

JUNE 1995

\$1.00



Woods-N-Water News

Michigan's Premier Outdoor Publication

Black Bear Hunting:

No Dogs, No Baiting?

Fishing:

**Walleye, Muskie, Brown Trout,
Bass and Trophy Carp?**

■ **Free Fishing Weekend: Take a Friend Fishing June 10-11**

■ **Slobs Trashing Forests**

■ **Infant Antlers**

Fast trolling for big muskie . . .

By George Richey

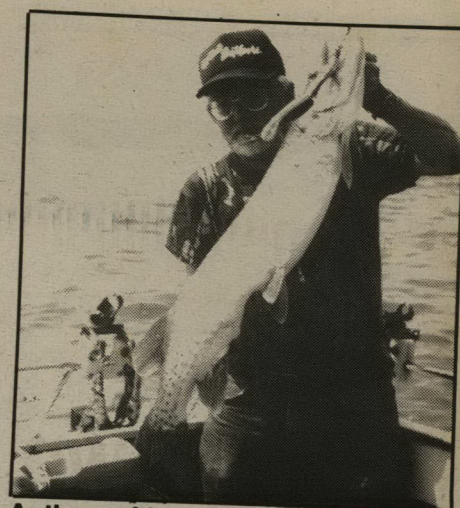
We began setting lures and it seemed like we were flying across the water. "How fast are we trolling," I asked Captain Don Miller as we sliced through the water. "I normally troll about 5.5 miles per hour. I may slow down a bit if the water is churned and dirty, and kick up the speed some when the water is clear. This way, a muskie has just enough time to react to the lure coming over the top of him and grab it," he said. Besides, this speed allows Miller to show lures to more

chartered Don landed 163 muskie out of 211 opportunities. That's excellent fishing for these big fish. He won't let fishermen keep muskies shorter than 45 inches (minimum size is 42") and prefer that fish near the 30 pound mark be kept if someone wants one for a wall mount. In 1994, he had 15 Michigan DNR Master Angler fish landed last year with a minimum of 45" or 20 pound

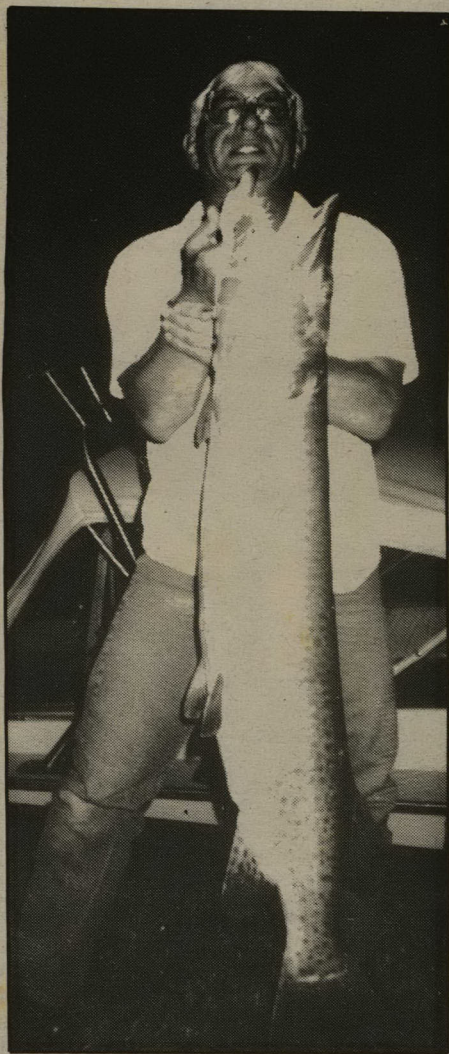
fish. Many of these fish were released. His largest muskie landed in 1994 was a trophy sized 30 pound 2 ounce fish.

I asked Don why the speed was so fast. He responded, "you can present a lure to a muskie slowly, and it gives them too much time to follow or reject the lure. With the

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Author with a 44 inch, 22 pound muskie taken on a rainbow colored Believer Plug.



