



# Sabourin Lake Lodge

In 1957 the Webb family, with the support of the Canadian government, purchased a plot of land and began construction of Sabourin Lake Lodge, located in the northern sector of Ontario's Woodland Caribou Provincial Park. The family had previously owned a fishing camp on Oneman Lake, on the English River system, which had been flooded under 35 feet of water by Ontario Hydro. In response, they had to search for a new location and, after exploring the Gammon, Pigeon and Berens Rivers, decided upon the Bloodvein River system. The Ontario government agreed to set aside the forest preserve and, as compensation for the flooding, to allow a lodge to be built on Sabourin Lake.

In early fall of 1957, Ralph Webb; Berger Olson, a building contractor out of Kenora; and Jerry Dusang, one of the original guides, began construction of the lodge. They flew in a crawler tractor, portable sawmill and generator, and milled some of the area's plentiful jack pine for lumber. Construction continued through the summer of 1958, during which time Ralph began to worry about costs and the construction delays. To speed things up, he ordered his crew to leave out one course, or layer, of logs on the main floor of the lodge. Today, only tall guests will notice this minor alteration. By the end of construction in 1958, the project's Norseman floatplane had flown over half a million pounds of construction materials from Oneman Lake, Laclu and Kenora



*A beautiful start to the day on Sabourin Lake, Woodland Caribou Provincial Park, Ontario. "Acrobatics, including spins, not approved" reads a factory sticker on the lodge's de Havilland Beaver floatplane. Fortunately, all the aerial shows involve the lake's piscine residents.*  
*INSET A bald eagle leaves her fledglings in search of their next meal.*

to Sabourin Lake. This amazing feat is believed to be the largest airlift in the North by a single aircraft at that time. Construction continued off and on for ten years until the completion of the lodge's store, the Hook Shop, in 1968.

Perhaps Sabourin Lake Club would be a more appropriate name for this timeless camp located in the northern sector of Ontario's sixth largest provincial park. For many of Sabourin's loyal guests, the annual summer pilgrimage to the lodge is simply not enough, and several visits a season is the norm. One guest has

returned 120 times in the past thirty years — the equivalent to three full summers!

Wildlife is abundant and highly visible within Woodland Caribou Provincial Park. The park's official motto, "Where nature still rules," rings true. The vast, untainted prairie-boreal forest wilderness that surrounds Sabourin is busy with bear, wolf, fox, wolverine and a huge moose population. A small population of the elusive woodland caribou, estimated to number no more than 120, inhabits the park and feeds on the plentiful turquoise-colored lichen that has wrapped



*During the lodge's construction in 1958, owner Ralph Webb ordered his crew to leave out one layer of logs on the main floor in order to speed things up. Today, only tall guests will notice this minor architectural shortcut.*



*The 30 windows on the front wall of the main lodge help illuminate the lounge and provide an impressive vista of Sabourin Lake. RIGHT These inconspicuous Ojibwa pictographs, found nearby on weathered, lichen-covered rock walls, depict images of various shamans, animals and hunting scenes.*



itself over the smooth granite face of the ancient Canadian Shield. As its name suggests, the Bloodvein River is a rich life source for pine marten, otter, mink, muskrat, beaver, bald and golden eagle, osprey, waterfowl and songbirds. These furred and feathered wild inhabitants obligingly entertain fin-focused guests throughout each day.

While today's visitors are there to enjoy these animals from behind a lens in the comfort of a trolling boat, the Bloodvein watershed was once a highly productive fur-trapper's paradise. The river was also an ideal transportation route for traders and trappers, with its 190 miles of navigable waterway flowing west into Lake Winnipeg, from which furs could be taken north to York Factory on Hudson Bay. This adventurous history charges the imaginations of visitors to the area and stimulates them further with the Native and early European relics left behind. The area is dotted with

the remains of Hudson's Bay trading posts, trapper's cabins and numerous, daunting pictographs, images of shamans, hunting scenes and animals created by the Ojibwa inhabitants of centuries past. These pictographs lie inconspicuously on flat, weathered, lichen-covered rock walls. They are the ancient maps and mysterious stories of the land's spirits, and passing visitors may find small bundles of burnt sage in the cracks of walls stained with pictograph art. These have been left by respectful viewers.

