

Tips For Finding Fish Under The Ice

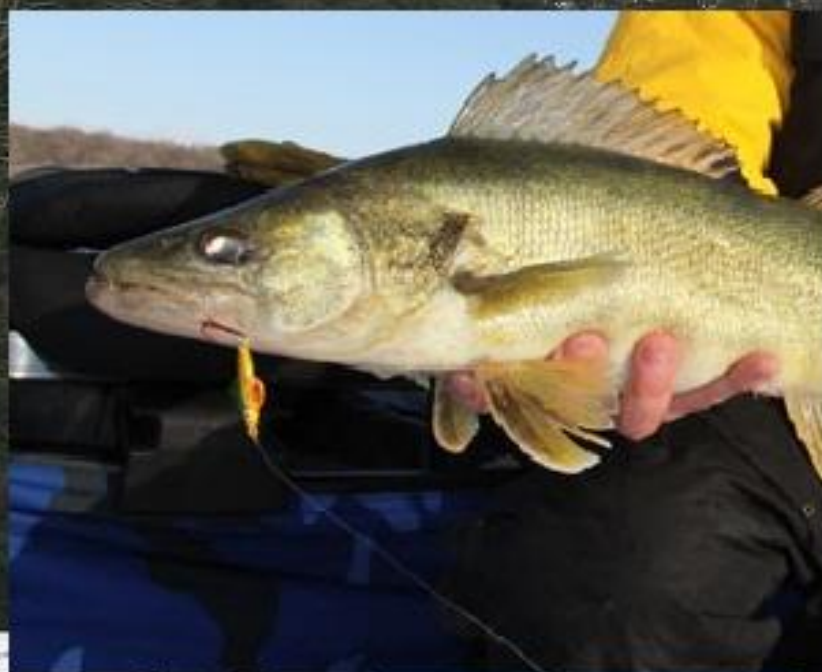


Techno Tip-Ups
Hit and Run Perch
Tip-Ups and Teeth

**Catch
More
Crowded
Crappies**



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I hope everyone had a "Very Merry Christmas Happy New Year". Hopefully, the Jolly Old Fat man gave you everything you wanted and more and you had a great time visiting with your family and friends.

This is also the time during the year that you should take the time and visit with some old fishing buddies, and if you are really lucky, you will wet a line.

Please keep this in the back of your mind; "DON'T CONTINUE TO PUT OFF THAT FISHING TRIP or visiting with friends" life is too short! God only knows if we are going to be around tomorrow to take that trip. As a friend of mine once told me: "You will never be sorry if you go, but you will be if you don't".

Please have a great and prosperous New Year!

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,

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Photos: Cover provided by Traditions Media, Index page provided by Vexilar and rear cover provided HT.

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Late Ice Crappie

By Dave Duwe

The warmer weather of March means the end of another long Wisconsin winter. The ice is becoming soft and can be dangerous, so always use caution. The end of the ice fishing season does offer one big benefit; some of the best crappie fishing of the year. The last ice period in late winter, I believe is better fishing than the first ice period. The fish are bigger preparing for their spring spawning ritual, and they are far more aggressive. I will try to protect the resource by releasing the bigger females and never keeping a limit. In addition, the warmer March weather makes fishing much more pleasant. Pre-dawn, dusk and night are the best times to catch late ice crappies. This is when they are aggressively feeding on small minnows and zoo plankton. During the day, crappies tend to be less active and concentrate around weeds and other structure. At night, crappies move into more open water. They are notorious for suspending throughout the water column. Crappies will school up in large numbers and wander throughout the lake feeding.

With the fish off structure in the main lake basin the depth to find them varies and is very dependent on the body of water you are fishing. The constant for most lakes is the crappies will suspend off bottom.

For schooling crappies I will try to fish three poles, which is the maximum allowed in the state. Two of the poles are “dead sticks” and the third will be in my jigging hand with my Vexilar. Dead



sticking is basically letting your poles sit. The presentation I use is similar to summertime slip bobber fishing. I will use a small Thill bobber with a small treble hook (size 16), with a small split shot. Don't be surprised when you go to purchase the small treble hooks, they are expensive for their size! I like to position one of the dead sticks about a foot off bottom and the other will be 2-3 ft off bottom. Minnows are undisputedly my favorite bait for late ice crappies. Of course, when using a

locator you will be able to see exactly the depth they are coming in at. You can adjust your presentation to match their location within the water column. My jigging rod will have a small spinning reel spooled with 4 lb Silver Thread. I found that lighter line isn't essential when you are fishing at night. I like a heavier ice-jig like a Lindy Fat Boy or Genz worm, a glow color is a must. I will tip the jig with spikes or wax worms.

The use of a quality locator is critical for suspending crappies. My preference is a Vexilar FL-20, which has a bottom zoom feature and a flat display screen. I found that the fish higher in the water column are the most actively feeding. I have noticed that crappies have a tendency to feed upward. The fish under a school of feeding crappies are usually tough to get to strike.

On my jig pole I will use a spring bobber. Unlike most fish, crappies will strike both in an upward or downward motion. When a fish bites it usually jiggles your spring bobber downward. When a fish is biting upward, your spring bobber will go straight. This indicates an upward bite. You need to set the hook fast. When fishing a Thill bobber, if a fish bites upward your bobber will go flat on the surface of the water.

Late ice crappie fishing is great, but please remember that safety needs to come first. Soft ice can deteriorate in a hurry. Always be safe and check ice conditions before venturing out.



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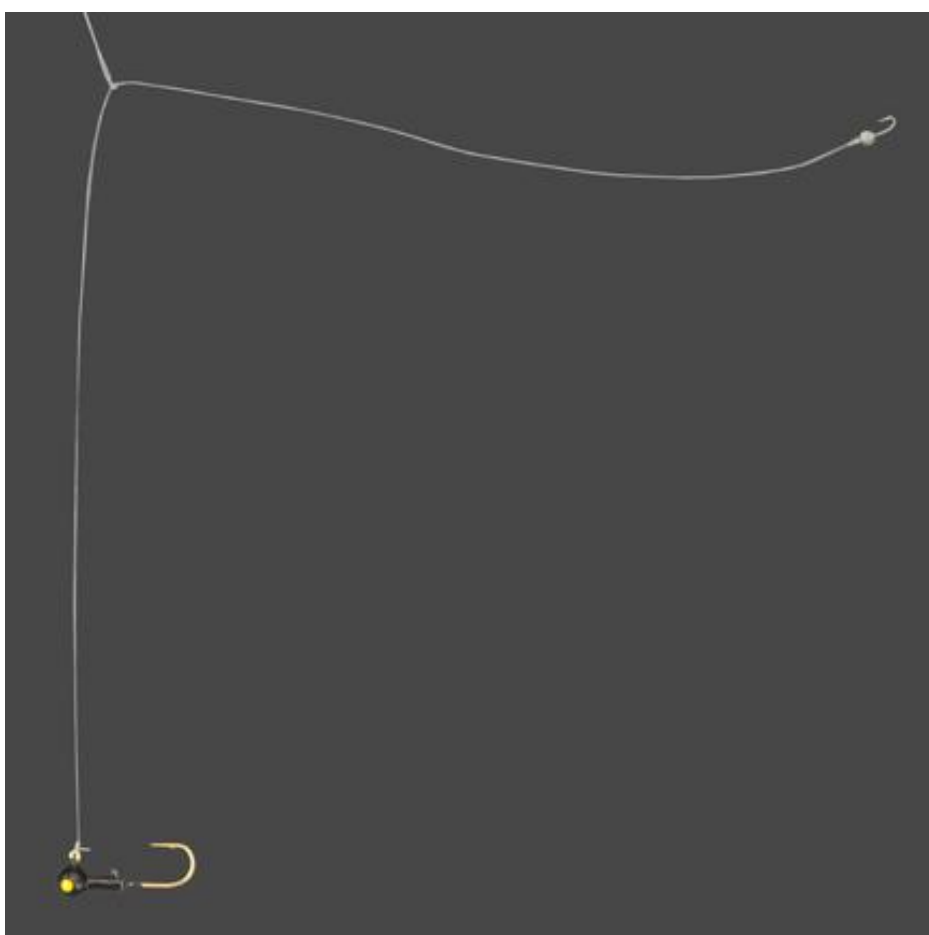


Dropper Magic

By Tom Gruenwald

I've been mobile, searching for perch on a 45 foot mud flat--so far, with only moderate success—a fish here, another there. Any kind of consistency appears dependent upon continual movement.

After punching yet another set of holes, I drop my transducer through the ice chips, where the Vexilar reveals fish stacked about ten feet thick, beginning about two feet off bottom.



The dropper loop knot rig: A heavier base jig anchors this rig, while a dropper loop is attached using a dropper loop knot, and usually features a light micro jig such as the Marmooska Tungsten Gem shown here, or alternatively, a tiny light-wire dry fly hook. The dropper line must be shorter in length than the distance between the knot connection and the lower positioned base jig to minimize tangling.

Anxiously I reach for a rod pre-rigged with a 1/10 ounce Jig-A-Whopper Hawger Spoon, modified by removing the hook from the bottom split ring and substituting an eight inch length of two pound mono, then adding a #14 Marmooska jig graced with two wiggling red spikes.

I love this system. The weight of the spoon breaks cleanly through ice chips without the need for skimming, allowing me to get that tiny Marmooska down quickly--and the flash and motion of the spoon help draw fish to my tiny jig, otherwise semi-concealed within the stained, heavily shadowed waters coated by a thick layer of snow-covered ice.

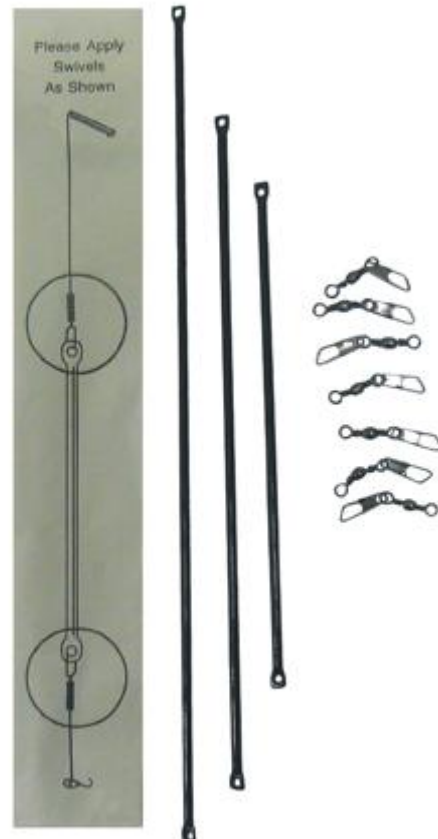
Furthermore, when perch see the flash and feel the vibration of the spoon, they're instantly attentive. As I've shared before, it's my theory perch interpret the spoon as another fish feeding, and react competitively. As a fish moves in to investigate, the tiny grub-tipped Marmooska appears, and the fish snatches up the offering, "thinking," perhaps, its stealing bait from another feeding fish.

Whether this little assessment is correct or not I'll never know, but regardless of the reason, a moment after my spoon settles a foot or so above the school, the jig drifts into place and my Polar Gold premium rod registers an ever so slight bump, indicative of a take. Instinctively, I snap the rod skyward, and immediately feel the satisfying weight of what feels like a substantial fish thrashing below.

Seconds later, I'm rewarded with a chunky, 10" yellow perch at my feet.

I've fished various types of dropper rigs through the ice for many years, with the classic rig described above remaining one of my favorite and most productive. The traditional removal of the hook from a relatively heavy spoon, replaced with a 4-6" dropper line leading to a small jig, ice fly or plain hook, continues to produce well in deep water because the spoon sinks fast and functions as an attractor; while the tiny bait coming from behind drops slowly into place, becoming the trigger.

The same concept incorporating a lightweight flutter spoon and shorter, 2-4" dropper line tipped with a tiny, baited circle hook is also a great way to attract fussy fish suspended high, holding in shallower water or over thick cover. Simply "pop" the spoon periodically, but gently, using long pauses between



The "hanger rig" dropper, a versatile rig featuring a metal in-line wire fitted with swivels on each end for rigging--the longer the wire, the heavier the weight. Simply add a dropper shorter in length than the wire itself to eliminate tangling, add your favorite micro lure and bait up. This unique in-line system slices through the water quickly to the desired depth, while providing continual, direct contact with even the tiniest micro baits at all times.



A basic dropper rig--in this example, a Jig a Whopper Lazer Rocker spoon with the hook replaced by a dropper line and lightweight HT Marmooska jig. The flash of the spoon attracts fish in, while the tiny jig triggers strikes.

these movements, allowing the dropper time to softly drift down, at times deftly quivering the presentation in place. Works like magic!



I also like the 'Hanger Rig' dropper, aptly named because initially, anglers used a cut section of wire coat hanger, flattened at both ends to accommodate drilled holes, each fitted with a snap swivel. One swivel is tied to the tag end of the line leading to your rod, the other to a dropper line shorter than the length of wire itself to eliminate tangling, and tipped with a baited micro ice jig. This system allows you to drop tiny jigs deep, fast. The narrow wire slices through the water quickly on a controlled drop, directly to the fish you're marking. And being an in-line design, you maintain continual, direct contact with your jig at all times.

Recently, anglers have begun experimenting with some new dropper rig designs, too. One unique system uses a Palomar knot to position a teardrop style ice jig semi-horizontally. Being sure the hook on your jig is pointing straight up, simply add an extended



The vertical style dropper rig, where the dropper line is tied off from the base jig positioned above. A base jig featuring a secondary eyelet or collar (as shown here) works best for this application.



A super-sensitive micro ice rod helps detect even the slightest bites from the fussiest winter pan fish. Establish a continuous, regular jigging rhythm, and if there's any unexpected interruption in that cadence, drop your rod tip slightly and set the hook!

dropper about 3-6" long featuring a lighter, secondary jig or plain hook at the end.

This slick rig allows you to offer two different style baits at once, which can help pinpoint patterns more quickly. Fish this rig with a slight flick of the wrist as you slowly raise or lower the rig, watching your line carefully for any indications of a strike.

You can also create a vertical style dropper rig. Although droppers can also be tied directly off the hook of any standard jig, this system works best when using horizontal jig heads featuring a collar or secondary eyelet to attach a vertical dropper line.

Advantage? You can now fish

two different baits—at different depths--simultaneously. When using short droppers about 3-4" inches long rigged with small, lightweight, grub-tipped jigs, these rigs perform well when fish are active--and also less likely to tangle.

