Ice Fishing Edition Nov/Dec 2014

ODU MAGAZINE

Guide-Proven Walleye Plays For Early Ice The Cult Of Catfish

A Cabin On Wheels cing the Perch

Of Winter

CID.

Stop Trying To Feel Bites



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Ice fishing season has started and some ice anglers have been rewarded with early ice. Good luck to you all. May you find safe ice, large schools of fish, enjoyable travels and fun times out on the ice.

Please remember that neighbor child or friend's kid who always asked to go ice fishing with you. Taking t for that future ice angler

them on the ice could be a wonderful Christmas gift for that future ice angler.

Getting out on the ice and having success can and does have a lot to do with your open water success and knowledge. This edition of ODU Magazine touches on two basic themes; getting ready for first ice and getting back to basics.

What do you need to go ice fishing? How to locate fish that are covered in a dome of ice? How does that fish finder or flasher really work? These are some of the questions that are answered in detail.

Enjoy this jammed back edition of OutDoors Unlimited Magazine and please feel free to contact us if you have any questions, a story to share, a new product you want featured or a chance at you own outdoor column. Use <u>odumedia@odumagazine.com</u> and we will be looking forward to the mail.

Reflection: Earlier last month the United States Senate (including the US House of Representatives and the many gubernatorial positions) received what many are calling a message, a message to change direction. This message might be to some as change for a better country and for better lives for all of the United States. For some it was a vote for change in economic policy, foreign relations and domestic policy. Others, like us, looked at our votes as a change in how our outdoor rights are protected. What happens in the United Stated Congress and who makes the decisions in the 50 governor houses has a tremendous impact on our rights as fishermen and hunters.

As soon as the votes were counted and the nation had spoke, all attention shifted back to hope. Hope that these new governmental representatives will make all the right decisions going forward. This is not a time to hope!

It is a time to remind and keep reminding our current and newly elected officials that they are there for us. Editorial Team Leader: Bill Schwarz, Bill@odumagazine.com

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Thank You All!

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They are there to work on what they campaigned on and to deliver what is expect of them. Every year new gun laws, fishing laws, hunting laws and new conservation measures both on land and sea are approached, discussed, proposed and voted on. We as outdoorsmen need to keep the pressure on and make sure our governmental representatives represent our outdoor rights appropriately. Keep an eye on what your local and statewide fishing and hunting clubs are reporting on when it comes to new laws and regulations. Make sure to communicate as groups, what you expect on each suggested



change. Stay connected to the process, and remember our collective voices count.

You can also follow us on <u>Facebook (NEW PAGE Just Launched)</u>, <u>Twitter</u>, <u>Pinterest</u> and <u>Google Plus</u>. And please, enjoy the outdoors.

> Co-Founders of OutDoors Unlimited Magazine Larry Thornhill and William Schwarz 207-310-3117





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CONTACT POINTS

By Tom Gruenwald

Deciding where to fish is a prime directive of every serious ice angler. Whether fishing a familiar lake or exploring new waters, it's critical to carefully evaluate lake characteristics and features, the biological environment, local conditions and weather to appropriately temper your strategies.

A quick review of a comprehensive hydrographic map will reveal depth contours and key structures, along with a number of additional relevant details, including the location of inlets and outlets, predominant bottom content distribution, types of available cover, water clarity, types of fish and forage present and how prominent each is within the fishery.

Plus, given the wealth of related information now available through websites, social media, electronic mapping apps, blogs and the associated speed this type of information travels, evaluating and identifying productive locations is easier than ever.

I believe most of today's knowledgeable ice anglers selectively sift through these sources, using them to discriminately determine the structures most likely to produce--yet many overlook critical, more subtle fish holding features that may substantially increase their odds of success.

I call these high-percentage spots "contact points," and here are a few such examples.



DEPTH CHANGES

Depth changes comprise rather obvious breaks, and better yet, prominent contact points. Yet it's important to understand not all depth changes are created equal. The productivity of a drop off lining a commonly sought structural element--say a shoreline point—will vary based on the type of lake you're fishing, its depth, species you're seeking, available cover, forage present, how far the season has progressed and current conditions.



For the sake of a generalized example, let's

evaluate this classic structure and review how to differentiate a good shoreline point from an exceptional one, starting by evaluating the slope of the surrounding depth change.

SLOPE

I've discovered "stair-stepped" sloping breaks from a shoreline point leading to a relatively deep basin are usually more productive than gradually or steeply sloped ones, simply because this variegated formation provides more options for fish. They can slide up toward the shallows and scatter throughout the adjoining flat to access forage as conditions allow, or just as easily slip back down using this favorably sloped point as a migration route, following the slope into deeper water and staging at various positions along the way, as conditions dictate.

Don't get me wrong: Points with more uniform or abrupt slopes will draw fish—a steep wall may constitute a distinct location game fish may use to "herd" a school of baitfish, and a gentle, more gradual slope with plentiful cover and forage will certainly attract fish at times. But you must prioritize each structure based on the situation, and stair-stepped breaks typically offer the greatest potential under a much wider range of conditions.

STRUCTURAL DIVERSITY

Next, let's look at structural diversity.

If the stair-stepped point you've identified features a hook-shaped tip, rather than just jutting straight out, that's a definite plus. Secondary protruding fingers and cutbacks, or a combination of what I call "secondary" or "microstructure"—essentially edges featuring smaller fingers, cuts, and their associated turns rather than just a homogenous, 'straight-line' break--are beneficial, too, as each represents a potential fish magnet.

Often such slight nuances won't appear on most maps, so you'll have to work to find them, but the rewards are well worth the effort.

SADDLE AREAS BETWEEN VARYING FORMS OF STRUCTURE

Our point also escalates in value if it's found in close association with other forms of structure. Should there be a sunken island separated from the point but not far away, this combination not only provides



more contact points to draw fish, but is much more likely to support a variety of forage that not only attract, but will hold fish there.



Such locations may also offer another key fish holding feature: Saddles.

Often in situations where two or more structural elements are found in close proximity, vou'll find what's called a "saddle" area separating them. This is simply a coined term for a region located prominent between where fish structures congregate to rest or feed, with the easy option of shifting from one structure or the other, as desired.

Should such an area exist where you're planning to fish, it's certainly worth checking, especially during "off-times" such as during the advent of a cold front, bright, mid-day conditions, periods of heavy fishing pressure or activity on the associated structures themselves—essentially any such variable or combination thereof that might push fish utilizing these structures into slightly deeper water.

BOTTOM CONTENT CHANGES

Another way to assess the value of our sample point is to note if any bottom content changes exist. If the point being fished is a hard bottom one comprised of rock or sand stretching out into a soft bottom saddle, this bottom composition transition creates an attractive break and will often result in a subsequent change in the type of cover and forage available, too--comprising a distinct contact point fish very worth looking into.



You might find one type of vegetation growing on the sand/rock mix and another in the mud, for example, with bait fish utilizing the hard bottom and bloodworms cover burrowed the softer in sediment. This biological diversity is something that ultimately offers strong potential for drawing not only a greater variety, but number of fish as well.



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VARIATION IN TYPE OF COVER

At times, variations in cover type might be much more distinct: Locations where a weed line meets a rock pile, for instance. Of course, these variations may be completely unrelated to a bottom content transition: A simple change from vegetation to wood might create a premium fish holding attraction.

Like bottom content variations, edges where assorted cover types meet often attract an increasingly diverse forage base, increasing odds the area will draw game fish, too.

VARIATION IN DENSITY OF COVER

Secondary breaks may also be considerably more subtle, yet no less important.

As an example, I've found variations in the density of cover can be a huge draw. During bright conditions, fish may shift deeper or into increasingly dense pockets of



vegetation, then slide back out along edges during low-light or overcast conditions. Locations along weed edges offering such diversity are thus more likely to hold greater numbers of fish in a wider variety of conditions than those without.

Similarly, breaks featuring larger downed trees with a complex array of branches, or taller stumps with exposed root systems amid smaller, less diverse ones would both offer comparably potential benefits.

VARIATION IN HEIGHT OF COVER

Another subtle variation is the height of the cover present.

These aberrations are usually associated with changes in depth, but not necessarily. Anytime you can find substantial clumps of vegetation growing higher than the surrounding canopy, or simply pockets formed by plants of lower stature, fish may use them based on the conditions you're facing. Be sure to check them out.

SUMMARY

So next time you're reviewing a lake map and searching for locations to fish, evaluate each feature carefully before making a decision, always looking for diverse sites offering the healthiest combinations of "microstructure"--spots I fondly call contact points. You'll find attention to such details will have a definite impact on your overall success!



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Chasing Dogs Riding Bicycles

By Garett Svir

I woke up in a panic. I've had nightmares before but this one was different. You see no one was



chasing me, I wasn't falling from a high place and I wasn't behind the wheel seeing headlights. I had just knocked off a bluegill at the bottom of the hole that I suspected was an honest two pounds. In a world where most anglers rarely find a one pound bluegill, this was a nightmare of epic proportions. Waking up safe and sound on top of the covers and coming to the realization that I had never hooked this fish was a huge relief. Fish of this caliber, while extremely rare, do exist beyond my unusual dreams. Legendary bluegill hunter, Bruce Condello, and his group of bluegill aficionado friends, had shirts made of dogs riding bicycles because honest three pound bluegills are about as common. Bruce specifically has five bluegills to his credit that went an honest three pounds in his home state of Nebraska. If we were to start a fantasy bluegill fishing league, another of my top draft picks would have to be Clayton Davis of North Dakota. Davis recently captured a 12" two pound specimen late ice this past winter and has many other large fish to his credit. While scarfing down a gas station burrito on the way home from chasing bluegills all day may have led me to strange dreams of massive pie plates, I wanted more. I wanted to know what it really takes to land a personal best this ice season. How do these anglers select lakes that have the capabilities to produce this caliber of bluegill? Does it relate to the genetics of the fish or is it simply a matter of finding over fed obese populations? What voodoo mind tricks are involved in finding dogs riding bicycles?

North Dakota angler, Clayton Davis, has really made a name for himself the past few seasons with his social media bluegill pictures. Living in an area where walleyes and perch reign as king, he has found populations of giant untapped bluegills. Davis has a system of finding lakes that have trophy potential and it starts with looking into state stocking reports. He explained to me that you not only need to check available data on bluegill populations but also try to locate lakes with large pike. Lakes that boast populations of large pike typically have a balanced population of bluegills. Balanced populations have the potential to grow large fish versus lakes that have over abundant populations of fish that will end up stunted. Lakes will only support so many inches of fish so these large predators are needed to keep the population in check and the size good.

After selecting lakes with high caliber potential, Davis begins his search. He notes that pencil reeds are paramount when searching out a new lake and big bluegills are usually in close proximity. He will start





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shallow and work his way through the mid depth weed flats out into the basin. During late ice, which he considers the best time to chase pie plates, he often finds giants in as shallow as three feet of water. Using the weed fishing mode on his Vexilar FLX-28 allows Davis to see his jig and approaching fish in this heavy cover. He explains that the weed mode drowns out clutter from the weeds and has been instrumental in his success. When he begins to find medium sized fish, he will often drill a large concentration of holes to circle that immediate area. This allows him to dissect the weed beds and find the best vantage points. Places for fish to ambush prey, while also providing cover from large pike, are going to hold the largest gills. He described that a sort of pecking order exists in the world of bluegills and big fish will take these prime locations and push smaller fish out into the fringe areas.

The founding father of modern ice fishing, Mr. Dave Genz, has been chasing high caliber bluegills since childhood. He likes to look for big bluegills in lakes that will sometimes experience a partial winter kill. Yes, you read that correct. This is a theory that has worked well for Genz over the years. It goes back to a lake only being able to support so many inches of fish. A partial winter kill will thin the lake enough for the remaining fish to thrive and grow large. In order for this to happen at least part of the lake has to be shallow limiting oxygen after the weeds die off mid-winter. This is one of the few events that can reverse the effects of lakes that house over abundant stunted populations.

Pursuing pie plate sized bluegills is my passion. I have spent countless hours milling over maps and lake data looking for the next lake that may produce a fish over 11". I have found a few factors that I like to look for when trying new waters. The first would be current. Lakes that are connected by rivers and

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have some current running through them for whatever reason are always top producers. While I have not completely figured out the correlation, give this trick a try and I promise you won't be disappointed. The second thing I like to look for is the presence of shrimp. Amphipods or shrimp are high calorie meals for bluegills and can bulk up fish faster than other invertebrates. If obese gills are on the docket this winter, find the lakes with shrimp and current.

The other piece of the puzzle is genetics. Male bluegills pass on genetics to their offspring. Just as my children will never be as tall as Shaqueille O'Neil's children, 7" male gills do not have the proper genetics to produce 11" bulls. Bruce Condello, owner of the website www.bigbluegill.com, has his own strain of bluegill called Condello gills. He has created this strain on a private pond that he manages by netting the pond every year in October. By taking out all bluegills except the largest 1/10 of 1 %, he has created a sort of super strain that can grow to 10" in sixteen months. One thing this tells us is that when anglers sort to keep the largest bluegills as table fare, we are genetically making our bluegill populations smaller. It is important that the bluegill aficionado recognizes this and opts to release big bulls and instead harvest more abundant smaller fish.

