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Ice Fishing November 2012

**Ice Fishing's
Future
is Now!**

**IceFishing:
A Family
Pastime**

**Eat
Baby,
Eat!**

**2013 World
Ice Fishing
Championship**

**Lake
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The elections(s) are finally over, and hopefully your candidate won, if not as my daughter tells me "Get over it dad". Now I can't wait to see what ads take over our airtime, yea, right, one thing that we know for certain, they won't be centered on hunting or fishing.

With that being said and thank god the presidential election is over, it must be fall and winter is right around the corner. Burr, just the thought of that sends chills up my back. Winter to me means, cold temperatures, snow, ice and hard water right around the corner. Which in turn means it's time to prepare for both winter and ice fishing. Hurricane Sandy gave us a jump-start with early snowfall in North Carolina, blizzard conditions in West Virginia and a lot of rain, flooding and high water in the Northeast. All of this preparing us for the upcoming season, whether it is winterizing our boat or getting ready for some serious ice fishing.

We had such a great response to last years "Ice Fishing" issue we decided to add an additional "ICE FISHING" issue this year. And yes, this took me by surprise. I did not realize how many ice-fishing enthusiasts there were. We are even talking about doing a third issue next year, if things go as expected.

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Photos: Cover photo of Dave Genz and provided by Mark Strand Outdoors. Indexed photo provided by Lawrence Gunther.

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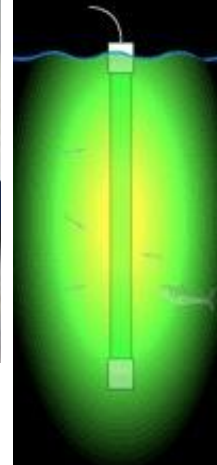
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This year the November and January issues will be focused on "ICE FISHING" and the December issue will be all about "Winter Fishing". And as usual, the February issue will be a Classic update and our New Product Tackle Box.

Please keep all of your correspondence coming. We are your magazines and without you, we are nothing.

Let's all make some time to enjoy the blessings that the good Lord has given us! Get outside and enjoy life. You may not be able to, tomorrow.

Enjoy the outdoors,

Larry Thornhill
Editor & Chief



PK Spoon



Dave Genz, shown here with a dandy crappie, uses every advantage made possible by the ice fishing revolution. For many anglers, who haven't fully capitalized on available advancements, the 'future' can be now, if they do the same. (Photo: davegenz.com)

Ice Fishing's Future is Now!

By Dave Genz

During the course of multiple interviews for his new book, *Ice Revolution*, Dave Genz spent many hours' digging through his memory banks, recounting the years he and his friends transformed ice fishing. Near the end in the process, he was asked to look to the future and envision what might come next for the sport.

Are there more major breakthroughs on the horizon? Or have we settled for a period when evolutionary refinements will mark forward progress?

Dave surprised himself by how quickly he began talking about compelling advantages today's ice anglers can have right now, some of which have been slow to make their way into the mainstream. "You can always wish for new things," he said, "but there's some pretty cool stuff a lot of people haven't tried yet."

He came away energized about the idea of stressing how he uses current state of the art to take ice fishing into a realm most people have not experienced.

High Speed, High Tech

Look closely at Genz's snowmobile and the fabulous state of current technology becomes evident. His is a big-time, high-powered machine, but he says you can set up the same gear on any snowmobile or ATV that will get you around on the ice.

A look around the dash, handlebars, and other parts of the machine reveals creative mounting of electronics that allows Dave to fish efficiently as he searches for biters.

"My GPS is right there in front of me," he begins, "so I can go right to the spots. The GPS with the map chips is not new. It's been around for a while, but there are still a lot of people who haven't taken advantage of the GPS."

(If you haven't used this technology, it's downright amazing. Your location is shown superimposed over contour lines that reveal the underwater structure in the lake. As you move across the ice surface, your location updates. It becomes easy to stop right out on the tip of a point, nestle yourself into an inside turn, or work the edges of an offshore hump.) "To me," says Genz, "the size of the GPS screen is important. I struggle when I'm looking at a handheld GPS and trying to figure out where I am on the lake, because the display is so small. Once I get near the spot, then it isn't quite so bad, but you just can't blow it up enough



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to get a good clear picture. A bigger screen, mounted on the snowmobile, is what I prefer.

“I have my Vexilar (flasher) mounted right up on the dash with me. I really like to fish right off the seat of my snowmobile unless it’s windy. I pull up, drill some holes, and start by dropping the Vexilar (transducer) to check depth, to look for weeds or some other type of cover, and to see if there are fish below.

“My underwater camera is mounted right there also, so if I’m struggling to see what’s down there – like if I’m fishing in the weeds – it’s really easy to whip the camera out and drop it down the hole.”

The secret to Genz’s latest version of the system is the rigging. Each piece of technology can be employed in seconds, with no setup to speak of. That’s the difference, he says, between putting things into action or deciding it’s too much work.

“The things we’re tinkering with now,” he says, “have to do with being able to easily move our equipment from shore – when we pull up to the lake – onto the ice, so we can start fishing. We’ve mounted the Fish Traps up on racks on our snowmobiles or ATVs. We’re not dragging them behind anymore.

“We arrive at the lake, and our shelters are already loaded onto the machines, packed with items like rods, jigs, heater, and a bucket for fish. There’s no time involved at the truck loading our gear. We pull the machine off the trailer; pop the skis under the trailer tires, if we’re going to use it to haul people and gear, and off we go.”

Simply put, it’s eye-popping how fast Genz is off down the lake, once he pulls up to an



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Rods For Tight Lining

Today's best ice rods are pretty close to complete in their evolution, with amazing feel and flex that allows them to fish "like long rods in miniature," one of Genz's favorite sayings.

Wrapped with increasingly small and lighter-weight guides, more of the blank's natural properties remain after the rod is built. Used with fresh line that's stretched before you begin fishing, matched up with a lure that's not too light or heavy for the rod, almost anybody can learn to feel the cadence of their lure bouncing.

Recognizing when the cadence is interrupted is the key to detecting bites, something previous generations of anglers had a much harder time mastering.

Comfort Catches Fish

Recent advancements in clothing have allowed Genz to fish 'outside' most of the time, either on the seat of his snowmobile or kneeling on the ice. That translates directly to more holes fished in the course of a day, while remaining comfortable and effective, which means more fish.

“Now,” says Dave, “a nice day is any day the wind’s not blowing. Temperature really doesn’t make any difference, because our clothing is so much better than it used to be. However, if the wind is blowing, your hands get cold, so you have to find a way to get out of the wind.

“It’s hard to maintain the feel that you need, if you’ve got heavy gloves on. So when it’s windy, that’s when the Fish Trap comes into play. You take the Fish Trap down off the rack and fish out of it whenever you need to get out of the wind. And for sight fishing, too, let’s not forget about that.

“The fish houses are easier to pull around from a spot to spot than they used to be. The sleds are nicely shaped for pulling, and we put runners underneath them that make the pulling easier.”

Today’s clothing and boots have also been engineered for less bulk and weight, and that is a huge advantage, according to Genz: “One of the things that really helped the system move forward is the lightness of our Ice Armor clothing. Our boots aren’t big and heavy anymore. They’re light, which makes it’s so easy to get around.



“Especially as I’ve gotten older, it’s harder for me to pick my feet up high to clear the top of the snow. I needed a lighter boot. However, lighter and warmer is the key, so we’re able to spend more time outside while staying comfortable.”

There will be additional refinements as the years go on. Perhaps even major breakthroughs. Nevertheless, for many anglers, there are existing elements of the ice-fishing revolution that remain undiscovered.

Note: Dave Genz, known as Mr. Ice Fishing, was the primary driver of the modern ice fishing revolution. He has been enshrined in the National Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame and Minnesota Fishing Hall of Fame for his contributions to the sport. For more fishing tips and information [on the new book](http://www.davegenz.com), go to www.davegenz.com.



Fishing Plastics For Winter Panfish

By Tom Gruenwald

Ice anglers throughout the world love to catch pan fish.

After all, they're often abundant and less difficult to find than larger game fish; usually competitive, making them more willing to bite; and their namesake pan-sized fillets are typically sweet and tasty, providing the centerpiece of any great meal.

Yet they're still fish, and given certain winter conditions, may disperse or become less active. When this happens, it's time to implement increasingly sophisticated tactics...and I've found many good strategies involve use of modern plastics.

That's right, plastics!

Most winter pan fish species aren't voracious, chasing style predators like trout or pike, they're typically slower moving. They'll approach even the finest presentations apprehensively, often pausing to examine each lure and hesitating before ever-so-lightly nipping at the bait, so it's critical to implement meticulous techniques incorporating small profile, slow moving, life-like finesse presentations. And today's tiny plastics are, perhaps, the ultimate finesse lure.

Finesse fishing strategies involve using carefully balanced, fine-tipped micro rods, lighter, smooth, yet smaller profile reels specially designed for ice applications, wispy thin lines and leaders—and scaled-down micro baits that typically measure an inch or less in length. A variety of such downsized micro lures are now at our disposal, and I've found modern plastic trailers among the most productive.

They're available in a wide range of colors and styles, with many representing various forms of plankton, insect larvae, grubs, worms, invertebrates and tiny minnows—staple parts of the diet most winter pan fish species depend upon. Some are smaller versions of the same curly-twist tail designs used for larger game fish; others feature thin paddle, ball or “flicker” tail designs—or simple; capsule shaped grub-like bodies.

These plastic trailers are productive in variety of conditions. Since they so closely duplicate the fish's preferred, natural forage but add durability and versatility, plastics often outperform even live bait—regardless of the species you're seeking, throughout the winter season, in a variety of conditions, at almost any depth and in a variety of lake environment

There are just a few simple rules to follow.

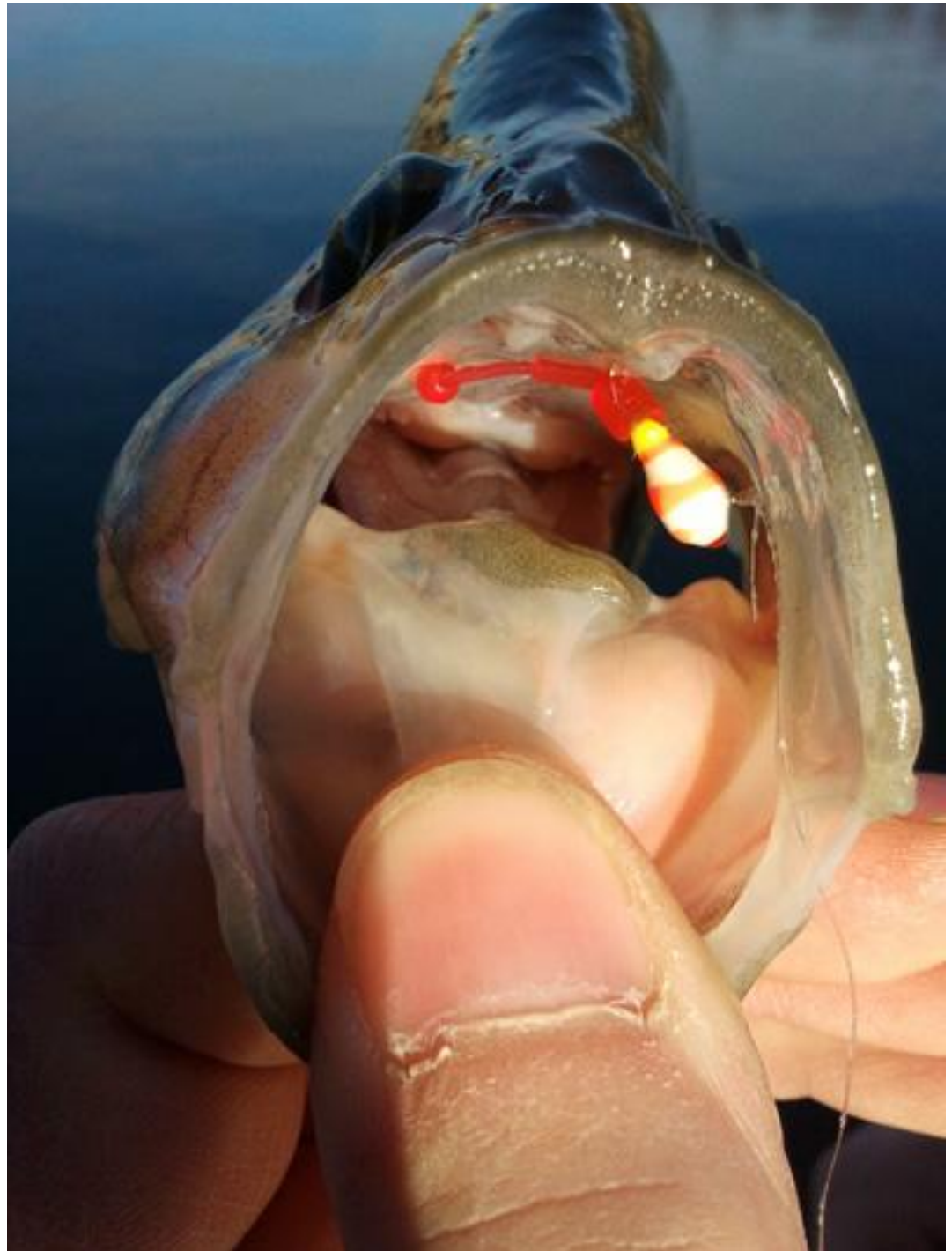
1. KEEP BAIT SMALL

Tiny profile plastics closely mimic plankton, and other natural winter pan fish forage in size, and the idea is to match the hatch as closely as possible.

2. TRY VARIOUS STYLES

Today's variety of plastics can seem confusing, but let's just consider four basic designs: Action, Paddle, Ball and Flicker Tails.

