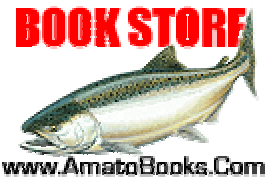


Catching Large Kokanee

By Phil Johnson & Phil Pirone



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Since we are both Phils for the purpose of this article any time I mention Phil it refers to Phil Johnson. He is the kokanee expert. My only contributions to this article are writing it, and also manufacturing the Pro-Cure bait scents that Phil relies on to catch fish. I am absolutely certain that the information contained in this article is so powerful that even a novice angler who accurately follows Phil's instructions and recommendations can start catching more large kokanee than he ever dreamed possible. Phil has poured out all of his knowledge and almost all of his tricks. Years of hard work and research have been condensed into a few pages. We hope you enjoy it.

I first met Phil Johnson over the radio in June, 1995. I was fishing and writing an article with top California guide Jay Chojnacki (see April/May '96). Jay introduced me over his boat radio to Phil, and told me that Phil was the absolute best kokanee fisherman he'd ever met. Jay also said that Phil was a real believer in Pro-Cure bait scents and relied heavily on them to consistently catch kokanee.

I fished next to Phil Johnson for two more days. Although Jay and I caught lots of beautiful large kokanee I could not help but observe that the man fishing in the boat next to us had brought kokanee fishing to a new level. I had to meet this guy. Phil's boat was the first to reach its limit (15 large kokanee for three anglers), and he called us on his radio to say good-bye. Jay was kind enough to follow him to Lake Don Pedro's Middle Bay takeout so Phil and I could meet.

Phil is a really neat guy who lives to fish, and his favorite fish are kokanee. We instantly hit it off, and kept in touch all summer long. Phil told me he fishes kokanee over 100 days a year, and makes several out of state journeys each year in search of a six-pound kokanee. He has lots of photos of four-pound plus kokanee to prove he really knows his stuff. He rattled off a list of all the places in all the states he fishes for kokanee, stating his techniques work well everywhere he's tried them. Since Phil liked using the Pro-Cure scents so much I asked him if he'd test products for us on his fishing sojourns. He said yes, and about once a week he'd call to tell me where he was, what scents were working best, his catch statistics and fish weights. As our friendship grew I realized Phil and I share several common interests. We both love to fish. We like to catch quality fish. We both appreciate quality products that really do work, and we both share a strong belief that even the best quality products, without the knowledge to use them, are no help to a struggling angler. Like me, Phil Johnson loves to share his knowledge with other fishermen, so Phil and I decided to write a no holds barred "how-to article" on catching large kokanee, consistently-anywhere large kokanee exist.

When you read this please be aware of how few top anglers would share their secrets with you. If you get the chance to meet Phil make sure to say hello and thank him. The sharing of this knowledge is a rare opportunity for us all.

Phil started kokanee fishing in Idaho on Lake Pend Oreille in 1991 using all the traditional methods that have been written about for years. Usually a heavy one to three-ounce sinkers or lead core line is trolled slow and deep. A spinner rig tipped with a chunk of worm, maggot, or piece of corn is attached behind a large tandem flasher combination. This established method is excellent for catching small school kokanee in the eight to twelve inch range. Most everyone fishing this way at Pend Oreille catches their limits of these small school kokanee.

In 1992 Phil was trolling for king salmon in Don Pedro reservoir when he trolled up two large fish he could not identify. Phil was pulling a red/pearl Apex lure with a small hoochie 12 inches in front of the lure. Questioning the local authorities Phil learned Don Pedro had been planted with kokanee in 1981 and 1982. A catch pen was located in the tributary stream of their introduction. Only four or five adult kokanee returned. There was no reported angler catch of these fish. Kokanee were written off at Lake Don Pedro. Phil was sure they were kokanee and finally brought the fish to a Lake Tahoe fish biologist. The biologist agreed with Phil. These were indeed kokanee. Two prime 16- inch plus beauties. (Phil was to later find out that kokanee are a very adaptable fish with a tremendous will to survive.)

At that moment Phil was hooked on kokanee. On light tackle they are spectacular fighters, and they eat extremely well. The meat on these silver rockets is a firm bright fluorescent orange equal to the finest ocean salmon you've ever tasted. Smoked or barbecued they are a real treat. Phil dedicated the next three years to reading every bit of kokanee literature available. He spoke to guides and other anglers and grabbed every bit of available information and went to the lake daily to test out these theories. He quickly discovered that large kokanee are simply not attracted to the angling methods most kokanee literature recommends. He discovered that large tandem flashers with the traditional spinners do little to attract the larger kokanee.

