

Lake of the Woods with Gord Pyzer

By Aaron Shirley

From the time I began preparing for the legendary muskie waters of Lake of the Woods (L.O.T.W.), the excitement for my friend and I, of throwing our first cast, had become overwhelming. Prior to this, I had been lucky enough to fish L.O.T.W. for the first time, in the summer of 1998, and since then I had dreamt of fishing it again. My fishing buddy and friend, Larry, on the other hand, had not yet had the opportunity to experience this lake. From my first time on L.O.T.W, memories of muskie clearly following my Johnson's Silver Minnow, among other enticing lures, and the beauty of such a magnificent lake, were still etched in my mind. This trip, however, would include something more: Gordon Pyzer - a well-established angler and outdoor writer, who would be guiding us.

Many thoughts raced through my mind as we walked through the doors of our accommodations; did we bring everything we would need? Did we choose the best lures for the trip? Is the major cold front we were experiencing going to affect the fishing? Somehow, by the time we settled in, I had managed to keep calm enough to make new leaders and check all of my equipment for any signs of weakness, after all ... I couldn't risk losing my dream muskie! As we got ready for bed though, I couldn't help but catch myself doubting a little, would we really catch that ever-so-elusive fifty-inch fish? Would we at least see one! Larry and I both hadn't boated a muskie over the 50-inch benchmark at this point, and we were counting on this trip to provide us with as good a chance as any.

In the morning, we got an early start on the breakfast menu - we had to store all the energy we could get, especially to cast muskie lures all day. After a satisfying meal, Larry and I loaded our gear on the hotel's dock, and as if on cue, Gordon edged up to the dock in his sharp-looking Ranger. As we hopped on to the boat, I remember thinking it was really cold for the beginning of October. After a brief introduction, we were off. As we travelled, I was notably impressed with the big Mercury Optimax on the back of the Ranger - quiet and quick. Gordon expertly manoeuvred the boat, weaving it between intimidating islands, rocks, and sand bars (which I'm positive was done to get Larry and I both lost!). Our map schedule: to fish the Central and Northern sectors of the lake. Gordon explained to us that this is where he believes the heaviest fish are located, as opposed to the southern areas of the lake, where the fish are generally longer and more slender.

We stealthily glided up to the first location and began casting within a very interesting and isolated area. Gordon instructed me to place a cast to a piece of timber close by, informing me that it was very likely there would be a fish holding there. Seconds after my Reef Hawg landed inches from the log; a nice fish in the 40-inch class sideswiped the bait! Unfortunately it was able to shake itself loose at boat side. Minutes later, a smaller fish hit my Sledge, but again, it also escaped capture. Gordon, in response to these encounters,

stated in a very surprised tone, "Those are the smallest fish I've ever seen in this spot". Following this observation, we moved on, pulling up to a nice island tip, with diverse structure surrounding it. A few casts later, a nice fish in the mid-forty-inch class, honed in on my Lunge Locker Minnow, following a big circle several times before disappearing. After several more casts, we realized moving to another new location would be a good idea.

Later, we cast to a nice bottle-necked area between two islands, containing a good-sized current. Gordon was confident there would be big fish there. We must have cast to the area for what seemed like two hours, and with many different lures, resulting in no sightings of follows. Just before we were about to leave for another location, I decided to try something different. Within a couple of casts, a huge fish appeared behind my Glitter Perch-coloured Jake. As the 40-pound classed fish neared the boat, it suddenly came on aggressively, chasing down my bait. The big fish followed my generous circles at least four times before disappearing. I must have kept doing circles another 20 times! Gordon suggested that I cast a Bull Dawg back to the fish, and I had that bait sailing through the air in seconds! On my first retrieve, a fish followed in. Was it the big one? As it got closer to the boat, I realized it was a much smaller fish. I barely even tried to tempt the smaller fish into taking the bait; I was so disappointed it wasn't the big one. I realized I just lost a momentous opportunity. The sport of muskie fishing had just shown me its highs and the lows within a matter of minutes; and I, of course, was hooked even more.

