

FISHING HOLE

DUNCAN LAKE

BY JOE SHEAD

WHY GO: Duncan Lake lies just a short, quarter-mile portage into the Boundary Waters. It boasts a good lake trout population, with a decent chance at better-than-average fish. An abundant cisco forage base fattens up those hefty mackinaws and could provide a good fishery in their own right.

ACCESS: As Boundary Waters lakes go, Duncan isn't too hard to get to. The shortest route is to access the lake from Bearskin Lake. Park at the West Bearskin Portage parking lot on the southwest corner of Bearskin Lake, off Hungry Jack Road. Another option is to launch at the Bearskin Lake public access on the east end of Bearskin Lake, where Clearwater Road meets N. Bearskin Lake Road. The downside is you'll have to traverse the entire length of Bearskin Lake; however, you could use a motorboat or snowmobile, making it easier. The portage to Duncan is located in the extreme northwest corner of Bearskin Lake, following a stream that flows between Bearskin and Duncan. Alternatively, you can access Duncan from Moss Lakes, which Matt Weberg, assistant area fisheries manager in Grand Marais, said is a popular option for winter anglers. Once you hit Moss Lake, go straight north into

the shallow bay for a short downhill portage into Duncan. Both Moss and Bearskin lie just outside the Boundary Waters, meaning anglers can motor or snowmobile across them to make the journey into Duncan a little easier. To reach Duncan Lake, drive 29 miles up the Gunflint Trail (Cook County Highway 12). Turn right onto Hungry Jack Road (Cook County Highway 65) just before Trail Center. Proceed about 2.4 miles to the West Bearskin Portage parking lot. If you're looking to come in from Moss, proceed about 1.5 miles down Hungry Jack Road from the Gunflint. There's a light trail from the northwest corner of Hungry Jack Lake. The boat launch for Bearskin is off Clearwater Road (Cook County Highway 66) if you're looking to go that route.

VITALS: Duncan Lake spans 476 acres with a maximum depth of 130 feet. It's a classic, deep, clear, rocky Canadian Shield lake, with a very deep basin. In fact, the average depth is over 45 feet. The lake has seven campsites and is accessible from Boundary Waters Entry Point 60.

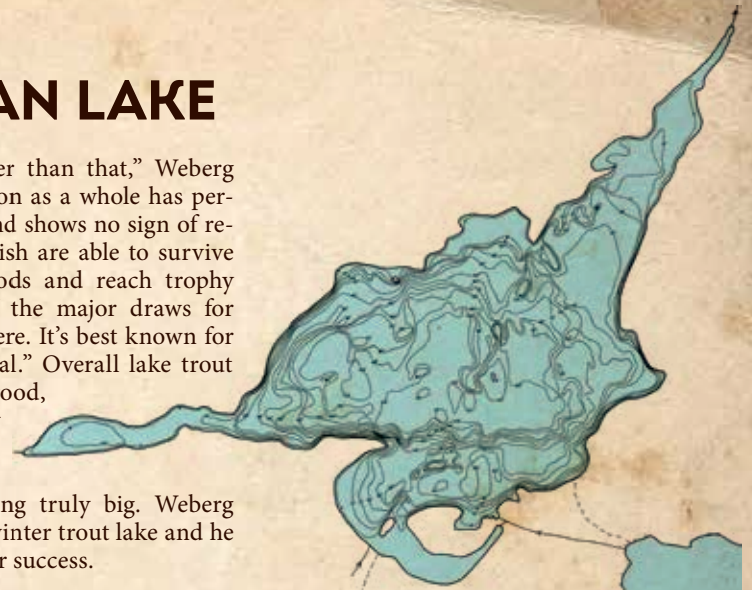
GAME SPECIES PRESENT: Lake Trout, cisco and smallmouth bass.

LAKE TROUT: Lakers are the main draw for most anglers on Duncan Lake. "It was stocked for a number of years in the '80s

and probably earlier than that," Weberg said. "The population as a whole has performed very well and shows no sign of requiring stocking. Fish are able to survive for very long periods and reach trophy size. That's one of the major draws for folks heading in there. It's best known for that trophy potential." Overall lake trout numbers are very good, and you'll likely encounter a few eaters before you hook into something truly big. Weberg said it's a popular winter trout lake and he hears of good winter success.

CISCO: Duncan has an abundant cisco population. "It's an untapped source for sure," Weberg said of the lake's cisco population. "I'm not sure how many anglers target them." Weberg said ciscoes usually run about 12 to 15 inches. And from what he's seen, they seem to be free of parasites, which plague cisco populations in some lakes. They certainly serve as a high-fat forage base for lake trout and are worth fishing for as well.

SMALLMOUTH BASS: Lake trout rule the depths, but you'll find smallies on the shallower reefs. "They've long been established in there," Weberg said of Duncan's bronzebacks. "Our surveys aren't



indicative of the smallmouth abundance in there." Weberg said you'll find smallmouths in any of the rocky areas and relatively shallow bays. They tend to be small and are slow growing.

STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN: There's actually two staircases on the portage from Duncan Lake down to Rose Lake, known as the Stairway Portage. This portage provides a scenic view of Rose Falls that's worth the effort.

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