

Hot Spots The Frontier



Rick Stanley

The countless islands that dot these lakes offer a chance to work bars, humps and shorelines for walleyes.

So Many Fish, So Little Time

Live your fishing fantasy on the James Bay Frontier.

Anyone who has ever visited the small, northern Ontario town of Wawa, near Sault Ste. Marie, is sure to remember the huge statue there of a Canada goose, its mighty wings spread, neck stretched forward and great head thrusting boldly upwards as if ready to take flight into the bright, northern skies. In fact, the name Wawa means wild goose in Ojibway. Just to the east, in the mining community of Sudbury, there is another giant landmark — this time a 20-foot-high, silver coin known as The Big Nickel. From there, a portage or two to the north, a massive polar bear sits in front of the Cochrane Board of Trade building. Its huge head raised as if to

catch a scent and its ebony eyes beckoning all who pass to climb aboard the Polar Bear Express for a true, Canadian adventure — a railroad ride to the northern-most boundary of the magnificent James Bay Frontier.

These huge icons are particularly fitting as they sit at the gateway to the North, because if there is one thing to be said about the James Bay Frontier, it's that nearly everything here comes in giant portions: big, beautiful lakes, rivers and streams, magnificent timber stands and mountain ranges, abundant wildlife,

by Anthony Benham

hearty northern hospitality and, best of all, lots of big, bad, tackle-busting Canadian gamefish.

The sport fish of the James Bay Frontier are as varied as the terrain itself. Big northern pike, walleye, brook trout, perch and whitefish top the list. They don't grow fast in the north, but they grow large, and they are as spirited as they come. A big, male, James Bay brook trout in its spawning livery makes for one of the prettiest pictures in any album. Not to mention, these spectacular specks reach monster proportions — upwards of five pounds is common. Then there are the trophy pike of Lake Kesagami. Few places in the world can virtual-

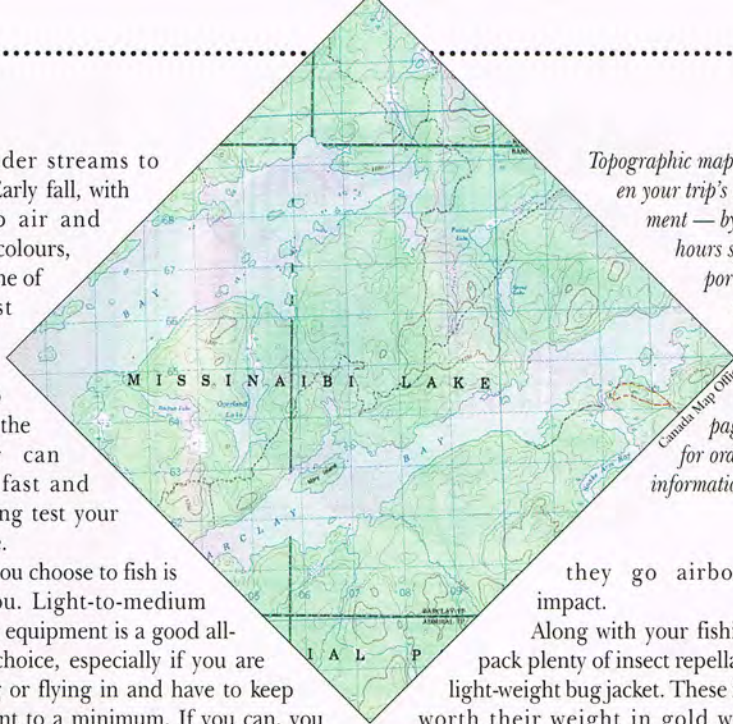
ly assure you of a 20-pounder during your trip, but this is one of them.

The walleye fishing can also be incredible. On a fly-in last June to Audrey Lake, an hour north of Cochrane by air, a couple of buddies and I caught more than 300 walleyes in six days. Most were pan-sized but we literally got tired of catching fish! A bonus catch in many of the lakes in the Timmins area (but not much farther north) are big smallmouth bass. A 50-fish day is nothing special, and bass season is open all year. Your outfitter can advise you whether a particular hot spot is claimed as a honey hole based on the size of the fish or on sheer numbers.

Even though the fish are plentiful, it is still important to time your trip based on the species you are after. Mid-June through July is, hands-down, the best time for pike and wall-eye. July is also good to go after the big sea-run speckles and lake trout of the Hudson Bay Lowlands. Late August, on the other hand, is when the big speckles of inland lakes move

into feeder streams to spawn. Early fall, with its crisp air and radiant colours, can be one of the most beautiful times to visit, but the weather can change fast and the fishing test your expertise.