After hitting a few more spots, we took a break for lunch on a scenic island. I remember thinking to myself that heaven couldn't be much nicer! I could spend season after season on this extraordinary body of water and never get bored. Once we finished our lunch, we hit several more unique spots that day. I caught a pike, and had a big follow on a Jake before it was time to end the day. I was absolutely exhausted from casting all day, so we retired to bed early - to be physically, and mentally prepared for the next day.

For our second day of the trip, Gordon decided trolling would be a better option, with a bit of casting mixed in, and we happily agreed (feeling sore from a long day of casting!). He took us out in his 16-foot Lund boat (specifically chosen for trolling) and we spent much of the day hammering the same spots we had fished the previous day, with the inclusion of some great-looking new ones also. In one spot in particular, Gordon threw out a couple of marker buoys, and set a pattern to troll this majestic spot. Gordon informed us this "special" spot had produced a forty-seven and fifty-seven pound fish for him on two different occasions, as well as offering him other large fish! Needless to say, after hearing that, we were very attentive. As we began trolling between the marker buoys, suddenly my Depth Raider was hit! I was immediately alert, and I was also nervous, my knees feeling weak, as the thought raced through my mind: Was this the fish of a lifetime! Moments later, Gordon cradled a 40-inch fish. We took a quick photograph, and watched the fish swim off. Well, it wasn't the big one I was hoping for, but it was still a nice fish.

During the course of that same day, my partner missed a fish that had hit his Depth Raider, but he later caught a pike on the same lure (I recall having wondered to myself, yet again, "Why do pike always seem to strike and stay hooked!"). With only a few hours left, we fished several more areas; Gordon surprising me with his choices, as I would never have guessed there would be muskies located in such high-traffic areas. Then, our two-day trip came to an end, yet we had been able to share a truly awesome experience with one of the nicest guys a person could ever have the pleasure to meet. And although

the fishing was slow, while trolling during the second day, we had a blast during great conversations, with such a knowledgeable and interesting guide. No, we didn't boat a huge fish (probably due to our own inexperience with casting for muskie), but Larry and I had a spectacular time with Gordon. He knows the lake very well, after spending the last 25 years fishing it, and he is an excellent guide! Gordon presented a high level of energy throughout the entire trip, and his run-and-gun approach kept us on our toes. His sharp thinking and patience with a couple of novice casters was highly appreciated. I'm already looking forward to booking another trip with Gordon, and to fish one of the best bodies of water that I have ever had the pleasure to experience.

As a side note, Gordon believes that a potential world-record fish is swimming around in one of his hot spots. He has had one such fish follow his bait in a particular area, and since then, he has been trying to catch it, or a close family member! We had the opportunity to try that spot, but unfortunately, we weren't able to raise a fish. We also had the opportunity to see Gordon's favourite (and priceless) muskie lure. I recall Larry and I staring at the chewed-up black and silver Grandma as if it were the Holy Grail. Gordon explained to us that he was given this lure from someone who had found it washed-up on a beach. It noticeably displayed a small chip on the left side of the lip, which Gordon believes may be the contributing factor to it attracting the big muskies; he has an impressive record of catching many large fish on that bait! Gordon also emphatically told to us that he would not sell the lure, not even for a thousand dollars, but he still does use the lure. However, he also made sure to make a lure retriever, just in case.

** Gordon Pyzer obtained a Masters Degree in Resource Management, subsequently working 29 years for the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources where he held many positions across Ontario, including Policy Advisor to the Assistant Deputy Minister for Northern Ontario. He then moved to Kenora as the District Manager overseeing many environmental programs. He has recently retired from the O.M.N.R., and now guides full time. In addition, over the past 25 years, Gordon has been active in multimedia endeavours including Fishing Editor of the Outdoor Canada magazine, and more recently, Field Editor of the In-Fisherman magazine, Outdoor Editor of the Kenora Daily Miner and News, Co-Host (with Bob Izumi) of the nationally syndicated Real Fishing radio show and President of Canadian Angling Adventures Ltd. He can be reached at: 807-468-4898 or via his web site: www.gordpyzer.com **