

About Fishes & Fishing

By Harvey House

About seven miles past Shell Lake and adjacent to the Provincial road there is a complex of lakes of varying depths and surface areas. The first of these is Beautiful Lake, next is Gull Lake then Laurie Lake and Childs Lake in that sequence. Each lake is stock by the Fisheries branch and probably the most varied angling in the Duck Mountains is in this area. Every angler, including the writer, has a favorite lake and if all the lakes in the Forest Preserve and Park, this is Gull Lake.

GULL LAKE

This long narrow lake was, at one time, most probably either a part of, or connected to Childs Lake by means of what probably was a creek or small river. This connection can be seen on the contour map about three-quarters of the way toward the north-end and on the west shoreline. A survey worker is located in this rather shallow and extended fork of the lake (a large painted boulder is the actual worker).

Originally Gull Lake contained pike and suckers as resident species but these were removed sometime around 1957 in order to prepare the lake for stocking.

The lake is very narrow, no more than a quarter mile long. The long dimension runs almost due north from the boat launch area located at the extreme south end. Like all Duck Mountain lakes the shoreline is treed, mainly with fir. From the boat launch and heading north, the right hand (south east) side of the lake is mostly gravel and rock with several spring seepages which are quite noticeable during high water years. The right hand shore is quite a contrast in composition compared to the left where the shore tends to be marshy. The lake bottom is varied, tending to be mud in the deeper parts, grassy weed beds predominate the left side (north west) whereas the south east or right hand side tends to drop off fairly rapidly, something like Glad Lake. Compared to East Blue Lake, Gull Lake water is considerably more turbid and resembles Laurie and Childs Lakes. About a mile north of the boat launch area is a small island covered with fir trees which adds a measure of interest to the lake. From a biological standpoint however, this lake is particularly good habitat for various salmonids--trouts and chars, because of the varied and abundant supply of aquatic insects and crustaceans which are a substantial part of the diet

of these fishes. The only disadvantages this lake seems to have are first-- it is relatively shallow, only 58 feet deep at the deepest point and second, a water level that fluctuates considerably something like Laurie Lake but not as extreme. With the predominant winds from the north west, the water is well oxygenated by wave action down its entire length so that winter or summer kills due to stagnation are highly unlikely to happen. At the same time, wind direction is such that the lake very rarely becomes so extremely rough that it cannot be used by small boats. (The only weather problems ever encountered are the usual electrical storms. The writer has the unusual experience of getting caught in a thunder lightning rain and hail storm on this lake around November 7 in 1964. There was a prolonged late warm spell that year and the lakes were free of ice until well into November.)

As mentioned previously Gull Lake was first stocked in 1959 with small mouth bass. The planting was not successful however and, in 1963 the lake was re-stocked using the hybrid trout known as the Splake or Wendigo. At the same time, Whitefish were also introduced with the idea that the Splake would use the Whitefish as forage. Very little has been heard of the Whitefish by anglers although a test netting by Fisheries staff in 1971 turned up several four and five pounders. Hopefully, this fish will not be able to reproduce in Gull Lake because it is very doubtful as to whether they would be a forage fish for the Splake and with their enormous reproductive potential could over-populate this lake. While Whitefish

of angling fun at certain times, the methods used to catch them are quite specialized. In addition, there is a tendency for whitefish populations to

become infected with a worm as was described in the article on Clear Lake in Riding Mountain. While the writer has no real desire to throw rocks at the staff operating the sport-fish section of the Fisheries branch someone should have researched the food requirements of the Splake far more carefully. Splake programs were in existence in Ontario, Alberta, Michigan and Colorado when Gull was first planted and a few letters of inquiry could have provided some very beneficial guidelines for use in Manitoba. (However, Manitoba's sportfishery group although enthusiastic and hard-working, is not under direct continuous control of a qualified fisheries biologist with a background in fish culture methods, genetics and selection techniques. Consequently,

the hatchery operation, brood stocks of fish and planting sites have never been scientifically co-ordinated. Further, there seems to be no overall plan or set of objectives whereby fish-stocking is geared to the development of a vigorous sport fishery. But this in itself is a subject which may be explored in a future article.)

The forage for Splake was later changed in 1964 to the Kokanee Salmon and finally, in 1970, rainbow trout were added to the lake in order to provide a species which would be active during July and August when Splake go deep and are difficult to catch. Thus far, only a few rainbows have been caught but, another year or two will be required before the rainbow reaches its stride. What has turned out to be a surprise

fish though is the Kokanee a landlocked freshwater form of the Pacific Sockeye salmon which is beginning to establish itself as a good sport fish.

The Kokanee were first caught in quantity by ice fishermen. But because the fish are spawning in late November and early December their flesh is quite soft or even mushy. So, most anglers were not too enthusiastic about them. However, several Dauphin anglers including Clayton Twigge, George Zradicka and the writer working separately but comparing results have adapted a method highly successful in west coast

lakes to catch Kokanee for use on Gull Lake. With this system it is possible during July and August to take large catches of Kokanee just before they have begun to spawn and when

they are at the peak of their development. There is no creel limit on this fish and the quantity of the sport and fillet is well worth the angling time. Insofar as the writer is concerned, Kokanee are far more sport than pickerel, just as easy to catch and, as mentioned there is no limit on your catch of this species.

The Kokanee technique was first described in The Daily Bulletin back in 1966 by the author's famous angling buddy Solomon Grundy, who has agreed to re-write the article for this series. His technique--the Solomon Grundy method for Kokanee, follows.

(To be continued.)

