

**The Lake Winnie Fishing Excursions
From Pine Haven Beach
By Lovern Nauss**

It all started in 1957, at the end of the first Summer Session at Mankato State College. I was a guest instructor to teach in the first Summer Session. As I remember, it was a hot summer. The house we were staying in did not have air conditioning which made living conditions worse for our daughter Sheri, who was bothered with a constant cough. Even the doctors in Mankato did not find a cause for her cough. Thus, we were apprehensive concerning our plan for the next several weeks to come to Long Lake to help Dick White.

Dick was a fellow Industrial Arts teacher in the Austin Public School System and asked me to help him with work he had lined up. Dick was well acquainted along the Pine Haven Beach of Long Lake. His parents, Harold and Delpha White, owned the Pine Haven Resort that included three rental cabins, a convenience store, gas and oil service, plus a large ice-house. When Dick was old enough to deliver ice it was his job and he soon became acquainted with the entire Beach area. Thus, he was asked to repair jobs for the cabin owners. And, this particular summer, he needed additional help with carpentry experience. To facilitate our move he found two cabins we could rent; one was his old cabin and the other was only two cabins away while his new residence was just two cabins beyond that.

The Park Rapids area, and Long Lake in particular, were new to my family although I had been to Dick's cabin for opening fishing season several times. We left Mankato with trepidation, mainly due to Sheri's cough. However, as we approached the pine tree area of Motley, we noticed Sheri's cough was less pronounced and by the time we arrived at Long Lake the cough's frequency had improved still more and continued to do so until it was nearly non-existent! One can easily imagine the relief we felt and the desire to purchase a cabin on Pine Haven Beach - which we did several years later. Actually Dick and Ev's previous cabin became available and we purchased it immediately. And now, to the main story - fishing on Winnie.

The first several years our work crew consisted of Dick, Leo Hoffman and myself. Leo was a former Industrial Arts teacher from Indiana and a resident for many years on Pine Haven Beach. Quite naturally, the conversation of fishing often came up with Dick and Leo mentioning northern pike fishing on Lake Winnie during July. They related some fascinating stories that aroused my desire to participate in the Winnie experience. I tried to persuade Dick to repeat the trek to Winnie but it was not to be this summer; the seed, however, was planted. Leo retired shortly after and Lee Bedsted and family purchased a cabin on Pine Haven Beach. Lee was a former Industrial Arts teacher and counselor, also from Austin and an avid

fisherman. Now there were two of us putting pressure on Dick to take us to Winnie. Dick would remind us that not any day would do; the wind would have to be from the right direction, usually during a warm spell in July. Thus, our daily greeting to Dick was, "Is the wind in the right direction?"

Dick had been a bomber pilot in the Pacific Theater during WWII. Part of his training had been in Meteorology and he kept an eye on his weather gauges daily. The day finally arrived when Dick reported a change coming in the weather and it looked like a good time to fish Winnie. Thus, the beginning of the annual Winnie fishing trip from Pine Haven Beach was launched and it continued for a number of years following. It took on an aura of excitement that permeated over much of the Beach. Some years we had little warning to prepare for the trip while others were less frantic.

When the fishing day was set for us to go, there would be a scramble the evening before to get our fishing gear, life jackets, raincoats (to protect against the water spray while traveling from one point to another at a high speed), and by all means, not to forget to pack lunch! Early in the next morning we loaded the gear in the van including Dick's 25 hp Buckaneer motor and my 6 hp Johnson along with their 6 gallon gas tanks, (the Buckaneer was an Outboard Marine product made from two year old parts of their Johnson and Evenrude lines). The next stop was at the gas pump to be met by Dick's dad. Dick would fill the VW tank and, if needed, the outboard motor tanks while Harold would wish us "good luck". Finally we were on our way to test the waters of famed Lake Winnibigoshish!

For some of us, the first-time trip to Winnie was interesting by itself. We left Pine Haven, turned right on C.R. 6, then a shortcut on the gravel Township road North to MN Hwy 34 and headed East, past the North end of Long Lake and on past Dorset, Past Lake Belletaine and Nevis (huge Musky statue representing Nevis as the Musky capitol of the World)). Next we passed several of the Crow Wing chain of lakes, past Akeley and on to Walker, where we would stop some times at Reeds Tackle & Bait Shop to purchase last minute tackle. We then headed North on Hwy 371 with the expanse of Leech Lake on our right, almost all the way to Cass Lake where we headed East on U.S. Hwy 2. Just we turned the corner, Dick would look at the water surface of the body of water to our right. He was looking for the wave action and its direction of movement. We would be most happy when he said, "looks good"!

