



Jocassee trout anglers fishing after dark get to experience a whole new side of the lake, often filled with rod-bending action.

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## Jocassee night bite heats up

BY PHILLIP GENTRY  
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Much is written about the beauty and majesty of Lake Jocassee with its unspoiled mountain vistas and pristine waterfalls.

For anglers, the lake holds an excellent fishery for trout and trophy-sized largemouth and smallmouth bass. Few, however, experience the lake under cover of darkness where the light from the stars is about the only existing light you'll find, unless you bring your own.

Jocassee fishing guide James Couch (864-982-1016) loves to fish the deep clear reservoir after lights out. In fact, he has held a couple of state records for fish caught at night.

"The best night fishing for trout on Jocassee occurs during the months of April, May and June," Couch said. "Two factors occur at the same time to make the fishing so good. One is that baitfish are spawning on the rocks at Keowee during the late spring.

"The second is that pump back activity, usually occurring at night, sucks water and baitfish from Keowee into Jocassee at the intakes. The

moving water and injured bait is like ringing the dinner bell for the trout."

The four-unit Jocassee Hydroelectric Station is a 610-megawatt pumped-storage generating facility. The facility works much like a conventional hydroelectric station, except that it can reverse turbines and pump back previously used water from Lake Keowee to store potential energy for later.

The Jocassee facility typically generates power during times of peak electric demand. Following 9/11, boats have been restricted as to how close they can get to the station. Sunset on Jocassee during the spring will often find several boats moored end to end along the edges of the barrier cable that restricts boating access.

Couch offered that this spring, that might not be such a good idea.

"The lake is 28 feet below normal pool," he said. "That's lower than we've seen **this lake in a long time**. Those pump back outlets are only about 45 feet below the normal pool level so if you're on that cable when they pump back, you're in for some rough water. I've seen boats capsize in that much current.

"If the wind is coming down the lake, I'd rather tie up to the shoreline to one side of the intakes and back out into the lake and drop anchor. With the current water levels, that's probably best anyway."

Couch recommends night anglers come equipped with at least 450 feet of anchor line to make sure they have enough rope to get a good anchor. Once anchored, Couch fires up two gas powered generators and runs four sodium vapor lights to attract baitfish to his location.

The noise can be loud on the boat, but Couch believes the noise and vibration mimic the

churning water from the intakes. In fact, once he's set up just before dark, it's not unusual for his party to be well on their way to a five trout per angler limit before the pump back starts.

"I'll put out six lines and bait each one with live minnows, frozen-cut herring or whole night crawlers," he said. "Trout are not particularly line shy at night, so I fish light to medium tackle with 10-pound test. The bait is hooked on a 1/0 Eagle Claw gold Aberdeen hook.

"The amount of weight used depends on when and how much current is being generated. I begin with 1/2 ounce before the bumping starts and then change over to 1 ounce egginker."

Effective July 1, the creel limit for trout will drop from five per angler to three. Touted as good for the fishery, it has some old-time anglers feeling somewhat desperate as this spring comes to pass. Fishing mortality takes its toll on trout, especially with fish that don't measure up to the 15-inch size limit and must be released.

"I don't understand why they didn't do something about all the fish that end up dying," Couch said. "Trout are a fragile fish to start with. A lot of them get hooked deep, especially at night using live bait.

"Next year we'll have just as many dead fish and two less you can take home."

EMAIL PHILLIP Gentry at pgentry6@bellsouth.net.