

The New

# **BOUNDARY WATERS AND QUETICO FISHING GUIDE**



**Michael Furtman**

## About Michael Furtman

*Michael Furtman has been a full time, freelance writer and photographer since 1982. He is the author of over twenty books, including Canoe Country Camping – Wilderness Skills for the Boundary Waters and Quetico.*

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The New  
**BOUNDARY WATERS  
AND QUETICO  
FISHING GUIDE**

**MICHAEL FURTMAN**



**Birch Portage Press -- Duluth, MN**

*The New Boundary Waters and Quetico Fishing Guide*  
Michael Furtman

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# Dedication

*In memory of my father, Ralph Furtman,  
who introduced me to the wonders of  
the Canoe Country.*



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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *The New Boundary Waters And Quetico Fishing Guide*, the updated edition of my classic title, *A Boundary Waters Fishing Guide*!

In case you're an owner of an earlier edition, and wondering if this version is worth the purchase, let me tell you that there is much new material in this book – new information on routes, new information on equipment, new information on fishing techniques, and a much more accurate and complete lake index. Lake information for both the BWCAW and Quetico has seen many changes and additions.

Yes, you'll find some familiar passages in this edition – no sense messing with a good thing! However, the number of changes and updates were so significant, that it required that I actually issue this as a new book, rather than a “revised” edition. There are two chapters that never appeared in the earlier book, and changes to every other chapter, some quite significant.

I first wrote this book in 1984. In fact, it was the first book I ever wrote. Since that time I've written over twenty books under my own name or ghost written, and I have to tell you that of them all, this little fishing guide has been my most consistent seller, and has remained in print the longest of any title. To say that I made a good choice in first writing this book is an understatement! I also quite enjoyed revisiting the old text, seeing what worked and what didn't, adding new advice, and updating the lake information. It caused me to recall quite vividly why I fell in love with the Canoe Country in the first place, and why it continues to draw me back each year. Today I find the portages a bit steeper and the packs a bit heavier than I did a few decades ago, but despite the increased aches and pains, there has never been a canoe trip I've regretted taking, nor has my passion to visit new lakes diminished. The Canoe Country is an enchanting mistress!

The longevity of this book probably shouldn't come as a surprise. The Canoe Country is a popular destination, and the U.S. side -- the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness -- is the most visited wilderness in the federal system. It has long stirred the imagination of anglers and canoeists, and will do so for years to come. Every year, new visitors plan their first trip, and in doing so, wonder how to fish the wilderness. Even experienced anglers find that fishing

by canoe, in a remote area, presents challenges with which they are unfamiliar, or want to know what is in a particular lake, and so find this book of great use. For all those reasons, this little book has stayed in print for a nearly a quarter of a century! Amazing.

If you are purchasing this book, thank you. I hope you find it useful, informative, and well written. I also hope that you have a wonderful canoe trip.

Just a reminder – the wilderness is fragile. Please respect it, its fish and wildlife, and the other visitors you encounter. Given just a little care, we can preserve the wilderness, and the wilderness experience, for generations to come.

Michael Furtman  
February 2008







# When And Where To Go

## Timing Is Everything -- For Anglers

The canoe country of the Boundary Waters and Quetico offers some of the finest angling anywhere. One of the great benefits of this area's wilderness designation is that the lakes receive relatively low angling pressure, and few people pack fish out, preferring to keep just a few for meals while on their adventure.

Because of this, fish populations are healthy, but it doesn't mean that they exactly jump into your canoe or boat. Like angling anywhere, timing is everything, and to enjoy the best results, anglers should fish for the right species during the right month.

Ice-out in the Canoe Country is about the first week of May, at least in an average year, and Minnesota's fishing season opens shortly thereafter. If you're headed into the Quetico for early lake trout, you need not worry about when the season opens. While walleyes will still be off limits, lake trout can be legally taken in Ontario as soon as the ice is out.

Whether you're in the BWCAW or Quetico, once the walleye seasons are open, the majority of anglers will be chasing walleyes. But as far as I'm concerned, the best angling in the Canoe Country in May is for lake trout.

