Like many endeavors, fishing for Lake Trout (or Lakers) has its own sets of rituals whether you are fishing shallow in the Spring and Fall, or jigging deep in the dog days of summer. From choosing your bait, line, and tackle, to deciding what to pack (if anything) for lunch, it's the total experience that makes fishing for Lakers one of the best ways I know to spend a day on the lake. Lake Trout are found in deep, cold, clean and clear water lakes, which works for us because that describes Kakagi (Crow) Lake to a T, as in trout. Once you are on the water, the most important part of the ritual is to relax, sit back and take in the surroundings. When you see pine covered islands, steep rock walls, and only the occasional other boat, you are at the right spot for Lake Trout fishing.

Since this is the beginner's guide, let's start with the **FACTS**

**Lake Trout (Salvelinus namaycush), also called Mackinaw**

- **Ontario record:** 63.12 lbs (28.65 kg).
- **Average size:** Two to 10 lbs (0.9 to 4.5 kg).
- **Temperature and habitat:** Around 50°F (10°C) in clear, deep lakes.
- **Biology:** Spawns in fall over boulders or rubble shoals in lakes. Can live 20 years or longer, hence can reach a great size.
- **Range:** Native to Alaska, Canada and the Great Lakes, they are most abundant in the Great Lakes, Hudson Bay, Alaska, Labrador, New Brunswick, Vermont and Maine. They have been widely introduced to cold waters throughout Canada and the United States.

Ontario is known to have 25% of the world population of Lake Trout, yet only 1% of Ontario lakes have Lake Trout.

Lakers have a raised tooth crest on the head of the vomer. The tail is forked. The least colorful of all trout, the body is generally blue-gray or bronze-green with pale spots on the side and back. During the fall spawning season fins near the tail become a pale orange.

Young lake trout feed on freshwater shrimp, plankton, insects and other aquatic invertebrates. Larger ones feed on small fish like cisco, smelt, sculpins, kokanee, whitefish and tullibee.

Open season for Lake Trout in our area is January 1st to end of September. Size restrictions come into effect in September for those using a full limit license.

Now you probably know more about Lakers than you ever wanted to know. Don't fret, there won't be a test at the end.
EQUIPMENT

The rod and reel are critical tools for fishing Lake Trout. You need a baitcast reel with a good clutch and drag. An old bass or muskie baitcast reel will work. The reason for the baitcast reel is that it will drop the lure more quickly than a spinning reel because the baitcast spool will spin faster than line will fall off the spinning reel. The baitcast reel clutch knob should be adjusted loose enough for a fast drop of the lure yet tight enough to avoid a backlash when the lure reaches bottom. The drag should be tight enough for a hook set and loose enough for the fish to pull drag. Adjusting the drag a little tight and backing off after the hook set often works well with Lake Trout because they often don't fight hard at first.

Though dependent upon the gearing, the average baitcast reel will retrieve about two feet of line for each full turn of the crank. It is a good idea to test and check your reel in roughly 100' waters, where 50 cranks on near still water would bring your lure very near the surface.

The rod should have a medium heavy action, but a medium action rod will also work well. A healthy amount of fresh, 12-pound, low visibility monofilament line is preferred. It is strong enough to set the hook and handle most fish, invisible enough to not deter the fishing. Be sure to start the trip with around 300 feet of line, so that the fish do not run your reel out of line.

One of the best lures I've found for Lake Trout fishing is the River2Sea Diver Vibe 80. We have a supply of them available for purchase at our lodge. With the Vibe 80 you can cast, troll or jig. The Vibe 80 has two treble hooks which will increase the likelihood of getting a hook in the fish over the single treble hook lures. The factory treble hooks are small enough to set easily and strong enough to hold most fish. The Vibe 80 has been one the most successful lures for new and experienced Lake Trout anglers.

