

On Wisconsin Outdoors

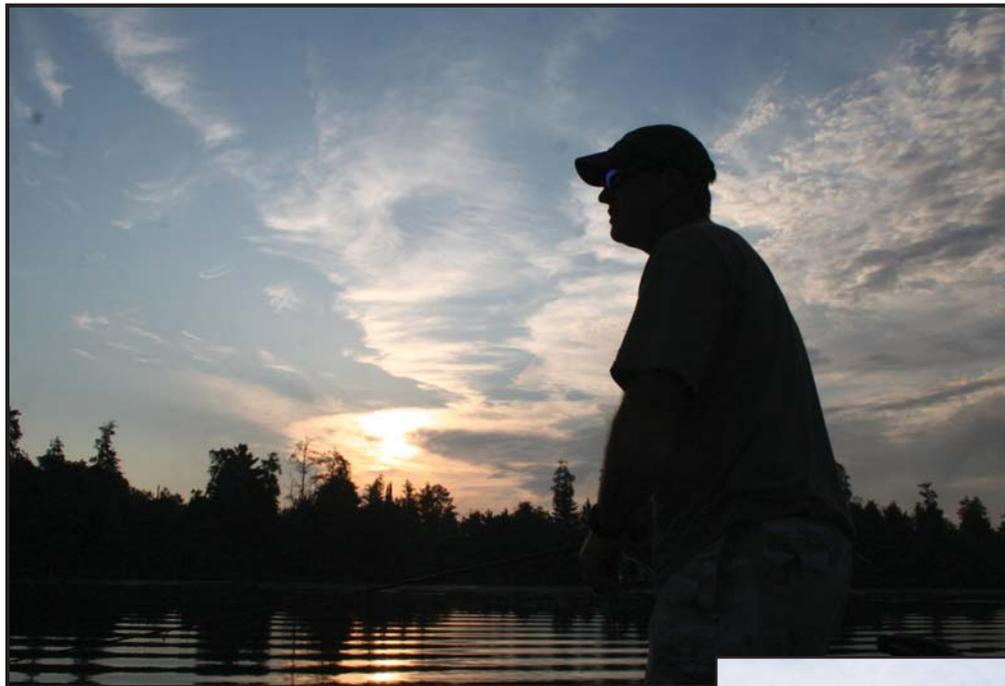
With the Dick Ellis Experts



My Oh Minong

Flowage, guide deliver great fishing

By Dick Ellis



Guide Chuck Roehl works the Minong Flowage in Washburn County at sunrise for northern pike in August. Pike cooperated in numbers, as did largemouth bass taking cover in the slop as temperatures climbed into the nineties.

Temperatures were climbing like a homesick angel, and the largemouth bass of Washburn County's Minong Flowage were moving for cooling cover. The migration of bass with the rising mercury had already taken us from deeper, open water to the edge of the lily pads as the August morning crawled toward noon. Now with the

continued movement of feeding fish evident from the swirling surface water, we followed again into even shallower water, and an unbroken carpet of timber and vegetation. We had transitioned to classic "slop" bass fishing, and a green slice of largemouth heaven.

Professional Guide Chuck Roehl stood on the bow of the boat, basking in the stifling

heat and watching intently as he worked the weedless frog from lily pad to pad with an excruciating patience. Another explosion was coming from the underworld. You could feel it. And from the back seat, with camera fixed on the scene in hopes of catching Mr. Bigmouth in mid-air with Roehl's frog hordeouves, the anticipation was killing me.

After letting the bait "rest" for a minute, Roehl offered one subtle twitch and one too many temptations for the bass that had moved in below the frog in ambush. I missed the bass with the camera. Roehl did not miss with a tenacious hookset,



Guide Chuck Roehl prepares to release another nice largemouth bass on the Minong Flowage in Washburn County during an early August morning search for pike and bass.

waiting to feel the weight of the fish instead of simply reacting to the swirl before rearing back on the rod. Backed with 20-pound test power pro line, Roehl won the battle in the jungle below. The four pound big mouth was photographed and released to thrill another angler, another day.