When fish are finicky, longer droppers tipped with tiny, lightweight #16-20 micro jigs or plain hooks tipped with a maggot often get better results, however, they're also more prone to tangling, so always raise or lower your rod slowly when using this system, incorporating slight, rhythmic "shivering" motions while watching your rod tip and line closely for any variance in the established cadence. If you sense any interruption, set the hook!

Also becoming more popular in recent years is a horizontal dropper rig. Here, using a dropper loop knot, the dropper line is spliced within your main line leading to a heavy base jig. The attached dropper line features a tiny, single grub tipped, light-wire dry fly hook to ensure the secondary offering will fall super slowly. To minimize tangling, this dropper line must be shorter in length than the distance between the knot connection and the lower positioned base jig.

Work this rig by simply "ticking" your presentation using a slight, "skipping" action, somewhat akin to the motion





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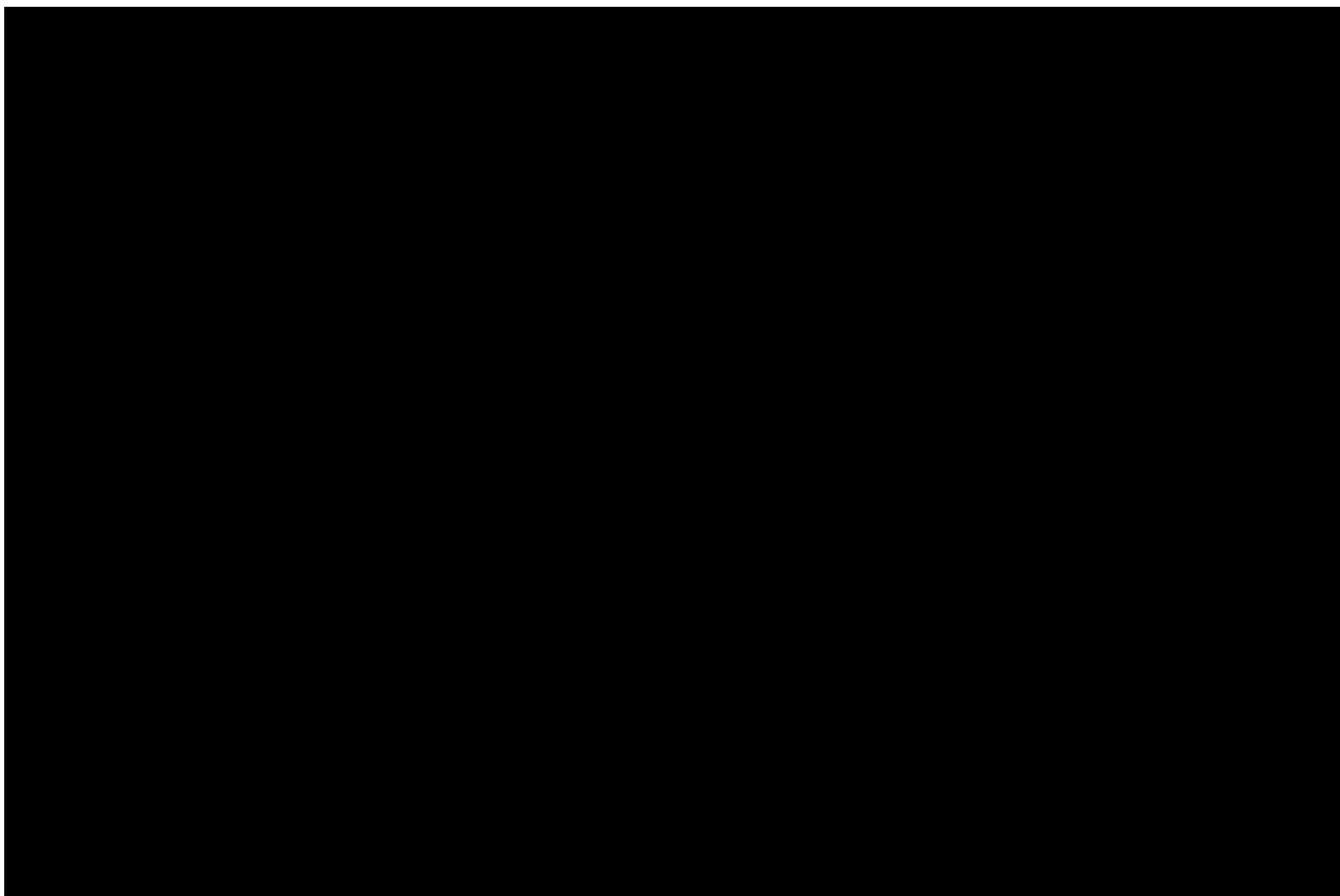
of a water bug skimming along on the surface of still water in summer. The heavier base jig will directly mirror this action, while the lightweight dropper will respond by simply floating up and down with a slight, plankton imitating action.

Just keep in mind that strikes from fussy pan fish on this nearly weightless dropper can be difficult to detect. To solve this issue, use a premium micro rod such as an HT Ice Blue, combined with the lightest, thinnest diameter line you can find, and always jig with a continuous rise or fall, using a steady cadence. Should your rod tip hesitate instead of moving according to the rhythm you've established, drop your rod tip, then set the hook. Often, you'll be rewarded with a deep bend in that Ice Blue!

NOTE: If you're fishing a state or province that legally allows only one hook per line, whenever using two jig dropper rigs, you must either cut the hook from the base jig--or in the case of the horizontal dropper rig described above, substitute a split shot for the base jig to create an effective, yet legal, winter drop-shot rig.

So this winter, while experimenting with various presentation options, don't overlook the possibilities these specialized rigging systems offer. Try tinkering with them, perhaps adding some modifications to form unique, productive versions of your own design.

You'll find dropper rigs will cast a touch of spell-binding magic upon your winter strategies--and ultimately, increase your winter catches, too!



First Ice Fishing Trip Of 2014

By Bob Jensen

The year 2014 started off with cold temperatures and reports of a hot perch bite on Big Stone Lake at Ortonville Minnesota, right on the Minnesota/South Dakota border. Some friends and I planned a trip to Big Stone with an eye on the weather. We decided that as soon as there was a break in the bitter temps we would get together to start the New Year with

some perch coming through the ice. When the weatherman indicated that a warming trend would be starting in two days, we loaded the truck with rods, reels, shelters, warm clothing, and headed to Big Stone. Our first trip of the year was productive, and as usual, we learned a little more about ice-fishing that will help us catch more fish on future trips.

We arrived at Big Stone in mid-afternoon, and indeed the warming trend had started. It was only fifteen degrees below zero, but the wind was calm. With portable shelters and proper clothing, it is possible to stay warm at fifteen below.

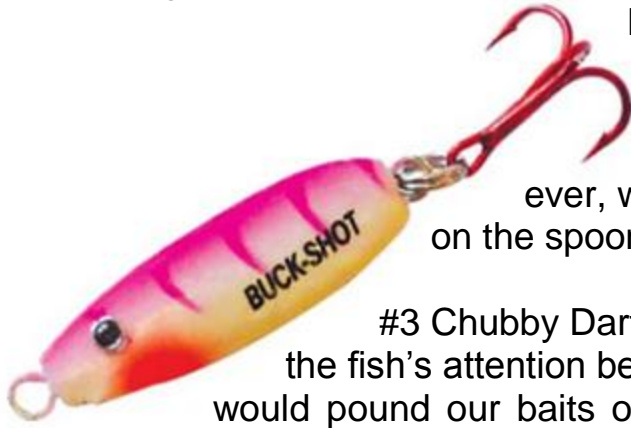
Our fishing partner Artie Arndt is a Big Stone fishing expert. He told us that the bite had been good, but it was coming in flurries. He said that the perch would move in and we would catch them, then they would move on, only to come back in twenty or thirty minutes. Artie was right.

We drilled a bunch of holes in eight to ten feet of water. We fished a hole longer than we usually would, because we knew that the perch would eventually come through. However, after ten minutes of not seeing a fish on the sonar, we moved. Fished again for ten minutes, if no



action, we moved again. Finally, we found a group of perch, and they were biters.

We used eighth ounce Buck-Shot Rattle Spoons: The new UV Pink Tiger (pictured) was the best. Some of us tipped the spoons with spikes: I used an Impulse Minnow Head. The Impulse caught fish as good as the live bait. I caught more fish per bait, and got my bait back down to the fish quickly. However, when the fish were really hot, I caught them with nothing on the spoon. Those are aggressive fish!



#3 Chubby Darters (pictured below) were also good. In fact, they got the fish's attention better than anything. When we first got to a new hole, we would pound our baits on the bottom. In the underwater world, this pounding really gets the fish's attention. Pound the bait three or four times, then lift it a foot or so above the bottom. Pounding disrupts the bottom and creates a little cloud of silt or whatever the bottom is made of. You want your bait above the cloud so the fish can see it.

Some of the fish would come off the bottom and look at the bait. If they didn't take it, we lifted the bait higher. Many of the perch were three feet off the bottom when they hit.

The following day was fifteen degrees above zero, but the wind was blowing. I prefer fifteen below and calm, but we take what they send when it comes to weather. The perch continued to bite, and we continued to have a good time. In fact, we started planning our next trip to Big Stone Lake. If you want to catch perch through the ice, you should plan a trip there as soon as you can. Contact bigstonelake.org—320-839-3284 for ideas on lodging, bait, rentals, and all the other things that can make an ice-fishing trip to this hot perch fishery successful.



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Cold Winter Rainbows

By Anthony Badham

Our trip begins on a cold -25f day in my home town of Laval, Quebec.

Me and my buddies meet at 6 am to make a 2 hour drive to our rainbow destination, as we travel north the temperatures keep dropping until we reach our destination at a whopping -30f. It's one of those days when your nose freezes as soon as you step outside... but hey we are the brave ones or crazy who knows?

We unpack all our gear into this small log cabin and immediately start the wood stove that seems to take forever to heat up so we get dressed layer over layer over layer. We finally hit the ice and it is bitter cold, we can't keep our gloves off for long as your finger freezes instantly.

We are setting up our light rods on HT Ice Rigger Tip up rod holders with Slender Spoons (pictured next page) and Little Cleo's in silver and blue just below the ice as we normally do tipped with small worms.

After setting up our stationary rods, we start to jig our spoons and look for fish by moving our Clams around every 20-30 feet until we find some active fish. I notice on my Vexilar there



seems to be a lot of action in the 22 feet range and mostly 5-6 feet from the bottom so I drop my spoon down and a fish comes up to see it but does not hit, so I jerk my rod up and it smacks my spoon hard. I set the hook and reel in a nice and beautiful colored 13" rainbow. I immediately let the others know of my catch so they can adjust accordingly,

We make the rounds to set our stationary rods at 15 feet below the surface in hopes of getting a few more nice fish. As the day progresses the sun comes out in full force and warms our faces, it feels great!

I head back in to my Clam Kenai and continuously jig my spoon with no luck, I decided to take a look down thru my

hole, as the water is crystal clear I can see my bait all the way to the bottom but no fish in site. I hear my buddy scream "got one" from a distance so head over to see what he has caught; it's another foot long rainbow... nice.

I head back to grab my gear and drill a few holes next to where he caught his fish, while doing so he puts another one on the ice. So I'm really anxious to get down there and catch one myself. I start jigging my spoon and notice on my flasher that 3 fish are coming up for it but as soon as they come close I stop moving my bait as much, they then go back towards the bottom with no interest so I jerk my spoon once again and one comes up from 5 feet and hits my spoon.

I reel him in and get



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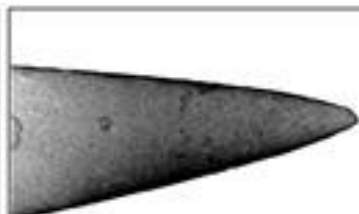
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back down there as soon as possible to keep the school going. I continuously catch fish after fish so my other friend comes over to drill some holes close by and he too catches a few fish. All of our trout are in between 11 and

15" which is perfect eating size for me.

We proceed to catch over a dozen rainbows in that location when all of a sudden they are gone and I mean gone, not one on any of our flashers. We decide to drill a pile of holes in the area hopping to find the school again but with no success. I suggest we go across the lake into another similar area but with a depth of 30 feet. We pick up our gear and head to the area while still feeling the cold we decide it's time for soup break and take a moment to warm up.

We finally drill a few holes in the new part of the lake and happily mark fish about 20 feet down on our Vexilar, spirits are high so quickly drop down to catch a first fish then another... we are on a huge school of perch. We keep pulling up one after another of small perch realizing we need to move if we want to find some more rainbows.

We walked and drilled then walked and drilled all over the lake but never



found the trout again. Not stopping until night fall we got to see a beautiful sunset but could not wait to get back in the truck for a warm ride home.

We did not catch one fish on the stationary rods all day as the trout really wanted an aggressive



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bite, they successful lures where both the Slender Spoon and the Cleo's in silver and blue tipped with small pieces of worms.

Our light action rods made for great fights with the rainbows and perch we caught and all had a great time. We promised to head back up there this season and all agreed to wait for a little warmer weather.

Two weeks pass and I head back to the trout lake with a few pals.

This times it's a beautiful 20f and sunny all day. I decide to start exactly where we caught them last time and wouldn't you know, they were about 30 feet from our original spot. Experience paid off as we used the same lures in the same 20 foot depth caught our limits in no time.

Although we did not catch any large trout up there we had a great time reeling in very aggressive and nice sized eaters.

We headed home early and decided it was going to be a late afternoon meal of rainbow trout and fries. We could not ask for a more beautiful day weather wise and fish catching.

To resume all was made possible with our flashers as no one could have predicted the fish would not be just under the ice as in the previous years.

The Clams and Mr. Heater propane heaters were a must on the first outing, without them we would not have been able to stay out and be mobile enough to find the fish.

As I always tell people it s all about being properly equipped to enjoy your outings and that why when most are sitting in front of the television talking about the cold, we are out in that cold talking about our catches.

Ice fishing is my passion; I love the search and trying to figure them out. The way we fish by staying mobile it's more like hunting than traditional fishing. Don't be afraid to try new lakes, new areas and new techniques; the reward is well worth it and that's the satisfaction of saying "I found 'em and I caught 'em"

Have fun on the ice and be safe.

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When anglers are interested in catching more fish from under the ice, the use of a Vexilar three-color flasher is considered "essential" by many to your success. Catching fish once you have pinpointed them is easy compared to what you need to know and the amount of effort it takes finding them in the first place.

