



TECH BULLETIN

ALBERTA CANADA

NORTH SASKATCHEWAN RIVER

Compiled from the Diaries and Logs of the Luhr Jensen Fishing Research Team.

By G. G. (Gary) Hanke
 Alberta Sports Fishin' Tours
 Edmonton, Alberta

In 1754, Anthony Henday explored the North Saskatchewan basin to determine and expand the potential lucrative fur trade business. As a result, a long and vivid history of settlements was established along the North Saskatchewan River (N.S.R.). Fur trading posts were located along its banks, Edmonton House in 1795 and Rocky Mountain House in 1799. These posts

One Of The Top Five Sportfisheries in Alberta

attracted settlers, farmers and missionaries.

In 1843, a Catholic Mission was established on Lac Ste. Anne and it still hosts a religious pilgrimage each year. A few years later a Protestant Mission was built on Pigeon Lake.

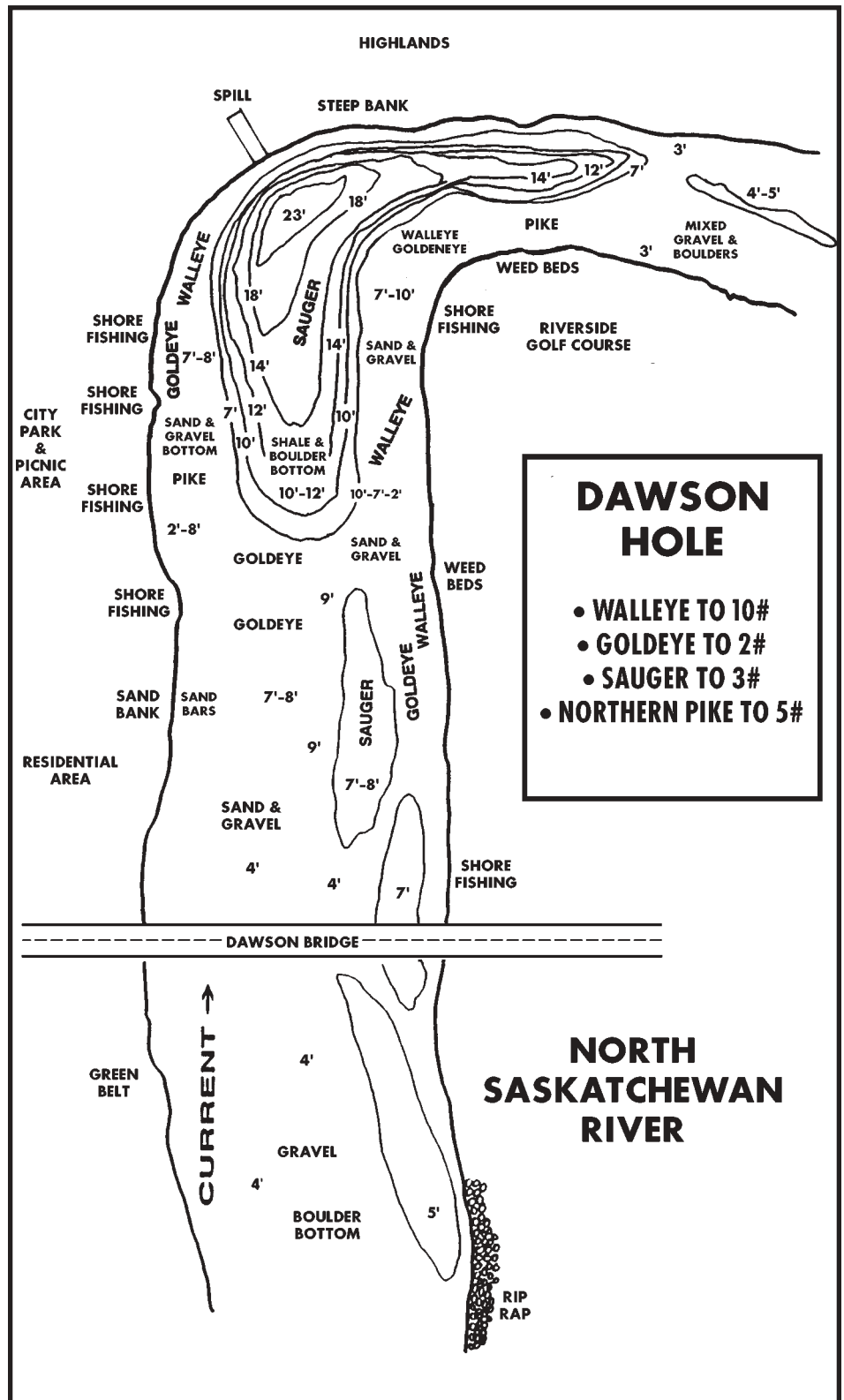
Edmonton became a focal point for much of the river basin and it still maintains this pleasure as the capital city of Alberta. Within the city boundaries along the N.S.R. there are literally hundreds of places to fish, yet the best locations seldom see more than a dozen anglers a year. These areas are mostly approachable only by boat because of steep banks.