Action tails like Berkley's Micro Power Grub are great when pan fish are schooled heavily and feeding aggressively...or ironically, given the opposite condition, when fish are scattered and you're trying to attract them from a distance. Paddle tails, like the J S Paddle Bug, offer slight swimming motions and are better suited when fishing concentrated but neutrally



active pan fish, as ball tails like Jig-A-Whoppers's YZ that generate slight "thumping" actions when jigged.

When facing tough bites, flicker tails such as Maki's Mousi, J S Ice Mite or Cy's Flies--plastics featuring short, slim bodies with super-thin, seemingly see-through tails that vibrate seductively even when scarcely moved—are tough to beat. These creative designs closely represent the subtle motion of plankton, common forage of pan fish worldwide.

3. EXPERIMENTS WITH COLOR

Plastics come in a tremendous array of tints and shades, and at times; certain ones will out produce others. One color may best represent the natural forage, be more visible given the environment and predominant light conditions—or, perhaps, not as recognized by fish, become a curiosity.

Two-toned plastics featuring bodies with one color and contrastingly colored tails, for example, are surprisingly effective. I've even deliberately melded various plastics with each other by placing them in a tackle box over a heat source so the colors run together to create completely obnoxious blends fish can't pass up.

Whatever the reason, color can make a difference!

4. CUSTOMIZE YOUR PLASTIC

Simple custom variations may spell the difference between a great day of catching and a poor one, too. When fish are finicky, try shortening the plastic body by cutting it back—but always do this from the front so you don't negatively affect the natural motion and performance of the tail.

You can also cut plastic bodies in cross section, making them flat. This forms a wider base that catches water and creates a slight gliding motion whenever they're lowered on a slack line. Conversely, try cutting your plastics laterally to decrease the lure's thickness. Cut low along the bottom sides, especially toward the tail, you can cause plastics to develop tantalizing side-to-side swimming wriggles when jigged.

Try it!

5. USE TUNGSTEN JIGHEADS

The way you present your plastics is also critical to



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success, and today's premium tungsten heads like HT's Marmooska Tungsten's Deluxe are considerably denser than comparably sized lead heads, therefore, heavier and sink faster. This provides greater opportunity to plastics directly within desired strike zones—eliminating frustrating moments when you've successfully found and marked fish, but can't cash in because the school moves away before you can get your bait within their reach.

They also allow precise drop rates that enable you to adjust and better control your presentation—while providing unsurpassed “feel,” thereby allowing greater sensitivity for detecting light bites. You've no doubt experienced those almost indiscernible taps from light-biting fish that aren't recognized until it's too late to react. You may even see a fish approach on the sonar or camera, and although you're positioned and ready to respond, the bite is so faint you miss timing the hook set.



This doesn't occur as often when using tungsten jigs. Due to their heavier weight, in spite of minor curves in your line are pulled tight, meaning presentations hang straighter and respond with less delay to your jigging motions, making it easier to maintain direct contact with your lure. Even the slightest bites are transferred through the line quickly; thus, any interruptions in your jigging rhythm--strikes--are easily detected, ultimately, resulting in dramatically improved hooking percentages.

In short, the weight and balance provided by the Marmooska tungsten allows you to get plastics down efficiently, and once there, better control your jigging speed, enhancing your ability to take advantage of the subtle, strike-enticing movements provided by plastics—all while maximizing sensitivity!

6. FISH SLOWLY

You've no doubt seen it: A finicky sunfish, bluegill or crappie approaches, carefully watching your bait for what can be a frustratingly long time, then turn away, leaving you wondering what you're doing wrong.

However, there's almost no way to fish plastic-tipped Marmooska tungsten's incorrectly—especially when using flicker tail designs—provided you fish slowly and with a subtle shimmy. You can use a gentle hop, gradual drop or lift, slow quiver—even held completely still, flicker tails undulate slightly, a movement most pan fish species find absolutely irresistible...and because plastic-tipped Marmooska tungsten's permit such fine-tuned presentation control, you can more easily experiment with various cadences, working efficiently to try tempting fish into striking given various situations.

To begin, try gently quivering the bait while gradually changing levels and intermittently pausing for varied periods. If a fish appears, don't let up, initially maintain the same movement that attracted the fish before pausing momentarily and slowly beginning to raise your presentation to trigger strikes.

Again, it's important to experiment with different actions. At times, you might try quick drops, or even need to stop all motions and simply let the fish look. Always vary your cadences and pause, changing things up to determine what's most effective—just understand the basic jigging action presented here provides a strategic start.

So there you have it. If you enjoy fishing for pan fish, you might wish to add a selection of plastics and some Marmooska tungsten's to your winter arsenal.

You'll never regret you did!



First Ice Homework Starts Now

By Jason Mitchell

Hitting the ice at the start of the season is a new beginning. There are times where we find fish right where we thought the fish could be at first ice and there are times when the fish are not where you think they should be. Some lakes that were excellent last winter will not be good this winter and vice versa. Finding fish at first ice is a process of elimination. There are lakes I cannot wait to hit this winter, but I truly will not know whether they are good or not until I start drilling some holes.

If there is one thing, however, that can greatly enhance your edge at first ice, my advice would be to watch fall bite closely. If possible, look at some lakes that you intend to ice fish during the fall. Not only can you get a really good handle of the size of fish and how the lake lays out much easier while in a boat but here is something that I strongly believe... water that is fishing really good come fall



The time to preparing for first ice is during the fall when good fall locations often lead to great first ice opportunities. Pictured is the author, Jason Mitchell with a great walleye.

typically fishes well at first ice. On the flip side, water that has had a tough fall bite often has a tough bite during first ice.

Fall fishing for me is as much about enjoying the last few days of open water and catching fish as gathering intelligence for the upcoming ice season. The general patterns of fall fishing often carries over into ice and what is even wilder, the exact spots or icons where fish are holding in the fall are sometimes loaded with fish at first ice. There are general rules of thumb and general patterns that seem to take hold on many fisheries across the board, but every year has a little bit different twist. There have been times, for example, where deep rock piles on Devils Lake (where I spent my career as a guide) would be loaded with nice fish and at first ice, we caught fish off of those spots, as soon as we could get to them. A few years later, the rocks' piles were not holding fish come late fall like some other years, and the fish were really relating to shallow weed bed edges and guess what, that is where we found fish at first ice. Time on the water in the fall enables you to gather a little more information so that you can take the shorter path to finding fish come first ice. Doesn't matter the species or the body of water, this intelligence enhances your winter game.

Size of fish can also be determined really well during the fall. If you want to find a small lake off the beaten path that has nice bluegills, for example, you can fish a lot of water using a boat during the fall. Lakes that are only producing small fish during the fall are typically going

to remain the same at first ice. Lakes,

however, that have a nice average size and produce nice fish during the fall are going to be your go to lakes come first ice.

These examples are merely common sense, but we still have to take the time to do our homework.



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January 12th ~ Dillenbeck Bay, Lake Champlain (Season Opener)

February 2nd ~ Lamphams Bay, Lake Champlain (Qualifier)

February 23rd ~ T.B.A, Lake Champlain (Qualifier)

March 2nd ~ Larrabees Point, Lake Champlain (Championship)

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Extreme weather is probably the only thing that can disrupt the

transition from fall to winter. The worst thing that can happen to a lake or an area is extremely strong winds at freeze up. We saw a huge example of this on Lake of the Woods a handful of years ago when late fall winds whipped the lake into a dirty froth right before the lake froze up, and the poor visibility created tough walleye fishing during first ice. We had a similar occurrence happen on Devils Lake a few years before where eastern and southern shorelines, especially over the larger bays and basins were terrible. The water visibility was so poor that you couldn't see the bottom of the hole for about a month in these locations while opposite sides of the lake were fine. The best indicator that this has happened is jagged ice. If the surface of the lake looks like a broken jig saw puzzle with pieces of ice sticking up all over, or if you drill a hole and there are multiple layers of ice, you might have to switch to the opposite side of the lake or switch bodies of water because typically, dirty water hurts you at first ice. There are adjustments you can make when you encounter this, on Lake of the Woods; anglers finally figured out that the fish were suspended right below the ice. On Devils Lake, I have had some success fishing in really shallow water when the water was dirty, but this wind effect is usually drastic and negative enough where I tend to avoid it if possible, much like fishing a river.... I don't look for dirty water. Don't confuse stained water with dirty water, stained water can often be good but dirty water usually shuts things down.

By keeping a pulse of what is happening on fisheries during the fall, you have a huge advantage during early ice so jumpstart your season now by being observant, marking down locations and lakes and gathering information.

You will shave so much time off the hunt for fish if you can put the fish to bed in the fall and be one of the first people on these locations at early ice.







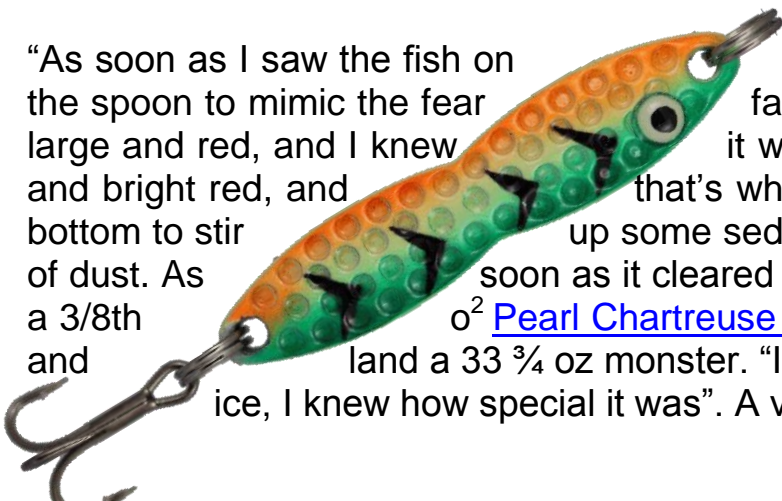


Sonar, Spoons, & Strategy Put Fish on Ice

By Derek Koch

Have you ever played chess with a walleye? How about a good game of poker with a perch? If you're using sonar and jigging, it's all about strategy, ... and there's no better strategy than the combination of sonar and jigging spoons. It was January 5th, 2011, when this fact was permanently etched into the minds of a dozen anglers chasing walleye on Last Mountain Lake in Saskatchewan as they watched Tim Geni.

"As soon as I saw the fish on the spoon to mimic the fear large and red, and I knew and bright red, and bottom to stir of dust. As a 3/8th and



the Marcum, I slowed down my movement on factor in a bait fish. The mark on the flasher was it was a really big fish. The signal got even larger, that's when I knew it was right under the hole. I tapped up some sediment, then I twitched it up and out of the cloud soon as it cleared the cloud, she hit that PK hard." Tim was using o² [Pearl Chartreuse PK Spoon, an](#) and used his flasher to see, outwit, and land a 33 3/4 oz monster. "I knew it was big fish, but as soon as it hit the ice, I knew how special it was". A video crew from No Excuses Outdoors TV was

on the ice filming that day. From there it was a short trip to the [National Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame](#) record books.

It really doesn't matter what species you're fishing for, everything from panfish to lake trout can be "played" on sonar with jigging spoons to put incredible catches on ice or in the boat. One of the key lessons to learn to successfully use spoons is to think like a bait fish. Occasionally twitching your rod tip just isn't going to get the job done.

[Johnnie Candle](#), winner of the 2010 Cabela's MWC World Walleye championship, walleye guide on Devil's Lake in North Dakota, and PK Lures Elite Pro Staff, knows you have to "think like forage".



"I feel that jigging spoons like the [Flutterfish](#) mimic dying bait fish better than any other presentation on open water or under ice. As a baitfish gives up its dying breath, it can do many things. It may dart forward or up in short bursts and at this moment gives up and flutter to the bottom, at this moment give it another try in a few minutes. They may sit and quiver for





PK Flutter Fish

several minutes before they give up the ghost, or a combination of the two. I run through all of these motions in a day of ice fishing until I find one that seems to work the best□□ If nothing works, I resort to the “eat or leave” theory and get very aggressive with the jigging motion to encourage a reaction strike or to get the non-eaters to leave so a better candidate can have a chance. Just pay attention to the details and listen to the fish.”

Another lesson to learn is to match your spoon to the mood of the fish. Aggressive fish normally want an aggressive presentation, and neutral or “negative” fish normally want something more subtle. But how can you tell what kind of fish you’ve got on sonar? Reading the “mood” of a fish is often about reading its proximity to structure – in this case the bottom. The tighter a fish holds to structure, the less aggressive it will probably be. Steve Gerber, is a lake trout guide on the famous Lake Granby in Colorado (www.stevegfishing.com and www.fishingwithbernie.com) often gives this tip to his clients.

“You can tell the mood of a Laker from how it approaches the lure. If it comes in two to three feet off the bottom, it’s most likely an aggressive fish and it will respond to a more aggressive presentation. If the fish comes in hugging bottom, it’s most likely a smaller or negative fish and it’s going to need a more subtle presentation. When I see an aggressive fish on sonar, I tell my clients to keep the spoon moving at the same 18 to 24 inch cadence that drew in the fish; but when I see a neutral to negative fish on sonar, I’ll tell my clients to either rest the spoon on or near bottom and give it just a few twitches.” If you want to catch a limit on spoons, sonar is invaluable in “reading” those fish and finessing your presentation.

A lot of guys on the ice will use spoons with almost no action, counting on “lifelike” paint jobs, rattle tubes, or a tipped minnow to draw in fish. Those tactics can be effective, but using a lure with good action is a must, not only because a spoon with good action gets more hits, but because it covers more water even in a vertical environment. Brian Woodward, elite walleye angler, second-place finisher in the 2012 and 2011 Cabela’s MWC World Walleye Championships, knows this well.

