

ALBERTA BORDERS

adventures inside and outside of Alberta *and beyond*

SUNSET COVE LODGE – NIPISSING LAKE, ONTARIO

by Brad Fenson

As our jet circled for an approach to the runway I twisted my head to look out the window to sneak one more glimpse of the incredible expanse of Lake Nipissing. Its shoreline extended far into the distance and it sure looked like good fish bearing water. The islands and rock outcroppings were typical of northern Ontario lakes and I could hardly wait to get my fishing rods from the luggage carousel and head for camp.

I was fishing with good friend and fellow writer T.J. Schwanky and we were booked into the Sunset Cove Lodge at Callander, Ontario, just east of North Bay where our jet landed. We had a cabin on the shore of Lake Nipissing and the stories of big fish had us chomping at the bit to get on the water. Lake Nipissing has an incredible assortment of gamefish. From smallmouth bass to walleye,



freshwater drum to the world's record muskellunge, I knew we were in for a couple of spectacular days on the lake.

Alfons Reiss, the host of our lodge, wasted little time touring us through the modern facilities and introducing us to their chef, who was anxious to tempt our taste buds with his gourmet, European cuisine. Our rental boat was tied to the dock and fueled for the next morning and it was just a matter of getting our bait before unpacking and heading back to the restaurant for dinner. The tantalizing aroma from the kitchen had my stomach growling and I was anxious to talk about the fishing over the next couple of days.

We woke the following morning to the sound of rain dancing off the roof but it didn't persuade us from going fishing. Breaking out our Gore-Tex gear we grabbed our rods, reels and tackle and headed for the boat. Alfons had provided detailed maps of the lake and we were headed for a series of sunken islands that was a well-known walleye haunt.

Reading the charts we motored across the lake avoiding the rocky hazards clearly


marked on our map. Using our fish finder we did a quick sweep of the area and found a fast breaking drop where we marked fish. The boat was still throwing a bit of a wake when T.J. and I made our first cast. The low pressure system had the walleye pretty subdued but our slow and methodical presentation proved more than they could resist. The bite was subtle but keeping our bait on the bottom proved to be successful with lots of average size walleye to start the day.

Once we had the drop figured out it was time to do some exploring. There'd be plenty of time to return to the spot, if needed, and the incoming creeks on the south shore beckoned our attention. We changed our presentation to target pike in the shallows and fan cast our way into each bay that

looked promising. Again, we had to work for fish but considering the conditions we were doing well. The smallmouth bass were a pleasant surprise and we pulled in some dandies when we least expected them. The bass were a real treat coming from Alberta, where there are no real opportunities. I can see how bass fishing could become an



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addiction and I'd return to Ontario tomorrow for a full week of chasing smallies.

It was a great experience exploring the new water and covering over 30 kilometers made Nipissing seem very big compared to the waters we fish in Alberta. We were basically fishing the eastern edge of the lake and it would take months to search the majority of the lake.

We barely took time to eat our bagged lunch and sipped the thermos of coffee dry while



we had our lines in the water. The day went by quickly and before we knew it we were back at the lodge for supper.

The meals were simply incredible and if I fished there for more than a week I know

I'd have to enter a weight loss program upon my return home. Everything from the salads to savory sauces and the right balanced wines made the meals gourmet by any standards.

The German schnitzel and rich brown gravy are a standout in my mind. It's making my mouth water just thinking about it.

We had an early dinner with plans to fish the late evening. There was a series of small islands and a rock shoal in front of camp and we wanted to drift and jig the edges of it until dark.

It didn't take long to find fish and the walleye and bass were cooperative. However, the highlight of the evening was when T.J. hooked into a big fish. It pulled with incredible strength and I wondered if we'd ever get a glimpse of it at the surface. Every time T.J. would gain

some line the fish would peel it back off his reel in an impressive display of strength. The battle raged for some time before I finally scooped the net under the bright silver monster. It was a freshwater drum, sometimes referred to



as silver bass, and it was a dandy. We took some quick pictures and returned it to the waters. We quickly nosed the boat back into the inside turn the fish was pulled from and it wasn't a minute later we were both fighting drum.

The action was non-stop and the awesome strength of the fish was something to behold.



I've caught drum on the Red River in Manitoba and know that they provide unbelievable action. We worked the hole until the sun had set, forcing us to call it a night. We edged back to the dock and admired the incredible view across Callander Bay and Sunset Cove.

The next morning we actually got to see the sun and wasted little time heading for the river. The fish were much more aggressive than the previous day and

we had non-stop action for walleye, pike and bass. It was interesting to explore the back bays and sloughs with everything from deer to turtles catching our attention. We put in another full day and made plans to fish the

rocks in front of camp again in the evening. I caught my first silver bass, not to be confused with the drum, and between the perch, walleye and smallmouth I never knew what was coming up next.

Ontario is an angler paradise with over 100,000 lakes and more fish species than most of us in the west would even recognize. The large assortment of waterbodies offers some unique trophies from monster bass to musky that are pushing 80 pounds. Walleye are a favorite no matter where you travel and we had little trouble finding a few for the frying pan. Fishing Nipissing was an adventure that I know I'll



do again some day. I have to go back and target the bass, walleye and musky in the fall, when things can really heat up.

Our accommodations and meals were simply outstanding and would be a wonderful

location to take the entire family or group of friends for an angling get-a-way. Ice-fishing is just as popular as the open-water season and from the pictures I saw a winter trip would be worth the travel.

For more information on

Sunset Cove Lodge contact Alfons Reiss at 705-2820, email sunsetcove@thot.net or look them up on the net at www.sunsetcovelodge.com.

For more information on the North Bay, Ontario's Near North, go to www.ontarios-nearnorth.on.ca or www.ontariotravel.net. ■

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