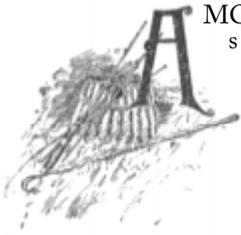


FISHING ON THE SEVERN RIVER.

BY W. THOMSON.



AMONG all the lakes and streams in Canada's wide domain, I do not know of one which offers greater inducements to the all-around angler than Severn River, Ontario. From Lake Simcoe it takes a tortuous and tumultuous course, and finally discharges its waters into Waubashene Bay, an inlet of the great Georgian Bay. Trout may be taken in all the undammed upper portions of the stream, and in its broad estuaries and "drowned lands" are to be found pike, black bass, pike-perch, spotted and channel catfish, yellow perch and, not unfrequently, the lordly muscullonge, besides sunfish (sometimes two pounds in weight), rock bass, suckers, mullet, chub, dace and other coarse fish. My last trial of this water will give a good idea of the sport it affords. I took with me a light six-by-eight tent, one rubber and one woolen blanket, my fishing tackle and a thirty-two caliber rifle. Having reached the little village of Waubashene, situated on the bay of the same name, I engaged two stout young fellows, brothers, named John and George. We hired a stanch, roomy skiff and purchased a week's supply of provisions, an axe, and a few sample cooking utensils, etc., etc. From Waubashene to the mouth of Severn River is about two and one-half miles, and although I hardly expected to take anything in crossing I rigged my ten-ounce split-bamboo rod and put out a No. 5 spoon. The boys rowed slowly, and outside an inviting-looking bed of rushes I secured, after some beautiful play, the largest small-mouth bass I have ever caught. This old bronze-backer weighed, when taken from the hook, six pounds and five ounces, and as I had never before landed one of over five and three-fourths pounds, I felt quite elated by my luck.

We took nothing more before reaching the great dam at the mouth of the Severn, where we unloaded the boat, lifted her over the dam, and after replacing the cargo, set off on a short tour

of exploration among the hundreds or islets studding the great expanse of the "drowned lands," here called Long Lake. These little islands vary in size from a few square feet in area up to many acres each. Some of them are densely wooded, though the majority are mere rock.

On the midstream side of the rocky islet we chose for our camp site, the bank was eight or ten feet high, and while the boys were preparing supper I approached the edge and, peering cautiously over, saw a number of fine bass swimming around among the bowlders on the bottom of the river. I tried them for a few minutes with the spoon, and then with several kinds of flies, but they would look at neither lure. So I then caught two or three of the little frogs which were hopping about in dozens, and bending on to my line a single gut leader and No. 4 hook, dropped the bait softly into the water. Instantly, half a dozen of the bass rushed for the frog and I soon had a bright three-pounder in the landing net. Two more of rather superior size followed, and then, as I did not care to take more than enough for immediate consumption, I ceased fishing. But we had evidently found, and in inexhaustible supply, the proper lure for this season, and henceforth during the trip we used frogs as bait for every kind of fish.

Early next morning we struck the tent, packed up our dunnage and rowed away toward our objective point, the Grand Chute, some six miles distant. We put out no lines as we went up the dead water. I sat in the stern, idly watching the water. As we floated past a large patch of weeds, I discovered a huge muscullonge lying motionless near the surface and apparently enjoying a sun bath. A whispered caution brought the rowers to a standstill, and I made preparations to capture the fish. From where I sat I could have killed him with the rifle, but that would have spoiled possible sport. I told the boys to back water, and we moved noiselessly to the shore just below the bed of weeds. I put my rod together and rigged the strongest leader and the heaviest snell and hook in my box. I baited with two

lively frogs and was ready for business. I moved to the bow, George took the stern seat and shoved the boat slowly and quietly along shore until opposite the muscallonge; then, with submerged paddle-blade, pushed her through the weeds directly for the fish. The boys were cool, careful hands, and there was absolutely no noise and scarcely a movement of the weeds, as inch by inch the sharp prow cut through or went over them.

The 'longe held his position, and I could clearly trace his whole length, but when we had stolen quite near to him he sank quietly out of sight. This was exactly what I wanted, and after a minute's rest, to let him settle in his runway, I made a cast, and caused the frogs to float, as if of their own accord, down stream and about two feet below the surface. The fish had merely been resting high up in his lair, for when the bait reached the exact spot where he had disappeared' he took it with a vicious snap, and in a moment I had him fast.

John shipped his oars, and with a few powerful strokes sent the boat through the fringe of weeds into deep water and beyond danger of a foul.

I kept a steady strain on the fish until we were well clear of the weeds, then roused him up in earnest. He, meanwhile, kept boring into his favorite cover in a lazy sort of way, but I knew that a rush was coming. George crept forward, and I took his place in the stern. We were then all ready for old musky to begin his real fight. He realized in a moment that fooling in the weeds would not do, and made a dash into the deep, unobstructed water. I felt jubilant, for if well hooked his capture was now a mere matter of time. skill and patience. The important matter was to keep a taut line on him, for if he ever got the leader across his jaws his sharp teeth would cut it in a moment, and then—good-bye! A ten-ounce split bamboo is none too heavy a rod with which to play a large muscallonge, but I was convinced from the *feel* of the line, as its pulsations were conveyed to my hand, that the hook was imbedded in that safest of all hiding places, the tongue of the fish. For some little time my captive did not seem to realize his position, but when the truth dawned upon his dull brain he roused with a vengeance. My chief effort was to keep his head al-

ways toward the boat, so as to prevent a straight-away rush which might possibly exhaust my hundred yards of line, though in that case the tackle would probably have borne the strain of the towing even if we could not have followed fast enough.

