

Economist & Sun • Stouffville Tribune

SPORTS

Piscators find paradise on doorstep



Jerome Watt

Been There, Done That Sailing and lubbing it

I'd only sailed once and I don't know much about the sport.

Truth is, I've never thought of it as a sport. After all, the wind does all the work.

But I was going to give it a try. My instructor for the day was John Palmer, the commodore of Sail Georgina.

For people such as myself who don't know what a commodore is, he's a naval officer who falls between the rank of captain and rear admiral. He's also the president of a sailing club. At least that's what the dictionary told me.

It was just one of the many seafaring terms I learned while piloting Mr. Palmer's 34-foot boat, the Buena Vista, off Jackson's Point on Lake Simcoe.

When I set foot on the craft, Mr. Palmer described to me the layout of any boat. I knew what the bow and stern were. I even knew port is the left side and starboard is the right. OK, I lie. I had to look up those in the dictionary. I always get them confused.

There were a few terms I'd heard before, but didn't quite know what they meant. For example, there is no downstairs in a boat, only below deck; the sail on the bow is the jib and the sail in the centre of the ship is the mainsail. Most importantly, the washroom on a ship is known as the head.

Any trip on a sailboat starts with raising the sails. We began by raising the jib. While raising the sail, I understood how physical sailing can get. I was pulling it up as quickly as I could,

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BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Staff Writer

In an angling fanatic's perfect world, every expedition and every cast of the rod would produce a fish.

That, of course, is piscatorial paradise of the highest calling. And if it happened, could we really call it "sport fishing"?

Whatever you call it, where regulations permit there are plenty of places in York Region to wet a line.

According to Wil Wegman, information assistant with the Ministry of Natural Resources' Aurora district office, the appeal of these places is you don't have to drive a day to get there and you don't have to spend your life savings renting or buying a boat.

For the most part, regional fishing holes are tailor-made for novice anglers.

That means no exorbitant tackle is required, unless you already have it and want to improve your angling skills.

"A lot of times, especially for the shore-bound angler, there are fishing opportunities available in York that are surprising," Mr. Wegman said. "It's a matter of priorities."

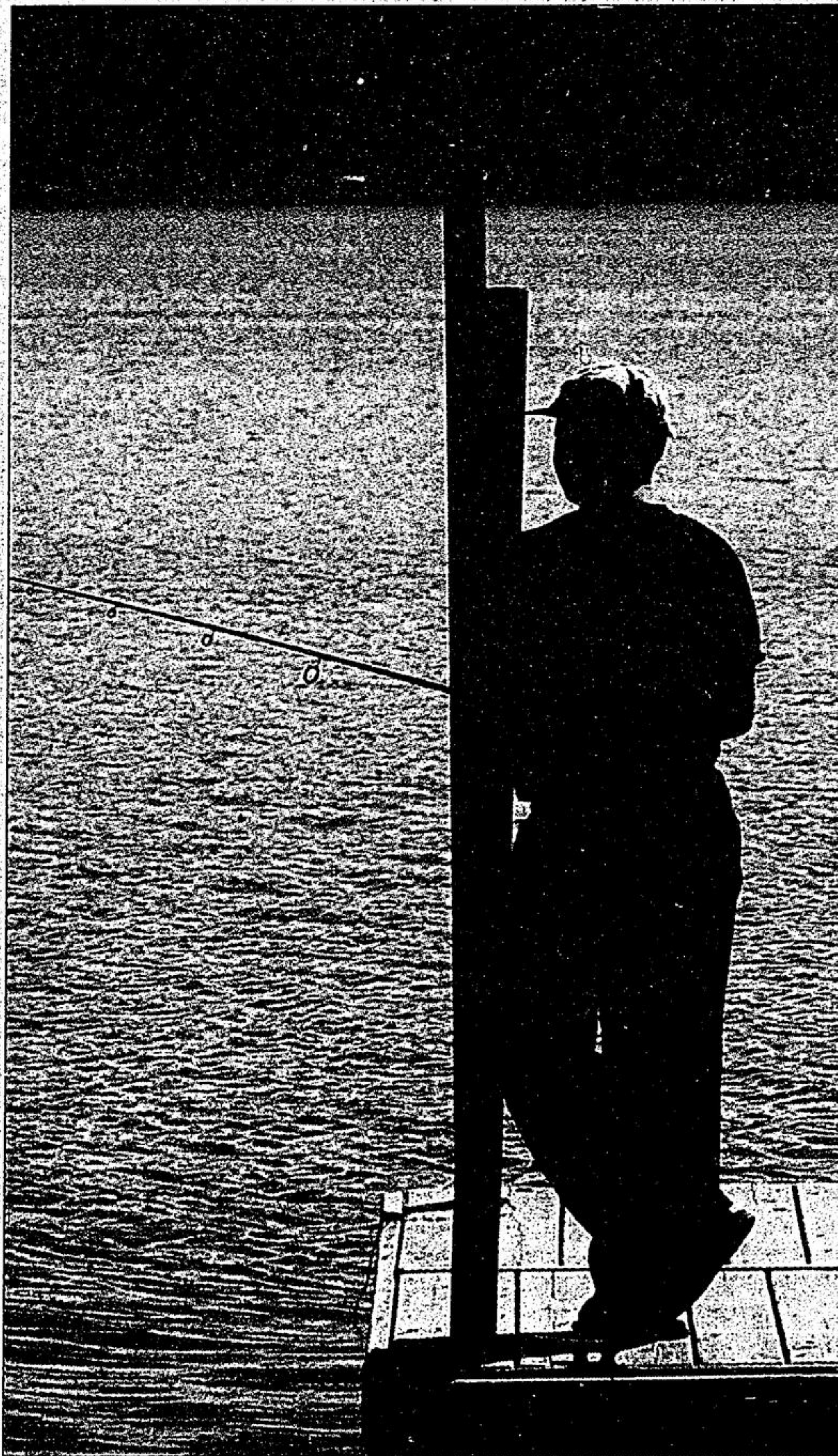
Among the places Mr. Wegman likes are those operated by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, including Markham's Milne Dam Conservation Area and Whitchurch-Stouffville's Bruce's Mill Conservation Area.

