

## Trout Site – Golden Trout

The Golden Trout  
By Bob Willis

Golden trout are often said to be the most beautiful or the most magnificent of all of the trout species. They are definitely pretty and only exist in the cleanest water in the highest elevations in the northwestern United States. They are native to the Golden Trout Creek in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California. The Kern River and Little Kern River drainages (these are the drainages that Golden Trout Creek drain into) hold all of the native Golden Trout. These drainages are within the Golden Trout Wilderness in the Sequoia National Forest. Wilderness designation is made by Congress and means that there are no roads or mechanized equipment allowed within the designated area. There are concerns about California Golden Trout. Their range has been reduced to about 10% of the original area. This is mainly because of the introduction of rainbows that crossbreed with Golden and Brown Trout that are more aggressive feeders and will eat Golden fry. The problem with reduction in range in California have led to several efforts to remove and reduce competition from the Golden areas and the creation of fish barriers to prevent other trout from moving into the Golden Trout's natural range.



This is a Golden caught in Lightning Creek, Montana.

There are several unique things about Golden Trout. These fish are located only in very small areas in four northwestern states in the United States. In most cases the fish are isolated from other trout species so they will not be able to crossbreed, and consequently have no predators and little competition for food. They are one of the few trout that continue to feed day and night, and are almost exclusively aquatic insect eaters. The exception may be the lake fish, where the larger fish most likely do eat the smaller Golden's.

The fish in the Kern River drainage of California are stream fish and generally do not grow very large. A 12-inch fish in this area is a large fish. These trout are long lived and may live up to nine years. Because of the remote habitat locations all of these fish are difficult to reach. All of the areas with Golden Trout do allow fishing and in California the limit is five fish. This is another fish that you have to lace up your boots and take your pack if you want to catch them. The largest Golden Trout are located in high mountain lakes of Wyoming and Montana, but there are also fish in Utah and Idaho. The largest Golden on record is an 11-pound, 4-ounce fish that was caught in Wyoming in 1948, and a 9 and ½ pound fish was taken from Virginia Lake, California in 1952. There was also a five-pound fish caught in Idaho in 1958, and the most recent big catch is a 5 and 1/2 pound fish caught in Montana in 2000.

All of the fish in high mountain lakes require a substantial walk to reach, and there is no road access. This is one of the mystiques that surround these fish. To catch one you have to be willing to make a substantial effort just to get to the water to make a cast. In also every case Golden

Trout are located in National Wilderness Areas that do not allow any road access. One of those Wilderness Areas in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness on the Gallatin National Forest in Montana. This is area where my two Nephews Mark and Chris help me catch some Golden Trout in 2010. It is a trip I will never forget. I have hiked all over the western United States, Canada and Alaska and this was the most difficult walk I have ever taken. It was steep there was no trail for about half the hike and where there was not down timber there was large boulders. I was just a killer hike. I think my Nephews thought that was literally what was going to happen to me. We were going to fish in Lightning Lake and never made it. Fortunately, the outlet to the lake held many Golden Trout and we caught several in Lightning Creek before we had to turn back. We were running out of light.

Golden Trout seem to hold a certain mystique as one of the most desirable trout to catch. I think that they are highly desirable and a very worthy trout to pursue. These fish are one of the first native trout to hold a special place in fishing history and also one of the first to be protected. All of these efforts have ensured that Golden Trout will continue to be one of the prized catches for all who love to fly fish. I will fish for Golden again, but probably not in Lightning Lake. It is just too difficult a hike.

If you want to read more about the trip into Lightning Lake and the Golden Trout in Lightning Creek read the chapter on Golden Trout in the book or e-book in **Trout Adventures – North America**. The book/e-book will be available from Wilderness Adventures Press sometime in 2012. This publisher specializes in fly fishing books and their website is [www.wildadvpress.com](http://www.wildadvpress.com).