He discovered that worms work marginally well only early in the season (March through May) and then kokanee seem to lose all interest in them. The use of maggots was also marginal. Phil tried corn and quickly found out that yellow corn does not work well at all. Without deliberately looking for it he stumbled onto his first can of White Shoe Peg Corn. The kokanee seemed to like this strange white corn better than all the other baits he had tried. Phil was tipping his lure's hooks with this white corn with limited success. Over the next two years he had tried to improve his catch by adding various scents to his white corn. He stumbled on to a local shop carrying several of the Pro-Cure bait scent oils and started experimenting with them. His catch instantly started to improve. Phil was testing and combining his own techniques daily, throwing out what didn't work and improving what did work. In three years he's become a kokanee master. Phil limits 95% of the time no matter where he fishes. Here are his theories and instructions for catching monster kokanee.

Rods And Reels

This is a personal preference. Phil prefers a 7 1/2 foot rod, either fiberglass or graphite with a sensitive tip tapering to a more powerful butt. He used Abu Garcia Black Max and Shimano Calcutta level-wind reels. He prefers the wider spool 3600 model so he can fit his thumb onto his spool, but admits this reel is more reel than you need to fish kokanee. The 1600 model will adequately handle kokanee. Phil cautions to avoid level- wind reels with inferior drags. The kokanee will not wear your drags out. Lowering your lures down the downrigger will. A worn drag soon gets herky-jerky. This will pull your line out of the sensitive downrigger release clip you'll need to catch kokanee. A bad drag will drive you crazy, and cost you lots of fishing time. Phil dislikes the use of spinning reels. In the hands of an inexperienced angler a spinning reel can cause excessive line twist while fighting a fish and can cost you fish. Since no casting is involved in this fishery a level-wind reel is quickly mastered by all. For line Phil likes Maxima Ultra Green in eight-pound test both for main line and leader. On rare occasions (in extremely clear lakes) he will go down to six- and even four-pound leaders, but only if absolutely necessary. Phil only uses 100 yards of monofilament on his reels. He fills the rest of his spool with Dacron backing. Phil has experimented with the new Spectra type fiber lines also. He likes them but cautions to use these "no stretch" lines only with a

fiberglass rod. Graphite rods are too stiff, and when used with the new Spectra fiber “no stretch” lines create too much pull on a kokanee’s soft mouth. This combination will cost you fish.

Electronic Fish Finder

This is an absolute must for serious lake trolling, and especially so for chasing kokanee. This may be painful to hear, but many fish finder models do not work well for kokanee. Phil uses a commercial Furuno model FMV6O5 (this model has been replaced by the LS-6000). This is a low end commercial model, but still lists for around one thousand dollars. On sale this model sells for six hundred plus. What you are paying for is power and pixels. The power is necessary for your fish finder to shoot a wide cone. The wider the cone your fish locator can use the more area under your boat you can read. If you purchase an inexpensive fish finder (\$150 to \$300 range) they usually come with an 18 degree cone. This is fine for shallow water bass fishing. But when you set your fish finder to read between 20 to 100 feet of water an 18 degree cone at 20 feet will only read a 6.36 foot circle, at 40 feet a 12 foot circle and at 100 ft a 32 foot circle. Furuno has available a 48.6 degree cone. This powerful cone reads a circle 17 feet wide at 20 feet, 34.5 feet wide at 40 feet, and 86 feet wide at 100 feet. It is critical to know if you are passing over kokanee, and if they are not biting your lures. The more area you can see under your boat will enable you to make the decisions on what to use and what to change. A very important part of Phil’s kokanee catching game plan is based on the theory that if Phil passes over three kokanee in a row and doesn’t get bit he starts changing lure colors, lure styles, or scent combinations. You must have power and pixels to get the electronic information you need.

The detailed pixels will allow you to distinguish kokanee blips from kings and rainbows. Fish finders cannot read through air. All fish have air bladders. The locator beam put out by your fish finder passes through water but cannot pass through air. Fish finders read the air bladder of a fish, and the image is bounced back to you. For their size kokanee have very large, cylindrical air bladders that run the entire length of their body cavity. The air bladder on a king is long and thin because it is partially atrophied or collapsed. it is a longer broken up image. Rainbows have larger bladders but a completely different shape than a king or kokanee. Hence with Phil’s Furuno unit he can accurately and consistently distinguish between the electronic image of a kokanee, king or rainbow. He knows when he passes over a kokanee and doesn’t get bit. You are only targeting kokanee. You don’t want to be making changes to your lures if you’re passing over kings or rainbows. If you are forced due to economics to use a less expensive unit Phil admits it’s better than nothing, but it will seriously impede your maximum success as a kokanee fisherman.

