

# Outdoors

## Fishing is red-hot at historically low Detroit Lake



Henry Hughes walks through the stumps and mud of Detroit Lake to access the historically low water level and go fishing in a small Jon boat.

**Zach Urness**  
Salem Statesman Journal  
USA TODAY NETWORK

To find the hottest fishing in Oregon, drive east of Salem until you reach a reservoir that looks as though it was flattened by an atomic bomb.

Unload your boat and carry it into a graveyard of stumps, through mud thick enough to swallow a small child, until you reach the water's edge of this post-apocalyptic utopia.

Detroit Lake is one of Oregon's most beautiful reservoirs in summer, a sparkling pool among green mountains stocked each year with 100,000 fish.

But this December it has been transformed.

Detroit Lake's water level drops each winter to make room for flood control on the North Santiam River, but this year it has fallen to near-historic levels due to repairs on the dam's spillway gates.

The lake is so low — 130 feet below summertime levels — that no boat ramp comes close to the water.

That's good news for anglers willing to do a little extra work.

Fishing at Detroit Lake in December is often good, but this year it has been



The mud is thick and access is difficult at Detroit Lake during the winter of 2019's historically low water levels. Henry Hughes accessed the lake with a small Jon boat. PHOTOS BY ZACH URNESS / STATESMAN JOURNAL

red-hot, as the low reservoir concentrates trout looking to feed before winter's doldrums.

The problem is accessing the water.

Last week, I joined fishing poet and Western Oregon University professor Henry Hughes on a quixotic quest to fish Detroit Lake in a more adventurous way.

### Detroit Lake drops to historic levels

The bad news arrived November 21. After inspecting Detroit Dam's spillway gates, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers discovered that three of them were damaged and needed repairs.

The repairs would mean dropping the

reservoir so low that the winter boat ramp would no longer access the lake.

"The gates wouldn't be able to hold back any water," Corps spokeswoman Lauren Bennett said. "Since we have fewer gates operational, we decided it would be best to draw down the reservoir low enough that we could capture any potential storm event."

The Mongold boat ramp reaches the reservoir at 1,450 feet above sea level, but during the drawdown, levels will drop as low as 1,425 feet through mid-January.

In summer, Detroit Lake normally sits around 1,560 feet.

That means anyone who wanted to go fishing needed to walk in — or carry their boat to the water.

### Why fish Detroit Lake in winter?

Detroit Lake is a great place to get your fishing confidence.

Whether you're a beginner or just an angler frustrated by bad luck, the hatchery-raised rainbow trout in Detroit Lake are refreshingly easy to catch.

That's particularly true in November

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## Remembering a very Bob Hope Christmas

**Fishing**  
Henry Miller  
Guest columnist

If I may be allowed a little holiday nostalgia — OK Boomer! — I'd like to share some visits with the ghosts of Christmases past.

As a kid growing up in Southern California, there was a ritual that became something of a fixture among relatives who made pilgrimages to the Golden State to thaw out over the holidays.

Cathedral Oaks School was a place where Christmas grammar school art projects involved painting the bases of sawed-off, blown-down palm fronds in garish poster paints as "tribal masks" to give to our parents.

Don't get me wrong. And after 30-plus years in Oregon, I've come to appreciate the joys of seasons and have a boundless love for the great, green Pacific Northwest and have no intention of leaving.

Dad was from Missouri, mom hailed from Illinois, and both came from large-ish families, the members of which were anxious to flee winters in fly over country, however briefly.

Along with side trips fishing at Lake Cachuma or the Santa Barbara pier, or driving to Disneyland — another rite of



From Henry's cruise book, **Bob Hope** crows during his USO show aboard the **USS Hancock**. A ghost of **Christmases past**. HENRY MILLER / SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

Christmas visits — there were the annual photo shoots, usually at Goleta Beach a couple of miles from our house.

There the familial tourists with skin tones like newly sprouted mushrooms would don their swimsuits and short-sleeved shirts with garish prints topped off with Santa and/or Micky Mouse hats and pose for pictures on Christmas day under the sun on the sand.

A weak sun, to be sure, but better than a couple of feet of snow on the sidewalk.

Invariably, the photos would show up in the mailbox as Christmas cards the

following December.

If getting a Christmas card from Buffalo, N.Y., with your aunt Flo and uncle Manley smiling on the beach seems a little odd, the most surreal Christmas for me was my first in the Navy.

Fresh out of boot camp, I was among about a half-dozen sailors who transferred after a week at sea from the USS Ponchatoula, a fueling ship, to our destination, the USS Hancock, an aircraft carrier cruising off of the coast of Vietnam.

We were delivered one-by-one two days before Christmas by highline, a steel chair suspended from a cable and pulled across the gap between the two ships by swabbies hauling on ropes on each side.

Being the lowest-ranking member, I went first, which proved to be a blessing.

Because by the second transfer, an officer, the guys on both ends of the lines realized that if they worked in unison with the rolling of the boats and the rising and falling swells, they could alternately dip the chair and occupant like a tea bag, then shoot them into the air like an abbreviated version of the slingshot ride at the Oregon State Fair.

Ignorance, in my case, was bliss. To add to the weirdness, Bob Hope's annual USO Christmas show was held the next night on the Hancock's hangar

deck. The troupe arrived by air, not cable.

To summarize, on holidays past, I didn't freeze, and I didn't drown, and I got to see Ann Margaret (ask your grandparents) sing and dance with Bob Hope on Christmas Eve.

Here's hoping that each and every one of you will be visited in the future with ghosts of Christmases past.

### Over the rainbow for the holidays

We've had Black Friday, Shop Small Saturday, Cyber Monday and Giving Tuesday.

How about Rainbow Monday?

About 150 8- to 12-pound rainbow trout from Roaring River Hatchery near Scio were stocked this week at three Salem-area water bodies.

Wirth Lake in Cascades Gateway Park off Turner Road and Walling Pond, 16th and McGilchrist, both inside the Salem city limits, got 50 and 46 of the bruisers, respectively.

Timber Linn Lake in Timber Linn Memorial Park in Albany also received 50 of the lunker trout.

Recorded updates about brood trout stocking from Roaring River are posted late Monday mornings after the fish, if any, are released.

The number is (503) 394-3155, then press "2."