

The Vermilion Bay Lodge Fishing Tip Guide Book

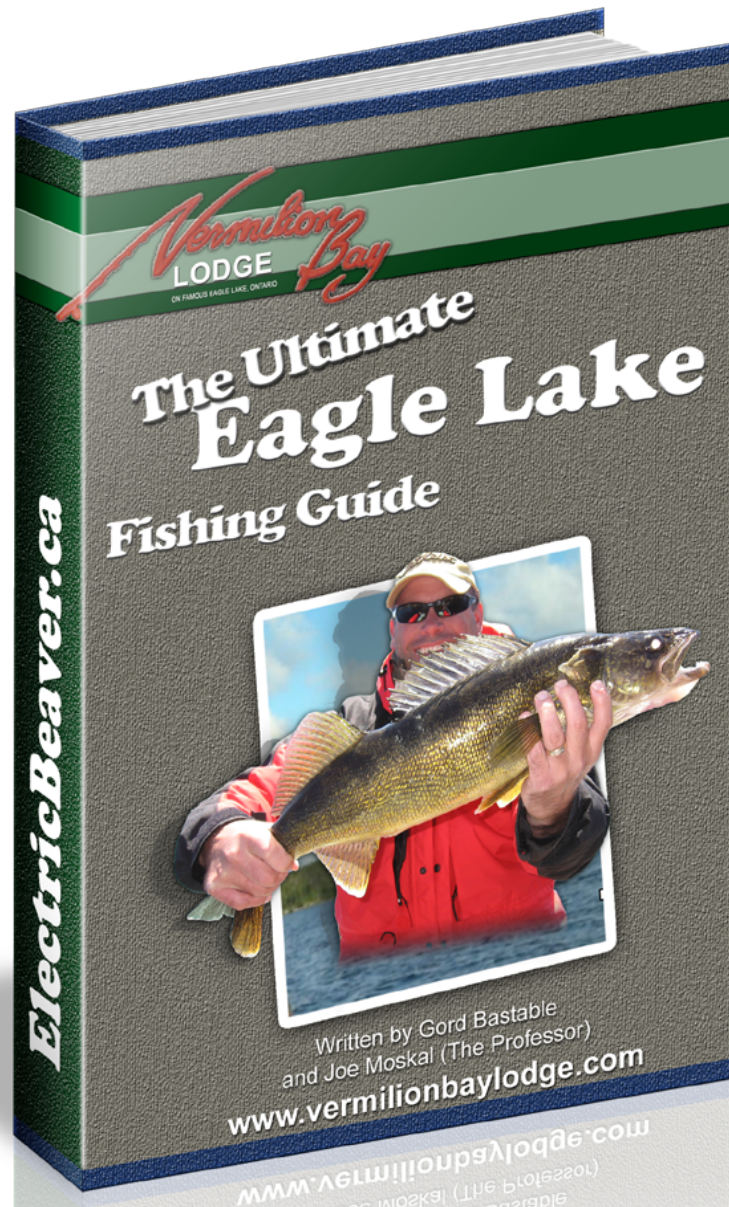




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Introduction

[Vermilion Bay Lodge](#) on Eagle Lake in N. W. Ontario is a fabulous Canadian destination for walleye, northern

pike, lake trout, smallmouth bass and trophy musky. With 8 comfortable housekeeping cabins and main lodge overlooking beautiful Eagle Lake, we offer personal service with over 30 years of experience serving fishermen & families. Come “*fish, relax & unwind*” is a phrase we like to use to describe our goal in having all our guests enjoy their stay.

Fishing “new” waters can be a challenging experience to both novice and seasoned anglers. Eagle Lake offers the chance for all 5 major freshwater species, but not all our guests may have had the opportunity before this to fish for them all! We can help!

In order to help introduce you to some of the basic techniques we have put together some simple, and useful, tips that will help you catch fish! Use the information on a trip to Vermilion Bay Lodge, or in your own neck of the woods. It has proven effective for us and we hope it will work for you! Good fishing, and don’t forget to “*relax and unwind*”!

Walleye



Tips to Become a Better Eagle Lake Walleye Angler

By Gord Bastable and Joe "the Professor" Moskal
Vermilion Bay Lodge, Ontario, Canada

A Little Perspective...

Eagle Lake offers very good walleye fishing, but they seldom "jump into the boat". Catching fish requires that you locate them and then present your lure or bait so that it gets bit. Here are a few basic things to consider that will make your fishing more effective.

Have an open mind. Don't rely on your old habits and techniques exclusively.

Use your sonar unit! The camp boats are equipped with locators that are set up to help you find structure such as weeds, rocks and drop-offs that may hold fish. The locator will also mark schools of baitfish and individual walleye in deeper water (15 feet+). This tool is indispensable. Learn how to use it well and you're going to be rewarded with more fish. Ask for help if you are unsure of how to interpret what it is showing.

Boat Control is Essential.

Boat control is essential. Keeping the bait in the right location, and at the right speed and depth, is the only way to consistently catch fish. Use your motor, the wind or both to control

the position of your boat. Use your lake map to record notes on successful locations, depths and speed to remind you of what brought about success.

