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Rolling on the River

By Don Lamont

Trail End Camp at Pointe du Bois accessible and affordable resort.

POINTE DU BOIS, Man. -- Nestled on a small bay at the start of the Winnipeg River at Pointe du Bois, just two hours from Winnipeg, Trail End Camp is a favourite destination of anglers in the know.

Not only is the fishing great but the place is incredibly affordable, allowing anglers to spend their money on bait and boat gas instead of accommodation and frills.

And there are some 60 kilometres of river open to check out and navigate -- all of it prime fishing waters as you headquarter out of this extremely comfortable and friendly lodge owned and operated by Vance and Maureen Hrechkosy.

Anybody who has ever visited Pointe du Bois and fished the river above the dam will attest to the rugged and wild nature of both the river and the landscape .

There is one drawback. Most of the angling must be done from a boat, although our kids did managed to catch a couple off a dock in front of the cabin in between swims. Trails End Camp has boat rentals or you can hire a seasoned guide to show you the hot spots and cook you a delicious shore lunch.

Vance and his brother Todd agreed to take us up the river on the Saturday of our visit. We loaded the family into my boat and followed them up the river. As we headed up through Lamprey Falls a flood of memories came rushing back.

It was in the early 1980's that I had spent three years navigating this same water as a guide at Eagle Nest Lodge, one of three lodges



Lamont's kids are better fisherman!

on the stretch of water above Lamprey to the Ontario border. While we had some high-water years back then, nothing could compare to the flow coming down this impressive stretch of river this year.

I recommend the stretch of river above this intimidating set of rapids are only for those who know the route. Still that leaves plenty of great fishing below Lamprey Falls. Most of the better fishing, especially for bass and walleye ,happens in this scenic part of the Winnipeg River.

Friend Jim Price, who discovered Trails End during a winter ice fishing trip, had been at the there two weeks earlier. He and a group of friends had some phenomenal fishing for big bass, landing a number of master angler fish in Blind Bay, which is just a short boat ride from Pointe du Bois. While we didn't have a chance to fish this bay on our trip, on our ride up to Eagle Nest, some 32 kilometres from camp, we found walleye everywhere. In fact we caught as many walleye as anyone could hope for and I would have to say it was better than I could remember in my three of years of guiding back in the early 80's.

This section of the river is in Whiteshell Provincial Park and certain guidelines apply. It is a high quality management areas, so all bass must be released. All pike between 75 centimetres and 110 centimetres must go back as well. You are allowed to keep four walleye and pike but the walleye between 40 centimetres and 70 centimetres have to go back. (This is a standard regulation in the area south of the Bloodvein River to south and west shores of the Winnipeg River including Lac du Bonnet, and the southern boundary of the park and from Lake Winnipeg to the Ontario border, excluding the Winnipeg River from Pine Falls to Lake Winnipeg.)

On this day, the thermometer hit 36 C, so numerous stops for a swim were mandatory. There was a sheer jump into seven metres of water Eagles were everywhere. Deer and black bear abound in this country.

There are also a myriad of back bays on this section of the Winnipeg River and pretty much all of them hold northern pike. Given the diversity of forage and the amount of cover for these fish, they get big, very big. A number of Master Angler pike are landed during the open water season with some truly monster pike registered



Lamont's family fishing on the river.

in the hard water period, fish in excess of 14 kilograms.

Vance says one of the best times of the year to catch the true monsters of the Winnipeg River is late August when the trophy pike target mooneye as their main forage, using a Mepps Cyclops in a silver pattern. He targets steep banks that drop off into the main river channel and casts and trolls for the monster pike that are trying to corral mooneye in these areas and drive them up against the sharp drop-offs.

Another big pike pattern comes to mind at this time of year. Back when guiding at Eagle Nest as the nights cooled off in late August, big pike would also move in bays with deep water in the middle and some deep cabbage growth. They would hunt mooneyes and other forage in these spots as well and an early morning venture into these bays using spoons, buzz baits and big Mepps spinners would produce some tackle busters.

Anglers are always looking for diversity when they go to a lodge or camp in an area for



Conner's before lunch.

a longer period of time. Obviously this section of the river gives you that but for the real adventuresome, you can also take some side trips like a jaunt into Little Echo lake by way of a creek. This small body of water holds some nice bass and even a decent population of crappies.

There are portage trips that are possible including one into Big Echo Lake, Crowduck Lake and George Lake (Vance can help you line up a boat) if you are real ambitious. For the most part, just trying to fish the area around Trail End Camp should satisfy even the hard core anglers.

Hrechkosy says road accessibility to his camp helps him cut costs. He also has a philosophy that it's better to be more affordable and have the camp full. Trail End Camp offers light housekeeping packages where the guests takes care of themselves or a full service package which include meals, boats, motors, guides and accommodations.

Maureen and Vance are planning to renovate and modernize their last five non-modern cabins which will give them 11 full service cabins, done in pine, with all the comforts of home. He was president of the Manitoba Lodge and Outfitters Association in 1999 and 2000 and currently sits on the board for the Manitoba Hunting Heritage Group.

If you can't afford to own a cottage and you want to go to a remote area of Manitoba head up to Pointe du Bois and give the Winnipeg River a try. Operations like Trail End serve to give the consumer a chance at a first class experience while keeping price in line.