When hunting down giant Nebraska bluegills on public water, Bruce likes to look for lakes that house large concentrations of juvenile largemouth bass. It goes back to the theory of lakes only being able to support so many inches of fish. According to



Condello, largemouth bass in the 11" range are eating machines and keep populations balanced. This allows remaining bluegills enough food to pack on pounds. He also looks for lakes that have, what he describes as, high water quality. Lakes that have submergent vegetation, clear water and low nutrient loads are his top choices. Clear lakes have better sunlight penetration for weed growth. These lakes with rooted vegetation produce oxygen from the bottom up so fish don't get stressed and can continue to feed even throughout difficult periods of the year. Lakes that are highly nutrient laden lack the sunlight penetration to grow deep rooted vegetation so oxygen comes from algae and can dip to low levels. He also noted the importance of appropriate sized invertebrates for the fish to feed on in the early stages. If another species strips out the 1 mm sized invertebrates, young bluegills must become risk takers, leaving the protection of the weeds in search of an open water food source. This often leads to them being eaten by bass. He believes that having enough of the correct sized invertebrates is more important than the amount of available spawning habitat in a particular lake. Avoiding lakes with small stunted populations is paramount. Lakes with an overabundance of weeds will foster small fish and stunted populations. Ideal waters are comprised of less than 10% weeds. Heavily weeded lakes will protect more bluegills from predation than the food source can support and the population will stunt. Condello's best advice for an angler looking to ice a personal best this winter is to first, find lakes that have big bluegills and second, sort through a lot of fish. Visualize the items that a large bluegill may eat that a medium sized bluegill cannot. Big bluegills have bigger mouths than their medium sized counter parts so bigger baits are often necessary. Pay attention to the depth that the bigger fish are using. Don't be afraid to leave medium sized fish to search out giants.

The ice season is finally upon us and with it brings an opportunity to spend time with friends and family on the hard water again. Whether you or I ice a personal best or not this season, the charm is what is elusive but attainable, a perpetual series of occasions for hope (John Buchan). I guess I just love chasing dogs riding bicycles.

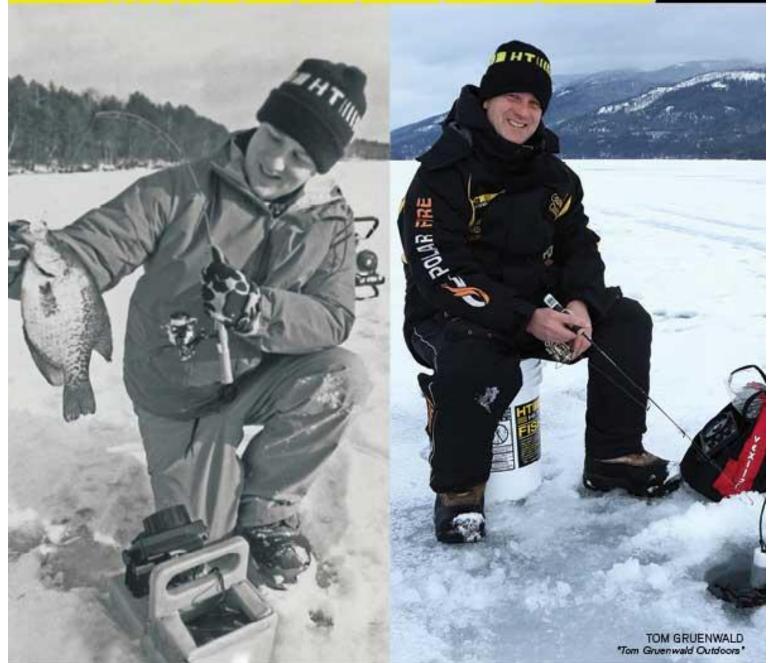
The author Garett Svir is the owner of Slab Seeker Guide Service <u>http://www.slabseekerfishing.com</u> and specializes in chasing big central Minnesota bluegills.





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The Cult of Catfish

By Bob Bohland

Catfish, long considered the fish of choice by guys in overalls and southern drawls, are beginning to develop a cult following across the Ice Belt. Though soft-biting, they are hard fighters and excellent table fare out of cold water. When it comes to targeting cats through the ice, the most popular place in Minnesota is the Horseshoe Chain of lakes in the central part of the state. Catfish were introduced to the Horseshoe Chain back in the late 1970s to help clear out the bullhead overpopulation. However, it was never imagined that they would take over the lakes. They have quickly become a favorite of many anglers, much to the chagrin of local cabin owners who see them as nothing more than a nuisance species.

The channel cats that inhabit the waters of the Horseshoe Chain are now a favorite of anglers far and wide who seek something different than the standard walleye and panfish they normally chase during the ice season. Many internet fishing forums have guys checking in from all across the Midwest to see how the ice is shaping up and how the bite is progressing; all anticipating that moment when the catfish go on their feeding binges and hoping it coincides with their time off work, often living vicariously through those who are currently chasing them.

One of the first things you should understand about channel cats is that they behave more like crappies than you would believe. They regularly are found in large nomadic schools that roam basin areas. While you will find some sitting off of the breaklines, generally, they will be out in no-man's land just swimming around. Large flashy baits can catch a few out of a school, but more often it is a livebait presentation such as minnow under a well-trimmed ice buster bobber that will produce for anglers that have found a large school of fish. Some favorites among seasoned cat anglers are baits such as a Lindy Frostee tipped with a fathead for a bobber rod once you have found the fish, and a flashy, noisy bait like a RattlN Flyer spoon tipped with a minnow head or waxies for tracking down the roving schools.

Catfish are notoriously light biting fish in the winter, so spring bobbers and noodle rods are standard equipment for experienced cat anglers. One cat-head I know has even taken it to the point that he has Ice Busters that are specifically trimmed for certain jigs. Even a small hop out of the ordinary with your



bobber is a reason to set the hook. While the equipment is very much the same, the fight is nothing like you would experience with panfish. Panfish anglers are used to hooking into small to medium sized fish that bump their spring bobbers ever so gently, but when you set the hook into a drag-screaming catfish that can top 10 lbs on occasion, it will be you that is hooked.

It isn't very often that a fisherman gets to experience consistent rod-bending, drag-screaming fun on panfish tackle, but when you manage to find one of the aptly named "catfish tornadoes" you will quickly become a convert. They are not only a riot to catch, but they are amazing eating as well. I have made everything from fish tacos to fish cakes with the flaky meat from cold-water catfish and no matter how I cook it up it is a hit with everyone who tries them. The latest survey of the lakes in the Horseshoe Chain (2011) showed the highest catfish population in their brief history, so what are you waiting for? Come join the Cult of Cat Ice Anglers, we are few, we are a little bit strange, but I can almost guarantee that walleyes will be boring after catching 30 catfish through the ice on light tackle. Join Bob on his blog at http://bobsfishinghole.blogspot.com/

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Trust Your Depth-Finder For More Ice-Fishing Success

By Bob Jensen

The pond froze over early this year, at least two weeks early and in most years it would still be a month before ice comes to the small body of water that I see most davs. Although the ice isn't safe vet, if the weather stays like it has been the past few days, we'll be walking on the ice within a This time of week. year, safety is the Number One consideration. There's

no need to take an icy bath just because you want to catch a few fish through the ice.

There are a few things to keep in mind throughout the ice-fishing season that will help you catch more fish from under the ice from now until ice-out. The most important thing to do for ice-fishing success in the mind of many of the most successful anglers is to trust your depth-finder. Do what it tells you to do. Several years back I shared an ice-house on Lake of the Woods with Mr. Walleye Gary Roach. We were after walleyes and were catching a few, but not as many as we wanted. We were fishing within a foot of the bottom in about twenty five feet of water, right where walleyes are supposed to be. Quite often





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we would see on the depth-finder a mark about halfway to the bottom. We assumed it was a whitefish or northern pike or crappie or something like that: Walleyes usually don't run that high on Lake of the Woods, or so we thought at the time. Once when Gary saw a fish up high, he raised his bait up just a bit over the mark. The fish hit the bait: It was a walleye. For the rest of the day when we saw a mark up



high, we brought our bait up to it and most of the time caught a walleye. Good learning point!

Also a few years ago when the crappie extravaganza was in full swing on Upper Red Lake: In the height of the boom, crappies would fill the sonar screen from just below the surface to the bottom. As the crappie numbers dwindled, they weren't running up high as much. The remaining giants were right on the bottom and looked just like walleyes usually look on an ice-fishing depth-finder screen. You had to make sure your sonar was tuned properly for maximum bottom separation to see and catch these crappies. Vexilar is the leader in ice-fishing sonar. Check out the new FLX-28. It provides all the features you need to be more successful on the ice.

Something I learned while ice-fishing for perch in South Dakota a year or two ago: When you can see a group of perch below your hole, if you catch a perch and plan on letting it go, put your bait back before you release the fish. It was proven pretty conclusively to me that if you release the fish first, the school might get spooked, or, if the released fish doesn't go straight back down to the school, the rest of the perch may follow it somewhere else. A little thing, but it pays dividends.

Last thought for now: When a school of fish is on the screen right below you and they won't bite what you're showing them, show them something else. Try a different color, try a different size, try a different action: Just try something different. There's no need to keep showing them something that they don't want to eat.



And now really the last thought: Keep your bait above the fish. They will go up for a bait much more readily than they'll go down for a bait.

Trust your depth-finder when you're ice-fishing. If you do, you'll catch more fish from under the ice.

Photo and Author information: Do what your depth-finder tells you to do and you will have more ice-fishing success. To see the newest episodes of Fishing the Midwest television go to <u>www.fishingthemidwest.com</u>. Visit us at <u>www.Facebook.com/fishingthemidwest</u>

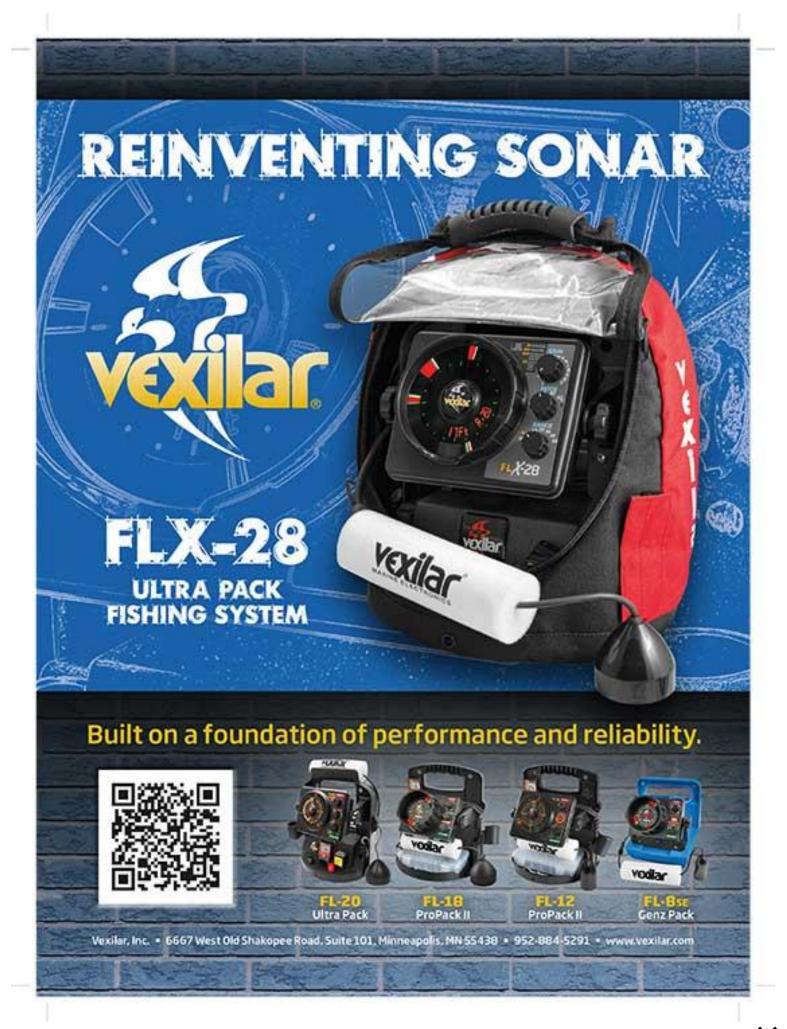




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By Brian "Bro" Brosdahl

Pulling up big walleyes, toothy northern pike, jumbo perch, slab crappies and monster bluegills through the ice is the ultimate "test" for any fishing line, pun intended. You're not only locked in mortal combat with the fish, but the elements too. The durability and strength of your line is constantly being tested as it's scraped across the ice and exposed to temperature extremes.

I'm exposed to some pretty gnarly weather as I guide day-in, day-out on Northern Minnesota's icescapes. So, I need an ice fishing line that can withstand these brutal conditions and repeated fish battles. For that reason, seems like I'm turning to braided fishing line because it is uncompromisingly strong, yet still soft and pliable.

First, the ultra-thin diameter of braid – even at heavier tests than you would normally fish – allows smaller lures like Northlands Bro Bugs Mud Bugs and Scud Bugs to sink faster, which helps me finesse big panfish out of deeper waters with ease.





Second, the thin diameter of braid also leaves less of a bubble trail on my super-sensitive Humminbird Ice 55 Ice flasher, which can be distracting when you're trying to visualize fish.

Third, the sensitivity of braid is unparalleled, which makes it a go-to line in numerous situations, including deep water jigging. Hooksets are also immediate and solid.

Braided line comes in many different size increments, which allow you to





choose the diameter that fits your fishing style. 2-, 3-, 4-, 6-, and 8 lb test are all great, thin ice fishing diameters. I like to tip my braided fishing line with a virtually invisible fluorocarbon leader, which ensures fish won't see my line when they are deciding whether or not to eat my bait. My line of choice for braid and fluorocarbon is Northland Fishing Tackle's Bionic Braid and Bionic Fluorosilk line.

The one drawback is water-wicking, which means when I'm fishing outside in sub zero conditions it can cause the guides of my Bro Series 371 rod and reel combo to freeze That's when I switch to up. fluorocarbon as a main line. The dense, sinking quality of fluorocarbon slides through a slushy hole with ease and doesn't collect ice like braid.