Food & comfort are two prime concerns of the walleye. Seasonal variations such as water temperature and weed growth dictate where the food source and the walleye will be found. As well, daily variations such as weather, wind and amount of daylight all play a role in where the walleye can be located and caught. Be aware of the subtle changes happening around you. Try to identify patterns that produce fish. But remember, walleye will adapt their behaviour in order to take advantage of favourable conditions. Just because you catch some in the weeds doesn't mean that it's only a "weed bite". Try different locations at different times of day. Walleyes often are moving around during the course of the day. If you're not getting bites, do something different.

Superior Advantage The Walleye Predator

Walleyes are effective predators because their eyesight gives them a superior advantage for chasing down food in low-light conditions. That's why it's to your benefit to be on the water early and late in the day. Put the odds in your favour. On some days, these are the only periods a decent bite will occur. Be ready for it.

Tune-up your equipment before you arrive. Make sure that your rods and reels work properly. If the line is not in excellent condition, replace it. And sharpen those lure hooks. It's your equipment that connects you to the fish. Have you ever noticed that fish, especially big fish, love faulty equipment? (NOTE: VBL is located a short drive away from Bobby's Corner, an outstanding tackle and bait shop that carries anything you need to replace.) Also, make sure that you can effectively tie a knot that holds, such as the Uni-Knot, Improved Clinch or Palomar Knots. Walleyes simply love poorly tied knots, just slightly less than faulty equipment, though.

Above all, don't be embarrassed to ask for advice! We all have something to learn about walleye fishing, and many guests can offer valuable tips based on real knowledge of Eagle Lake. Use the Sunday night fish fry and interactions at the lodge with your host and other guests to share and receive fishing information. Ask about locations, water depths and lure speeds/colors that are producing fish. And talk to Gord before you head out on the water. Make it your business to really understand what's working to reduce sheer guesswork and wasted fishing time. Don't let yourself (and your partner) spend the first few days of your vacation fooling with unproductive methods.

Methods That Will Catch Walleye on Eagle Lake

There are many methods for catching walleye. This article will cover three good ones for Eagle. Each has a different purpose and requires different skill and equipment. Remember, the better you become at each one of these, the more fish, and bigger fish, you're going to catch. So, we suggest that you use your stay at Vermilion Bay Lodge, in part, to intentionally become a better angler. Challenge yourself to make it more than just another fishing trip. After all, you're going to be on outstanding walleye water.

If you're fishing with a partner, talk about what you're each interested in and then work

together on the methods. Be aware that the methods are not compatible for simultaneous use. For example, one of you should not be jigging while the other is trolling. Agree upon a method and stick with it until change is deemed desirable or necessary. You can take turns selecting the method to fish with which has the advantage of forcing periodic changes if what you're doing is not working very well. Experiment with different lure sizes, weights and colors. And if one lure proves to be hot, both of you can run it.

Crank-baits:

An excellent method to cover the water quickly and locate walleye. Forward troll at slow to moderate speeds, working weed and rock edges, depth changes, mud flats & humps. Tie on using a small snap swivel. Ten to 14 pound "super-line", such as FireLine or PowerPro, is recommended for trolling. Its "no-stretch" design will help you feel the lure working properly, much more so than with mono. This is a big plus, because a lure fouled with weeds won't catch fish. The thin diameter line will allow your lures to run deeper as well.

Going Invisible

It's advisable to attach a three-foot length of 10# fluorocarbon (or mono) leader material between your line and lure to make the line less visible to the walleyes. This is an advantage. A six and a half foot (or longer), medium-power rod with either a bait caster or spinning reel will work fine. And it's best to hold your rod in your hand to know if you're hitting bottom or ticking weeds, which is something that you should be doing occasionally, unless the fish are clearly suspended higher in the water column. Two or more anglers in the boat should spread their rods widely off to the side. And let out plenty of line (75 feet or more) to get your lures well behind the boat. Check your lures periodically to insure they are running clean. If it's breezy out, troll with the wind-it's much easier to control the boat. The table below will give you a few suggestions on getting started. But there are plenty of other lures that will work, too.

Spring Late May-Early June	Early Summer Mid-Late June	Mid Summer July-Early Aug.	Late Summer/Fall Mid Aug.& Sept.
8ft.-15ft. depths	10ft-20ft. depths	15ft-25ft. depths	20ft-40ft. depths

Rap. Husky Jerk* (3" up to 4 ¾") <u>Colors:</u> silver/ black, Tennessee Shad ----- Reef Runner* "Rip Stick"* <u>Color:</u> gold clown ----- Rap. Tail Dancer* (#7, 2 ¾") <u>Colors:</u> hot green, shad	Rap. Tail Dancer* (#7, 2 ¾"...#9, 3 ½") <u>Colors:</u> hot green, shad ----- Reef Runner* "Rip Stick" & "Deep Little Ripper" <u>Color:</u> gold clown	Rap. Tail Dancer* (#9, 3 ½"...Deep T.D.) <u>Colors:</u> hot green, shad ----- Reef Runner* "Deep Little Ripper" "Deep Diver" <u>Color:</u> gold clown	Rap. Tail Dancer* (Deep Tail Dancer, 4 3/8") <u>Colors:</u> all seem to work ----- Reef Runner* "Deep Diver" <u>Color:</u> gold clown
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Jigging:

A good way to work concentrations of fish once you find them. Tie your jig directly to your line....no snaps or leader. Six to eight pound monofilament line with the lightest jig to do the job. Back-troll slowly, drift or cast, keeping your jig just above the bottom. A 6' or 6 ½' medium power spinning rod with a fast-action tip would be a good choice.

