

Of The Outdoors

The smallmouth bass of Mille Lacs

BY GARY HOWEY
Hartington, Neb.

Before heading out onto Mille Lacs, our guide Mike Christensen of Hunter Winfield's Resort (www.hunterwinfields.com) had shown us a spot on his GPS where the LakeMaster chip in the unit indicated an area that smallmouth bass had been feeding.

As we approached the buoy, the huge boulders and rocks deposited there by the glaciers started to appear below the surface.

Many were larger than our boat, extending out from a point into the lake at a depth of 12 foot, giving the smallmouth excellent hiding spots from which to ambush bait fish.

Team member Larry Myhre and I have been frequent visitors to Mille Lacs as it is an excellent fishery with good numbers of trophy size walleye, smallmouth, musky as well as numerous other species of fish.

We'd arrived the day before, hoping to have the opportunity to film a couple of our Outdoorsmen Adventures segments, if the weather didn't force us to change our plans.

Mike strategically maneuvered the boat through the shallow water, positioning us within casting distance of many of the larger submerged boulders.

We were on the water early, trying to take advantage of nice weather hoping to beat the many fronts that would

be coming through the area during the next couple of days.

Since we weren't sure what the fish would want this morning, all three of us in the boat were rigged with different baits, allowing the fish to tell us which bait they preferred, once they did, we'd all switch to that bait and hammer on them.

As we worked our way around and through the submerged rocks, a smallmouth smacked something floating on the surface off to our right.

I quickly switched from my crankbait to a surface popper propelling it in the general direction where the fish had risen.

After several cast, I could see a big smallmouth come up from behind one of the hundreds of boulders to take a whack at my lure.

The bass must have been far sighted or I was a little too anxious to boat a fish as he made a pass at my popper as it neared the boat, hitting ahead of the bait as I reared back on my rod, propelling the bait into the air.

Not to be deterred, I immediately cast right back into the same general area, only to pull the bait away from the bass once again.

This happens a lot in clear water, as the depth the fish is in can be deceiving and you'll see the fish come up and jump on your bait, which can result in short strikes.

On my fourth cast, I had my hook set down perfectly and a battle ensued.

Smallmouth bass, known as "Bronze Bulldogs" are one of the most powerful fresh water fish you'll find, diving deep, fighting hard and often going airborne or doing a tail walk across the top of the water, testing the gears in your reel as well as the line it's spooled with.

The fish, a nice three pounder, gave me all I wanted, then coming into the boat for a few pictures, before being released back into the water.

Mike was the next to connect as another three pounder inhaled his bait right beside the boat.

Since their mouth is much smaller than that of their cousin the largemouth bass, choose similar bait you'd throw for largemouth only in a more compact size.

Some of the best baits for smallmouth bass would be tube jigs, small crawdad imitating crank baits, smaller worm rigs and livebait.

Smallmouth are an extremely aggressive fish and will attack almost any bait pitched at them, so it's very easy to fish them out of a certain area.

This is one of the reasons that many bodies of water that hold holding these fish have such stringent slot limits on them.

Smallmouth can grow to large size with the Minnesota state record



PHOTO: LARRY MYHRE

Smallmouth Bass are one of the toughest game fish you'll find. This 4-pound smallmouth is one of the four fish that were caught and released on Mille Lacs two weeks ago.

make you come back for more.

Gary Howey, Hartington, Neb., is a former tournament angler and guide. His Outdoorsmen Adventures television series can be

seen in the upper Midwest and on www.MyOutdoorTV.com. For more information on the outdoors check out www.outdoorsmenadventures.com.

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9		7						
7					9			
	4			5	6			
8			9	7				6
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Check today's issue for the solution to the puzzle.

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