“Without the flexibility of moving from spot to spot in a boat when we’re ice fishing, we’re forced to move and drill holes

more often to locate roaming fish. The PK Spoon is a 'go to' bait for me because it helps me eliminate one of the advantages that dispersed fish have during ice season, and drill fewer holes. With the unique action of the PK Spoon I can cover a larger radius through a single hole by changing the speed I let the lure fall. The slower the fall the more vertical the action on the spoon, but when I'm targeting walleyes in deeper water a faster drop can move the lure 15-25 feet away from the hole giving me an advantage over other anglers fishing other lures that only allow you to fish straight up and down."

Of course, a good jigging spoon can also be an incredibly effective "flasher" to draw dispersed fish in from a distance as well, even if they aren't actively feeding. Even dormant fish are opportunistic, and if you can bring them in, and if you can see them on sonar, they'll often pick up a set line if they won't take the spoon. [Ray Tiffany](#), member of the 2012 USA Ice Fishing Olympics Team, knows this strategy well.

"The PK Flutter Fish and the PK Spoon are key elements when used to draw fish in. The more aggressive fish will usually strike, but there are always tight-lipped bandits who can raise your blood pressure. That is where the "tag team" comes in. We use a PK in conjunction with a "dead stick" tipped with a minnow or other live bait. Aggressively jigging



the PK to gain the attention of fish, near or far, then letting the PK fall to the bottom, what we call “taking a nap”, the more subtle, slow moving bait remains for the less aggressive fish to eat. Even though PK Lures are usually used aggressively to catch fish themselves, when fish just won’t bite, the PK can still be used as a valuable asset in addition to trigger the negative bite.” If you can see the fish on sonar, but they’re not hitting your spoon, this can be an immensely valuable tactic.

At the end of the day sonar is an incredibly effective tool for marking fish, and a lot of anglers will simply use it as advance warning of an inbound predator to pay extra attention to a tip up or set line. The technology of sonar is most effective; however, when combined with a knowledge of baitfish behavior, a keen eye on the sonar to read the “mood” of the fish, a jigging spoon like a PK Spoon or Flutterfish with outstanding [ing action](#), and [an angler](#) who wants to catch fish enough to do a bit of work.

Simply put; sonar, spoons, and strategy put more fish on ice. Now go and play some chess with a walleye – and beat him this time. Check out [PK Lures](#) on their [Facebook](#) page for more information on some of the best jigging spoons ever made!

Derek Koch is an avid outdoorsman from Ontario, Canada.



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Lake Champlain Has The Ice Anglers Crave

By Vic Attardo



There, just ahead, was ice -- fishable ice: a seven-to-eight inch thick crust stretching from the shoreline's rocky slope out into the secluded bay; turning to open, unfrozen water

only by Lake Champlain deep-water channel markers, five hundred yards away. Everything in between was white and shut solid and perfect for ice fishing.

To reach the spot, three of us had come down out of total darkness at 6 a.m. across a rolling Vermont farm, our fishing equipment strapped to a sputtering quad and bouncing along in a trailing buggy.

The quad's driver -- guide Jamie Vladyka -- directed the handlebars across difficult terrain while Jim Weidman of Pine Forge, and myself, held tight to the machine's body work as we went up and down frozen ditches, then braked continually on a twenty-degree woodland grade to the edge of the bay. All of this doubly exciting because just minutes before we had seen the reflected white eyes of a prowling bobcat along the edge of the road.

When the quad's lights reached across Champlain's frozen expanse, I spotted the glow of another set of white reflectors, which I mistook to be someone fishing ahead of us. But that wasn't the case in this desperately out-of-the-reach place. The reflecting shine came from Vladyka's nylon tent that he had previously set with spikes held firm in the thick ice.

Weidman had been fishing with Vladyka for a few days and knew the drill in the darkness, but the scene was strange and a little unnerving to me. The Pennsylvania man was fishing and catching fish before I had my short ice rods untangled.

For Christmas, Santa had promised me sufficient ice for fishing, but as we've learned hereabouts, Santa can be a sly guy and he didn't say where this ice would be. As it was, I had to travel about six hours from my home and so did Weidman, an avid iceman, to find the illusive winter crust. So happens, we also found some excellent fishing.

Under Vladyka's tutelage (www.fishhoundsoutdoors.com or 802-855-0082) we caught four or five dozen bluegill and a few dozen crappie on the day after a full moon. Yet the excitement belonged to catching big toothy pickerel and pike on tip-ups with small minnows. The best pickerel was a thick four-pounder and the best pike, twelve pounds or thereabouts.

For this Esox fishing, Vladyka employed plastic, disc tip-ups made by HT Enterprises, Inc. of Campbellsport, Wisconsin. I found the tip-ups very easy to use and extremely effective.

The spindle on the model PTE-500L folds into the disc for storage and, for actual fishing, is pushed into place with little pressure. The discs are immeasurably sturdy and unlike wooden tip-ups, seem far less prone to "false flags" when tickled by the wind. The flag is also connected with a strong spring.

As Vladyka noted, the PTE disc completely covers an eight-inch hole preventing daylight from getting into the drilled divot – light that often spooks fish because it's unnatural beneath the ice sheet.



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One alteration you might consider with this product is dipping one side of the spindle in a bright paint or nail polish so that, at a distance, you can see the spindle spinning with a running fish. The 500L comes with a night light that signals when the flag rises (www.htent.com 920-533-5080).

Beneath the discs Vladyka used two-inch fathead minnows, not big shiners.

“It’s a fallacy that you need big bait to catch these big pike,” Vladyka said. “I’ve used two-inch fathead minnows on small hooks and have caught twenty-pound pike with this rig.”

Yet on this outing, it wasn’t easy landing the bigger toothy critters. The ice surface was a tad slushy, melting and refreezing when disturbed by an auger or walked on. Fishing line laid out on the ice found mounds of sharp crystals to wrap and snag around. You couldn’t just yank on the laid-out line and expect the reformed ice, thin and brittle as it was, to break away; instead it was necessary to unwrap the line just as you might around a submerged stick or rock. If at any moment the fish pulled hard while the braid or monofilament was stuck in the surface, there’d be the same result as if the line was unforgivingly snagged underwater.

This is was why it actually took the three of us to land the biggest twelve-pound pike.

Initially the fish had pulled some 15 yards of line from the tip-up spool. At the flag’s signal Weidman rushed to the disc and after smoothly setting the hook, laid the line on the ice.

But when the pike made another run, the line could hardly go easily because it was stuck to the uneven surface. Weidman had to hold the line high at the hole while Vladyka and I had to step away and lift the line so it didn’t contact the ice.





At the same time the three of us needed to -- in an instant -- let the connection run freely through our hands; to grasp the line tightly – a thing ice rookies might do – would cause a break.

After a five minutes fight, our combined effort resulted in a beautiful landed fish – one that stretched from Weidman’s shoulders to his knees.

Beside this fish and other pike and

pickerel, big crappie and a host of bluegill made repeated appearances in the bay taking everything from maggot-baited chainspoons to tungsten jigs with Vladyka’s signature “Jamie” from Maki Plastics.

Across the unfrozen channel, passenger and freight trains ran the thread of land on the New York border. Because of the open channel, no one could cross and fish in the Vermont bay, and no one else knew about the backwoods passage to the lake: a life-long Vermontonian, Vladyka had the route.

And though Santa may have stretched the truth, we found sufficient ice for ice fishing.





Fishing From Shelters. It's Cold Outside. Come On In.

By Nathan Krusko

Sitting on a bucket huddled over a hole with the wind at your back and your fingers chapping from the water that has frozen on them from your last catch is not just a memory but, is an every day occurrence on the ice. Your huddled over that hole trying to steady your rod and your line to the best of your abilities so you can feel the most subtle tug on your line but with the thought in the back of your head wondering: "Am I really going to feel that bite?" "Are they even here?" The reality and answer to this is you might be missing the bite on that windy brisk cold day. With your line subtly being lifted from the hole and you're not feeling it because of your cold chapped hands.

Controlling the elements and eliminating the effects of them on your body and your presentation is an essential step in the evolution of an ice angler. Shelters are the element that enables the graduation from the bucket to the fine tuned angler that you could be. Shelters come in from a wide array of sizes and selection and designs. For many of you, your intro to shelters might be a hub style shelter. It's a bottomless shelter that pops up like a tent, and you anchor it to the ice. With these you've got a place to get in out of the cold, and you're anchored to the ice. You have your base camp. Hub shelters come in a wide array of designs and generally fit 4 to 9 people with the insulated ones being the go to top. The average practical uses for shelters of this design are for larger groups, families or couples that will be fixed in an area.



The step above a hub is a sled style shelter where the tent is attached to a sled complete with a seat. It is these shelters that require little set up and most commonly just a quick flip of the poles, and you are fishing out of the elements. Sled shelters are good for the angler who wants to be a little more mobile, wants the comfort of a tent with an integrated seat and can quickly set up in their location. The mobility will come from being able to keep all of your gear organized and confined to one sled. These are known by many names around the ice belt such as traps, shacks or shelters. They're designed to keep you mobile, all of your gear in one place, keep you out of the wind and snow. The way they work



is, you drill your holes, glide the sled to the hole sit down and flip over. Within moments, you are fishing. This process can be repeated over and over and over again quickly allowing you to move from hole to hole.

There's more available than just being comfortable by fishing from a shelter. You have the ability to fish new opportunities. Let's take sight fishing for an example. The most common thing that comes to mind when people think about sight fishing is a man laying on the ice with arms cupped around the hole looking through the hole trying to catch a fish. Yeah, that could be one way of doing it with the modern advancements in clothing you will remain warm and dry enough to do that. Nevertheless, the use of a flip over shelter will help darken the area around you enabling you to look down the hole to the fish below. In some clear eastern fishing destinations, you may be able to do this in lakes with a depth of up to twenty feet fishing for suspended crappie a passing perch or even bluegill. By sight fishing, you are looking down the hole presenting your lure directly to a selected fish. It is this ability to sight fish that is beneficial to the angler who has yet to buy a sonar, a new angler looking for a highly active day or even anyone who enjoys seeing bluegill and is seeking an extremely effective method for fishing for them.

With all this discussed, how do you know a shelter is a correct choice for you and what style will satisfy you're fishing applications? Hubs will satisfy: 1. Social groups enjoying a day on the ice grilling, fishing and gathering, 2. Families with small children where they will not be as mobile, 3. Small groups of three or more fishing together (fishing for a species or in a method that requires little movement or relocation such as night fishing, smelting or shallow-water sight fishing over dense weed beds). Sled Style Shelters will satisfy: 1. A single angler who is seeking a method that contains all the gear and provides quick setup, 2. An angler who may be fishing with another person that too is wanting to be mobile to pursue a species that requires consistent movement (note there are sled style shelters that accommodate 1, 2 or three persons), 3. An angler who finds fishing from the elements is making fishing uncomfortable or difficult limiting one's enjoyment on the ice, 4. A parent wanting to take on or two children fishing (these shelters will aid the parent through the ability to keep all the gear in one location and provide an area for their children to be warm and happy). Shelters come in many sizes to accommodate all. If you have answered yes to one of the above, then a shelter should be in your fishing future.

Fishing from shelters will help you enjoy new fishing opportunities such as sight fishing. You will be warm and dry even in the harshest of conditions. And you will be on your way to further fine-tuning your presentations and methods from a controlled environment effectively helping you further catch more fish.

www.NorthEastIceFishing.com



“Eat Baby, Eat!”

By Joe Henry

“Man, we are seeing a lot of fish coming through on the electronics, but they are just not eating”. Ok, let’s take another perspective on this. First off, they may or may not be eating, but the question is, can we get them to?

There are definitely ways to increase your catch.



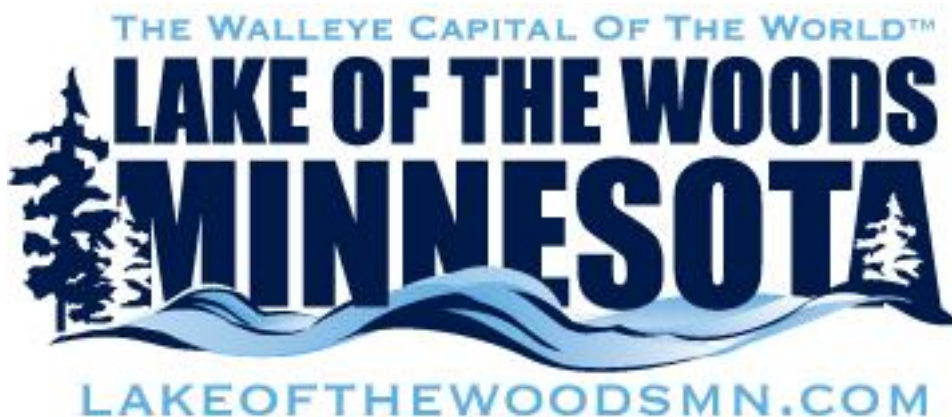
1. The norm. Jig, jig and let it sit in the strike zone. Jig, jig, jig and let it sit in the strike zone. This technique catches thousands of walleyes. However, there are times when the walleyes and saugers seem a bit unresponsive. What then? That’s when it is time to mix it up.

2. Rattataptap. When you see that fish come in and it isn’t whacking ya, try shaking your rod tip as fast as you can. I also take and tap my fingers on the butt of my rod as fast as I can sending vibrations down to the lure. This often induces solid “tap” or that extra weight of an eye or sauger.

3. Thrill of the Chase. When a walleye is watching your lure, but not hitting it, try jigging the lure while raising your lure higher and higher in the water column. This emulates the prey trying to get away. When that fish is following up, don’t slow down! Keep the lure rising just ahead of the chasing fish. Either that fish will fly up, close the gap and hit your lure, or that fish will come off the bottom a bit and go back down. When it goes back down, try teasing them up again or try another strike inducing technique.

