

FISHING HOLE

LOON LAKE

BY JOE SHEAD

WHY GO: Loon Lake is a classic Canadian Shield lake nestled along the Gunflint Trail near the Canadian border. It has a decent population of naturally reproducing lake trout, some better-than-average northern pike, and plenty of smallmouths. It's even got a decent bluegill population, which is uncommon for the area.

ACCESS: It's easy to get to Loon Lake, but you'll have to drive 43 miles up the Gunflint Trail (Cook County Hwy. 12) from Grand Marais. Then turn right onto Forest Road 1347 and follow it to the access at the end of the road. There's a concrete ramp there, a rustic outhouse, and parking for about six trucks and trailers.

VITALS: Loon Lake is a long, narrow, crystal-clear lake with light development. Much of the center of the lake is over 100 feet deep, with a maximum depth of 202 feet. The lake covers

1,095 acres and there is a single rustic National Forest campground on the northwestern part of the lake that is accessible by boat.

GAME SPECIES PRESENT: Lake trout, northern pike, smallmouth bass, bluegill, rock bass, cisco, and walleye.

LAKE TROUT: Most anglers visiting Loon Lake are probably in search of lake trout. With its deep, clear, rocky waters, Loon is ideally suited for lake trout. There's a decent population of lakers here and consistent natural reproduction is enough to carry the fishery. Young lake trout grow slowly at first and the DNR suspects this is because juvenile fish compete with a robust cisco population for insects. In fact, according to the latest DNR survey, 4-year-old lake trout averaged just 8.4 inches, compared to an area average of 12 inches. However, once they grow

large enough to prey on ciscoes, these long-lived, slow-growing fish are capable of reaching lengths in excess of 30 inches.

NORTHERN PIKE: You won't find an abundance of northerns in Loon Lake, but what they lack in numbers, they make up for in size. That combination of an ample cisco forage base, combined with access to cool water and the lack of competition from numerous other pike is the perfect recipe for growing lunkers. DNR surveys regularly find fish in excess of 35 inches here, and there are likely fish over 40 inches. You'll go a long time between bites, but this lake could truly produce the pike of a lifetime.

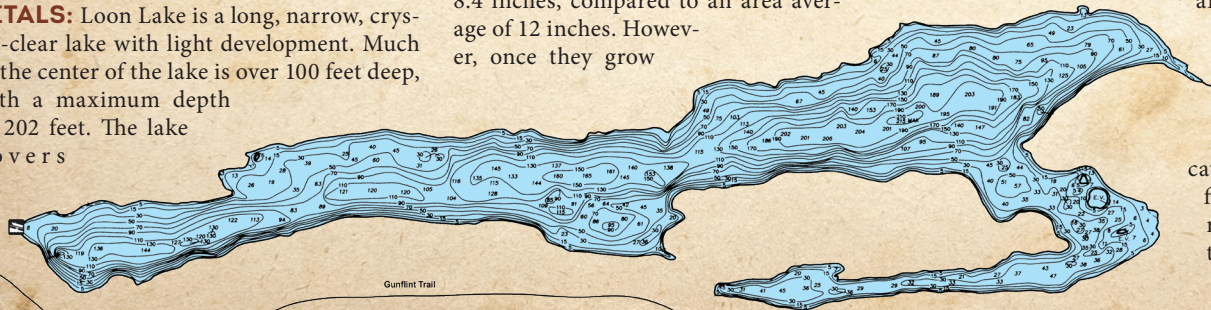
SMALLMOUTH BASS: Smallies are quite numerous, but they are slow-growing and their size leaves something to be desired. You'll catch a lot of them fishing shoreline rocks, but expect to catch a lot of

6-inchers, with few over 10 inches. There are some fish over 15 inches out there, but don't expect to catch a lot of this size class.

PANFISH: You wouldn't normally expect to catch a lot of bluegills in a lake that plunges to more than 200 feet deep, but there's actually a decent bluegill population here. You won't catch any real slabs, but there are a fair amount of fish in the 6- to 7-inch range where you might consider keeping them. In addition, rock bass are at home in this rocky lake and you'll find plenty of them in that same size range.

CISCO: Big schools of cisco roam the depths of Loon Lake. They provide excellent forage for lake trout, pike, and large walleyes. They grow big enough to fish for, but unfortunately, most contain tapeworms in the flesh, making them unsuitable for eating.

WALLEYE: This is not a destination walleye fishery. Walleyes are found in the lake in low abundance, but like pike, large specimens feed on ciscoes. If you catch a walleye by accident, it's usually a pretty good one, but specifically targeting them is usually futile.



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