

O K L A H O M A

Lake Watonga (Roman Nose State Park)

3236 S Hwy 8A, Watonga, 580-623-7281(Carla). Call for available sites, 1st come-1st serve. \$12-\$20/nite. The Canyon Vista/Cedar Cove, Two Lakes, Bitter Creek and Beaver Dam area campgrounds and bathrooms remain open year-round (has showers). The Deer Run day-use comfort station is closed during the winter. General Store 580-623-7750 for info. Trout are stocked from Nov. 1 through March 31 of the following year.

It's 3 hours from home. Seven miles north of Watonga in Blaine County. 55-acre lake located within Roman Nose State Park. Bitter Creek flows into Watonga Lake and out, then into Boecher Lake and out again. Camping & lodge facilities are available within Roman Nose state park. For information, call park (580) 623-4215.

1 Turn-off

35.93437 -98.43269

2 Boat ramp on west side of the lake

35.94357 -98.42364

Dec. 11, 2013

A new state record rainbow trout was caught recently from Lake Watonga at Roman Nose State Park, reminding Oklahomans that this non-native, cold-water fish is in season and providing plenty of angling action across the state.

On Nov. 17, Mark Reed of Blanchard caught the 10-lb., 10.56-oz. rainbow, breaking the nearly half-century-old state record of Billy Payne, who caught his 10-lb., 4-oz. trout from the Illinois River in July of 1966.

Reed's fish was 27 3/4 inches in length and 17 1/2 inches in girth. He caught the fish from the west side of the lake using a copper-colored Super Duper 502 with a red head.

Native to cold-water streams, trout can survive all year long in Oklahoma's two year-round trout areas (the Lower Mountain Fork River and Lower Illinois River), but generally cannot survive year-round in Oklahoma's warm waters. However, they can be stocked for fishing during the winter, providing a unique opportunity to anglers. There are six seasonal trout fisheries in Oklahoma that are stocked throughout most of the fall and winter, usually beginning Nov. 1 and continuing into March. According to fisheries biologists, however, it's possible Reed's record fish wasn't stocked this year. The fish's excellent body condition and the documentation of over-summering trout because of cold water from springs that flow into Lake Watonga could mean the fish had been in the lake for some time.

Thomas said the big fish was colorful, had healthy fins and showed no bodily abrasions that are typical of trout that have recently come from a hatchery, where the fish are paler in color and raised in concrete raceways. Once the trout acclimate to their new environment and start eating natural foods, their bright color comes out and their body conditions improve.

Anglers who believe they may have hooked a record fish must weigh the fish on an Oklahoma State Department of Agriculture certified scale, and a Wildlife Department employee must verify the weight. For a complete list of record fish and the procedures for certifying a state record, consult the current "Oklahoma Fishing Guide" or log on to wildlifedepartment.com.