For these situations having two rigs on the ready is a great idea. That means I can fish braid inside the warmth of my Frabill Side Step portable fishhouse, which makes moving in and out easy via spacious side doors, and scout in the cold with the fluoro combo.

The Reel Deal

Now that we know what line to use, let's match it to the right reel for ice fishing.

While there are lots of ice fishing reels on the market, the majority are spinning reels, which introduce line twist to your presentations.

When a fish comes in to strike at your lure and you pause to let them eat it, the jig unwinds, spins and scares the fish away. I have seen this on my Aqua-Vu Micro 5 underwater camera enough times to know it's a real turn off. Also keep in mind that many ice fishing lures and jigs want to swim in a semi-circle by



design, so over-jigging can also introduce jig spin. Err on the side of less jigging is more; you'll be blown away by the results.

Over the past few years I've been designing a series of reels with Frabill called the Straight Line that eradicate the dreaded jig spin. In a nutshell, they wind and feed line in a way similar to a fly reel but are designed for ice so they don't freeze up. Plus, Straight Line reels have a high gear ratio so you don't need backing, something required of low retrieval rate reels like 1:1 fly reels, which only take in 5 to 7 inches of line per reel handle turn. The Frabill Bro Series Straight Line 371 has a 3.7: 1 ratio , which means every turn of the handle picks up 22 inches of line. This means you can fish with finesse but do so with quick jig drops and retrieves to stay on active fish.

Here's a reminder: As you change line, remember to dispose of your old line properly. Line left out on the ice will end up in the lake when the ice thaws and fish and waterfowl can tangle up it and die. It can also wrap in outboard props, ruining lower unit seals.

New improvements in ice fishing line and reels may seem like small details but can add to the ice fishing experience in a big way! Like helping you catch more fish!

We'll see you on the ice! -- Brian "Bro" Brosdahl







Product Showcase: Streamside Predator – Ice Rods

Streamside has released new editions to their amazing Predator Ice Rod series. Just in time for ice fishing season, the Streamside[®] Predator Short Handle Ice Rods have arrived. They are constructed with a highly sensitive tip to detect even the slightest nibble, yet strong enough to land a big fish. The rod is made with an IM7 graphite blank, cork handle and stainless steel guides.

Features:

- High density cork for non-slip grips
- Non-Slip Shock absorbing handle
- IM7 graphite blank
- Stainless steel guides
- Medium Action
- 28"(79g) 34"(92g) 42"(98g)

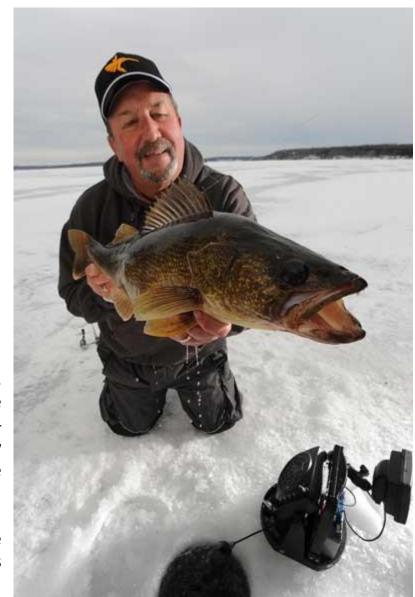
Guide Proven Walleye Plays For Garly Ice

Legendary walleye guide Tom Neustrom shares strategies for first-ice 'eyes

By Jason Herter

The venison is neatly wrapped in butcher paper, labeled and squirreled away in the freezer; the orange outfit retired for ice fishing bibs and slipon cleats. In a perfect world, there's little snow and good, clean ice is forming throughout the Ice Belt.

Whether you call ice fishing's honeymoon phase "early ice" or "first ice," one thing is certain: it's hard to beat, especially for walleyes.





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Grand Rapids, Minnesotabased guide Tom Neustrom encourages anglers to hit up fall walleye spots during early ice – could be deep, shallow or somewhere in between. Simply, if you caught walleyes there in October or November, chances are they won't be too far away.

"Typically, walleyes move to deep-water structure in the late fall – points, islands, steep breaks, deep

weed edges – so that's always a good place to look. But don't limit yourself to textbook spots and traditional wisdom. This October and November, I was catching walleyes shallower than usual in 8-14 feet," says Neustrom.

To ensure he can put clients on fish from day one of ice, Neustrom does a fair share of late, open-water scouting.

"I use my Humminbird 999ci HD SI to locate structure and fish in late fall, setting waypoints for first ice. Pop a blank SD card into the 999, save the waypoints to the card, transfer the card to the 688ci HD Ice Combo and save the spots to the machine. That way I can still use my LakeMaster card, too." <u>http://www.humminbird.com/Products/1199ci-HD-SI-Combo/</u> & <u>http://www.humminbird.com/Products/ICE-688ci-HD-Combo/</u>

One of the great things about late-fall walleye fishing is the great day bite. But during first ice, that's not always the case.

"There can still be sediment in the water from the wave action of fall, which definitely extends the bite window from morning into afternoon. Same goes for darker, more turbid prairie lakes or the bog-stained, tannic waters of the north. But if the water's clear, low-light periods are best; I'll choose to fish early morning or the last two hours of afternoon into evening."

Two other significant factors are ice thickness and snow cover.

"Be quieter during early season – the ice is thinner and transmits more noise. Second, If you have clear ice, it's going to be hard to sit in 6 or 7 feet of water and catch walleyes. Combine the two and it can be really tough, so I like to scout out spots where there's snow pack and decreased light. Cloudy days can help tremendously, especially on shallower or clear waters."



In terms of location, Neustrom says anglers can hedge their bets by fishing around the edges of still green weeds, like cabbage.

"Green weeds produce oxygen and attract life. You'll find the whole food chain: micro-invertebrates, baitfish, panfish, predators ... The cool thing about that is you get a mixed bag. You might pick up walleyes during the low-light periods and panfish and pike during the day. Great place to set up shop with the family," says Neustrom.

Once again, Neustrom typically has a slew of waypoints set before stepping foot on the ice.

"In fall, I like to scout with Side Imaging to find large weedbeds, setting waypoints all along the edges and any pockets, funnels or points in the weeds. Then I motor over and verify my marks with 2D sonar. If the water's clear, I can tell if the weeds are still green. Or cast into them, intentionally snagging vegetation to get a closer look. An Aqua-Vu underwater camera also works wonder for scouting weeds."



Neustrom confides the weed-program is an ace he keeps up his sleeve for trips with clients.

"Add clear water and minimal snow cover and I'm headed to weededges – or deeper rock in 12-16 feet. Both places offer excellent cover and ambush spots for walleyes. Don't just head for that first deep breakline."



Tom's 'Silent Partner'

Given Minnesota's two lines per angler regulation, Neustrom says jigging is his core program, although he'll stack the odds by using a nearby tip-up or dead stick. He fishes aggressively with a single tip-up by drilling eight or 10 holes, moving the rig hole-tohole every half-hour or so.

"I treat the tip-up like a 'silent partner' that I can move around to test new waters shallower, deeper, on an inside turn, whatever. It'll tell me pretty quick where I should move to jig, too."

Neustrom's preference lies with traditional wooden rail-style tip-ups for their reliability and ease-of-use.

"I also like to use heavier test braid, which doesn't get tangled as easily or cut and freeze into the ice. For pike, I prefer 60-80-



pound; for walleyes, 20-pound, something like Sufix 832. Then it's a small barrel swivel and an 8-pound fluoro leader for walleyes or a 20-pound fluoro leader for pike. Hook size all comes down to the size of your bait, but I tend to go smaller with hooks wherever possible for walleyes. This minimizes the tendency to reject and spit the bait."

Neustrom is also fond of adding a small glow bead above the hook, which he says can make the difference in some situations, especially darker waters.

"One of the biggest mistakes anglers make is letting their bait get too wild. Position the right size and weight split-shot on the leader to act as a fulcrum to pin the bait and define a strike window. You've gotta remember, a fish's metabolism slows in winter. If that bait is freaking out, swimming everywhere, the fish might just decide it's too much work for the calories."

Another mistake Neustrom says walleye anglers make is not maintaining their tip-ups.

"Always check the trip mechanism and make sure line flows easily off the spool. Too much resistance or split shots that are too heavy—and that walleye's going to spit the bait."

Another flaw in most anglers' tip-up programs is what he calls "operating distance." In other words, don't position your 'silent partner' too far away.

"If I'm using a dead stick, I like it pretty close to me, like 10 feet or closer. The key is to respond quickly rather than chase it down. Same thing for a tip-up; I rarely set them more than 10 yards from where I'm jigging."



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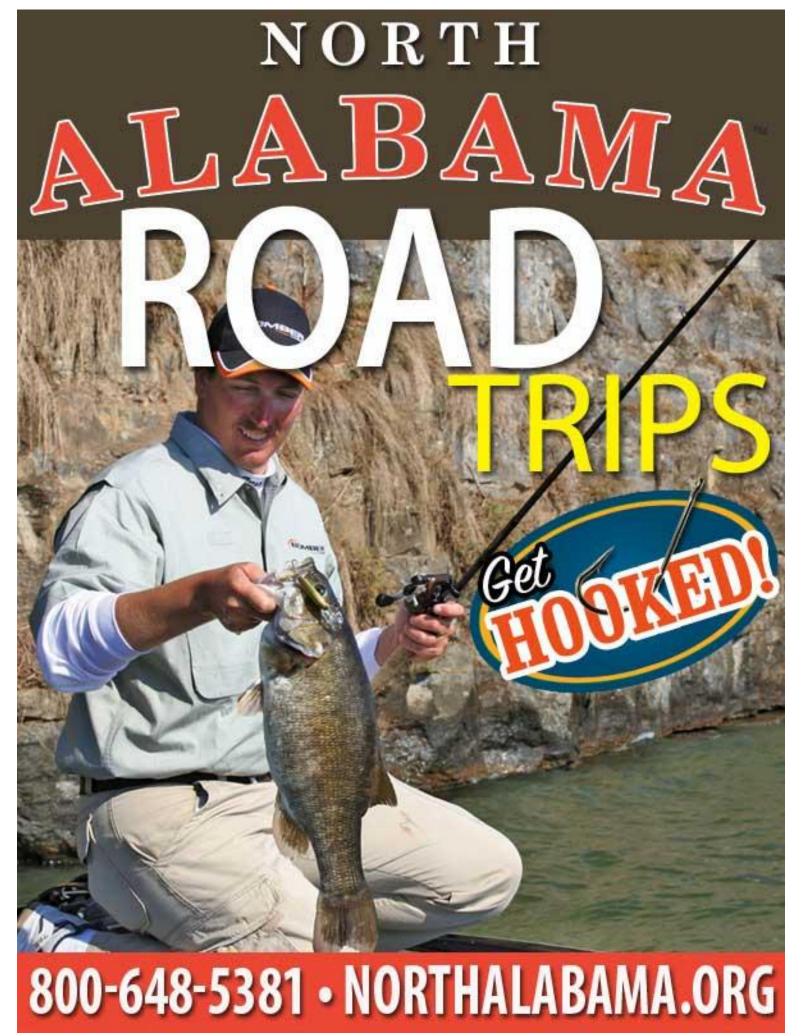
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MAN COMMANY





But Neustrom says he still catches the majority of his early-ice 'eyes actively jigging.

Tom's Go-To Bait

"A Jigging Rap has a wide swing that most ice baits just don't have. Plus, it looks like a baitfish to attract fish from a distance and also displaces a lot of water, which walleyes can feel with their lateral line. Most of the time, you're getting hard aggression bites. It definitely brings out that kill instinct. Sometimes I'll add a scent component, too, by adding a minnow head to the center treble."

For anglers new to the Jigging Rap game, Neustrom suggests a small assortment of baits in the #5, #7 and #9 categories.

"The #5 excels for tough, finesse bites; the #7 is my standby; and the #9 is great for deeper water."

With respect to color, he suggests starting with something that resembles the prevalent forage base of where you're fishing.

In terms of rigging, Neustrom attaches a small barrel swivel to 8-pound mono main line and a 12- to 24inch 6-pound Sufix fluorocarbon leader above the bait to combat line twist. He likes the addition of a Fast Snap or Quick Clip to attach the Jigging Rap.

"If you're spooling your reels with mono, use something soft. I like Sufix Elite, which is a little softer than a lot of lines. In the winter, we're often using reels that have a smaller spool and it's a tighter fit, which leads to more line memory if you're not using a soft mono," says Neustrom.



Then, for waters 20 feet and deeper, Neustrom prefers braid for added sensitivity and its lowstretch characteristic, which provides quick and solid hooksets.

Although many anglers prefer a longer rod for fishing Jigging Raps, Neustrom sticks to 28 – 32inch models that he can still fish in a portable shelter, typically medium-action with a little bit softer tip.

"When I'm fishing deeper I'll move to something with a little more backbone so I can get a better hookset," says Neustrom. "Obviously, you can go longer for fishing outside."

Ice Safety

While Neustrom recommends fishing early ice for more walleyes, he's quick to stress the importance of proper ice fishing safety.

"First, make sure to check ice thickness to ensure safe travel whether on foot or an ATV. Be especially mindful of areas with current and don't get too brazen; no walleye is worth your life. I look for 4 inches before fishing on foot and 5 inches for ATVs. And by the time we have the foot of ice needed to sustain a truck, we're moving from earlyice into mid-winter strategies."

Fish with Tom this winter in the Grand Rapids, Minnesota, and the greater Itasca County area: <u>http://www.mnfishingconnections.com/</u> or call 218-327-2312.







GO ICE-FISHING... IT WILL DO YOU GOOD

By Mike Borovic

Cabin fever, what's that?

If I ever experienced it, it would have been in the summer months. Hot, sticky humid weather with ticks, flies, mosquitoes, bees and air quality as thick as mud?

No thanks.