The steps to follow in locating fish under the ice is no easy task. Anglers heading out on lakes with little or no ice fishing pressure are in for some plain old hard work. Few anglers relish the challenge of finding fish on a new

Tips For Finding Fish Under The Ice



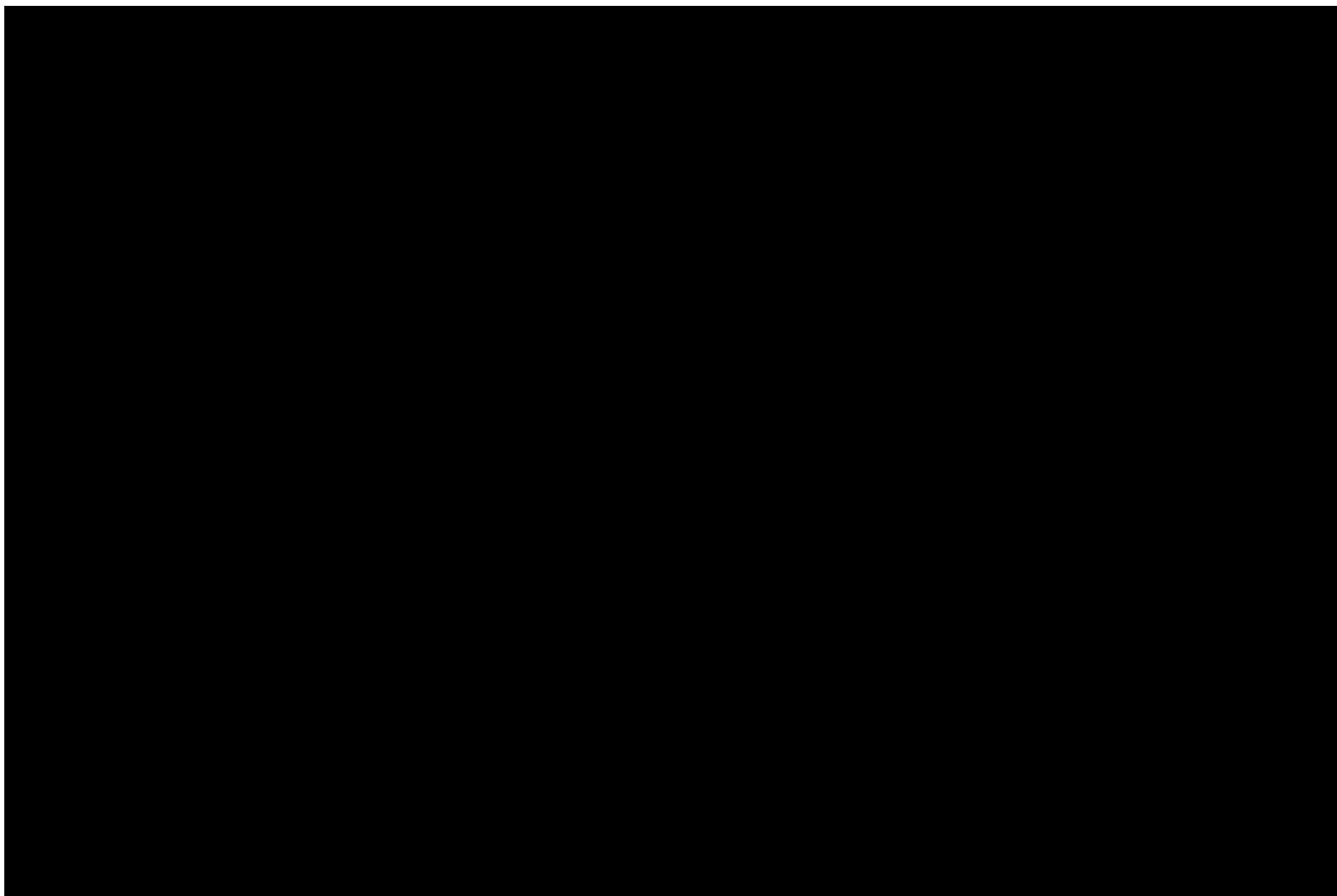
lake. Most prefer "following the crowds" and let their eyes be their fish finders. To some, going from one group of anglers to another is their form of "recon". If you ice fish, you may not want to join the crowd or at some time you will be faced with the challenge of being the only angler on the ice, so here are a few tips to remember the next time it happens to you and you want to find fish.

Your first step is to understand the kind of water you are going to fish. This will mean getting a lake map and looking at the types of structure you have available to you at this time of year. Remember, your ability to travel on a lake may be limited to foot power or poor ice conditions may limit the areas you can reach safely. It is always a good idea to know the roads and the various winter access points that surround any given lake.

When it comes to finding fish, every time you try to make rules as to where you **SHOULD** find fish, the rules change. Like catching sunfish at night,

many would agree that sunfish don't bite at night, but in some lakes, you don't catch the really big ones until the sun goes down...go figure. Here are a few good guidelines to use to begin your search, simply because you will need to start someplace. The more you learn by fishing, the more you can refine the rules that govern the lake you are on that day.

Walleyes love deep, hard bottom areas. Crappies and perch love waters of over 30 feet with a super soft bottom, and sunfish love to hang off steep weedy break lines. Finding the right fish holding elements for the fish you are after is fairly easy with a lake map. If the lake has one deep hole, then you would start there for crappie. If a lake is a maze of structure, then it is best to break the lake into small regions that you can work without getting too confused. Your first goal on most lakes is to establish the edge of the weed line. Most winter lakes get far clearer than they do in the summer, and some of the biggest sunfish in the lake move into the old weed line for protection from predators. Checking the edge of the weed line is even better if you are near a point or inside turn where the deep water comes closest to shore.



Once you embark on a lake, you better come to the realization that drilling holes will be the best way to find out about what is below your feet. When clear ice is available, the transducer from your flasher will be able to transmit a sonar signal right through the ice. To do this, you will need to make sure there is no air between the face of the transducer and the ice. Water is often used to bridge this gap to give you a good sonar connection with the ice. White ice or ice with bubbles will restrict the transmission of the sonar signal; so drilling a hole is the best way to go.

If you're targeting a break line, a series of holes placed only ten to twenty feet apart heading out

from shore will give you a feel for what to expect as you move away from the weed line to find the clean bottom edge. In the weeds, your flasher display will show a great deal of green and orange signals above the bottom red band, even on the lowest gain setting. You will need to keep your gain turned down as low as you can to make sure you find the true bottom in thick weeds, since the weeds themselves could appear as a red signal if the gain is too high. If you fish a great deal in waters under ten feet, you may find your FL-8se will work best with the aid of an S-Cable or suppression cable, available from Vexilar or a Dealer as an accessory. The S-Cable attaches quickly to your transducer cable where it attaches to the back of your unit. This small cable will reduce the output of your signal by more than 50% to allow you to see through



thick weeds to find true bottom. Summer anglers commonly use the "S" cable. The other Vexilar flashers have a special shallow water, or Low Power, mode built-in, so all you need to do is switch into the "LP" mode.

As you move to deeper and deeper waters, the growth of weeds will move tighter and tighter to the bottom. If you are seeing a great deal of flasher signal movement inside the area of weeds displayed as green or maybe even orange flashes moving up and down or coming and going from the display, this may or may not be fish. The display can show fish moving around in the weeds, but don't be fooled into thinking they are ALWAYS fish. There is a great deal of weed movement under the ice than most anglers realize. As the weeds sway back and forth the green and orange signals will flicker or even seem to move up and down. These moving weed signals will seem to move like fish. To be safe, it is best to drop a line in such situations to see if there are indeed fish inside the weeds. The best technique is to keep your bait a foot or so above the weeds to see if the fish will move above the weeds to feed. Many anglers like to fish two or even three feet above the weeds because you will be able to show the bait to more fish the farther above the bottom your bait is, but water clarity often effects how willing fish are to see and then move great distances to grab your bait. Ice fishing legend Dave Genz loves to fish

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big bluegills right inside the weeds and has mastered the art of looking for moving targets inside the weed signals. For most anglers, it will take a few trips to identify active fish inside a weed bed, but it can be done. The fewer the weeds you have, the easier it will be to spot targets holding just above the bottom.

If you're looking for walleye, many anglers use the same technique to search out the transition edges where the bottom density changes. Contrary to what many might think, you seldom drill a hole and find a school of walleye sitting under your hole. Walleyes love to move along transition edges, like places where rock turns to sand, sand to silt. You may want to move deeper and deeper until you find the transition point where the hard bottom turns to silt. Transition zones can be spotted on your flasher in the same basic way. The harder the bottom, the crisper the bottom red signal will be. To say here in text what you should look for is difficult at best, so take a look at these diagrams. What we have learned to do is compare bottom signals from one area to another. If the bottom signal band is wider and the trailing bottom edge extending farther and farther beyond the back side of the red depth band

is one sign of the getting softer, when compared to nearby readings. Softer bottoms will absorb signals and make it harder to get a return signal. A weak signal may even be shown as the bottom turning to orange or even green in mucky bottom areas. It is best to NOT adjust your gain setting when looking for changes in bottom density.

Since you are hoping to catch fish holding on or very near the bottom, you seldom "see" fish on your flasher before you drop a line. This is why you will need to punch holes, lots of holes, and move from hole to hole to pinpoint pockets of fish. You will be surprised how quickly the fish will respond by coming to your bait if you are close to them. Give each hole just a few minutes of fishing time while you watch your sonar for fish interest. When using this technique, the first thing you will notice is that the very top edge of the bottom signal will begin to flicker and even pulsate. On many occasions you will have a small thin green line that sits just above the bottom signal and that green line will start to bounce as the fish approaches your bait. The signal will grow and eventually seem to pop up off the bottom and start to turn orange, then red, as the fish enters the area of your signal directly below your transducer. The fish didn't

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suddenly come in from below you, it was a distance away and you attracted them to your bait. Perch are also great for this kind of fish finding and catching technique. When fishing for bottom fish, you will need to do a lot of testing to find areas the fish are really holding in, don't rely on electronics to "find" your fish. Once you find action, stay of course, but don't be afraid to move when the fish signals or flickering bottom disappears. The advantage of electronics will be your ability to know if there is fish activity around your bait.

If you are fishing at a time when the fish are moving through the area, you can actually follow the school up or down a break line if you pre-cut your holes along a key migration route. Once the fish signals disappear, the fish often move up or down the break line at key times and that is



when knowledge gained from hole drilling can help. Say you set-up for walleye fishing at three in the afternoon on a point. Your daytime fishing action may take place in thirty feet of water, but as the sun hits the horizon, the fish pull up on the point in only 12 feet of water. By pre-drilling and knowing the bottom contour the fish may travel, you can extend the prime time of fishing catching to a few hours instead of one quick flurry of action.

The mobile hole-jumper really has the edge over the angler who sits and waits for the fish to come to them. After a while, a "pivot area" will develop as a key area for fish to school around, this is where you want to focus your attention. When using your sonar to fish for tight holding walleye, be aware of how large rocks and steep slopes can create a "dead zone" in your area of coverage. If you position your hole near a large boulder, you

will find your lure dropping a foot or two below the bottom signal you see on your dial. This is simply a nature of the sonar signal itself being shielded by the shadow created by the rocks you are fishing around. When this condition exists, don't expect to see many fish when you get a bone jarring strike from a walleye holding tight to the bottom between the rocks. A narrower angler transducer can help reduce this effect if you find yourself in this situation a lot. One big exception to fishing transition zones on lakes would be fishing for sunfish, crappie and perch on lakes with soft muck bottoms. These "mud lakes" hold an enormous amount of insect life in the soft "muck" bottoms and panfish know it. For this reason, they often school in great numbers over this area of soft bottom.

Finding fish schooling 18 feet down over 35 feet of water is common on many natural lakes with soft bottom areas. The use of your Vexilar flasher will become critical for you to find these nomadic schools of fish that range over these mud areas for most of February and March.

Often referred to as "crappie holes" these deep water pockets of soft bottom will hold a large number of crappie and sunfish in the late winter months. Using your flasher for finding winter panfish is almost a MUST. Seldom will you get into big numbers of panfish unless you are able to actually spot schools on your flasher first. This is where you can really cover some water since your sonar will be your eyes. Many prefer to drill holes even for this type of fishing recon since you are able to increase the gain on your unit to "look" for fish on the edges of your cone signal. Fish targets will appear as green lines randomly coming and going three to ten feet above the bottom. It might even seem like interference to some, or look like weeds to others. We have heard reports of perch schools on Devils Lake ten feet thick! If you are still able to



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will show this change as a change in depth. The colors of the signals will also change as the fish gets closer to the center of the cone. Since your small ice fly is shown as a red mark, it won't be long before the fish that was once a small green blip, will change to orange and then to a bright red.

As you head out on a lake in search of fish under ice, remember to keep an open mind, a full tank of gas in your ice auger and a watchful eye on what your electronics are telling you. Think of it as an adventure, a challenge and a great winter workout.

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Tip-Ups And Teeth

By Adam Walton



When ice fishing, it's hard to beat the adrenaline rush that a triggered tip-up flag brings. The quick response that follows can be quite entertaining as well. Watching your buddies run to the hole, performing an uncoordinated ice skating routine the entire way. I don't know what's more amusing, watching someone fall on their rear or watching them pretend nothing happened after getting up. Regardless, tip-up fishing can be a blast. As long as the proper tactics are used, this style of fishing can be very productive, especially when targeting the notorious Northern Pike. Having the proper equipment, knowing where pike hang out, and

understanding their feeding habits will significantly increase your odds of catching these awesome fish.

Let's first discuss gear. Having the correct equipment is crucial when chasing these trophy fish. Just like fishing rods, quality and durability should be a high priority when purchasing items. There are many tip-up brands on the market, but nothing compares to a trusty Beaver Dam. Beaver Dam tip-ups are handmade in Wisconsin and their quality components are built to last many generations. In fact, I still have my great grandfather's tip-ups that he purchased many years ago. Beaver Dam continues to offer their signature rail style tips-ups, but they have also expanded their product line. This includes round tip-ups, carry bags, Beaver Grip storage brackets, tip-up line, stainless steel leaders, and foam hole covers. These new products now offer anglers the whole package when it comes to getting set up.