Trolling Speed

This is very critical. Phil not only has the boat speed indicator built into his transducer which registers on his fish finder screen but also uses an Accutrol speed indicator device on the side of his boat. The original Accutrol manufacturer went out of business, but Phil tells me they are once again being manufactured by Luhr Jensen of Hood River, Oregon. Phil monitors both speed readings, trying to consistently troll at a real 1.2 miles per hour. He will vary this speed from as slow as .9 mph to as high as 1.4 mph. Finding the right speed is critical in consistently catching kokanee. Fine tuning the speed will vary on a day to day basis. Once you find the magic speed it’s critical to duplicate it on every trolling pass. Motor rpms alone are not an accurate indicator because they don’t take into account trolling with the wind or against it, or lake current for that matter. Knowing your speed and maintaining it is critical.

Downriggers

Downriggers are an absolute must for successful kokanee fishing. On light tackle kokanee are spectacular fighters. To enjoy this fight downriggers are a must. You can purchase dependable hand crank downriggers from as little as \$80 dollars to the fancier electric models ranging from \$300 to \$800 dollars. There is very little pleasure trolling for kokanee with a tuna rod, lead, a three foot long tandem flasher blade combination and a lure tipped with bait. With this type of heavy tackle all enjoyment of fighting a fish is lost. In fact the rod required to haul all this junk around is so stout that most often the angler does not observe the initial strike and trolls a hooked fish around for hours. Eventually they reel up a drowned, dead fish. Some fun, huh. With a downrigger not only are you placing your baited lure at the precise depth you are marking fish but upon a strike the downrigger release clip pops your line free allowing you to freely fight your fish on light tackle. Since you are trolling extremely slow for kokanee a four-, six- or eight-pound trolling ball is all you will need. Phil prefers an eight-pound weight.

Be sure to use enough weight to make your downrigger cable run straight up and down while trolling, If your cable is running back at any kind of angle you will not be trolling at the depth you are reading. Phil uses the finned or rudder type downrigger ball that he coats with a red or black rubberized material. There is evidence that the red ball tends to be less visible to a fish than the standard black downrigger ball. He feels he gets more bites with the red weights.

A Critical Note For Kokanee

Flowing from your boat down your downrigger cable is an invisible electrical current. If the current is just right it will attract fish to your lures. If the current is too high you will repel fish. You must measure the amount of electrical current your boat puts out through your downrigger cables to successfully catch kokanee. To do this you will need an Ohm meter. With your boat in the water clip the Ohm meter's positive lead to your downrigger cable and the negative lead to your battery. If you measure over 7/10ths of a volt positive you are repelling fish. Many aluminum boats put out well over one volt. Phil has a fiberglass boat, and he regularly measures his boat's output charge. It is consistently 2/10 of a volt. It seems a positive 2/10 to 3/10 of a volt is ideal, but you will be able to catch kokanee with an output up to 6/10 of a volt. Above that you are wasting your time. This excessive electrical leakage can be greatly reduced with some effort on your part. Make sure all of your electronic components are grounded to the best of your ability. Inspect your wiring for thin or worn out areas. Where wiring takes a bend or has a rub point run it through a rubber hose, plastic tubing or wrap it well with electrical tape. The electrical charge can be greatly reduced by adding several zinc anodes to your boat's hull and motor. These anodes attract the electrical current to them and neutralize it rather than letting it go out into the water. Phil runs zinc anodes on both his boat's hull and motors. At least three times during his six month kokanee season Phil removes these anodes and buffs them on a coarse wire wheel to remove all the corrosion and build up that coats these anodes. The anodes must be regularly cleaned to keep them at peak performance. When they are bright and shiny they will attract and absorb the maximum amount of electrical current. Remember-it is consistently doing the little things (paying attention to detail) that separates the really good fishermen from the pack.