4. Pound the bottom. Another successful technique to get

fish to bite but also to attract fish is pound the bottom with your lure and lift off slowly. This will not only give off vibrations in the water, but also stirs up the mud or sand representing some living creature the walleye are often used to eating. Be ready when you lift off the bottom as if there is any extra weight, set the hook. Sometimes the walleyes will grab on subtly and



"It's not what is on the other side. It's the climb."

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it takes a good stick to detect.

5. Rip em. When fish seem sluggish, I often go against the grain and rip a Cicada or other type of vibrating blade lure. This aggressive 3-foot jigging motion gets that blade bait vibrating and even when things are slow, one of two things will happen. Either out of nowhere, a bright-red line (fish) will appear on the electronics. This fish is hot and all I need to do is put my lure in front of the fish, jiggle it and most of the time; that fish nails it. The other scenario is the erratic vibration will pull the fish in, and they will end up swimming over to my dead stick, and the bobber goes down. Either way I win. My favorite color on Lake of the Woods is gold with dark-green tape. I also like the smaller sizes.

6. Go micro. When fishing gets tough and I can't figure them out, one technique that has helped me fill the bucket is going small. Often times I will take a very small panfish sized Swedish Pimple type lure and add a wax worm to it. I will work this close to the bottom and have in fact done very well when others can't touch them. I know one friend who actually keeps some freeze-dried waxies in his arsenal in the event he has to turn to this unexpectedly. On many occasions, this turned out to be the ticket.



7. Work the combo. Jigging a lure with live bait of some type has typically produced the majority of walleyes for me. I will say that some days, the dead sticks or bobber lines will out produce. Under a dead stick, I either like a gold or glow jig type lure with a live minnow, or a plain hook with a split shot set above it with a live minnow.

8. Simple jigging. I know some great ice anglers on Lake of the Woods who will have one line rigged with a jig. They either hook the minnow through the head or thread the hook through the mouth, out of the gill and through the mid section of the body (for a better % of hook sets). No bobber is used. Often, after jigging, the rod is set on the top of a 5-gallon pail so the rod tip is in good view. Sometimes times, the tip of the rod will go down just a bit. Set the hook. It took me a few trips of watching this technique out produce a jigging spoon that got my attention.



9. Tipping lures with bait. I normally tip my jigging lures with a minnow head or the tail section of a minnow. Frozen shiners, fatheads and crappie minnows are staples for me. I like the way the fatheads and crappie minnows stay on the hooks when I am jigging. I like the scales and smell of the

frozen shiners, but am careful to hook the piece of the minnow in a spot that will hold as they are more fragile and will come off easier. With the frozen shiners, pinching them off behind the gills and carefully hooking the shiner head without creating too big of a hole so the bait falls off is the key. I also use the tail section, as hooking through the backbone of the minnow is very secure and has a good flash.

10. Change it up! The bottom line, when you know there are fish below you, and they are not biting, do something unusual. First, try different presentation methods with the same lure. Next, switch colors. Finally, change the lure.

Add these tools to your tool belt this year and notice what happens to the day's catch!

Joe.henry@lakeofthewoodsmn.com



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LOWRANCE





Logistics of Mobility on Ice

By Jeff Kelm

For years ice fishermen have been told to become mobile, be willing to go to the fish, rather than wait for the fish to come to them. That is truly great advice; the next step is how you become mobile. What are the logistics of being mobile? How do you carry everything? What should you bring, and what should you leave at the truck?

As tournament anglers, our whole goal is to create a game plan within a couple of days of “pre-fishing”. We arrive at a lake with a map, our means of travel, generally ATVs, and all the equipment we might need for the weekend. We generally do not pull all of our equipment out of the truck unless we have too. We have back-up sonar units, augers and batteries; often we don’t even pull out our ice shelters. In order for us to stay mobile and find fish quickly we have thought through what we need, and geared ourselves accordingly.

Let’s start with what you are wearing. Your outerwear is the one thing that has to put up with the snow, water and wind. You need to have quality outerwear to be mobile. Our team uses the Polar Fire ice fishing suit, its waterproof, windproof and lightweight. It allows for layering

with a relatively light non-cotton base layer. Avoid wearing cotton as much as you can while ice fishing, or doing anything active outdoors. Cotton absorbs moisture and you will get cold, cotton socks, cotton undershirts, and the old school long underwear is a no-no if you plan to be mobile and stay warm. The Polar Fire suit has pockets on the bibs outside as well as inside and outside pockets on the jacket. In order to be mobile for a full day of fishing, you are going to need those pockets. The Polar Fire suit also has belt loops on the bibs; I use a belt on my suit to carry my multi-tool.

So you have a suit, you know how to stay warm, but what else do you need on your person to truly be mobile? How about that multi-tool I mentioned. Most have pliers, knife, screwdriver and other tools that may just come in handy if you are a few miles away from the truck. More than once I have needed to repair the ATV, change blades on the auger or use the pliers for a swallowed hook. Another item I always have on me is a lanyard with a nail clippers attached. You can purchase “line cutters” but generally you can get two nail clippers for the price of one brand name “line cutter”.

While fishing, we often find ourselves trying new jigs styles, new colors and new baits. Many times we have multiple rods, 6-10 different pre-rigged rods, on our ATVs ready to use at all times. At times it is easier to explore holes with simply one rod, and in that case we carry a small selection of jigs on us, in the pockets of the suit. Utilizing Fly boxes is a great way to keep your go-to jigs on you all the time. They generally fit in any pocket of the suit and make it quick and simple to change if you need too. The other two items we always have in the suits is a small crush proof bait container for live bait and a small box containing a selection of favorite plastic baits.



Overlooked Fisheries

By Bob Bohland



In the days of satellite mapping on cell phones, GPS with mapping chips, and internet forums where fishing information spreads like wildfire, it can be tough to strike out on your own and find a tiny little honey hole that you can keep to yourself. Nevertheless, if you are willing to put in the leg work, use the technology to your advantage, and come up empty handed a couple of times, you can find some amazing tiny little spots, even close to the big cities.

One of my favorite little spots I discovered when living in the Twin Cities was so small that it would barely qualify as a pond. I would frequently fish the lake across the road for walleyes and panfish, and one day my curiosity got the best of me, and I hiked over. After the first few holes, I drilled brought up

nothing but stinky black mud, I was a little disheartened and ready to turn back, but I pushed on and drilled out to the middle of the pond where I found depths of almost 30 feet, furthermore, there were several marks suspended on my flasher! I ran back to my little Otter sled and grabbed the first rod I could, dropped the walleye-sized spoon down the hole and was rewarded with a decent crappie flopping on the ice. While not a monster to most anglers, an 11" crappie inside the 94 corridors in the Twin Cities is something to be proud of. Most little ponds like this one won't have the kind of depth, I found that day; this pothole had several other things going for it: 1. It had water flowing through it, which supplied oxygen for fish present to survive the winter, 2. It connected to a larger waterway that had a decent fishery, and 3. The ring of cattails and other emergent vegetation gave it the appearance of being a shallow duck slough, which kept other from trying to fish it.

Learning the little secrets of ponds around the metro that most drove past while on their ways to bigger waters gave me a huge edge when I could travel further from home. Small ponds like these are sprinkled across the ice belt, yet only a select few give them the time they are worth. One of the first steps is to log on to a resource like the MN DNR Recreation

Compass or Google Maps. Pick an area you would like to target and start doing some research. Obviously, lake surveys are a great place to start, but some of the best spots will either have a survey that is 20+ years old, or they will not have one at all. Little ponds out in the middle of nowhere can be productive if you are closer to the Dakotas, but for the most part, around Central and Eastern Minnesota, they will be shallow and unable to support consistent fish populations. However, feeder creeks, small rivers and streams can provide enough oxygen and food to make panfish thrive. By clicking on the mapping portion of the program, it will be much easier for you to identify these little blue squiggles as they trace their way across the land. The small little feeder creeks aren't the only ones that can point you to a great fishery though, even larger rivers such as the Mississippi, the Rum, and the St Croix can have little backwaters that are often overlooked by others. This can be either because they don't want to bother to check and see if there are fished, or it could be that they are concerned over ice conditions on the way to the spot.

A body of water doesn't have to be tiny to be overlooked, however. Lakes that are on the way to, or are near more popular angling destinations often are bypassed in the excitement to get to a more noteworthy fishery. The Chisago chain of lakes near the Twin Cities is a prime example of this. As a very popular spot for pan fishermen, these lakes see thousands of anglers a year. Nevertheless, a quick look on a map shows dozens of lakes that anglers drive past on their way to supposedly greener pastures. Many of these bodies of water have been equal, if not better fishing (with much smaller crowds) than those in the Chisago area.

Lakes in and around the most populace areas have the same problem. Anglers still suffer from the misconception that you have to travel a long way out of the metro to find decent fishing. There are a few that have zero complaints about this ideal, since it provides them

with some amazing fishing without the crowds mere minutes from home. Lakes in your own backyard, or even outside your office window, can produce some wonderful results if you are willing to give them a try. One lake, my brother and I found a few years ago is right next to a junction of two major freeways in the Twin Cities. I would estimate that close to



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200,000 people drove by this body of water every day. We didn't even know it was there until we found it on Google Maps. Our next step was to research lake maps and survey info; to our surprise, we found that it had a great panfish population. Just like that, we were rewarded with our own hidden gem that was a mere 5 minutes from home.

Panfish aren't the only overlooked angling opportunities to be found. When you are poring over survey info, don't forget to take a look at stocking info. One of my favorite little metro puddles has had literally millions of walleye stocked in it during the last ten years. This "lake" is only around 150 acres, but puts out some fantastic walleyes every year because no one else realizes its potential.



Homework, it's a dirty word to most. However, it makes a huge difference between striking out and catching fish when scouting out some new honey holes. Google Maps, aerial photos, lake surveys, GPS, and plat maps (these help out a ton when trying to get onto private/semi-private waters) are all readily available for you to use. So why aren't you using all available resources as opposed to the old word-of-mouth from the bait shop? The technology is there, set out on your own and find yourself a little spot that isn't already crowded by truck-loads of other anglers.



First Ice

By Ben Leal

Ahhhh...nothing like your first trip out to the ice. Days prior to your first trip you go through the list, Vexilar battery...check; auger...check; load new line on your ice rods...check; ice jigs and bait...check; ice shack...check; lantern and heater tested...check; everything seems to be in order and ready to go.

As I was walking through this self-made equipment checklist, I realized that I had failed to take the time to load up new line on my new ice rod, one that came prefilled. Truth is, you should always remove the line that came with the reel and load new. There is no telling how long that line has been there, and the line that is loaded is usually not the best quality. Take the time to go out and get some good ice fishing line, you'll thank me later. I've gone with Polar Ice, Suffix, and lately Trilene Micro Ice by Berkley has been my line of choice.

Finally, first ice also requires some caution. Don't venture out alone if you're unsure of how thick the ice is. Early ice tends to be inconsistent so it's important to be wise when hitting the ice. In general here is a short list of guidelines that are common throughout the ice-fishing regions:

- Two inches of hard ice can support one person on foot.
- Three inches of ice are sufficient for two or three people, as long as they aren't concentrated in a small area.
- Four inches of ice will generally safely support small groups of people.
- Five inches of ice will support an ATV or snowmobile.
- Eight inches of ice will support a small car, but generally there should be at least ten inches of solid ice to support a full-size pickup truck or SUV.

Remember it's always best to error on the side of caution. If you like punching holes in ice that is two to three inches thick take along a set up spikes and wear them around your neck. That way if you happen to go through you can jab the spikes into the ice to help pull yourself out. Also never go alone, take a length of sturdy rope that can be used to help pull you or your fishing partner to safety. Let someone know where you are fishing and when you are expected to return. Early ice fishing can be some of the most productive fishing during the season, make sure you're home to enjoy the fruits of your labor.

The first bite

Here's a quick tip and time saver for first ice outing; Ice tends to be typically pretty clear, so rather than punching a bunch of holes in search of fish, bring along a small bottle of water. Once you've found what you think will be a productive area, pour some water on the ice, set your sonar transducer on the ice in the water and turn it on. The water acts as a conductor,

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and you can shoot right through the ice in search of active fish. Once you've found them, you punch a hole and start fishing!

I grabbed a rod that was new to me last season, but one that I had not caught a fish with, and I tied on a Custom Jig and Spins Ratso, Glo-Brite Lime jig. As I was lowering my offering down to the fish, I could see marks moving in and out of the transducers range, I came to about the 15-foot mark and stopped there. Bouncing the jig a couple of times it wasn't long before I had my initial bite. As with any ice angler, anxious to get that first fish, I yanked on the rod like I was trying to set the hook on a marlin. I felt a fish briefly, but my severe hook set likely ripped the hook clean out of its mouth. So calming down a bit, I lowered my bait back down, a couple of more bounces and a slow lift of the rod, feeling the weight of the fish, I set the hook, fish on!

Strategies for early ice

The early-morning bite was pretty exciting. Fish after fish took our offerings; my fishing partner Rick was using Berkley's new Gulp! Alive! Fish Fry in pink, I switched to the Fish Fry

in red and tied on a second jig, baited with a wax worm. Fishing was pretty consistent for the first couple of hours. Then just like a light switch, the fish disappeared and the fishing slowed. Like open water, you have to move and find the fish.

I found a drop-off in the lake that went from about 13 feet down to 16 feet, all within five feet. I tried fishing shallower first, after about ten minutes with no activity, I decided to move. Dropping my bait down a deeper hole, I saw some fish move in as soon as the jig hit about 15 feet. Watching my spring bobber dip, I set the hook on yet another nice bass. Ironically enough and without surprise, every time I hooked a bass out of this area I wouldn't see a bluegill for a while, go figure huh? Those pesky predator fish... I'll take one any time.