Captain Don Miller of Saline, with a 36 pound trophy muskie. Photo by George Richey

fish during the day by covering more water.

It has long been thought that a muskie is a once in a lifetime fish, but Captain Miller's records show that he is able to consistently put anglers into good numbers of fish. "I learned much of my muskie fishing techniques from the late and great Captain Homer LeBlanc. He was a stern instructor, but he wanted me to learn to fish muskie the proper way," Don said.

A year ago, the anglers that

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faster speed, the muskie has to make up its mind instantly to grab the lure and they do it so viciously, that the hook setting ratio is vastly improved over the slower speeds. You simply can't pull a plug away from a muskie at our normal 5.5 miles per hour boat speed. Running the lures close to the boat was part of Homer's strategy, and it's proven itself many times over. The muskie is fearless."

Muskie season opens June 3, and probably the best time as far as numbers of muskie caught would be the end of June through Labor Day. August often produces the bigger fish. The weather is hot, the water temperatures are warm and the muskie are actively feeding and respond well to a fast trolled plug or spoon.

"We often troll in 17 to 20 feet of water and the weed growth will come to within six to eight feet of the surface, and the muskie lay in ambush in the weeds. As the lure wiggles past the muskie, they can slant upwards out of the weeds with their famous burst of speed and attack the plug or a hapless perch," the Skipper told me.

He runs quite a few plugs, including the wooden Mason and

Gotscha lures made in St. Clair Shores, the Swim Whizz lure originated by Homer LeBlanc and the Believer which is very similar, as well as the occasional old-time Creek Chub Pikie minnow. In fact, last year, I landed a good sized muskie on one.

My largest muskie taken with Don Miller hit a Rainbow colored Believer plug, and pulled the scales down to 22 pounds and measured 44 inches. It wasn't heavy enough to warrant my keeping the fish, although it was of legal size. I shot a couple pictures of the fish, and then I quickly released the fish.

Don told me, "Since the catch and release ethic took hold on Lake St. Clair, the average size of the muskie has grown. Muskie fishing has vastly improved in the past 20 years. A fish of 15 to 20 pounds was a good fish back then, and now with many fish being released and caught again, the elusive 30 pound fish are relatively common place catch today," Captain Miller told us.

The muskie can live up to 30 to 35 years, and often weight a pound or a bit more per year of age. With more and more anglers catching and releasing muskie, these fish have been caught several times, but they

aren't afraid of anything, and will attack almost anything smaller than themselves. They are a extremely hardy fish, most fish will be able to withstand the rigors of being caught, provided they are released quickly, and not held out of water for minutes while someone tries to focus a camera. If the fish can be landed, a quick "hero" shot taken, and released inside a minute, that muskie should be in good shape.

Our most recent trip with Captain Miller further established the fact that he is probably the top muskie charter skipper operating on the Great Lakes today. We finished up our day landing four muskie out of four fish on. The heaviest was a 22 pound fish, and the other three fish were just under legal size.

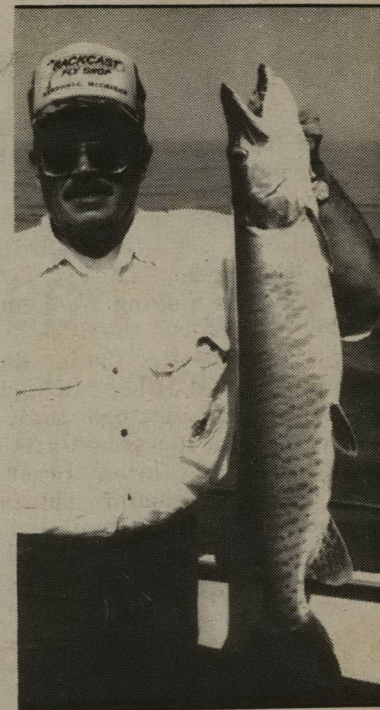
Another prime time for big fish is in late September, and October often will produce some big fish. There won't be the numbers of fish on the line as there can be in June and July, but the chance for a big fish is always there. In fact, the largest muskie Don ever caught was taken in October, and the fish measured 54 inches and weighed in just over 40 pounds.