At no other time of the year will lakers be so easy to catch. Sensitive to both light and temperature, these fish dive toward the bottom as waters warm and days lengthen. But during May, and even into June during some cool years, anglers can expect to catch lakers in the shallows, from the surface to twenty feet deep. Contrast this to July and August, when the trout plunge to forty feet or more in depth.





# What to Take With You and Why

Going into the Canoe Country without a fishing rod would be like going on your honeymoon without your new spouse. It might still be enjoyable, but not nearly so. Yet every year I see people on the portages, tramping by under their bug nets, with no rod in sight. Some may choose to forgo fishing because of a sincere lack of interest. Therapy can help these sad folks. Others may not know what to bring or be unsure of how, when or where to fish the wilderness. They should buy this book.

I will admit that when this book came out, now over two decades ago, I got a few angry letters (that was pre-email!) from folks who thought that I was being overly hard on those who had no interest in fishing. Maybe I was. It struck me as interesting, though, that apparently those who had no interest in fishing were reading a fishing book or they'd have no idea that I'd penned those words. Oh well. I learned long ago that there are plenty of critics in this world.

If you ARE interested in learning to fish the canoe country, you'll find that fishing these beautiful northwoods lakes does not require a large investment in equipment. If you are an absolute novice, this book will give you all the information you'll need to catch fish. If you are an experienced angler, and fish for the same or similar fish at home, chances are you already have most of the stuff you'll need. The trick for you is to learn what to haul along, what you must have, especially if you are unfamiliar with this area. There are no bait shops in the interior. What is in your pack when you enter will have to serve throughout the trip.

It pays then, to give your tackle needs some serious consideration before you leave home. A little homework can save you consternation in the field. Invariably you will find that you could have used a few more of this and a lot less of that. Remember, you are not fishing from a bass boat





# Wilderness Walleyes

The most sought after fish in Minnesota, the walleye is equally popular within the Boundary Waters. The largest member of the perch family, it is not pursued because of any legendary fighting prowess. The most fighting involved with walleyes is who is going to get the last fillet from the frying pan. For this is the real basis of the walleye's popularity, it is delectable dinner fare.

Not that some aren't respectable on the end of a rod. It's just that they aren't very memorable either. Many a big walleye has been mistaken for a snag being retrieved from the bottom, much to the surprise of the fisherman when he sees those big, luminous eyes coming up toward him.

I suspect that the rest of their popularity comes from the fact that the average walleye, around a couple of pounds, is fairly easy to catch. True, there are times during the year when catching walleyes can be a downright mystery, but for the most part they are fairly predictable. Consistently catching above average size walleyes is another matter entirely.

This receives a lot of attention by those "pro" anglers and they often raise a lot of hullabaloo while trying to make a science of walleye fishing. You have your backtrolling, oxygen meters, temperature gauges and video sonar. You have your "hawg" walleyes, structure, weedlines and the rest of the terminology. Of course, you have a bass boat with two outboard motors and an electric trolling motor, all of this to catch a meal of walleyes and most of which means diddly-squat for the wilderness canoeing angler.

The truth of the matter is that with a little common sense, the ability to read water, maybe a topographic map of the lake or a portable fish locator, and some basic background on the likes, dislikes and habits of walleyes, you can do a respectable job of catching your dinner.





# Canoe Country Lake Trout

In the north, in the spring, there lives a little stream.

Come summer, it barely flows; and great, gray granite boulders periscope from what little water remains, making passage by canoe nearly impossible.

But in May, this stream flows buoyantly from lake to lake, fed by melting snow. And with it flows our canoe.

Parts of the Boundary Waters are a bit too well-traveled for our tastes, but this route is seldom used. The portages, barely evident, are punctuated by moose tracks, not boot prints; and the lakes connected by this stream are rarely visited. It would not be far from the truth to say that by taking this route, we are seeing country that few human eyes have ever scanned. And we like it that way.

For decades my wife, Mary Jo, and I have chosen this route west of the Gunflint Trail for our first canoe trip of the year. Though it is not an easy route--and is growing more difficult as our bodies age--it holds a charm that offsets the effort.