And did I mention the gosh-darn allergies too? I'd rather have my dentist drill my molars for fun.

I'm part of a different breed, a secret society of winter. My mark is a 5-gallon bucket and an ice scooper. Most often I can be found sitting on a frozen lake peering down an 8-inch hole waiting for the next hit. Yes, I'm the kinda guy who keeps his maggots and wax worms in the refrigerator, right alongside the eggs and milk.



Hello, my name is Mike, and I'm an addict. I'm addicted to catching jumbo perch through the ice.

There is nothing quite exciting as that feeling of a 13-inch perch pulling drag, tugging from the other end on an ultra light, ice-rod. Sometimes they bite and often times they just kiss it, but when they slam it... pass the wheel to Cletus and hold on Mama!

Sitting on hard water breathing in that rejuvenating fresh air is far more relaxing than sitting on the damn couch watching television waiting for the snow to melt. Fishing is just plain good old fun and catching fish is even better. It can be as simple as you want or as high-tech as you can afford.

Many folks I have talked with over the years just





don't understand it. Many folks just think its nuts, and many just won't brave the cold. Well, if you don't understand it, then I think you better try it.

Cold is something of the past. With today's high tech garments, waterproof, windproof and insulating properties available, there should be absolutely no worries. You can even enjoy fishing in the warmth, from inside many of the portable shanties now attainable, and with a 10 000, BTU heater... you'll be driven outside in a real hurry!

Over the last few years, I've enjoyed the annual trips to northern Ontario's, Lake Nippissing. There's just something about the warmth and smell of a wood-burning stove while sitting on a frozen lake watching the sun break over the tree-lined shore waiting for that first bite of the day. There are literally hundreds of ice hut operators across cottage northern Ontario's country. For a unique fishing experience, you can stay right on the ice in a comfortable, fully equipped housekeeping bungalow. Bungalows generally feature propane heat, lights, TV, BBQ, stove and as well as a table, chairs and a kitchen complete with pots, pans, dishes and utensils. All you need to bring is your sleeping bag, food, towels, etc. If that's still too rough for ya, then just fish the operator's day huts and crash in their cottages or cozy cabins at night (where you'll at least have running water).

These guys provide all the





transportation to and from the huts along with all the bait as well. In most cases, they do provide tip-ups if you haven't any fishing gear of your own. Just talk to your operator or guide at the time of booking and let him or her know your concerns or needs.

This is a fantastic way to self introduce yourself to ice fishing if you don't know of anyone to show you. It also makes for a great family vacation away from the norm, and you could even turn it into one heck of a romantic weekend getaway where your wife just might catch the big one! www.thingsithinkiknow.com



Go to IceTeam.com to learn more and become a member for FREE!



DAN'S FISH 'N' TALES®

Glowing Ice Fishing Success

By Dan Galusha

Color selection is always a hot topic when it comes to any sort of fishing. In ice fishing there are basics that seem to work for many species, but one that is extremely productive is a selection of "glowing" lures.

My first choice for panfish is Custom Jigs & Spins glowing colors of Glow Brite/lime, Glow Brite/pink, Glow Brite/blue and

plain Glow Brite. While there are several models in which these colors are available, my selection would consist of the Gill Pill, Diamond, Ratfinkee, Demon, and Ratso, in sizes 12 through 4. The sizes that I use most are 12, 10 and 8, but will go a little larger for the larger crappie and bass.

Glowing jigs are used throughout the ice season, but they come to the peak when the fishing is tougher. A good time for "glowing under the ice" is when there is a heavier snow cover, or milky ice, which blocks the sunlight penetration. On this same line of thought, using these jigs in heavy brush piles, deeper water, and stained water (not found a great deal when ice fishing) have also had success.

These jigs hold there charge for a good length of time. Although it is not necessary, I like giving them a



charge about every other time they are pulled from the water, or whenever the bites stop coming. Many times a bite will be produced immediately after the jig is recharged.

Recharging can be done in two ways.

A cloudy day with heavy snow cover is the perfect time to use a Glow Brite Gill Pill tipped with a Gulp Rainbow Crappie Nibble for big crappie suspended around heavy weed areas.



The first is to hold it in the sunlight. If fishing in a shelter this requires putting it up to the window, or on the ice/snow outside of the door. The other way is by using LED lights. There are the Frabill shelter LED lights that fasten to the shelter supports with Velcro, or very small, pocket light called a Nuclear Flash, that is produced by Custom Jigs & Spins. Frabill's models are a single light, which is powered by 3 AA batteries, and a 4 strip light, that is powered by 6 AA batteries. The Nuclear Flash is powered by a watch type battery that normally works for 120 hours before having to be replaced, and with using it



Custom Jigs & Spins Glow Brite Gill Pill tipped with a Gulp Waxie, shown along with the alternative live wax worm.

for only a short period "flash", that means it could last for a few seasons.

Other than keeping the jigs charged there isn't anything special on techniques to learn, which means whatever is successful can only be enhanced by the glowing properties of the lure. The jigs can still be tipped with whatever baits are normally used, such as a wax worm, spike, Crappie Nibble, Gulp baits, or other prepared or live bait.

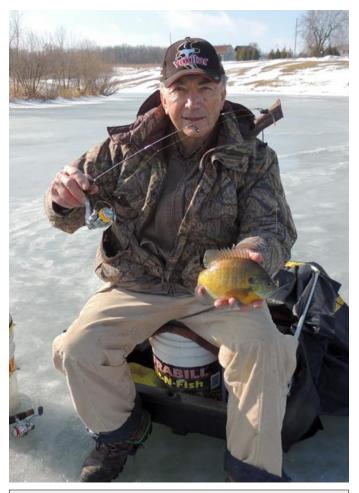
It is uncertain as to why the glowing jigs are so successful. Earlier the lower visibility situations were mentioned, and it is true that the jig can be seen well in these instances. However, I've had great success with them during times when the ice and water were extremely clear, and the fish were holding outside of cover, or over other types of structure. At these times I think it still goes back to the fact that the jig can be seen better, and as with any time of the year, a fish is going to investigate the first thing he can see. If nothing else, the "glowing beacon" peaks the fish's curiosity to investigate, and once



there, it is up to the angler to use the correct technique to tempt him into striking.

The two models of Frabill LED shelter lights, which not only light up the inside of the shelter, but also provide a recharge for glowing jigs.





On a sunny day with milky ice, Don Banning caught this nice bluegill while fishing a orange/glow Custom Jigs & Spins Diamond Jig with a wax worm. The next time you head to the ice, try some "glowing" jigs, and it is most certain you will have "glowing success under the ice".

Christmas isn't far away, so think about a selection of glow jigs for the ice angler on your gift list – they make excellent sock stuffers. In case you are the angler on that list; drop a few hints to others.

For more information on Glow Brite and Nuclear products visit the Custom Jigs & Spins website at <u>www.customjigsandspins.com</u>, and for the Frabill LED Shelter Lights go to <u>www.frabill.com</u>.

If you have any questions about this or another fishing subject drop me a line through the Dan's Fish 'N' Tales[®] website at <u>www.dansfishntales.com</u>, which links to ODU Magazine, Custom Jigs and Spins and Frabill websites. Also, check out the Dan's Fish 'N' Tales[®] Facebook page, click on "like" and follow some of my fishing reports, tips and other fishing information.

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

Stop Trying to Feel Bites!

Feel the jig, know the bites

By Mark Strand

At the heart of the ice fishing system Dave Genz pioneered is the belief that we can fish through the ice with the same approach we use in open water. This mindset changed everything about the sport, because it allowed us to take the pursuit to the fish rather than anchoring ourselves over one hole and hoping they show up.



The system needs a good auger, because you have to bore a hole every place you drop a hook. Beyond that, everything hinges on being able to drop an offering quickly and fish it quickly, to trigger bites from fish that are ready



to eat, right now. This is the efficiency factor Genz talks about. Rather than slowly sinking and fluttering something that's nearly neutrally buoyant, the true Genz approach drops something down there that knows how to sink and get busy attracting fish without wasting time.

If you spend less time on every 'drop,' you can make more drops over the course of a day. It's a numbers game, a way to cover water. "Every drop down a new hole is like making a cast in the summertime," says Genz, and the philosophy is solid: there are a lot of fish in the lake, but only a small percentage are ready to bite right now. That's why you aim to pluck the biters and move on. Keep doing that, and by the end of the day you will have caught more than you would by sitting in one spot.

Ah, but there's a catch. Fishing this way requires the ability to feel your jig bounce at the bottom of every short, rapid movement of the rod tip. The connection is between your rod, your hand and the weight of the jig. Boomp, boomp, boomp. Feel it and you're golden, because when the feeling goes away, it often signals that a fish has taken the bait. Hookset time.

Here's where reality strikes. If your equipment is not crisp and well balanced, it's difficult or impossible

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to feel that boompboomp-boomp. If your line is too heavy for the weight of the jig (or even if it has taken on coils), you can't feel the jig. If your rod is too flexible for the weight of the jig, the jig will 'boing-boing' up and down like it's on a trampoline and you won't be able to feel it well or make it do the dance.



If you can't feel the bait, you can't detect the bite.

Even with such an aggressive approach, winter fish often half-heartedly sample things. The take can be so subtle that most of us have a difficult time consistently feeling it. That's why we see so many bite-detection aids!

Here comes an amazing piece of news: no matter how subtle a bite is, you will feel it if you stop feeling for the bite and instead learn to feel the jig. When the feeling of the jig goes away, set the hook. If you don't get the fish, assume it didn't have the hook in its mouth. Next time it happens, drop the rod tip, then set the hook. Usually works wonders.

Once you turn your fishing fortunes over to this approach, you will look like a magician out there, "feeling bites" that others can't feel.

Because you aren't feeling for the bite!

"From years of sight fishing, and watching fish on (an underwater) camera," says Dave, "you know that a fish can totally put the bait in his mouth and there's no signal up above. Don't wait to feel a bite. You just have to know that the fish stopped the motion of the lure. That's what we mean when we talk about feeling the cadence."

Feel the jig. When the jig is gone, something's up.

Let's help you do this, once and for all.

Tightlining with Feel

Genz calls it pounding when you make rapid, short movements of the rod to impart almost a vibrating action to the jig. It looks and feels real to the fish, and is magical in its ability to bring fish in and make them bite.

The biggest roadblock to fishing well with this approach is separate pieces of gear that are not in tune with one another. The weight of the jig, weight (and freshness) of line, and choice of rod have to match up. Everything has to balance or you can't perform the pounding presentation – and even if you could, you can't feel the jig well enough to detect bites.

Being able to feel the jig has forever been elusive for most people. They hear Genz talk about feeling for the weight of the bait, and feeling for the absence of the weight of the bait, but just can't feel it. It becomes frustrating, and most people end up using spring bobbers, floats and other bite-detection aids to make up for the fact that they just can't feel the jig. (Quick note: spring bobbers, floats and other devices are effective and have an important place in modern ice fishing. But to fish the Genz pounding



GENERAL ICE THICKNESS GUIDELINES [FOR NEW, CLEAR ICE ONLY]

2" OR LESS	STAY OFF!
4"	ICE FISHING OR OTHER ACTIVITIES ON FOOT
5"	SNOWMOBILE OR ATV
9" to 12"	CAR OR SMALL PICKUP
12" то 15"	MEDIUM TRUCK

SELF RESCUE IF YOU BREAK THROUGH THE ICE:

- 1. TURN IN THE WATER TOWARDS THE DIRECTION YOU CAME FROM
- 2. DIG THE POINTS OF YOUR ICE PICKS INTO THE ICE AND WHILE VIGOROUSLY KICKING YOUR FEET, PULL YOURSELF ONTO THE SURFACE BY SLIDING FORWARD ONTO THE ICE
- 3. ROLL AWAY FROM THE AREA OF WEAK ICE. THIS WILL DISTRIBUTE YOUR WEIGHT TO HELP AVOID BREAKING THROUGH AGAIN
- 4. GET TO SHELTER, HEAT, AND WARM DRY CLOTHING IMMEDIATELY

ALWAYS CARRY ICE PICKS WITH YOU



presentation, you have to be able to feel the jig.)

There is a degree of talent involved, but most people can feel the jig immediately once they fish with a balanced setup, and it's never been easier now that there are jigs made of tungsten. Yes, tungsten is a godsend.

Here's what you need:

- * A jig that can catch fish. (Doesn't matter how well you can feel it if fish don't like it.)
- * A rod that's light, sensitive and matches up with the jig's weight.
- * Line that's fresh (and stretched, if necessary, to remove coils) and matched to the weight of the jig. The jig has to remove all coils and cause the line to hang straight down at rest.
- * A reel that keeps your line from developing twist and coils.

Gearing up for Balance

This is the winter everything changes for you.

Let's start with the jigs, but we'll come back to them, so when you tie one on, you tie everything together.

Jigs

Since the start of the modern ice fishing revolution, Genz has been the stressing importance of "small jigs that fish heavy." They are a crucial part of the system, and with development the of tungsten jigs, they're better than ever.



Tungsten jigs are difficult to manufacture, but game-changing to fish with. Comparing apples to apples, tungsten is 70 percent denser than lead, and weighs 30 percent more. Again comparing apples to apples, it's much easier to feel a tungsten jig bouncing down there than a traditional jig.

Clam, recognizing what a godsend tungsten can be, developed a line of jigs made from the super-dense, super-heavy material. It's easy to spot a tungsten jig in the Clam Pro Tackle line: if it has Drop in the name, it's made with tungsten.

Rods

At the top of the Clam rod line is a series called Legacy. "As soon as you pick one up," says Genz, "you sense the responsiveness it gives you when you're jigging the lure. It allows better execution of the rapid cadence, and you can feel the lure down there."

