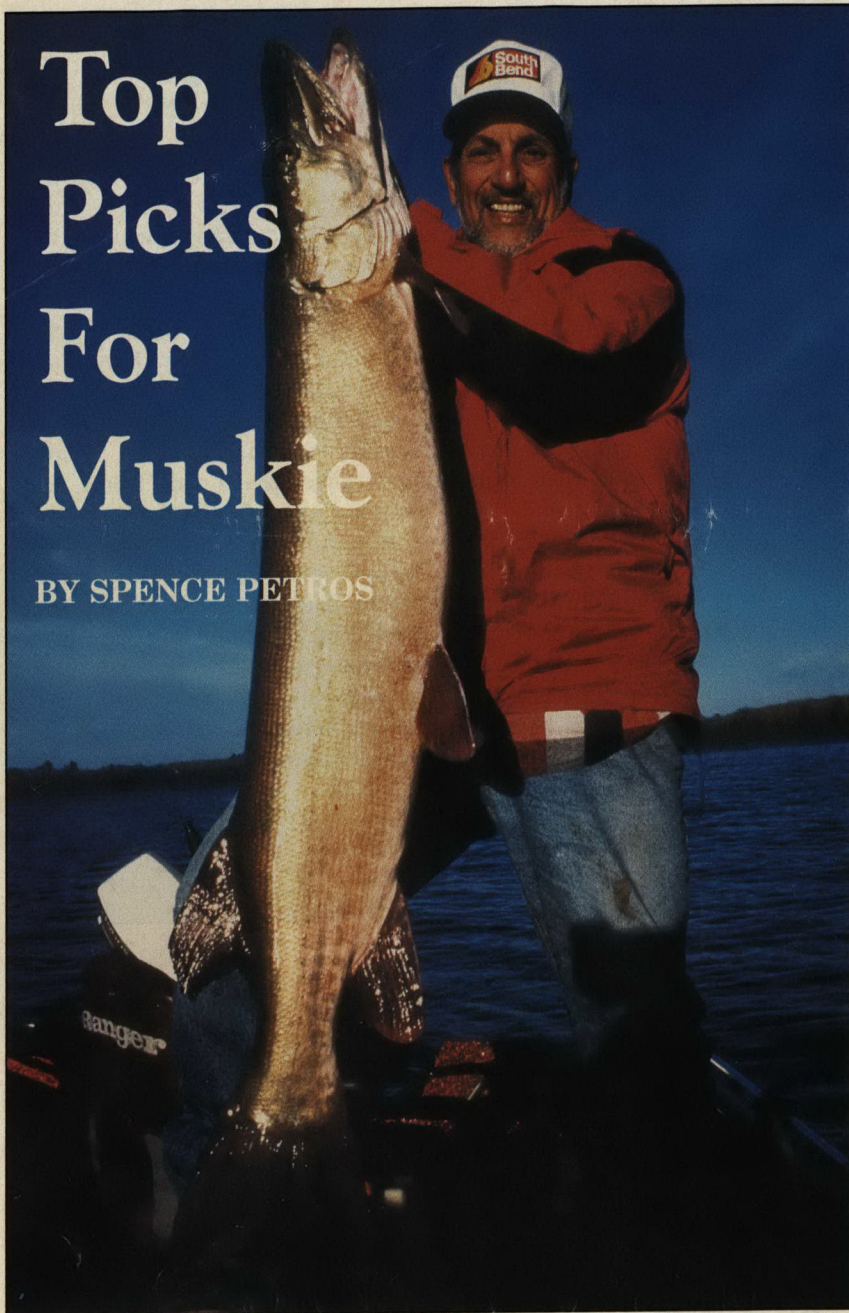


Top Picks For Muskie

BY SPENCE PETROS



It seems like every body of water has at least a story or two about some giant muskie that lives there. It doesn't matter if the lake is 300 or 30,000 acres, a monster or two almost always exists. But putting all the hype and ignorance aside, where are the truly great muskie waters in North America? Here are some of my picks.

