

Bronzeback Hot Spot

Trophy destination

By Joel Prunty

Every angler dreams of catching a trophy. Pike fishermen want a crack at a 40" gator, walleye anglers dream of setting the hook on a 10lb hog and we smallmouth addicts, well...we dream of a six-pound missile blowing up our favorite topwater plug.

Problem is, very few lodges offer trophy water for our dreams to come true. For smallmouth fishing...there is a hot-spot within easy reach dedicated to making smallmouth anglers dreams come true.

Campfire Island Lodge on Rainy Lake, Ontario hosts only one group (up to eight anglers) at a time – so all the focus is on you. Plus, Wayne Howard (who along with his wife Pat own Campfire) is a tournament hardened Rainy Lake fisherman and the head guide. You get the picture, they take smallmouth fishing seriously.

Wayne's office, a brand new Yar-Craft 2095BXT high-performance bass boat, is further proof of their dedication. Throw in a 150hp Mercury tiller outboard, Lowrance navigation and locator and the craft is perfectly suited to navigate the vastness of Rainy Lake.

Conditions were not perfect during our stay with my wife Janet. The summer of 2017 near Fort Frances, Ontario was extremely hot and dry. Our early August trip saw a swirling low bring rain, lightning, wind and cool temps.

Despite the changing conditions over three days, we caught many bass in 10 feet of water or less...a good percentage in the four-pound plus range. Three tactics worked best, aggressively working light colored flukes, vertically jigging pumpkin tube jigs directly under the boat (Wayne would spot them on the locator and they'd slam our dropping jigs. We could even watch them strike our lure on his TV screen!) The third tactic was casting Rebel silver and blue Pop-Rs and watching smallies destroy them.

What makes Rainy such a fabulous smallmouth fishery? For one, it is huge, over 250,000 acres huge. The lake is littered with islands, reefs and shoals providing perfect big fish habitat. Some of you may think of Rainy Lake as a U.S. fishery, but actually over 70% of the lake and 90% of its islands are located in Ontario.

With so much of the lake residing in Canada, little development has occurred and the lake retains a wilderness feel. There are only a handful of Canadian lodges and Campfire Island is the only destination dedicated to smallmouth fishing. The guides there specialize in trophy smallmouth fishing and display a nose for big fish.

Rainy Lake's Canadian waters also have very healthy populations of trophy walleye and 10 lbs plus pike. Janet and I fished walleye for a few hours each morning and not only were the numbers good, but they were all over 20" ...most much larger. Janet caught her biggest walleye ever – a really fat, late summer hog measuring 28 inches.

One of the special parts of Campfire Island is coming back to the lodge each evening, your very own private island. The food was delicious. We dined on ribs, pork roast and rib eye steaks in the classic log lodge. Each meal was topped with a scrumptious desert. I've eaten Butter Tarts from one end of Canada to the other over 25-years and Campfire Island's are the best. I took all the extras back to our cabin and ate the final one on the ride home. It made me feel sad when they were gone.

Our cabin, which more closely resembled a home, sat high in the shore with a terrific view of the surrounding water. Each night we sat on the porch and watched the sunset.

If you have always dreamed of a great shot at a trophy smallmouth and you are up for an adventure in a very unique setting, Campfire Island is the perfect place to make those dreams come true. Give Pat and Wayne a call, you won't be disappointed.

Campfire Island Lodge

Tel: (807) 274-9500

Email: fish@campfireisland.com

www.campfireisland.com

Joel Prunty spent 20-years fishing Canada with the All-Canada Show and has visited over 300 of Canada's BEST lodges and resorts. Now as an expert in Canadian lodges, he writes features to help improve the travels of U.S. anglers to Canada.