

FLY-IN FISHING



PHOTOS BY LARRY PORTER

Sandy Broadhagen of Dryden, Ontario, has been helping her husband, Rob, operate fishing camps in northern Ontario for more than 25 years. She can fish, too. Here she shows off a 43.5-inch northern pike caught from Makoop Lake while her husband and their dogs, Bo, a yellow Labrador, and Sage, a golden retriever, look on.

WOMEN ON BOARD

Upgraded camps, time away make fishing trips to Canada more attractive

BY LARRY PORTER
WORLD-HERALD
CORRESPONDENT

MAKOOP LAKE, Ontario — Bud and Jean Hill live in Sutherland, a northwest Iowa town less than an hour's drive from Lake Okoboji. But even though they love to fish, you won't ever find them at the popular lake.

"Okoboji isn't geared up for fishing," Jean Hill, 72, said as she stood on a dock at Makoop Lake in northwest Ontario. "It's a little crowded. It's really hard for a fisherman to do much fishing."

Jean took a deep breath of pine-scented air and gazed out across the 28,000-acre lake. Not a single boat was visible, although about 100 yards offshore a pair of loons was teaching their youngsters how to fly. Takeoff required a lengthy running start, and the kids had not yet acquired the knack for liftoff.

"It has to be the fishing," Jean Hill replied when asked what she enjoys the most about a Canadian fly-in fishing trip. "But I love being in the wilderness — the trees and the water. The only thing better than this would be Alaska, where you have the mountains in the background."

Jean is among a growing number of women who are joining their husbands on North Woods lakes.

"Probably 80 percent who take fly-in trips are men," said Sandy Broadhagen, of Dryden, Ontario, who helps her husband, Rob, oversee a hunting operation and a couple of fly-in fishing camps.

If you go

Rob and Sandy Broadhagen of Dryden, Ontario, operate northwest Ontario outposts at Makoop Lake and North Caribou Lake. The Broadhagens can be reached at 807-223-6533 or by e-mail at robs1@shaw.ca.

Like many other fly-in camps, both offer flush toilets, hot and cold running water, and showers.

A satellite system at both camps provides telephone and internet service, which enables anglers to be notified in case of an emergency at home.

Each outpost has a camp manager who, if necessary, will teach anglers how to operate boats and provide a guide service.

Makoop has a strong population of trophy-sized northern pike 40 inches or longer. The lake covers 28,000 acres and is about nine miles long.

"They're not waiting around for anyone to take them. They don't need a man to run the boat. They're going."

Sandy Broadhagen, fish camp operator

"But we're getting more women up here all the time."

"It's more than a trickle. In fact, we're getting women who come with women. A group of 10 or 12 women from Dryden do an outpost trip every year. We're finding that more women are getting into fishing and hunting. They're not waiting around for anyone to take them. They don't need a man to run the boat. They're going."

A key element in the rising number of women at outpost camps is the disappearance of outhouses.

"The biggest change in outposts is indoor toilets and showers," Rob Broadhagen said. "Men used to come home and tell stories about having to walk in the dark to an outhouse 100 yards back in the woods where a bear might get you. Their wives would be scared, and the guys knew they would never ask to go along. But husbands can't tell those stories now."

"Many of the camps in northwest Ontario have been upgraded. At the very least, they have flush toilets in a central part of the camp area. They have hot and cold running water, along with showers."

The Broadhagens manage the Makoop Lake outpost for the Bearskin Reservation. Tribe members helped build the lodge and four cabins, all of which have indoor toilet and shower facilities.

"I really appreciate the indoor bathroom in our cabin," Jean Hill said. "Every other place we've been had an out-

house. I don't like going out in the dark when there are wild things out there."

Several women accompanied their husbands to Makoop in August, and the lake came alive with whoops of excitement each time one of the gals tied into a trophy northern pike.

"I like the fishing, of course," said Almeda McDonnell, 68, of Royal, Iowa, who has accompanied husband Jim to a fly-in outpost for each of the past seven years. "We've always had good fishing wherever we go in Canada. But having a flush toilet and shower right in the cabin makes it much nicer."

The fishing couldn't have been much better. Almeda caught two 44-inch northern pike, along with a 41-inch. She gave much of the credit for her success to her husband, who guides on Lake Okoboji.

"Why wouldn't I like to fish with my husband?" Almeda asked, laughing. "He takes all the fish off for me. And I really don't get to fish with him that often at home because he's guiding. It's great when we come to a place like this."

Sue Brown of Shoreview, Minn., is among only a handful of women who have fished as amateurs on In-Fisherman's Professional Walleye Trail. She was a tournament angler for 15 years, and she and her husband, Tom, a professional angler, still fish together in two-person team tournaments.

"Coming to an outpost is a time of restoration for me," Sue said. "There are no phones, no television, no radio. It's quiet. There are no sounds of cars,

planes, trains or trucks to disturb your sleep at night. Also, the time spent with my husband is wonderful. We can either be quiet or we can talk."

Neither Almeda McDonnell nor Sue Brown is compelled to fish from dawn to dusk every day they are in a fly-in camp.

"I've been known to use a boat cushion for a pillow and take a nap in the boat," Almeda said, laughing. "And I always take a book along. If we're casting for northern pike, I get tired after a couple of hours. Then I read for a half-hour or so before I pick up a rod again."

There were times when the women remained on shore while their husbands yielded to that dawn-to-dusk fishing compulsion.

"I love to read," Sue Brown said. "If you don't feel like fishing, you can stay in. You don't have to go out there if you're tired of fishing or if the weather is nasty. This was a nice trip because a bunch of other gals were in camp. We read and visited. We got to know each other better. Some friendships were forged."

Makoop offers a good population of trophy northern pike that exceed 40 inches.

"I got to know the northern pike a little better on this trip," Sue said, smiling. "I've always been quite scared of them. I think I still am. My longest was 39 inches, but I got to net a 46-inch for my husband."

The main activity in a fly-in camp, aside from fishing, is talking.

"The benefit of an outpost," Rob Broadhagen said, "is how much more deeply we get to know each other. This is not the place to bring up issues of concern. Don't try to solve the world's problems here. Leave that behind. If you do that, the camaraderie among the people in camp will be just as good as the fishing."



Seeing the North Woods wildlife, such as this loon, helps make a fly-in venture a memorable experience.



Sue Brown of Shoreville, Minn., fished in various walleye circuits for 15 years and is among only a handful of women who have fished as amateurs on the Professional Walleye Trail circuit. Here she holds a 23-inch walleye caught at Makoop Lake in northern Ontario.