"Acrobatics, including spins, not approved," reads a factory sticker on the control panel of the lodge's de Havilland Beaver floatplane. Fortunately, all aerial histrionics are piscatorial, especially those of the northern pike (*Esox lucius*, translated "water wolf"), a notoriously aggressive and violent fish. When this fish is hooked, anglers are often treated to lightning-quick surface strikes and powerful splashy lunges straight into the



*Every night, after dinner, the lodge manager announces the names of anglers who that day caught and released a pike, walleye, bass or lake trout over specific trophy dimensions. In the summer of 2002, over a thousand trophy pins were awarded.*

air. If handled improperly at the boat before release, pike usually leave the angler bleeding. Pike are plentiful in the tea-colored water of Sabourin Lake and complement the great action from walleye, whitefish, chunky smallmouth bass and lake trout caught in nearby lakes. Sabourin offers over 250 miles of shoreline fishing, both lake and river.

All species are native to the lake, with the exception of the bass. One of the lodge's original guides, Jerry Dusang, a Second World War veteran and commercial fisherman, was instructed by lodge founder Ralph Webb to catch eight smallmouth bass on a fly-out lake near

the English River in the early 1960s. He brought the fish back in a 5-gallon bucket and released them in front of the lodge. This was done to prevent Ralph from being accused of false advertising, as he was still using his old brochure from Oneman Lake and it promised smallmouth. To this day, a healthy population of smallmouth bass swims the waters of Sabourin. As guardians of this resource, the lodge enforces a strict catch-and-release policy on all lake trout and bass caught. Suicks, Little Joes, Johnson Silver Minnows, weedless Daredevle spoons, jigs, spinners and worms are the traditional gear of choice at Sabourin.

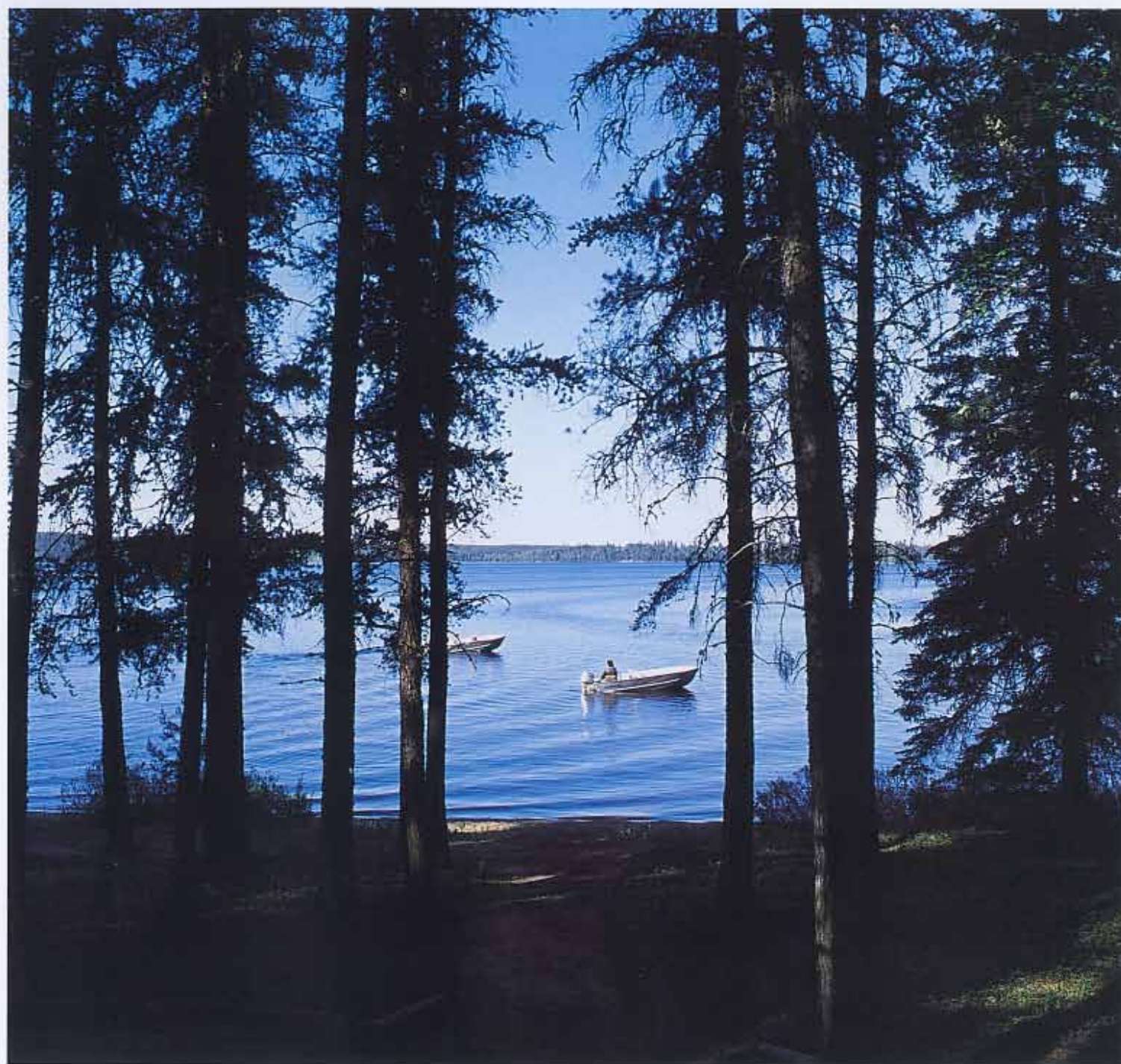
However, it is the glassy-eyed walleye that swims its way into the hearts, minds and bellies of most anglers at Sabourin. Some fish it exclusively for its fight, but all anglers pursue it for its performance as the prima donna of the shore lunch. And perform it does, coated in Sabourin's decades-proven secret batter, it is the deep-fried sustenance for guides and guests alike. Shore lunches at Sabourin are akin to religious rituals (though far more pleasant and as keen for the spirit), and the guides are its high priests, for the guides hold the key to the primary reason why most people are really there at all. The sights, smells and sounds of shore lunch are a temporary yet emancipating voyage into a life that people wish they could live, but realistically can't — that of the hunter-gatherer in

