

# The Cisco Disco

Get your gill groove on at Bear Lake



STORY AND PHOTOS BY KRIS MILLGATE

**There's a thick** cover of ash-colored clouds over Bear Lake and head lamps dot the water's edge. It's January and the lake should be deep in freeze, but the chill hasn't stayed long enough so there's no ice on the water. That means wader-clad anglers are standing in the cold current rather than on top of ice. They're all holding long handled nets and no one is moving. They have to be shivering. Seven-year-old Davey Butler knows they are.

"It's really cold, but your feet don't feel it that much," he says from his boulder perch on the beach.

He left his dad's side when the shiver proved too much for his layers.

"I'm wearing waders and my grandma's shoes she doesn't wear," he says. "A hoodie, a jean jacket, an overshirt, t-shirt, pajamas, jeans and waders."

His dad, Chad, is just as layered in the water. He brought Davey from Evanston, Wyo. to Bear Lake for the Cisco Disco. It's part of Bear Lake's annual winter festival. Bonneville cisco are only found in Bear Lake. They are narrow, finger-length fish



that run the shallow rim of the lake for 10 days every January. They move in schools so the 30-fish daily limit is easily attainable in the right conditions.

“They have a yellow stripe and they’re small and it’s easy to catch them,” Davey says. “It’s fun cuz you get to use a net and it’s fun cuz the cisco are yummy.”

The annual Cisco Disco includes a fish fry right on the beach. Hundreds of cisco are eaten in a few hours and hundreds more go into freezers to hold as bait come summer, when fishing for large Bonneville cutthroat trout.

Davey’s dad uses an actual cisco as bait to lure in more cisco. It’s working. A little. He plops a few flippers in the bucket. His catch collection grows slowly. No ice on the water means the fish are more spread out. The fishing is harder without the lake frozen.

Davey is not ready to quit, but he’s still out of the water. He’s sitting on his freezing fingers wishing for warmth.

“They kinda get cold,” he says. “Then when you put something warm around them, it makes them kind of shocked.”

