

Fishing Scenario ID #333

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Mount Baker Hike-in

It's a serious hike, although not a long one; and the scenery is among the most stunning in the country, up here along the Chain Lakes Trail—"likely the single most scenic place I've been in my life – especially the drive by Nooksack Falls and also Picture Lake," says Dale. The trout are plentiful but smallish, five to seven inches, with some up to ten (Iceberg Lake), gorgeous as the pair of lakes where they live. Don't think about bringing bait, although you may use spinning gear; and a light fly rod might be the best match for these places and prey.

That's not all you'll want to carry in. For Iceberg Lake a float tube makes a critical difference. Both lakes require waders for anything close to best results.

Did we mention bears? They're around, sometimes, but far, far less likely to create problems than weather, so check reports carefully. If it helps you to keep that fact in mind, remember that Mt. Baker set the world's record for snowfall not long ago, and ice on the trail can put an edge on your day.

Still...follow the sun in, follow this Gameplan, and you'll end up hooking some of nature's brightest gems in one of the most beautiful anywhere.



Andy W. photo



Mt. Baker Hike-in Brookies

Timing Details

1. **DATES: September 4 to September 28!**
Note: Some years the snow is 4' deep as late as August 1, and as early as October 5!

2. Aim for days when the high temperatures at MAPLE FALLS are expected to range between 59 and 71 at weather.com! **Note: the temperatures at the lakes will be roughly 10 to 11 degrees colder than at Maple Falls.**

BEST HOURS: morning and evening, especially for dry fly fishing.

Don't go when:

- a. The road to the trailhead is still snowbound!
- b. If weather forecasts predict
 - a cold front, with a drop in temperature more than 7 degrees from the previous day;
 - a snowstorm, thunderstorm or subfreezing temperatures all day!
- c. You're not physically comfortable with a steep, 1.8 mile hike, beginning at 5100 feet, and classified "more difficult." Most hikers should expect something less than an hour in (downhill) and more than that on the (uphill) walk out.

3. To check on weather, road and other Mt. Baker conditions, *definitely* call the Forest Service at 360-599-2714.



Dale Dorcas photo

Special Regulations/Issues

1. **A Northwest Forest Pass is required for each vehicle parked at the trailhead.** These can be purchased at the Ranger Station at Mt. Baker Hwy, or at the Heather Visitor Centre. <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/mbs/recreation/activities/trails/mtbaker.shtml>
2. Parking at the trailhead can be a problem on a sunny weekend in the summer, so plan to arrive before 10:30 AM. <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/mbs/recreation/activities/trails/mtbaker.shtml>
3. **Limits:** June 1 to October 31 anglers **with current WA freshwater licenses** may take Eastern Brook Trout per standard statewide regulations. Please note that "Any fish hooked in the gill, eye or tongue should be kept, if legal to do so," and be sure to check with WDFW for any emergency changes at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/>



Mt. Baker Hike-in Brookies

Equipment

- 1. Waders, wading boots. For Iceberg Lake, also a lightweight float tube, and fins. Remember that you will be carrying these. (Wearing the waders is possible, if they're breathable.)
- 2. A light fly rod. An eight to nine foot three to four-weight would work well for Mazama Lake, a stiffer five-weight would serve better for Dale's trolling technique in Iceberg. Whatever the rod, bring a weight forward floating line with enough backing on the reel to fill the pool.
- 3. Be sure to carry 4X, 5X and 6X tippet spools, preferably fluorocarbon.

AND

- a. **Dry flies** as small as #16 and as large #12. Effective patterns include: Adams (our #1 choice), Black Gnat, Parachute Black Gnat, Renegade, Royal Coachman Trude, Olive Trude, Humpies, ants, beetles, spiders.
- b. **Nymphs and streamers:** A #8 very slender black nymph was our #1 producer for Mazama! Also try Olive woolly buggers #10, Prince Nymphs and Pheasant Tails in #14 and #16, both standard and bead-headed versions.

OR

- 4. A lightweight spinning rod, preferably long—up to 10 feet—rigged with 3 pound test line, along with an assortment of small swivels and weights, and small spinners such as Roostertails.
- 5. Fishing vest to hold fly boxes, lures, forceps/hook remover, floatant, clippers, etc. (Or store these in your float tube pockets.)
- 6. Hat, to cut glare, and polarized sunglasses to spot the cruising fish!
- 7. Sunscreen.
- 8. Insect repellent.
- 9. Drinking water.
- 10. Needle-nose pliers or a hemostat to pinch down hook barbs. (See page 7.)





Mt. Baker Hike-in Brookies

Rigging, Techniques, Location

For Mazama Lake:

This tiny impoundment is so shallow that Dale can wade about 40 per cent of the water. That's excellent for access, but presents challenges when trying to keep a lure or wet fly free from bottom moss. Dale's had 50 hits here, from fish averaging 5 to 7 inches, and from a few monsters up to nine inches. Fishing barbless flies with a spinning rod will be the most effective method.