The creek is part of that charm, for when traveling its hidden course, we feel a deep sense of adventure, of exploration. On the ridges along the creek, dark stands of jack pine climb the hills; and on ridges elsewhere, aspen and birch reach toward the sun.

I recall years when we waded through snow on portages and paddled through windswept channels on lakes black with rotting ice. Other years, spring came early, and the leaves -- and black flies -- had already burst forth by the time we launched our canoe.

But in most years, we find the ice has recently departed, and we must hunt north slopes to find snow -- our natural cooler for perishable foods and fresh fish fillets. Cold nights linger, keeping insects at bay. If we are



Figure 4

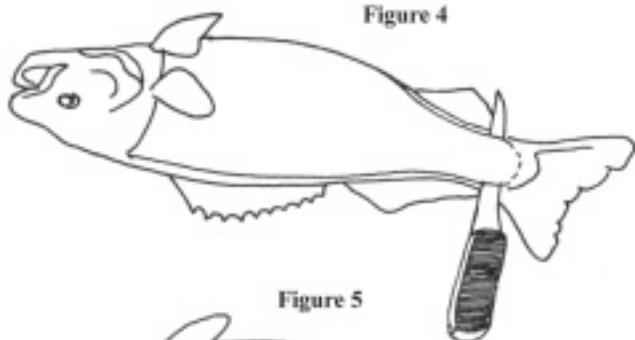


Figure 5

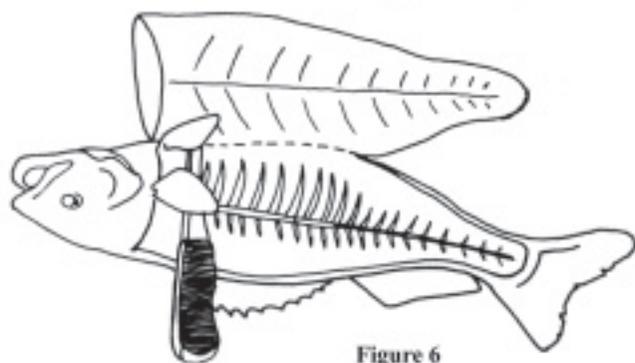
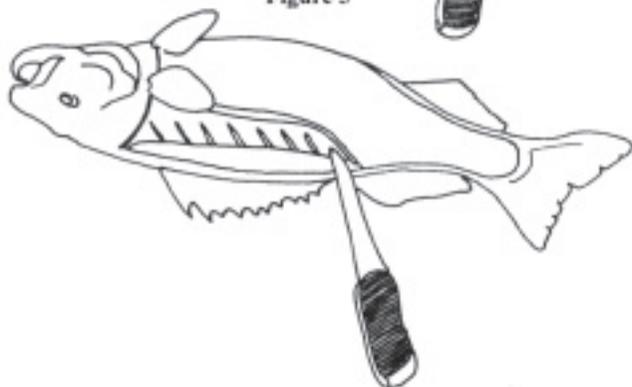


Figure 6



Figure 4 ...and continue back toward the tail with the blade still sliding along the spine. When you get to the tail, cut through the skin.

Figure 5. The meat is still attached to the ribs at this time so go back up to them. Grab the flesh along the back above where the ribs are and gently lift up, as if you were trying to open a book. While lifting, cut the flesh away from the rib cage with light strokes. This should be done with the tip of the blade and care should be taken not to angle it too much. The meat here is thin and easily cut through or wasted so keep that blade against the rib bones.

Figure 6. Once you have sliced the meat away from the ribs, open the fillet up and slice away at the belly line back toward where you already cut through. By removing the fillet from the ribs in this manner, there's less wasted meat, and less wear and tear on your knife's edge.





# Portaging The Permit Path

It used to be that if you were going to get confused on a canoe trip, it happened while charting a course through the maze of aptly named Crooked Lake, or while seeking some seldom-used portage in Quetico Provincial Park.

While those things still may lead to confusion, many visitors to the Canoe Country now find the trip through the permit maze just as confounding. There are also other rules, such as bait restrictions, watercraft and fishing licensing, and border crossing issues to be aware of.

Here's what you need to know about these rules and procedures before venturing out on your next visit to the Boundary Waters or Quetico.