Roehl would have been a good boy scout. He's prepared. We successfully fished the hottest conditions possible but talked about cold fronts. He'll teach the advanced angler how to catch fish in diverse conditions with unique tactics but will place a bobber over a leach to insure that kids or inexperienced anglers in his boat are going to catch fish the easiest way. And, on this stifling August day, we did it all on the beautiful Minong Flowage in beautiful Washburn County. We could have been on any of numerous lakes in Washburn County because Roehl really is prepared, before he ventures out with clients. It really doesn't get any better than this...anywhere in beautiful Wisconsin.

According to Michelle Voight, Executive Director of the Washburn County Tourism Association, Washburn County, located in Northwest Wisconsin, offers anglers over 950 lakes to choose from. Lakes range from small, glacial lakes to lakes over 3,000 acres. The area is known for excellent Musky fishing,

Northern Pike, Bass, Trout, Walleye and Bluegill. According to a Lake-Link profile, the Minong Flowage, is a 1564 acre drainage lake with a mean depth of nine feet and a maximum depth of 21 feet offering great fishing for bluegill, crappie, northern pike, rainbow trout, and largemouth and smallmouth bass.

Fall is a great time, Voight said, to experience Washburn County's many lakes after they have quieted down a bit from all of the summer fun. "Not only do we have over 950 amazing Northwood's lakes in Washburn County, but we have great lodging, dining and amenities on many of our lakes," Voight said. "Washburn County is also very family-friendly. We have kids' fishing areas, tons of great activities for the kids and even a Kids' Scavenger Hunt. We think it's very important for kids to get outside and do fun activities with their families. Fishing is a great way for kids to learn more about the outdoors."

Guide Chuck Roehl can relate. At age 13, he began his first job working in the Hayward baitshop, Pastika's, owned by his best friend Lee's father. When they weren't working, he and Lee were fishing, and learning to fish better.

"We pretty much fished all day, every day we could," Roehl said, as we began a search for northern pike on the Minong

A Guide Is Born

Big fish being brought into Pastika's Bait Shop where he worked made 13 year old Chuck Roehl "fall in love" with muskies. Already proficient and self-taught in angling tactics for walleyes, crappie and bass, the soon to be professional guide set out to learn how to catch muskies and pestered anglers entering the shop for equipment advice, tips, and tactics. He learned that some golden oldies like bucktails, the black Suick, crane baits, and the Eddie bait are still among the best on the water. The old reliable lures, he said, also remain the best bet for pike.

"The simple lures, like the spoon, still work," he said, catching and releasing northern after Minong northern on a classic red and white spoon. "I had purchased lots of cool lures in all kinds of colors and spent hundreds of dollars and it reopened my eyes that the spoon is still the best pike lure. The thing they really want is that old spoon. Pike can be

fussy, but mostly I love their aggressive attitude. It's amazing what they'll put in their mouth. We've caught nine-inch pike on eight-inch Eddie Baits, had a 22-inch northern grab a 16-inch pike already on the line, and caught a 27-inch northern on a 21-inch pike we were using as bait for musky on a quick-set rig in deep water."

By 1989, Roehl was a part time guide. He turned his first love into a full time endeavor in 1997 by guiding for clients staying at an area resort. While there, he honed a unique work ethic that made doing his angling field homework a mandatory chore before taking clients on to any given lake.

"It could take almost a lifetime to learn even a dozen lakes like you need to," he said. "Before the client goes out, I need to know a lake like the back of my hand. Not just the general area but specific edges of weeds or isolated weed bars or deep weeds. If a cold front is coming and I believe fish will be suspended during cold front conditions, that's still just a guess. I have to go out and prove it so I'm prepared for the client. There is no guinea pigging with clients." ^{GW}



Pike action was hot and heavy on the Minong Flowage in Washburn County. Guide Chuck Roehl prepares to release another northern before fast action transitioned to largemouth bass in the slop as temperatures climbed into the nineties



Guide Chuck Roehl works slop for largemouth bass on a sweltering hot afternoon on the Minong Flowage in Washburn County. The pike bite was fast and furious in the morning and bass cooperated throughout the day.