We run all of our tip-ups with 25# braided line. When targeting large pike though, we use two different styles of tip-up rigging. The first way is with Beaver Dam's "Liquid steel" leaders tipped with 3" to 4" Black Tailed Chubs. Hooking the chub upside down, just in front of the anus, keeps the bait lively. Minnows and chubs do not like being upside down and will constant

struggle in attempts to right themselves. The constant motion is obviously more enticing than bait hanging motionless. This single leader application works best when fish are finicky, since the leader's thin profile decreases its underwater visibility. This smaller profile also works well if you're looking to catch a mixed bag. Along with pike, walleye and bass will also strike this set up. If fish are more aggressive or if you're looking to strictly catch trophy pike, Northland Tackle's "Predator Rig" puts fish on ice. Made to hold large live bait, such as 6"-10" suckers, this steel "Y" type rig has dual leaders and treble hooks with added attractor blades to help lure fish. If fishing an area with an abundant small pike population, the "Predator Rig" will help keep them at bay so you can focus on the larger fish.



Given that many pike cruise the shallows year round, they can be fairly easy to locate. We typically target pike in water depths between 2' and 5'. Pike prefer cover to ambush unsuspecting prey, so areas with weeds present are preferred. During first ice, weeds can still be reasonably thick in the shallows, but many will die off as the season moves on. As long as weeds act in their advantage, pike will be there whether weeds are thick or sparse. Open areas within these weed beds or areas along the weed edges are excellent spots to place tip-up sets. The first ice on many lakes is clear enough to see the weeds below. In these cases, look for channels running through the weeds. These natural highways are perfect locations to place tip-up sets. If unable to see through the ice, underwater cameras can play a huge roll in locating prime spots. The new Aqua-Vu Micro series, which is small enough to fit in your pocket, offers anglers a compact camera with recording capabilities. After drilling several scout holes, we drop the Aqua-Vu down and pan the area.

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Holes that do not look promising are filled back in with slush and good holes are marked with ice shaving piles or sticks. Since fishing shallow increases the likelihood of spooking fish, ensure to drill and mark plenty of areas right away. This allows you to quickly and quietly move tip-ups out of unproductive locations later. However, before moving a tip-up set, trying a few simple steps before pulling the plug on a hole. First, simply check your bait and make sure it's very lively. The key word here is "very". Many anglers fish with the same bait all day long, even though it lost its spunk hours ago. Shiners seem to be more sensitive than chubs or suckers, meaning they may need replacement more often. Secondly, try suspending the bait at different locations before moving a tip-up. Some pike cruise just below the ice and bait suspended below them will go unnoticed. A simple height adjustment could make all the difference.

Later in the season, bay areas that transition into marsh can also be very productive. Pike spawn in shallow marsh grass soon after the ice begins melting. They will congregate and stage in these near-by bays weeks before the spawn. During this time of year, weed cover is not as important since the pike are moving in to prepare for spawning rituals. In February through March, we fish a large muddy bay that transitions into marsh area. The water depth is 3 feet or less and there are no weeds present. This location gives us consistent action area year after year.

Chasing pike can be very exciting and rewarding. The unknown a tripped flag brings, the anticipating of a possible trophy fish, and the fight to the hole are all something other ice fishing opportunities don't offer. Ensuring proper equipment is used along with understanding pike behavior will hopefully help you land your trophy this season.



THE IMPORTANCE OF SINK RATES IN ICE FISHING



By Daniel Quade

Hardwater warriors weigh many factors when putting together a successful winter presentation. Lure style, size, color and tipping all warrant serious thought, as does the aggression with which the whole shebang is fished.

Only a handful of anglers, however, take into account one of the most important considerations of all—the presentation's drop speed.

"It's definitely worth thinking about," says veteran guide and lifelong ice fan Jon Thelen, "because the speed at which your lure falls is one of the greatest triggering factors in all of ice fishing."

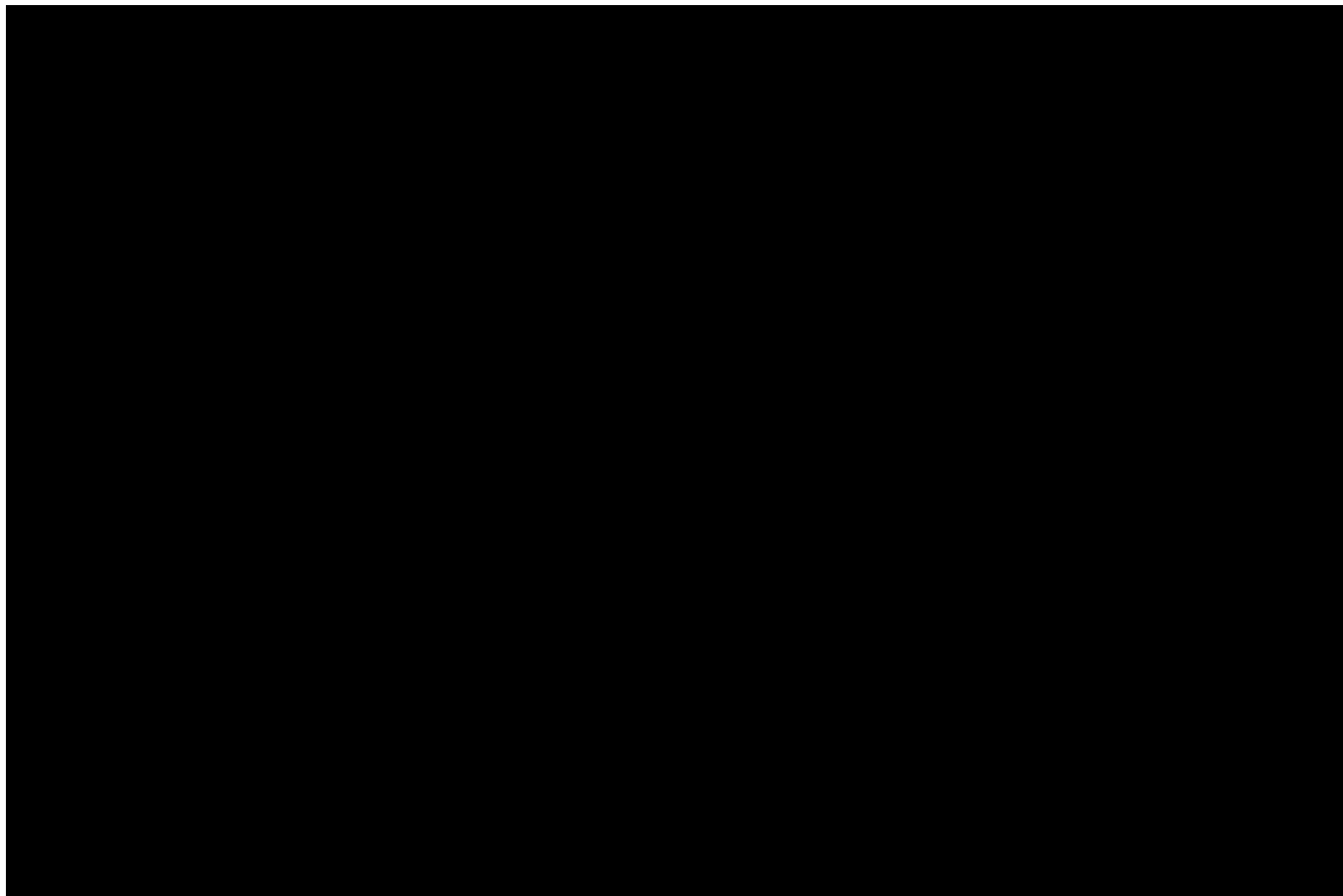
But let's not get ahead of ourselves, because drop speed is even more than that. In fact, Thelen divides descent into two distinct but ever-pertinent categories.

"To me, drop speed means two things," he explains. "The first is how quickly the lure gets down to the fish, which can be a big factor when you're fishing small lures, particularly in water deeper than 10 feet."

In this context, a speedy sink rate increases fishing efficiency by reducing the amount of time you spend waiting for a dainty jig to s-l-o-w-l-y drift into the strike zone. Besides eliminating frustrating wait times, fast falling lures are especially important when you're dealing with pods of cruising fish—such as mobile, moody, suspended crappies. When your jigstrokes finally attract the attention of a passing posse, you have precious little time to reel in a fish and get the bait back down in front of its schoolmate's noses before they lose interest and wander away. A fast fall is also a boon when you need to drop your bait through hordes of small fish to get to the realm of larger ones below.

All of which might lead you to tie on the heaviest lure possible—except, of course, for the fact that winter fish seldom are in the mood for a supersized meal.

"It's a balancing act," says Thelen, noting that lures made of tungsten—a relatively new arrival on the ice front—are considerably heavier for their size than traditional jigs made of lead. "When a fast fall is important, tungsten is a great choice," he says. "Plus, a lure that's heavy for its size allows you to effectively present smaller baits when dealing with finicky fish."



However, Thelen tempers his need for speed with the second consideration in the realm of fall rates.

"It's equally important to keep in mind how fish react to how quickly the lure falls from the top of your jigstroke," he says, cautioning that many times, too swift a descent can scare off fish that are in a neutral or negative state.



“When you watch on sonar as fish come in, check out your bait, then dart away and disappear, a lot of times it’s because the drop speed is too fast and spooks them,” he says. His solution in such situations is to fish old school. “If this happens, use a lead jig rather than tungsten to get a slower sink rate.”

Conversely, Thelen says tungsten is the perfect solution for aggressive fish that fearlessly charge anything dropped into the strike zone.

“The faster fall rate means I can work tungsten jigs more aggressively, jig faster and drop the bait more quickly,” he says. “Plus, because tungsten jigs are



more responsive to jigstrokes, they allow me to move the bait more, with less movement of the rod tip.” Finally, Thelen notes that in his book, “The biggest benefit of tungsten is that it holds the line tighter, so you can feel light bites better. Tungsten jigs are just more sensitive than lead.”

In general, Thelen starts on the aggressive end of the animation spectrum no matter what species of fish or lure he’s fishing.

“When I’m fishing panfish, I often start with a Lindy Tungsten Toad (pictured). If fish come partway into the sonar cone—say, a green return that never quite turns red—you’re probably too aggressive, and it’s a good time to switch to lead,” he said. I

If he wants to keep the Tungsten Toad’s bottom-pounding action and large side profile, he simply replaces it with Lindy’s traditional lead Toad.





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Fall rates are also a factor with walleyes and other larger predators.

“You can alter the drop speed of a Lindy Rattl’n Flyer Spoon (pictured) by changing line diameters (larger line equals a slower sink rate), but in clear water than can be risky, since you may spook skittish fish. I switch lure weights, not so much because the fish are looking for a different sized lure profile, but because the lure will fall at a different rate. Downsizing from a 3/16- to 1/8-ounce spoon doesn’t change the physical dimensions of your offering very much, but it affects the drop speed and action as it flutters on the fall.”

Tippings, too, offer another option for altering drop speed.

“The same Rattl’n Flyer behaves a lot differently with a waxworm on each treble tine than it does with a half minnow on one tine,” he says. “With the waxies, it drops more quickly and falls more vertically, while the half-minnow slows the drop and causes a more horizontal fall.”

In a similar vein, soft-plastic baits also slow on a fast-falling lure. Different plastics apply the brakes at different rates based on size, profile and density. Tipping a 1/32-ounce Lindy Jig with a beefy Watsit body, for example, creates a bigger parachute than the slender tail found on the Lindy Ice Jig.

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How To Catch Big Walleye On The Move

Although recent sub-zero temperatures have required a roof over his head, ICE FORCE pro-staffer Tony Roach, a preeminent Minnesota guide and popular ice-fishing media personality, remains on the move in his quest to put clients on big walleyes.

“When you can’t get out and ice troll, you’ve got to keep the guys on the move in the portables, where they’re

By Tony Roach

warm, comfortable, and of course, where they’re going to catch a lot of fish,” says Roach.

Although Roach prefers “ice trolling,” January’s sub-zero spells have not allowed for much of it, as the process involves drilling and fishing through multiple holes, monitoring them regularly by walking a circuit of them and dropping a MarCum Technologies transducer to check for fish.

But when the Mercury plummets, Roach scouts locations and checks holes in his truck, as his clients fish comfortably in fully thermal Otter Outdoors portable ice houses set up on fish-holding points, breaklines, contour shifts and inside turns.

“I’ll bounce around and either truck-door fish or use the truck as a little bit of a wind





block and I'll check various points really quickly," Roach explains. "I might only fish five minutes on that point, just seeing if I can raise a fish... If I get into an area where I see fish, even if they're not biting, or they're not coming in fast and furious, I'm always returning to those spots ... because I know that as soon as the sun gets lower on the horizon, or you get some cloud cover rolling in – boom! – those fish turn on."

Once he sets up clients on a good spot, Roach will encourage them to try various approaches before moving – especially in changing conditions that are often the norm throughout January and early February.

"With the changing conditions, you've got to stay on the move and you've got to be prepared each day and take each day for what it is," he says. "Make sure you're jigging, make sure you've got the dead-stick lines down, and make sure you're mixing it up a little bit on the cooler days and the colder-temp days."



Despite his penchant for ice trolling, Roach does spend a little more time on each hole while fishing in sub-zero conditions.

When its not fast and furious and you have to set up in a shelter, as long as you're seeing fish cruising, hang there for a while, even if they're coming through there every 15 or 20 minutes," he says. He and his clients are catching "lots of big fish" with this strategy.

As the bite slows however, Roach will move his Otters to the next spot he scouted in his truck. Designed for fishing on the move, the portable Otters are easy to fold down, tow to the next spot and then set up again.

"That's been our biggest key to

success all winter – just staying on the move,” Roach says. “You hit one spot, pick up two or three fish, go to the next spot, two or three fish, maybe zero, then all of a sudden, you hit that jackpot.”

Generally, the bite has been more consistent with warmer temperatures, Roach says.

Colors for conditions

In sub-zero temps and changing conditions, Roach says anglers should experiment with downsizing baits and multiple colors.

“There’s times when we’re catching them on glow colors and then all of a sudden, that sun will peek out, or a front will quit and then boom, we’re right back into silver, gold, more natural presentations,” he says.

Red and fire-UV-style VMC spoons (pictured @ end) “have been phenomenal” on partly cloudy and mostly cloudy days, Roach says. “As the sun comes out, or as the sun goes away, we’ve been mixing it up between gold and silver, [red] and orange... Those have been great colors.”

He suggests rigging one rod with a gold or silver spoon and another tied up with a more eye-catching color.

Go deep

The deep-freeze bite has been the toughest – and least consistent – during mid-day hours, especially on high-sun, blue-bird sky days. In those situations, Roach has been fishing deeper.

“A common theme this season has been fishing in deep water, especially in daytime hours, when the sun is high in the sky,” he says. “I’ll fish three, four, five feet off the bottom and a lot of

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times those fish come in just below, or right at your bait and they race up and smack it. If they're going to come up that high in the water column to hit something, they're going to take it."