LAKE OF THE WOODS, MINNESOTA/ONTARIO BORDER

This sprawling, fish-filled lake is about as good as it gets. I like the west side, coming in through

Warroad, Minnesota. It has darker water and plenty of big fish in shallower water. Fish bucktails over the weeds earlier in the season, starting in the back of bays and working toward the points. Don't neglect shallower "slop" bays. Look for patterns to develop. In early July, rocky areas begin to turn on as do smaller weed areas near deep water. Add top-waters to your list of lures. If you locate a large muskie refish the spot with a topwater early or late. Also have a Lindy Tiger Tube rigged to toss back at followers. When the bloom begins to set in August, use brighter colored lures and fish a little slower. In late summer/early fall,

make sure your lures cover the edges and drops of the structures. From October on troll eight- to 14-foot depths along fast-breaking edges with Grandmas, Jakes, Lindy Big Ms, and Depth Raiders. In the last seven years, I fished here 58 days in the fall and we (one boat) have bagged 167 muskie. Almost 200 muskie over 40 inches and 19 over 50 registered at Monument Bay last year. One hundred ninety-three were caught at our one week Musky Hunter school in July. We generally stay at Monument Bay Resort, but drop in on Bill Sandy at Blackhawk Island for a day or two. Contact—Lynn or Jim Kayfes, Monument Bay Resort, 807-543-4002; Bill Sandy 218-689-3852 or 386-1099.

NIAGARA RIVER, NEW YORK/ONTARIO

Niagara Falls is noted as a honeymoon hot spot, but the 33 mile long Niagara River, is also red hot for muskie. Trolling upcurrent with crankbaits use to be the rule, but since zebra mussels cleaned up the water, trolling downcurrent over 20-30 foot depths produces best. The upper river is more productive, but the lower river also holds plenty of muskie. The mouth of the river where it goes into Lake Erie can be as good as it gets for giant muskie. It's especially productive on opening week if the water is 60 degrees or lower, and during the last part of the season which has been lengthened in 2003. Big fish catches have sky rocketed in recent years due to a strong catch and release program. There's a lot more 25-30 pound fish! The Niagara exceeds the national average for time in catching a muskie—only four to six hours per fish. The river mouth will produce 40-50 pound muskie this fall, especially with the later season.

Contact—Capt. Larry Jones 716-432-8198; Capt. Tom Slomka 716-871-9185; Dicks Sporting Goods, (several) 716-685-5720; Rainbow Sports, Tonawanda, N.Y. (716) 692-7510; Gander Mountain in Tonawanda, N.Y.

GEORGIAN BAY, ONTARIO

This giant bay off Lake Huron is the best bet for the next world

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record. Most anglers troll, concentrating on the 20-40 foot depths along the edges of shelves and funnel areas that come out of deep water.

Guide Jody Mills fishes the whole southeast section of the giant bay following the hot bite and seasonal movements of the fish. He splits up casting and trolling about 50/50, and may even night fish. In 2001, he had a fat 56-incher that weighted over 50 pounds, and a 49-inch hybrid in 2000. Every year he has numerous fish over 50 inches for his clients. Best summer trolling speeds are usually five to six mph. Most big muskie are caught by working shoals that come out of deep water and top out at the 25-30 foot level. Wire line, and BIG crankbaits are commonly used. Knowledgeable casters can also do well, on top waters retrieved over weed-coated, off-shore structures. Contact—Jody Mills, (705) 375-1826; www.canadavmall.com/Jody.

LAKE ST. CLAIR, MICHIGAN/ONTARIO

The best fishing occurs from mid June through the end of August—it's streaky after that. Mostly a trolling bite using multiple rods, with some lures within a few feet of the churning motor works well. Believers, Swim Wizz, T-3 Terminators, are some of the favorite lures of Guide Don Miller, who puts hundreds of good-sized muskie in his boat yearly. Every year this lake gets better due to strong catch and release ethics. It's not uncommon to catch five or more muskie per day, with good days producing double digit catches!

Troll smaller lures early and in clearer waters, then go to bigger lures as the waters warm. Troll to six mph in summer, four to 4-1/2 mph in fall. "Dumping grounds" are hot mid June to later July. The shipping canal is best in later summer and fall. Under clear, sunny conditions use silver, chrome or white. Try perch or fire tiger in dingy water or on cloudy days. Water color changes at river mouths can also pay off.

