

## **Fishing Lore on Lake Seymour.** By Charles "Woody" Woods

April is a time to think "fishing" on the lake. The fishing season opens on April 9th. But, of course, for many folks in the area, the real opening of the fishing season is the third Saturday in January when from then until March 15th ice fishing season is a local tradition and passion. In fact, the Abenaki name for the lake is Namagonic ("salmon trout spearing place") which most likely took place during the winter. Lake trout and salmon are very active during the winter and often are found in shallow water, so the fishing can be very exciting. On a cold winter day on Seymour, one can catch lake trout, brown trout, rainbow trout, salmon, smallmouth bass, burbot (also known as ling) and of course yellow perch through a hole in the ice. Each February Wright's Sport Shop in Newport sponsors a fishing derby, and most years the winning lake trout is in the 10 pound range, with winning brown trout and rainbows usually 5-6 pounds. The largest yellow perch is usually about 13 inches and a pound. Nice fishing on a winter day. Like Town Meeting Day, ice fishing is a real Vermont tradition in February and March. The characteristic ice shanties so common on Seymour during the winter cannot appear before November 20th and must be removed by the last Sunday in March. However, on a weekend day in mid-February a small village of ice shanties exists off the town beach. Smoke comes out some chimneys, cars and snowmobiles are parked beside many, and people are standing about talking, barbequing or tending tip-ups over their scattered holes in the ice. For those SLA members who are never here during the deep winter months, it is a sight that is hard to imagine on a warm mid-July day on the lake. And there are stories to tell about the goings on in the small Seymour Lake Ice Village.

Just after the ice goes out in April two early season fishing opportunities unfold; 1) fishing from shore in the weeks after the ice goes out, and 2) fishing the "Hex Hatch" in June. Soon after there is open water it is possible to see large fish rising to the surface (more like rolling just below the surface), and casting to one of these with a spinning lure or fly can result in a nice brown trout or smallmouth bass. This potentially nice fishing opportunity is made possible because of insects

and debris being washed into the lake from high water in the streams, and by fish being nearer the surface than they are after the lake warms in May and June. And of course it goes along with the excitement of opening day of the season and once again being able to fish after a long Vermont winter. In the Seymour East area of the lake where the combination of Sucker Brook entering the lake and a steep drop off 100 feet off shore has created a special fishing opportunity divined by several generations of local camp owners. At this same time of year white suckers (*Catostomus commersoni*) are making their spawning run up the brook, and are easily captured for bait. This special fishing technique of great local ingenuity places a hook and line baited with a sucker (or large minnow) in a row boat to be rowed out to the drop off and lowered into the lake. Rowing back to shore, and setting the spinning rod on shore (with its bale open) supported by a forked stick the rod is then watched (with a little socializing going on too) for a sign that a fish has taken the bait and is swimming away. It may not sound like the art of fishing, but in the Northeast Kingdom, what works is appreciated, and I can confirm that this technique works.

The "Hex Hatch" occurs in mid to late June as the lake warms enough that mayflies begin to emerge from shallow (10 feet more or less) soft bottom areas. The hex is from the name of the very large mayfly *Hexagenia limbata*. This pale colored mayfly emerges from the surface of the water just before dark, and unfolds its yellow sail-like wings to float upwards. When a huge hatch of these flies occurs the surface of the water can be alive with rising trout or smallmouth bass, and the darkening evening sky full of swooping gulls and bats feeding on the airborne mayflies. What an exciting time, although the rapidly deepening dusk into dark can make casting or changing a fly agonizing. But it can also be an exuberant fishing experience with a fly rod and the proper imitation hexagenia dry fly.

Another Seymour fishing tradition is trolling for lake trout and salmon. We have all seen the slowly moving boats in the early morning and evening hours, usually trolling along favorite stretches of the lake. Often where the lake suddenly drops off or where there is a deep hole. These savvy fishermen have their well-

guarded routes and locations, and are recognized evening after evening as they troll by our camps. I am one of these fishermen, and I love trolling a streamer fly at the end of a lead core multi-colored line. The number of colors one puts out is related to how deep the fly (or lure) is trolled, and that varies as the season passes. Some of this information is passed down from friend to friend (or generation to generation). Fishermen (or as is more acceptable these days "fishers" ) guard their secrets carefully, and are notorious for vague statements and even outright lies. But these days, electronic sonar equipment can reveal all, and answer many of the questions held so dear.

I have spent many an afternoon or evening trolling one of my secret favorite flies, and landing and releasing three or four nice 20-25 inch lakere. And there is always the chance of a nice 25 inch landlocked salmon or even a beautiful amber-colored brown trout. There are variations on this theme. Troll more quickly some say. Others troll slowly, and jerk their lures back and forth. Others, the real old hands at lake trout fishing, have a special technique. They will be over a favorite deep hole or rise, or drift slowly, while they jig a line just off the bottom. Some with a lure (jig-like spoon) on a rod, but others holding the line by hand so that they can feel every tremble or action. These are the lake trout specialists and traditionalists. And they are often the ones who catch the largest lakere. They guard their secrets carefully.

The fishing season slowly passes. The lake warms, and the summer boat traffic blossoms. Jet skis and cheerful tubers and water skiers dominate the lake during the warm daylight hours. But the fishers are still on the lake, trolling or jigging for the big fish, just very early in the morning or late into a long summer evening. The fish are deep, and the number of colors on one's lead-core line increases, but the fishing can still be rewarding. For the real enthusiast or old hand, however, a resurgence of good fishing occurs after most of the season activity has died away. The lake begins to cool down. The lake trout are beginning to spawn in special places close to shore, and lakere and salmon are closer to the surface. In September and October the fishing can be extremely fine. Like spring skiing at the end of a long cold season. The crowds have thinned,

but the fishing (like late March and early April spring skiing) is something special. For Lake trout and salmon the season is over on October 31.

For smallmouth bass, the season on Seymour stays open until November 30th. And Seymour Lake is one of the best smallmouth bass lakes in the state. Casting a lure or fly over rocky areas or drop offs can produce a beautiful, energetic 3-5 pound smallmouth that will take out long runs of line and frequently jump. In the spring the smallmouths are spawning in "beds" in shallow water. The females guard their nests with ferocious vigor, and will take a lure or fly in an effort to drive an intruder away. There is a special catch and release only season for smallmouth bass from opening day (April 9th this year) until June 10th. The fishing for smallmouths during the hex hatch can also be excellent.

Lake trout in Vermont must be at least 18 inches, and salmon 15 inches to be kept. A total of no more than 2 (combined) of these two species may be kept in a day, while the combined number for brown and rainbow trout is 6 (with no size limit). For smallmouth bass the minimum size is 10" and the limit is 5 fish. The limit for yellow perch is 60 and there is no size regulation. For pickerel (yes Seymour has pickerel), perch, smelt and burbot there is no closed season.

Seymour Lake has a reputation as one of the best fishing lakes in Vermont. There is a healthy population of smelt, one of the primary requisites for big lake trout. And there are swarms of small 1-2 inch perch, which is another excellent baitfish. The lake is large (1,769 surface acres), deep (167') and cold, and it has an irregular bottom and shoreline. It has a lot of recreational use, but it is not overfished, and many people fishing the lake release some or even most of the lake trout caught. It does not have as many large rainbows nor as fine a hexagenia hatch as nearby Echo Lake. And it is not the kind of shallow eutrophic lake that produces great perch, bass and bluegill fishing. But for lake trout and smallmouth bass, with an occasional landlocked salmon, brown trout or rainbow, it is an outstanding lake with a character all of its own. We are lucky it is our own Seymour Lake