When fishing deep, Roach presents his bait about three to four feet off the bottom, and he's not afraid to raise it up.

"Work 'em high," he says. "If you're fishing

really close to the bottom, you'll notice they'll come up real slow, but as soon as you raise that bait, they're going to come up and strike it."

That said, Roach has noticed remarkable differences in the attitudes of fish he's caught.

"Some just come flying in and nail it, other ones come in just really slow," he says. "You just have to play every fish and act like every fish is a biter. Sometimes I'll jig it up high in the water column, especially when we're fishing out in deep water."

Play dead

Throughout all of his hole hopping and spoon fishing, Roach always keeps some deadstick lines in the water.

"The deadsticks will bail you out on the days when they're not cruising," he says. "They've been producing fish time and time again for us."

He deadsticks shiners or rainbows on #4 or #6 hooks two-to-three feet off the bottom, on both tip-ups and bobber lines.

"They're coming in and hitting that minnow just tipped with a plain hook.

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POLAR FIRE

Mid-Season Ice Fishing

By Bob Jensen

The middle part of the ice-fishing season will soon be here. There are things we do in the middle of the season that we don't do earlier in the year. For more fishing success in the next few weeks, keep these ideas in mind.

I was fishing for perch through the ice last year in South Dakota with Blake and Taylor Anderson. These guys are as sharp as it gets when it comes to ice-fishing. The perch seemed to be kind of spooky at mid-day. We could see numbers of perch on the bottom with our sonar, and we were catching them regularly, but Blake and Taylor were catching them more regularly than I was. Here's why, we think. We weren't keeping any perch that day, we were releasing them right away, or at least I was. That was my mistake.

When Blake or Taylor caught a perch, and there were other ones down there, before releasing the perch, they would drop their bait down the hole and let it get close to the bottom. Then they would release the perch. It seemed like the perch on the bottom paid attention to the bait and not the perch that had just been released. That kept them from spooking. Is this giving the fish too much credit for being smart? I don't know: I do know that when I started putting my bait down the hole before letting the perch go my catching improved.

If they're not eating the bait you're showing them, show them something else. However, showing them something else doesn't necessarily mean you need to change baits, you just might need to change the way you're showing them the bait.



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Hillsdale County Conservation Club
Two-Man Pan Fishing Contest

Saturday, January 25, 2014

6:30 am Mandatory Rules Meeting & Registration

At HCCC Club House

3835 South Bird Lake Road, Osseo 49266

8:00 am - 1:00 pm Fishing Contest

on Baw Beese Lake



\$50.00 per team

Jr. Class 14 & under \$20.00 per team



3:00 pm Cash Payback at HCCC



For more information contact Milt Winters 517-287-4619 or
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For instance, let's say you're fishing walleyes and you have a Buck-Shot Rattle Spoon down there. You can see on your depth finder that fish are coming in and looking at the bait, but they're not eating it. Buck-Shot Rattle Spoons are about as good a bait as you can use for walleyes and perch. For many anglers, this spoon is their "go-to" bait for walleyes and perch.

But sometimes the fish want the bait presented in a certain way. Sometimes they want it fished very slowly, with just slight jiggles.

Other times they want it moved more aggressively. So, if they won't eat it the way you're moving it, move it differently.

If you try different jigging actions and nothing works, it's time for more drastic measures. If they were looking at the

spoon, that's at least an indication they're interested. Try a similar spoon in a different color or size. Often times when the fish are being selective, a different color or size will get them to eat. Usually it works best to go to a smaller size for finicky fish.

If that doesn't work, a complete overhaul is called for. Maybe a plain hook and splitshot under a slip-bobber will get the job done. This is a pretty bare-bones presentation, and sometimes that's what it takes to get the fish to eat.

If you keep these ice-fishing ideas in mind, you're going to catch more fish through the ice.

To see the 2013 episodes of Fishing the Midwest television go to www.fishingthemidwest.com. Join us at www.Facebook.com/fishingthemidwest.



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Quebec Ice Fishing 2013/2014

By Anthony Badham

The 2013-2014 ice season has been phenomenal for me so far with 28 days of hard water already.

To start things off, I got out in November for the first time ever and ice conditions have been excellent since then, the 30th to be exact.

I started of the season as usual with pan fish and they were biting big time for the first three weeks, I had huge success with light tungsten jigs and slender tail baits for crappie and bluegills in suspended water, most of the areas I fish are shallow between 6-9 feet and fish are about half way down, so triggering them to bite is the hard part as they are easily found with a flasher, in my case a Vexilar but I have worked with Marcum's and Humminbird's as well and honestly I feel they all equal and a must to locate fish, I could not imagine being out there without a flasher.

Getting to spend so much time out there I really learnt a lot about my cadence and how fish react. Time on the ice is key and experience is golden, I have been out with over 20 different anglers this season and I noticed the ones with more ice time are the one catching more fish, obviously they feel or anticipate the bite more and they vary the retrieve based on the fishes mood and those are traits we acquire with time spent with rod in hand. So it's quite normal to miss the crappie's light bite in the first outings but once you get the feel of it, it becomes second nature in anticipating the bite.

Morning's are my time for crappie, as soon as the sun comes up they start to rise of the bottom to feed, the bite is ferocious until about 2pm and then you really start to slow down and you

must finesse the fish to bite and that's usually when I move to catch some nice bluegill and pumpkinseeds that are a lot less finicky. Using pretty much the same baits but changing up my color selection has worked well for me, where I fish the water is fairly murky so pink, chartreuse and blue work well in sunlight then dark colors such as black, purple and glows do the job in the late afternoons. Each area is different so carrying a good selection of colors is a must and the difference between a dozen fish or a hundred fish a day... we have actually had 2 days with over 200 crappie caught between 3 anglers, believe me those days will never be forgotten.

-About 2 weeks ago I got on the walleye big time. The area I fish is a huge slow slopping drop between 8 and 22 feet with a sandy and gravel bottom.



I have noticed over time that 14' seems to be the magic spot and I honestly have not figured out why. There is a good current that varies all day and the best fishing is when it's at it peak, usually between 8am and 2 pm. This season I have experimented a lot more with gold and copper spoons on the sunny days and it's paid off big time. On snowy and cloudy days I stick with my go to Northland Buck Shot spoons (pictured) as they have put so many fish on the ice over the years but when sun comes up the Slender Spoons go on in gold/orange, gold/green and copper hues. This year I tried something new that has saved me time and resulted in a lot more fish on the ice, instead of just adding a minnow head to my treble hook, I take the treble off and put the minnow head thru the eyelet and reattach with a snap. This saves me from changing my bait as often and walleye can't get to the bait without getting hooked.

Although most fisherman use 10 tip ups with live minnows here in Quebec, I continue to jig with one rod and have a deadstick set up not far away with the just the minnow head on my spoon, I can honestly say that me and a buddy almost always out fish 2 anglers with 20 tip-ups for walleye. The flash, vibration and rattles bring the fish in and then it's all about the movement of the spoon to get them to bite. With my Vexilar it doesn't take too long to figure out the mood of the fish, it's either slow almost no movement at all or a good solid jerking cadence. Sometimes I may miss a fish or two on the initial strike but it can be worth it to figure out what they want and duplicate that for the rest of the day.

We have caught numerous large fish in this area but mostly during the week, seems the weekend ice traffic and anglers spooks a lot of the larger fish as this past weekend we caught many walleye in the 13-15" range and only one big one about 5 lbs, however on the Wednesday I went out on my own and caught many in between 19-22". Next outing we will adapt and stay a little further away from the crowd and hopefully find them a little deeper.



-Perch... the bite has been great over the last few weeks but specially the big ones.

I fish perch in a variety of depths and different water clarity but this season the big fish have been very close to bottom and hard to get them to come up. Therefore I have adapted my technique by staying close to the structure and bouncing my tungsten jigs on the bottom and calling them in. I pretty much exclusively use artificial baits for perch with the Northland Impulse series being my favorite for many years but I have been experimenting with new Trigger X line and I am getting awesome results. Tungsten jigs are the way to go simply because they get back down to the fish faster and they noise they produce bouncing of rock brings in the fish. My most productive set up is a pink and blue Northland Tungsten ball jig and the Trigger X Spike worm in pink and white.

I have caught many perch over 12" this season and almost all on this set up and always very close to bottom, when I try to coax the

fish up most of the time the smaller fish hit it first but when just hovering it the big ones smack it hard and just run with it making for not only a nice big thump but a great fight on light line as well.

-My Rainbow outings have been limited as the ice took a long while to get any thickness; up north the large amounts of snow caused insulation so the ice did not thicken as quickly as the southern parts of the province.

We did manage a few good days with solid numbers but no monsters to date.

Our best technique was a Slender Spoon in silver with blue stripe and Little



Cleo's blue and silver as well. Under normal conditions we would set up our baits just under the ice but we had more success jigging them in the 15-20 foot range and jigging them hard and abruptly was the trigger that set them off.

-I must be honest I am not a huge Pike fisherman but we got out a day for some nonstop action. We set up 8 rods in HT Ice Rigger tip-up rod holders in a small bay with large minnows in the 5-7" range, it did not take any time at all for our first flag to pop, then another and another. All in all we caught 14 pike in 3 hours ranging between 24 and 37". I must admit than I enjoyed the outing as we had good fights on the rods and it



was much better than just pulling them up with big line by hand as we did in the past, I will definitely be getting back out there for pike this season and brining a few novice friends along as it a fun and simple technique.

To resume, the first part of the season has been great with good solid ice and lots of action. The weather has been up and down with days around 32f and about a week of -30f plus wind chill. The key to having fun is being dressed and equipped



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for elements; my must haves are a good pair of -70c boots, my Clam Kenay and my Mr. Heater propane heater.

One note that I wish to share to all starting to ice fish, do not get discouraged at first if you don't find fish, it takes time and a lot of prospecting to find good consistent spots. Many of us have spent hundreds of day on ice to find and understand the fish in our areas. Don't hesitate to hire a guide or an outfitter and if you are in my area look me up.

Hope you are all having a great beginning of ice season as I am, wishing you all big fish and ton of fun.

Be safe!

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Ice Fishing Ideas

By Bob Jensen



In many areas where anglers fish through the ice this time of year, we are at about the midway part of the season. Most lakes have a good cover of ice as well as some snow. We also have cold weather, lots of it. There are a number of things we can do to catch more fish through the ice this time of year, but you've got to go fishing to catch'em. That sounds pretty simplistic, but consider that getting cold isn't that much fun for most people so they don't go fishing when it's too cold. With today's clothing options, you don't need to get cold. Dress appropriately and get

out there. Here we go.

Some people like to fish from the warmth of a fish house. Some of the fish houses today are really nice, and they're really fun to fish from. They have tv, a kitchen, comfortable chairs, and they're warm: You can fish in shirtsleeves. If that's your style of fishing, wonderful: Enjoy it. If you've got a group of fishing partners that you enjoy spending time with, you're going to have a wonderful day on the ice.

The problem with fishing from a house like this is, you've got to wait for the fish to come to you. Some anglers prefer to go to the fish. They pop a bunch of holes, then get their sonar unit and a rod with a spoon or a jig or something with a hook attached and start visiting each of the holes they've popped. If you don't see a fish on the sonar unit, keep moving until you do find fish.

Remember that you'll only see fish that are in the cone angle of your transducer. If you're using a twenty degree transducer, you'll be able to see an area about one third of the depth. In twenty feet of water, you're seeing an area of about seven feet. If there's a fish within that area,

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you'll see it. But there could be a fish a few feet outside that area that you don't see. You can draw it to your bait. Here's how.

"Pounding" is a technique that many successful anglers use to attract a perch or walleye to their bait. You simply lift and drop your spoon so it "pounds" the bottom. When the spoon hits the bottom, it kicks up a little cloud of dust, and this attracts fish to your spoon. If you "pound" your spoon awhile and nothing shows up, find another hole to "pound". Eventually the fish will show up.

Once you have some fish below you that are willing to bite, it works well to stop your spoon well above the bottom. Try to determine how far up the fish will come to take your bait. If you drop the spoon all the way to the bottom into a bunch of fish and catch a couple of fish from that group, the others will spook. If you keep the spoon above the fish and catch the ones that move up to it, the others won't spook as quickly. You'll catch more fish per hole.

When the bite is on, you want to fish fast. Catch a fish and get your bait back down there while they're still around and willing to bite. Impulse plastic baits enable you to fish faster because you're not re-baiting as much as you would with live bait.

Get a pair of warm boots and get on the ice. Keep moving until you find the fish and you can find some hot action even when it's cold outside.

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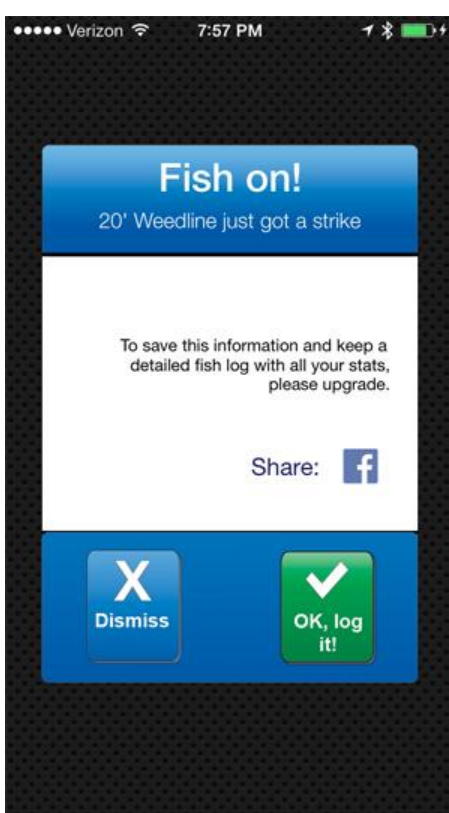
Techno Tip Ups

By Bob Bohland

In recent years I have found myself going away from my tip-ups more and more. It isn't that they aren't enjoyable, most of my favorite days on the ice have been spent running back and forth between flags; it is simply that I find myself on the move frequently and when I am not drilling a ton of holes it usually because it is really cold and I am camped out in my fish house. However, with a little work combined with some new technology, tip-up fishing is no longer a sit and wait technique.