Spring May-Early June	Early Summer Mid to Late June	Mid Summer July to Early Aug.	Late Summer/Fall Mid Aug. & Sept.
4ft. -15ft. depths	10ft. -20ft. depths	15ft.- 25ft. depths	20ft-40ft. depths
1/8 to 3/8 oz. chartreuse, orange	1/4 to 3/8 oz. chartreuse, orange	3/8 oz. chartreuse, orange	3/8 to ½ oz. chartreuse, orange
Minnow	Minnow or crawler	Minnow or crawler	Minnow or crawler

Bottom Bouncing:

A deadly method of covering the water using live bait spinner rigs.....either single hook minnow rigs or double/triple hook crawler harnesses. A bottom bouncer is a weighting system that attaches a piece of lead to a wire shaft.

Special bottom bouncing weights are available in various sizes...the generally recommended weight is 1 oz. for every 10ft. of depth. There are several designs available and they all work. However, we favour the "slip bouncer" design that allows your line to freely slide through the bottom bouncer, much like the traditional Lindy

Rig does.

When a fish bites you immediately feed it line for 2-3 seconds (undetected by the walleye) before tightening up and setting the hook. Look for the Northland Tackle "Rock Runner Slip Bouncer" in stores. Cabela's sells something similar they refer to as a "torpedo style" bottom bouncer. Forward trolling at moderate speeds is preferred, although a slow back-troll or drift early in the season is effective using lighter weights. From mid-summer into fall, fishing with heavy weights (2-3 oz.) is necessary.

A 7 foot medium-power rod with a fast-action tip combined with a bait caster with a "flippin' switch" is ideal. (A "flippin' switch" allows you to quickly and precisely release line in a controlled manner, which is a huge plus when you're trying to stay close to the bottom.) Other rod/reel combos will work, but not quite as well. Ten to 14 pound "super-line" is recommended to allow you to get to the proper depth and give you excellent feel of the bottom, as well as the lightest walleye bites.

The idea is to run your bait just above the bottom, while just ticking it every now and then. This is very important because if you drag this rig on the bottom it's going to get badly fouled. Northland Tackle "Bait Fish Image" holographic spinners and crawler harnesses work exceptionally well.....choose the bigger blades if planning on fishing late summer/fall. Suggested spinner blade colors are: Fire-tiger, Gold Shiner, Silver Shiner, Sunfish, Rainbow Chub, Gold Perch, Yellow Perch and Sunrise.

Minnows are the bait of choice in the spring with crawlers through the summer and fall. For a detailed description of the bottom bouncing technique, a suggested reading is Phil Rolfe's article, "Bottom Bouncing A to Z", available online at: http://www.justfishontario.com/bottom_bouncing_a_to_z.htm

Spring May-Early June 3/8 to 1 oz.	Early Summer Mid-Late June 1 to 2 oz.	Mid-Summer July-Early Aug. 2 oz.	Late Summer/Fall Mid-Aug. On 2 to 3 oz.
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Significant Seasonal Events-"Adapting to the Mayfly Hatch":

The annual hatch of mayfly larvae which occurs mid-June to early July, and lasting several weeks, is a preferred food source for walleye and can create difficulties for some anglers. Rather than using this as an excuse to NOT catch walleyes, use this feeding frenzy to your advantage! Walleyes will actively seek out areas where mayflies are hatching, generally mud bottom, cabbage strewn, shallow sections of the lake.

Back bays containing the warmest water will show the first mayfly hatch.....key in on this structure! Larvae activity is triggered by rising water temps which is often at its peak during mid day, high light conditions. Contrary to our "walleye instincts" mid day (10-2) can often be the best time period to catch fish during the may fly hatch!

Cover these areas by trolling crankbaits, keying in on weed edges and shallow

mud flats. Many times the walleye will be buried in the cabbage beds themselves. Working a jig tipped with a crawler or casting & twitching a lure such as the Rapala Suspending Husky Jerk can often result in some quality fish. Remember, these fish are often "stuffed" full of food and may require an aggressive approach....bigger baits, erratic action, a quicker retrieve....mix things up till you find what works.

In Conclusion:

There you have it, three ways that will definitely catch walleyes. You will be pleasantly surprised with the numbers and size of the fish you will be catching as you develop real skill with these methods. We have caught hundreds of walleyes on Eagle Lake using the same methods described above. You can too!

Smallmouth Bass



Smallmouth Bass Basics

Here at Vermilion Bay Lodge (VBL) we are lucky to have all five major species of game-fish (walleye, pike, lake trout, musky, & smallmouth bass). Eagle Lake has potential for big bass (5#'s plus), with a good average size (2-3#'s) being the norm.

For getting into larger numbers of fish, we have boats on smaller portage lakes. Your reward for the extra effort required to get into these is a lake full of bass. High-Rock & Caribou Lakes are two of the best.