With spinning tackle

- 1. A long rod helps to make longer casts, so does light, 3 pound test line.
- 2. Rig with the lightest sinker (usually just a #5 ball-bearing swivel, with no weight!) that will allow you cast a slender, #8 black nymph. Don't hesitate to experiment with smaller flies.
- 3. Reel at a relatively rapid rate—about the speed as when fishing a spoon. Remove any moss from your lure!

With fly fishing tackle

- 1. Look for rising fish, which you're most likely to find at the "flat," northern side of the lake, where they may be feeding in 3 to four feet of water.
- 2. Use a long leader—12 to 15 feet, even longer if you can manage it, tapering to 5X.
- 3. Approach carefully. Don't line the fish (drop your fly line across them). Cast **to** rises, or to fish you see cruising, **not across** them!
- 4. Dale has done well with a #14 Adams. But—as always when fly fishing—look for insects, and try to match a hatch if you find one. (If not, a tiny black dry gnat, #16, might be a good searching pattern.)



Dale Dorcas photo



Mt. Baker Hike-in Brookies

Rigging, Techniques, Location



Iceberg Lake

Dale recommends beginning on the wooded west side (the side you hit first on the trail coming in from Artist's Point). He's found the best fishing just off the large rocky point located about 200 yards north of the outlet creek. Dale will launch his float tube there, then kick from the outlet creek (which can appear quite dry in mid-summer), north along the wooded shore to the western corner of the lake....religiously moving to where the fish are rising.

For Iceberg Lake:

At 30 acres, Iceberg is the largest of all the Chain Lakes. It's also the first choice of fisherman by a 4:1 ratio. Probably for that reason, there appear to be fewer trout in Iceberg, but they do average several inches longer than at Mazama, over eight, with the largest up to 10. A float tube provides a significant advantage! While trolling is Dale's preferred method, be ready to fin over to rising fish, and to (carefully) cast to them.

With spinning tackle

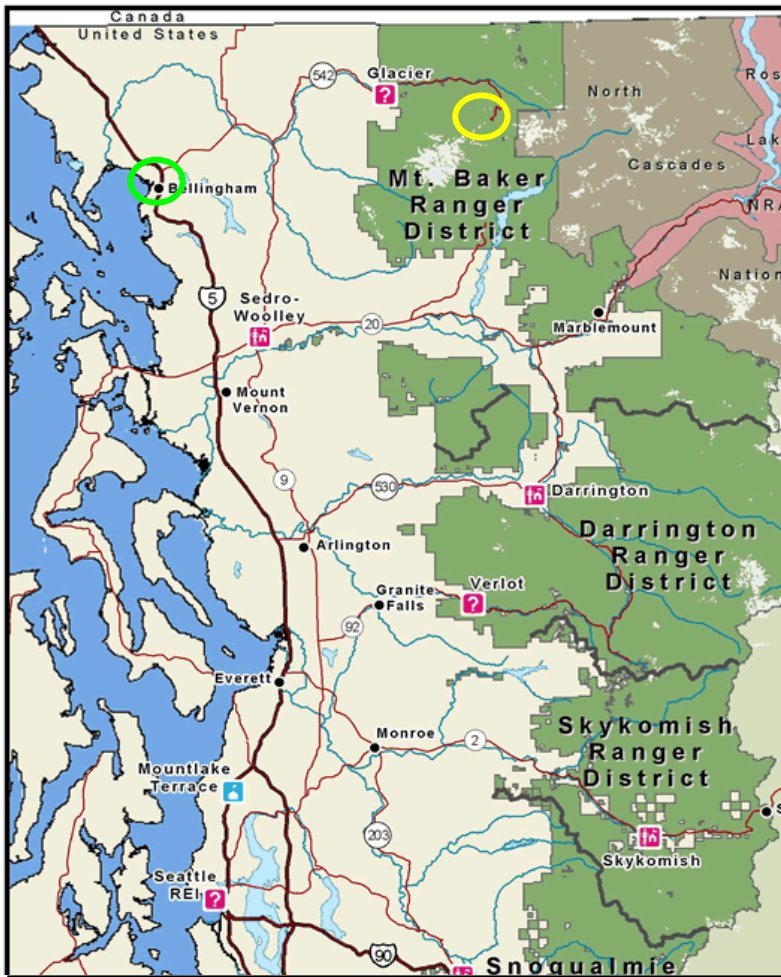
- 1. Once again, a long rod helps, for casting to distant, rising fish, and to help manage hook-ups when trolling. The clear water makes 3 to 4-pound test line necessary.
- 2. A *tiny* Roster Tail spinner is a good choice, to which Dale adds paste scent. Use enough weight to allow for those long casts.
- 3. When kick-trolling, let out 80+ feet of line to avoid spooking fish.
- 4. Dale says, "The faster you kick the more fish you'll likely catch here."

