

Spring is a great time to target Lake Jocassee trout

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
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Located in the northwest corner of South Carolina, beautiful, pristine Lake Jocassee offers anglers a variety of fishing adventures that are found nowhere else in the state.

The 7,500-acre mountain lake is the deepest in the state, measuring depths of nearly 300 feet. Four Appalachian rivers feed the lake, keeping its depths cold throughout the year. An impoundment of the Whitewater, Thompson, Horsepasture and Toxaway rivers, Jocassee remains almost virtually undeveloped. It's surrounded by steep mountain terrain owned by Duke Power — the creator of the lake — and public-trust lands owned by the state.

While Jocassee is a well respected, trophy black bass fishery, it's best known for its abundant rainbow and brown trout, which are stocked and regulated by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources. The lake's trout fishing strategies have evolved over time, with most anglers now relying almost completely on trolling tactics using downriggers to reach the lake's deep-water trout.

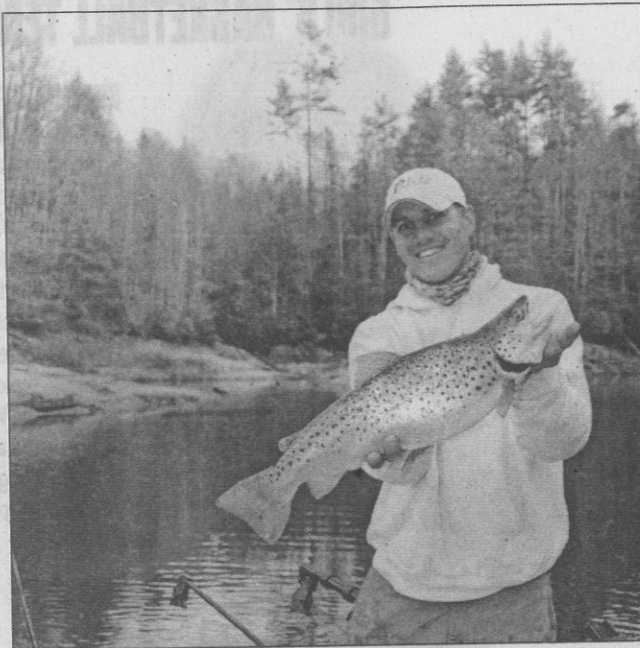
Due to their propensity for cold, dark water, trout are often caught as deep as 100 feet throughout the year. This deep-water fishing necessitates the

use of specialized equipment in order to present the baits at appropriate depths. For years, Great Lakes and saltwater anglers have relied on downrigger setups to reach deep-water fish. This has now become the norm on Jocassee.

A downrigger uses a round or oblong 8-to-10 pound lead ball to get lines down to the desired depths. The weight is suspended by a 150-pound test cable that connects to the boat via a metal arm or boom. The cable is attached to a spool that allows line to be released or retrieved by either a hand crank or electric motor. A line release is attached to the cable just above the weight, which holds the main fishing line.

Baits are either cast or measured out behind the boat, then the line is clipped into the release. Two rods can be fished from each ball by employing a double stacker release, which spreads the lines so they don't tangle. The most popular baits are trolling spoons, small crankbaits or large, live shiners on a live-bait hook.

Like most fish species, trout pattern differently in Jocassee depending on the time of year and the water's surface temperatures. Although neither brown nor rainbow trout successfully spawn in Jocassee, both species make annual spawning runs up the river arms. This run begins in November and



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Look for Lake Jocassee trout fishing to begin heating up this month.

lasts until late March, when the fish return to the main basin.

The trout bite in March is primarily rainbows, with just a few browns scattered in. It has been suggested that the browns don't recover from the spawn quite as quickly, and also that the rainbows are just more aggressive. In either case, 90 percent of the trout catch in March and April tend to be rainbows, with a few brown trout scattered into the mix, although the browns do tend to be really good-sized fish.

Stocking of both rainbows and brown trout are the lake's source of recruitment, with stocked fish coming from the nearby Walhalla Fish

Hatchery that was purchased by the state from the National Wildlife Service many years ago.

The daily creel limit for any cold-water trout caught from Lake Jocassee is three per person per day. There is a minimum size limit of 15 inches for any species of trout from Oct. 1 through May 31, with only one fish of more than 20 inches allowed. A freshwater fishing license is required. South Carolina does not require a trout stamp.

PHILLIP GENTRY is the host of the "Upstate Outdoors" broadcast from noon to 2 p.m. Saturdays on WORD 106.3 FM. The show can be streamed live online at 1063word.radio.com or via podcast anytime.