ODU MAGAZINE VIDEO BLOCK (www.odumagazine.com)

One of the secrets, says Clam's Matt Johnson, is lighter guides.

"Putting lighter guides on our Legacy rods essentially stiffens the rod," says Johnson. "It can perform more like a blank without guides on it. The difference is striking."

Never satisfied with anything, Genz and the people he is surrounded with constantly look for what else ice anglers need. This outlook led to the development of a Medium Light rod action that matches up perfectly with certain tungsten jigs.

"Dave is all about fishing walleyes, northerns, trout, bass during the day," points out Johnson, "and the number 8 Drop jigs are a perfect size. You can pack 'em with maggots, wax worms, or a plastic and have a ball."

By now, you've got a clear picture of how the pieces fit together, and why you can't declare one rod your 'favorite' and attempt to fish all different size jigs on it. "The Medium Light rods," says Genz, "let you fish the number 8 tungsten Drop jigs on 3-pound and 4-pound-test (line). You'll catch more fish on this size bait during the daytime hours. Bigger spoons and other baits are great at prime time, but during the day they don't want a big bait. But the larger Drop jigs are the ticket."

Genz describes the need for matching the rod to the line and jig this way: "With number 8 tungsten jigs and our Light action rods, the rod would bend too far when you were trying to pound it. And the

Medium action was too stiff. You couldn't get the cadence we want. We needed this rod weight, because it lets you fish tungsten lures for larger fish in the middle of the day."

Line: Stronger, Tighter Connection

Because they weigh more for their size, tungsten jigs allow you to use heavier, stronger line and still maintain the balance and feel you're striving for.

"The lure needs to take the kinks out of the line," stresses Genz, "and now you can use 4-pound-test with some of the smaller jigs." Anglers who have typically used line that was too heavy for their smaller jigs, "can suddenly start feeling their lure," said Genz. "It really helped those people."

Summary

The equipment allows you to fish this way, and tungsten jigs are a bigger deal than you might think. The rod and line have to be in balance or the links fall apart. It's all about a distinct connection between you



and your bait, and covering water looking for active biters. It's the essence of ice fishing as Genz practices it most of the time. Only when things don't work this way does he spend time using slower presentations. Dave carries at least one pre-rigged rod with a spring bobber on it and goes to a "slow it down" approach (often with plastics) at some point on most days. This surprises a lot of people when they first hear it. But that's a story for another day.

For now, let's concentrate on getting you balanced up, feeling the jig, and knowing a bite when you don't feel one.

Photo of Dave Genz - Learning to detect bites without the aid of a spring bobber or float comes down to feel. It's one of the most elusive skills to learn, and here's the secret, according to Dave Genz: quit trying to feel the bite and focus on feeling the jig instead!

New tungsten ice jigs help us feel a distinct thud at the bottom of each jigging cycle. By matching the right line and rod to the jig weight, everything falls into place. (Photo: www.davegenz.com)



Ice Fishing in a Boat, Pre-season Scouting Secrets to Success

Just because your favorite lake has yet to freeze over doesn't mean you can't go ice fishing. No, we're not talking about performing miracles, or walking on water like another ancient fisherman once did. Rather, it's all about the fact that as water temps move into the mid to low 40s, fish of many species are fairly settled in the same spots they'll be once the surface seals the lake shut. Find 'em first in a boat and you'll be light years ahead of the pack once safe ice arrives, with fresh hungry fish awaiting lures below. Last year, three top teams at the North American Ice Fishing Circuit (NAIFC) Championships hopped into boats a month before the December tournament and discovered some real gem fishing spots-places that eventually lead to monster crappies and winning weights.

Anglers Shawn Bjonfald, Kevin Fassbind and Brandon Newbie travelled to Mille Lacs Lake in Central Minnesota on a cool fall day to literally search the water for hotspots. The key, Bjonfald noted, was the use of GPS alongside Humminbird Side Imaging sonar, which made clean sweeps of large shallow flats. The anglers' eventual quarry palm-stretching crappies and sunfish—were known to haunt very specific patches of vegetation. But on

By Ted Pilgrim

Mille Lacs' shallow southern bays, the best plant patches—including pondweed, elodea and coontail only grew in small gardens. The choice greenery housed the biggest panfish, too, but was often surrounded by empty acres of clean sand substrate. "Finding these spots with Side Imaging in a boat," noted Bjonfald, "was infinitely more efficient than it would have been on ice. We searched hundreds of acres of featureless, fishless water before finally finding our best spots; can't imagine how many holes we would have had to drill had we waited to start searching at first ice."

IceBoat 04For Bjonfald, Fassbind and Newbie, the strategy involved motoring slowly across expansive 10- to 15-foot flats in a parallel grid pattern, simultaneously inspecting 100 feet of real estate on both



sides of their boat. Bjonfald's Side Imaging unit clearly uncovered not only the location of vegetation, but revealed the tallest pondweed stalks interspersed with little openings perfect habitat for monster crappies and sunfish. "Not only did the Humminbird reveal the best weed beds," he said, "Side Imaging also let us zoom in and drop GPS waypoints on tiny pieces of turf—areas we returned to during the tournament to catch big panfish."



Bjonfald and his comrades noted that the coordinates were often so precise that literally just one hole was needed to position them directly over a sweet spot. The teams also attributed their precision and eventual success to Aqua-Vu Micro underwater cameras. "In prefishing, anytime we saw something promising on screen, we would drop the camera optics and verify it—often spotting fish relating to specific plant stalks. When we returned to fish the Championship, the fish were still there." After the two-day competition, which hosted nearly 100 top-qualifying teams from across North America, the enterprising anglers had nearly made a clean sweep of the tournament, capturing 1st-, 3rd- and 4th-place finishes.

Bjonfald took "big fish" honors with a trophy 2pound crappie, eventually finishing 4th. Fassbind and partner Nick Smyers took 3rd, while Brandon Newbie and partner Ryan Wilson iced nearly 25 pounds of panfish to win the Championship by over 6 pounds.

Newby and Wilson also won two other qualifying events in the 2012-13 NAIFC season, leading to a Team of the Year title. Recently, Bjonfald and



company were back afloat Mille Lacs. Once again, they searched the shallows for those elusive giant crappies and, perhaps, another successful showing at the upcoming 2103 NAIFC Championship, December 21 and 22. Even though most of us won't be fishing for anything more important than



bragging rights among buddies, the same strategy of scouting for fish prior to the big freeze can make you a big winner. Wait for one of those nice, calm late November or early December days. Launch the boat and you'll likely have the lake all to yourself— and set the stage for the best ice season you've ever had. Photos courtesy of Bill Lindner Photography. This article was produced for <u>Bass Pro Shops</u> <u>1Source</u>, where it appeared first.







\$25.00 cash entry all proceeds in support of Kids Fishing For A Cure



Ice Fishing Insights From Ice Force

By Quintin Biermann

A master of the shallow-water, flat-land bites of South Dakota's Glacial Lakes and Prairie Region, Quintin Biermann tackles walleyes with an aggressive approach and has a soft spot for sumo panfish as well.

Q: What makes the bite the toughest in your area and how do you overcome it to catch fish?

A: The biggest thing is pressure on shallow, small lakes. Fish are turned off by noise.

To counter this, fish early – be coming off the

ice when others are coming on – and fish late. Wait it out. Also, fish non-typical structure, like shallow weed edges for perch, when everyone else is fishing the basin bite.

Q: What's the biggest myth in ice fishing?

A: That fish are not aggressive. Fish are predators and are always eating. I rely on big baits like Rapala Jigging Raps and Jigging Shad Raps to consistently put big perch on the ice. Don't sit idle with tiny jigs and small minnows waiting for a bite – go to the fish!

Q: What's the number-one thing you see other anglers doing wrong when they are not able to get consistent bites?

A: Continue using a pattern that is not working or fishing the same spot. When the fish are off the mud bite eating small invertebrates, fish a point, tip or mid-lake hump with a large spoon in silver or bright colors. Trigger your own feeding frenzy.

Q: In what specific ways does using the best products in the industry help you catch more fish consistently?

A: I use my Otter Pro XT1200 to stay on the ice longer and be more comfortable than most anglers. This allows me to wait out late bites that other people miss, because they are too cold or have been worn down by a long day fishing in less than desirable conditions.

When I use my MarCum LX-7 to graph large schools of perch, I know by the separation

features whether I'm in a school of jumbos or a school of dinks and need to move on.







Deep structure can be relative but the location is often reserved for walleye or perhaps lake trout. So often, anglers targeting panfish, sunfish in particular, often focus on basins but the search is so often concentrated on transitions that correlate with inside or outside turns. These classic spots are definitely worth the exploration and often hold fish. Sharp breaks featuring good weed growth that cut along a basin are another classic top pick.

One of my favorite locations however if it exists is any type of mound or hump that exists in the basin. These basin humps or rolls don't have to be big or obvious; sometimes they are no bigger than twenty square feet. They are usually best if they are soft bottom that is no rocks or harder substrate. Just a bump on the bottom that sticks up from the basin. Some of these sweet spots only poke up a foot or two from the bottom so they are not always obvious on a contour map.

Finding these locations can be difficult. Many lake chips offer one foot contours but many lakes have vague contour mapping with five foot contours. Reading basins with

Basin Bump Gills



existing contour maps first means understanding how contour maps are often made. When a lake is surveyed, a boat basically drives a grid pattern across the lake mapping the sonar data. This data is than converted into a contour map with a computer program. The wider the grid, the less accurate contours. On more popular and heavily fished bodies of water, the grids are tighter and more time is spent to create the most accurate map.

Smaller, less fished bodies of water don't create the demand to spend the time to create the best map, simple economics. The best way I have found these small soft bottom humps is to spend time scouring a map zoomed in all the way looking for anything irregular. Remember that a hump might not look like a hump, could be a finger or turn on the contour. What you will also find are locations that look like a hump does exist on a map but finding that no such rise exists. Finding these locations can be frustrating and takes some work and a little bit of luck but they are worth the work.

What I like about these hard to find locations is the fact that they often hold big fish and they also seem to recharge. That is, they hold big fish and attract other roaming fish in the area. You can sit over these spots because they just seem to pull in new fish that are in the surrounding basin. When you find these sweet spots, save the coordinate.

Typically on these types of locations, we find panfish simply hovering around the bump. As a rule of thumb, the more stained the water, the closer these fish seem to ride to the bottom but even with clear water, we typically find fish within ten feet of the bottom when they are on these locations. Especially the larger fish. Because of the depth involved with many basins where an angler might be fishing as deep as thirty or more feet, presentations that cut through the water column fast are important.

Tungsten jigs like the Northland Tackle Tungsten Fireball teamed up with three pound Bionic Flourocarbon is a solid combination. Another sometimes overlooked presentation for deep panfish are small spoons like the Forage Minnow. On tough bites, the Forage Minnow with a hanging treble hook

can sometimes work better than the small horizontal jigs often associated with the finesse required to catch fish that are off. Reason being is that with a tough bite, the fish will suck and spit more and sometimes bump the wrong end of a jig.

For deep panfish, I like the hook set response and leverage of slightly heavier rod blanks because it does take more leverage to set the hook fast in deep water. If you are using a spring bobber, combine the spring with a stiffer rod action. Our Meat Stick line up of glass noodle rods are extremely popular with anglers because of the fast hard backbone that enables you to snap a solid hook set.





With the small spoons, no matter how the spoon is turned and no matter how the fish approaches, there is a hook facing the fish. There are pros and cons of every presentation and picking the jig or lure is often a result of efficiency. Spoons shine whenever you need to pull fish in from greater distances and need more visibility. They work great on tough bites if the fish are not giving you that second gulp. They can work against you if you are on a better bite where it takes longer to unhook a deep treble hook versus a single hook or if the fish won't approach the larger profile.

Tungsten jigs and small spoons however are a good one two punch because the mood can often change and vary through a typical day. Some of the deeper basins seem to fish much better with some sunshine overhead. You will often get windows of activity where you mark fish and pull your hair out, fighting for



winter, make a point to analyze your favorite panfish holes further and be observant as these locations might not jump out you. Sometimes, we have stumbled on to these spots with dumb luck. When you can find these main basin bumps however, they typically hold fish.

every bite. A good bite will often come in spurts and is usually ignited by catching a fish. This is why spoons and tungsten jigs work so well, you need to get back down fast before the activity dies.

These types of patterns or locations are a favorite of mine because they usually are hard to find and don't get fished much. These spots also usually hold larger fish. We often find smaller fish scattered throughout the basin all through the water column but the larger panfish seem to claim these small pieces of structure for their own. This







Gearing Up For Hardwater Adventures

By Dan Johnson

Ice fishing season is fast approaching and hardwater warriors are busy preparing for all of the great action to come. To help you gear up for your best winter ever, veteran iceman Bernie Keefe offers these timely tips.

"It won't be long now," grins the affable yet hard-fishing guide, who hails from the high-country paradise of Granby, Colorado. "But there's still time to stock up on great new gear, as well as give your existing equipment little TLC help а to everything perform flawlessly from first ice to spring breakup."

Prepping for success yields icy good rewards.

As a full-time winter fishing

guide who targets lake trout of lunker proportions in the unforgiving but fish-rich environs of the Rockies, Keefe knows a thing or two about the need to keep gear in fighting shape, or suffer the consequences. "For example," he begins, "Chipped or cracked rod guides can damage your line, leading to catastrophic failure at the moment of truth."

Since that moment may be when a 30-pound laker gives once last, violent head-shake before ascending to our side of the ice, Keefe does everything possible to avoid such heartaches. "Check for damage by running an ordinary Q-tip through the guides," he says. "If the cotton catches on any irregularities, chances are the guide could abrade your line and cost you fish. Replace it, now."