Without a doubt, smallmouth bass don't receive the attention that walleye and northern do. That's a good thing if you really like to fish for bass because the competition from other anglers is practically nonexistent. For those of you who might be a little "rusty" on

this species, we are going to offer you a few elementary tips on what to do should you decide to try and catch these feisty fish.

Seasonal Tactics:

To keep it very simple lets divide up the whole season in three parts. In early spring when the water temps reach 60 degrees, the bass are in spawning locations, very shallow, and very concentrated. This usually begins about June 1st and lasts about two weeks.

Don't worry about where to look, we can point you in the right direction here at the lodge. As spring progresses into summer, the bass are spread out, relating to shoreline structure. Early morning & evenings are the best times of day to find them feeding in close and shallow.

Preferred temperatures during this time are 65 to 70 degrees. During mid-day, expect them to be suspended in deeper water close to these shallower areas. By mid to late September, bass will be spending more time in deeper water, congregating on mid-lake humps and reefs, once again becoming very concentrated.

On the Water Tactics:

There are many baits and techniques designed to catch smallmouth bass. We are going to assume you don't know any of them, have just motored away from the dock, and have been given a few locations (and baits?) to try by the lodge owner at VBL.

There are a couple of key things to remember:

The first is to put your baits tight to the structure you are fishing! This is very important. The structure might consist of a single big boulder in a field of smaller ones, a downed tree along a stretch of shoreline, a rock face offering some shade, or a rock point tapering into deeper water.

The second is to not rush your retrieve or hook set. The first few feet of your retrieve are the most important. Let your bait pause when it hits the water...watch the ripples move away from your bait and be prepared to set the hook.

This can be challenging when using a top water lure. A common mistake is to set the hook immediately when the fish strikes. You will hook more fish by momentarily pausing when you see the hit. Otherwise there is a good chance that you will pull the bait out of the fish's mouth.

Try to hold back until you actually feel the hit! This is a skill that comes with experience. Twitch your bait, let it rest again, begin an erratic retrieve. Bass are very aware of any

nearby commotion and will come to investigate.

Be patient and don't rush it!

The lakes we fish have good water clarity. So even bass hanging suspended off structure in deeper water (10-15') can react to a bait struggling on the surface. Chances are if you don't have results on the first half of your retrieve you can speed up and cast to the next spot.

Suggested Baits to Use:

Some of the best baits for early season and fishing tight to structure are surface baits, or at least baits that are "floaters". You are less likely to get hung up and the spectacle of big bass smacking top water baits is amazing! Give some of these a try: Rapala Skitter Prop (lime frog pattern), Rapala Skitter Pop (no prop), Pop-R's, Heddon Zara Spook or one of many buzz baits.

Other shallow diving baits can also be dynamite, and allow you the ability to fish them as a surface or subsurface bait. Good ones are the Rapala Original Floating Minnow, & the Rapala Shallow Shad Rap (perch pattern is hot). Smaller spinner baits can also be effective as well as in-line spinners such as the Mepp's #4. Rubber worms such as a Senko are a killer bait and can be used with a small jig head or rigged with a worm hook.

This bait requires a slower retrieve (letting it sink to the bottom and twitching it back), and can be highly effective. As summer rolls around having a few deeper diving baits to work deeper shorelines are helpful. Try the Rapala Shad Rap or Rapala Tail Dancer. The basic lead head jig tipped with live bait or one of many good plastics (Gulp Minnow, Berkley Realistic Minnow) is effective, especially in fall.

The lures mentioned are just a small fraction of what is available, but for sake of simplicity, we have kept the number down to the bare bones, essential baits that we have had success with.

Other Equipment Basics:

Go with 6-10 pound test mono on a spinning reel with a good working drag. You could also opt for 10 # super-line (Fireline works well) if you wish, but be sure and use a 3' fluorocarbon or mono leader.

Bass are wary and the less visible you are to them the better results you will have.

A seven foot, medium power rod will help you make longer casts than a shorter rod will. Some quality ball bearing snap swivels are essential if using spinners such as a Mepp's to eliminate line twist.

As we encourage catch & release (on our portage lakes we expect it) we suggest that you flatten down the barbs on the hooks.

When you are in the midst of a fish flurry you will appreciate the ease by which you can safely deal with your catch, never mind the point of keeping your lure in the water more than your partner!

Why not join us in person here at Vermilion Bay Lodge and let us introduce you to some fine smallmouth bass fishing. Our web site will provide you details on our accommodations, services and prices.

Lake Trout



Simple Methods for Catching Lake Trout

By Gord Bastable & Joe Moskal

There is a myth that Lake Trout are both difficult to catch, and require specialized equipment to "get down deep". Surprisingly, especially for those that have not tried fishing for trout, nothing is further from the truth!

The average walleye angler likely already possesses most of the gear needed, and with a little helpful advice, can begin to catch lake trout throughout the season. Here are a few simple tips that have worked for us here at Vermilion Bay Lodge, and will work for you on your next Canadian fishing trip.