Don Miller has been a muskie guide for over 20 years, and he learned from the best, Homer LeBlanc. Homer was world famous as a muskie guide, as well as fishing lure manufacturer. Homer originated the Swim Whizz lure which was first made from wood and now made of plastic. He also made the Swim Zag spoon, and the 4B spinner. "Homer was the last of the great guides, and he knew Lake St. Clair intimately. Most of my customers are catching fish, using the same techniques Homer taught me," Don said.

Don is quick to let everyone know that all he's doing is passing on the same knowledge that Homer taught him. "About the only thing I do different than what I learned from the master is using plugs off a planer board, which allows the baits to run well to the sides of the boat. This allows me to use the close to the boat techniques, the 'down' rod and lure running close to the corner of the boat," he said. My last trip with Don resulted in three of the four fish landed coming off the "down" rod.

Don organized the First Homer LeBlanc Muskie Classic on Lake St. Clair which was held in September of 1993. This tournament usually produces some king-size muskie taken. Many of the fishermen are members of the Michigan-Ontario Muskie Club, and often many of the fish are returned to the lake to continue growing and putting on pounds.

It's hard to describe the thrill of seeing a big muskie boiling up off the corner of the boat. These fish have fire in their eyes, and they are mad. The drags on the reels are set fairly stiff, and a big muskie will peel line off the reels easily. Occa-



Butch Thompson of Honor with a 38 inch muskie, his first. Photo by George Richey

sionally they will jump and that is a sight, seeing a four foot fish in the air.

Captain Don Miller typically runs his charters from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. He charges \$500 per day and will take up to six passengers. For further information on a muskie charter, call (313) 429-9551 or write him at 471 Canterbury Street, Saline, MI 48176.

Depending on the time of year, he will fish either in Michigan waters in June, and usually switches to Canadian waters in July and August. Depending on water color dictates where he will fish. "I learned from Homer to always save a little time so you can troll towards home, rather than running back. Many times, I've had a good fish or two hit on the run home as the charter is winding down," he said.

Don told me, "his best day on muskie was 19 fish, and probably my finest day ever was when we caught nine muskie and 26 wall-eye." He is quick to tell anyone that days like that are rare, but catches of two to four muskie per trip aren't uncommon. He is a class act, and he works hard to get his customers into fish. He also proved that a fast trolling speed works wonders on the lean, mean silver muskie of Lake St. Clair. ■

Michigan's 10th Free Fishing Weekend, June 10-11

By John Robertson
MDNR Fisheries Chief

Anniversaries are always something special. They're definitely cause for celebration. Thus it is with Michigan's Free Fishing Weekend.

This year marks the 10th state observance of the free fishing days. It was back in 1985 that Michigan's Legislature first decreed that, in conjunction with the annual nationwide observance of National Fishing Week, our state should sponsor a weekend each spring when all fish-

ing in state waters would be "free."

Free Fishing Weekend '95 is slated this year for the weekend of June 10-11. The two-day event offers novice and veteran anglers alike the opportunity to fish any of Michigan's public waters without requirement of fishing license or permit. However, all pertinent state game fish regulations and size restrictions remain in force over the weekend.

In addition to the chance for license-free angling, Free Fishing Weekends offer our state's active

sportsmen and women the chance to pass to the non-angling public a most special gift — the lesson of "conservation ethics" learned through angling. When I speak of conservation ethics, I'm talking about the process of developing a level of respect both for Michigan's many natural resources and for other persons as well.

The conservation ethics, as I use the term, acknowledges the importance of self-respect and, additionally, offers important lessons in assuming ultimate responsibility for one's own actions. It also means learning about the proper stewardship of Michigan's wealth of resources and about making a lifetime commitment to clean water, air, soil and healthy critters.