How you choose to fish is up to you. Light-to-medium spinning equipment is a good all-around choice, especially if you are canoeing or flying in and have to keep equipment to a minimum. If you can, you should also take along a baitcaster and a fly rod. Big pike are as much fun on flies as the speckles and, in most lakes, they will hit streamers and surface bugs so furiously that



Topographic maps lengthen your trip's enjoyment — by the hours spent poring over them before and after. See page 138 for ordering information.

they go airborne on impact. Along with your fishing gear, pack plenty of insect repellent and a light-weight bug jacket. These items are worth their weight in gold when the mosquitoes and black flies get your number, and like everything else in the north, these critters are big, mean and hungry! Take your camera and also pack rain gear and a couple of warm sweatshirts. Evenings and early mornings can be surprisingly brisk, even in mid-summer.

Lodge Options on the Frontier

The southern rim of the James Bay Frontier is the most accessible by automobile, with the northern reaches demanding travel by canoe, plane or, to a limited extent, by rail. Home to some of Canada's last remaining wilderness, the James Bay Frontier has large populations of moose, bear, wolves and deer; as well as mink, marten, grouse, ducks, geese, woodcock and more porcupines than you can shake a stick at.

The area just north of Sudbury offers a rich history of mining and the fur trade, of which remnants remain if you search, but for the most part you are surrounded by crystal water, abundant wildlife and fishing from another era.

Among the lodges and resorts supporting anglers in this area are Auld Reekie, Lost Lake and Tata-Chika-Pika. Accessible off highways 144 and 560 between Gowganda and Gowgama, these three facilities are remote from major population centres, yet close to services.

Offering year-'round accommodations,

the southern James Bay Frontier area is now accessible to snowmobilers and ice fishermen as well as the traditional hunters in the fall and the spring and summer anglers.

In this area there is no closed season on smallmouth bass, so the serious bass angler can practice cold-water techniques in preparation for an upcoming tournament or just try to increase his personal abilities.

Or, during hot weather, the area's numerous, spectacular falls introduce dissolved oxygen into the waters and attract the oxygen-dependent, cold-water species to the deep, cold pools below them.

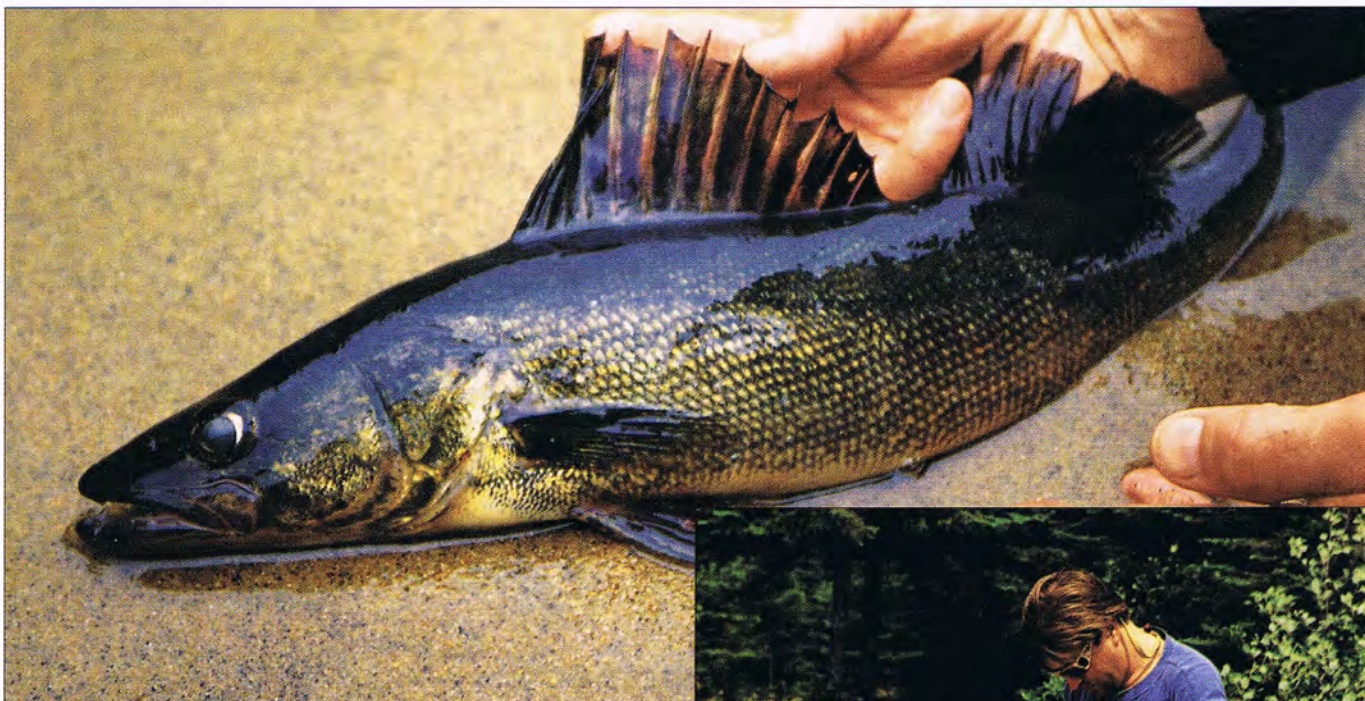
Auld Reekie is off highway 560 near Gowganda. Contact Doug and Cathie White at 705-624-3512.

