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Woods-N-Water News



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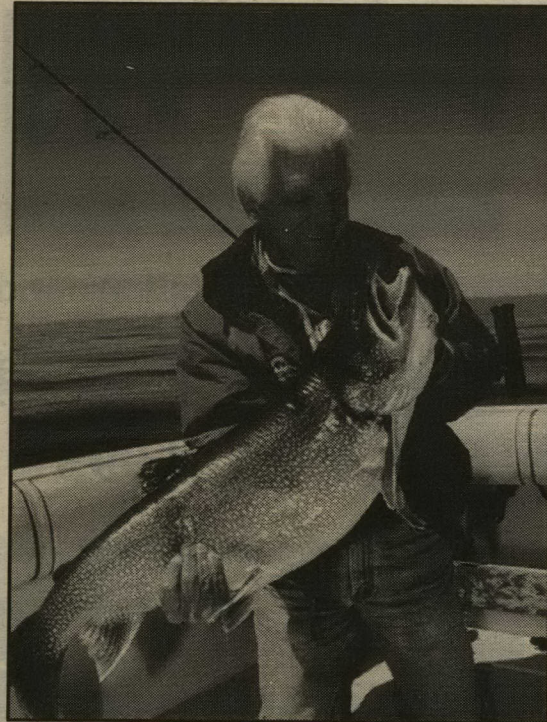
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The Cover...



Stannard Rock in Michigan's Lake Superior is not only known for producing numbers of lake trout, but trout of mythical proportions. Last July Larry Alexander was fortunate to slay one of the dragons that have made Stannard Rock legendary - this 29 pounder. Be sure to read Mike Gnatkowski's Stannard Rock Lakers story on page 26.

Photo by Mike Gnatkowski

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The growing legend of muskies and Capt. Miller

By George Richey

The white-haired skipper was setting line as we motored across Lake St. Clair. I've heard of zip-trolling, and we were zipping along.

"How come so fast?" I asked Captain Don Miller of Saline, Michigan.

He continued setting lines as he answered my question. "We usually troll about 5.5 miles per hour under normal conditions. When the water is dirty or churned up, I may slow a bit, and pick up speed as the water clears. A muskie has just a fraction of a second to react when the lure comes swimming over him and strikes are ferocious," he said.

The fast trolling speed allows him to present lures to more muskie each day.

His reputation is growing. He learned his muskie fishing tricks from Lake St. Clair legend Captain Homer LeBlanc.

"Homer was a wonderful skipper, always full of info and some-



times stern, but he taught me the right way to catch a muskie. He told me that a muskie is afraid of nothing, and his technique of fishing close to the boat works. The propeller draws the fish in close, and

muskie hit right in the prop wash," said Miller.

During our trip, we hit a big muskie that ripped line out on me. I could feel the fish pounding at the end of the line, but I never got the fish close to the boat. Another muskie, showing no fear, hit our "down" rod which had a blue frog T-3 Terminator plug running five feet off the corner of the boat. The fish slammed the bait, boiling up in the prop wash. When landed, it weighed about 15 pounds and was gently released.

Another fish during the same trip hit a frog spot Believer running less than 15 feet off the back of the boat, and this fish was boated as well. The fast trolling speed and closeness to the boat certainly agreed with Don and Homer's theory of aggressiveness, by producing muskie after muskie.

One trip a year ago found us trolling right off the mouth of the Detroit River. Skyscrapers of De-

troit in the background, and lots of perch and walleye boats were anchored nearby. Don steered my buddy Leonard "Butch" Thompson of Honor and myself along the edge of the pack. We didn't see anyone catch any fish, and there probably was a reason. We hit three muskie within 100 yards of many of the boats. The muskie was feeding, and had probably moved right through the pack of boats.

Muskie season opened early June, and according to Miller, "You can catch quantities of muskie in June and July. If you want a trophy fish, later in the season is best. You won't catch as many fish in late August, September or October, but this is prime time for trophy fish. The bigger fish will feed heavily as the water begins to cool, and muskies become eating machines as they put weight on for the winter months.

I've fished several times with

Miller, and caught nine muskie in two trips. My biggest so far has weighed 22 pounds, and measured 44 inches in length. It was returned to Lake St. Clair as were all the rest of the fish we've caught." With perfect reproduction molds available today at good taxidermists, there's no reason to keep many fish. In fact, of all the muskie landed in 1997 on Miller's boat, only three fish were kept.

"Our largest muskie caught in 1997 weighed 38-1/2 pounds and measured an even 50 inches in length. The longest fish was 52 inches, weighing 35-1/2 pounds. Of the 326 muskie caught last year on my boat, 110 to 120 were larger than the 42-inch minimum size lim-

it set by the DNR for Lake St. Clair," Miller said.

Much of the area trolled is in Canadian waters, although at least 1/3 of all the muskie caught last year came from American waters. Seventeen to 20 foot depths where weed growth comes to within five or six feet of the surface is ideal. Don likes to have the plugs running just above the weeds. Muskie lay in ambush along weed edges. This enables them to dart out quickly to seize their prey.