Before your ready to fish with the Vibe 80 you will want to find the retrieve speed or cadence that brings out the vibration in the lure. Using a medium heavy rod with 12 pound test, you might not feel the vibration until the lure is within 30' of the boat. Practice a few times and make a note of the cadence and use it often, because the vibration will help in getting the attention of a nearby Laker.

The last piece of equipment critical to jigging for the Lake Trout is a depth finder. The high end depth finders have the wonderful ability to show your lure moving on the graph, but even the low priced depth finder will provide enough information to locate some feeding Lake Trout.
As the summer progresses, the Lake Trout will be moving to deeper holes. June will likely find the majority of the Lake Trout in 50-80 foot waters. During July and August the Lake Trout typically will be in 80-120 foot waters. September Lake Trout may be deeper yet, but don't overlook the shallower waters, especially if the lake has cooled. Most of the Lake Trout will be near clouds of small bait fish which will show up on the depth finder, sometimes confusing the depth finder into showing it as the bottom.

Watching the depth finder is key to finding feeding Lake Trout. Fish that show up in the bottom 20% of the water column and fish near the thermocline are not the best targets. When the graph shows a solid mark at 60' in 110' water this is probably a Lake Trout. If a few bait fish marks show slightly above or below, this is a good sign the Lake Trout is in the process of chasing the bait fish and you want to get your lure in the vicinity. Another sign of feeding Lake Trout will be if the depth finder is showing a tight cloud of bait fish or possibly confusion of the depth finder about where bottom is located. An example would be the depth reads 130' then shows bottom at 80' for a short distance and bounces back and forth between 80' and 130' readings. The other way to find Lakers is to ask at the lodge, where we will share the latest information on where the fish are hiding.

The best way to estimate the thermocline is to note the depth where you have marked many open water fish on the depth finder. Generally this will be between 15' and 35' most of the summer on Kakagi (Crow) Lake.
**FISHING**

The experienced Lake Trout fishermen have many techniques and all of them will work. Some have specialized gear such as down riggers, cannon ball sinkers, wireline rods and high tech electronics. In the early season during April and May when Lake Trout are shallow some anglers will fish from shore with dead or live bait. Trolling crankbaits in bays and along drop-offs is a very popular early season technique. Occasionally we even see a fly rod being used for Lake Trout.

Once you arrive to the general fishing area position your boat for a slow drift. If the winds are above 5 mph the options are use the electric trolling motor to slow the drift speed or the preferred approach is to use an island as a slight wind break. While I'm not certain it has made an actual difference, I try to avoid fishing directly near the shadow of my boat.

The simplest technique to catch the feeding Lake Trout is to keep your lure near the bottom until you mark a feeding Lake Trout. Think of the bottom as your starting line and count the cranks using the cadence to work the lure up to roughly 40' above the marked fish and let the lure drop again. Be ready for the fish to hit on the way up, if not be ready during the drop. As you first start working this technique, expect to have a Lake Trout hit about 5% of the retrieves and as you get more experienced at the technique the success rate should increase to around 10%. Remember that the Lake Trout is already chasing something, moving and odds of putting a lure in the that fishes fast moving strike zone are not high. 5% to 10% doesn't sound like a high percentage to some, until you ask how many casts does it usually take to catch a 4 to 6 pound fish?

If you aren't marking fish in the feeding zone then you will want to keep slowly drift over an area looking for Lake Trout. While in this looking mode let your lure drop to the bottom and quickly crank it back up 5 or 10 cranks so that you are working the bottom 10' to 20'. Don't allow the lure to lay on the bottom, else you may find yourself in a nasty snag. Repeat the process while watching for a Lake Trout to appear on the depth finder. There is no need to bounce the rod like commonly done when jigging for walleye. In fact, because the lure is a considerable distance from the boat, there is very little risk that you will break the rod if a fish hits deep so you can usually rest the heavier portion of the rod on the side of the boat and sit back in your comfortable seats. As the lure nears the surface or when a fish is on, be sure to hold the rod up off the side of the boat. Do not forget that the most important part of fishing for Lakers is relaxing and taking in the surroundings while you keep an eye on the depth finder. Don't be surprised if you catch a fish near bottom as they are down deep, but the percentage of fish marked to those caught is lower, roughly less than 1% of marked fish will be caught from the near bottom zone.

