

Kentuckians Take up Camp in Canada



By Gary Garth

Bear Lake Wilderness Camp rivals any “Come-to-Canada” vacation literature. The camp, located in Ontario, is perched on a pine-studded island that’s surrounded by miles of pristine water.

More than two dozen lakes dot the surrounding landscape, most of which are a relatively short hike or portage from any of the five cabins on the island. An angler could spend a couple of weeks here and never fish the same lake twice.

The terrain is as rugged as it is remote. Glacier scarred rocks mark the countryside, which is beyond the reach of cell phones and pagers. Some are covered with rugged pine that grudgingly hangs on against the brutal winters. Others remain bare. But the main features of this outdoor paradise are lush hillsides, clear clean fish-stuffed lakes and very few people.

This slice of wilderness is owned by Kim and Bill Drane of Prospect, KY. The Dranes came up as guests and liked what they saw. When the camp came up for sale the Kentuckians purchased the property in 2000.

“We came here and just fell in love with the place,” said Kim Drane. Everything about it is just peaceful and serene. We love it here.”

The Camp is open from May through October.

This is not a plush resort but it is clean and comfortable and outdoorsmen will find everything they need and more. The camp is honed down to the basics: Five rustic cabins, a small lodge, fish cleaning facility, guide cabin, shower facilities, latrines and a fleet of dependable fishing boats.

Trips are typically booked from Saturday to Saturday and barring an emergency a boat only makes the 45 minute trip to the mainland on Saturday for guest pick ups and on Tuesdays for groceries and supplies.

Fishing ranges from unbelievable to fantastic. With more than 25 rarely fished backcountry lakes to choose from the biggest problem visitors have is deciding where to go.

Bear Lake surrounds the camp but the Kim Drane recommends visitors work on one of



the backcountry lakes, many of which are located within Killarney Wilderness Park

The camp has boats cached on 25 of these lakes. A few of the portages are strenuous but most are short and relatively easy. Maps available at the lodge and an adventuresome spirit put most lakes within easy reach of any fishermen in fair physical condition. Guests are required to sign out the remote lake that they intend to fish each day.

“I could tell you about the lakes,” but you need to see for yourself.”

I had planned to start the week at Beaver Lake, which is a short portage from the camp. Guide Ken Luopa said it harbors countless bass with a taste for worms, either freshly dug or artificial.

“When you go to Beaver a lot of stuff will catch fish,” Luopa said. “But be sure to take some plastics.”

The trip to Beaver was briefly postponed when Bob Abella invited me to join his family for the long trip to Gem Lake, one camp's more remote lakes.

"Gem Lake's a pretty long trip in" said Abella. "But it is worth it"

A three-hour trip brought us to a deep, bowl-shaped lake flanked by the La Cloche Mountains. Abella first visited this picturesque spot as youngster and has returned annually for more than 40 years. He has never seen another fisherman here. A brief search with a depth finder put us over what Abella called "the hump"

Dragging and casting watermelon colored 6-inch Riverside worms and purple Plow Jockeys, we sacked a dozen smallmouth bass and a 27-inch northern pike in less than a half hour. The largest bass was three pounds an impressive size considering the short growing season here. A two-pound bass is probably four years old.

After a shore lunch of fried bass with beans and fried potatoes, we concentrated on pike, trolling the canoes over the hump while trailing chrome colored Hot-n-Tots.

"I know some people think you come to Canada and throw a lure into the water and get a fish on every cast," Abella said after helping his 9-year-old nephew release a feisty northern. "And on several lakes here that is nearly true.

Locating fish might pose a problem but fishing pressure is never an issue.



Bob Abella shows off his pike from Gem Lake

"I've been coming here for a long time," Abella said. Sometimes you'll see someone canoeing. But I have never been here when someone else was fishing.

Guided trips at BLWC are available but not really necessary as the portages are well marked and the trails are well maintained. However, it is a wilderness area. Don't expect trail markers every quarter mile. A guide is required for first time visitors to Gem and Burnt Cabin Lakes because of the distance. Both are five to six hour round trips.

However, Like Gem. Burnt Cabin is well worth the three portages, mile long hike, and canoe paddles it took to reach it. The most remote lake accessible from the camp, Burnt Cabin, is tannin stained and loaded with hungry largemouth and saucer size bluegill that rarely see a hook.

"I doubt that any more than two or three dozen people fish this lake a season," said Luopa. "If that many."

I stopped counting at 20 bass have no idea how many we released after that. We collected a sack of bluegills for supper before starting the trip back to camp.

"You probably won't believe it but this was kind of a slow day," Luopa said. Bob Abella who has fished Burnt Cabin as often as any visitor in the 50-year history of the camp added, "That's right. It really was a little bit slower than usual.

If YOU GO:

Bear Lake Wilderness Camp is located approximately 30 miles southeast of Espanola. This is roughly 800 miles from Louisville. The camp is open May through October. Ice out starts around mid April and the lakes are clear by mid May.

Camp rates are \$675 per person for a 7 Day stay (Saturday – Saturday). The price includes a cabin, boat, motor, fuel, and water taxi to and from the camp. Children under 14 are only \$100 and a 10% discount is offered on fishing packages to military, law enforcement and fire fighters.

Cabins include a kitchen with a refrigerator, stove, dishes and utensils, running water, and electric lights. Shower facilities and chemical toilets are on property.

Guests are responsible for their own meals or a meal plan is available at additional cost. Guided fishing trips are available for both the day and half day.

For more information:

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