We traveled East for a few miles before turning North on a small, sandy road that led to an area of the Chippewa National Forest that had damage from a forest fire some years ago. We noted the recovery process was at work; the small brush, some scrub pine and the fast growing "swamp spruce". After a few miles, we came to

road with signs pointing to several resorts on Winnie, one of which was our destination – McArdle’s Resort. Its location was on the high West bank of where the Mississippi River enters Lake Winnie. The resort looked huge with a variety of cabins of various sizes, a large lodge and the building that housed the office, bait and tackle store, as well as a game room. We rented one of the deep 18’ fishing boats and Dick backed the van on the ramp leading to the docks. The van was unloaded, motors mounted on the boat and all the gear placed in the boat. While Dick parked the van we finished sorting and transferring every thing in the boat. Dick returned, got in the boat and started the 25 hp engine. All the fishing pressure was on him, as our knowledgeable guide!

We moved away from the dock and Dick headed the boat towards the main body of Winnie. We continued at a fairly slow speed as suggested by reading the signs on the shore. The water was reasonably calm here but, as soon as we got into the lake proper, the waves became more pronounced; so much so that we appreciated the deep boat. We began to travel at a brisk rate and grabbed our rain gear to protect us from the wet spray. We headed in a NNE direction, 50-75 yards from the shore. Dick finally found a marker on the shore (Little Rock) and slowed down, at the same time telling us to get our lines in the water, while he trolled around looking for the underwater weed beds that the northern pike liked. After moving farther offshore, someone called out “Weeds”. Within a few minutes someone had a bite. The fish was landed and designated “a keeper”. This weed patch was worked over until we had no more action. Hopefully, we would have landed several more fish at this location.

It was time to move to a new location and once again we headed toward the north end of the lake. We quickly came abreast the “Big Rock”,- Dick’s next location to search for the offshore weed bed. The search ended when one of us had a bite or had seen a glimpse of the weed bed. This area was patrolled until it was determined no more fish or that they were no longer interested in our bait. We would then proceed northward – trolling along the way. A good landing spot was the sandy shore of the “High Bank” area; a good place to stop for our lunch break and stretch our legs. Lunch time was interesting for another reason – Dick’s lunch. Ev would pack a gorgeous lunch, both in quality and quantity and Dick would have to endure a lot of good-natured ribbing!

I do not recall success fishing along the North End of the lake and we never got as far as Cut Foot Sioux, the famous walleye fishing area. Also, it was time to take stock of how much longer to continue fishing on the return trip. The prospect of inclement weather was another factor as the afternoon ‘squalls’ were well known to Winnie fishermen. Quite often we had our limit of northerns by this time and were fishing for ‘size’ now. We found out it was advantageous to have sturdy rope

stringers as opposed to the metal chain stringers with wire snaps. There was a drawback with the metal type as some times one of the snaps would become undone and the fish lost. We found the long handled, larger landing nets worked better in the deep 18' boats to net the large northern pike we anticipated catching.

Our usual plan was to leave the lake by at least 4 p.m. We would be met at the dock by one of the working dock hands. While Dick went up the embankment to bring the van down to be loaded, the rest of us gathered the gear, motors, gas tanks and fish on shore to be loaded in the van. During the latter years there would be several boatloads of fisherman. Some of the participants (beside the three of us) that I recall were Dean Christen, Earl Brooks, Art Carter and sons (Rick and Rob) as well as Joe Grismore and a few of his family members. That reminds me of a time the Carters were with us and young Rob was in our boat. He hooked a nice sized fish and had a difficult time getting it to the boat. When he finally landed the fish we noted that it looked like a pike but it had a light colored body along with some faint stripes. Actually, it was a Silver Musky – a cross between a Northern Pike and a Musky. This is an experience the young lad will remember for the rest of his life.

There would be a lot of bantering between us on the trip back to Long Lake. More often than not, family members would soon be on hand to view the fish. Hopefully there would be several that would produce “ohs and ahs” to the delight of those present. Reality would finally take over and the fish would be taken to the fish cleaning shack of Pine Have Resort. It had an electric light, running water and the screen door offered us protection from the ever-present mosquitos. The cleaning bench was wide enough for two of us to work side-by-side. While the cleaning process was going on, Harold White would recall some of the great fishing of years gone by. The last activity was to give a thorough cleaning, rinsing and brush down of the bench and to discard the entrails. Now we could look forward to enjoying a fish-fry in the very near future and look toward next year's trip to Winnie.