The fact that many modern day Michiganders are all but cut off from the natural world makes the conservation ethic lessons to be learned through angling all the more important. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the state Natural Resources Commission have each pledged to do their utmost in furthering the conservation ethic among our state's populace.

During the Free Fishing Days of the preceding nine years, event

sponsors have been able to offer literally hundreds of fishing workshops, clinics and derbies in locations throughout the state. State conservation and fishing groups, along with 4-H organizations, community recreation programs, businesses and the DNR itself, are among those who regularly hold such events on or around Free Fishing Weekend.

Fishing clinics usually center around the needs of non-angling youth, families and novice anglers, but may also target senior citizens and the handicapped. Sometimes, a more experienced angler will encourage his or her club or community organization to sponsor a Free Fishing event in order to share the joy found in fishing. Other times, that angler will independently share his or her angling skills by leading novice anglers on a fishing excursion. Either way, ideally the conservation ethic so inherent to fishing is passed on.

If you or your organization would like to hold an event such as a clinic or workshop next year (or even later this summer), please contact the DNR Fisheries Division, Box 30446, Lansing, MI 48909. Telephone (517) 373-1280. ■

State Parks to host 'take a friend fishing' clinics

There's every reason to try fishing at Michigan State Parks this summer. Expert anglers and Department of Natural Resources staff will help individuals and families learn how to fish and sharpen their fishing skills during "Take a Friend Fishing" clinics hosted at 14 state parks beginning June 12.

"This program is an exciting effort to introduce people of all ages to fishing and the great outdoors," DNR Director Roland Harnes said. "In addition, it is a fantastic way to introduce children to fishing — a sport that can be enjoyed for a lifetime."

"Take a Friend Fishing" clinics include weekday evening and weekend-long activities at selected parks. The program is a partnership between DNR Fisheries and Parks and Recreation Divisions, Michigan Tackle Manufacturers, Michigan United Conservation Clubs and Michigan State University.

Weekday clinics will be held in 10 state parks in southern Michigan between June 12 and August 18. All weekday clinics begin at 6:30 p.m. Reservations are not required. Weekday fishing clinics are scheduled at the following state parks:

- Mondays: Fort Custer Recreation Area, Augusta (616) 731-4200; Maybury State Park, Northville (810) 349-8390.

- Tuesdays: Ionia Recreation Area,

Eight weekend-long fishing clinics will provide more extensive instruction and hands-on experience. The weekend-long clinics begin Fridays at 8 p.m. and end Sundays at noon. For each clinic, registration is Friday; weekend activities include learning the basics of fishing, receiving training by expert anglers and practicing newly-learned skills. Saturday night will feature discussion on the state's fishery management program around a campfire. Other activities will vary depending on the park. Reservations are encouraged, as weekend clinics are limited to 100 people each. Participants do not have to attend all three day's activities. People can extend their outdoor experience by camping at the park as space permits. Weekend-long fishing clinics are scheduled at the following state parks:

- June 16-18, Muskegon State Park, North Muskegon (616) 744-3480.

- June 23-25, Fort Custer Recreation Area, Augusta (616) 731-4200.

- July 7-9, Muskallonge Lake State Park, Newberry (906) 658-3338.

- July 14-16, Lake Gogebic State Park, Marenisco (906) 842-3341.

- July 21-23, Sleepy Hollow State Park, Laingsburg (517) 651-6217.

- August 11-13, Rifle River Recreation Area, Lupton (517) 473-2258.

- August 18-20, Tawas Point State Park, East Tawas (517) 362-5041.

Participants in all "Take a Friend Fishing" clinics should bring their own fishing equipment; a limited supply of fishing rods will be available. Individuals 17 years and older must purchase a fishing license before arriving at the park. Motor vehicle permits are required to enter Michigan State Parks and can be purchased at any state park entrance.

For more information on a specific "Take a Friend Fishing" clinic, call the state park where the clinic will be held. ■