

FISHING HOLE CARIBOU LAKE

BY JOE SHEAD

WHY GO: You don't find too many good largemouth bass lakes along the North Shore, but Caribou Lake, located a short drive northwest of Duluth, has some good bass fishing, along with good opportunities for walleyes and panfish.

ACCESS: Caribou Lake is just a short drive from Duluth. From the mall area, drive 10 miles up Highway 53/Miller Trunk Highway. Turn right onto Munger Shaw Road and proceed 1.7 miles north to Birch Point Road. Turn right and proceed a mile to the boat launch parking lot on your right. This boat launch, located on the northwestern corner of the lake, has the best ramp, although there are a couple other access sites as well. This one has a concrete ramp with a dock, a restroom, and parking for a half-dozen or so trailers.

VITALS: Caribou Lake is a 538-acre lake with a maximum depth of 21 feet. The lakeshore is heavily developed. The lake's abundant weed growth serves as good habitat for northern pike, largemouth bass, and bluegills.

GAME SPECIES PRESENT: Largemouth bass, walleye, northern pike, black crappie, bluegill, and yellow perch.

LARGEMOUTH BASS: "It's a pretty neat little fishery," said Dan Wilfond, Duluth area

DNR fisheries supervisor. "It has relatively clear water and a lot of vegetation. It's one of our more high-density largemouth bass lakes. If you're looking for abundance, if you want to take the kids and get a number of 12- to 16-inchers, it's a good place to go."

WALLEYE: In addition to bass, Caribou is managed for walleyes. "We hammered down a historic high for walleyes in the 2023 fisheries survey. It's one of our bread-and-butter fingerling-stocked lakes. There's a number of decent year-classes," Wilfond said. The 2023 survey turned up 6.3 walleyes per gillnet. Average size was 17.9 inches, and nearly 47% of the walleyes sampled exceeded 18 inches. Only about 7% of the fish were not stocked, so the stocking program not only supports the fishery, but seems to be working quite well.

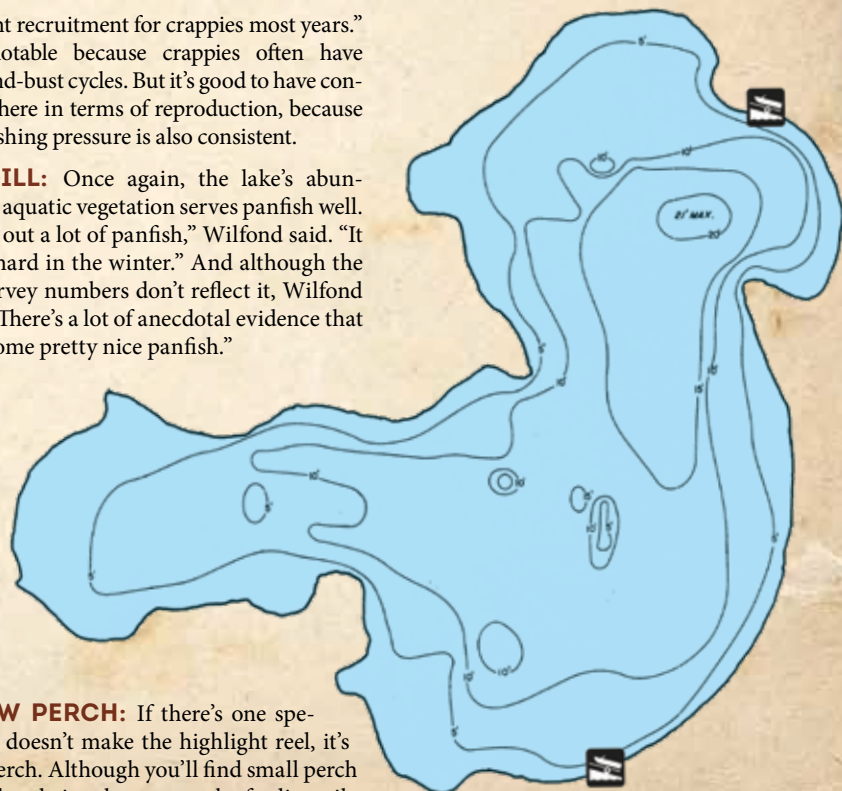
NORTHERN PIKE: Caribou is a popular winter spearing destination. The weedy environment is good for pike, but despite the quality habitat, you're not likely to tangle with a lunker. "It has pretty good pike production and there's a lot of harvest, so I think those bigger fish get cropped down," Wilfond said.

BLACK CRAPPIE: Winter anglers also hit Caribou hard for crappies. "It's pretty well known in the area for some decent crappie fishing," Wilfond said. "This one seems to have

consistent recruitment for crappies most years." That's notable because crappies often have boom-and-bust cycles. But it's good to have consistency here in terms of reproduction, because winter fishing pressure is also consistent.

BLUEGILL: Once again, the lake's abundance of aquatic vegetation serves panfish well. "It kicks out a lot of panfish," Wilfond said. "It gets hit hard in the winter." And although the DNR survey numbers don't reflect it, Wilfond added, "There's a lot of anecdotal evidence that there's some pretty nice panfish."

YELLOW PERCH: If there's one species that doesn't make the highlight reel, it's yellow perch. Although you'll find small perch in the lake, their role seems to be feeding pike and walleyes instead of anglers.



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