I spent the balance of my day

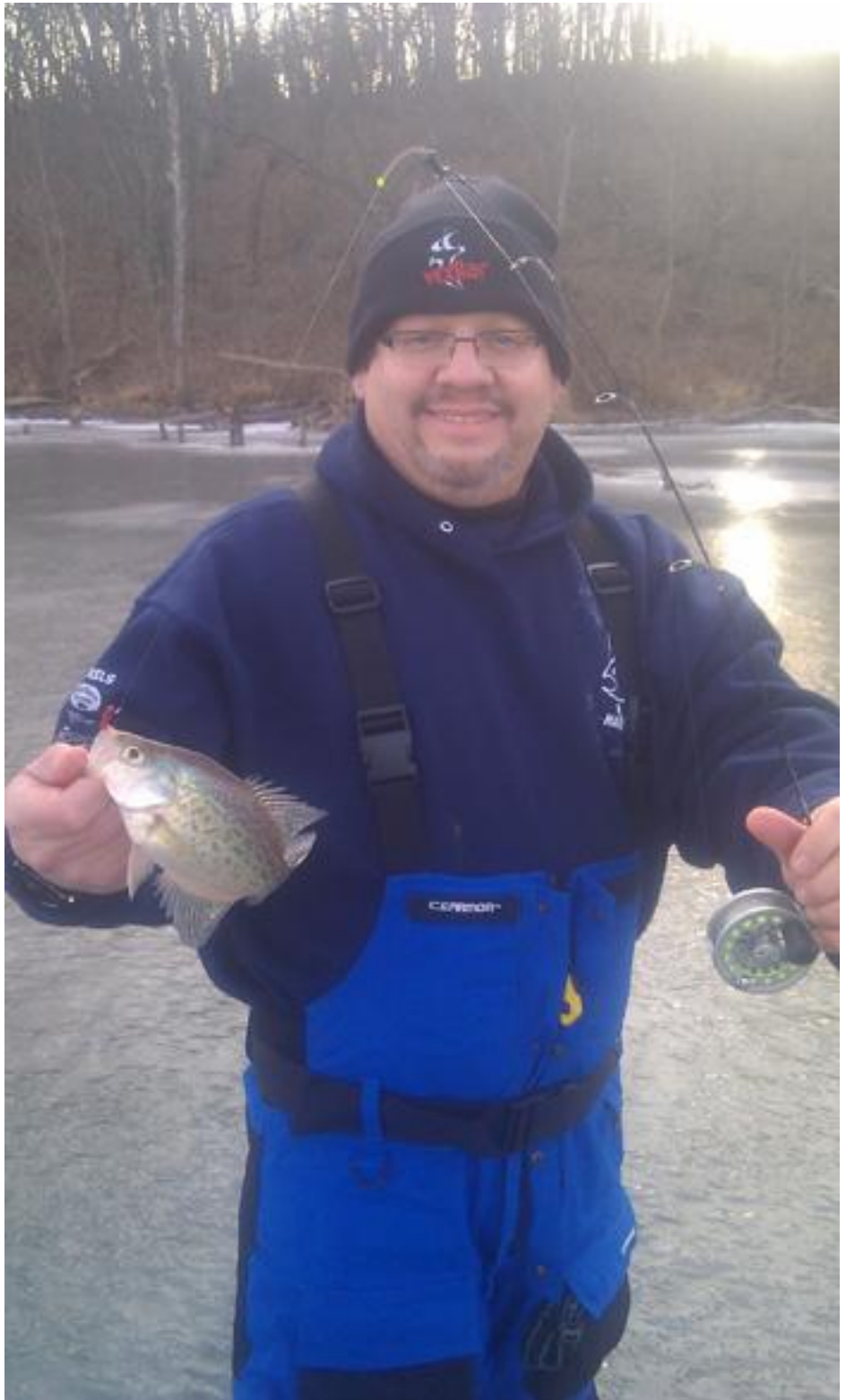


here, right at the bottom of this drop off. As I stated, there were times when there were no fish, but suddenly a very bright-red line would appear in my Vexilar, hover next to my jig, and take the bait. My partner Rick would move to an area that he was fishing picking up fish here and there.

If you have access to a GPS unit, you can mark those areas that are productive. It's not a bad idea to log the fish you catch, location, type of bait and depth and also take note of what the barometric pressure is doing. We had a weak front that was moving through that day and as the snow started to drop, the fishing changed. In general here are some tips on how barometric pressure changes affect the fish.

- High pressure, clear skies – fish slow down, find cover or go deeper.
 - Rising pressure – clearing or improving – fish tend to become slightly more active.
 - Normal and stable – normal fishing.
 - Falling, degrading weather – the most active fishing.
 - Slightly lower, usually cloudy - Many fish will head away from cover and seek shallower waters. Some fish will become more aggressive.
 - Low, rainy or stormy – Fish tend to be less active the longer this period remains.
- A great day...

We concluded our day at about 2PM. As we were packing up our stuff, there were some other anglers who had made their way out to the ice to try their luck. I took home several keeper bluegill for supper and Rick also took a bunch to share with his family. I caught fish on red Berkley Gulp! Alive! Fish Fry, on two-pound test line. There is nothing quite as challenging as landing one of those bigger fish on such light tackle, through an eight inch hole.



When To Use Rattling Lures Through The Ice

By Nathaniel Myson

Sometimes an ice lures that makes a lot of sound will produce the best action. Other times, a quiet approach works best.

Some ice lures come equipped with rattles, and the sounds they emit are as essential as their shape or action. Other ice lures are silent, and their lack of sound is as much a virtue as the rattles of the others. It's like calling wild turkeys, in some situations, the only way to keep a turkey coming is to pour on the vocalizations. Other times, the best strategy is to shut up and wait.



Jon Thelen, host of the Internet fishing shows This Week on the Water and a lifelong ice fisherman from Minnesota, is a big advocate of using sound to attract fish, and he includes a lot of rattling in his ice-fishing approach. Thelen has learned, however, that knowing when not to use sound is every bit as important as knowing when and how to use it. Years of experience have helped Thelen develop several guiding principles for deciding when to break out the rattles and when to remain silent.

Notably, when Thelen talks about various factors, he typically talks about how he would begin fishing a spot. He makes his best initial choice based on what time has taught him, but he adjusts as he goes based on what the fish show him that day or even though a particular hole in the ice. He'll almost always have lures of both types tied on

and ready.



It's also worth noting that the factors don't always line up perfectly, and while one factor might point toward using a noisy approach, another might suggest staying silent.

Water Color

"The color of the water has a huge influence over the behavior of the fish," Thelen said.

Generally speaking, Thelen is likely to begin with a silent lure such as a Lindy Frostee jig or Frostee Spoon when fishing clear water and a rattling lure such as a Rattl'N Flyer Spoon or Darter if the water is more stained.

"When the water is dingy, I'll begin with rattles to bring in the fish. If it's really dingy I'll use a bigger rattling bait, partly because it will make more sound," Thelen said.

Frostee Spoon

At the other end of the spectrum, if the water is clear but other factors suggest that a sound-emitting lure might work best, Thelen typically

will turn to a small rattler that is less likely to spook the fish. He might still use a Rattl'N Flyer Spoon, for example, but instead of using a 3/16-ounce model, he drops back to 1/8-ounce version, which still rattles but has a smaller profile

Fish in Sight

Another important decision point for Thelen comes based on what he sees on his electronics after he drills a new hole. If he does not see any fish but it's a hole that he wants to fish, Thelen normally will drop a lure that rattles with hopes of calling in fish from nearby.

If he does see fish, he'll start with a silent lure, such as a Frostee Spoon tipped with a minnow head or a Frostee Jig baited with a whole live minnow, because he believes the lack of sound is one less foreign element that could spook fish that are already near enough to catch.

"If the fish are down there already; I want to use something that is less intrusive," Thelen said, noting that fish tend to be to a lesser degree hungry and substantially spookier under the ice than they are in the open water.

"On a windy summer day you have waves breaking up the light and making noise. Under the ice, the light stays constant through most of the day, and it's completely quiet, so you could easily spook a fish by suddenly introducing



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noise,” Thelen said.

Season

Early in the ice season when the fish tend to use shallow structure and often feed visually, Thelen may or may not use rattles, based on factors already discussed. As the season progresses, though, the fish tend to move deeper, and deeper water means less light penetration and a more likely need for a sound element to help the fish find the lure.

In many places, mid-winter also brings substantially more snow, and a heavy blanket of snow on the ice farther reduces visibility. At the same time, the sun angle stays the lowest through the middle of winter.

“When you’re fishing structure that’s more than 20 feet deep and there’s a thick layer of snow on the ice, I don’t think a fish sees a lure until it that lure is only a few inches in front of its face. Sound and scent are necessary to help the fish find the bait,” Thelen said.

Time & Place

Thelen has observed that fish have definite feeding areas and resting areas, and that if you can locate fish when they are in their feeding areas, you probably can get them to bite. There are also feeding times, and the fish normally don’t move to their feeding areas until it is feeding time. With walleyes, that’s usually late in the afternoon, just a little before dark, and the feeding area is often on top of some type of structural feature. If the fish feed atop a bar, they typically rest somewhere on the sides of the same structure in just a little deeper water



but not far away, and they won't move up until they are ready to eat. Thelen likes to drill his holes in the prime feeding areas at least an hour before he expects the fish to move up on their own, and he uses a noisy rattling bait to draw them up.



He gets into position to call the fish to the feeding area, while anglers with him might choose to drill holes along the sides of the structure to search for the fish.

"They'll be marking fish, but the fish won't bite because they are in resting areas," Thelen said. "If I can get one to move up, that fish is going to feed and there's a good chance it will pull a few of its buddies up with it and will get the bite going early."



Once the fish do move up, Thelen may end up switching to a silent offering, but that depends upon the water clarity and the season. Even more so, it depends upon whether they simply come to investigate, or they take his rattling lures.

Lindy Darter

Two-Pole Sound

At times, Thelen also will employ a two-pole technique with two holes drilled near one another. In one hole, he rigs a Lindy Ice Jig tipped with a minnow, and in the other hole, he jigs a Lindy Darter, a loud lipless hard bait. He's not necessarily looking forward to catching the fish on the Darter, but its high-volume rattle call's fish in order to investigate. One attracted, the fish often take the jig-and-minnow.





2013 World Ice Fishing Championship Team USA Preparing Smarter Not Harder

By Brian Gaber, USA Ice Team Coach

After a grueling weekend of National Team qualification last March, each USA Ice Team member gathered up their equipment, packed it away, and drove back to the far corners of the ice belt. With the spring thaw in full swing, we pushed the season to the last days of possible ice in 2012. We also pushed each finalist competitor to the max in three days, and five competitions heats to decide who would be a member of the USA Ice Team for 2013. This year will be special, as the 10th World Ice Fishing Championships (WIFC) is back in the United States. Wausau, Wisconsin will be home to the greatest ice fishers in the world from February 11th through the 17th 2013.

There is no place like home. The USA team has had mixed finishes in the years since our 2010 WIFC gold-medal performance in Rhinelander, Wisconsin. In 2011, the team traveled to Ukraine to defend our title and finished 8th of 16 countries. In 2012, the team traveled half way around the world to Kazakhstan; the first WIFC ever held in Asia. The US team finished 9th of 11 countries in that competition. This year, after a successful bid to the International

Freshwater Fishing Federation, the United States Freshwater Fishing Federation was successful in getting a bid back in the US. Back to home ice. Now the challenge to hold serve begins.

International ice fishing competitions are a far cry from what most American ice anglers are used to. There are no shanties, no tip ups, tip downs, or other passive methods. This style of competitive angling pits five American anglers against up to 15 other countries in each of five grids

for a three-hour heat. You get to use one rod at a time with one jig. No power augers or electronics is allowed during practice or competition. You are restricted to a predetermined zone with your 15 other countries' competitors. You compete head to head in your zone for a three-hour heat. The most weight determines your placement. First place is good for one point. The team with the lowest total points in two heats wins. The top three teams and overall individuals receive gold, silver, and bronze medals. It is truly the Olympics of ice fishing. The tactics include finding the fish first and catching them the fastest. You can move to another fishers that are catching fish, but can only move within a 5 meter radius of the edge of the competitor's hole. It's part speed, part endurance, part chess, and 100% concentration. If you want to be the world champion, you cannot miss a bite.



While all the US team members were home fundraising, and concentrating on the warm-weather parts of their lives, the team coaching staff and sponsor partners were hard at work taking the necessary steps to prepare for a great 2013 competition. While the 2010 US competition was a huge success, there were some minor criticisms from our international competitors. The major complaint was that we had only catchable species in play that had strict bag limits. In Europe, there are no bag limits, and the catchable species in play make for a speed competition. The European teams



have consistently displayed dominance in catching small fish fast. For us, finding an unlimited bag limit and catchable fish species were critical to winning a bid to host another WIFC. Enter the common carp.

The host support of the great sports city of Wausau Wisconsin had us searching central Wisconsin for water and species that will support our international event. After scouring area waters for the better part of a year, we have settled on the waters of the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir. This reservoir has gone through a number of ups and downs in recent years with water level issues, oxygen fish kill issues, and the resulting effects on the fishery. One thing that system has is carp, millions of carp. The fishery also has a sizable population of crappie and perch as well. With more cooperation between dam controllers and partnerships with the lake's association to stabilize the water levels, the lake is on the comeback. The carp in the system range in size from 1 to 25 pounds, and are in every part of the system. What makes them, particularly good for this winter competition is that they are very difficult to catch through the ice. They will be a true test to get hooked, and then a true challenge to land using finesse gear. If you've ever hooked up with one of these freshwater monsters, you will know that they pull a ton. They will be a true test of the light gear commonly used in this competition. With a total weight competition and the potential in this lake, it should be a shoot-out.

