

# FISHING HOLE

## BRULE LAKE



**BY JOE SHEAD**

**WHY GO:** Brule Lake is a popular Boundary Waters entry point. It has numerous campsites for overnight stays, but as an entry point, it's also well-suited to day trips. Anglers will find eater-sized walleyes, quality-sized smallmouth bass and potential for some good-sized ciscoes.

**ACCESS:** From Lutsen, travel 17 miles up Highway 4 (Caribou Trail) to The Grade (Forest Road 153). Turn left on The Grade and proceed about 2 miles. Turn right onto Brule Lake Road (Forest Road 326) and follow it to the parking lot at the end of the road. Brule Lake has a concrete ramp with a rustic outhouse and parking for 90 vehicles. No motors are permitted on Brule Lake. Brule Lake has more than 30 campsites and is a very popular entry point. Six portages lead to other lakes beyond Brule Lake.

**VITALS:** At 4,326 acres and with a maximum depth of 78 feet, Brule Lake is big water. In fact, it's the second-largest lake contained entirely within the BWCAW. As such, paddlers should use caution on windy days and be aware that the weather may dictate your daily plans. Brule is a classic Canadian Shield lake: rocky, deep and clear, with 17-foot water clarity. It is believed lake trout were native here, and stocking did maintain a small population into the 1970s.

**GAME SPECIES PRESENT:** Walleye,

northern pike, smallmouth bass and cisco.

**WALLEYE:** "Historically, it's been one of our best large Boundary Waters walleye lakes in terms of relative abundance and size," said Matthew Weberg, assistant area fisheries supervisor in Grand Marais. "Gill net catches are at or above the lake class median and there's fairly consistent natural reproduction." Weberg said walleyes were first stocked into Brule in 1929 and have been stocked "sparingly" since then. They reproduce well on their own, and with a cisco forage base, there is the possibility of hooking a big fish. However, most fish anglers will encounter will be good eaters in the 15- to 19-inch range, with a real possibility for something in the low 20s.

**NORTHERN PIKE:** Northern pike are present in low numbers. The perch and minnow populations are low, which doesn't provide a lot of forage for young pike. Despite the deep, rocky nature of the lake, there are a few shallow, weedy bays that provide cover for small pike. However, if pike are able to grow large enough to prey on ciscoes, there is real potential for growth while feasting on these abundant fatty fish. Whether large

pike exist is a question. They haven't shown up in DNR surveys, but then again, it's a big, deep lake.

**SMALLMOUTH BASS:** Smallmouth bass are another non-native species to Brule Lake. They first appeared in DNR surveys in 1970, and had likely been established for a while at that point. They are ideally suited to the rocky habitat found within the lake and have done well for themselves. "The fish we see tend to be 12 to 18 or 19 inches," Weberg said. Although DNR survey numbers don't show a lot of bass, smallmouths are wary of nets and are best detected with electrofishing, which isn't practical in the Boundary Waters. Anglers should find lots of smallies, including some nice-sized ones.

**CISCO:** Ciscoes are an interesting story in Brule Lake. "Cisco are from Lake Superior

and were brought here as an inland brood stock," Weberg said. "Brule was commercially fished for cisco for many years, up to the '70s. The lake is open to sport netting in mid-October and produces some pretty large ciscoes. If people are willing to brave the weather, it can be pretty fruitful." Weberg said it's impossible to know how many people actually net ciscoes in fall, but it's likely not many. He said ciscoes can sometimes harbor parasites, but the ones the DNR has sampled have been clean. Hook-and-line anglers usually target ciscoes in winter, but Brule Lake Road isn't plowed in winter, making access difficult.