

The “Ghost Trout” of Whitewater Lake

...Tyler Lancaster

Lake Trout (*Salvelinus namaycush*)

Most people seem to be reluctant to believe that there are actually Lake Trout in Whitewater Lake. And why not, most people have never caught or seen one there. But “most people” excludes those who join us early each spring at Whitewater Lodge.

No one really knows much about these fish (the Whitewater Lake strain that is), their habits, their summer locations, their dietary intake, etc. We do know that they are present in Whitewater and we have seen photographic proof.

Larry Blankenship of Gazewell, Virginia has been fishing Whitewater Lake for almost 25 years and is usually among the first groups to come up each spring. I am not aware of any trout being caught anytime after the earliest stages of spring. Larry has been witness to several catches and also boasted a chunky 14.5 pounder himself some years back. Another member of his fishing group also caught and released respective 18 and 23 pounders in the same day.

They also tell me that while fishing at the Ogoki River inlet right beside the lodge, they have drifted over top of some huge specimens that are just sitting in the swift rapids. Larry let me know that all Trout caught within his group have come on either trolled spoons or trolled crank baits. Not a single Lake Trout has been caught using live bait in the Blankenship group. It seems so strange to me that no one ever catches these trout after the earliest stages of spring. Where do they go? What do they feed on? Of course, anglers would love to add Lake Trout to their itinerary while fishing Whitewater.

This is my theory and I could be wrong. Whitewater Lake is home to only a small population of Lake Trout for many reasons. First and most important is that the deep holes in the lake are few and far between. The rest of the lake stays too warm through the summer to support trout. The numbers of trout that can inhabit these few deep holes is limited due to what we call “carrying capacity”. Imagine a bucket full of minnows, the more you add to it, the less oxygen, the easier the spread of disease, the higher the temps get, and the more competition there is for food. A certain area can only sustain a certain number of fish.

A second major contributing factor in the small population of Lakers is the large number of predatory fish such as Walleye and Pike. These predators influence Laker populations in several ways. They are very aggressive feeders and will always outcompete trout for food. They will also make trout part of their diet. Lake Trout rarely mature before the age of 6 and sometimes not until the age of 12. This is a long time to survive unscathed and make it to the age to reproduce. Imagine trying to evade 40+” pike every day for 6 years. Even when a female does get that far, the mortality rate of her young is very high. And what I believe to be the most influencing factor is spawning time. Both Walleye and Pike are spring spawners while Lake Trout spawn in the fall. During the fall, Pike and

Walleye feed very heavily, trying to fatten up for the winter. Spawning Lake Trout and their eggs/fry make quick and easy meals for these roaming predators.

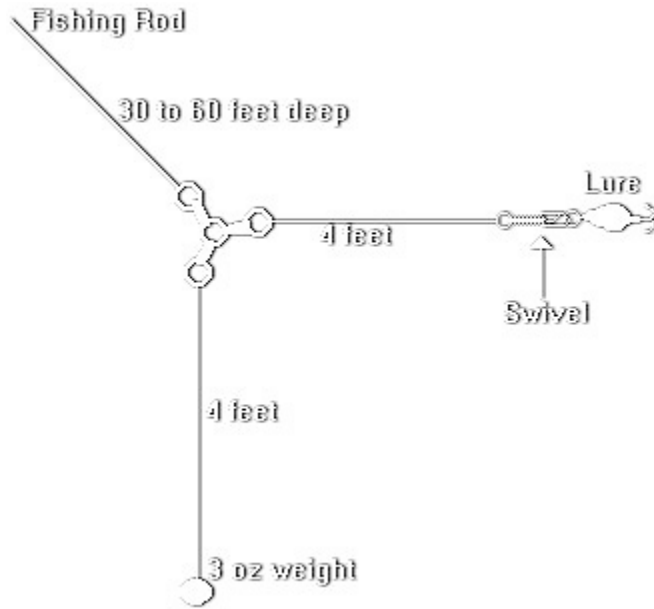
I do believe that there is a large enough population to make some recreational fishing out of. The key to making this happen lies in location, presentation, and offering. In the springtime lakers can be found from 10 foot depths right up to the surface. As soon as the water begins to warm, they will move out to deeper water. Depth finders are essential to locate these holes and also to locate schools of baitfish and or Lakers. Once you find the right spot, I believe a very slow presentation is required. You don't necessarily have to get right down to the bottom, it depends where in the water column the feeder fish are. I'm stumped on what these trout are primarily feeding on. It may very well be Whitefish or suckers. Popular lure choices include silver spoons, white tubes, live minnows, and small spinners in some cases.

IDENTIFICATION: Lake trout are a medium to dark gray or olive color with white worm-like wavy marks on their backs and on top of the head. Occasionally, they have bars or spots along the side mainly tinged with red. Lake trout also are the only trout in Ontario with a deeply forked tail.

RANGE & HABITAT: Lake trout are native to the Great Lakes and prefer deep, coldwater lakes throughout North America. They are usually found offshore in deep, well-oxygenated water.

ADULT SIZE: Lake trout average between 20 and 24 inches and 3 to 6 pounds, but are capable of reaching 50 pounds. Ontario's provincial catch record stands at 63.12 pounds caught in Lake Superior back in 1952. The pending world catch record is an incredible 78.85 pounds which came from Great Bear Lake, N.W.T. The largest specimen ever recorded came from a gill net and weighed a whopping 102 lbs.

Note: that this is the same rig that I described for use with the slow death hook as a walleye rig. Other methods for getting down deep include jet and dippy divers, downrigging, and bottom bouncers.



By using light line, the line has less friction with the water and slices through so that your line goes down to the bottom without having lots of line out. Tie two 4 foot pieces of line to your three-way swivel. Use a 2 oz. weight on one line and a light lure on the other.

Lake Trout like small lures. Use #1 or #0 Mepps or Blue Foxes. The absolute best lure for Lake Trout is the Sutton Silver Spoon. Try to find a 2 inch weightless. Your local bait store will have to order them for you. It's very rare to

see them on the shelf.

Trolling Slow:

You only want to move just fast enough for your lure to work and no faster. If your boat is moving too fast, it will be very hard to find the bottom of the lake. If you are using a boat with a bigger motor and it's hard to keep slow, try back trolling.