What you need to know about the fish:

Lake trout are a cold water fish that require deep, cold lakes that hold plenty of oxygen throughout the season. Maximum depths of 70 to 100 feet are common in trout lakes. After ice-out lakere can be scattered over much of the lake in shallow water and move gradually to the deeper water as the surface temperatures increase above 52 degrees Fahrenheit. During the warmest parts of the summer you will find the lake trout concentrating in the deepest sections of the lake.

As the water temps decrease towards fall the trout will migrate towards boulder strewn shorelines and reefs where they typically spawn during late September or early October. Lake trout are one of the few freshwater fish that are able to release air from their swim bladders and, with care, can be successfully released after being brought up from deep water.

They are slow growing fish and care should be taken to release all but the smaller "eaters" to preserve a healthy spawning population.

Techniques that work:

Early spring:

Before surface temperatures get above 52 degrees a simple method is to troll shorelines and islands with crank baits or spoons. Long lining with lures such as Rapala Husky Jerks, Shad Raps, Count -Down minnows will all produce trout. Color patterns in silver or silver/blue are time tested. Spoons such as the Doctor, Williams Wabler or Loco are excellent as well.

Concentrate on the shallowest waters during low light conditions.....morning, evening or cloudy days. The fish may hang deeper during mid-day...try deeper diving crank baits such as the Hot-n-Tot, or Rapala Tail Dancer. Monofilament line (or leader) combined with a quality snap-swivel is advisable. Let out plenty of line and troll forward.....vary your speed till you have success.

Mid to Late Summer:

Once the trout begin to move away from the shallows the most critical item in terms of being successful is knowing how to use your locator. Trying to fish without one is difficult for two reasons. The fish will be relating to the deepest water and structure.....if you don't know where that is you are just guessing.

Secondly the locator will show you that you are over fish and what depth they are at. Fishing at 80 feet when the fish are suspended at 50 feet is non-productive.....fishing areas that do not show fish is most likely a waste of time. Deep water trout can be caught using one of two simple methods...jigging or trolling.

Jigging for Trout:

This technique works best when the fish are concentrated, and requires no special rod, reel or line. A basic light spinning rod with 6-8 pound mono and a ½ to ¾ oz jig will work just fine. White buck-tail jigs or white tube jigs are both deadly. Tipping the hook with a

minnow, or piece of sucker meat, can improve your odds but is not normally necessary.

Jigging spoons are also a highly productive method. Spoons such as the Little Cleo (blue/silver color) or Krocodile (silver) are both great lures. In the case of either a jig, or jigging spoon, the best approach is to start jigging on the very bottom and gradually work your way to the surface with pauses along the way.

Trout will often follow your bait and be triggered to bite by the bait moving through the water column. Be alert for strikes, as trout will very often hit a bait that is fluttering back after being jigged. This is where many inexperienced anglers often miss catching a fish! One suggestion to increase your sensitivity to strikes is to use a super-line such as 10-12 pound test Spider-wire combined with a 3 ft. fluorocarbon leader. Covering ground by slowly drifting with the wind, or by using your motor, is very effective for locating fish.

Trolling for Trout:

Trolling works best when the fish are scattered over large areas and covering ground is essential. In the absence of sophisticated down-riggers and such, a simple alternative involves the use of the 3-way swivel and 3 separate line components.

The first being the main line connecting the swivel to the rod and reel. For this we suggest a medium action rod with a reel spooled with plenty of 10-12 pound test super-line. When thinking about how much line just keep in mind you may have to let out 200 feet, or more, just to get you lure in the right position.

The ultra thin diameter of the super-line means less resistance through the water column which means a more manageable amount of line, and sinker lead, being required to "get down there" while trolling. It also means less stretch when you go to set the hook, very important!

The second component is the "drop line" which connects the 3 way swivel to your sinker. A 3 foot section of 8 pound mono will work just fine. The amount of weight needed will be determined by the depth and speed of your troll.

Generally for forward trolling at 45 feet you will need 4 ounces of lead, 6 ounces for 60 feet, and 8 ounces for 80 feet. Back trolling at a slower speed is an option that would require less weight to do the same job.

The third component that connects to the 3 way is the line attached to your lure. A 5 foot fluorocarbon leader with a quality ball bearing snap lock swivel is recommended. Lure choices are unlimited. Spoons such as the larger Doctor, Williams Wabblers and flutter

spoons such as the Sutton all work well.....choose the silver color. When trolling these keep in mind that varying boat speeds and boat direction will often trigger fish.

Also pumping the rod occasionally to create some erratic action will have the same effect. Try and maintain a 45 degree angle on your line from the rod tip to the water as you troll. Too much of an angle likely means you are going too fast for the depth of water, or a combination of too little weight, depth and speed. It is critical to maintain the "feel" for where you lure is in relation to the bottom to be successful.

Final Considerations:

Catching lake trout can be a lot of fun and being properly prepared to successfully release them is very important. Here are a few suggestions. Flatten the barbs down on lures with multiple hooks.....you won't lose more fish and releasing them is so much simpler. If you plan on seriously pursuing these fish buy yourself a rubber net.

Trout are notorious for tangling themselves in a regular mesh net. Don't keep fish out of the water longer than you can hold your breath. This is particularly true with warm surface water temperatures.....a major cause of mortality to these cold water fish. They need to get back down as soon as possible. When reeling a fish in take your time and allow the fish to "decompress" on its way to the surface.

