



JAMES SMEDLEY
TRAVEL EDITOR

Getting There



Turn south along Settler's Line from Trans-Canada Highway 7 and follow the signs to the resort.

Rice Lake Rendezvous

A bit of work and lots of play on the water and in the field.

It's Gord Ellis' fourth cast on this calm October morning. Smatterings of reds, browns, and yellows still cling to the hardwoods that guard the periphery of cleared fields sloping towards southern-Ontario's Rice Lake. Gord is retrieving a huge rubber perch past a rocky shoreline flanked by deep weeds.

"I've got something," he says, with a distinct note of surprise. Even though we're fishing for what has been called "the fish of a thousand casts," Gord is incredulous. "It's a muskie!"

Guide Joe Ford scoops the fish and Gord hoists the respectable 36-incher. "That didn't take long," he says, beaming.

Business and Pleasure

Every couple of years, the writers, editors, illustrators, and photographers for *Ontario OUT OF DOORS* get together for a few days of editorial meetings, heavily diluted with as much fishing and hunting as we can manage. This year, we're at Elmhirst's Resort on the north shore of Rice Lake. Because contributors are spread throughout the province, it's a great opportunity to reconnect and check out the hunting and fishing in different areas of Ontario.

As a base of operations, Elmhirst's Resort is stellar. Our group is divided amongst a line of housekeeping cabins along the shoreline,



Rice Lake vista. Surrounded by fields, the area is also popular with waterfowlers.

a short walk to the Hearthside dining room, where meals of Angus beef raised on the premises are joined by locally reared trout, washed down by the products of local micro-breweries on tap.

Field and Stream

On day one I join Art Director Tamas Pal and Rice Lake veteran Terry Curtis to pull walleye up to 22 inches from a vast mid-lake weedbed. When we reconvene at Elmhirst's Wild Blue Yonder pub for lunch, our group of close to 30 compare stories, encapsulating the scope of hunting and fishing opportunities within the Peterborough and Kawartha's area. Over a buffet of burgers, sausage, and salads, we compare notes on Rice Lake smallmouths and largemouths, Pigeon Lake muskie, Otonabee River carp, as well as pheasants and geese from nearby fields.

We digest the feast with a short drive to the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters' Mario Cortellucci Hunting and Fishing Heritage Centre in Peterborough. The centre is all about the past and present efforts of anglers and hunters to conserve the creatures we hunt and fish for. The multimedia educational centre celebrates

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our hunting, fishing, and trapping traditions with things like life-sized dioramas of wolf, bear, and moose and a huge aquarium filled with virtually every Ontario game fish.

Time Flies

Next morning, I pile into Luigi De Rose's van with photographer Jim Markou and writer Jim Poling. The drive toward Hastings gives us a great autumn sampling of the rolling pastoral landscape of fields and split-rail fences sloping down to Rice's dark waters and round, wooded islands. We're hoping to launch Luigi's bass boat at the eastern end of the lake, but the attendant is late and a padlocked chain is stretched across the launch. With morning hours ticking away, Luigi initiates plan B and



Traveller Info

THE TRIP

Resort-based hunting and fishing around Rice Lake.

TRANSPORTATION

Drive-to resort.

ACCOMMODATION

Deluxe waterfront cabins with hot tub, fireplace, sunken living room, deck, full kitchen, and bathroom start at \$160 per night for two and \$30 per additional person. Pricing ranges depending on season and day of the week.

we head east of Hastings to launch into the Trent River.

Plan B works out well, with narrow sections of the river providing a measure of protection from a howling wind. We catch a few small bass by working shoreline current breaks before Luigi heads to a mid-river raised rocky flat, where fittingly, OOD's Bass Editor puts on a clinic. I manage to hook a few decent bass by popping a tube jig off the rocks, but Luigi swings in at least three 20-inchers and backs it up with a small muskie.

With the bass and Luigi showing no signs of slowing down, we reluctantly realize it's time to pull the plug and head back for lunch and an editorial meeting. Leaving active fish is tough, but Elmhirst's Resort delivers again with a lunch buffet with everything from mussels and smoked salmon to prime rib. After such a feast, the fact that no one nods off during our meeting is a strong commentary on the dedication of our writers.

By mid-afternoon, most of the group pack up and head home. However,

Author, left, and Joe Ford with double bass.





OD editors and writers check out the OFAH's Mario Cortellucci hunting and fishing heritage centre in nearby Peterborough.

knowing that the mixture of meetings and fishing just wouldn't scratch the angling itch with the force we need, Gord and I will be staying a few extra nights, in order to head out on Rice Lake for a full day on the water.

Getting Serious

Ford picks us up at the dock in front of our cabin at 8 am the next morning and we layer up for the cool ride to our first stop at a deep, rocky shoreline adjacent to a broad weed flat. This is where Gord boats a muskie on his fourth cast. After releasing the mid-sized predator, Gord continues to cast the big rubber perch, while I throw a bucktail spinner and Ford experiments with various presentations.

Within half an hour, the perch provokes another attack, with a larger muskie surfacing and clamping down on the rubber fish just as Gord is lifting it out of the water for another cast. There's a brief thrashing, and Ford and I look back to see the lure fly into the air and the fish disappear into the depths.

We decide to give the spot a rest and troll along what Ford says is the old river channel toward a windblown point. He adds most of Rice Lake is 6 to 10 feet deep, but drops quickly to 25 feet off the point. To demonstrate the value of this structure, Ford casts a blue crankbait close to the wave-washed rocky shoreline and connects

instantly with a fat smallmouth of about 19 inches.

We continue to work down the shoreline, using tube jigs and crankbaits to boat chunky smallmouths from the rocks. When the shoreline becomes adorned with lily pads and weeds, I put on a Senko and pull out half a dozen largemouths from water just deep enough to keep their backs wet.

We continue probing all the bays, islands, docks, boathouses, cribs, flats, and breaks that Ford can deliver. At one rocky extended point, Gord puts on a 6-inch tube to target muskie, but sets the hook into a 21-inch smallmouth.

There's so much interesting water to fish, it seems we barely find time to eat the lunches Ford packed for us. The 31-year-old guide and tournament angler explains that at this time in autumn the fish are in transition from their summer to winter haunts and often there's no reliable pattern. This means that we continue to pick up quality fish from

a wide variety of locations, and the day slips quickly by.

With the sun hovering above the trees, Ford takes us back to the dock in front of our cabin. Gord and I get changed for dinner and walk along the waterfront path to the Hearthsides dining room. Between swigs of Church-Key Northumberland Ale and mouthfuls of duck prosciutto, we both agree this is not a bad way to end a great October day on the water. ●

Elmhirst's Resort

1045 Settlers Line
Keene, Ont., K0L 2G0
1-800-461-1940
www.elmhirst.ca

Peterborough and the Kawarthas Tourism

1400 Crawford Dr.
Peterborough, Ont., K9J 6X6.
1-800 461 6424
www.thekawarthas.net

Joe Ford Pro Fishing

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Check List ✓

- Bring a hearty appetite for truly great meals.
- Take time to walk the hiking trails for an elevated view of Rice Lake.
- Fish the lake in fall when most other anglers are done for the season.

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