

NORTH OF 60

RICK BLASI HUNTS BIG PIKE IN NORTHERN CANADA

BY TERRY BITZ OF
OUTDOOR CONVERGENCE

Rick Blasi has been on a 20 year quest for big northern pike. This semi-retired Somers angler has traveled thousands of miles across the Canadian landscape in order to fulfill that quest.

In late June of this year, Blasi and his long time friend and fellow pike hunter George Sanfransky of Mount Pleasant traveled to the Northwest Territories. The fishing camp they went to is called North of Sixty, so named because it is located north of the 60th parallel.

“It is so far north that the sun set at 11:30 at night and then it rose at 3:00 a.m.”; said Blasi in a recent interview.

The trip started in Milwaukee where Blasi and Sanfransky took a flight to Winnipeg. In Winnipeg, they boarded a small plane that flew them 700 miles north to a gravel airstrip. From there, a floatplane carried the two anglers a short distance to the lake where the lodge is located.

Fishing in these far northern waters is quite different than what we experience here in late June. Blasi said the water is still cold with main lake temperatures in the 40 degree range, cold enough that one of the big lakes still had ice on it. Ice augers, however, are not required. The anglers instead look for shallow bays containing water of about 50 degrees; the preferred temperature for the big pike.

“When we pull into a bay, you can see what look like logs lying in the water”; said Blasi. “However, these logs are big pike sitting in 4 feet of water”

A preferred fishing method for these shallow water pike, according to Blasi, is to cast top water lures. Often, multiple large wakes appear behind the bait as it is retrieved. These wakes are big pike that are converging on the lure which Blasi says makes his heart race.

“When these (fish) hit the top water stuff, it’s an explosion”; he said



Rick Blasi of Somers Holds a 46 inch Northern Pike Caught in Canada

Blasi credits Bob Meshikomer, a well-known muskie and pike angler and host of the Simply Fishing television show, for teaching him how to fish for big pike in Canada. Blasi has been on three of Meshikomer shows that were filmed north of the border.

On this year’s trip the anglers were mostly landing pike in the 30 inch range, but multiple toothy lunkers over 40 inches were caught including a pair of 44 inch fish. Blasi scored the biggest pike of the trip by catching a fish that stretched the tape out to 46 inches. That is a trophy almost anywhere, but not in these anglers’ book. For them, it takes a pike over 50 inches to be classified as trophy status.

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The anglers surpassed that mark five years ago when they landed a fish that was an incredible 53 inches long. That is a monster even for Canadian waters.

Even though Blasi is on the hunt for big fish, he says part of the appeal of fishing in Canada is that he catches a lot of fish. This year's catch total was 476 pike and 12 lake trout.

Many anglers go to Canada in search of walleye. That is not the case in the far northern camps because there are no walleye. The waters are just too cold. Besides pike and trout, there are whitefish and arctic grayling in the lakes.

"Grayling are not very good eating, but they fight hard"; said Blasi.

He is proud of the fact that out of all the fish they caught, only 1 died. The rest were all caught and released which Blasi says is a necessity for the waters to maintain large pike. If people want a mount, they have to get a replica.

"The lodge has strict catch-and-release regulations along with requiring the use of barbless hooks"; he said.

Blasi does very little fishing locally now. He admits the Canadian fishing experience has spoiled him and laments the numbers of northern pike he would see harvested by anglers on our local waters.



George Sanfransky of Mt Pleasant Holds a Pike Caught in Northern Canada

"I used to fish quite a bit here. But once you get to Canada, you come back here and you don't want to fish"; he said. "I like to catch a lot of fish. Release the fish and let your kids and grandkids catch them"

Blasi said the chase for big pike is not for everyone. It takes dedication and a willingness to invest significant sums of money. And though he is well into his 60's, Blasi continues to make plans for future pike fishing adventures. "It's the scenery, the solitude, and it's a challenge"; he said. "Plus, I really like to catch a lot of big fish"