

# FISHING HOLE KEKEKABIC LAKE

BY JOE SHEAD

**WHY GO:** You've really got to want to go to Kekekabic Lake. You're looking at a solid day's worth of paddling and portaging if you push it, though it's probably better to plan a couple days to reach it. But if you like breathtaking views, good lake trout fishing, and the satisfaction of a major accomplishment, you might give it a shot.

**ACCESS:** Kek is located solidly in the middle of the Boundary Waters, so getting there won't be easy. There are a few options to reach it. Although it's not easy, the "easiest" option is from the Gunflint Trail, via Seagull Lake (entry point 54). Still, you'll have to do a dozen portages to reach the lake, although several of them are short. The first portage you'll face is 107 rods between Seagull Lake and Alpine Lake. It gets easier after that. Another popular way to reach the lake is from Snowbank Lake (entry point 27). This route requires 10 portages, but four of those will be more than 100 rods, including a 207-rod grunt fest from Boot Lake to Ensign Lake. If you want to leave the canoe at home, you could hike to the lake via the Kekekabic Trail, which is a 46-mile hiking trail that runs between the Gunflint Trail (Kekekabic Trail East, entry point 56) and Snowbank

Lake/Kekekabic Trail West (entry point 74). Although the trail doesn't actually touch Kekekabic Lake, you can head north on the portage trail between Strup Lake and Kekekabic Lake to reach it. That may be an option for a winter ice fishing expedition.

**VITALS:** Kekekabic is a gem of a lake, offering world-class scenery. It's a big one, at 1,688 acres, with a maximum depth of 195 feet. Water clarity is a crystal-clear 22 feet. The lake also boasts 16 campsites and several islands. It's like a little slice of heaven on earth, and once you reach it, you may never want to leave. You might have to, however. The lake's east-west orientation can be problematic if the wind whips up, so keep an eye on the sky and be ready to take shelter quickly.

**FISH SPECIES PRESENT:** Lake trout, rock bass, smallmouth bass, and northern pike.



## LAKE TROUT:

Most anglers who fish Kek are after lake trout. Lakers are present here in good numbers, and you stand a reasonable chance of catching fish, particularly early in the season when the water is cold and the fish are still shallow. At that time, they can be caught trolling crankbaits. Jigging with tube jigs or salted ciscoes along drop-offs or in saddles between islands is another option. Most lake trout run about 15 to 20 inches, but occasionally, memorable fish over 30 inches pop up.

**ROCK BASS:** Nobody is going to portage across 10 to 12 portages to catch rock bass—the black sheep of the panfish world. But these red-eyed rockies are abundant in the

lake's shallow, rocky areas and provide action, especially if fishing is tough for lake trout. You may also encounter some yellow perch in the shallows as well.

**SMALLMOUTH BASS:** Smallies are expanding their range in the Boundary Waters, and they've made their way into Kek now as well. I'm not sure of their abundance, but the last DNR survey found one, so they are likely established, as bass are usually net shy.

**NORTHERN PIKE:** Pike are present in small numbers in Kek, but sometimes in large sizes. It's certainly not a destination pike fishery, but don't be shocked if you catch one. And if you do, it could be a big one.

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