## **BWCAW OR QUETICO?**

The first step in securing the correct permits is to determine your destination. Are you going to the Quetico? To the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW)? Both on the same trip? Will the trip be overnight, or are you taking a day trip? The answers to those questions will begin the process of figuring out just which permits you'll need.

First and foremost, each party needs a permit whenever they enter either wilderness, and permits for the Boundary Waters can not be used in the Quetico, or the reverse. Visitors to the Quetico require a permit from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and visitors to the Boundary Waters require a different permit from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). While the procedures for acquiring these permits from each source are much the same, they are distinctly separate permits. Each wilderness also requires a permit to enter each time you visit, whether or not your party is making a day trip or staying overnight. Keep in mind, however, that day-use permits and overnight permits are not the same thing.



a sturgeon, but the fact remains that they are there, they can grow quite large and are a desirable food fish. Check the fishing regulations, though, to see if you can keep one, as size restrictions do apply.

Each wilderness has its own lake index. The BWCAW comes first, followed by the Quetico. Lakes in the BWCAW also have the county in which they are found. The three counties in which the BWCAW is located, from west to east, are St. Louis, Lake, and Cook.

Now get out your marker pen, your maps, and have fun planning that next canoe trip!

### KEY

Fish species and abbreviations:

- BC – Black Crappie
- BG – Bluegill
- BT – Brook Trout
- LB – Largemouth Bass
- LT – Lake Trout
- M – Muskie
- NP – Northern Pike
- P – Yellow Perch
- RT – Rainbow Trout
- SA – Sauger
- SB – Smallmouth Bass
- SF – Sunfish
- SP – Splake
- ST – Sturgeon
- W – Walleye
- WF – Lake Whitefish
- (—) – no information available

**NOTE:** *If a species is listed in parenthesis (NP?), it means that I had a reliable report of its presence, but it has not been confirmed by lake surveys or my own personal experience.*



Lake Name	County	Acres	Max. Depth	Species
Abinodji	L	39	33	NP
Abita	C	102	14	P
Ada	C	28	13	NP
Adams	L	590	84	BG, NP, W, WF
Adventure	L	51	9	NP, W
Afton	L	50	-	NP
Agamok	L	113	29	NP
Agawato	ST. L	39	58	NP, P
Agnes	ST. L	1,069	30	NP, P, SA, SB, W
Ahmakose	L	49	68	LT
Ahsub	L	58	78	BT, SB
Alder	C	506	72	LT, NP, SB, W
Alice	L	1,556	53	BG, NP, W, WF
Allen	C	49	12	SB, NP, P, W
Alpine	C	839	65	SB, NP, W, WF
Alruss	ST. L	28	48	BT
Alsike	L	30	16	NONE
Alton	C	1,039	72	SB, NP, W
Alworth	L	203	33	NP, P, W
Amber	L	135	27	BG, NP, P, W
Amini	L	23	-	--
Amoeber	L	386	110	SB, LT, W
Angleworm	ST. L	144	11	NP, P, W
Anit	L	12	19	NP
Annie	L	18	16	NP, SF, WF
Arch	ST. L	49	-	--
Arkose	L	21	37	P, SF
Arrow (North)	L	13	-	NP
Arrow (Mid.)	L	31	6	NP, P



- Contains updated indexes to nearly every lake in the Canoe Country listing fish species present.
- Sound advice on fishing gear and tactics for beginner and expert.
- New chapters on route planning, advice on choosing the BWCAW or Quetico, and obtaining permits.
- Best times of year to fish each species.
- Specialized techniques for angling Canadian Shield lakes!



Author Michael Furtman with a fine Canoe Country lake trout.



The long awaited update of Furtman's original A Boundary Waters Fishing Guide, *The New Boundary Waters And Quetico Fishing Guide* is for those who dream of fishing the twin wilderness areas.

Hundreds of changes to the heart of the book -- the indexes to the fish found in nearly every lake in both wilderness areas -- and two new chapters means that this book is a must even for those who own the original. Each major fish species gets its own chapter on techniques and tackle. Whether you're an experience angler, but have never fished these remote Canadian Shield lakes, or a complete novice, the information in this book practically guarantees fresh fish dinners!

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