

THE ORIGINS OF WILLIE WALLEYE

by John Rioux

This is the true story of Willie Walleye, believe me. As Glacial Lake Agassiz was receding, a breed of giant walleyes roamed. The shallow areas south of Baudette were the breeding grounds. As they dried, only the Rapid River and the ditches on Highway 72 held enough water. Soon enough, however, the giant walleyes began to run out of room. Swimming from place to place, their sides scraped the walls of the ditches, and that's why they remain deep to this day.

At this time a giant walleye by the name of Wilma began to search for a mate. That's when she met Wally Walleye in Baudette. The two massive walleye swam around and around, creating the bay in the wake of their spawning.

One of the eggs hatched, and was given the name Willie. Willie grew and grew, and, well, he grew some more. Willie roamed far and wide, traveling north across Big Traverse, until he ran into a big island. Willie got lost and was run aground. Willie frantically swam in circles, making an island and he turned, making another. When Willie finally finished, over 14,000 islands had been created.

Willie looked everywhere for other giant walleye like him, but none could be found. None in Muskeg Bay, and the Warroad River was too shallow, as Willie had grown substantially. Sadly, he traveled to Whitefish Bay and rested in deep water.

One day, a handsome young boy named Johnny (whose last name I shall protect) was fishing on the bank of the river near Birchdale. Johnny couldn't afford fancy line, so he used laces from logger's boots. He liked them because they were oily, and could be stretched. Johnny had no hook, so he made one out of a wild plum thorn. He tied it on, and threw the line out.

Later Johnny saw his line begin to twitch. The fish pulled hard, bringing Johnny into the water, but Johnny refused to let go. The fish began to drag Johnny toward International Falls. Willie pulled Johnny up the falls (Johnny invented water skiing that day, but that's another story).

Back down they went, until Baudette Bay where Willie rested. The thorn hurt! Suddenly, he heard Johnny's voice. Johnny promised to remove the thorn if Willie promised to return the favor later. Willie happily obliged and took Johnny home.

Years passed until a company was pouring cement near Peace Park. One day, they went to work, only to be surprised to see the perfect imprint of a walleye in the slab. Willie had returned! Town folk fashioned a mold, and made the current statue as a remembrance of that great day.

Word has it that some early summer nights Willie comes out of the depths to return to the bank to visit his old friend. If you see an old man seeming to wander aimlessly, look closer, it may be Willie and Johnny. I know this story to be true, because I'm Johnny.