The N.S.R. basin is the third largest drainage system in Alberta. It originates in the Rocky Mountains from glaciers of the Columbia icefield and flows north and east to Drayton Valley. Through this area from the highest elevations, the Alpine and sub-Alpine regions, it finds its origins. The river winds its way through Kootenay Plains, Boreal Upland Forest in the Nordegg, on into Boreal Foothills to the town of Rocky Mountain House and then to the town of Drayton Valley. This latter area hosts diverse forest and vegetation. Trembling Aspen, Balsam Poplar, White Spruce and Lodge Pole Pine are the most common trees to this region. The section of the river from Nordegg to the Drayton Valley town-site is full of cutthroat trout, brown trout, brook trout, bull trout, lake trout, Rocky Mountain whitefish and some

walleye. This is a large river and at times, with the high water from rain and spring runoff, it can be wild and dangerous for the inexperienced boater.

From Drayton Valley eastward, a noticeable change in the river takes place. It moves through mixed wood forests of Trembling Aspen and Balsam Poplar. The slope of the N.S.R. decreases as it extends eastward past

Stony Plain, Edmonton and Smokey Lake areas. There are several recreation lakes in this area and they are the most heavily used in the province. These are Lac Ste. Anne, Lac La Nonne, Wabamun Lake, Pigeon Lake, Buck Lake and Jackfish Lake. All of these host northern pike, walleye, whitefish, perch and lake suckers. Wabamun Lake consistently produces large northern



RECOMMENDED N.S.R. LURES



pike, while Lac Ste. Anne and Lac La Nonne are prolific producers of walleye in the 2- to 4-lb. range with an occasional 8- to 10- pounder.

This region of the N.S.R. hosts sauger and goldeye to 2 pounds, lake sturgeon 40 to 60 pounds, northern pike to 20 pounds, walleye to 15 pounds and an occasional brown or bull trout. An Alberta record walleye (6.7 kg) caught in 1989 comes from this region.

Lake sturgeon in the Edmonton area are being tagged for a fisheries project and anglers are asked to supply tag number, location, date and length of capture to any Fish and Wildlife office.

From Smokey Lake townsite the river flows through Aspen Parkland crossing the border into Saskatchewan joining the South Saskatchewan River near Saskatoon. Eventually it flows into the impoundment of Tobin Lake and into the Nelson River system which empties into Hudson Bay.

Fishing is a major activity on Alberta lakes, but the river itself is seldom travelled, probably due to its inaccessibility and few boat launches. The abundant fish population is a direct result of this lack of fishing pressure.

The walleye fishing has three very strong angling periods through the year and is consistent for the balance.