symbiosis with nature. And the guides administer this fantasy in happy doses, along with deep-fried or buttered fish, fresh fried potatoes, grilled onions, canned beans and corn. Shore lunches are mandatory at Sabourin Lake Lodge.

At Sabourin Lake Lodge there is fame and glory for those who practice catch-and-release fishing. Beginning in 1976, as a conservation initiative, the lodge launched its "Trophy Pins" program. Every night during dinner, the lodge manager announces the names of those anglers who during that day caught and released a pike or walleye over specific "trophy" dimensions, or any bass or lake trout. Each victorious angler is greeted with cheers and applause and receives a commemorative lapel pin as an award.



*Lodge and guest cabins shelter in the shade of pine trees along the sandy shoreline of Sabourin Lake.*



*Guides hover, engines idling, waiting to pick up guests from the beach in front of their cabins. Many aspects of life at Sabourin Lake have never been altered. Each cabin's wood stove is stoked and hot coffee left for guests every morning before sun-up.*



*New guests and old friends are always warmly welcomed by lodge manager Fred Penner and his wife, Susan, as they disembark from the lodge's floatplane. RIGHT Matt's mission: big pike for Sabourin's guests.*



This has been an immensely successful program for the lodge. In the summer of 2002, over 1,086 trophy pins were issued. Prior to 1976, many of those fish would have been filleted and frozen for transport home. Another initiative aimed at promoting sustainable management is the annual draw for a free trip the following summer. Only those guests who purchase provincial conservation licenses are eligible.

If you can imagine yourself at a summer camp in a remote spot back in the 1950s, you've pretty much described the atmosphere at Sabourin. Despite changes in fishing practices, many aspects of life at the lodge will never be altered. Wise Native guides from Winnipeg, Kenora and Red Lake return summer after summer to expertly ply their trade. One of the guides, Stanford, has become an institution by humbling cocksure guests at the gigantic chessboard in the main lodge. Each cabin's wood stove is stoked, with hot coffee left for guests every morning before sun-up. Tuesday night

is still chicken night, as it was forty years ago. New guests and old alike are always warmly welcomed by lodge manager Fred Penner and his wife, Susan, as they disembark from the lodge plane.

Guests like things just the way they are. This is one of the reasons that Sabourin has never really advertised since the early 1980s, when owners Ron and Shirley Williams, who purchased the camp in 1968, promoted the lodge at a couple of sport shows in the United States. Much of their current guest base, overwhelmingly from the midwest United States, was established at this time. Not having to advertise for close to twenty years is a testament to the quality of experience and service that guests enjoy at Sabourin.

You could not build a camp as large as Sabourin Lake Lodge without the help of interesting people, each with their own stories. Many have passed on to the Great Beyond, and it is with great respect that Sabourin shares these stories.