Tip-ups can be very effective in a run and gun setup, especially when the fish are on the move over shallow flats with little structure to hold them in one place. With this kind of setup, it is no longer a waiting game with your tip-ups, but you need to be ready to constantly move them to different locations in your area in order to keep them productive. The type of lure you tie on the end of the tip-up makes a huge difference also. While quick-strike rigs are all the rage among



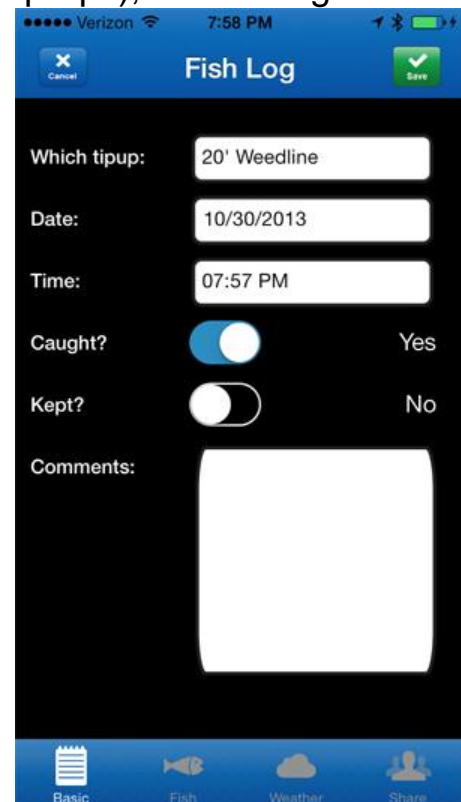


pike fisherman, for other species they are not as efficient. While I will at times use a quick strike on my tip-ups, I have found that a spoon or a circle hook increase my hooking percentages for all species. One major benefit to using a spoon as opposed to a quick-strike is that allows you to present many different colors along with your bait. Not only will this help you adjust what you are catching on other tip-ups, but it also shows you certain color preferences on new waters that allows you to change your setup on your jigging rod.

Much like everyone else, I have become a slave to my smartphone. As a fisherman, I will try out almost any fishing related app. My new favorite, however, is the Blue Tipz app from Deep Freeze. Granted, you will need to buy the accessory for your tip-ups (it does work with all existing tip-ups), but being notified directly from your phone the moment your tip-up goes off, and knowing exactly which one (as you can name individual BlueTipz devices) is priceless. Blue Tipz doesn't just stop

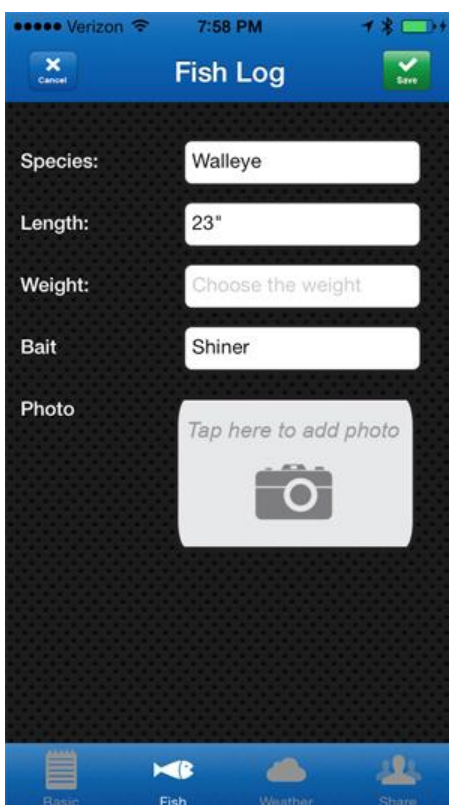
at notifying you when your flag goes up though, it also allows you to store data such as:

1. What depth you were fishing
2. What bait you were using
3. Whether or not you landed the fish
4. If you kept or released the fish
5. Species and length
6. Dates and times of day



There are several other things you can do to increase your catch rate while you are fishing tip-ups. One of my best is to hook the minnow upside down. While this isn't a tactic for a tip-up to remain in one place for a long time, the minnow will constantly struggle to right itself, creating more flash and vibration and attracting fish looking for an easy meal. Another is to cut the tail fins off of the minnow. This makes the minnow swim harder to move, again creating more attraction for fish in the area.

Ice fishing is the fastest growing segment of the fishing industry, and the technology is finally starting to keep up with the growth. Whether it be underwater cameras that fit in your pocket, underwater sonar that shows you what is around you without drilling holes, or a tip-up alert that goes straight to your smart phone the technology is out there. So don't be afraid to try out all the new technology out there, you will find some very useful tech that will help you catch more fish.





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River Region: Madeira, Madeirinha, Sucunduri, Pineapples, Acari, Uatumã, and more. Price per person: \$3550,00 Includes: Air Ticket round-trip Manaus/Olinda/Manaus and one night hotel stay in Manaus. Groups of 16 to 18 people for 6 days of fishing.

2nd Schedule From the 2nd half of September to the 1st half of October/2014

Regions: Rio Negro Mid Section, Jufaris, Demeni, Branco, and more. Closest city: Moura-AM. Price per person: \$3550.00 Includes: Ferry Boat round-trip to Manaus/fishing spots/Manaus and one night hotel stay in Manaus. Groups of 16 to 18 people for 6 days of fishing.

3rd Schedule D From the 2nd half of the October/2014 to March/2015

Regions: Barcelos and Santa Isabel do Rio Negro. Rivers: Negro, Caures, Culunim, Paduaui, Preto, and more. Closest city: Barcelos-AM. Price per person: \$3850.00 Includes: Air Ticket round-trip Manaus/Barcelos/Manaus and one night hotel stay in Manaus. Groups of 16 to 18 people for 6 days of fishing.



ATTENTION

The above information is subject to change due to region's water level. The values mentioned does not include airfare tickets from your origin destination to Manaus.

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Don't Change the Jig, Just the Jigging

By Dan Galusha

Jigs are a major part of terminal tackle in ice fishing. For successful fishing it is important to have confidence in the jig, and once it is built, that particular lure usually becomes an angler's favorite.

What happens when suddenly that favorite jig stops producing on a day when the Vexilar is showing the fish are still in the same location and depth? Some anglers will change to a different jig or color. This can work, but there is something that should be tried first - changing the jigging technique.

On a warmer day with light wind, the gloves can be taken off for a short time outside of the shelter, and the wind can be used to jig the line, while watching one of Frabill's sensitive strike indicators for an indication of a bite.

There are three basic types of techniques - active, slow and inactive. The best way to change is to work from



These are three sensitive strike indicators, which can be very helpful when straight line fishing, produced by Frabill (top to bottom) – fast tip rod; coil spring bobber; and adjustable Titanium bobber.

one end of the scale to the other. For example, if the jig is first being worked with active movements go towards the inactive, and visa versa.

To help in this endeavor here are a few techniques in each of the categories. While these are geared towards straight line fishing, without floats, or a coil spring bobber, they can be adapted to float fishing.

ACTIVE

Drop the jig to the selected depth. Work it up and down with quick 1 inch jerks, or slower lift and drop movements of the rod tip, keeping it at that depth.

Work the jig down to the desired depth while jigging the lure. Then go past the depth zone a

little ways. After this, work the jig back towards the surface, being sure to pause at the main depth zone a little longer before working upward.

SLOW

Take off enough line to let the jig fall slowly through the fish holding zone. Pick it back up slowly, to a few feet above this area, and then let it fall again. Don't do any jigging, just let the fall and lift be the action. This normally works best when using lighter weight jigs, or ones that have a flutter or side-to-side action on the fall. Lighter weight allows for a slower fall through the strike zone.



With the right jigging technique, and these 5 Custom Jigs & Spins lures (Ratso, Ratfinkee, Gill Pill, Diamond Jig and Demon) tipped with a Crappie Nibble, Gulp Waxie or live wax worm, an ice angler searching for panfish is certain to have some success.

INACTIVE

This is the easiest of techniques, as it could be termed as “do nothing”. Just let the jig fall to the fish holding depth, and set still for as long as 10 to 20 seconds before lifting and dropping again. Many times when they are in a mood to take this type of presentation the strike will only be a “hold”, making it feel like a snag. Frabill's Titanium or coil spring type bobbers, that can be purchased separately to fasten to the end of a rod tip, or as found on a Panfish Popper and Jiggler rod/reel combinations, are ideal for sensing this sort of bite. The Jiggler is a combination made for “hole hopping”.

In this same category, let the wind do the jigging. Again, drop the jig to the depth and allow it to set,

perhaps a little longer than before, but with the wind blowing the line. Of course, this is not always possible, as the wind can blow too strongly to be effective. Also, it needs to be on one of the warmer days when the shelter can be opened, or when setting in the open. True, this may sound more in the active category, but the line is not being moved by the angler. For some reason, many times, I've found this technique to out produce a manmade jigging motion. To use this method to its highest potential, a light wind is best. The strike is usually detected by the straightening of the line, when it takes out any bow or vibration in the line. If the aforementioned Titanium or coil spring bobbers are used, the strike will stop the spring from vibrating (or reduce wind vibration), and in some cases cause a downward bend as with any normal strike. Since you are outside the shelter when "hole hopping", this is the ideal time to use the aforementioned Jiggler combo.

A Vexilar unit helps not only in locating the fish, but in showing how fish react to various jigging techniques. The fish can be seen moving up to a jig, which normally means they are somewhat active, depending on how fast they come after the jig. If that flash moves away it is very possible that the technique being used is not the one they want to see. That means it is time to try some of the ideas that have been mentioned in this article, whether as



Watching the Vexilar to see how fish reacted to changes in jigging helped catch some nice bluegills and crappie, on a day that would have otherwise been very tough.



Outdoor Writer, Don Banning from Illinois, was having a struggle getting fish to hit on one of his favorite jigs, even though they were being seen on his Vexilar. After switching from jigging to a slow fall, he caught this nice 13 1/2" crappie that was suspended a few feet under the ice.

is, or experimenting with them in combinations.

The next time fish stop biting, are still being seen on the flasher, and conditions and depths have not changed, don't suffer the problems of tying on another jig in the cold, try changing the jigging technique.

If you have any questions on this or another fishing subject, drop me a line through the Dan's Fish 'N' Tales® web site at www.dansfishntales.com.

Until next time, get out on the water, and enjoy a great day of fishing.



Dead Sticking Revised

By Jason Mitchell



In a perfect world, we would always be able to fish for fish that make us look good. Fish that burn up to the presentation and rise to meet and greet you. Fish that are looking for a meal and want to eat. So often with fishing, we are dealt our hand of cards however and there are times when we have to react and make adjustments to what the fish are giving us.

Massive cold fronts and other factors can shut the activity of fish down. Lop sided forage bases that offer endless forage options can also create tough winter

bites. There are many situations where the fish are the exact opposite of aggressive. There are times when moving the bait aggressively causes fish to flee the other direction. When fish are turned off and won't respond to aggressive presentations, we either have to make some adjustments as anglers or really struggle.

Often, tough fishing can often coincide with tough weather. When conditions are tough, one strategy that is consistent is to find a large school of fish and sit over

The author Jason Mitchell with a dead stick perch caught by modifying a Northland Tackle Buckshot Rattle Spoon as discussed in the article.

them with patience and diligence. For perch and walleyes, dead rods really come into play when fish just don't want to eat.



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One Two Punch

The classic one two punch for both perch, crappie and walleyes is to jig a rod and then have a dead rod situated right next door. On tougher bites, the fish might still be attracted to the jigged lure but instead refer to the lonely struggling minnow nearby. Some days, some of the fish come on the more aggressively jigged lure while other fish take the minnow. By having multiple rods down, you give the fish a few options and have more lines in the water. On the toughest bites, you will usually catch more fish by having more lines down. There are times however when I don't jig any lures and use all dead rods when the fish are really difficult. You can usually monitor just how tough the fishing situation is by either using an underwater camera or really understanding your sonar. When you see fish bolting when you raise the lure or refusing to investigate the lure, play the dead rod game.

I have to first admit that staring at multiple rod tips without holding a rod is not my favorite way to fish. I like to hold a rod and jig a lure, knowing what I am doing to that lure results in me catching a fish. Staring at dead rods is for people who like to play cards or drink beer while they fish. That is not me. There are times however when dead rods shine and discussion on using dead rods deserves merit. Like anything, there is an art to fishing dead rods effectively and there are details that can mean the difference between scratching out several fish under tough conditions and catching few fish. Here are a few adjustments I have found over the years that have made a marked and significant increase in my success when I have to resort to letting the minnow do the work.

Rod Position

It seems like whatever rod you are holding is not the rod the fish bite so I have had much more success laying out dead rods around me where I can reach them without taking a step. I drill my holes as far apart as possible within the footprint of my shelter or from where I am sitting and use long rods. The two piece forty eight inch Meat Stick rod (pictured) in our Jason Mitchell Elite Series line up is perfect if you want to set up some additional dead rods near you.

You can use a tip down or even lay the rod over a five gallon pail. When a fish hits the minnow, the rod tip will dunk. I more or less have the most success when I put my hands in my pockets and watch each rod tip like a hawk. When I rod tip dunks, I can grab the rod quickly and set the hook or let the fish have the minnow longer. I personally have a much higher batting average if I use the rod tip versus using a bobber or float. When running multiple dead rods, nothing beats a hub style shelter because you have so much more room to work where you can spread out rods and heat the area so that lines and holes don't freeze when dealing with the toughest bites.

Do Not Swing

When a fish does dunk the rod tip, I hook up with more fish if I don't swing to set the hook at the fish. Don't give the fish a traditional hook set, instead lift up the rod to load the rod and crank on the reel. This smooth solid connection just seems to hook up more fish. I also feel that I hook more fish if I use the lightest line I can get away with, often using four pound monofilament for perch and six pound monofilament for walleye.





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I have experimented with small jigs, plain hooks and split shot, small treble hooks and just about every other rig to use below a dead rod but I have settled on a program that works the best most of the time for the toughest bites. When dealing with a tough bite, the smaller minnows often work the best and the best system I have found for both walleye and perch is to modify either a Buckshot Rattle Spoon or Forage Minnow by replacing the treble hook with a long shank Aberdeen hook, usually about a number four or six size.

Hook the minnow through the hide right behind the gill so that the hook faces towards the head of the minnow. This spoon and minnow combination does a few things on a really tough bite. First off, the minnow can't go anywhere or swim to get away. The long shank hook swings into the mouth of the fish much easier without the fish having to move much water. By hooking the minnow near the head and facing forward, the fish will typically have the hook in the mouth even when they just grab on to the head of the minnow and hold the minnow in the mouth while the tail hangs out.

