

Bill Rivers from Ontario Fisherman, January / February, 1996: Destination

Having had the opportunity to fish for bass across the province, especially in southern Ontario, I am of the opinion that no one spot can really boast as having the best fishing in the province. But (you knew there had to be a but) if forced to choose one area to visit from now until the day I am hooked, landed and filleted, it would be northern Victoria County for its remote, back-lakes bassing. Victoria County is just east of Lake Simcoe in southern Ontario. There, just a few miles west/southwest of Minden, lies Digby Township, still largely an unspoiled tract of Crown Land – a bass angler's mecca.

Early last July, my summer wanderlust took me back to Digby Township for a week of fast and exciting back lakes bassin' at Crooked Lake Wilderness Lodge, a remote retreat north of Norland/Head Lake, smack in the heart of Digby Township. At first glance, Crooked Lake's proximity to Toronto, small size and unproven track record prompted doubts and reluctance on my part, but the early July visit proved to be one of my best bass trips ever.

Since the early 1900s, the retreat at Crooked Lake was the domain of wealthy corporate concerns. Now, with private ownership, Rick and Avril Morris have opened the lodge to anglers, canoeists, hikers, rock climbers, naturalists and photographers.

With exceptional 2-species bass fishing on the main lake – a 22 ½ inch, 6-pound bucketmouth punctuated a 30-bass first day – access to several adjacent and walk-in lakes and 4-star accommodations, it seems certain that anglers will dominate the clientele.

Crooked Lake is small by most standards – little more than a mile long and a third as wide. Access is accomplished by a series of short boat rides and portages over the course of four small lakes, a trip which takes about 40 minutes with gear (about ½ hour without). The portages are short,

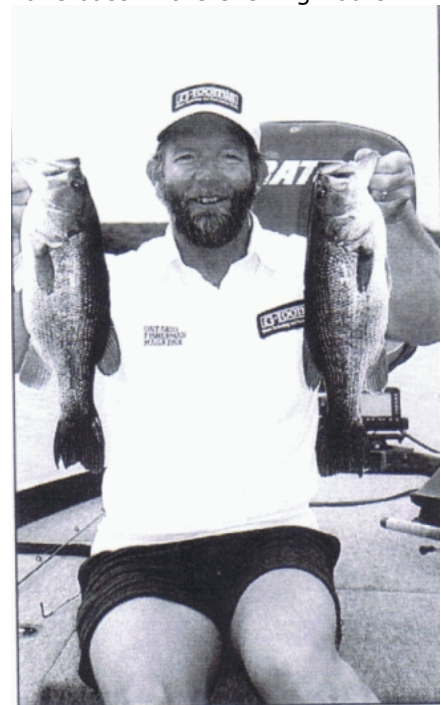
easy, well-groomed and boats/motors await at each end. By boat, the final leg will introduce guest to almost the entire length of the lake before the sudden appearance of the imposing lodge sitting atop a rocky point and overlooking the lake. Across the lake, an incredible rock prominence invites adventurous climbers and photographers to its summit for a spectacular view of the area.

Popular and effective tactics include crankbaiting, spinnerbaiting, plastic wormin', Carolina riggin', and topwater pluggin'. With plenty of heavy weed growth and some shoreline cover, pitchin' and flippin' tactics will almost surely dupe Crooked Lake bass.

For the casting crowd, perch-pattern crankbaits, especially deep divers (Shad Rap) and lipless rattle baits (Rattlin' Rap) are ideal for those shortline areas which drop off quickly to 8 to 14 feet of water. At more gradual breaks, a 3/8-ounce white or chartreuse spinnerbait tipped with a No. 11 Uncle Josh pork frog worked well – especially under early-morning grey skies and in the evening hours. On the shallow flats at the north end of the lake, we did very well with Carolina-rigged baits. The biggest bass of the trip – a 6, a 5 and a 4-plus-came from predictable spots on plastic worms. My trophy largemouth was caught almost immediately after switching to a 10-inch Power Worm, while Sam Kelba caught the other heavyweights (one smallmouth, one largemouth) on 7-inch Power Worms along the steep drop off of the lake's main point.

Working the weedlines and fast-breaking rocky shoreline stretches accounted for the most fish. Again, Berley Power Worms, Larew Salty Craws, and impregnated Zoom lizards were our top producers but a ¼ to 3/8 ounce jig-n-pig would probably work equally well. To fish right in/through the weed growth, a

Johnson Silver Minnow tipped with a pork chunk gets the nod. Along the weed edges and rocky shorelines, 'hard' topwater plugs will draw strikes from Crooked Lake bass in the evening hours.



Bill Rivers hoists a pair of nice bucketmouths.

For more information contact Crooked Lake Wilderness Lodge, P.O. Box 863, Lindsay, Ontario, K9V-5N3; Phone: (705) 953-9844; Email: info@crookedlakewildernesslodge.com; Website: www.crookedlakewildernesslodge.com

- Bill Rivers