With fly fishing tackle

- 1. Look for rising fish, but expect to find these very spooky. Use a long, light fluorocarbon leader. Dale recommends a #12 Adams, or *bright* #12-#16 dry flies like Humpies or Royal Wulffs.
- 2. For kick-trolling, Dale goes with 35 feet of fluorocarbon leader, and lets all his fly line out, right to the backing. (Obviously it is almost impossible to *cast* this rig.)
- 3. Also while kick-trolling, try two or three fly rigs comprised of nymphs and small streamers.
- 4. If action is slow near the surface, experiment with an intermediate sinking line—preferably clear (also known as a "slime line").



Mt. Baker Hike-in Brookies Location Details



1. Start by clicking into http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/mbs/creation/activities/trails/mtbak_er.shtml, where you will find a variety of maps, charts and trail descriptions.
 2. From the trailhead at Artist's Point parking lot, Mazama is roughly a 1.8 mile hike (one-way), Iceberg is 2.0 miles (one-way). Some years there is lots of snow on the trail as late as August 1st so always call 360-599-2714 Baker station for trail info.
 3. The trail heads west from Artist Point, but forks at roughly a mile. TAKE THE TRAIL ON THE RIGHT, which soon descends to Mazama Lake. World-class scenery!
- OR,**
4. Continue 0.2 miles further to Iceberg Lake.

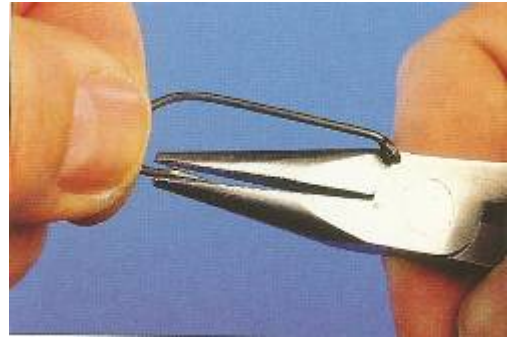
Services and Facilities

1. **Camping:** Both these lakes are located within the Mt. Baker Wilderness, so party size is limited to 12. Overnight visitors must camp at designated campsites, one of which is located at Mazama. No fires are allowed.
2. Remember, **a Northwest Forest Pass is required for each vehicle parked at the trailhead.**
3. **Services:** None. Bring everything you need (see Bellingham).
4. The nearest major town to Mt. Baker is Bellingham, WA, a city approaching 100,000 located on I-5 where you may restaurants and accommodations of all kinds. For Bellingham options, see <http://www.bellingham.net/>

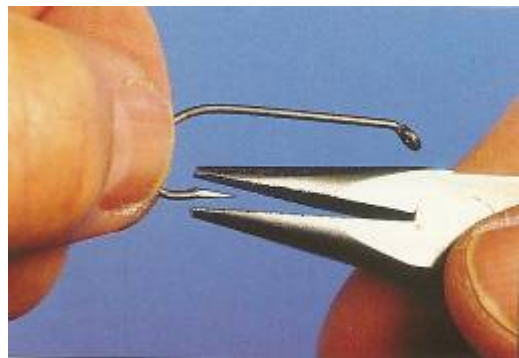
Responsible Catching

While opinions vary as to whether you'll land more fish with crimped barbs, or less, no one argues that improved *catching* makes it critical for anglers to practice the most responsible *releasing* techniques for fish they do not keep. This begins by pinching down the barb of hooks you use in nearly all Fishing Coaches Scenarios, and finishes with the proper landing and reviving of tired fish.

Step 1. Hold the hook by the bend and position the jaws of a pair of flat needle-nosed pliers over the barb. Only the flat hook spear should make contact with the jaw face. (Do not insert pliers far enough to press or scrape against the bend.)



Step 2. Squeeze the pliers to bend the barb down. Use the lightest pressure that will still do the job. Most barbs will not bend completely flat, and some may require touch-up with a file.



Text and illustrations from *Fly Tier's Benchside Reference*, courtesy of Ted Leeson, Jim Shollmeyer, and amatobooks.com

Catch and Release Tips

Adapted from the British Columbia Federation of Drift Fishers www.bcdf.com

Play the fish as quickly as possible.

Leave the fish in the water.

Never poke a finger in the fish's gills, or lift it by the gills.

After removing a hook, face the fish upright into [slow] current. When the fish is able to swim away on its own, release it to swim out of your hands.

If a photo is desired, quickly lift fish up (not longer than 5 seconds out of the water) holding it under the pectoral fins, and the other hand supporting the wrist of the tail.

Fish kept out of the water for more than 30 seconds will almost certainly suffer brain damage, and may not survive.