A recommended resource for further research into catching lake trout is the In-Fisherman DVD "Trophy Lake Trout" available online. Another suggestion is to join us here at Vermilion Bay Lodge and give lake trout fishing a try. We would be happy to get you started!

Muskie

Muskie Fishing Tips

By Gord Bastable



What do you need to know to fish for muskie? There is an abundance of information out there on the technical aspects of angling for muskie....and an abundance of differing opinions.

If you need to get some good background on the subject I would suggest picking up a copy of Dick Pearson's, *Muskies on the Shield*, which deals with the types of water and conditions you will find on Eagle Lake. My purpose here is to get the "average" Vermilion Bay Lodge guest into an Eagle Lake "muskie mind set".

Whether you are a serious muskie person, or are not even planning on fishing for muskie, some of these ideas may be useful to you on your next trip to VBL. After all, regardless of what you are fishing for, if you have a line in the water, there is a chance a muskie is "eyeballing" your offering!

Be Prepared



Here at the lodge I have met thousands of anglers with differing skills and interests. A common problem is that many people are ill prepared to deal with a big fish after it's caught...this applies to ALL species found here in Eagle Lake.

This problem is magnified greatly when the fish in question happens to be a muskie. A big, heavy, fierce looking fish with rows of sharp teeth can be daunting. The question then becomes how to release the fish without hurting yourself or injuring the fish....both of which are very easily done.

The former can add a trip to the hospital; the latter can ruin the experience of catching a beautiful fish. The bottom line is being prepared for the possibility of catching big fish and knowing what to do when it happens.

Here are a few tips:

Avoid using lures with excessive numbers of hooks.

A lure with three trebles has nine hooks that you and the fish will have to eventually deal with. Look for lures with as few hooks as possible. Single hooks are the mainstay of saltwater fishermen whose prey can be 20 times the size and stamina of any freshwater fish. Multiple hooks are not necessary and are the cause of most disasters between the angler and the fish...keep them to a minimum. For example, a Rapala with three sets of treble hooks can be modified by removing the center treble.

Use your pliers to **flatten the barbs** on your hooks. The concept of barb-less hooks seems to scare people... "Won't I lose more fish?" Not likely. Give it a try on one lure and you will soon realize the benefits of an easy release....not to mention the danger factor to yourself (or others if your casting technique is faulty) is significantly lowered. Just remember, the less time trying to remove hooks increases the likelihood of releasing your big fish unharmed.

Bring the right tools!!

Like I pointed out in the beginning, being prepared to catch fish means more than just having the tackle to catch them...you need the tools to release them too! At a minimum have a "**Hook-Out**" hook removal tool. If you're not familiar with what that is just ask for one (get two...they don't float!) at any decent tackle shop...it's only a few bucks.

A pair of long nosed pliers will also be suitable...especially as it can be also used to flatten barbs. For those who refuse to flatten barbs a handy item is a quality pair of side cutters or hook cutters (**Knipex** makes a quality product). In some cases it is better to quickly cut the hooks when removal is very difficult.

A large fish can easily "inhale" a lure deep into its mouth, which will make hook removal difficult and potentially dangerous. Purchase an inexpensive **jaw spreader** to keep the fish's mouth wide open so that you can see what you're doing. These work well for pike as well.

Another "tool" that can save your hide and that of the fish is a pair of fish handling gloves. These generally have a rubber coating that will give you some protection from sharp teeth and gills....and will also protect the fish's outer coating of slime from being rubbed off. Create a "place" in the boat for these items to have them ready for use.

One last important item is the **net**. If you are serious about targeting big pike and muskie then spend the \$ to get a decent muskie net... **Beckman** and **Frabill** are two manufacturers of a quality product. If you are just dabbling with the sport and are a **VBL** guest ask about borrowing a bigger net....we would be happy to provide you one.



A Good Release...

You've hooked and landed the "big one"...maybe even the fish of a life-time. The future of that beautiful fish is now in your hands. These are the steps you need to follow once you bring the fish to boat-side. From an **idealistic** point of view the ultimate "**best**" thing you can possibly do is an "at boat-side release".

If you prepare for this moment in advance you may have reduced the number of hooks on your lure...maybe even pinched the barbs. Your camera person is ready and is snapping shots as the fish comes alongside.

You reach down and "voila" the fish swims away none the worse! If only that was the norm. The norm is this, **it never goes the way you think it should**. We also need to deal with our inherent human nature which demands a photo at least half as dramatic as those we are bombarded with on fishing shows, magazines, and fishing lodge websites. Let's deal as best we

can with reality then.

Step one,

if you have a decent net then use it to corral the fish at boat-side... **IN THE WATER!** Never, never, never...have I said it enough?...bring the fish into the boat using the net. Why? What ultimately happens is the fish will "freak out", thrash wildly resulting in split fins, slime removed and hooks tangled. You are also removing it from its environment where it is able to breathe. Try to imagine it this way, you have just ran the marathon and as soon as you cross the finish line someone jams a sock into your mouth. The cardinal rule of muskie fishing is to only keep the fish out of the water as long as YOU can hold your breath...it's as simple as that.

