

Sunset Country Superman

Contributed by Bob "Bobzilla" Chochola
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You could visit her one hundred times and never even begin to know the treasures that lie beneath her majestic beauty. She's a jewel as pure and unspoiled as the falling snow deep within Northwest Ontario's frozen wooded winter paradise. One hundred trips north is a century of musky fishing if you are like me and venture into Sunset Country once a year in search of the Queen of all beasts prowling the fresh water depths — muskie. It's no surprise to me that such a beautiful place, with its thick carpet of pine and wandering waterways that separate a seemingly endless collection of towering rock formations under an always-spectacular sky, can lure an angler away from his favorite musky lake forever.

Like a mistress, Dryberry Lake seduced me with her ways. I betrayed the familiar and loyal, a place where I fell in love with muskie hunting and swore — at least in my own heart — to always be true no matter what. I traveled north of the border for a fling that I thought would never last, an infatuation with the unattainable, a rendezvous with a once-in-a-lifetime fantasy world. I was wrong about that though — dead wrong. Her awesome presence and rugged charm stole my heart and I found myself wanting her more and more with every meeting: wanting her with every cast for the rest of my days.

Until I met her, my heart belonged to another. I would, without thought of straying, remain loyal to my one and only true hot spot for more than a decade. I believed that I had it all, but would eventually learn that there is much more to muskie fishing than convenience, comfort, and familiarity.

The moment she came into my life everything changed. Nestled deep within the Canadian Shield, Dryberry Lake is a hidden treasure among many other golden angling opportunities that are much more popular and well publicized — not to mention easy to reach. Her modest twenty-seven thousand acres of gin clear water is forever part of the national forest and therefore protected from becoming too civilized. Dryberry's solitude isolates her even further. Unlike the popular Lake of the Woods, this lake is not studded with resorts, and it is not easily accessible by a motor vehicle with a boat in tow. In fact, there are only two resorts that I'm aware of on (or with access to) Dryberry Lake and you must bring ALL your gear into camp (in BOTH cases) by boat. One road access is for those who choose to just drop their boat in and fish for the day, but be advised this is a treacherous ride and unforgiving if rain, sleet, or snow glaze the trail.

For those who make the trek, however, Dryberry Lake has it all. Unforgettable muskie fishing is always on the menu and if you pause to pursue other species, lake trout, small mouth bass, and northern pike grow pretty big considering they are always on the menu too — the muskies' menu, that is.

My fishing partner Pat made it to Dryberry first, hitting the late fall bite with some friends of ours. By the time he got back he would have stories of very strong, sturdy lunge that put all of our south of the border conquests to shame. He said that I wouldn't want to go anywhere else again. He was right!

I wasn't an easy sell though and decided to split my next trip between the standby and this new mysterious seductress that my friend seemed to have fallen in love with at first sight. After the first nine days on old reliable battling party boats, speedboats, wave runners, water skiers, tubers, and unbearable fishing pressure, we hit the back nine on Dryberry and only encountered two other boats in more than a week's time. The fishing was good too in spite of the fact that this was our first solo navigating the twenty-seven thousand acre lake. We didn't know our way around and we didn't know the spots, but we still raised more fish in nine days than in ten years at the other place. These were fat fish too, unlike the anemic variety we were used to seeing. Hogs!

This fall I will travel fifteen-hundred-and-three long miles to make her acquaintance once more - Dallas to Chicago by air and then Northern Illinois, through Wisconsin and Minnesota, and on up into Ontario's Sunset Country by car. This is a journey I have been making for the last nine years and, God willing, I will experience many more great adventures to come on Dryberry Lake. The allure isn't her big muskies alone, although the thrill of the hunt and the probability of a powerful strike make the long haul well worth it for me. Were it not for the big muskies I guess I would probably be tossing spinners for large mouth bass on Caddo Lake, but the total experience on this Canadian treasure is so phenomenal that the wonder of it all takes me back to my childhood when everything was a mystery.

Today my Muskie Mistress awaits my arrival and in twenty-eight days I will be with her again to challenge the Queen of Dryberry Lake prowling the deep (and the shallow) with a reckless abandon like only such an aggressive fish can do. Those big toothy critters have captured the heart of this muskie man, but it is the true outdoorsman in me that gets

carried away upon the waves. Her natural beauty; towering cliffs and rich vegetation are the perfect setting to escape the stress and pressure that life so often brings. I enjoy the boat ride maybe more than the stops we make along the way to cast. I feel free and at home – a million miles from “the real world.”

When she gets angry she shows me her dark side; I’m wise to respect her fury when this time comes. In an instant the peaceful pool can turn into a raging sea, but she always comes around to reveal her beauty to me again. This is what comes naturally for her and it’s what I love about her. The proof is in the pictures I take and in the memories she makes. It is evident on my face when I speak of her, I’m told. My Muskie Mistress’ big fish and awesome wilderness make me feel like a Sunset Country Superman every time we’re together.

Bob Chochola is a freelance Writer and Photographer based in the Dallas/Ft.Worth area. Read more of Bob’s articles and check out his photo galleries at WWW.BOBZILLA.TV

Send Bob fan mail at bobzilla@bobzilla.tv This e-mail address is being protected from spam bots, you need JavaScript enabled to view it

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