SPRING

The post and prespawn always produce many 1- to 10-lb. fish at creek mouths, spillways and other man-made areas. The Edmonton Power Station, Science Park, Clover Bar Creek, Whitemud Creek Park, Ross Dale Hole, Dawson Hole (see map on front) and other inflow areas or secondary creeks (Aux Pins Creek) are traditional angling areas in the Edmonton vicinity.

High spring water conditions resulting from rain and mountain snowmelt from May until June offer difficult, but productive fishing. Angling for walleye and sauger this time of year is challenging at best because clouded water and turbulent conditions necessitate changing usual lure presentations to a slower, more methodical technique.

For walleye or sauger, a 1/4- to 1/2-oz. walking sinker and a shiner min-

now or leech will produce many fish. A jig and minnow can also be effective in back eddies and at the confluence of tributaries.

SUMMER

These months offer improved angling conditions with clearer water and an abundance of food. These factors, along with warming summer temperatures, generally create aggressive behavior in the fish. Work drift boats through and around the edges of holes vertically jigging 1/2- or 3/4-oz. **Crippled Herring** spoons.

In clear water try **Nickel** or **Nickel/Neon Blue Back** while in stained water use **Pearl White** for walleye and sauger. Also jig **Krocodile** spoons in the same weight and colors as the **Crippled Herring**. A personal favorite is to jig a **John L. Super Walleye** lure with a worm or minnow while drifting downstream. This will not hang up on the bottom and is very effective drifting with the current. Cast crankbaits such as the **Sugar Shad**, **Speed Trap**, **Rock Walker** or **Fingerling** in back eddies. Walleye angling peaks in the latter part of the summer.

FALL

During this season, there are several approaches one can use such as back trolling flats and eddies with **Power Dive Minnows** or **Power Minnows**. Casting from a boat to shore and allowing your boat to free-drift will pull the hook into deeper water and is also effective when working very shallow water (less than four feet).

When trolling crankbaits either up or down stream, always long-line the lure 120 feet or more behind the boat. A 3-way rig with a **Jeweled Bead Wall-eye Spinner** and dew worm or 3-way with a **Power Minnow** or **Needlefish** spoon works very well. A 4 3/4" **Power Dive Minnow** or a **Ripple Tail** can also be effective.

Use 14-lb. Berkley XL for main line and up to a 3- or 4-oz. bell sinker on a dropper line. Troll downstream slightly faster than the current. Work it through and around the edges of holes in 12 to 20 feet of water usually found on river bends. Long-line on flats adja-

cent to bends (tongues) with the **Power Minnow**.

Other trolling techniques include using a **Hot Shot Side Planer** with a crankbait about 60 feet behind it. This allows you to run your boat in the main channel of deeper water while your plug is up on the 4- to 7-ft. feeding flats.

Cast along rip rap banks, rocky shorelines and edges of sandbars or islands to key in on heavy fall feeding. When water drops below 49° F., fish congregate in deep holes and feed on nearby flats and large eddies.

WINTER

Alberta regulations do not allow you to angle frozen flowing water.

RIVER ACCESS

One can access the river at the Edmonton Power Plant on the east side, Rundle Park, Capilano Park, Dawson Park, Rafters Landing, Emily Murphy Park, Whitemud Creek Park and Terwilleger Park on the west side of the city. These provide the angler access to many varieties of fish. Tailraces of spillways, pools, runs, flats, back eddies and many other structures are here to challenge angling and casting skills.

The boat launches are spaced so that you can drop in your boat at the west end of Edmonton and float through the downtown area and river parkland to the east end and pull out at the day's end. The launches are at Laurier Park and Capilano Park on 50 Street. The latter is the better of the two.

SHARP HOOKS PAY OFF!

Another of the easiest, yet most important, things you can do to improve your fishing success, is to maintain super-sharp hooks on your lures at all times. A fine-toothed file such as Luhr Jensen's **Sharp Hook File** is the absolute best hook sharpening tool available.

Hold the file parallel to the hook point and with gentle, one-way strokes, remove a small amount of metal on at least two sides of the point to obtain a sticky-sharp point with a knife-like cutting edge.