On really tough bites where the fish are very negative, I have watched over and over with an underwater camera where fish would just grab onto the head of the minnow and hold for a long time while the tail of the minnow hangs out of the fish and flaps. When fish are more aggressive, they swallow the whole minnow or take a second gulp to suck in the whole minnow but when things are tough, you don't get that and this presentation connects. This allows you to set the hook as soon as the rod dunks and you don't have to guess so much as to how long to wait before setting the hook.

Running Traffic

Dead rods will only work however if you have traffic below you. Rolling up your sleeves and camping out over a spot won't do you any good if there are no fish below you. You still have to find that zone where there are fish moving back and forth. On a tough bite, I will sit over a spot if I am getting some kind of activity every hour. On tough bites, one of the most important tools for making good decisions is a watch.

It can be easy to become too impatient and move too much but it can also be easy to get lulled into a spot for way too long. By watching the clock, you can easier manage your time and make better decisions. On tough bites, you can still scratch out a decent day on the ice if you manage your time and make the proper adjustments.

We all hope for days where the fish are stacked up below us and snapping but the reality is that does not and will not happen every day. When conditions get difficult and fishing gets difficult, you can still scratch out a respectable day on the ice.

D & B Ice Adventures

Trending Technologies: Stay With Them



The era of the modern ice fishermen has well established itself throughout the ice belt making its way from the upper Midwest and finally reaching the northeast. Although us folk in the northeast are slightly behind we have made a rapid effort to catch up with the latest styles and techniques. If you are a like us you will benefit some of the latest and greatest products that hit the market this year.

Electronics have increased in popularity in recent years and even the seasoned “old timers” have seen the advantages of carrying one in your sled. Flashers and cameras seem to be the most popular

units available at a reasonable price. Both a camera and a flasher have serious advantages for the fishermen. A camera allows you to not only see the fish but more importantly to us, it allows us to see the habitat. We have spent much time drilling and fishing without a camera to find nothing, but with the camera you can drill and look, if you don't see what you are looking for you can make a slightly larger move in hope of finding the weed line, sharp break ect. . This will save a lot of time and make you a much more efficient angler. One option for a great camera is the underwater camera made by Vexilar. “The Fish Scout FS2000DT is the most advanced underwater viewings system

for fishermen on the market today. It's color/black and white camera system automatically switches from color mode to black and white mode in low light conditions. Digital sensors give the viewer Depth, Temperature and Direction the camera is pointed while under water. The Fish Scout system comes with 80 feet of cable and everything you need to start viewing right out of the box. 9 Amp hour, 12 volt





battery and 1 amp digital charger, digital battery status indicator, over-hole suspension arm, carry case, wide-screen color monitor and it is all covered with Vexilar's two year warranty."

Vexilar has brought and new flasher to the market as well for the 2013-2014 ice season. The FLX 28 has everything you need in a flasher. For those of you that have fished with a flasher in the past you'll know what I'm talking about if you have a chance to use this product. To begin with Vexilar has one of

the best reputations in the fishing electronics market today, to go along with excellent customer service. "The features found in the FLX-28 read like the wish list of avid ice anglers starting with digital depth, Auto Range, Two zoom zones, battery status, FIVE color palettes to select from for maximum visibility, five foot depth range adjustments starting at 10 feet, Maximum range of 300, Day and Night display brightness settings, Low power options for fishing in super shallow water, a unique Weed Mode for better performance while fishing in weeds. And to top it all off, the unit even has its own Demo mode so you can show non-Vexilar fans how the system works with a lifelike fish catching simulation to watch." For more information on other Vexilar products you can ask your local retailer or check out their website. www.vexilar.com

Clam outdoors has added some great new products to their line-up for the 2013-2014 season. One of the most exciting new products is their ice auger conversion kit. Are you tired of mixing gas and lugging around your old auger? Well Clam has come up with just the thing. Clam's Ice Auger Conversion Kit allows an angler to use an 18-volt cordless drill as the "power" to drill your holes. Extremely lightweight & portable, there has been nothing like it on the market to date. Providing enough power to drill through over 700 inches of ice on a fully charged battery, testing has been done on up to 24 inches of ice using a 6-inch auger bit. Clam prides itself on mobility and this will set the bar for how a mobile ice auger performs!

Another addition to the line-up is the new line of tackle that clam has come out with. We are very excited about the selection of ice jigs that are available. These jigs are molded from tungsten, which allows you to fish faster in deeper water and give micro plastics (like the baits from Maki Plastics which can also be found at Clam Outdoors) a surreal life like action. "Let's talk tungsten. 70% denser and 30% heavier than lead. That makes for small jigs that fish heavy, punch through slush, sink fast, show up on electronics, and give you sensational feel as you pound 'em. It's like the difference between 'glass and graphite. Instantly, you're better at bite detection." A full line of ice tackle can be found at www.clamouotdoors.com





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If you are in the market and looking to try out a custom built ice rod this year we highly encourage you to check out T7 Custom Rods. Chris Confer is the owner and operator of this company. Chris is an avid fisherman, so he knows exactly what we are all looking for in a rod. As a matter of fact, Chris will build you a rod with your exact fishing situation in mind. Whether you're fishing for perch in deep water and require a stiff backbone with a light detection, or you are looking for a noodle rod for shallow water finicky panfish, Chris will build it. Right now Chris is currently working on a rod for me that is 34" long, has a lot of



backbone but at the same time has a fast tip for softer and more accurate bite detection. The craftsmanship that goes into one of these rods is off the wall, they are durable and very appealing to the eye. Whether you're a novice or a pro, staying with the ever changing technologies can have such a positive impact on your fishing success.

Contact D&B Ice Adventures at <http://dbiceadventures.wordpress.com/>

Hit and Run Perch

By Jason Mitchell

Schools of perch often seem to continually be on the move. When there are several mouths to feed, sitting in one location doesn't work. A school of perch can devour everything in its path. I would hate to be a minnow or crawfish when jumbo and all of his friends roll through. Because schools of perch are typically here today and gone tomorrow because of their nomadic lifestyle, finding and getting on top of fish can be always fleeting.

How do you land on a moving target? Sitting in a good location where fish are likely to roll through isn't a bad strategy. If the fish are moving through and you have good traffic underneath you... why move? The other strategy is a run and gun mentality where you approach the ice much more aggressively and move when you are not on fish and move when you stop catching fish. If you are experiencing some success, cycle back through the holes until you wear out your welcome.



Finding and landing on fish is half the battle but the other factor that can enhance your success on the ice is how you capitalize on the opportunities. Perch fishing is often intense where a ten percent window can often produce ninety percent of your catch. You can go from zero to hero in a hurry. This all depends however on how quickly you can get back down into the water and how long you can keep these drifters down below.

The "turn around" is probably one of the most important factors that dictates how many fish you catch. How fast can you get the fish up into your hand and unhooked and how fast you can get back in the water. There are a few ways to increase the turn around.

Choosing lures that fall fast is one angle. Fast dropping lures include the classic Buckshot Rattle Spoon and the



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Northland Tackle Puppet Minnow (pictured). On a really torrid bite, using lures that can be unhooked more quickly (one hook versus treble hook) can speed up the turn around. You can also bend out the hook slightly and pinch off the barb so that the fish can pop off the hook easy. Lures like the Forage Minnow or the classic Russian Spoons. The final way to increase turnaround is to speed up the elevator ride. Stiffer rods allow you to reel in fish faster, heavier line also allows you to lift the fish out of the water and can make you more efficient. So in a perfect world on top of a crazed school of perch, you want to throw a fast dropping lure with one hook on the heaviest line you can get away paired up on a heavier rod so that you can just windmill fish.

Of course we don't live in a perfect world all the time so often, we can't get away with maximizing the turn around on every front. Usually, we can only incorporate pieces of the basic formula above. What can often happen however is that while the overall conditions or tone of the day might require more finesse like using three pound test and a Meat Stick, when the fish finally do get wound up, you can do a lot of damage having that extra rod nearby that is rigged up for total destruction. So often, we might get the school started on the more subtle and finesse and do the real damage once we get into a rhythm where we get the school to rise up higher and start competing.

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check the HCCC website www.hillsdaleconservationclub.com

Besides being conscience of and manipulating the “turn around,” the other variable is how you can manipulate the school. Keeping fish around and staying on fish is much easier to do with a few other anglers. When you get a good school below you, get your friends in as tight to you as possible. Often, in shallow water especially.... I am not a big fan of drilling holes right next to somebody catching fish. If there are no holes close to you and you have fish stacked below, tag team the fish. When you reel up a fish, have your buddy drop down. That way there is a line in the water as you are unhooking the fish. When the bite gets intense, you can literally double the damage.

Besides keeping a line in the water, some other ways to increase your success is to pick fish off the top of the school, lift the fish higher in the water column by either fishing above the fish or using a fish on your line to pull fish up higher.

All of these variables can enable you to maximize your opportunities. In the end, you have to take what the fish will give you but the more things you can get going in your favor, the more perch you can catch. Only on the best days do all of the factors above work. Usually, you can increase your success exponentially with each facet you can incorporate.

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Catch More Crowded Crappies

By Daniel Quade

Visions of icing slab crappies seldom include crowds of

anglers. More often, sweet dreams of icy nirvana center on remote backcountry waters or hidden gems that somehow fly under the masses' radar. However, while untapped fisheries can be dynamite, you can also enjoy banner catches on waters besieged by the bucket brigade.

Panfish fanatic Paul Fournier knows the drill. Years of practicing his craft on hard-hit lakes sprinkled across central Minnesota's Minneapolis-St. Paul megatropolis have left him well versed on tackling pressure-cooker crappies. His finely tuned tactics include a blend of pre-trip recon and refined fishing strategies to ice slabs that elude other anglers.

"Start by doing your homework, so you know as much as possible about a lake before you get there," he said.

Prior to an outing, Fournier scours lake maps for trends in depths and structural subtleties, often breaking lakes into one of two categories based on whether it has a deep or shallow basin.

In systems characterized by deep water, crappies often frequent the same locations in early winter as they did in late fall, such as the outside edge of deep weedlines that are adjacent to deep water. The depth of the edge varies by lake, but 10 to 15 feet is a common range on many waters. Often, crappies slide out deeper to gather over nearby soft-bottom basins as winter progresses.



Finding fish in shallow-basin lakes is often a matter of ferreting out the deepest water available.

“Depth is relative, but for example, a 20-foot hole in a lake with lots of 12- to 16-foot water can be a hot zone,” he says.

In total bathtubs, factors such as well-oxygenated inflows, bottom content changes and subtle differences in weed growth or woody cover can channel fish activity.

Such physical distinctions help guide Fournier’s on-ice search efforts, but he also brushes up on the fishery’s forage base. Finding out whether the crappies are feasting on insects or eating other fish, including minnows, young-of-the-year perch or even juvenile panfish, also steers him toward potential drop zones. For example, an abundance of food in shallow, still-green vegetation can hold slabs in surprisingly skinny water, offering savvy anglers a shot at unpressured panfish, even while offshore schools suffer wholesale slaughter in mob scenes barely a long cast away.

Once Fournier settles on a likely fishing area, he focuses on primary strike zones comprised of the best structure or cover the spot has to offer.



“Examples include the tip of a point extending into deeper water, and an inside turn on a drop-off or weedline,” he said.

Rather than punching a hole or two and hunkering down over such a sweet spot, he drills out a 20-hole grid pattern that starts shallow, covers the edge of the break or transition line, and stretches into deep water. Drilling completed, he quietly walks from hole to hole, using sonar to check for fish.

“Multi-crappie ‘Christmas trees’ are ideal,” he grins. “They signal active fish competing for food, a scenario that encourages large

A promotional poster for the February 15th 2014 Wisconsin Ice Fishing Classic. The poster features the event title in large blue letters, a fish illustration, and a yellow starburst announcing "OVER \$10,000 IN PRIZES!". The schedule lists registration at 6:30am, tournament from 8:00am to 3:00pm, seminars at 9:00am and 11:00am, and prizes/drawings at 4:00pm. It also mentions the tournament location as Small Lake Wissota and includes a section for a Youth Ice Fishing Basics Seminar presented by Greg Karch. Logos for the Lake Wissota Lions Club and Leinie's Wisconsin are also present, along with a Facebook link and a website for rules and regulations. The bottom line states that all proceeds benefit the Lake Wissota Lions Club.



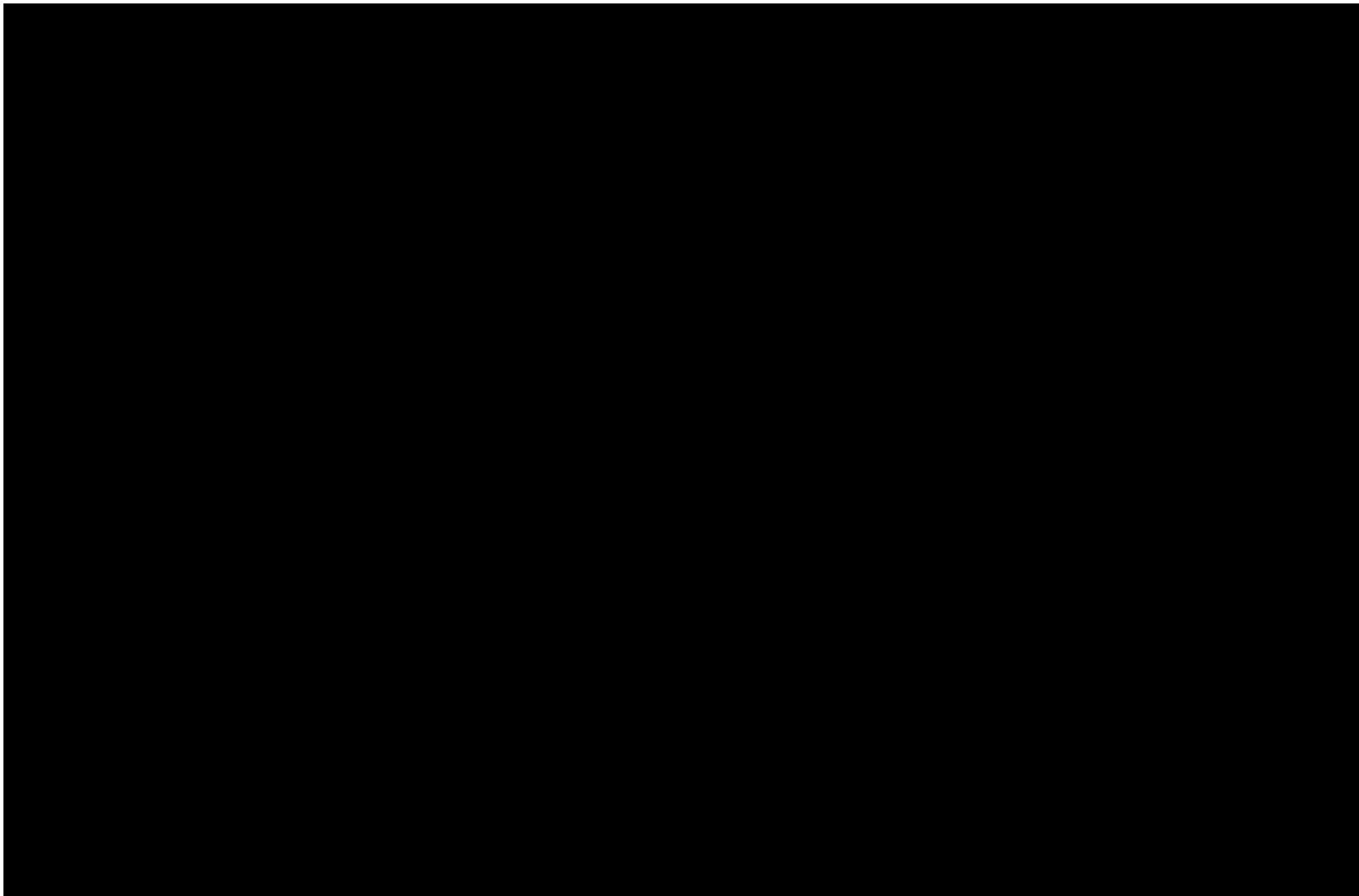
crappies to feed.”