Another important step-insulate your downrigger ball from your downrigger cable. Lead is a great conductor of electrical current. That's why your battery posts are lead. The cable on your downriggers is woven stainless steel cable. The excessive electrical charge from your boat travels right down the cables to your lead balls, and the excessive charge is released right in the immediate

area of your lures. To avoid this it helps to use a plastic coated downrigger ball. However the plastic coating on the ball's eyelet soon wears off and electrical contact is made. Plastic clips are available to separate your cable from your downrigger weight. Phil does not like these however and makes his own loops using 90-pound plastic coated sturgeon leader doubled up and run through a piece of heavy wall plastic model airplane fuel line tubing. He attaches this loop to his cable using a traditional metal downrigger clip.

The Two Rod Theory-And The Mind Set For Kokanee

Kokanee are attackers. The larger solitary fish are very territorial. They will attack strange intruders as long as they believe they have the advantage, if kokanee feel they are outnumbered they will stay away from your lures. Phil always uses only two downriggers for kokanee. He produces more kokanee consistently with only two downriggers in use at one time. Another possible theory for the success of the two rod theory is that four to eight lures, dodgers and tandem flashers may serve to attract kokanee but too much might be going on and the kokanee simply get confused and cannot focus on attacking a lure. When these fish attack they exert a tremendous amount of energy, but their burst of pursuit only lasts for a few seconds. The kokanee may simply get confused, tired and quit. You may be getting dozens of "almost" bites each day and never know it. Stick to the two rod theory.

This two rod theory is difficult for many anglers, and especially guides. Imagine having three friends plus yourself out on your boat for a day of kokanee fishing. With California's new two rod license option you could be fishing a maximum of eight rods for four anglers. Imagine the looks on your friend's faces when you inform them you are only going to put out two downriggers with two rods and two lures because you will catch your limits more quickly (20 fish in this case). It's even harder for a guide to try to explain this eccentric two rod behavior. You can see it in your client's faces immediately. "Oh god, how did we ever pick this lazy S.O.B.!"

I guess you'll just have to be strong, or bring a copy of this article along with you, and highlight this section on the two rod theory. You must develop the belief that these two rods will help you catch more kokanee more quickly than trolling a tackle department.

There are several other really good reasons to use just two downriggers and two rods. Kokanee fight very erratically, swimming from side to side very rapidly. They can quickly foul up every line behind your boat, causing you nightmarish tangles and lost fish. With two rods in the water once a fish is hooked Phil quickly gets the other line and both downriggers up and out of the way. Phil leaves nothing in the water to cost him his hooked fish. Because of their very soft mouths kokanee cannot be horsed. This lack of excessive pressure or control allows kokanee to get fouled easily. Phil clearly states limits are caught one fish at a time. When a kokanee is hooked take your time and concentrate on landing that fish only. Once landed you can quickly get both downriggers and lures back in the water.

Other advantages occur during windy days, and when making tight turns. When fishing six to eight kokanee rods wind can cause lures to constantly tangle. What advantage is pulling eight lures if six of them are tangled. Turns are also a nightmare with more than two rods. With six to eight downriggers and lures you must make large gradually sweeping turns to avoid tangles. Even when making careful turns you will still regularly tangle lures. The best kokanee lures swim side to side, and with two rods on each gunnel and two to four rods across your transom there simply is not enough distance between your lures to consistently avoid tangles. When trolling smaller coves with

good kokanee populations the two rods allow you to make tighter turns which gives you more time to work lures over marked fish.

Kokanee are unlike any other fish. They are primarily plankton feeders, and also feed on tiny mysis shrimp. Since they do not readily feed on minnows, lures or standard bait kokanee must be targeted specifically. Larger kokanee are very territorial. Kokanee are attackers. What triggers this attack seems to be the right style of lure in the right color for the moment. Corn and scent seem to be the final key to triggering an attack.

Lures

Phil constantly experiments with new kokanee lures, but his two favorites for producing large kokanee are the Tomic Wee-Tad and the small Apex Trout Killer. It seems kokanee's favorite colors are bright red, pink and hot orange when good light is on the water. They seem to have a preference for greens and chartreuse in early morning to midday in many lakes. Phil cautions these color preferences are just a tendency and not a hard and fast rule.

