offers largemouth, white and striped bass in state-record sizes. Here are some tips to get a hit.



Ben Koller of The Hook Up Outfitters shows off a 3-pound largemouth that nailed a surface plug in Lake Pleasant's Humbug Creek Cove. Photo by Tony Mandile.

Sitting among saguaro-studded hills with a backdrop of the rugged Bradshaw Mountains to the north, Lake Pleasant serves as the main attraction of the Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department's 14,000-acre regional park. Because of its proximity to the Phoenix metropolitan area, the lake on the Agua Fria River has become Arizona's most popular recreation area. Fishing and camping draw visitors during the cooler months, and boaters add to the mix in summer.

The completion of the New Waddell Dam in 1993 tripled the lake's size to about 10,000 surface acres, making it the second-largest in the state behind Roosevelt. The lake now contains lots of excellent bass habitat, with enough jutting points, shallow flats, brush stands, steep cliffs, rocky shorelines and underwater islands to keep any fishermen content.

Pleasant already contained myriad species of fish, including largemouth bass, channel and flathead catfish, black and white crappie, green and redear sunfish, bluegill and carp. Plus, it served as the only home for

white bass in Arizona.

Then in 1994, when the 336-mile-long Central Arizona Project began pumping water into Pleasant from Lake Havasu on the Colorado River, it brought in another denizen of the deep — the striped bass. Pleasant now harbors a very fishable and reproducing population of stripers, including many that have grown large over the last decade.

LARGEMOUTH BASS

Most anglers visit Lake Pleasant to chase largemouth bass. Fish heavier than 7 pounds are common, and several lunkers more than 10 pounds appear each year. Awhile back, one lucky fisherman boated a 13-pound, 13-ounce monster that came really close to the 14-pound, 2-ounce state record at the time. (The current state record is a 16-pound, 7.68-ounce bass caught in Canyon Lake in 1997.)

For anyone who enjoys catching a largemouth on a top-water plug, Lake Pleasant is an excellent place for it, according to Ben Koller, who operates The Hook Up Outfitters and Guide Service.

"The best surface action occurs at either end of the day

— right at dawn or just before dark,” he said.

Koller said to concentrate on the brushy areas in the coves, especially in the shallows along steep dropoffs into deeper water. “If you’re not into surface-fishing, try a spinnerbait with a white or chartreuse skirt,” he said.

Koller spends about 150 days a year on Pleasant, normally concentrating his efforts at the back ends of Castle Creek, Cole’s Bay or Humbug Creek. All of them have sufficient areas of brush and structure to attract largemouth.

In August of last year, Noel Arnold set a new inland striper record when he boated a 27.28-pound monster at Lake Pleasant.

Before the main bass spawn, schools of shad make their way into these areas early or late in the day. The largemouth bass, searching for an easy meal, follow right behind.

“When the lake begins to warm in mid-morning, however, the bass seek out structure in deeper water,” said Koller.

WHITE BASS

Among game fish, the prolific white bass is Pleasant’s most populous species. Finding a school containing fish that average 2 1/2 to 3 pounds is not unusual. The white’s favorite entrée consists of threadfin shad, so some fishermen locate them by trolling shad-type lures.

When it comes to trolling for them, white bass might be very selective. So experimenting with dif-

ferent boat speeds and plugs that run shallow or deep sometimes becomes necessary.

But finding the right combination should guarantee you plenty of action. White bass almost always travel in large schools. If you catch one while trolling, others will likely be in the immediate area. Consequently, circling back through the same spot should attract additional strikes.

When a fish hits a trolled lure, immediately shift your motor into reverse and back up to the strike area to stay near the school. After the first bass is in the boat, rather than trolling again, try casting jigs or lures in the surrounding area.

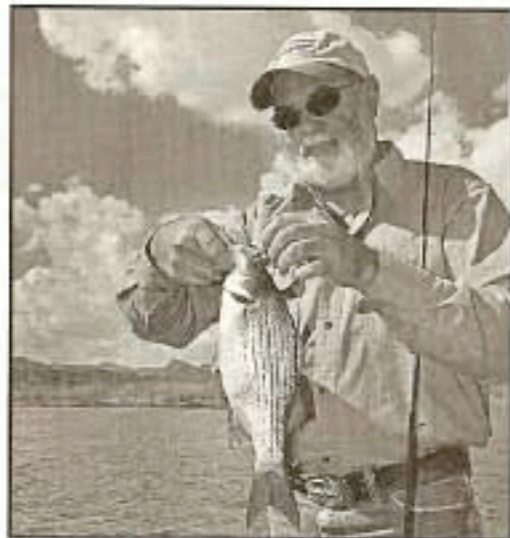
Before guide Floyd Preas passed away, he was the recognized expert when it came to catching white bass.

His favorite method was a technique he called “jump fishing.” He slowly cruised areas of the lake where he had found whites in the past. Then he watched for the telltale surface commotion caused by a feeding school. On a calm day, such action can be visible from as far as half a mile away.

Preas often extended his sight range by using binoculars, and Koller occasionally uses the same method.

STRIPED BASS

Although most of the stripers currently average 1 to 3 pounds, anglers often land fish weighing more than 15 pounds, and several weighing more than 20 pounds have been caught. Last year, Noel Arnold set a new inland fishery record with a 27.28-pound monster at Lake Pleasant.



Mesa resident Bruce Fritz caught this chunky white bass with a surface plug at Lake Pleasant. Photo by Tony Mandile.

Arnold lives in Whittman, Ariz., and spends a lot of time fishing for striped bass at the Aqua Fria Reservoir. Even though his record fish swallowed a live waterdog, Arnold normally entices the line-sided fish with frozen anchovies.

When using anchovies, Arnold uses two rod-and-reel setups. His spinning rig is spooled with 8-pound line, and his baitcaster with 12-pound line.

“I like to fish at night,” he said. “And early on, the smaller fish are normally what I’m catching. As it gets later, though, the fish seem to get bigger. That’s when I switch to the heavier baitcasting rig.”

He uses a small lead jighead on the lighter rig, and slip-sinker with a plastic worm hook on the other one.

“Once I get to where I’ll fish, I lower a submersible green light to attract the lower organisms in the lake’s food chain. They attract the shad, which in turn attract the bass,” Arnold said. “I also like to cut up a bunch of anchovies to use as chum.”

Koller concurs with Arnold, especially about fishing at night after the water warms over the next few months.

“We take out clients after dark and drop down crappie lights in the creek channels or down near the dam,” he said. “Then we have them fish frozen anchovies. Although most of the fish are less than 2 pounds, on a good night we often catch a hundred or more over a few hours.” □



Noel Arnold’s 27.28-pound striper, caught on August 2007 at Lake Pleasant, broke the state record. Photo courtesy of Noel Arnold.