

Where the Big Ones Are

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photo courtesy of *In Fisherman*
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Looking for the walleye-of-a-lifetime? Here are the top six Canadian hot spots for landing a trophy—complete with angling advice from the pros

1. Lake Erie, Ontario
2. Bay of Quinte, Ontario
3. Lac Seul, Ontario
4. Lake Winnipeg, Manitoba
5. Lake of the Prairies, Manitoba
6. Tobin Lake, Saskatchewan

Canada boasts fantastic walleye fisheries from B.C. to Quebec, but only a handful of lakes, rivers and reservoirs consistently kick out good numbers of brutes weighing eight to 18 pounds. Even on these marquee waters, though, it's important to put yourself in the right place at the right time with the right presentation. So, here's the skinny from the experts on where and when to go, and what to throw.

Lac Seul, Ontario

John Butts is one of only two Canadian walleye anglers to ever win a Professional Walleye Trail tournament. The Dryden, Ontario, native captured first-place honours—and the U.S.\$65,000 purse that goes with it—at the PWT event on the Fox Chain of Lakes in Antioch, Illinois, last year.

He credits fishing Lac Seul, the second largest lake wholly within Ontario, with helping prepare him for the victory. And as a tournament gypsy, Butts gets to sample the entire gamut of North American walleye waters. That makes his assessment of Lac Seul as “one of the best walleye fisheries in the world” all the more meaningful. “It's just so easy to catch so many quality 27-, 28- and 29-inch fish,” In contrast, Butts says the U.S. tournament trail is much tougher. “Down there you're often looking for five bites a day,” he says. “A tournament spot might be where you caught two fish in practice. So it can be hard to refine your presentations and work on details.”

That's hardly the case on Lac Seul. Butts says that catching 100 walleye a day on the 240-kilometre-long reservoir, situated between the northwestern Ontario towns of Ear Falls and Sioux Lookout, is rarely a problem. In fact, he typically carries 10 dozen minnows in his livewell and uses them all up by mid-afternoon.

“Something I learned fishing American reservoirs,” Butts says, “is that walleye love timber. And Lac Seul is full of it in the back bays.” He explains that the best bays have three things in common: they're usually eight feet deep or less; they contain plenty of submerged, standing timber; and they're adjacent to the deep, main-lake basin.

Butts usually starts fishing by making a long cast with a crankbait so he can figure out where the submerged timber is situated. "Most of the tops are broken off," he says, "so they're not visible from the surface. When I catch a walleye, I'll drop anchor and throw a jig-and-slip-bobber combination." Specifically, Butts' choice of baits when jigging for wood walleye is a 1/16-ounce green glow Northland jig with a red hook tipped with a small minnow.

While weeding out early-season wood walleye is Butts' passion, he says the midsummer period is perhaps his favourite on Lac Seul. The weather is ideal and the walleye fishing is explosive. Thanks in part to the reservoir's stained waters, the walleye remain shallow and within easy reach, even in July and August. Visibility is generally five feet or less.

"In the spring, the walleye are more specific from a location perspective," Butts explains, "but in the summer they spread out. The northwest side of the lake, around Scout Bay, is my favourite area." He recommends using a sonar unit to locate underwater reefs and long-tapering points in water five to 20 feet deep.

You'd think that in the stained water a flashy crawler harness would be ideal. And though Butts says you can catch plenty of walleye pulling that combination behind a bottom bouncer, jigs tipped with minnows can't be beat. "I'm not sure why minnows work so well on the lake," he says. "It may be because there are so many smelt in the system. But day in and day out, minnows are usually a better option than leeches and crawlers. Just find a good piece of structure and vertically jig over the side of the boat." he says.

From: Outdoor Canada Magazine Online



Prizewinner: John Butts takes to the podium

PRO TIP

Butts says fishing timber-filled back bays, such as those on Lac Seul, is an early-season pattern that more Canadian anglers should discover.



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