

FISHING HOLE TOM LAKE

BY JOE SHEAD

WHY GO: Tom Lake is a pretty average walleye lake for the area, but it also has a couple coldwater species: burbot and lake whitefish. Although these latter two species don't attract as much interest as walleyes, the lake provides a relatively unique fishery.

ACCESS: The road to Tom Lake is long, circuitous and at times, rough. From Hovland, head north up the Arrowhead Trail (Cook County Highway 16). Proceed 11.5

miles, then turn left onto Esther Lake Road. Head west for 2.1 miles, then turn left onto Tom Lake Road. Head south on Tom Lake Road for 3 miles, then turn right onto Brumbaugh Road. Proceed about a quarter-mile and turn left into the boat ramp on the northern tip of the lake. There's a concrete slab ramp, a dock, and parking for about seven trucks and trailers.

VITALS: Tom Lake is 404 acres with a maximum depth of 35 feet. The lake does have some cabins but isn't very busy.

GAME SPECIES PRESENT: Walleye, yellow perch, lake whitefish, and burbot.

WALLEYE: "Tom Lake is a cookie cutter walleye lake," said E.J. Isaac, DNR area fisheries supervisor in Grand Marais. "It's a classic Canadian Shield lake. It's not an outstanding walleye lake, but it's fairly consistent." The 2023 DNR survey found walleyes up to 27 inches, with a mean of 14.3 inches. Growth was slower than the area average. Isaac said the lake does have some good structure, which will help anglers pinpoint fish. And anglers won't have to worry about pike biting off their lures, because northern pike abundance is very low. "We used to pick up northern pike in our surveys in low abundance," Isaac said. "We've done three surveys now when we haven't caught any pike."

YELLOW PERCH: Yellow perch numbers have been on the rise in the

last few DNR surveys and are now much higher than average for the lake type. And they're not just dinks. There are enough keeper-sized perch to be of interest to anglers. "We've seen a little increase in perch in recent surveys," Isaac said. "We did catch perch over 10 inches. The lack of northern pike may help perch, although walleyes certainly prey on them."

LAKE WHITEFISH: Few anglers specifically fish for lake whitefish, and there is no fall netting season for them on Tom Lake. But you may hook one by accident. If you do, it will likely be of good size. "The lake is kind of unique in that it does have some coldwater fish," Isaac said. "There's a good number of adult spawners (whitefish) out there." It's not uncommon for whitefish to reach 20 inches or more. The last DNR survey found average numbers of whitefish with an average weight just shy of 3 pounds. A whitefish would be a nice bonus for walleye anglers and would be a real treat on the table.

BURBOT: Burbot, or eelpout, are found in low numbers in Tom Lake, but they turn up in every DNR survey. Like whitefish, these odd-looking fish prefer cold water and are infrequently targeted. Only a single burbot was caught in the last survey, although they have been more abundant in previous surveys. While you're not likely to catch one, if you land an odd-looking fish with barbels and long fins on its back and belly, that's what it is.

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