Miller uses mostly wooden lures including the old-time Creek Chub Pikie Minnows, Terminators, Mairson and Gotscha lures, and the plastic Believer plug. Perch colored lures work well on Lake St. Clair, as do pike scale, and the blue frog Terminator color has been hotter than a firecracker. Each lure needs fine tuning, so they run true as the fast trolling speeds. Hooks needs to be honed so they slide in easily.

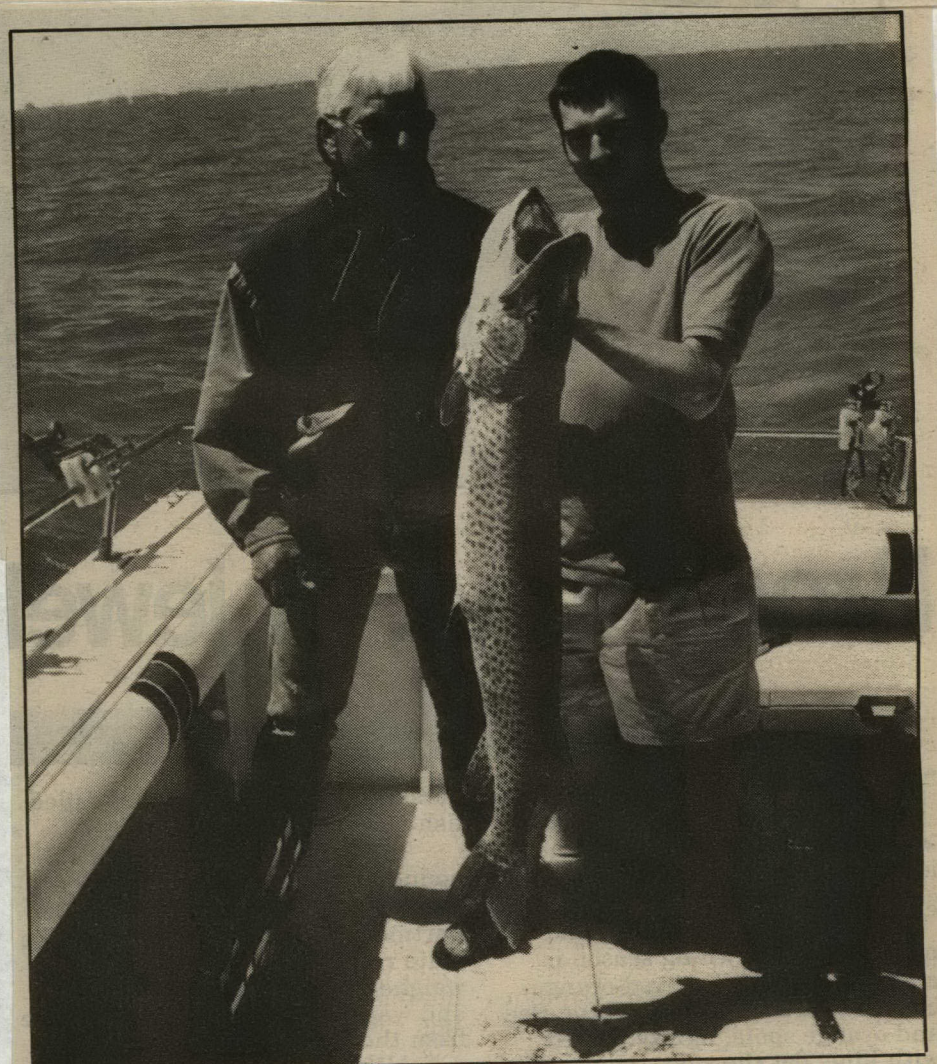
Muskie live to 35 years, and may weigh a pound or a bit more for each year of life. With the catch and release ethic on Lake St. Clair, many fish are tenderly released to fight another angler, another day. You must be careful when releasing fish, leave the muskie in the net and never gaff a muskie you want to put back. Don't put the fish on the floor where they hurt themselves. Ease the hook out and if a picture is to be taken, have the camera ready and snap a couple quick "hero" shots and ease the fish back into the water.

There are still huge muskie in Lake St. Clair, and Captain Miller is certainly one of the top guides in the state. He typically fishes with four to six rods, all positioned to run close to the boat. If enough fishermen are on the boat, he may use planer boards which helps spread out his presentation. It's a huge thrill to see these big black-spotted fish roll up next to the boat and then steam off on a long headed-shaking run.

Miller docks his boat at Miller's Marina at St. Clair Shores near 10 Mile Road. His phone number is (734) 429-9551. Or check the charter directory for others. ■



Don Muchow of Livonia with a 50 inch muskie that weighed 38 pounds.



Michael Vollmyer of Auburn Hills (rt) and Capt. Miller with a 52 1/2 inch, 32 pound muskie.