However, I took no such risks, and had not, in fact, at any time during the fight to give more than forty yards of line. Careful play and the spring of the rod kept the fish within safe bounds; and although he bored to the bottom, and again surged heavily to one side or the other, he never quite succeeded in turning tail and never got an inch of slack. His most dangerous trick was in running direct for the boat, but rapid work foiled all such tactics. I kept a steady, killing strain on him, and gave him no chance to recuperate.

After playing him for twenty minutes or so I forced him to the surface quite close to the boat, but an exclamation of surprise and admiration from John sent him off with a strong, determined rush. I now gave him the butt, and the rod was arched into horse-shoe shape before I stopped his mad race. This last effort, however, exhausted his powers, and once again, foot by foot and very cautiously, I led him along side, where—as a played-out 'longe always will—he remained motionless on the surface for a few seconds. George grasped a short club, kept for the purpose, and gave him the *coup de grace* by a deft blow upon the back of the head.

He proved to be a beautiful bright, male fish, in splendid condition and very broad and chunky, measuring four feet three inches in length, twenty-five inches in girth, and weighing, as he came from the water, thirty-one and one-fourth pounds. I have seen females, after spawning, five feet long, weigh less than thirty pounds. For the benefit of anglers unacquainted with this noble fish, I may say here: Never, if you can possibly avoid it, take a large muscallonge *alive* into your boat. If still fast to the tackle, he will surely break something and severely lacerate your hands should you attempt to extricate the hooks before killing him; and the latter process is sometimes a quite hazardous one while he is flopping about under the seats.

Twice in my life I have seen green fishermen punch holes in the bottom of a boat while trying to kill a muscallonge with the butt end of an oar. I have also known many fish to leap out of canoes and skiffs and so escape.

As I never carry any kind of intoxicating drinks on fishing excursions, we celebrated our victory this time by a quiet congratulatory smoke, and then proceeded quickly on our way. After an hour of rowing we reached the Little Chute, an incline of about one foot in twelve, and forty yards long.

This is a half-mile below the Grand Chute, and its waters rush over a smooth bed-rock and between precipitous walls, where the river is not more than sixty feet wide. The eddies at the tail of the rapids are choice resting-places for fish. Without unloading the boat we towed it up the chute, and a few minutes' pulling then brought us to the great, almost circular basin into which the Grand Chute plunges. The pond or basin is, I should think, forty or fifty acres in extent, and is very deep in the middle. The bold, rocky shores rise from ten to twenty feet above the surface and the water is about the same depth at their bases. It is a great spot for still fishing.

The Grand Chute is formed by the river above meeting a wall of solid rock, with an opening only about thirty feet wide through which the whole volume of the stream is forced, with many a wild, tumbling leap over huge bowlders which line the chasm. It has a fall of fully eighty feet in less than one hundred and fifty yards. We landed at The Portage, the only piece of shelving beach we could find, carried our supplies across a narrow neck of woods, and made our final camp on the smooth rock at the head of the chute. After arranging everything for a week's stay, our first business was to build a stone corral in the water at the landing below, for the purpose of keeping our fish alive.

By the time George and I had completed this job, John called us to a dinner of muscallonge steaks, with sundry other good things.

We fished in the evening and were

embarrassed only by too much luck. John and George had long cedar poles, strong twine lines and big, old-fashioned flat-headed hooks. The fact that I could equal their combined catch surprised them very much, for they had no faith in fine tackle. The small green frogs could be captured anywhere, and we kept our bait boxes replenished without trouble. We enjoyed a week of glorious sport, fishing during the mornings and evenings. Our total catch included forty-one pike, one hundred and thirty-nine black bass, sixty-two pike-perch, thirty-nine cat-fish and three 'longe. What we did not eat of these were kept alive in the corral. The lot weighed about one thousand pounds, not one ounce of which was wasted.

There was a large camp of loggers near us, while other parties were constantly passing and repassing, and to these hard-working men we gave the greater part of our catch. The remainder, about four hundred pounds, we gave away in Waubashene, excepting a fair share taken by John and George, and the two muscallonge which I packed in ice and took home with me.

On the last night of our stay I was awakened about two o'clock by a curious shuffling noise outside the tent. I guessed the cause at once, and taking the rifle, crept silently to the front of the tent. On peeping from behind the flap I saw a half-grown bear licking up some granulated sugar which John had accidentally spilled on the rock.

The beast was not six feet from the muzzle of the rifle when I pulled the trigger, and he certainly never knew what hurt him, as the bullet passed clean through his head from ear to ear.

His skin was not of much value so early in the season, but he was as fat as butter and his hind-quarters made delicious eating. He gave me one of those chances which are so seldom resented to the regular hunter; I took him at a disadvantage and the killing was no great credit to me; but I will leave it to the ordinary fisherman to decide whether or not it was a fitting wind up to my week on the Severn.