Since Phil fishes over 100 days per season just for kokanee chances are pretty good he's fished there the day before. Many times he'll start out using the last lure color and scent combination that was working for him the day before. He stays with this combination if it's producing or until he marks three kokanee in a row without getting bit. If this happens he starts changing his lure color, lure style or scent combination. Both the Tomic Wee-Tad and the small Apex come rigged from the factory. Phil never uses the factory rigging. He saves the hooks for other types of trout fishing, but discards the rest of their rigging. It is important to note that both of these styles of lure share two similar characteristics. One is their great lazy side to side swimming action. The other extremely important characteristic is the leaders do not attach to the lures. The line runs through both lures and attaches to the hooks directly. The lure is free sliding on your leader, and only the pressure of the water as you troll holds the lure against your hooks. This is extremely important when you hook a kokanee because the lure will slide up your leader and the kokanee will not be able to use the lure for leverage to tear the hooks out of its soft mouth. Avoid using lures where the leader ties directly to the lure and the hooks are attached directly to the lure's body. Kokanee are tremendous head shakers and love to roll up on your lure and line. A lure that stays in a kokanee's mouth will provide a tremendous amount of leverage in tearing hooks out.

Phil rigs both types of lures with two #2 red Gamakatsu octopus style hooks. He rims either an oval shape white "glow in the dark" bead or two small pink or red beads between the lure's body and the top hook. There is approximately a 1/4 inch distance between the bend of the top hook and the eye of the trailing hook. This free sliding two hook setup is extremely critical in landing big kokanee. Kokanee have very fragile mouths (until fall during pre-spawn when their mouths toughen considerably).

Most anglers will tell you they lose at least 50% of the big kokanee they hook. Phil loses less than 5% with these lures and double hooks. Here's why. As we mentioned the lure slides up the leader and out of the way. Kokanee are tremendous head shakers. A kokanee will usually get at least one of these hooks in his mouth. But while violently shaking his head he will inevitably drive the second hook through the outside of his cheek or mouth. The bony plate on the outside cheek is very tough, but the super sharp Gamakatsu hooks easily drive through it. Hooked in the mouth and through the cheek with the load shared between two hooks these fish rarely come off. Remember to legally keep a fish at least one of these hooks must be inside the mouth. Otherwise the fish must be considered snagged and released unharmed into the water.

It is important to note when rigging the Tomic Wee-Tad there are two line holes on the lure. Always use the front line hole coming through the slanted front of the lure. This gives the perfect kokanee action. The rear hole which comes through the top of the lure gives a very erratic action kokanee do not seem fond of.

When you get kokanee on top of the water prior to netting they usually go crazy. They will start to roll up on your line. When a kokanee is exhausted and lying on top on its side it is perfectly OK to skim him across the surface of the water into your net. Phil cautions however that when a kokanee is on top and going wild to quickly lower your rod tip and get the fish to go under and start swimming again. If you attempt to horse a kokanee when it's on the surface going ballistic you will almost always tear the hooks out, even with the two hook rig.

Some lakes seem very color oriented. Boca is an example. Greens and chartreuse works well from first light until around 11:00 a.m. when the sun is well on the water. At this time the bite slows down and Phil switches to the hot orange, bright reds, bright pink or pearl pink lures. He has also been playing with silver Wee-Tads and Apex lures, and has been customizing them with a very flashy red "laser" tape with good results (more on this in a little bit). Some lakes are not as easy to develop a pattern for like Boca, and more daily experimentation is required. Another reason to change colors when the bite slows down is because these fish have seen this color combination at least 10 times or more and have lost interest in it. All the fish that were going to bite have bitten. A color change can trigger instant action, and usually does.

Another note to mention is that Phil will never leave an area if he is marking kokanee. He really believes he will eventually get them to bite. He keeps changing until he does. First lure color or lure style, then dodger color, then the flavor of his scented corn or his trolling speed. He is persistent and will get these fish to bite-day in and day out. Maintaining a positive attitude and working hard are characteristics shared by many successful anglers.

A Note On Corn

Many serious kokanee fishermen know that nothing works as well for kokanee as White Shoe Peg Corn. Phil agrees. But while we are about to mention the merits of using this kernel corn to attract fish I must in good conscience mention an important caution in using corn. Improperly used kernel corn is a killer of trout. I don't know why but trout, both hatchery and wild fish love the flavor and scent of corn. When still fished whole corn (even worse when chummed) is an absolute killer of trout. The outer shell of a corn kernel is cellulose fiber, and trout and salmon simply cannot digest cellulose fiber. The strong acid in their stomachs can dissolve a fish hook in a week but can't touch cellulose. On lakes where corn is used for bait and chum large trout are regularly found dead. Autopsies show their digestive tract to be plugged solid with undigested kernel corn. The use of kernel corn we are suggesting in this article should not be confused with the deplorable use of kernel corn for bait or chum. Tipping your lures with two to four kernels of corn while trolling makes the consumption of large quantities of corn an impossibility. Even if a kernel or two comes off during the course of a day it's not enough to cause damage. Also to maintain healthy populations of large kokanee in most lakes they must be caught and kept. Only serious angling pressure can control overpopulation and stunting. You are targeting these kokanee to keep. This is not a catch and release program. Chances are a kokanee's first encounter with a lure tipped with kernel corn will be his last.

