

On Wisconsin Outdoors

With the Dick Ellis Experts

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Incident on Chequamegon Bay

Big pike can't beat big plan

By Dick Ellis



This northern pike was caught by Dave Schinker and Al Schintgen and used as bait to entice the big fish to hit. (Ellis)

The facts of the matter about to be told are historically true and will be known from this point on and ever-more in the hearts and minds of Wisconsin anglers as the "Incident on Chequamegon Bay". The "Incident" itself occurred March 15, in the Year 2009 involv-

ing southeast Wisconsin anglers Al Schintgen and Dave Schinker on the 84,000 acre body of water serving as the gateway to Lake Superior and the Apostle Islands.

Our story moves back on the calendar to November of 2008 when Dave Schinker and Al Schintgen, on a charter targeting smallmouth bass with famed Chequamegon Bay Captain Roger LaPenter, first saw "The Fish." Three feet of tail fin, according to Captain LaPenter's journal, broke the surface due west of the charter craft, just prior to a swirl initiating a tsunami that buried Long Island and Chequamegon Point

and landed the party prematurely on the gravel shore of Ashland after a precarious two-mile ride on the crest of a 10-foot wave.

"That's a big un'," said Captain LaPenter. "I'd say it was a Pike."

Al Schintgen is a big man. So is Dave Schinker. They buy big men's clothing. They like the movie, "Big", they eat Big Macs, they think the Big Dipper is way cooler than its little brother and they pack the big Fig Newton as their snack of choice on fishing trips. Most of all, they think big. They knew there was big doings on the big bay and they hit Al Schintgen's big basement dead set on making a big Tip-Up worthy of the Big Fish.

After working feverishly through the winter months and missing first ice, safe ice, and really safe ice, the big Tip-Up was ready. Six pieces of one-quarter-inch plywood meticulously cut, machined steel and lathe-turned special monster hook on heavy duty coiled rope, garage door spring, and a red signal flag fixed to a flexible 10-foot staff came together as a piece of art.

"And the best thing is this is your basement," Dave said as they admired their contraption. "We'll never get it out of here without

knocking out your east wall."

After paying the \$7,436.85 bobcat and mason bill to knock out and rebuild the east wall, a date was set in March to target The Fish. Dave Schinker and Al Schintgen are bonded not only by their love for fishing but also by their legal ties as brothers-in-law. Lori Schinker, Al Schintgen's sister, had accepted Dave Schinker's proposal of holy matrimony years before with the stirring words of passion, "...and I'll only have to learn a few new letters in my last name..."

Ms. Schinker, and Al Schintgen's wife, Jane, accompanied the anglers north to beautiful Ashland-Washburn country to target "The Fish." "Do you realize we'll make history if we land The Fish?" Dave



"The anglers made a hole large enough to remove the Big Fish from Chequamegon Bay by auguring numerous holes adjacent to each other



The tip-up is set and baited while angler Al Schintgen keeps watch on Chequamegon Bay hoping the monster returns. (Ellis)



After the flag sprung and rope uncoiled by the mile, angler Al Schintgen would fight the estimated 1,000 pound pike for three days before winning the battle. (Ellis)

Schinker asked the women as the 12-foot tip-up rattled the roof of the truck on Highway 39 north. "We sure appreciate your support."

"We wouldn't miss it," answered Jane Schintgen. "But we're actually going shopping. Ashland and Bayfield Counties have some great shops. They would even be greater if I had another \$7436.85 in my checkbook."

After unpacking at the Ashland Hotel, Dave Schinker and Al Schintgen unleashed the Tip-Up and unloaded the two ATVs necessary to pull their project across Chequamegon Bay. Slowly moving passed the communities of ice anglers set up on the Bay targeting steelhead, lakera and walleye, Dave Schinker and Al Schintgen basked in a volley of encouraging rhetoric from the locals.

"Just might work..." offered William J. Frederick of Washburn. "Not bad, not bad at all boys..." said Sam Brown of Red Cliff with a supportive wave. Ferguson F. McGillicuddy of Odanah probably best articulated what most of the masses were actually thinking. "What?" said Ferguson. "Are you nuts?"