US team coaches along with the products and services of Crestliner Boats (www.crestliner.com), Humminbird (www.humminbird.com) and Outdoor Technologies LLC (www.outdoortechnologiesllc.com) have been scouring the bottom of the reservoir, surveying more than 2000 acres of water, to find locations to hold both practice sessions and the actual competition areas. The advanced imaging capability of the Humminbird electronics units provides the data, and then the advanced Geographic Information System (GIS) and

mapping capability of Outdoor Technologies LLC allows us to map, compare, and compile all the data, we need to translate the available data into places to fish. The ability to see the bottom, digitize it, and then conduct advanced selection GIS queries is the pinnacle of the use of advance sonar technologies to understand the relationship to catching fish. By documenting the location that we've previously caught fish, available oxygen, examining the bottom type, depth, and cover present, we are able to determine patterns and timing of the fish in the system. The use of this equipment will help the US team assure that we set up the grids in quality areas that give the best opportunity for a successful competition.

If you are interested in learning more about ice fishing in one weekend than you may have learned to this point in your life, make plans to be present for the 2013 WIFC near Wausau, Wisconsin this February. You will get to see what the best in the world use to finesse and catch fish. For many it will be an introduction to this competitive head to head style of ice fishing. You may even get to see the USA Ice team take climb back to the top of the world of



ice fishing. If you get hooked on this style of competitive ice fishing, stay tuned to the team's Facebook fan page(<http://www.facebook.com/pages/USA-Ice-Team/318429564835351>) to find out how to try out for the team this upcoming March in Rhinelander, Wisconsin. That US Finals competition will determine the team for 2014. Have you got what it takes to fish for the United States? It's the pinnacle of competitive fishing.



Watch Your Step! The Path to a Successful and Safe Ice Fishing Season

By Anthony Larson

As ice fishing approaches, I am asked a lot of questions in social media and press about ice fishing tips and tricks. The most asked question is often based on ice safety; “what should I do if I fall through the ice.”

I’ve interviewed several ice fishing pros throughout the years, and the topic of ice safety weighs heavy on just about every serious ice angler’s mind. It seems that a majority of ice-fishing pros fears falling through the ice, or at least it sits on the back of their minds.

However, there is one topic that seems to get missed, and I try to emphasize when I am talking about ice safety is falling **ON** the ice rather than falling **THROUGH** the ice; as most anglers know is very slippery, sometimes the path to the ice is slippery; and in some cases, especially during last ice where the ice erodes from the shoreline, we have to do super ninja moves to get to the ice.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics U.S. Department of Labor, in 4,609 fatal work injuries occurred. Of those fatalities, 621 were in the agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting industries, and 14% were resulted from falls, slips, and trips.

There are many ways to prevent an unwanted fall on the ice. First, make sure you have the proper footwear. I prefer the Yaktrax Extreme, but will recommend the Pro (www.yaktrax.com). The extreme has an extra rubber piece with spikes that grab the ice; however, the Pro works just as well with the wire coils. Both the Extreme and the Pro have a Velcro strap that is useful while walking on the ice should the ice grab the traction and attempt to pull the unit from the foot.

Secondly, especially for first ice that is pure and glass like, I recommend that one carries a spud. Not only does the spud ensure that the ice is hard and thick enough to walk on, but it gives the user a pole to lean on or assist with balance should the ice be too slippery.

Third, make sure you have a mat or something to put on the ice while you are fishing. I use a cheap yoga mat and interlocking foam blocks that daycares use (you can pick them up at any box hardware store for \$10.00). This offers continuous foot traction while fishing and gives you something to toss a friend should they fall and need help getting up.

Always let people know where you are going- Even if it's a note on the fridge or a text to a buddy. If something should happen and you're not back at a certain time, this gives people a general idea on where to look for you. A few years ago, a friend of mine fell on the ice and got knocked out and broke his collar bone. Because of his injury, he couldn't move or use his phone. Eventually, someone came looking for him and found him on the ice lake and got him the help he deserved.

Lastly, carry your phone. Put your phone in a ziplock bag or in a waterproof box to keep it dry. Most modern phones have GPS built in them. If something goes wrong, you can call for help; or in some cases they can track you by using your built in GPS.

Ice fishing is a great sport, but it is only enjoyed when you are safe and healthy.

Anthony Larson is a ice-fishing guide in Onalaska, Wisconsin and is on the pro staff teams of Castalia Outdoors, PK Lures, NuCanoe, Micro Spoons and Jigs, and Swish Rods. You can reach him at www.coulee-region-adventures.com



Count on Taste, Touch and Scent to Ice More Fish

By Lawrence Gunther

A friend who recently acquired sight after a lifetime of blindness said vision is often perplexing. He explained that seeing an object for the first time offered few clues about its true nature, making, touching, smelling and even tasting crucial to gaining understanding. For example, he had to use touch and smell before he could distinguish a rubber ball from an apple. Fish also sort out their world by deploying all their senses.



All fish start off life by depending on their inherited instincts, and survive on through to adulthood by conditioning their foraging behaviors through negative and positive experiences. They expend considerable effort sorting objects in their world into categories such as food, inedible objects and things that cause stress. Other than the few weeks when spawning becomes central in a fish's life, the rest of the time is spent refining these foraging skills.

A big part of a fish's maturation process now includes conditioning through repeated catch release experiences, resulting in older wiser fish developing a mistrust of artificial baits that repeatedly kick their butts, and a heightened mistrust of anything new. The task of identifying real food is also getting tougher due to better more life-like "match the hatch" artificial baits

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coming on to the market each year. And while fish may not understand the concept of “artificial”, they are competent at using all their various senses to tag objects as things to be either eaten or avoided.

Choosing to purchase artificial baits based on looks alone is equivalent to buying a truck because it looks cool. While it’s true, reaction-style baits such as spoons depend on their looks to trigger active fish to strike, coaxing neutral or negative fish into sampling your offering involves much more. In fact, sight is secondary to much of a fish’s mid-winter foraging activity since a good portion of the time is spent in low or no light conditions. Consequently, fish have evolved heightened non-visual sensory abilities. So exactly how do fish taste?

Taste

A distinguishing characteristic between us and fish is that we have hands for grasping and touching, whereas fish have only their mouths. Everyone who has fished for Walleye through the ice will attest to how difficult it can be at times to discern their

bite, resulting in more time wasted fishing with empty jigs. These fish are simply tasting the offering, and then deciding to make it a meal.

A fish’s taste buds are not only located inside their mouth, but can be found on the sides of their faces, gills and fins, and in the case of Carp and Catfish, along their barbels (whiskers) and the sides of their bodies. Surprisingly, though, fish can’t taste with their tongues.

While the degree to which different species of fish rely on their sense of taste is determined primarily by their preferred style of foraging, the importance an individual fish place on flavor have also to do with their attitude at the time. Aggressive or feeding fish often competes with other fish and have less time to exercise caution, giving them little opportunity to reject baits for reasons of taste, feel or smell. Curious fish, on the other hand, might explore their world utilizing all their senses, while neutral or negative fish first deploy their longer-range senses such as hearing and sight before deciding to move in closer to smell, touch and taste.

All predatory fish depend primarily on their sense of hearing to be alerted of approaching prey. Sight is then used for verifying and targeting. Designers of ice fishing jigs, spoons and hard-body baits such as Lindy understand this 2-step process and have built in rattles into

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many of their offerings. However, triggering inactive fish to strike is when natural baits or artificial scents become essential for satisfying a fish's taste feel and smell criteria. That's why using natural baits can kick-off a feeding frenzy, after which it's prudent to switch to artificial baits to take advantage of the feeding spree by reducing the time associated with re-baiting.

Feel

As fishers we all get asked if fish feel pain when they are hooked. The answer is no, otherwise there's no way predatory fish could tolerate eating baitfish with spiny dorsal fins or crawfish with their hard shells and pinchers. While bottom foraging fish such as Whitefish have softer mouths to suck in bottom-dwelling insects, they depend on their sense of taste to sort out food from other particulates. Carp also scoop food from the bottom with their mouths and then use water pressure to rinse away inedible particulates such as sand, weed, rock and even metal, all based on the sense of taste and not feel.

It's not the feeling of a hook penetrating their mouth that causes fish to respond, it's the pulling as they are reeled in. In fact, most fish aren't even aware they are in danger until brought to the hole and panic. Up until that moment fish often simply hold on what they assume to be either incredibly tough prey, or food a competitor is trying to steal away.

How a fish initially grasps with their mouth depends on their intent. Striking aggressively is used to injure or kill prey. However, just as often fish simply want to hold or squeeze an object to determine if it feels tastes or smells like food.

A number of plastic baits such as tubes were never designed to visually mimic what fish actually eat. Many species of fish find their shape intriguing though, which leads to their taking, the next step and either striking, if actively feeding, or simply mouthing the tube to satisfy their curious nature. Once in the fish's mouth, tubes feel life-like, and as long as they don't taste or smell inedible, it doesn't take long before their down the hatch.

Scent

The use of scent can assist in triggering neutral or negative fish to strike, and can serve to mask unnatural scents such as tobacco, gas or hand sanitizer. However, caution on how you store and handle your artificial baits should make the use of masking scents



unnecessary.

When fishing for aggressive predatory fish such as Northern Pike using reaction baits, adding scent to create a scent bloom can assist in triggering strikes. Scent additives are even more effective when you slow things down, giving fish more reasons to sample your offering.

Fish that link a certain shape and color of artificial bait to having their butts kicked won't unlearn this conditioning simply by adding scent. Altering that same bait's color or presentation style, in addition to introducing a triggering scent, just might.

Thus, scents perform two functions. They mask non-organic scents fish don't associate with food, and trigger feeding behavior by emulating their traditional forage. Some argue as well that scents can also initiate aggression bites if associated with competitors or nuisance life forms.

In what order of priority fish applies their senses depends on many more variables than discussed herein. Foraging style, water clarity and temperature, light levels, competitive pressure, the presents of known or unknown threats, spawning instincts, reaction time, etc. are all factors that need to be assessed when selecting a bait. The odds of your bait passing the different sensory tests applied by aggressive, feeding, curious or neutral fish will improve by thinking of your bait both as a complete sensory stimulation package, and the context in which it's being fished.

Lawrence Gunther is North America's only blind professional tournament fisher, and a writer and speaker on the subject of "Feel the Bite!" Follow [@LawrenceGunther](https://twitter.com/LawrenceGunther) on Twitter, and visit www.LawrenceGunther.com to read more of his articles.





Ice Fishing: A Family Pastime

By Jay Warren

Some of my fondest memories as a child are with my Dad and involved carrying a fishing pole or a gun. My Dad instilled in me a love for the outdoors, and now I am doing my best to pass on this passion to my children. Ice fishing is something that can (and should) be enjoyed by the entire family. If you have children and they enjoy fishing in the summer, then chances are they will also enjoy ice fishing. If you want your kids to get outdoors and are looking for some winter activities, then ice fishing is something you should look into.

Anytime someone “new” is introduced to an outdoor sport; efforts should be made so that the beginner has a positive first experience. If you are taking a person (especially a child) ice fishing for the first time, you need to make sure of two things: 1. They stay warm and 2. They have fun. Both can be accomplished fairly easily (and relatively inexpensively) with proper preparation

Staying WARM

If you are introducing a child to ice fishing, staying warm should be the number-one priority. If possible, pick a nice sunny day, preferably one with as little wind as possible. Dress in layers



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and keep all of your cold-weather clothing dry if possible. If you own an ice shack, make sure you had it set up and heated if possible. All of the ice shacks that I have fished out of have dark interiors. After being set up for a short period of time the shacks warm up with the heat of the sun. Throw in a heater of some sort and the process becomes that much quicker. Remember - the warmer the kid, the better your chances for a positive experience. Even if it is a warm sunny afternoon, have a dozen holes drilled and are jumping from one hole to the next in search of the elusive "honey hole" - set up a shelter and use it as a warming station

Having FUN

Let's think about this for a little while. . . How many of you parents have heard your kids complain, after being stuck inside for what seems like an eternity by mid-December, that they are bored and don't have anything to do? Or they are at home, only getting off the computer to use the bathroom, and you want them to do something other than whatever computer / internet activity they have been involved with for who knows how long? The cure to this winter dilemma is ICE FISHING!!!

Having fun while taking your family ice fishing is one of the easiest things to do on a winter afternoon! All that is needed is a short lightweight fishing pole, small fishing jigs, bait, a bobber of some sort and something to drill a hole in the ice. You can get a beginner's ice fishing kit (containing lures, bobbers, ice fishing pole, etc.) for around \$20 and a hand-held ice auger for around \$50. This is a very simplified version of ice fishing, but for the beginner,

not much is really needed and these few simple items can lead to an unlimited amount of memories and fun with your family.



Once you have the needed equipment, make sure you bring plenty of hot chocolate and your favorite family snacks. Even if the fishing is slow, if there is plenty of hot chocolate to keep everyone warm and snacks to keep everyone full and happy, the kids will probably not remember the lack of fish but the good times they had when they were ice fishing. Fish with the kids for a while, if they get bored, it is OK for them to slide around on the ice, make snow angels or throw snow balls at each other. There have been a lot of times when I hook a fish, hand the pole to one of my kids and let them land it. They love reeling it in and as long as everyone is having

fun that should be the goal.

Getting Started

In the state of Iowa, we are lucky to have access to a good amount of public waters. There is also a plentiful amount of private ponds, most of which can be fished after gaining permission from the landowner. Take the beginners somewhere close to home. Hopefully, it

is somewhere you fished during warmer weather and are familiar with it. If you are familiar to a body of water, your chances of catching fish through the ice are better. If it is close to home, it also takes less planning, and you can get home quicker if necessary. As far as bait goes, you can't go wrong with wax worms. They can be picked up at any local bait shop and when fished 1 – 2 feet off the bottom, will usually do the trick.