Contact—Don Miller 734-429-9551, one of the best out there and he will take up to four anglers in



the boat. Going into Canada waters for a day is a great option.

EAGLE LAKE, ONTARIO

The east portion of this lake is recommended for most consistent results. Two 60-pounders have been caught there. Water color gets darker around Stanton Island and southward giving you a better chance at success. All conventional methods can be tried based on structural elements and wind, but also try trolling jerkbaits or spinnerbaits over big wind-swept weed beds (Exp.—Windigo Island, north). I take a bus trip up there every year near the end of July where lots of walleye and pike are caught. I mostly fish for muskie and generally average about one fish per day in the boat. In the eight years I've been going to North Shore, we generally have two to six big fish hit per trip (my boat). Big fish being 48 inches or longer or heavier than 30 pounds. It's the nicest resort on the lake, super clean, excellent boats, and good food. I have caught 40-pounders in '01, '02 and '03.

Contact—Darryll Andreason, North Shore Lodge, 1-800-976-9779 for general info, or to get on one of my bus trips, www.northshorelod-geontario.com.

CAVE RUN, KENTUCKY

Looking for a muskie hot spot in March-May and after Halloween? Cave Run reservoir is the place.

As the waters begin to warm in early March get into the wooded back ends of the "hollers" (coves) with spinnerbaits, slow gliding jerkbaits, and twitch baits. The sharper breaking cove banks are fished next with jerkbaits and cranks, with the fish ending up on points in May. If the fish aren't up, troll the edge of



the channel. When the water hits 70 degrees or warmer, crankbaits produce best. Trolling the main lake is the best summertime tactic, but locals don't do much of this because they believe it stresses the fish too much.

Muskie head back into the coves in mid September, migrating out to deep main lake points as the water cools into the 50s.

Contact—For an excellent resort with A-frame cabins and good guides contact Cave Run lodging, 606-783-1234 or 1-888-276-8759. Also try guide "Crash" Mullins at 606-286-6305.

WINNIPEG RIVER, ONTARIO

This river in Northwest Ontario, about 15 miles from Minacki, has been a bit of a sleeper. But some anglers know it holds more than a marginal muskie population. The river forms a series of lakes connected by channels, which also holds muskie. Some lakes such as Little Sand, Gun and Pistol have stained water, while the northernmost lake, Big Sand, is gin clear. The area has lots of 45-50 inch fish

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with 10-12 muskie boated per trip not uncommon. Play water color and structure to correspond with existing weather and water conditions.

Contact—John Hazelett, Rough Rock Lodge, 807-224-3403 (summer) or at 319-359-9507 (winter).

LAC SEUL, ONTARIO

During June, July and August this massive dark water lake has about as good weed fishing as there is for big muskie. And the weeds are shallow—less than seven feet. Fish can also be caught on the rocks in summer, but the rock fishing really starts in September.

Savvy summer anglers often target a big fish or two at dusk, or work it after dark. It's a good strategy when staying in a houseboat or traveling after dark with a GPS unit.

Contacts—Gary Hyslop, Floating Lodges, 807-582-3284; Lac Seul Outposts 1-800-576-4775.

UPPER FRENCH RIVER, ONTARIO

Productive patterns shift on this river, that pours into Georgian Bay, like the current. Rocky structures in the main channel are favorite areas when the water is rising, but weeds near deep water are muskie magnets when the levels drop.

The best times for big fish are the full moon periods in August, September and October. Art Barefoot, who caught a 59-pound, 11-ounce muskie here in 1990, says casting bucktails is the best summer tactic, while trolling is tops in fall.

Contact—Art Barefoot, Bears Den Lodge, 705-857-2757.

ROWAN LAKE, ONTARIO

Nielsen's resort on Rowan has been owned and operated by hard-core muskie fisherman Don Pursch since 1987. He is always willing to help his guests catch muskie. You can only fly a float plane into Rowan, which keeps fishing pressure low, which results in plenty of available big fish. Both American plan and housekeeping cabins are available.

All the standard muskie presentations and strategies work here. There are a wide variety of conditions to fish, including some connecting waters that also harbor some giants. Call Don at 1-800-653-5946 (winter) or 1-807-226-1234 (summer).

For more information on Spence's classes and trips log on to his website—www.spencepetros.com.