

“Are you sure this isn’t a shark?”

There are most certainly not any sharks up in the waters of Green Bay, but the way the fish grow big up there, it seems like some of them could be.

Captain Dennis Radloff of Sterling Guide Service, offered my wife Kristy and I the opportunity to fish with him up in Green Bay to see if we could find track down some of the huge muskie and large walleye that swim in the waters there.

Green Bay has gained a reputation as a trophy fishery for a number of species with the large walleye and muskies getting a lot of press the last couple of years.

Radloff spends most of his time from the late spring through early summer guiding for muskies on the waters around Milwaukee and for walleyes on Lake Winnebago. Come late July he shifts his focus to Green Bay, especially the areas near Door County.

While past years saw most of his clientele looking for an outing to chase after trophy walleye, this year most clients want to fish for big the muskie that grow at phenomenal rates up in those waters.

“Fishing for muskie has become popular because of the potential this fishery has to offer”; said Radloff who had seen several fish over 50 inches in the past week.

We met Radloff at a launch near Sturgeon Bay and started the morning casting lures for muskies around the shallow weed beds in one of the smaller bays. With no fish showing their presence, we switched to trolling in the small bay and then out into the main waters of Green Bay.

I questioned Radloff on what the muskies were feeding on.

“They (the muskies) are feeding on ciscoes, shad, panfish, walleye; pretty much anything that gets in front of their face”; said Radloff.

I wonder if that includes fingers, toes and pets? Better keep all of them out of the water when you are there; just to be safe.

A singing drag stopped our hearts for a second while we were trolling; however, tooth marks on the bait were the only evidence left behind by whatever critter tried to munch on the lure.

We finished the morning casting lures again with a “small” muskie of about 36 inches following Radloff’s bucktail at one point, but that was as close as we got to a fish.

We loaded the boat back on the trailer and moved north to the town of Fish Creek to see if the large walleye would be in more of a biting mood.

We motored out to one of the many reefs in the main part of Green Bay, where Radloff spent several minutes deploying the planar boards which are used to spread the deep diving crankbaits in a wide pattern to cover a large amount of water.

He positions the boat in anywhere from 20 to 30 feet of water while trying to present the lures relatively close to the bottom. Getting the lures to the proper depth is very important since if the lures run too shallow the walleye may not rise to hit the bait. Run the lures too deep and they will get caught up in the rocks or end up full of rock moss.

Lure depth is determined by a precise combination of line length and boat speed.

With the planar boards deployed, we settled in to admire the scenery and discuss a variety of subjects from fishing to teenagers.

One has to have the mindset that you are not going to catch a cooler full of walleye when on a hunt for a trophy. You will not have quite as much “action” as say you would on Lake Winnebago, but when you hook up with a fish there is a very real possibility it could be a lunker.

About an hour later I noticed a rod bending deeply. Radloff immediately announced it was definitely a fish, possibly a big one and handed me the rod. I asked Kristy if she wanted to reel it in, and she agreed.

Radloff instructed her to keep constant pressure upward on the rod and to keep reeling.

With about 150 feet of line between her and a fish that didn't want to be caught, along with the additional drag from a boat that was still moving under power; reeling in the fish turned out to be hard work.

Minutes later Kristy uttered those words at the beginning of this story about the possibility of the fish being a shark. The way the rod was bending it looked like it could be. The Jaw music started playing in my head.

The fish finally surfaced about 25 feet from the boat which caused Radloff to announce excitedly that it was a really big walleye and that Kristy should not try and “horse” the fish. I don't think that was much of a risk considering how tired she was.

Soon the fish was in Radloff's net and there was a mini-celebration going on in the boat. It was definitely the largest live walleye I had ever seen and the largest fish Kristy had ever caught.

The walleye turned out to 31 inches in length and over 11 pounds which is a true trophy and a fish of a lifetime for many people.

After some quick photos, we decided that we would let the fish go if it swam off, which it did. A good fiberglass replica looks just as good and lasts longer than a skin mount anyway.

We finished the outing a couple hours later with me catching a large sheepshead and losing a smaller walleye; which means that Kristy gets to hold the bragging rights to the largest walleye ever caught in our household.

Thanks to Radloff I now likely have to shell out some money for a fish mount, though that's not a bad problem to have.

Thanks Dennis.

Dennis Radloff of Sterling Guide Service guides in Waukesha County and also the waters of Green Bay and Lake Winnebago. He can be reached at 262-560-1309 and by email at sterlingmusky@charterinternet.com. His website is www.sterlingmusky.com.

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