Though casting is a non-issue during the winter, Keefe nonetheless cleans, oils and otherwise pampers his reels with care bordering on obsession. "Fighting big fish is no easy job," he says. "You want a seamless performance throughout the battle, and drags in particular have to perform without a hitch."

Keefe also religiously spools each reel with fresh line. "Don't risk the fish of a lifetime on last year's line, which may be damaged or weakened," otherwise he says. As far as personal picks, Keefe says 10-pound-test Berkley Trilene 100 Percent Fluorocarbon a stellar is choice for super-size trout, especially when paired with a 40-inch, heavy-power Dave Genz split-handle rod from Clam Outdoors.



Smooth drilling is key to Keefe's winter strategies.

Since he also targets a salmonid smorgasbord including rainbow trout, Keefe also needs supple fishing line that won't coil like a slinky when deployed with a light jigs or spoons. Fluoros, monos and braided mainlines of a bit lighter test are fine for smaller fish, though a low-vis leader can be key to tricking wary trout.

Keefe's Vexilar flasher is his window to the underwater world, which explains why he checks the transducer cable and all wiring for signs of fraying or loose connections. "Clean and test the battery, too," he adds.

In a similar vein, Keefe's heating systems are scrutinized as well. "I give my Mr. Heaters a thorough cleaning, then put a fresh bottle of fuel on each and fire them up to make sure everything's working properly," he says. "If there are any problems, check the thermo-coupler."



Same goes for your ice auger. "Get that old fuel out of there," he advises. "Inspect the spark plugs and start the engine to make sure it won't let you down on the ice. Also, either replace



the drill's blades or at least pick up a spare set. While you're at it, an extra spark plug in your tool kit can also turn out to be a trip-saver."

While there's nothing quite like fishing outside in shirtsleeve weather against a rugged mountain backdrop, Keefe fields a fleet of Clam ice shelters to keep clients comfortable and effective, no matter the conditions. "Set up your huts prior to first ice," he says. "Clean them up and repair as needed, so they're as ready as you are when it's time to hit the lakes."

A fleet of fit flip-overs keeps Keefe's clients comfy.

Also on Keefe's pre-game checklist is taking stock of tackle. "Inventory everything," he says. "Figure out what you need to fix, and which new lures to purchase, so you can bring your A-game to the ice the first time out." In the fix-it category, Keefe repairs or replaces bent and broken hooks, and touches up the points on everything.



As for beefing up his arsenal with new tackle, Keefe carefully eyes new-product reviews and peruses retailers' latest offerings, both online and in person. "Manufacturers are stocked up now for first-ice success.

always coming out with hot new products," he explains. "Keeping up with these trends can help you catch more fish. Take tungsten jigs, for example. Tungsten fishes heavier than lead, so you can fish smaller jigs in deeper water, which can be critical in finesse situations.

One of Keefe's favorite purveyors of new and noteworthy tackle is <u>www.clamoutdoors.com</u>. "Clam has everything from tungsten jigs and special pliers designed specifically for them, to ice rods, shelters and the warmest apparel on ice," he says.





So You Just Picked Up Your First Vexilar Flasher and Now What Do You Do?

"The Story Behind The Lights"

By Jason Durham

it down and try to make more sense of the different elements that affect your display, such as bait targets, ice conditions, bottom content, flat structure verses sharp breaks, different cone angles, Ice-Ducer positioning in the hole and gain/sensitivity settings. All of these different elements can and will affect what the lights on your Vexilar are telling you.

Preparing To Fish

Always check and re-check the surface of your transducer from time to time while fishing. Ice or even a thin film of slime or dirt may weaken the effects of the transducer. It is a necessary part of making sure your transducer is making a solid contact with the water. Just being in the hole sometimes isn't enough. Slush, ice or even frost may develop on the face of the transducer so you need to wipe it on your pant leg or arm to make sure all foreign substances are wiped off the face of the transducer. We call this

Modern ice fishing has been and always will be about seeing your bait among other things. Understanding what your electronics tell you is one of the most important aspects of becoming а savvy angler. For years, anglers been have fishing with Vexilar flashers, primarily for ice fishing. This has become an indispensable tool for the serious winter angler.

But what do the lines or lights on the screen really mean? n depending on how the gain/sensitivity is adjusted. What color should it be? Drop the transducer down in hole and one the bottom looks clean and crisp, but in another hole it looks long and ragged. Why is this? In the next few paragraphs, we'll break "wetting the transducer." It is wise to do this several times throughout the day. This will help you get the maximum performance from your transducer. Failure to do this can result in a weak signal on your display.

Gain/Sensitivity Setting

What's the first thing you do after you drop the Ice-Ducer in the ice hole and turn the Vexilar on? You probably adjust the gain control knob to get a signal showing what depth you're in. However, you should start with the range setting first. Here you will want to start at the first setting—0-20 foot range or 0-30 foot range depending on what model you have—to see if you get a bottom reading. If you don't get a reading, chances are it's deeper than 20 or 30 feet. Then you'll need to go to the next depth setting to find the bottom. Once you've done so, then it's time to adjust your gain/sensitivity setting accordingly.



Too Much Gain

The Gain Control knob is used to regulate how much of the signal we want to read. The strength of the signal sent out by the transducer is constant, but the return (echo) is adjusted by the Gain Control knob. Think of it as being in a crowded room with lots of people talking, but you only want to hear the person in front of you. If you put your hand behind your ear and try to just listen to the sounds directly in front of you, all the noise and clutter behind or around you diminishes. The gain control knob works similar in that you can focus in on only the targets or signals closest to you. Increasing the gain setting will reestablish contact with the lure, but if you find yourself turning up the gain too much, you will make the unit over-sensitive, and all the signals become blobs of color rather than distinct targets.

Vexilar uses a three color system. Why different colors? These colors indicate the strength of the return signal (echo) coming back. Green is the weakest signal, with orange being stronger and red showing the strongest signal. A green bottom signal means either the gain is turned too low or that the bottom is extremely soft. If you have your gain ideally adjusted, then small objects show up as a green line. If we consider the size of our jig as the smallest object that we want to see, then the gain should be set to view it as a green object. For Example: When a fish approaches your jig it may first show up as only a green line as it comes from the weaker outside edges of the cone (listening area), then the colors start to change as it moves closer and closer to your jig, ultimately transforming to a red target as your jig merges into the larger fish signal – get ready for a strike!



Many times it appears that a fish rises up from the bottom to reach your jig. In actuality, it is really coming in at the same depth as your hook but since the fish is further away from the center of the transducer signal, it looks as if the aggressive fish is moving from the bottom up.

Bait Targets

Every angler should really take the time to study what a tiny, 1/64oz jig really looks like on the dial of a flasher. When lacing one, two, three maggots or even a piece of plastic on that same jig, what do you see? If you examine your Vexilar flasher closely, you'll notice the four different



bait offerings show up segmented on the screen—and they should—because each target (bait) will reflect sonar sounds differently and only a Vexilar is sensitive enough to show that! You'll also detect a difference in signal strength when using a horizontal lure verses a vertical lure. Since a horizontally positioned jig provides more surface area for the transducer signal to bounce off from, due to its horizontal angle, it appears larger when compared to a like-sized vertical hanging bait, even though the two jigs may be identical in size and weight. With this knowledge, you'll know when it's time to re-bait.

That's a definite advantage when using a Vexilar!

An angler may periodically encounter a time when it seems difficult to achieve a consistent signal for their bait, sometimes even disappearing completely from view. This issue can be the result of one of several variables. One possibility could be lake currents that push your bait out of the cone angle. This happens quite a bit on larger lakes and rivers.

Another possibility could be that the bait itself moves to the outside of the cone angle. Lures like the Chubby Darter are meant to move horizontally, but occasionally swim beyond the scope or cone of the transducer. Just looking down the hole at your line might give you a clue to know if your bait is below you or off to one side. Simply repositioning the transducer around in the hole often puts the bait back on the display. This is especially common in late winter when thick ice makes it difficult to drill a straight hole and your transducer may lay against the ice pointing at an angle where it cannot see your lure. Turning up the gain can re-establish contact with the lure, but too much gain makes the unit oversensitive, and all the signals become blobs of color rather than distinct targets.

Ice Conditions

When most anglers think about ice conditions, we think about safety and thickness of the ice. Instead, let's consider how the ice affects the signal of your Ice-Ducer transducer. When lowering your

transducer into the water do you place it near the top of the hole, down the middle of the hole, or do you place your Ice-Ducer so it hangs below the bottom of the ice? Any way you choose is fine, but each scenario will give you different readings on your Vexilar. If you have your transducer positioned near the top of the hole and there's 12 inches or more of ice, it may display "clutter" throughout the top foot or so of your screen and the thicker the ice, the more "clutter" that's created. It's ok to have your transducer up high or down low in your hole. It depends if seeing that extra "clutter" bothers you. More and more anglers are starting to keep the Ice-Ducer up high, so it's easier to take out for when you're



Weed Tops At 5 1/2'

Bottom at 12' Open Pocket Under Canopy

battling the "big one!" It also makes it easier for hole hopping (when anglers move from hole to hole looking for active fish). However, if fishing in shallow water, or for suspended fish high in the water column, this clutter may begin to encroach upon the area your bait is in, making it difficult to find between the random signals created by the surface clutter.

Another consideration is the position of your Ice-Ducer. If your Ice-Ducer is leaning against the side of the hole, it may be difficult to see your bait. This is because the signal of your transducer is shooting at an angle verses straight down. Try to keep your transducer from touching the side of the hole to get the most accurate reading below you. Remember, the strongest signal is straight down from the center of your Ice-Ducer.

Bottom Content (hard vs. soft bottom) Bottom content can be important if you're looking for bottom holding fish like walleyes and perch. Many anglers use a 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 directly below. Walleyes love to move along transition edges, like places where rock turns to sand or sand switches to silt. What we have



learned to do is compare bottom signals from one area to another and these transition zones can be spotted using your flasher.

To begin the hunt for bottom content changes, set your Vexilar gain to a specific setting, say about 50% of the possible gain setting level and leave it there. Start shallow and move deeper and deeper until you find the transition point where the hard bottom turns to silt. The harder the bottom, the "tighter" or thicker the bottom red signal will be; meaning you'll see more red and the bottom will have a short tail. If the bottom signal band is wide and shows more orange and green, this indicates that the bottom content is soft. Softer bottoms absorb signals and make the return echo appear weaker. Refer to the diagrams here. A weak signal may even be shown as the bottom turning to only orange or even green in extremely mucky areas.

Flat Bottom vs. Sharp Breaks — Dead Zones

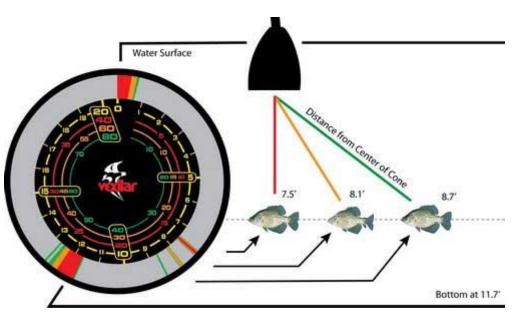
Depending on the slope of the bottom, there'll be a big difference in how close you can see fish or your bait near the bottom. A flat bottom allows you to see everything very close to the bottom. In fact, you can rest your jig on the bottom and even the slightest lift will be visible on your Vexilar. However, if the bottom directly below you has a steep slope to it, you may have to raise your jig a foot or more to see it on the display. The reason for this is called the "dead zone." The dead zone is a condition where the high side of the bottom slope is actually closer to your transducer than the bottom directly under your transducer. Your Vexilar will mark the bottom at its highest point. Anything below that resides in the

dead zone. When fishing an area of the lake with dead zone conditions, the only thing you can do to reduce the effect is to use a transducer with a narrower cone angle. This will not eliminate the problem, but it will reduce the area of the bottom that is covered, and thus reduce the size of the dead zone.

Here's a related tip. Have you ever wondered why while fishing near the bottom it seems as though the fish are coming up from the bottom on your Vexilar screen? Sometimes it almost looks as if the fish are coming up through the mud or silt from the bottom. You can bet this fish is approaching from the side instead of from below. Your Vexilar will mark fish in the same way it does bottom. As the fish moves from side to the center of the cone, the fish appears to simply come straight up through the bottom signal. This is very helpful to understand when fishing perch and walleye.

Different Cone Angles (9, 12, 19) Ice-Ducer Position in the Hole

Besides affecting the amount of bottom your Vexilar covers, the transducer cone angle directly affects signal strength. The reason for this is simple. Imagine an adjustable flash light, where the light can be changed from wide coverage to a narrow spot light. The light bulb isn't getting brighter or dimmer when adjusted; it's just putting the same amount of light into a smaller or larger area.



Transducer cone angles basically work the same way. You can gain apparent power by going to a narrower cone angle, but you sacrifice area of coverage. Which one do you choose?

To answer this question we often talk with anglers about where they fish most often. In depths under 30 feet, the 19 degree works well. The 12 degree is better for depths to 45 feet and the 9 degree is recommended for water beyond depths of 45 feet. A need to turn up the gain higher than 50% to see your bait indicates a stretch of your transducer's limits. Adjusting the gain higher than 50% greatly increases the amount of interference your unit will display from other nearby sonar units and just make it hard to achieve good target I.D.

Summary

In summary, "The Story Behind the Lights," is a composition of elements that involve the components, settings and adjustments of these components and the interpretation of the readings/feedback we receive from the Vexilar unit itself. Vexilar has been working since 1960 to better understand our underwater world and making it more accessible to the public for everyone's enjoyment. Our brief explanation of "The Story Behind the Lights," is an overview for understanding your Vexilar flasher. With this, you may start to understand why certain fish can be found in some areas and not in others, why one lure/bait works better than others and so on. We at Vexilar are continually striving to make our products easier to use, better to understand and more reliable.