Step two,

while the fish is at boat-side in the net take a deep breath, get the tools needed to release the fish at hand, and have the camera person set up and ready.

Step three,

do your best to remove the hooks...this might mean grabbing the fish under the jaw to reach into the mouth (this is when you will really appreciate a glove and not having three trebles thrashing around your hand!) If you flattened the barbs you should have an easy go of it.

Step four,

the fish has been unhooked...now you need to decide on a photo. The best route from the fish's perspective is a release shot "**in the water**"... this is probably the route to go if you are at all unsure about handling a big fish. If you feel you need to pick the fish up (and we all do) consider the state of the fish...if it is looking at all stressed skip the photo and just let it go. If it seems healthy then a quick photo is appropriate. Just make sure you support it in a horizontal position...and remember the cardinal rule...only as long as you can hold your breath!

Step five,

stop shaking and congratulate yourself on a good release...that is more impressive than the simple task of actually catching the darn thing anyways! Hope for some good pics!



The Measurement...

"Back in the day" when I first started guiding on Eagle Lake the idea of measuring muskies was something you only did if you clubbed it and brought it in. Granted, those were the "dark ages"... I think we even had a 28" minimum size! Now that was progressive thinking...NOT! If we were lucky enough to see or release a fish it was always a 20#er or a 25#er. Now people are obsessed over measuring their catch. My only suggestion is to curb this impulse as much as you can. You'll soon find yourself more concerned about getting "the measurement" than releasing the fish in a healthy state. There is nothing wrong with just estimating the size of your catch, especially if it is not your first, or is a small fish anyways. If you feel the urge is too strong then at least invest in a floating measuring device and do it at boat-side.

Be Prepared For the Unexpected

Drawing by Mary Walker



For some of my guests that first huge fish, be it muskie, northern, walleye, or whatever, is highly anticipated...but totally unexpected when it happens. Anybody have a camera? Where's my pliers? What do I do!!? Well, if you paid attention to the first part of "muskie tips" then you might be better prepared for the unexpected. One thing that may seem obvious is recognizing "what" you have just caught. You would be surprised by the number mistakes that are made. Aside from being very embarrassing (and highly illegal) bringing in a smallish muskie because you didn't know the difference is frowned upon.

Perhaps part of the root of the problem is the misconception that all muskie on Eagle Lake are huge. There are plenty of all sizes so please be aware. In simple terms a pike has a darker body with lighter spots.....a muskie just the opposite...a lighter body with dark spots. The pointed tail fin of the muskie is a dead giveaway as well. **A good rule of thumb is if you aren't 100% sure what you have caught, you need to let it go.**

Muskellunge - Northern Pike

Know How to Tell the Difference

Muskellunge (*Esox masquinongy*)
3 Common Pattern Variations

CLEAR



Note: Faint indication of marking pattern is sometimes present on posterior 1/3 body in clear variation of muskellunge.

SPOTTED



Paired fins having more pointed tips

Caudal fin with pointed tips

BARRED



Muskellunge
6 to 9 pores

Northern Pike
5 or fewer pores



Muskellunge
Upper half of cheek and operculum with scales



Northern Pike
Entire cheek and upper half of operculum with scales

HYBRID "TIGER" MUSKELLUNGE

(*Esox masquinongy* x *Esox lucius*)



Paired fins having more rounded tips

Caudal fin with rounded tips

Note: Sides sometimes exhibit an alternating pattern of stripes and spots, or narrow paired-bars on a light background. Pattern never resembles that of a northern pike.

Coloration having irregular narrow vertical dark markings on a light background with stripes merging onto the back in an interlocking pattern.

NORTHERN PIKE (*Esox lucius*)



Coloration with pattern of horizontal rows of light, round to oval spots on a dark background (juvenile pattern has white, oblique bars, which extend from the white belly).

A muskie mindset....

After many years of chasing muskies I have noticed behaviour that just doesn't fit into a neat package of what these fish "ought" to be doing, and "where" they should be doing it. The idiosyncrasies of muskie fishing are often frustrating and addicting. Acknowledging that these fish can be unorthodox and unpredictable is the first step to achieving a muskie mindset.

Check out this photo from 2007. That summer the leg of a 13 year old guest, Billy Balinski, became prey for an Eagle Lake muskie! This was a first at VBL, and is possibly a new pattern for attracting shallow, beach-oriented muskie. Who would suggest using children for bait though?! Better to stick to the artificial baits (or limbs).



The paradox, at least in my experience, is that while many a muskie may not be adverse to a large meal, a large bait does not necessarily guarantee the desired results. In 2007, here at VBL, the largest muskie of the season was caught on a Mepp's #4 bucktail. This is maybe two inches long and is a great smallmouth bait.....but not an obvious "muskie bait".

How about using a walleye spinner harness with a fat night-crawler as a muskie bait? As weird as that might seem that combination has caught several muskie for guests at VBL. In 2008 long time guest Joe Moskal caught a muskie on a crawler rig in forty feet of water while bottom bouncing for walleye. A few days later, his partner, Marty McVicker, had a very large fish take a spinner harness in 35 feet of water before it broke off. Not only are they biting on the "wrong" baits, they are not in locations where they are supposed to be!!