Shoe Peg Corn

This is a specialty strain of gourmet white corn grown in the Midwest in very limited quantities. Shoe Peg Corn is not only white (a definite kokanee preference) but it is a firm, crisp kernel that holds onto a hook well. The kernels are long and slender and very uniform. I suspect this is where it gets its name-the old wooden pegs that were used to hold shoes together. Depending on rain and irrigation the seasonal yield of shoe peg corn can really vary. In some years it's in very short supply. No bait seems to work as well as shoe peg corn, and for this reason the serious kokanee guys stock up on it while it's available. Green Giant packages it in 15-ounce cans, but it is available in other brands too. When you find it purchase a good supply. Once you run out you may not be able to locate any until the following season. Only take out enough corn to last you a few weeks. The rest can be placed in a glass jar in its own juice and frozen until you need more.

Scenting Your Shoe Peg Corn

Phil feels Pro-Cure scents have greatly helped him perfect his kokanee success. Phil uses four scents mixed 50/50 with Anise Plus Bait Oil. The four basic scents he uses are Herring Oil, Shrimp/Prawn Oil, Fresh Water Shrimp Oil and Squid Oil. As I mentioned he blends each scent with our Anise Plus Oil. Kokanee like anise, and in our research we have found anise flavor (licorice) to be very attractive to many fish. It seems to work best, however when blended with other fish scents, and used to compliment baits. I can only relate this preference for anise to how we like salt. We might put a little on our food, but who likes salt enough to eat it straight. A little is all it seems to take to improve flavors. Overkill on Anise is usually not good. Phil completely drains off the corn's liquid and divides his can of corn into four small snap-top plastic containers. He then places approximately 1/2 a teaspoon of Anise Plus Oil into each container. He then puts a half teaspoon of an individual scent oil into each container and mixes the corn around to get it exposed to all the scent. He always cleans off his teaspoon measurement in between scents so he does not contaminate the different scents with another scent. It seems the clearly individual scents make a difference when the kokanee are looking for a change. If you're not careful when scenting your corn all your scents will soon start to smell the same. Keep your scented corn in the refrigerator for up to four weeks. Once the corn starts to get a slimy feel to it it's gone bad, and you will not get bit using it. Discard the corn, carefully wash out the container and start over.

Putting The Shoe Peg Corn On Your Lures Hooks

Remember, paying attention to detail counts. Phil lays each kernel perfectly parallel to each other exactly on the bend of the hook with the round top of the kernel facing forward. (See photograph.) The perfect placement of the kernels takes practice, and it does improve the bite. There are thousands of kernels of corn in a 15-ounce can, so it is a very inexpensive bait to use. Practice rigging your lures at home so you can have it mastered by the time you're on the water. Phil always starts each day with two kernels of the front hook and one kernel on the back hook. If the bite is slow he will try two kernels on both hooks, or one kernel on each hook. It sounds ridiculous but these little things do make a difference-especially on the tough days.

Phil always starts with two different scents in the water. If they are both working he makes no changes. If one starts to consistently out produce the other he'll switch both lures to the hot scent. He'll stay with this scent until the bite starts to slow down or if he marks three kokanee in a row without getting bit. If this happens he'll change lure colors or change from a Wee-Tads to an Apex. Then he'll change dodger colors (this information will follow shortly.) He'll change the number of kernels on each hook. Phil will eventually hit on the right combo again, and he'll start catching fish

like a machine.

Time Of Day

Many experienced kokanee anglers believe the best bite for kokanee is in the morning, and they literally quit biting after 9:00 a.m. Phil believes this is hogwash. He can catch kokanee all day long. He will mark kokanee at 20 to 25 feet first thing in the morning, and if the boating pressure is light the fish will stay within a five to ten foot band of the original depth all day long. Excessive boating pressure puts kokanee down. During tournaments he'll start out catching kokanee at 20 feet, but by the 2:00 p.m. shut off time the fish will have moved down to over 60 feet to get away from all the commotion.

