

Makoop Lake fly-in adventure, part I

BY JIM MCDONNELL
THE FISHING PROFESSOR

It was late winter when Larry Porter, the outdoor editor of the Omaha World Herald, myself and Rob and Sandy Brodhagen, who are the owners of North Caribou Outfitters, sat down together in a restaurant in Omaha, Neb. and discussed the Makoop Lake Lodge.

This lodge had been started about six years before by the natives of Bearskin Village but had never been finished. This Cree and Ojibwa village is located about 40 air miles from the lodge itself.

The lodge and cabins have sat empty since that time with no paying customers. The only known fishermen on the lake had been the carpenters and natives who were there to work on the resort.

In late 2005, the Canadian Government, along with the council and chief at Bearskin Village, enlisted the Brodhagens to try and get this picturesque location, along with its fantastic walleye and northern pike fishery, up and running.

Carpenters were brought in from Winnipeg and Quebec, along with 18 Bearskin workers to finish the project. Just getting equipment and supplies into this remote area was difficult.

Some of the hair-raising adventures told by the crew as they battled the winter elements were simply amazing. They slept outside on pieces of plywood for weeks in the middle of winter as they tried to make a road to the camp with only a campfire to keep them from freezing.

Temperatures were down to 30 degrees below zero. Heavy equipment was breaking through bogs and the caterpillar's tracks would freeze solid with ice and have to be thawed out.

The lakes would be frozen with slush and snow, further hindering their progress as they looked for safe ice to support the heavy weight of the equipment, generators, saw mill and sled holding 50-gallon barrels of diesel fuel. Some of the equipment and supplies were flown in by airplanes fitted with skis, and with helicopters.

All wood used to finish the lodge and cabins was cut and stacked during the winter by the natives of Bearskin, then the logs were pulled across the open water this spring and stacked near the project.

All of this awaited our group as we headed north to Pickle Lake and a 90-minute flight into Makoop Lake. We



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Dick Turpin, The Fishing Professor's partner, with a nice Makoop Lake walleye.

would be sharing the camp with 24 workers that had five-weeks of work left to do before the first customers would arrive.

Our main objective was to pinpoint good fishing locations on an aerial map as well as mark underwater rocks and reefs that could damage motors and lower units.

I made the 15-hour trip from Royal to Pickle Lake with Larry Porter and Dick Turpin, who was the Chief of Game and Fish Enforcement for the State of Neb. Dick is now retired and is making his special Turpins Turkey Calls, Deer Calls and Boot Waterproofing Wax, plus a variety of other outdoor products.

This year's trip produced some excellent photo opportunities. First we had a lone male black bear that crossed the highway and remained up on a rock for a period of time while I squealed like a dying rabbit.

The bear could not figure out where that rabbit was, and we didn't leave the Chevy truck to help him find it.

Next was a cow moose feeding in a grass meadow beside the road. Then we had a chocolate color phase black bear and three cubs that provided us with about an hour of entertainment.

A Canadian game warden even stopped to see what we were up to. So we visited with him about bears and enforcement problems in Ontario.

The nice fellow just took the time to chat with three old geezers. He and our retired warden Turpin got

to telling war stories, and it made for a great conversation.

Ironically, Mama Bear stayed around while we were stopped, all the while not paying much attention to us until a truck carrying a live trap, with a problem male bear, went by on the highway. As soon as Mama Bear got a whiff of that male bear, she gave a woof and the entire family took off for the woods.

Male bears will kill the cubs if they can, so Mama Bear was taking no chances. A short time later another moose ventured across the road.

It was the thought of all this heavyweight wildlife on the roads after dark that kept us on a two-day driving adventure. Colliding with a 200-pound deer is one thing, but hitting a 1,500-pound moose is quite another. Besides, we like to shoot wildlife pictures and daylight is the time to do that.

If you are heading to Canada, make your motel reservations in advance as to where you want to spend the night. Vehicle lines at the border on Saturdays can be several miles long.

Passports are the way to go, and everyone will need it by 2008. For now, a birth certificate will get you by. It takes about four-months to get the passport paperwork completed.

Upon arrival at Pickle Lake we checked into the Winston Motel, the only motel in town, and met the Brodhagens for supper. We also got our flight times for the next morning.

If the weather held we would be taking off around 9 a.m. All gear had to be on

the flight deck by 8 a.m. Our rods were stored in Frabills heavy-duty bazooka style rod tubes.

Lures, jigs, Gulp, Powerbait and other tackle was packed in Planos soft-sided tackle boxes, two per fishermen, and reels were packed in a Plano padded reel case. A much-needed piece of equipment on any fly-in trip is a depth finder. Mine is a Huminbird Fishfinder Model 535 portable unit that runs on two 6-volt batteries and is enclosed in its own travel case.

Huminbirds are known to be user-friendly, and this 535 portable with a suction cup bracket transducer worked perfectly. I used two Energizer 6V batteries and they were still running the unit after ten-days of fishing.

Here is a little tip; it pays to buy the high end Alkaline Batteries. Also pack several spares for backups because you can't just run to town and pick up new ones.

Good rain gear is a must when up north so the, Cabelas Guide Series rainsuit was first into the duffel bag. It is also a good idea to put a light 8X8 rain tarp in the bag, as it saves removing your gear from the boat at night. All gear is covered with the tarp and held in place by a paddle and a Frabill Pro Performance landing net.

We'll conclude with the Fishing Part II of the trip in my next article. A lot of lakes to be fished and so little time to do it. Until next time, enjoy each sunrise, keep your line tight and may your aim be straight.



Big Spirit walleyes on a tear

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It was a beautiful day on the water. The sun was shining, the water was calm, and the air was just what we needed. We were out on the lake, and the fishing was excellent. The walleyes were biting, and we were catching them. It was a great day, and we were all enjoying it. The fishing was so good, we were almost disappointed when it was time to go home.

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