Other spots in the south end of the region include Unionville's Toogood Pond and Markham's Mount Joy Lake Park, the Stouffville Reservoir and three spots in Richmond Hill: Mill Pond, Lake Wilcox and Rumble Pond Park.

More detailed information on these locations, along with other angling opportunities within the area south of Hwy. 9, can be found in a free ministry brochure called Recreational Fishing in Toronto and Surrounding Areas. Call the ministry's Aurora office at 905-713-7400 to obtain it.

The guide supplies detailed information on what species can be caught at specific times of the year.

It also lists amenities available



FILE PHOTO

at the sites, such as restroom facilities, boat rentals and launches, parking, user fees, handicapped access and public transit accessibility.

While not run by the TRCA, Island Lake in Whitchurch-Stouffville is another body of water where anglers can wet a line from terra firma. It's accessible off the York-Durham Line.

North of Hwy. 9, the Lake

Simcoe Region Conservation Authority operates two public angling facilities. One is at the Wesley Brook Memorial Conservation Area on Fairy Lake in Newmarket and the other is Scanlon Creek Conservation Area near Bradford.

Heather McKinnon, a spokesperson for the LSRCA, said Fairy Lake has pike transferred from Cook's Bay in Lake Simcoe

by the ministry and Aurora Bassmasters. The Scanlon Creek reservoir has bass and pike.

Detailed information on these sites can be found at www.lsrca.on.ca/fish.html or by calling 1-905-895-1281.

While the LSRCA encourages people to fish at its sites, the authority is quick to note Lake Simcoe has the most diverse angling in York — and possibly the province.

"Simcoe produces the best fishing opportunities in the region," said Ms McKinnon.

"You have warm-water species such as largemouth and smallmouth bass and cold water species such as whitefish and lake trout."

With summer in full swing, most attention on the local angling scene is focused on bass. Lake Simcoe produces some of the best smallmouth bass action in North America.

Some fish caught there in live-release tournaments top the scales in the six-pound range.

"Without a doubt, Simcoe is one of the top smallmouth lakes in the world," said veteran Thornhill tournament angler Dave Chong.

Teaming up with Rob Lee to capture last weekend's Chev-Mariner Lake Scugog Bass Tournament with a two-day weight of 20.35 pounds, Mr. Chong believes anglers have only discovered the tip of the Simcoe bass iceberg.

He speculates the presence of zebra mussels has improved water clarity, which in turn has sent a good number of the bigger-sized smallies into deeper depths where they never see a lure.

"It's a body of water you can't ignore," Mr. Wegman agreed. "You can definitely land a trophy-sized smallmouth bass."

The more popular smallmouth hotspots on Lake Simcoe are found along shoals surrounding Georgina, Thorah, Fox and Snake islands.

However, reaching these places requires a boat and plenty of caution.

With Simcoe being Ontario's

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