My wife and I have two daughters and a son. Last winter, my daughters were 9 and 7, and my son was 4. I took them ice fishing on some local ponds with some success, but wanted to “expand our horizons” and take them to somewhere like the Iowa Great Lakes (IGLs). Fishing in the IGLs with my wife and three young children for me would most likely be an overnight trip, and I had to come up with some way to keep everyone happy and content. I had to call in the two “reinforcements”. . . Number One was my buddy Tim. He lives in the lakes' region and is my “local expert” when it comes to fishing there. He fishes up there quite a bit, knows the lakes well and has the patience of Job. Throw in the fact that he is always texting me pictures of his limits of fish he catches, and every time I have fished with him; we have done very well! Number Two was Bridges Bay Resort on East Lake, Okoboji. This is a really nice hotel, had affordable winter rates and best of all an indoor water park for the kids!!!

We found a weekend that worked for everyone. Tim scouted out where the fish were hitting, and we decided to try our luck on West Lake Okoboji for gills. My wife and I and our three kids met Tim on the lake at around noon. Tim already had his shack set up and the bite was





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fairly steady. With the help of my wife, I got my shelter up, fired up the heater, baited hooks for everyone and started fishing. If you ever have an opportunity to fish for panfish on West Lake, definitely give it a try. We fished Millers Bay and with the darkness inside an ice shack in combination with the water clarity allows you to see everything below you. Sight fishing takes a lot of guesswork out of whether the fish are biting or not because you can see the fish take the bait into their mouths. It really is a blast!!! Tim and I both have flashers and gas-powered ice augers, so when the fishing slowed down, we always looking for new spots to fish. The fish were biting well enough in my shack (and it is warmer inside a heated shack!) to keep everyone satisfied. Tim and I fished from several different holes and kept moving around in search of the state record bluegill. My son was happy following me around with his ice scoop, scooping snow and reeling in fish that either Tim or I hooked. By the end of the afternoon, we had close to two limits of gills, and all were at least 8" long. After we finished fishing we headed to Bridges Bay, the kids enjoyed the waterpark and my wife and I appreciated being able to sit in the hot tub while watching our kids playing in the waterpark. Married guys out there take note if you are not familiar with the following statement: "If Momma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy. . .

With all the modern equipment available from improved portable shelters, advanced cold-weather apparel to the continual improvements in tackle and baits, the future of ice fishing seems unlimited. The "tools" available today, if used properly, give ice anglers tremendous advantages. These advantages can lead to awesome times with your family and memories that will last forever. I feel like our society is at somewhat of a crossroad. We need to be getting future generations of outdoorsmen (and women!) excited about being outside and involved. I can't think of a better way to get kids involved in an outdoor winter activity. Ice fishing for me isn't about the amount of fish you catch, it is about the memories that you gain, and the quality time spent with family and friends. Ice fishing truly is a Family Pastime for me and hopefully in the future can be for you. . .



Pull Position Walleyes

By Jason Mitchell



One of the authors favorite tactics for catching shallow water walleyes is hard pounding a horizontal swim lure like the Chubby Darter, causing the lure to bounce and shimmy.

I am convinced that in order to catch walleyes through the ice, you have to be good at finding fish. The first people on a school score big. By the time the word reaches the bar, the bite is over. People who are always hitting new ice and checking fresh spots are usually one step ahead of the crowds. By venturing out and finding fish, you can also fish much more aggressively for a few different reasons. In order to find fish, you have to check locations and fish through spots fast. Typically, I stop on a spot and drill holes over what I believe are the best locations on a particular spot. Drop down and fish aggressively just to see if anybody is home. Don't bother setting up camp when you are in search mode. When fishing fresh ice that hasn't been pressured, you can usually get some sign of life relatively quickly. When I am looking for fish, all I want to do is mark fish that I am pretty sure are walleyes. After you find fish, you can slow down or make sure you are on the spot during the prime windows during the morning and evening. Here is the other kicker, fresh fish act very differently when a school of walleye are set up on a spot, and you are the first line in front of those fish,

they are typically more aggressive because of how these fish are schooled. Higher concentrations of fish create a more competitive nature among fish. When working a lure aggressively in these situations, the fish that are in the area find you. They race each other and attempt to beat each other to your lure. The density of the school often has more to do regarding the level of aggressiveness than whether or a lot of other factors. Fresh fish bite better.

Typically, what happens after a school has been worked over, is the big school gets broken up into small pods of fish that



Chubby Darter

are scattered. Typically as well, the overall size drops when a spot gets pressured because the big fish suppress the actions of smaller fish. Take the big fish out of the equation and then the small fish get a chance to get to the lure. When these schools get broken up and pushed around, they become less aggressive and harder to catch. By now, word has reached the pub that the walleyes are biting on such and such point. At this point, the aggressive presentations often quit working and the game becomes a dead stick game where dunking shiners or minnows will keep picking off these less aggressive fish. So if you sit on these good spots dunking minnows, you are going to catch some fish, but you can catch so many more fish if you put in the work to find new fish and fish aggressively.

What is fishing aggressively? Attitude matched with lures that will pull fish into you from a long distance. The lure is a dinner bell and you as an angler have to ring that bell. You have to move enough water and create enough flash to bring in aggressive fish. In some situations, especially after dark or in stained and turbid water, noise can also call fish in. Aggressive fish or fish that are schooled in a way to create the competitiveness described above want the aggressive lure. These fish are looking for a meal and want to gun down that meal before the rest of the fish. This is a hard adjustment for some anglers to make. Many anglers make the mistake of not jigging enough, call the fish in. Jig that lure like you are swinging a hammer. Seeing fish on the Vexilar is half the battle. By jigging aggressively in



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these situations, you just see more fish because more fish can feel and see you from further away. Once fish arrive and you can see fish, you might have to back off and get more subtle, and that is why you have to use a Vexilar so that you can watch how these fish respond to every move you make. So often, however, these fish respond to your attitude. What I mean by this is if you fish with a finesse mindset, you will get subtle bites. If you fish aggressively, you will get fish that come in and tear the rod out of your hand.

Aggressive lures basically fall under three different categories: horizontal swim lures, spoons and rattle baits. As a general rule of thumb, super clear water often dictates a longer jig stroke higher off the bottom where fish can see the lure from further away. Stained water sometimes dictates a tighter, harder pound that ranges from six inches to a foot to call fish in. Never be afraid to occasionally rip the lure high off the bottom, because a high lift sometimes brings fish in. I cannot tell you how many times a fish came in hot as I reeled my lure up fast, and I dropped back down and caught that fish. In stained water or after dark, I personally like to rattle baits or lures that rise straight up and drop straight down as the fish seem to be able to hone in on these lures better. In water with really good visibility, lures that wander or swing out on the drop often work better for bringing in fish. Regardless of lure however, I like to make the bait somewhat predictable when a fish nose in. Make the bait predictable by keeping your cadence the same where the lure keeps landing right in the same spot or slowing lifting away where a fish can find it. When a fish is right on you, you do not want to rip the lure and have it fall behind the fish where they can't find it. This happens a lot where fish come in hot, and if they over shoot the lure, they cannot see the lure anymore. When a fish is right on top of you

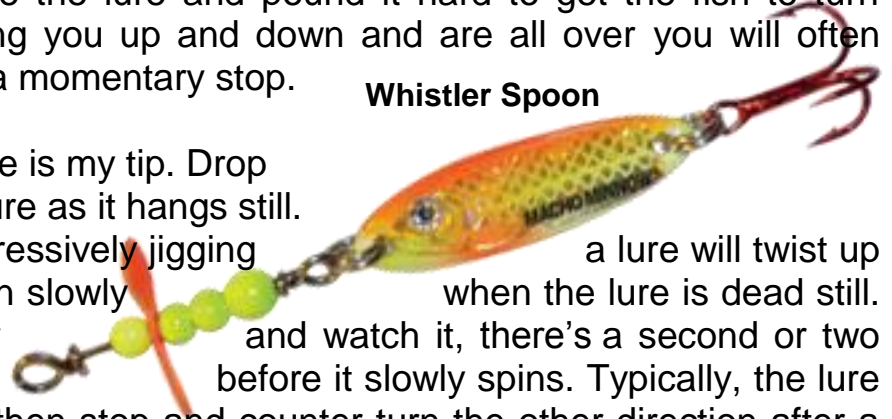


The author Jason Mitchell with a tank of a walleye caught using a prototype of the new Northland Tackle Whistler Spoon.

When a fish is right on top of you

and acting weird, raise the lure back up and pound it to see if you can turn the fish back around. If a fish starts to drift off, raise the lure and pound it hard to get the fish to turn towards the lure. Fish that are following you up and down and are all over you will often punch the lure when the lure comes to a momentary stop.

Whistler Spoon



How long should you stop the lure? Here is my tip. Drop the lure down the hole and watch the lure as it hangs still.

Even with a swivel above the lure, aggressively jigging the line enough to cause the lure to turn slowly when the lure hangs perfectly still and watch it, there's a second or two before it slowly spins. Typically, the lure will spin slowly a certain direction and then stop and counter turn the other direction after a few more seconds. Get a mental timeline in your head of these two factors on your lure. That few seconds you have before the lure turns is the first and most important trigger most days, interrupt your jigging cadence with just a momentary stop, that you time in your mind, as was just before the lure turns. That when you usually gets the bite. If that doesn't work, bobble the lure just enough to rock the bottom treble hook and this also counter some of the spin so that the lure stops turning. For more difficult fish, hold the rod still and pull then make the last move, let the lure turn until it stops and turns the opposite direction. This last move takes a few more seconds and when the lure stops turning and starts to turn the opposite direction; that moment is typically when the fish hits the lure. Now is when taking care of your line and using swivels will help you catch more fish.



Salmo Zipper

Getting back to lures, there are a few key baits that you don't want to hit the ice without.

Horizontal swim baits shine when you are fishing

water that has good visibility. For water less than fifteen feet, Chubby Darters are tops for pulling in fish. The key to fishing the Chubby Darter is to pound the lure hard, get the lure to dance and shimmy. That particular lure drives walleyes crazy if you fish it aggressively with a short hard pound. Another top horizontal swim lure is the Northland Tackle Puppet Minnow. Puppet Minnows can be fished very similar and are a great versatile lure that fishes well in deeper water and current. I love the horizontal swim lures and am very confident with these lures most of the time. There are exceptions, however. In really dingy or turbid water, I often switch over to rattle baits like the Salmo Zipper. These baits put off a lot of vibrations and are loud under water. The zipper is so loud. I can actually hear the bait when I fish it at times.... under the ice. One of





the most effective ways I have found to fish rattle baits in deeper water is to drop the bait down and then reel up the bait about five to ten feet fast enough to cause the lure to vibrate, this really calls fish in and often gets fish to shoot up off the bottom where they can be easy to catch. Once a fish shows up, I typically just shake the lure in place just above the fish. Fish that are high off the bottom usually dunk the rod tip pretty good

when they hit. The strength of spoons is that they are so versatile. There are few places I can think of where you cannot catch walleyes with spoons. Again, in clear water, flutter spoons or brass slab spoons like a Macho Minnow are often better. On the flip side, in stained water or during low light, choose spoons that drop straight down. One of the best spoons ever made, in my opinion, for walleyes is a Northland Tackle Buckshot Rattle Spoon. The strength of this spoon besides a rattle chamber is that this spoon drops like a rock right back to the same spot every time, and fish can find this lure easy. Another great low light, stained water spoon is the Northland Tackle Whistler Spoon that is new for this ice season. I had a lot of time on the ice testing this spoon last winter, and this particular spoon with the blade attachment sends off a lot of vibrations on the upstroke but with the blade attachment, this brass spoon falls straight down predictably.... Perfect attributes you want in a spoon on places like Red Lake, Lake of the Woods or Devils Lake where visibility isn't always perfect. We caught a lot of walleyes with prototypes of this lure.



I was at a sport show a few winters back, and a gentleman told me that my lines of walleye rods under the Jason Mitchell Elite Series Brand were too stiff for walleye fishing. The gentleman spent most of his time fishing out of a permanent shack with rattle reels and for that style of fishing, the gentleman was right. If you are sitting on a spot with live minnows

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and bobbers, the graphite blanks we use are too stiff. When it comes to working the above lures, however, you want a fast-action graphite blank that can give that lure some pop on the upstroke and also have enough tip to bury that hook when a walleye punches that lure hard. Our lineup of rods was designed specifically for working spoons and swim lures. Too soft of a rod is going to cost you so many missed fish when working lures so that is why we designed the rods that we did. If you leave the rod on the floor of a permanent fish house and have a minnow hanging below a bobber, a rod that has a more parabolic and uniform bend with a softer action is often better.



So match your rod to the presentation. I want to stress as well that sitting on good spots with dead rods is not necessarily bad and there are times where that is what you have to do to catch fish but so often, looking for fish and finding fish is so much better if the goal is to catch walleyes. By approaching the ice with an aggressive mindset and focusing on trusting your electronics with one rod and a handful of good lures, covering water until you find fresh fish.... That my friend is how you can really catch a lot more fish most days on most bodies of water. Many anglers start out fishing with live bait and dead rods and out of frustration if that doesn't work, they switch to aggressive fishing techniques, I urge you as an angler to do the opposite. Start out covering water and looking for fish and fish aggressively. After you find the fish and give them the work over, then you can often coax out one or two more days off the spot with tip ups, dead rods and minnow dunking just to eek out the spot a little more. This aggressive fishing mentality, however, allows you to cover water and find fish. The emphasis is finding fish, when you find them and the spot is fresh.... You are going to catch so many more fish.





Tough Bite...Try This!

