

FISHING HOLE

LITTLE SAGANAGA LAKE

WHY GO: It's a destination lake for lake trout in the month of May and into June. It is considerably deeper into the woods than other noted lake trout waters in the area, but this translates to far less pressure, and more excellent campsites than are needed on the fishing opener weekend. Andy McDonnell of Tuscarora Lodge and Canoe Outfitters said that remoteness also bodes well for solitude during the peak of the summer season.

ACCESS: Little Saganaga is entirely in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. McDonnell said the most direct route to Little Sag is from the Round Lake access (off the Gunflint Trail), and suggested taking the route through Tuscarora, which includes a very long 420-rod portage as being quicker than a route to the north through Bat and Gillis because of far fewer portages. If you are attempting to get there directly, either plan a good 10-hour travel day (and pack light) or plan on two days of travel to Little Sag. McDonnell points out that some do approach the lake from the Sawbill Trail and other points. In the summer, it's a great lake to basecamp from.

VITALS: This vast, 1,627-acre Cook County lake has many islands (the lake has 43 miles of shoreline as a result). It's considered one of the prettier lakes to look at in this part of the Boundary Waters. It has a maximum depth of 150 feet, and water clarity down to 10 feet.

GAME SPECIES PRESENT: Burbot, lake trout, northern pike, yellow perch and white sucker.

LAKERS AROUND THE OPENER: McDonnell says the state's lakefinder surveys for Little Sag, most recently completed in 2011, generally sell the lake's trout fishery short.

"It has a really good population of small lake trout," he said. "The action is way better than Tuscarora."

Given the size of the lake and the number of islands and reefs, it is fairly easy to fish, McDonnell said. He suggested going to Google Maps to locate the shallow reefs and then marking them down on your map.

"A reef that has deep-water access, 10 to 15 feet below the surface is perfect for either trolling on the edges or right on top of it," he said.

In the spring, when trout tend to be shallow, McDonnell's go-to laker bait is a Rapala Taildancer that gets down 12 to 15 feet. "They don't get hung up as much as a spoon if you stop," he said.

In-line spinners and spoons work, too, he pointed out, and gave one tip for the popular Little Cleo spoon. "You have to be careful with your trolling speed," he said. "You want it to flutter from side-to-side. You don't want it to just spin." Regarding spoons, he also cautioned about line twist.

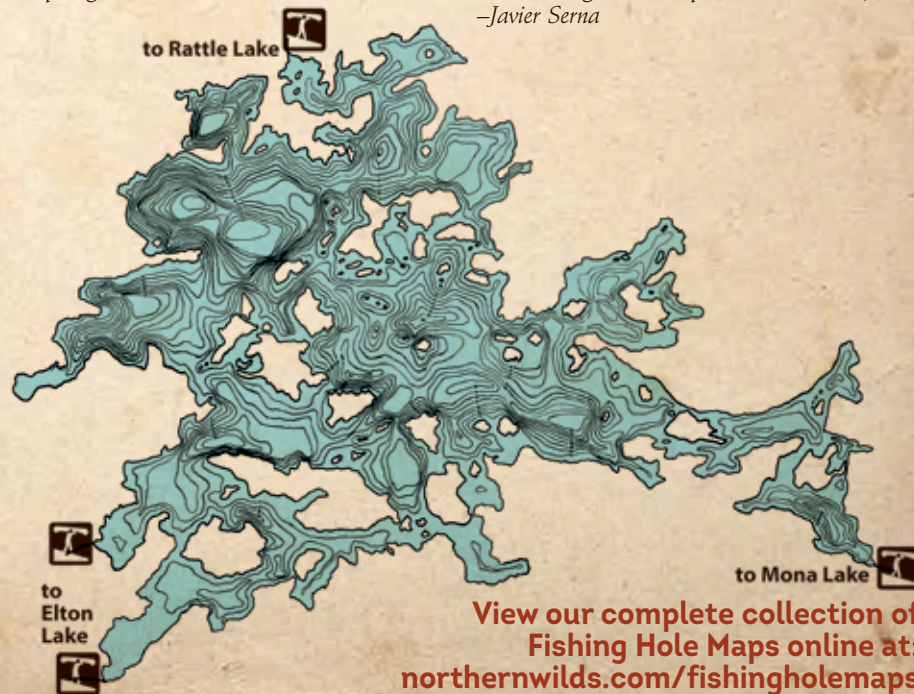
A high-quality ball-bearing snap swivel should cut down on that issue.

While most focus on the spring, the fall can be even better, McDonnell said.

"That last week of September can be hot," he said. "They are coming up from the depths as the temps drop. The water plummets, they will think of spawning. Fish them the same way you do in the spring."

LAKERS IN THE DEPTHS: For targeting lakers in the summer, when the fish are deep, McDonnell recommended a 1 ½-ounce trolling sinker and a fluorocarbon leader short enough that fish can be reeled in canoe-side. That should allow baits to be dropped down 30 to 40 feet. "Even if it's 80 degrees, you will get to those magical water temperatures that they are at," he said. Or you can vertically jig heavy baits along the deep sides of reefs, too.

—Javier Serna



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