

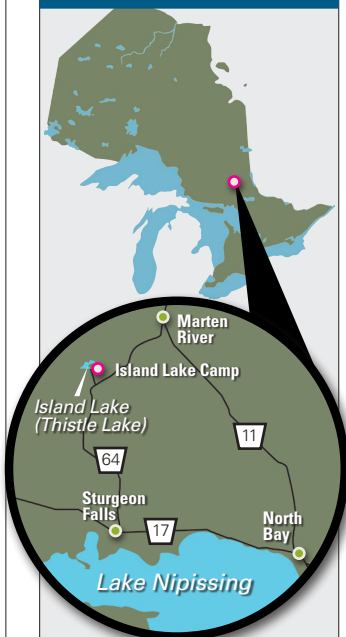


Island Lake Camp

An all-to-brief visit to this easily accessible near-wilderness area leaves the author wanting more.

BY GORD ELLIS, SENIOR EDITOR

Getting There



From Hwy. 11 at Marten River, turn left (south) at Hwy. 64, turn right on Island Lake Rd. to the camp. Or, from Sturgeon Falls, take Hwy. 64 north to Island Lake Rd., turn left to the camp.

Travelling to a new destination is always an adventure, especially to somewhere you've wanted to visit for years. This was the case for me as I turned off Highway 64 and negotiated 5 winding kilometres to the end of the road at Island Lake Camp.

Several years earlier, I'd spoken with owner Gord Mitchell about visiting his camp on the Temagami Waterway System near Field. Yet, scheduling issues meant it took nearly a half-decade to make it happen.

"You made it!" said Mitchell, as I jumped out of my truck. "Welcome to Island Lake Camp, the best-kept secret in the north."

While unloading gear, I took in the great view across the lake. The camp is nestled into a pine-ridged bay. My cabin felt both homey and private. Sitting on a comfortable couch, looking out at the lake, I felt the stress of a long drive slipping away.

A History Tour

After I settled in, Mitchell fired up his pontoon boat and told me to climb aboard. "Time for the Island Lake tour," he said.

Heading down the lake, Mitchell said, "Island Lake Camp was opened in 1946 by Harry Morel. Harry recognized this area as an ideal location for a tourist camp." Bob Carswell carried on the Island Lake Camp

tradition for 19 years. Mitchell and his wife, Ellie, took over in 1976.

"We're still the only outfitter on the lake," said Mitchell. "We've tried to retain the remote feeling of a wilderness camp, while providing modern conveniences."

Continuing the tour, Mitchell pointed to his favourite fishing spots and talked about what the fish like to bite. When your job is to catch fish in a new lake, it never hurts to have local knowledge. We passed several sandy beaches and ran through surprisingly swift water.

"There's a lot of current in the system, which seems to attract fish all year," said Mitchell. "Walleye move into the current areas, especially in the evening."

First Success

By the time we got back to the dock, I was chomping at the bit to get fishing. "We've got a boat ready for you, Gord," said Mitchell. "Grab your tackle, and whenever you're ready, go catch some fish."

Twenty minutes later, I was driving across the placid surface of Island Lake in one of the camp's blue and white boats, heading for fast water that had caught my eye during the tour. A swift river entered the lake, and Mitchell had mentioned walleye would likely be hanging around the mouth. Although it

was early afternoon, I wasn't going to wait for evening.

I motored into the current and lobbed a jerkbait into a back eddy. On the second cast, something nailed the lure and roared into the main flow. If this was a walleye, it was a monster. I decided it must be one of the big pike Mitchell mentioned. Sure enough, I saw the long shape of a pike swim under the boat, my bait stuck firmly in its yap. After a long struggle, I hand landed the fat 37-inch pike, extracted the lure, and released the fish.

A few minutes later, as I continued to throw a jerkbait at the rivermouth, another fish grabbed hold. This time, I was sure I'd hooked a big walleye. The fish dogged deep before revealing itself on the surface. I scooped up the 4-pound fish and admired its deep yellow colouring and stout girth. Not an eater, but a nice walleye for a relatively clear lake at mid-day.

With my stomach rumbling and rain clouds rolling in, I returned to camp. Island Lake was living up to its billing.

That evening, Mitchell invited me to his place to watch a hockey game and

talk fishing. "We have fantastic bass fishing in summer and fall," he said. "We have groups that do nothing but fish topwaters for smallmouths. They get good numbers of bass to 5 pounds."

Fall Favourites

He also talked about opportunities for guided bear and moose hunts. Another popular package is a combined grouse and waterfowl hunt.

I didn't have time to go on the river trip below McWilliams Falls, 3 miles downstream from the lodge. The trip in johnboats includes a classic shore lunch. Mitchell says the smallmouth and walleye fishing in the stretch below the falls to Ragged Chutes is excellent, and is kept that way by selective harvest.

Unfortunately, my two-night stay at the lodge was interspersed by rain, followed by an unseasonable early June snowstorm and a nasty cold front. This turned the lake into a wind-swept tempest, but I braved the weather long enough to scrape up enough walleye for dinner. However, the fishing I enjoyed during my initial time on the lake confirmed what I'd already heard from

others. Island Lake Camp is something special, and definitely worth a visit if you like good fishing and hunting in exquisite surroundings. ●

Check List

- Warm clothes, rainwear, and waterproof boots for temperamental northern-Ontario weather.
- A GPS for navigation and punching in walleye humps.
- For walleye, jerkbaits and a selection of jigs, live-bait rigs, and spinners. For bass, topwaters and diving crankbaits. Spoons, bucktail spinners, and steel leaders cover off pike.

The Lodge

Drive-to lodge features eight two- to three-bedroom cabins. All include propane fridge and stove, utensils, dishes, bathroom with shower, spacious screened porches, gas barbecue, and picnic table. Rates start at \$655 per person for four days and nights. Includes 16-foot boat with padded seats, motor, gas, fish finder, landing net, and bait.

CONTACT INFO

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For more information about Ontario fishing adventures visit:
www.gofishontario.com

KEY WAYPOINT

Island Lake Camp	
Lat/Long	UTM WGS84
North 46°39'8965	Zone 17T E575633
West 80°00'6795	N5168406

 **MAP CENTRE** 
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