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FISHING





Icing the Perch of Winter

By Justin Hoffman

Perch through the ice one of life's are greatest pleasures. For many seasoned ice anglers, it's a back-tobasics approach to fishing — standard and simple rigs, large

schools of fish, and delicious fillets for the dinner table. For the beginner, it means relatively easy fishing with the possibility of 50 or 100 fish days! By following these simple tactics and techniques, sticking to lakes that hold healthy populations of fish, and spending the time needed to find the fish, you'll be on your way to bucket loads of perch and broad smiles.

Where are They Hiding?

One key tip to remember when searching for perch is to keep moving. Perch gang up in big schools during the winter and will spend the days cruising in search of food. If you can intercept one of these untouched pods, you can be sure of dynamite fishing, as long as you give them what they want and are prepared to move with them.

You'll find that your best bet to start, as soon as the ice is safe enough to venture on to, is the shallows. At the beginning of the hard-water season, the shallow water bite is on big time, and the fish will readily bite. Your lure will hardly make it down the hole, before another hungry perch grabs your offering with almost reckless abandonment. Action like this can be hot for days or even a week, depending on how hard the shallow fish get pounded. One thing to keep in mind is that ice fishing for perch is a popular sport, and the ice can become "crowded." If you can keep ahead of the next person, and find an untouched school, you will reap the rewards.

Undoubtedly the time will come when the shallows will be devoid of perch. Fish will now be found in deeper, offshore areas, yet can still be easy to find if you search for them. Begin by trying deeper water adjacent to shallow spawning areas. Another good bet is finding areas between islands or off of points. Perch will often be found throughout the entire water column, so it is often a good idea to experiment





with depths. Unlike the walleye, which is usually found on the bottom during the winter, perch will often suspend throughout the water column. The key is to experiment and probe the depths, while making a mental note of how deep that first fish was caught.

A productive way to find out where the fish are, in relation to the lake, is to talk to hut operators or local tackle shops. They will be more than happy to give you the information, and this has often saved the day for myself. Another key is to look for the huts and the crowds of anglers. Hut operators are in the business to make money, so you know their huts and paying customers will be in the vicinity of the fish. Finding these areas can definitely pay off.

Tactics

The first thing to do, once you arrive on the ice, is to start drilling holes. Drill a half dozen in a zigzag pattern and drop down the transducer of an ice sonar to see if fish are present. (If you don't have an ice sonar, you will have to fish each hole blindly in hopes of finding some action.)

Begin the day with a small spoon, (tipped with a miniature shiner, maggot or Powerbait micro), or a small tube jig. Work all areas of the water column, from a foot below the ice to inches off the bottom of the lake. What you're searching for with these faster-moving presentations are the active fish, which

will show you the location of a school. If after five or 10 minutes you still haven't connected, then move on to the next hole to see what's down below. Once you've caught a few fish from a hole, it's time to slow down your presentation, and also set up a secondary line, which will be your tip-up.

The best placement for your tip-up is approximately 15 to 30 feet from your primary jigging hole. This will be set close enough to get to quickly, and will also be in the vicinity of the school you located. If the action starts to die down in the area that you're fishing, it's simply a matter of moving outwards till you connect with the migrating school. A dozen winters ago this scenario took place and became one of my





fondest fishing memories. I was fishing the famed Lake Simcoe, located in Southern Ontario, in early February with two good friends. The weather was glorious, and, in fact, enabled us to fish in just our t-shirts! After the first few holes were cut, we hit pay dirt. Jumbo after jumbo perch was flopping on the ice, and we really had our hands full. At times, all three of us had fish on at the same moment, not to mention our tip-ups being pulled down. But as soon as the action started it would die down. So off we moved outward to connect with the roaming school once more. It didn't take more than a few holes and we were knee-deep in fish again. At day's end our smiles told the tale — a bucket of tasty perch, sun-tanned faces and a whopper of a fish that evened the scales out at 1.5 pounds! Who says ice fishing isn't fun?

Equipment

<u>Rod and Reel</u>: For jigging purposes, any good quality ultra light or light-action rod will do the trick. These are usually between 24 and 28 inches long and must have a sensitive tip. (This will be necessary in order to work the lightweight lures to their utmost effectiveness and also to relay bites better.) A quality ice rod of this style can usually be found for around \$30. Match this with an ultra-light reel with a smooth drag system,



and spool it up with 2 or 4 pound-test monofilament. Use 2 pound-test if you are using extremely small baits or if the fish are really finicky. If there is a healthy population of walleye in the lake, it may be best to use 4 pound-test line, just in case you hook one of these bonus predators.

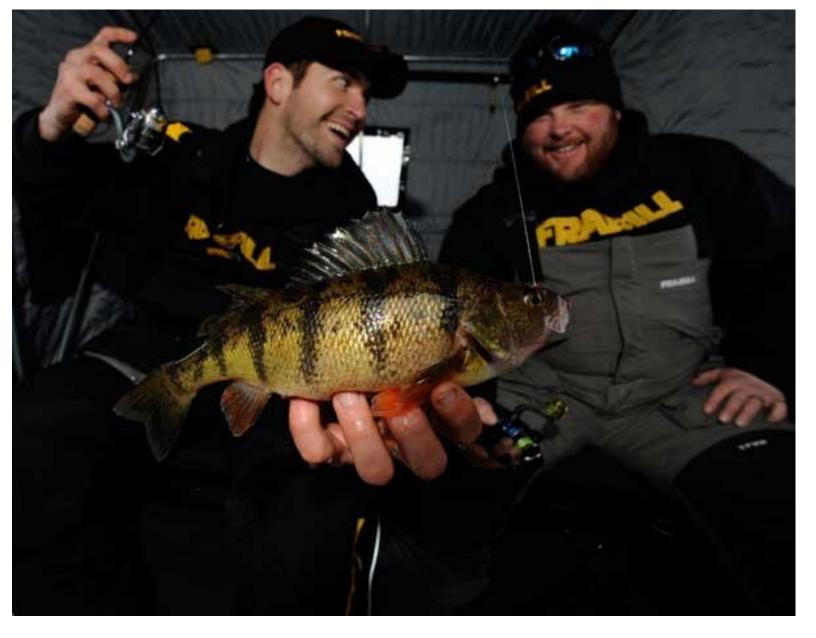
<u>Tip-Up</u>: Any of the standard tip-ups will do for perch fishing, as long as they are smooth and sensitive. Many people even use a simple willow-branch, with line attached to one end, out on the ice. Tip-ups are very inexpensive and can be made quite easily from a few pieces of wood. The most effective presentation to use with a tip-up is a spreader rig. This is a weight attached to your main line, with two or three single hooks spread out a few feet from bottom. Attach a lively 1 to 1.5 inch shiner or pinhead minnow through the back, just below the dorsal fin, and you're on your way.

Lures: There is a myriad of lures for perch fishing out on the market, but my best advice is to purchase a half dozen or so, and see which ones work best out on the water. Some of my favorite lures that have produced for me in the past are any of the spoons in the 1/32 ouce to 1/8 ounce range, such as the Forage Minnow. Micro tube jigs in bright or natural colors, in the above-mentioned sizes, can also be dynamite, as can the swimming Rapala jigs. Experiment with size, color and tipping options (shiners, maggots, meal or wax worms), and sooner or later you'll ring the dinner bell. The simplest presentation can be key, and often times I have produced dozens of fish with a small hook and shiner, slowly jigged up and down.

<u>Ice Sonar</u>: As I alluded to earlier, an ice fishing sonar is invaluable for those that spend time on the ice. These units will help you locate fish, ascertain what depths they are relating, and bottom line: put a ton more fish on the ice. For those that don't own one, I definitely recommend picking a system up.

As you can see, ice fishing for perch is a wonderful way to spend a winter afternoon. By following through with these tactics and techniques, you'll be on your way to becoming a successful perch fisherman. Here's to a happy ice season to you all! This article was produced by <u>Justin Hoffman</u> for <u>Bass</u> <u>Pro Shops 1Source</u>, where it appeared first.





Best Lines For Ice?

Application is name-of-the-game for determining best ice fishing line

By Steve Pennaz

Whenever you play on the fringes of extreme, the choices you make truly do impact success.

Ever see what -25 degrees does to motor oil? How about fishing line?

When I started ice fishing line choice was simple. You used mono on "jiggle sticks" and Dacron on tipups. Pound test was determined by size of fish targeted—2- or 4-pound test for panfish, 8-pound for walleye, and 20 or so for pike.

The biggest issue I struggled with back then was line memory. Cold, stiff mono went down the hole in coils so I'd load the line with enough split shot to get it straight, then select a float large enough to keep it all from sinking!



Fortunately, numerous advances in fishing line have taken place since then and now you can find the right line for every ice fishing situation. So, what's the best line for ice fishing? All of 'em.

I'm not kidding. Depending on the application, I'll use a monofilament, super line or fluorocarbon.

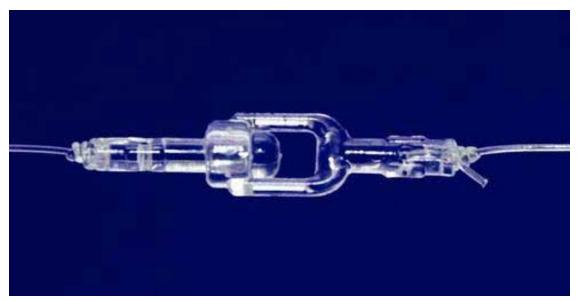
Choosing the right ice fishing line comes down to two questions: 1. What do you need the line to do? 2. How strong do you need it to be? The line you choose to jig lake trout in deep water is very different from the line you need for catching shallow-water 'gills. There is no ONE best line for ice fishing. It's very much application specific.

Whatever line you choose, pay particular attention to line memory. Low memory increases sensitivity and more detected bites.

When to choose mono

It's really hard to beat a good monofilament when fishing in shallow water, say under 20 feet. Advanced products like Berkley Micro Ice have low memory and stay pliable in cold weather. And although monofilament typically absorbs some water, the formulation of Micro Ice absorbs less, meaning it resists icing and getting caught in spring bobbers and guides. It also has some stretch, which also puts the odds of landing fish in your favor. I almost always use mono when fishing crappies for this very reason. They call them "papermouths" for a reason.

These days, 3-pound Micro Ice has become my go-to for shallow-water panfish fishing. It's skinny enough that fish aren't line shy and strong enough to land those bonus bass, pike and walleye that come along—if my drag is set up properly.





Fluoro made for finesse

Today's fluorocarbons handle much better in cold weather than early formulations and in situations that require the ultimate in finesse it's the line I go to. Nearly invisible thanks to low light а reflectivity index, fluoro makes a difference in clear or heavily-pressured waters.



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One great example is sight fishing trout under the black shroud of my Frabill portable, where I sit head tilted down, actually watching trout swim through turpentine-clear waters via a couple 8-inch holes. Fluoro's near invisibility also makes it

the line of choice for tight-lipped crappies and bluegills, or walleyes bellied into the bottom, during frontal systems.

Fluorocarbon also sinks, which makes it a great choice anytime you're fishing small, light jigs. With fluoro, you can often get away without having to use split shot, an unnecessary component more anglers should jettison. The fall rate of fluoro also adds to getting your bait back down into the strike zone quicker when fish move into your vicinity. For waters where fish move in and out fast, it can make a huge difference.

And although many anglers believe fluoro has zero stretch, in actuality it does stretch, which means you can land bigger fish with a smaller diameter test when combined with a smooth-drag, high-quality spinning reel.

The past couple years I have been running 8-pound fluorocarbon on my walleye tip-ups and I've found my catch rate has gone up tremendously. Not only is fluoro nearly invisible, its weight helps keep minnows where you want them—near bottom. For neutral or negative walleyes, this can be key. I've



watched high-pressure system walleyes on my Aqua-Vu that balk at chasing a shiner or fathead that swims up and away from them. The split shot act like a fulcrum keeping the minnow on a well-defined leash.

Similarly, for pike rigs I alternate between Knot2Kinky wire and 50-pound fluoro, depending on the situation.

Super line time

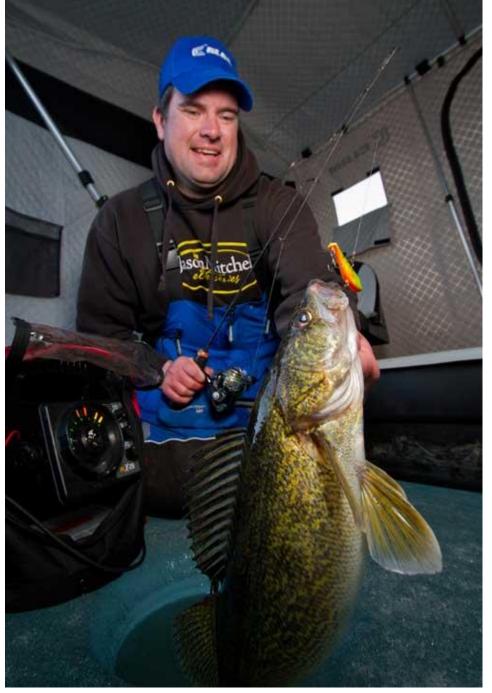
I use superline when fishing 30 feet or deeper because the lines offer superb sensitivity at those depths. Likewise, because there's almost no stretch, hooksets are immediate even at depths of 40 feet and more. Keep in mind that at these depths light penetration is often limited anyway, so the more visible aspect of super line doesn't come into play.

The nice thing about super line is you can up your break strength, too. Most super lines also offer considerably smaller line diameters for comparable break strength, which means you can go up in test for peace of mind. Also, the small diameter means it cuts through the water easier, so can get your bait back down to fish in deep water faster. For those rare situations where water visibility is still very clear below 30 feet, I simply attach a fluoro leader to the super line via an Aquateko Invisaswivel.