Al Schintgen and Dave

Schinker continued on to where they had seen The Fish months before just off of Long Island. Not long after drilling a hole and setting a more standard tip-up, they landed their bait, a beautiful 26-inch pike. The original augured hole was expanded by another 20 augured holes in a row to create one big hole worthy of the Big Fish. The Big Tip-Up was set and the vigil began.

For three days and three nights the anglers did little but wait. The billion stars of Superior Country were their only companions. When sleep finally overcame Dave Schinker, Al Schintgen slipped a loop of coiled rope around the ankle of his brother-in-law so that he might catch a bit of sleep of his own and ample warning would be assured if the Big Fish did actually hit.

The ample warning came just before dawn in the form of a massive splash as Dave Schinker disappeared down the hole. "This is great but this isn't good," Al

Schintgen's mind raced this way and that as he was jolted from his slumber.

"Now how the heck am I going to get two ATVs outta here?"

Because the entire coil of heavy duty rope burned off the spool, it was later estimated that the Big Fish traveled north by Salno, Bayfield and Red Cliff with La-Pointe Island to the east and made it to the southern boundaries of the Apostle Islands before Al Schintgen was able to stop it. Little by little, hand over hand, day after day, night by night, the angler worked the Big Fish back to Long Island.

"It was a darn good thing I've been working out," Al

Schintgen told reporters later. "It would have been easier to get him out of the hole if Dave wasn't still cross-ways in its mouth. I was hoping he would have already

turned Dave head-first so I could have used his boots to horse the fish outta there."

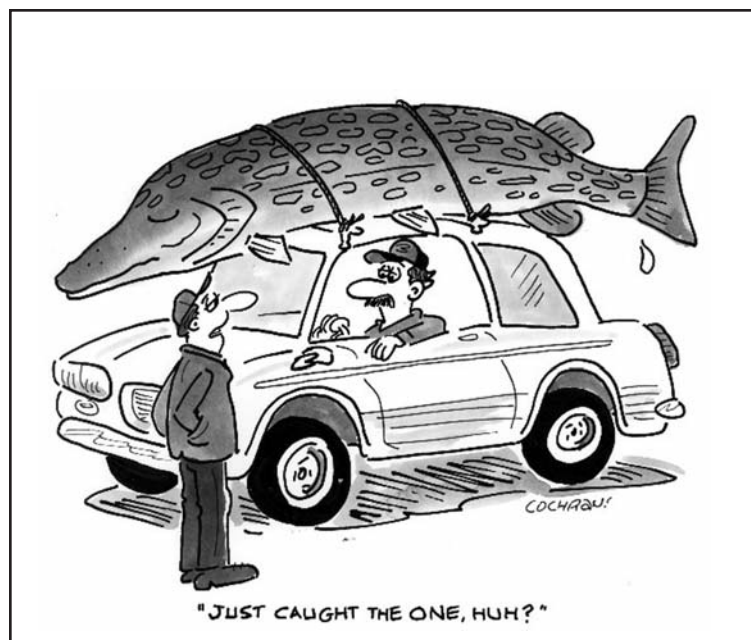
"As it was it took me another three hours to get the Big Fish to let go of Dave. By the way, Dave didn't look too good but I'll take a better look when we find him in spring."

The Big Fish was indeed a Northern Pike. It is currently at Outdoor Allure in Washburn for taxidermy work and a special certified scale is being brought in to obtain an official weight. Since it's estimated at over 1,000 pounds, the fish is also expected to be a new world record.

"I'm not real happy with that taxidermist up there," said Al Schintgen. "He's charging me by the inch."

Finally, after being mobbed by reporters from throughout Wisconsin, Al Schintgen headed home to the southeast. The wives stayed for a few more days of shopping. According to the Ashland Press, the tired and hungry angler made a final stop at McDonald's before heading south.

"He ordered a Filet-O-Fish," the report states. "And Super-Sized it." *Wo*



Artist Bruce Cochran rendering of the giant catch on Chequamegon Bay shows Ashland Daily Press Publisher Gary Pennington greeting angler Al Schintgen.