By Scott Brauer (pictured on prior page)

“They’re here, they just aren’t biting” Ever have a day like that? I was surrounded by some of the best local fisherman our lake has to offer, and it was just going to be a tough night. Until by accident most of the rubber bait that I was using was ripped off by a crappie, bent on stealing the glow lure that I was jigging. As it often does, there were more crappies cruising just under the ice with this bait stealer. As I rushed to re-bait, I could not find the replacement glow I wanted so I threw on a red tail which gave a” leftover” glow head and red body presentation that turned the night around for me. Over the next hour and a half, it also proved to be too much for the “tough bite” fish to resist. I “lucked” into a full limit of crappies, a couple dozen really nice gills and sunnies and two kicker perch on a really tough night. Warren, who I will argue, is the best fisherman on this particular lake and my son Luke, who has won more tournament money than me, struggled, along with the others that were fishing around us. Anytime, there is a significant difference in buckets among comparable fishermen, there is something to be learned.

After loading our huts in the trucks and comparing buckets, Warren, Luke and I went into Macks for a piece of meatloaf so big it shouldn’t be legal. As we waited for it to be delivered to our table, we theorized about the reasons why on a tough night this fluke would be so productive. Color combo, shape change, glow head, fall rate, matching the existing available food source, or because it was late in the season, it was just different than what they have been seeing all year?





Color Combo

When you think all the reasons why a color combo would work it seems obvious that very few, if any, natural food source's fish eat, are a solid color. Shades of colors, specks, flakes and transparency all come into play. So how do we accomplish this on the ice? Well, the easy way is to buy your bait with two-tone patterns, holographic, specks, glow, or to stack bits

of rubber on your jig. I also always have a few Sharpie markers with me in my bibs to change baits on the fly if I find a pattern that is working.

Shape Change

As we look at all the bait options that are out there now we can find just about any shape in any size. Why would that matter to fish? Size change can be as simple as offering the fish a larger or smaller meal of the hatch that you are matching. Shape change in plastics is usually for attraction or action. The way a bait flows because of its shape, can mimic its real counterpart or impart a radical action that will attract fish and help it to commit. Some of the best shape baits are the Gojo from J and S Custom Jigs, the Nuggies from Little Atom, Northlands Bro's Scud Bug and most of the match the hatch baits from Makiplastic.

The Glow Connection

Glow during twilight, morning or night, can be a killer! Nevertheless, to put a piece of glow plastic on to attract a strike or cause interest can draw fish under you from long distances. When we can, it is best to find travel corridors but when you are seeing fish on the camera that just cruise by, try a small piece of glow charged and watch how they react to it. If the glow is on the front, and they are taking it head first take note, if they come in and hit the opposite end, take note. While the glow can be a great attractor, it can also be a detractor turning some fish away if the presentation is unnatural, if you witness this don't give up on glow maybe all you need is to turn it down a bit, by using it in combination with an opposing color or a piece of live bait.

Fall Rate

As feeding fish come through and pick falling food from the middle of the water table below us, the rate in which a bait appears to them can be important. In this world of drop shot and

dropper flies we can control the falling rate of a stacked bait; this is a time tested tourney winner. The key to this working is finding the right piece of rubber and matching it to the right hook to speed up or slow down the presentation for the situation that you are fishing. If there is a run in because of melt off you may want to speed up the fall. If the fish are coming in and bumping weeds to knock off shrimp you may want to slow it down so that it matches the action that you are seeing below you.

Match the Hatch

The prevalent theme throughout this whole article is this concept. The ability to convince fish that what they believe that they are seeing and sensing is true. In fact, almost everything that we do is to try to get them to commit to the bait. By making a connection with the fish using colors, action, attractants and natural balance, we hope to trick all of their senses, eliciting that fully committed strike.

Mix It Up

The key to success in almost all fishing scenarios is the commitment to outworking and outthinking. Outworking by not getting stuck in a rut and trying the same thing repeatedly, and outthinking the fish by being willing and able to try new things on tough days. Last but not least sit after a tough bite and talk with your fishing partners about what worked and what didn't... Meatloaf optional.

Have a great next outing!





Fishing the East two and a half days, four lakes and one tournament

By Nathan Krusko

Fishing the East two and a half days, four lakes and one tournament. In just under 1500 miles this journey was completed during the difficult winter of 2012. While many through the ice belt were battling difficult ice conditions, many in the eastern region of the ice belt of NY and VT were still able to enjoy the great ice fishing opportunities in their backyards.

The trip began as many trips in the east do. There is an active river setback bite at night, potential for 15-inch crappies on a clear glacial lake, tournament fishing on Lake Champlain and classic pan-fishing small private ponds as a true stand by. How many fishing destinations can an angler fit into such a short amount of time? Answer as many as one can consider the NY and VT region of the ice belt have so many lakes concentrated together. Such a concentration that it is feasible to enjoy an early-morning crappie bite on one lake, followed by a late morning perch bite and off to complete the evening with a choice for lake trout and smelt or bullhead, crappie and walleye while using underwater lights.

ANNUAL NEW YORK STATE CRAPPIE DERBY

This January weekend began in planning for a trip to fish an early Saturday Tournament with the Vermont Sportsman's Hard Water Tournament Series on Lake Champlain. Figuring on the fact that this would be complete by 1 pm there is plenty of time to work more into the schedule. After all, fishing only one destination in a weekend seems kind of a waste, considering all that the region has to offer. So with a cameraman in tow and a busy schedule we must formulate a plan. We are beside ourselves for what to pursue, but one thing was certain fish were to be caught and photos to be taken. Easy enough Right?

The obvious choice to us was night fishing using our underwater lights. The use of underwater lights is a growing trend and while legal in NY and VT, very few enjoy this, so we are set to find new areas and different species to test this on. Our first location comes to us



on a lead of a hot bite in a river setback while some hot bites go cold while in planning we would be determined to try this out as there has yet to be an opportunity to enjoy this on river setbacks on the upper Hudson River. Upon arrival, we are greeted with a beautiful walk through the woods down to the river's edge. At the edge, we find a familiar site for evening fishing; we are alone. Odd considering the great location and the chance for crappie. We press on finding the location between the island, looking downriver and aligning to the cabin on the shore. Yes, no GPS here. Within moments the auger begins cutting. The sound of an electric auger speedily making the penetrations through our icy workspace is all that is heard. When all the chaos is over fifty holes dot the area. Yes, fifty. Enough for a good evening start. Area set we begin fishing and searching with lights energized and hopefully bait attraction working. This hot bite did indeed



go cold and only a few were caught. Not a waste of time though. During this time, we enjoyed the company of one another, and I met a new angler. Meeting new anglers and the community of ice fishing is such a great part of trips such as this. During this time, we formulated the

remainder of our weekend's plans that event the newest met angler would like to bring his daughter to yet another evening opportunity.

Day two begins with the steady 2am beeping of the alarm. Time to hit the road and head north for a 5am setup. Yes, we have a 2-hour drive to near the Canadian Border. Though high winds and freezing wind we did not slow. We are ice fishermen; bad weather does not deter us. What a drive. At the launch, we are greeted and time to set up and prepare for a day recording and fishing. Compete and film. We shall call it compete. I was indeed registered as a competitor, but I was not digging in for a win but more of a community experience with these folks. On this day, the sustained winds were at 20 mph with gusts to 40 mph. Too much for fishing out of a shelter, but we came prepared. And according to the lake



surface looking like a small community this group too is well equipped. As the day progressed, we did find some fish and enjoyed some filming, but the feature was the steady shifting of the groups attempting to find fish collectively so it appeared. Some bystanders were on other plans with the smell of brats and venison steaks in the air. As fishing is community, I abandon plans to further compete and follow curiosity towards an angler with a pole bending to near breaking point. Odd considering most are here for panfish. This angler definitely did not have a panfish. Indeed. During the battle, we get a few glimpses of something huge and the main focus was on the fact that this gentleman wanted his jig back and more so than the bruin on the line. With the 2lb line, a noodle rod, and a reel with smooth drag this fish comes to the surface. It is a burbot. What a toothy monster. Immediately, after the prized jig (or as they say in this region bibit) is retrieved the beast is released. What a thrill. With time elapsing the weigh in is upon us. The camera man heads in



and begins to document the return of hungry tired and excited anglers. Enough excitement did fill the day as one angler is awarded a guaranteed fish mount, a victor was determined, and the points leader was selected. Is our day really full? No? We quickly shake hands pack up and roll back into NY and the mountains for a fun adventure on yet another new

body of water. This time for a chance at night time crappie and trout.

Two hours of hilly driving later we arrive at a pull off near our next destination. A big change in scenery. Just leaving the large valley lake of Lake Champlain to this quaint mountain lake on the edge of the Adirondack Park. Scenery being different some faces are familiar; the angler from the previous outing is here with his daughter eager to learn, and as we walk out I spot two others that are very familiar. Two die-hard fans who are now super icefisherwomen. What a small community ice fishing can be. Now with a posse of anglers we are set to conquer this area an area I have not even researched. Like a general armed with sonar, lights and an auger I formulate a plan with the troops. Once to the spot I take lead with the auger as I usually do and start drilling at a fast pace as if I have a vengeance against the clear ice below our feet. To keep pace cameraman and another angler are pressing on with their sonars in my path of destruction searching each newly made hole for any sign of fish

below. Once a glimmer of fish activity is found we will set camp for our night battle. As the fishing begins the lights are glowing with the clear icy surface and fish move in and out. Each angler and event the youthful daughter persistently tried to elicit a bite of these tight-lipped crappies. Not all is lost though we found them for another day, and this youthful angler is now hooked from the fun she had this evening. All in all, we shared fun some new techniques were learned, and this young girl walked away with a life experience and a new ice fishing rod. A true success. Not all successful outings end in record catches of fish.

With a long end to day two, day three will arrive very fast. In this day, we will change scenery even more and spare the driving. Yes. No driving to this area. Promptly, at 6 am, the alarm sounds and the coffee begins to brew. No sense of urgency on this day as we do not have to drive. We have a chance to fish a small mountain pond just a couple hundred feet from where we slept. Today's species are perch and bass. Private ponds do offer some fun fishing opportunities. In this case, it is big bass, small perch and unspoiled views. Fishing the east has so many opportunities. We selected this place as it is home to us and a fine place to unwind after such an adventurous couple days. Now we are able to slow the pace down, do some fishing and get a chance to get work done. Yes work on the ice but is it really work if we enjoy this so much. This day it will be filming videos to enrich others' experiences and grow this community of ice fishing. For us, it is a calming time to work together laugh and share this bond of fishing.

By the end of this journey, we traveled 1500 miles. In the 1500 mile, we drove by countless dozens of fishing destinations, met new people, fished for multiple species, fished at night and even fit in a tournament. This is a sampling of what fishing the east can be if you are truly looking to do a full crash course. In this we fished Brant Lake a clear mountain lake, a setback of the Hudson River, the vast expanse of Lake Champlain and a small private pond. Open a map and plot your journey to the east you too will find lots of opportunities and adventures. Chose a species or multiple species, there is sure to be a body of water that will meet and exceed your dreams.

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Tournament Fishing Vermont - Small State, Big Competition

By D & B Ice Adventures

To many, winter is not an enjoyable time of year. Between the wind and cold why would you ever leave the comfort of home before sunrise to go trudge through snow and slush just for some fish? Well, for a select group of us, a little camaraderie, bragging rights, and the thought of pulling fish through the ice is more than enough motivation to leave the comfort of our warm homes.

Some would argue that Vermont is behind the times when compared to the rest of the states along the ice belt but we think that is not necessarily true anymore. When you attend an ice fishing tournament, such as the ones put on by the Vermont Sportsman Hardwater Tournament Series, you will find the same passion, intensity, and gadgets being utilized to search out a winning limit of panfish. The Vermont Sportsman's mission is to help advance the sport of fishing and outdoor recreation in the North East by providing the highest level in education, competition and product promotion.

The tournaments we are talking about are all located on the what is considered to be the sixth great lake; Lake Champlain. With close to 500 square miles of fishable water the options are nearly endless. These tournaments target panfish, more specifically bluegill, pumpkinseed, and both black and white crappie. Depending on the location, different species will comprise the winning basket. This coming year, two tournaments will be held at Dillenbeck Bay on the Northern end of the lake while the other two will be on the southern part of the lake at Lapham Bay and Larabee's Point. Northern Lake Champlain boasts plentiful populations of large pumpkinseed and black crappie while the Southern end a winning bag will be composed mostly of bluegill and both species of crappie.

The majority of people who fish these tournaments are locals, however the series has gained a lot of interest in recent years and has seen a number of competitors traveling from New York and Pennsylvania. Each event is a one day competition. Take off is usually at 6:00 am and anglers have until 3:00 pm to get back for weigh-in. Like all tournaments, there are designated boundaries which are determined and marked at the start of the event. Anglers are allowed to weigh-in six fish of which only three can be crappie.

Anglers spend most of the day fishing within sight of everyone, this makes keeping a good area to yourself all the more difficult. Most anglers choose to spend the day in the shanties moving from time to time in effort to stay on a decent bite. Some that prefer to stay a little more mobile in their efforts to search out that small spot that seems to be holding a good number of fish. Both tactics have their advantages and disadvantages. Although this is a single person event, many fishermen work together in hopes of locating and staying on a school of crappie or the ever so present pie plate pumpkinseed that inhabit the shallow weed beds of Northern Lake Champlain.

There is a wide array of techniques used on



tournament day, but one thing is for sure, the modern way of catching fish is becoming a major factor in one's success at these events. It was a big deal to see an angler with a flasher unit at the first event three years ago, now it's the exact opposite. Flasher units, underwater cameras, electric auger, portable fish houses, and micro plastics have all become a part of the tournament scene here in Vermont, giving those with an open mind a better chance at bringing home a plaque.

Weigh-in takes place in the afternoon and all anglers participating in the event need to be present to weigh-in. One thing is for sure, every one of these tournaments that I have fished have been a complete tossup. I recall one day when the winning bag consisted of only one crappie. That fish wasn't a monster but it was one of a very few that had been caught that day. At another event, just about every angler weighed in their six fish. Bags of up to 4.5 pounds have been seen at these events.

You can find more information on the VT Sportsman Hard Water Tournament Series at:
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