Phil believes kokanee will bite all day long. However they do have bite periods when they will bite exceptionally well. Phil subscribes to a set of charts similar to the old solunar tables which told what days and what times fishing would be at its best. The charts Phil uses are based on lunar phases and most importantly tides. These charts are called "fishing the average tide" and they are available through Lou Smitzer, 6108 Madra Ave., San Diego, CA 92120. Their phone number is (619) 582-1594. The cost for the charts is \$10.00 dollars which includes shipping, handling and tax. Phil states that the listed peak times have been very accurate over the years, and he will always try to be on a lake during these peak bite times. The exception to this is the really early morning bites. If there is a bite at 5:30 a.m. or 6:00 a.m. Phil will pass on it, preferring the extra sleep and relying on his belief that he can catch kokanee all day long. If it's a 7:00 a.m. bite he'll make an effort to be on the lake, but he likes his sleep.

Another important note. Phil prefers to fish weekdays at Don Pedro rather than weekends. The excessive boat traffic, both from fishing boats and recreational boat traffic create such a din that the kokanee fishing is usually poor during the daylight hours. The jet ski traffic is especially damaging to your catch ratio. If you're like most of us you are pretty much stuck with fishing weekends. Phil recommends being on the water in the dark and ready to fish at first legal light. The kokanee fishing will produce for you, but as boating pressure increases you will note the kokanee will get deeper and deeper.

Phil has a special warning for you about jet skis. It seems most of the jet skiers are party people and don't make early starts. Most don't show up until 10:30 a.m. or 11:00 a.m. Phil will be catching kokanee well when one of these mechanical monsters shows up. The kokanee instantly quit. With his fish finder down to 120 feet he can't even mark a fish. He suspects they cannot stand the high pitch whine of the ski's jet motor, and quickly move to the deeper water of the middle lake and sulk. In any case when the jet ski's are around plan on fishing early and late. Catch some sleep or play with the kids during the mid day hours. Plan on being back on the water around 4:00p.m. (this is usually when the jet skiers run out of gas and energy). The kokanee will quickly move back into their preferred areas with the absence of the jet skies and you can enjoy good kokanee fishing until dark.

Phil starts out each day running his lures without a dodger in front of them simply because its more enjoyable fighting a fish without the dodger on your line. Phil admits the use of a dodger will usually help him catch more fish. Some days the kokanee bite so well it's just not necessary. However, if Phil marks three fish without getting bit on go the dodgers. If he is still not getting bit he'll run several tandems of large flasher blades off each downrigger ball. When rigging with dodgers Phil prefers to use the silver or chrome finish Silver Horde Brand dodgers in size #3 or #4

in the hammered or dimpled finish. These dodgers are four and five inches respectively. Phil always runs the Wee Tads and Apex lures 30 inches behind his flashers to allow these lure to swim freely. A shorter leader will greatly restrict lure action.

Holographic Laser Tape

This material is an incredible breakthrough in fish catching material. This laser tape is a very thin reflective self stick adhesive backed tape you use to customize your lures or flashers by adding more flash. It's truly unlike any reflective tape material you've ever used before. "Fish Laser" material is actually a holographic fish photograph or scale pattern transferred to this material using real laser technology. When sunlight reflects off this material it literally explodes into a rainbow of colors. It's truly amazing material, and it gives you an incredible advantage when fishing for kokanee. Phil first started using it on his flashers, and it worked so well he's started to put little pieces on his lures with great success. His favorite holographic pattern is the large fish scale in the silver tape, but he also uses it in the green and red version. He has this material on all his dodgers.

If you doubt the flash and light-throwing ability of this material try this test. Rig up a fish laser dodger on one rod and your brightest dodger on another. Send both rods down in 10 foot increments. Long after your old favorite has disappeared into the darkness you'll see the flash coming off the Laser tape. This material sends out light beams in the darkness of deep water like a flashlight beam cuts through the fog at night. The additional flash and light are the first step towards bringing more fish to your lures. Extra flash means extra visibility from a long way off. You are attracting more kokanee to investigate the flash. As they close they see the lures. As they approach the lures they pick up the flavor of the scent-treated corn and they bite. This laser tape has a grain to it. Rather than completely covering a surface with a single piece of laser tape Phil covers one half with the grain running north to south and the other half with the grain running east to west. This way he'll be assured the dodger or lure's surface will always be reflecting light. If you cannot find this Fish Laser material locally it is made by Real Image, P.O. Box 566, Pacifica, CA 94044 Phone (415) 355-8897.

