

## Travel



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(R.W.G-SD)\*\*\*5C

## Yo-ho, yo-ho, it's off to catch Coho we go

MANISTEE, MICHIGAN: The fish boat is almost ready, with Jack Hammond tending the pot over an open fire. We're lucky to be here, because a fish boat is a private affair, an evening meal that charter boat captains and their families sometimes cook for themselves after the charter boats are in. The fish have been cleaned and the work is done for the day.

We have been salmon fishing on the Ginger Brandy with Captain Joe Wolff and his wife, Ann, of Southfield, and we hit the jackpot before we had been out an hour: seven fish, three over 15 pounds, and only one that got away.

Iris Jones is president of the Michigan Charter Boat Association (MCBA). His 300 members fish salmon and trout on Lake Huron, walleye, muskie and bass on Lake St. Clair, walleye and bass on Lake Erie, some salmon but mostly lake trout on Lake Superior, and salmon and trout on Lake Michigan. This Lake Michigan coastline is where most of the charter boats ply their trade.

CHARTER BOAT fishing is a \$59 million business in Michigan, when you count the money it brings into various areas in lodging, meals and other associated expenses.

Wolff and his fellow captains suspected fishing was big business, but they were delighted when it was made official by a 1985 study done by Michigan State University's Cooperative Extension Service and Agriculture Experiment Station.

We talked about charter fishing as Hammond added the traditional one pound of salt to the pot, with the usual ritual protests. He assured us that the salt was only to help the water boil and would not be tasted in the food. He was right, although I still don't understand why.

We talked about the business of fishing, but mostly we talked about today's catch. I was fishing with my photographer-husband, Micky, and with Sue Wagner of the Michigan Travel Bureau.

REAL FISHERMEN go out while it is still dark, but we had said 7 a.m., and when we pulled up at 7:30 a.m. they were all waiting for us on the Ginger Brandy. Joe and Ann Wolff along with Jack and Marilyn Hammond.

Jack Hammond retired to his fishing boat after 33 years with the fisheries division of the state, most of it in staff positions overseeing the hatcheries. He was the district biologist in this area when the coho and chinook salmon were introduced to the lakes in 1965 and 1967, and he has been catching those big beauties ever since.

His boat is called Shenada, "you know, she needs this and she needs that and it always costs \$800."

We eased out of Solberg's marina, past boats like Swans like Swans, and down the channel that leads through the town of Manistee to Lake Michigan, with Ann Wolff giving us the guided tour. Ann teaches at Berkeley High School and is "first mate on land and sea," she loves fishing boats even more than Joe does.

ON OUR RIGHT was the Memorial Drive project, walkways and grassy hills built by Michigan youths under state supervision. On our left was a boat called Hook Jaw, owned by Detroit Tiger pitcher Jack Morris. A town park and a Coast Guard



WHAT A CATCH: Travel writer Iris Jones takes a proud look at the salmon she caught with the help of Captain Joe Wolff (ABOVE), skipper of the charter boat "Ginger

Brandy." Sue Wagner (at RIGHT) of the Michigan Travel Bureau was along to help catch the salmon she is holding.



Photo/MICKY JONES

station bracket the mouth of the river, where Captain Joe made radio contact with boats already on the lake.

Joe was a writer and editor at the Detroit News for years, fishing on the side, until he took up charter fishing full time in the late seventies. "Connie Gall, this is Ginger Brandy WRB9575."

"I'm into the third bank and into 105 feet of water," the radio voice replied. "We had a flurry but I've only seen one fish."

The Ginger Brandy began to thump against choppy water as soon as we entered the lake, and I began to wonder if I should have taken a dremamine before I left the dock. Sometimes this water is a pane of glass, but if the waves get higher than four feet Joe says on shore. Today was a good active water day for fishing.

WE JOINED the rest of the fleet on "the shelf," a stretch of lake adjacent to a land formation called the Three Bears. Ann took the wheel while Joe organized and hooked up the seven fishing poles, in their shiny chrome holders at the back of the boat. She can hook, haul, and swing do everything he can do, but for the moment her job is to keep the boat on course.

I had just said "no fair catching fish while you're still letting the lines out," when the first big salmon struck.

"Who's going to take it?" Joe holed, and there I was trying to brace myself against the lurching deck, with a humungous fishing pole jammed into my stomach and a fish running for its life. I've always suspected it is the captain and the boat that catch the fish, and I was right.

"Keep the pole up high! Keep the line taut! Be ready to reel in fast if he turns toward us!"

IT SEEMED like hours later, but it was only 20 minutes, when Joe leaned down with a net and scooped up my fish. Note that: "my fish." By that time Micky was struggling with another one and the deck was awash with water.

Ann and Joe cleaned us up, reset the lines and half an hour later they all went off like firecrackers.

"Line four! Who's going to take it?"

"Line Seven!"

"Look out Joe, there goes line nine!"

There were four people hauling them in and one fish that got away by sheer neglect before the excitement died down. By that time I was a very pale shade of green and watching the horizon; the horizon doesn't move so you always watch it when your stomach rebels at sea.

WE PROBABLY would have sunk the boat with salmon, but they finally took pity on me and we went in.

The fish boat is ready now and my stomach feels just fine, so "my fish" is getting bigger with every retelling. Jack Hammond is almost ready to serve the fish bowl, the corn is ready to eat and Toots Dean stops working long enough to join the crowd that is gathered at the tables in front of her mobile home.

Toots and Emil Dean have been fishing here for 19 years; Emil is considered the dean of charter fishing in these parts. He was working for the railway when he had a serious accident in the 1960s. He was paralyzed when he moved up here and he never really expected to work again.

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