He cautions, however, that even though the biggest fish may be the first to slide in for a look at your lure, they can be the toughest to trigger. Fournier favors a lengthy jigging rod, say, 36 inches or longer, to keep his silhouette out of the hole. He spools with 4-lb monofilament mainline, ties on a small ant swivel to limit line twist, and then adds a 2- to 4-foot leader of 2-lb fluorocarbon. He notes that even though water clarity dictates

leader length, it should always be long enough to prevent sunfish from swarming the swivel.

Presentational options abound, given the near-endless variety of jigs, jigging spoons and other hardbaits at his disposal. Still, Fournier often throws a reliable one-two punch. His first strike is typically a small horizontal-hanging jig like the Lindy Tungsten Toad.

“Since it fishes heavy for its size, it works equally well for targeting deep water off the edge of



the break, and for punching through shallow weeds,” he says. “Waxies and eurolarvae are common tippings, mostly skin-hooked wacky style, though super-wary slabs may demand the bait be threaded on lengthwise. Plastic baits can be deadly on slab crappies, too, provided you learn how to fish them. Fill up the tub or a sink and practice your moves at home.”

His second rod brings slightly heavier metal to the table, in the form of a small Lindy Rattln’ Flyer (pictured) or Frostee Spoon, with waxies strung between the treble tines. Rigged this way, they’re hard for fish to pick off the hooks, he says.

When fishing either the Toad or a spoon, Fournier’s mindset and jig strokes are similar.

“Fish above the crappies, slowly coaxing them higher,” he says. “Subtly work the rod tip back-and-forth so the lure moves from side to side.”

When a rising crappie stalls out, Fournier drops the jig back down to where he jigged it last. Often, this triggers a follower to dash down and strike.

Two to three jig and spoon sequences are typically sufficient to milk a hole of its biters. Before leaving, however, Fournier taps the Toad for a final descent.

“Let it fall just above the fish, give it a jiggle, pause it about 20 seconds and jig it again,” he says. “If that doesn’t work, move on.”



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To be fair, this is just the tip of Fournier’s presentational iceberg. He also works swimming hardbaits like the Lindy Darter (pictured) into the act, especially on deep lakes, as well as in shallow basins offering a decent drop-off. Dropper rigs, too, have their moments. One of his favorites is a Lindy Ice Jig or Toad dangled 6 to 8 inches beneath a spoon. In shallow water, a slow-falling soft plastic bait gets the nod. He especially likes a Lindy Watsit Grub, skin-hooked on a horizontal jig.

Time of day can also be an ally.

“Crappies tend to school up and become more active at night,” he says. “Sunrise and sunset are also peak activity periods for big crappies.”

In the end, he believes the key to making your crappie dreams come true on pressured waters is fishing smarter and working harder than the crowd. Do that and your well on your way to your best season ever.

GLOW IN THE DARK ICE FISHING

By Ted Takasaki and Scott Richardson

There are many bright ideas for hard water, but there's one that has been pretty consistent over the years...the use of glow colors for low-visibility conditions. Fishing at night or in low-light conditions (sunrise, sundown, or in stained or dirty water) often creates special problems for ice anglers. Fish can have difficulty 'eating your bait' if they can't see it.

Having said that, it's known that many predator fish have the ability to locate prey using their lateral line sense. Given the option, though, fish appear to prefer to use sight to nail down something to eat. With some species that ice anglers love to target, such as bluegills and pike, they darn near have to see your bait or you go biteless!

Recent breakthroughs in paint technology have allowed manufacturers to paint jigs in a variety of glowing colors, like blue, red, and chartreuse. Different colors emit light at different intensities under different conditions. Sometimes, one color may overpower fish. Another color may not be enough to draw them near. Always experiment and let the fish tell you what they want.

Light of day

Glow jigs shine even in daytime and will often catch walleyes and panfish when nothing else works. Why? Maybe it's because you're fishing at sunrise or sunset. But, many lakes in the North are fed by streams that flow through cedar swamps. Water is stained like tea by tannic acid. Visibility is diminished even at midday, especially when the ice thickens and snow covers the ice, cutting down on light penetration.

When that's the case, fish often go deeper as winter settles in. They are forced out of the shallows when weeds die and sap oxygen from their surroundings. Baitfish will suspend somewhere between top and bottom, looking for the depth where plankton reside, and predators have a harder time finding them. A glow jig will attract fish that settle at the same depth as the baitfish. Then, the action you put on your jig will make them bite.

Stained lakes normally offer classic structure situations. For walleyes, you usually can't go wrong fishing over hard bottoms on the steepest drops to the deepest part of the lake. Use a lake map and your GPS armed with a



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LakeMaster mapping chip to search out potential spots. Drill multiple holes and use a portable depth finder, like a Humminbird ICE597 (pictured) to search for fish. The ICE 597 has a GPS and a graph all built into one unit for convenience.

Later in winter, move to deeper structure like mid-lake humps. As ice-out nears, concentrate on spots near known spawning areas.

Start by jigging aggressively with minnows to prompt a reaction strike from the most active fish. Hook the minnow through the mouth and up through the head. You can also clip the head of the minnow just behinds the gills.

Small lakes may host spectacular prospects for panfish, like bluegills, crappies and perch. Head to the deepest area of the lake and remember that 'deep' is relative. Seek that area out whether it's 40 feet or 20 feet.

On large lakes, look for deep areas in bays and inside turns on points at the mouths of bays that reach to deep water.

Smaller vertical jigs and spoons tipped with eurolarvae, work best for panfish. Use a sensitive ice stick, like the St. Croix Legend Ice series rods (pictured) that let you keep in touch with your bait. Jiggle it constantly with short movements so the jig vibrates. This action triggers attention.

Perch tend to hold deeper in schools as big as a football field. When fishing with friends, leap-frog each other in order to drill holes at 100-foot intervals until someone connects. Try a small, red glow #8 jig tipped with eurolarvae. Drop it to the bottom and slightly raise it, and twitch. Fish may be finicky during the day. Try to stay away from the crowd.

Sunlight is a good way to make



Kristi Takasaki with a beautiful crappie caught in bright sunshine, but with a glow jig! Photo: Ted Takasaki



phosphorescent paint glow. Some anglers like to use camera flash units. But, it never seems to fail... the batteries are drained when you need them most, either through overuse or failure to turn the flash unit off after you were done the last time. There are now many different small, super bright, LED flashlights that work much better.

Night bite

The action improves significantly after dark for walleyes and some species of panfish, like crappies. Even larger bluegills will bite after the sun goes down. For this fishing, glow jigs are a must.

As for location, the same spots you fish during daytime will hold walleyes and crappies after dark. Bottom structure that holds baitfish is best for walleyes. Focus on dropoffs near points, on humps or channel edges.

Crappies often suspend over the deepest water in small lakes. In larger lakes, they can be found suspended. Funnel areas between the tips of two points that come close to each other or where a sunken island is located just off a point are good, too.

Fish are not so spooky after dark. Fish with friends or migrate toward the groups.

Other tips

Use the biggest auger you think you'll need for the species of fish you are going after. The bigger the hole, the easier it will be to retrieve your fish.

If you don't connect with any fish, don't stay long. The more you move, the more likely you will locate active schools. Take a friend with you in case you run into trouble. Don't fish alone. And take your flotation cushion out of your boat and tie 50 feet of rope to it. It can be a lifesaver if one of your group falls through thin ice.

Light up your life with glow jigs through the ice. They're a real turn-on.



Spoony Tunes

**Not any old spoon
works wonders
when the
bite...bites**

By Mitch Eeagan

Flip, flash, flutter and fall; jigging spoons have it all. Whether tipped with livebait, fake or sporting nothing but a plain Jane hook, jigging with spoons is one of the deadliest tactics for taking fish through the ice.

But not any old spoon is going to work wonders every time out. The lure's shape, metal-makeup and the thickness of the stamp not only dictates the action, but determines what performs best at different depths and on various species.

Ups and Downs

Enter ice-fishing expert Mark Brumbaugh; the Arcanum, Ohio, touring walleye pro that's no stranger to the ups and downs of using jigging spoons year round. And he has his favorites, especially during days when fish are in a funk.

Jigging spoons are Joe Balog's go-to all winter long. And this jumbo perch came utilizing Humminbird sonar coupled with an Aqua-Vu underwater camera to get his lure in the fish's face. Photo by Bill Lindner Photography





Custom Jigs and Spins' new Pro Series Slender Spoon sports the same proven shape, tumble, flash, flutter and fall as the original, but in spectacular new colors and with even sticker hooks. Photo courtesy of Custom Jigs & Spins

"First of all, thin [in thickness] spoons are going to have the most 'natural' action," says Brumbaugh. "They are usually wider in shape and lighter in weight, too, which the bait to waft with the water currents; just like the very forage fish are feeding on."

Brumbaugh then revealed his go-to spoon – Custom Jigs and Spins' Slender Spoon. This lure is both slight in thickness and tapers ideally from head to foot. Unlike many other ice-fishing experts, Brumbaugh

uses the Slender Spoon just the way it is right out of the package—putting no "secret" torque to it with needle-nose pliers in an attempt to alter the action. Slender Spoons require no such tweaking.

Through trial and error, Brumbaugh will determine what 'swirl' induces strikes; be it quick-and-aggressive foot-long lifts and drops of the rod tip, to nothing more than a vibration of the wrist. Oftentimes, you'll find him deadsticking with spoons; the only action coming from lake currents or the liveliest minnow in the bucket.

"A lot of anglers don't realize that a lightweight spoon never stops stirring," Brumbaugh asserts. "When you hold a rod at rest, the tip's still shaking a little – even when the rod is camped on a bucket, the lure delicately whirls with any current. It's that continuous movement, ever so slight, which

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gently reflects light, mimicking the scaly sheen of baitfish.”

However, it’s not just the spoon that makes a fish hit. To that, Brumbaugh is very specific about choosing his entire ensemble of gear.

First of all, there’s the largest accessory: the fish house. Brumbaugh’s is a Frabill Thermal Predator Flip-Over Shelter. He asserts that fishing from a shanty improves the catch times two. “It’s all due to cutting winter’s winds, which can blow so hard they grab and pull on what little line is out in the open between rod tip and hole.” Huddled in a shelter, he’s able to concentrate on every flicker of the spoon, as well as detect the slightest nip.

Brumbaugh’s rod and terminal tackle are lighter than one might expect, too, even when he’s after fish that register as trophies.

He prefers a medium-light action rod for engaging multiple species. This rod action bodes well with 6-pound-test, 2-pound-diameter superline spooled as the main line; the fine diameter line maximizing the Slender Spoon’s native action.

Contrary to popular light-line beliefs, however, he adds a 12-inch piece of 8-pound-test fluorocarbon leader. Yes, that’s two pounds worth of test heavier and a whole lot thicker.

“It’s the stiffness of the wider-diameter fluorocarbon that keeps my lightweight spoon from tumbling and getting tangled up in the mainline,”

A perfect match: Humminbird sonar allowed Brian “Bro” Brosdahl to get his jigging spoon into the strike zone of this suspended crappie, while the Aqua-Vu underwater viewing system was just the ticket to seeing them strike in real time. Photo by Bill Lindner Photography





Brumbaugh says.

Brumbaugh connects the mainline and fluorocarbon via a tiny ball-bearing swivel, and then joins the Slender Spoon to the leader with a small snap (not 'snap-swivel' as the extra hardware will impede the action of the lure).

Si... I see

Now introducing Michigan's Joe Balog – Ice-fishing extraordinaire when it comes to cranking hardwater panfish and perch on spoons.

And I have experienced this love affair with spoons firsthand.

While on an expedition to Grand Rapids, Minnesota, I watched Balog work his magic with a thinly-stamped spoon on perch and panfish. And to boot, no bait was skewered on; the only dressing, a plastic bead threaded on the hook shank.

But Balog's true prowess is seeded in his confident use of electronics.

"With the aid of both my Humminbird sonar and Aqua-Vu, I can set the hook the millisecond a fish hits. The two really go hand in hand."



Balog deploys the transducer of his Humminbird ICE 597ci HD Combo (pictured) the moment a hole is bored, testing depth hoping to spy active fish. Once depth is determined, he lowers the lens of his AV Micro II (pictured) — a palm-size underwater camera that's attached to his Humminbird via the Pro-Snake AV-Micro Camera Mount.

“The sonar allows me to get the lure where it needs to be – right in front of the fish’s nose or just above; the camera lets me see strikes before I could ever feel them. I can also see the size of the fish on the camera, and lift my spoon out of bite’s way of smaller ones.”

Spoony tunes

Overall, spoons rock (wobble and waggle, too) when it comes to catching fish through the ice. But not any old spoon is going to work wonders every time out.

Thinly-stamped spoons have the most flutter on the fall and an enticing waggle at rest. Just make sure to use your sonar wisely, and utilize the real-time images underwater cameras can provide, and you’ll be catching more fish than ever on jigging spoons.

Mitch Eeagan is an outdoor writer who lives in the snow-covered cedar swamps of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. He hunts, traps and fishes not only for sport but substance, and enjoys teaching others the finer points of the outdoors through his typed words.





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