

# NORTHERN TIER FISHING TIPS



Northern Pike caught by Interpreter at Bissett.  
Fish released after photo.



Colorful tackle box

The most sought after fish species you will find at the Northern Tier bases are:

- ✘ Walleye (great tasting, very little fishy flavor. This is why the walleye is the most prized fish in canoe country. They are not great fighters – it often feels like you snagged a log when you catch one.)
- ✘ Northern Pike (very abundant, easy to catch, good eating if you know how to fillet to remove y-bones. Fun to catch – they can be quite large. Some 48” (~27 Lbs) Northerns were caught by Participants in 2004)
- ✘ Smallmouth Bass (good eating, great fighters. Some people like to catch them on fly-fishing tackle.)
- ✘ Lake Trout (usually stay in cold water hence run quite deep in warmer weather. They can be difficult to catch, but put up a good fight)

We get a lot of questions about what kind of tackle to bring to the Northern Tier. Fishing is controversial, and most lures are designed to catch fishermen as much as to catch fish. Here are some tips from some successful local fishermen. Your success may vary!

You don't need a big tackle box filled with lures. A few basic designs will be all you need. Your lures should fit into a box not much bigger than a bar of soap or box of bandages.

Here are some recommendations:

Line and Accessories: 8 to 12 lb. test line. Many people use a light wire leader for catching northern pike although it often isn't necessary. Leave the landing nets at home. Fish can be landed without them and they are a real nuisance while portaging. Forceps are great for removing lures from fish. Fishing swivels help to keep line from twisting and snarling when fishing spinners or spoons. One lightweight stringer per canoe is plenty. It is useful also to have 25' of light rope and a stuff sack you can fill with rocks to act as an anchor. Walleye fishing is often good in a current or when the lake is not calm and an anchor will help keep you where the fish are located.

Poles and Reels: Whatever you have – spin-casting, bait-casting or spinning rod and reel. Multi-section pack rods are great! You won't need one for each person as only two people can fish at a time from a canoe and most people don't often fish from shore. Some people enjoy fly-fishing for smallmouth bass.

Jigs and twisty tails: The number one all-around fish getter in canoe country. They are cheap and easy to fish. Good sizes and colors are 3/8 - 1/2 oz. White or pink with 3-4" yellow, orange, green, or pink twisty tails. Clean paint out of the hook eye at home, it is much easier than doing it while fishing. Quick and easy to make 'barbless' to be legal lures in Manitoba. You can carry a lot of these in a small container. Many people now use the new scented and flavored twisty tails (*Gulp*<sup>®</sup> and *Power Bait*<sup>®</sup> for example).

Spinners: Small to medium size spinners can be effective, especially for smallmouth bass and northern pike. The general rule is silver for clear water and gold for darker, tannin stained water. *Mepps*<sup>®</sup> is a popular brand of spinner. Some people add live or artificial worms or leeches to the spinner.

Spoons: Shiny spoons work well. Red and white and silver seems to be a popular color. Spoons are good for fishing deep and casting on windy days. *Daredevil*<sup>®</sup> is a popular brand.

Floating or diving minnow type lures: *Rapala*<sup>®</sup> is a well known brand. These work well trolling, especially when there is a problem with snagging.

Live Bait: Leeches and worms make jigs and lures better fish catchers. Use and possession of certain types of live bait (e.g. live minnows, gamefish & crayfish) is prohibited in some areas so check the regulations.

#### Techniques:

- ✘ Walleye and Smallmouth Bass – These fish spend most of their time near the bottom around structure (points, slopes, boulders, reefs, weedlines, and moving water). Jigging 1-3 ft. from the bottom in 8-20 ft. depths is productive. Remember – if you catch a walleye there are probably more in the same area as they tend to be in schools.
- ✘ Northern Pike – These voracious feeders are likely to be found near weed beds but can be anywhere. They seem to strike at anything that moves. It takes a pike as long as your arm to be worth filleting, but once you get them cleaned they make a nice meal. Some people like to cut them into strips, boil them and dip them in butter. This is called "poor man's lobster". They also make a good fish chowder and this is a good way to make a few fish go a long way for dinner.
- ✘ Lake Trout – These fish generally stay in 40 degree water, but will sometimes come to the shallows in low light conditions looking for baitfish. Spinners can be effective in these conditions. Normally, light colored jigs (white or silver), spoons, and minnow type baits trolled deep work best.

Don't try to fish while traveling. You can't make time and fish effectively at the same time. You also risk damaging people and fishing poles. A fishing stop near a rapids might be worth a try however. Pack up your tackle and clean your fish before moving on. Cleaned fish packed dry in a plastic bag in the food pack will keep the best and be great for supper.

Finally, practice "catch and release" as much as possible. Large fish are females that lay up to a half million or more eggs a year. Medium sized fish are the best tasting and safest to eat anyway. The big ones are more likely to have higher levels of mercury and other contaminants as they have lived longer and the contaminants accumulate. If you catch a trophy – take a side view close-up color picture of the entire fish, measure the length and girth by marking these with knots in a light cord or piece of line. Release the trophy as quickly as possible and unharmed. The picture and measurements are all that is needed to make a graphite replica of the fish.

Don't plan to have a fish meal every day. A couple of fish dinners is plenty and leaves more fish for others to catch.