Lost Lake is also off highway 560 near Gowganda. Contact Ed and Judy Dunkin at 705-624-2417.

Tata-Chika-Pika is off highway 144 north of Gowgama. Contact Dick, Dave and Pat Neil at 705-894-2037.

The first images of the James Bay Frontier that come to mind are bush planes, outpost camps, Indian guides and freighter canoes. This is also one of the purest visions of the area, with its remote lakes and rivers, many of which are accessible only by air from outfitters based around Cochrane, Hearst and Kapuskasing. There are, however, other areas in the Frontier that can be reached by train or even automobile. For example, with their clean, well-equipped campgrounds, northern provincial parks are the perfect place for family adventures by car. Tourist Information Centres throughout the region point out nearby historic sites, seasonal activities and other attractions. And some of the best lodges I have ever stayed at, in terms of hospitality, facilities, and fishing, are those I have driven to near Timmins, Cochrane and Timiskaming. These places are about eight hours from Toronto by car, but it's well worth the drive.

For those who want something more remote than a provincial park but prefer not to climb aboard a bush plane, there is always the Uttle Bear — one of the last "flag stop" trains in Canada. The Uttle Bear is the Ontario Northland's year-round train service between Cochrane and Moosonee and it will stop just about anywhere along its route to let passengers on and off. Travel this train to one of the mighty rivers like the Abitibi, the Missinaibi or the Mattagami, and you are as likely to sit beside a real fur trapper as you are a canoe



Beautiful walleyes are the order of the day (above) all across the James Bay Frontier. And, while most return to spawn and grow, a few have to attend shore lunch (right). The quality of these fish is beyond description.

tripping party or just an interested sightseer. Local outfitters can help plan your trip, and any Ontario Northland rail agent can provide you with Uttle Bear travel information and schedules.

Whatever your wilderness trip fancy, the James Bay Frontier has what you are after. The fishing is phenomenal and you will sense the spirit and solitude of the wild frontier all

There is a terrific guidebook published by the Cochrane-Timiskaming Travel Association, P.O. Bag 920, Schumacher, Ont. P0N 1G0, (705)360-1980, 1-800-461-3766, Fax (705)268-5526.

Excellent James Bay Frontier planning guides are also available from Ontario Travel, Queen's Park, Toronto, Ont. M7A 2R9, (416)965-4008. A special Fishing Guide that lists hundreds of lodges and fly-in camps, and an Adventure Guide provides information on activity packages for canoeing, hiking, rafting and other outdoor interests. So, what are you waiting for? Pick your spot, pack your gear, and plan your trip to the James Bay Frontier. It really is closer than you think, and it promises to be one of the most memorable wilderness fishing trips you've ever experienced.

around you, just as Champlain and his voyageurs did when they opened the fur trade in this region over 300 years ago. While fishing here, we have had families of curious wolves follow us along the shoreline as we drifted in freighter canoes, casting into reeds for pike, or were greeted daily by a delightful mother moose and her bandy-legged calf which seemed as amused watching us as we were watching them.

Right on the doorstep of the James Bay Frontier are four other magnificent northern Ontario travel regions known as the Near North, Rainbow Country, Algoma Country and North of Superior. The Near North is rich with accessible wilderness from the tranquil beauty of the Almaguin Highlands, to the rocky shores of Lake Nipissing and the city of North Bay, to the great forests of Temagami, and the myriad lakes and rivers set amidst the rugged Canadian Shield of Algonquin Provincial Park. Rainbow Country, to the south, has water everywhere. From the 30,000 Islands of Georgian Bay's breathtaking northern shoreline, to the vistas of Lake Huron's



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North Channel, to the hundreds of other lakes and streams within a stone's throw of Sudbury, this is also primo fishing country for bass, walleye, pike, trout and muskies. Algoma Country to the south-west is a region as beautiful as it is rich in contrast nestled quietly within the pristine beauty of Lake Superior's eastern shoreline, yet home to the bustling city of Sault Ste. Marie. Finally, toward the west, are the legendary brook trout waters of Lake Nipigon and the northern shores of Lake Superior, deep in the heart of true Canadian wilderness. Each of these regions is a spectacular travel area in its own right and a visit to all or any of them is a great way to round out a dream fishing trip to the James Bay Frontier.

Tony Benham is a freelance writer and journalist from the Toronto area.