The Complete Rigging

When not being bit well Phil not only runs dodgers in front of his lures but also two or three sets of flasher tandem blades off of each downrigger ball. Phil never attaches his flasher tandems to his line. There is too much drag on the line and he'd need a very stout rod to fish them. Instead he attaches these tandem flasher assemblies to his downrigger balls. He uses combinations of all silver, and silver and brass. He uses the largest Half Fast, Les Davis or Luhr Jensen trolling tandems. This sequence of flasher tandems may be eight to ten feet long. Two feet above his downrigger ball he attaches a stainless steel commercial gurdy clip to his downrigger cable with a light line downrigger release set on light tension for kokanee. Right above where this gurdy clip attaches Phil runs an in-line "S" clip directly on his downrigger cable. He slowly lowers the flasher tandem down into the water and then lets out his corn scented lure two to five feet behind his flasher tandem. When fishing this way it is very important to lower your downrigger ball very slowly into the water. If you lower it too fast all the drag from the flasher tandem will cause it to rise upwards and grab your lure line. This will instantly cause the tangle from hell. Remember your lure line is running only two feet above your flasher tandem. Phil uses Cannon electric downriggers and always lowers them on the "down slow" setting. He brings them up on the "medium" retrieve setting to also avoid tangles.

Trolling Patterns And Techniques

When trolling an established kokanee area it is important to be marking fish on your fish finder. However you may be catching fish without marking any. This is because fish are being attracted towards your lures and attack your bait without ever passing through the cone your fish finder is reading. If Phil is not marking fish but getting bit he will always stay in that general area. If he is not marking fish and not getting bit he will move. When establishing a troll pattern in a cove or off a particular stretch of shoreline Phil makes mental notes of distances and landmarks. If he is consistently getting bit on each pass he will try and duplicate the path he follows on each pass. (Remember if there is wind or current to accurately monitor your Accutrol speed indicator.

The precise troll speed in both directions can be critical to getting bit. If Phil is not getting bit often enough he will vary the distance off the shore, or the angle he trolls through a cove. Phil keeps very accurate notes and records of all his catches.

One of the amazing facts he has documented is that his strikes have more than doubled when trolling perpendicular to the sun rather than parallel to its course. When trolling perpendicular to the sun the dodgers and flashers are reflecting much more light and therefore much more flash. Flash definitely attracts kokanee. When possible Phil tries to always troll perpendicular to the sun. This assures him the maximum amount of reflection coming off his dodgers, lures and flashers. From 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. when the sun is at the peak of its arc trolling direction makes little difference. But in the morning and afternoon trolling perpendicular to the sun's path will definitely produce more strikes.

When kokanee find an area that has plenty of plankton or micro shrimp to feed on, plus ideal water temperature they tend to consistently be found in the same area for weeks. If those conditions change they will abruptly move. Last season in Don Pedro Phil was fishing the southeast corner of Middle Bay regularly. It was full of kokanee. Phil pounded, them for five weeks straight. All of the sudden they were gone. In one day there were no bites and no fish. I guess if you were a research biologist you'd want to know why the sudden change. If you just like catching kokanee you don't care why they moved. You just set out to find where they moved to.

This is exactly what Phil did last season. He started running large sweeping patterns, slowly covering new coves and new areas. He worked the shallows and the deeper middle lake in search of these fish. Phil finally discovered the mother load. The fish had moved across Middle Bay to the Northwest corner. Once he found them it was business as usual. Limits every day. During his search Phil did not target plankton or water temperature. He just looks for kokanee until he finds them. He tackles new lakes the same way. If he cannot get reliable information from the local tackle shop or local anglers he just starts running large sweeping patterns until he finds the fish. He also looks for concentrations of boats fishing kokanee.

Phil feels that constant experimentation is critical to continued success. The best methods can always be improved. Always do something other anglers have not done yet. Give kokanee something they have not seen yet. Last year Phil played around with putting a bead and swivel immediately under his Wee-Tad. Twelve inches behind his lure he ran his two hooks, but in front of them he ran a series of brightly colored, hand-cut faceted Austrian glass beads. This inch long chain of beads literally shoots out bursts of light. Tipped with scented corn and jigged by the action of the Wee-Tad plug this combination simply drove kokanee wild.

Phil is also testing a new lure put out by Vance's Tackle (916) 725-2383 of Citrus Heights,

California. It's their new "glow in the dark" Kokanee and Trout Bug. It also has worked very well, but it has a rigid hook design which Phil is currently working on improving. Knowing Phil he will figure a way to improve it. But that's going to have to be part of our next article.

See you on the lake.