Flowage just after first light with plans to transition to largemouth bass later in the day. “All we had was our bikes. I can’t remember when I didn’t fish. We weren’t old enough to run a motor. We’d just shove off and drift or row all day; most of the time we fished from shore. When I became a part time guide in 1989, the clients were driving my boat and trailer to the lakes. I wasn’t old enough to have a license. I had a boat, not a nice boat by any means, and I finally got a motor when an old gentleman showed me an old 1957 Sea King 25 and told me if I could lift it, it was mine. I became a fulltime guide in 1997.”

With more pike action than we even hoped for filed to memory, we turned to Largemouth bass. The swirls of big fish in deeper water adjacent to weeds led us to active fish. Over the next several hours, we caught fish in open water, on the edge of the vegetation, and finally directly in the shallow slop as the temperatures continued to rise and the fish moved in. In addition to frogs, as we transitioned we worked twitch baits, shallow running fat raps, and floating style rapalas on the edge of the vegetation. Roehl’s stressed a slow presentation.

“Barely let it wobble,” he said. “The slow presentation is important. You hardly want to feel the vibration of the rod. When you can see them feeding in the shallows like this, we have a good idea of where we’ll find the bass everywhere. When the bass are shallow, they’re that much closer to the surface so you’re lure has a good chance of working.”

With a contrast of bottom vegetation including milfoil behind us and a sea of solid red cabbage in front, the guide offered another lesson that could be adapted for use on any water. Learn the weeds on any lake, Roehl said, and learn to successfully catch fish.

“This clear water is good for



Anglers work the Minong Flowage on an early August morning. The flowage offered excellent pike and largemouth bass fishing in Washburn County.

weed growth and that’s good for bass, especially big bass,” he said. “New weeds mean fresh oxygen and the opposite for dying weeds. New weeds keep popping up on lakes even into the fall. The newest green weeds will mean fish. Fish leave vegetation that’s dying in search of different emergent growth.”

As we lifted bass to three and four pound from the slop for photos and lost another in the five pound class, another impressive swirl drew our attention back to open water where all had been silent since the “migration” to the shallows had begun.

“Just when you think you have it all figured out, we see another boil in the open water where we haven’t seen a fish in an hour,” he said. “That tells us to keep an open mind. Don’t be fixed on any one thing. Bass eat anything. They’re opportunistic. They look up and go after bugs, worms, leeches, minnows, whatever is available. If there’s a big hatch of little leeches or insects, you want to throw something black and small.

You want to match what they’re eating. Sometimes you get bigger fish by going smaller.”

My on-board education concluded with a cold-weather lesson, despite our steamy environment. Largemouth, Roehl said, provide the ideal target following a cold front that will shut down many other gamefish. It was a lesson to take home and remember with the fall season just on the horizon.

“After a cold front, when nothing else will hit, look for bass on a deep water weedline off of a shallow place like this where they were today,” Roehl said. “In those conditions, you can almost cancel walleyes off at the boat landing. If pike aren’t biting, look for the bass that will run back out from the shallow weeds to deep water weedlines. And they won’t shut down. They’ll still be active. Out there though the weeds won’t be in your way. In here, we had to drop the bait right on top of the fish to get them to hit.”

Washburn County, the Minong Flowage and Professional Guide Chuck Roehl.

Now that’s a hit. 

Call Guide Chuck Roehl at 715-634-7132 or 715-699-2045 or connect at www.chuckroehlsguideservice.com. For more information on Washburn County, including lake maps, trout stream locations, fishing bait & guides, fishing reports and more, connect with www.washburncounty.org

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