The next photo is of a muskie...mid 40 inch range...that was caught in August of 2008 trolling for suspended walleye. The rig consisted of a three way swivel, six ounces of lead, and a five foot mono leader with a seven inch Rapala. The muskie was in 60 feet of water suspended at a depth of 35 feet. Was this a fluke, or is it more the norm? These examples prove that muskies do strike unexpectedly, and it will happen again this year. Will you be ready if a muskie takes your bait?



You may be disappointed that I have left out the "how to catch" section that you might have anticipated. There is no substitute for putting in the time on the water, for being prepared, and for acknowledging that the muskie will ultimately do what it wants, regardless what the experts say it should do.

Develop your own muskie mind-set, even if you don't fish intentionally for this species. Other than the basics, there would seem to be no absolute right or wrong as to what your approach should be, except to be "ready". Have fun, be safe, and put 'em back alive! We'll see you at the lodge and look forward to swapping some muskie tales and tactics.



Whitefish



Fishing for Whitefish on Eagle Lake

Whitefish are a mystery fish to most anglers. A relative to the trout family, whitefish spawn in late September / early October, and spend most of the summer months in the deep, cold water associated with main lake basins. They are very prolific throughout Eagle Lake and can often be found in dense schools using your locator. Average size

runs about 2-3 pounds. They are a good fighting fish and very tasty as well!

Targeting these fish is a relatively new past-time here at Vermilion Bay lodge. Over the years they have often been caught by walleye anglers early in the season. At this time of year the whitefish are roaming the shallows in search of food and can often be caught while jigging or trolling small crank-baits or spoons. It is not unusual to see them surfacing during the evening low light periods feeding on mayflies or other insects.

By far, the best time of year for catching these fish is during the summer and fall when they tend to be congregated and living in deep water. Locating fish on the sonar and presenting your bait at the appropriate depth is the key to success. They will either be bottom-oriented or suspended above the bottom. We have found 1/2 to 3/4 ounce white hair and twister tail jigs, or 2/5 to 2/3 ounce jigging spoons can be deadly.

A recommended spoon is the Little Cleo in the blue & silver or green & silver pattern. This is also a great spoon for lake trout as well, and both species are often caught in similar areas. Start your search near some of the deepest water and with the steepest break-lines.

Whitefish have small mouths and often you will feel them "bumping" your bait without hooking up. This is a sure sign that whitefish are in the area so stay alert for very subtle strikes. Be aware also of fish hitting your bait as it flutters back down and be ready to set the hook. Using a no-stretch line such as 10# Berkley FireLine will allow you to hook far more fish compared to ordinary mono.

Northern Pike



Northern Pike Fishing Tips

There are countless ways to catch pike but let's keep it simple. Here is an article on pike fishing that appeared in the VBL newsletter "The Beaver, 2008" by long time guest Joe Moskal (The Professor) from Edgerton, Wisconsin. His expert advice will put "pike on your pole"!

Tips on Northern Pike as submitted by Joe "the professor" Moskal:

By the middle of June cabbage weed will be emerging in the shallow water sections of Eagle Lake. These weeds are important because they hold baitfish which the pike like to eat. Cabbage is bright green & curly, and can grow in sparse strands, bigger clumps, or dense mats. It matures by the middle of August and might be growing all the way to the surface in 12 feet of water. Pike of all sizes will relate to these weeds.

There are many different ways that pike can be caught, but I'm only going to discuss the method that consistently produces the best for me in terms of numbers and size of fish. That method would be trolling with a stick-bait right over the top, or just off the side, of the cabbage weeds. It's a simple method that has produced hundreds of pike for me on Eagle over the years, including several very memorable ones last year.

As far as equipment is concerned, I like to use a 7 foot, medium-power spinning rod & reel loaded with 14# no-stretch superline attached to a 3 foot section of 14# fluorocarbon leader material. A bait-caster set up in a similar fashion is a good option as well. If the weeds are still low, I'll tie on a size #11 Jointed Rapala and troll right over the top of the weeds.

If the weeds are growing close to the surface, I'll troll just outside the weed line edge. If deep water is next to the weed line I'll use a Rapala Down Deep Husky Jerk (DHJ12). Effective colors include silver, gold and Firetiger. I let out about 100 feet of line and stay close to the weeds as I forward troll with the wind at my back. Experiment with speed, depth and color. Bring a jaw spreader and pliers for hook removal.

More Tips?

In these few pages we have covered some of the basics for catching fish on Eagle Lake. While not intended to be a comprehensive book on every aspect of fishing, it will get you pointed in the right direction to being a successful angler. Learning to do some of the basics well is **“The”** most important first step.

Feel like you need more information? Check out our fishing blog, [**The Electric Beaver**](#), where you will find posts relating to all the NW Ontario fish species and up to the minute reports and discussions. There you can also sign up for our electronic newsletter and updates.



Thank you for taking the time to check out these fishing tips. We hope they make your next fishing

adventure a memorable one. We look forward to seeing you at the lodge where our goal is to have you “ Fish, Relax, Unwind” !

***Gord & Susanne Bastable
Vermilion Bay Lodge***