

FISHING HOLE

CARIBOU LAKE

Location: Caribou Lake is in the southwest corner of Cook County, partially inside Superior National Forest. It's north of Lutsen, which is the closest town. There are two other lakes by the same name in the county, but those lakes are near the Gunflint Trail and entirely inside the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

Access: There is a state-owned concrete boat ramp on the lake's west shore, off C.R. 4, with parking for five vehicles.

Vitals: Caribou is 728 acres, with 10.4 miles of shoreline. It is 30 feet deep at its deepest and has a mean depth of 13 feet. The oddly-shaped lake, with a large peninsula at its center, generally drops off sharply around the entire shoreline. There's a fairly shallow outlet to Caribou Creek, and the connecting 90-acre Bigsby Lake, to the northeast, is actually fairly shallow, with a maximum depth of four feet.

Game species present: Walleye, smallmouth bass, northern pike, yellow perch, black crappie and bluegill.

Forage species present: DNR surveys have also collected white sucker, golden shiner, creek chub, blacknose dace, trout-perch, fathead minnow, Johnny darter.

Walleye Work: The DNR completed the first of three assessments on the lake in 2011, prescribed by a 2010 lake management plan. The assessments will be used to determine whether walleye stocking in this lake should be resumed (it was most recently stocked with 440,000 walleye fry in 2009). Subsequent assessments are scheduled for 2014 and 2017. In the 2011 assessment, the walleye gill net catch did not meet the DNR's long-range goal, though the catch was above average for the lake classification and was similar to catches seen in the lake since 1992. And the strongest year class of walleye (2010) was apparently produced nat-

urally. Walleye growth rates appear to be average for the area, and the largest fish collected were in the 15- to 19-inch range.

Pursuing pike: The 2011 DNR survey turned up lots of younger pike, with no fish older than the four-year mark collected. The DNR's catch and size goals were met during the survey, and the growth rates have been average or better for the area, with three-year-old pike on average reaching a length of 20.5 inches by the end of their third year. Only one fish in the 25- to 29-inch range was collected.

Something about smallies: The smallmouth bass catches in the 2011 assessment were low, just as they had been during the previous assessment in 2008. Only three smallmouth were collected, but two of those were in the 15- to 19-inch range. Data suggests the smallmouth population peaked in the 1990s, but despite the low numbers collected in gill nets and trap nets, (bass are difficult to catch in

nets) an angling assessment conducted in June of 2011 by the DNR indicated that there was actually a high-quality smallmouth bass population, enough to produce good catch rates for anglers.—*Javier Serna*