**YOU HOOKED ONE**

For the beginner, one of the most important items in Lake Trout fishing is to plan out how to bring the fish in quickly and have a successful release. Being prepared for the catch means having a good sized net handy and knowing exactly where your long nosed pliers and line cutting device are located.

When a trout is hooked, everyone should be reeling in the other lures and lines that are out and preparing to handle the fish quickly and easily. A key item is letting the fish release its bladder near the thermocline in the water before netting. The release will result in a series of small bubbles coming to the surface.

When hooked the Lake Trout can do just about anything. Often they will come along easy for awhile but be prepared, be very prepared. When the Lake Trout decide they no longer want to come along easy, they will roll and can dive back down to the bottom and often they will make two or three deep dives before they tire enough for you to bring them to the surface. Diving is only one of the many tricks the Lake Trout use in their attempts to become unhooked. It will only take a couple Lake Trout to become addicted to this incredibly fun species of game fish.
Lake Trout have sharp teeth much like a Walleye and they don't tolerate having the gills squeezed during handling like a Northern Pike. The suggested approach is to net the fish and leave the net in the water if the fish is lip hooked – Trout are often very lively and many times will be able to throw the hook while in the net. If not, carefully grab one of the treble hooks with pliers and with a quick jerk in the opposite direction that stuck hook should release. If the fish is more deeply hooked, net the fish and bring the fish into the boat. Cutting the line often helps, and you should be unhooking and re-tying the hook frequently. Wet your hands or glove before grabbing a hold of the fish and use the long nose pliers to retrieve the lure. Lake Trout bleed often when caught and the suggestion is to work safely but quickly and don't worry about the fish bleeding. Lake Trout need the 50 degree or colder waters to survive, the amount of time in the warmer waters is very hard on the fish. Avoid holding onto the fish during the release or working the gills because the warm water will be deadly for the fish. Dropping the fish back in the water head first also helps with getting them going towards the deep, high oxygen water.

For those planning to keep a couple of Lake Trout, you will find that generally the smaller the fish the better tasting it will be, and the best eating Lake Trout are under 5 pounds.

**OTHER STUFF**

In addition to Lake Trout, guests will occasionally catch a Whitefish, which is a wonderful fish to have smoked. A couple times per year guests will report catching a Burbot, a.k.a. Eel pout, Ling or Lawyer... properly prepared I understand they are very tasty, but so far I have chosen to pass.

The most common accidental catch while fishing Lake Trout are Muskies. Two of the past three years the largest Muskie caught has come from guests fishing for Lake Trout. Most weeks during August and September the Lake Trout anglers will encounter at least one Muskie – some are caught, some are lost, some will grab a Lake Trout that is hooked and others will follow the Lake Trout to the boat. Almost all of our frequent Lake Trout fishing guests have some incredible Muskie tales to tell.

Summer Lake Trout fishing can be very exciting, one never knows what they will catch, but even if you just catch a great day on the water, it will be something you will treasure for many years to come.

**IT AIN'T BRAGGIN' IF YOU CAN DO IT**

On September 26th 2009, just a couple days before our Lake Trout season closed, I was lucky enough to catch a 30 pound, 41” Lake Trout. It was an incredible fish, amazing fight and probably a once in a lifetime catch. The Lake Trout was caught on a River2Sea Vibe 80 lure on the equipment and techniques previously described. The big Lake Trout was in 135-142 foot waters during a strong wind and I did not see it on the depth finder. After catching a special fish, people have asked if it spoils your desire to catch more or smaller Lake Trout? The answer is only for a couple days! The one thing the big fish did change, is more than ever before I want to see someone else catch a huge Lake Trout.