

FISHING HOLE

LAC DES MILLE LACS

WHY GO: Lac des Mille Lacs is an expansive lake full of islands and walleyes. It's a good ice fishing option, and is a spring and summer walleye destination, too. And there are other species to target, including northern pike, smallmouth bass, and eelpout.

ACCESS: There are several public boat launches on the lake, including the East access in the southeast corner, the Maze Bay access on the north-central side, and the Honkonan Narrows access in the northwest corner of the lake. There's also a dozen resorts on the lake that offer access, according to the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources website. From Thunder Bay, it's about a 100-mile drive out to end of the Pine Point, a prominent peninsula near the center of the lake.

VITALS: Lac des Mille Lacs is about 59,000 acres. Its deepest hole is about 80 feet deep, according to provincial records. It has an average depth of about 20 feet. The lake is west of Thunder Bay, and is less than 15 miles south of the unincorporated town of Upsala.

GAME SPECIES PRESENT: Walleye, smallmouth bass, northern pike, yellow perch, eelpout, lake whitefish and white sucker.

WALLEYES, SUMMER AND ICE: Kris Hipenbecker, who, along with her husband, runs Pine Point Resort, said the lake is known for both eater and trophy walleyes. But anglers on Lac des Mille Lacs, she said, have found the walleye to prefer down-sized presentations. "Here they want the least amount of stuff with your hook. Like a No. 6 with half a nightcrawler," she said.

While nightcrawlers are a great way to go during the open-water season, minnows are the name of the walleye game in the winter, she said.

Hipenbecker said wall-hangers caught more often early in the open-water season, noting one angler with a lot of success catching big fish early every morning.

"People who come for the opener (this year, that's May 19), think it's best, and the ones that come in July think it's best," she said. "We have some folks that come twice in the summer."

She spoke of numerous walleyes in the upper 20-inch range being caught by some skilled anglers and of 30-inch walleye being reported on an about annual basis.

In the middle of February, she said most of the walleyes were caught in 18 to 22 feet of water, but they tend to be caught deeper as the ice season progresses.

ESOX: Hipenbecker said there are a few larger pike in the lake to be caught, some real dandys. And though the lake's pike fishery closes down after April 14 until the second Saturday in May—an exception to the regulations in Ontario's Zone 6, where it otherwise remains open all year—the lake's pike protected slot was recently liberalized, reverting back to zone-wide regs (not more than one greater than or equal to 27.6 inches, with a four or two-fish bag, depending on license).

Hipenbecker said she's heard of a 54-inch northern being caught on the lake, and also said a couple of tiger muskies were caught recently.

EELPOUT: Hipenbecker said her U.S. guests don't typically target eelpout, or ling, but some Canadians do, fishing the deepest waters of the lake—areas that winter walleye anglers generally avoid.



RESORTS/RENTALS: There's about a dozen resorts that cater to anglers and hunters on the lake, most with cabins, and some that will cater to guests for the day. Hipenbecker said Pine Point Resort (877-429-8889) does offer that service, as well as some fish houses during the winter.

"If somebody has never been on the lake before, I beg them not to leave the sight of the resort because they will get lost," she said. "And you can catch plenty of fish within sight of the resort."—*Javier Serna*

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