Observations on the Ice Walleye Scene



By Jason Mitchell

trends Many and mindsets that originate over the open water season eventually transform on to the ice scene. There was a time when walleye anglers had a hard time putting anything on a jig besides a shiner. Today, soft plastic and water soluble soft baits have traction with the walleve crowd. The soft plastic replacing live bait trend has slowly gained a foothold on the ice walleye world. Just like open water, soft plastics will never replace live bait but they are a great compliment and with certain situations and applications, work much better.

For ice anglers, many of the productive soft plastic options for walleye are merely tipping agents. Anglers are using lures where they traditionally tip the lure with either a minnow or minnow head. Now nothing smells or tastes as good as the real thing. What many ice anglers have discovered however is that tipping the lure with soft plastics in some cases adds a little

flash, a little movement as the hook swings. If the lure is moving and the strikes are aggressive, anglers have discovered that the presentation doesn't have to taste or smell good. The fish don't get a chance to analyze. This is the key to fishing with soft plastics. Sticking a soft plastic perch eye or minnow head imitation below a slip bobber and letting the hook sit is not going to catch much. If you are going to just sit and wait, use live bait. If however you work the lure however and can analyze the response of the fish with electronics, soft plastics can work better than live bait. Heres why: Soft plastics are much more durable and in some cases have as good or better action.

So often, I just use a pinched off minnow head below spoons or swim lures. Reason I like the pinched off head is because I feel like my batting average is higher on hook sets. The fish come in on the lure and hit the lure. With just a minnow head, the hook is in the mouth of a fish. There are times when a



full minnow will flop more and trigger fish that are a bit tougher and there are also times when fish want the larger profile of a whole minnow so it pays to experiment.

the fish want the lure pounded hard

where

Situations

and want the lure moving are perfect situations to replace traditional live bait with soft plastics. When fish are smoking high lift fall flutter spoon presentations, when the walleyes are punching horizontal swim lures and spoons that are getting pounded, that is the time to experiment away from bait. Last winter, I had days on Devils Lake where I caught over twenty walleyes on one Impulse Perch Eye tipped onto a Buckshot Rattle Spoon. A bag of Impulse lasts me a week.

The reality is that these trends have been happening a long time in isolated regions for both perch and walleye. Bead spoons for example have long had a following for aggressive, shallow water walleyes on Great Lakes fisheries. The bead is just a touch of color, a little flash and the concept is similar to tipping an Impulse Perch Eye on to a Buckshot Rattle Spoon. A mistake many anglers make is thinking that "their fish" on the lakes they fish are not aggressive enough for these baitless presentations.

I have heard all the reasons. "Our lakes are tougher." "That is just a Saginaw Bay thing or the walleyes on Devils Lake are much more aggressive." "Red Lake walleyes will eat anything but our fish are harder." There are truths to certain fisheries and ecosystems having specific traits that make them



more or less conductive for certain presentations no doubt. Here is the other reality however that many anglers don't understand. We often think of ourselves as adapting to the fish but the truth is fish also adapt to us. If we fish with finesse and assume the bite is going to be tough and fish for nonaggressive fish, we will find the non aggressive tough biters. If you don't fish aggressively or at least give the fish that option at times, you will not see aggressive fish. Very rarely do you ever see an aggressive response from fish with passive presentations.

There are so many times where the fish want the lure moving, they lose interest if you back off the tempo or cadence. Electronics have taught us that. A pretty solid game plan is to start out with





an aggressive presentation especially during prime time windows like sunrise and sunset or when fishing new water. Assume that there will be some aggressive fish and cover water to find them. Soft plastic options shine for this. Not only do you cover more water by fishing multiple holes but you also cover more water below the hole by working the lure in a fashion where it can be seen, felt and heard from

greater distances. Soft plastics stay on the hook during this process.

There are times when these lures can and will catch fish without tipping at all. I have often had more luck with walleyes with Chubby Darters without tipping the lure. Rattle baits also work well without tipping. Traditional horizontal swim lures like Puppet Minnows and Jigging Raps can be fished with no bait. Spoons, especially flutter spoons can be worked without being tipped. On some western reservoirs in Montana, Wyoming and Colorado, anglers are catching walleyes ripping large flutter spoons like the PK Flutter Fish.

Fishing lures for ice time walleyes with no bait is a leap for some ice anglers. The soft plastic tipping options available to ice anglers today kind of bridge the two worlds. I think it is safe to say that most winter walleye anglers learned to fish with the traditional minnow and bobber routine, eventually graduating to tipping a minnow onto a spoon. The next leap is using a lure and trusting in the action of that lure to trigger fish. Now don't think that one mindset is better or more advanced because that is a mistake some anglers make. By getting confident



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however with these different fishing styles, you will have another arrow in your quiver. There will always be times when an angler has to break out live bait but what will surprise many anglers is how often you don't need live bait. What also surprises some anglers is just how much fun these walleye bites can be.

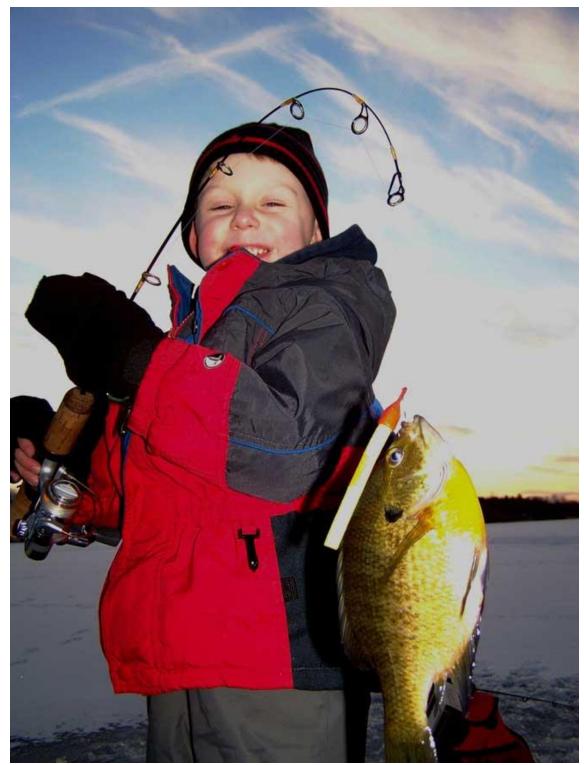


PANFISH PANACEA: ICE MEANS FAMILY FISHING FUN

How to minimize hassle and maximize fun with a few simple tips

By Joe Mallard

Custom Jigs & Spins pro-staffer Loren Keizer spends plenty of time on the water and ice, much of the



time with his wife and kids.

"For our family, fishing's a lifestyle. Both my wife and I think it's important to make sure our kids have every opportunity available to fish and be outdoors. And one of our favorite times is late ice. Fish get more active, the weather's nicer and panfish opportunities are plenty."

But, as anyone with kids can attest, there's far more involved than jumping in the truck and driving to the lake. Longtime North American Fisherman editor Kurt Beckstrom once summed it up perfectly: "Remember, when you take kids fishing, it's their fishing trip, not yours."

Keizer's approach echoes Beckstrom's wise words. "One thing I've learned since taking my son out these last few years is that the focus turns from me to him. Forget about always





needing to be the one to catch the fish. Take time to teach your kids how to enjoy the sport, understand electronics, set the hook, the basics of biology and conservation, etc. By focusing on them over you, you can create some lifelong memories you'll share and talk about for years!"

Keizer has a host of recommendations that can spell more fun (and more fish) on the ice

for any family.

Pre-ice prep

"Just like sending kids out to play in the snow, they need to have on the right apparel when heading out on the ice, even during late season."

His check list includes waterproof boots, a warm coat and bibs/snowpants, waterproof gloves, wool socks and a warm hat. "But don't be afraid to bring along extra boots, snowpants, gloves, socks and pants. If a foot makes it down the hole, your outing could be done in short order if you don't have extra clothes to keep the kids dry and warm. Using bread bags as a boot liner isn't a bad idea, either. That way, if they dunk a boot their socks stay dry."

Second, Keizer advises bringing snacks—and lots o' 'em. "Just like being out in the boat during the warm weather months, snacks can keep an outing enjoyable and prolong the trip for another hour or two. We all know how calories can boost our energy levels when things don't quite go as planned."

As your budget allows, invest in or borrow additional fishing electronics for kids. "You don't fish without 'em, why should kids? My son loves having a flasher in the hole so he can 'fish like dad.' Plus, he's learning how to read it! And an underwater camera can bring plenty of enjoyment, too. Help kids identify their bait and fish and you'll surprised by how quickly they catch on the program!"

But Keizer admits that no matter what you do, some days their attention span just doesn't hold. "Sometimes a quick pull on a sled, some snow football or a quick ride on an ATV or snowmobile is a good diversion until a late-afternoon or evening bite."

Take shelter

"Kids do a good job of letting you know when they're cold, but make sure to keep an eye on them. Sunny, calm days are great for fishing outside, which makes the experience that much more enjoyable, but sometimes you can't pick the weather and that's where a portable fish house comes in handy."



He says pop-up "hub" style shelters, like the Frabill Ambush Outpost are light, compact and easy to put up or down and will fit into the trunk of a car. "Flip-over shelters, like the Frabill Ambush Side Step, are great, too, especially when used with an ATV or snowmobile. The side doors on the Side Step make it easy for the kids to get in and out of the house without having to walk over everything."

When it comes to heaters, Keizer's a fan of Mr. Buddy products. "Since adding my boys to the ice fishing experience, safety definitely comes first. Unlike a sunflower heater, where the entire heater gets red hot, Buddy and Big Buddy heaters have a very limited area that gets hot and even that is protected with

a grill. Plus, Buddy heaters automatically shut off if they get kicked or tripped over. This makes it safer for kids and your shelter."

Location, location, location

After you've assembled all requisite gear for a family outing, Keizer says having a solid game plan of where to fish is key. As time allows, he recommends scouting areas ahead of time to eliminate unnecessary wandering around with kids to find fish.

"For late-season panfish I tend to look for shallow weeds and flats with adjacent deep water. With more sunlight coming through to shallow waters, weed growth will start here first, reinvigorating aquatic life, much of it on the panfish menu. Some of the best places to look late-season are the same places you spot green weeds during early ice," says Keizer.

"Also, if you're new to ice fishing, don't be afraid to go to community holes. But position yourself on the edges of the group, because a lot of time the intense



fishing pressure pushes fish off to the sides of these groups, especially crappies. And that can mean some pretty steady action, even when the group of houses isn't doing so hot."

Presentation: Keep it simple, meatless

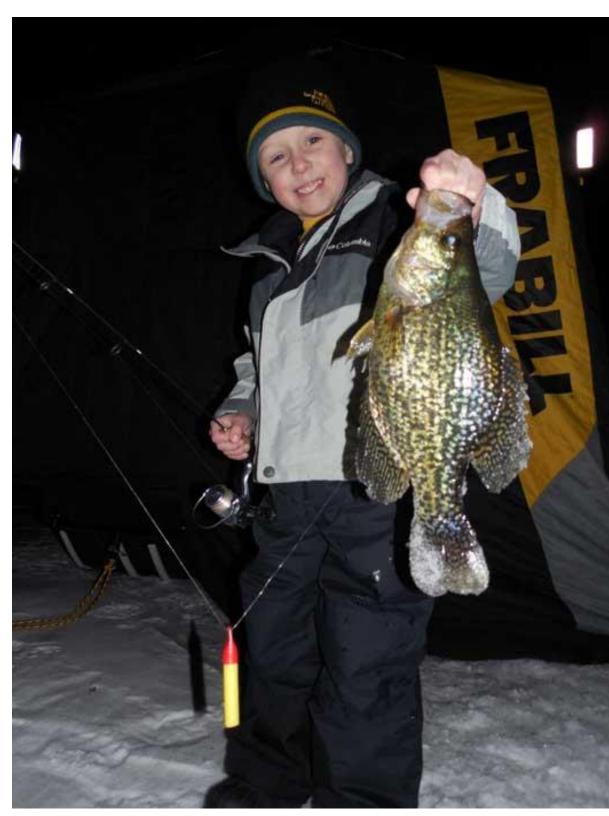
When it comes to presentation, Keizer's a proponent of leaving live bait at home. "A Rat Finkee with a gold head and green body is my all-time favorite late-ice panfish bait. Ratsos and Shrimpos are great, too. Their lively soft-plastic bodies work great in shallow water and their fall is a bit slower than some of the other jigs out there. A small Chekai or Diamond Jig with a plastic tail is another great option. Great

thing about all of these baits is you don't need to worry about live bait, which helps keep the action going with kids!"

Parting advice

Keizer says that keeping kids warm, dry, entertained, and catching fish will help make some great memories for the future and instill a natural love for the sport.

"These early years are also great for getting kids started on the right foot with conservation. My oldest son, Lucas, is always asking about what fish we're going to keep, why we need to throw some of the fish back, etc. I have had the opportunity to explain to him why we release larger fish to breed and maintain



a healthy fishery. Same goes for not taking a limit of fish every time we go out. Over time, kids begin to understand the importance of conservation through example and explanation. Same goes for picking up after ourselves and others. I think it's important to teach your kids how to respect and protect the resources we have."

Keizer challenges families – even those new to ice fishing – to take some time this February and March to get kids out on the ice and enjoy the great fishing opportunities present across the Ice Belt.

"Remember, by making it more about them and less about you, you're creating a fishing partner for life!"







Top 10 Secrets to put Crappies and Gills on Ice

By Matt Johnson

We once believed that the best kept secrets for targeting winter panfish were shared at local bait shops, church meeting rooms, neighborhood coffee shops; basically those unknown locations where old-timers spend most of their time spewing the tricks of the trade. On the contrary, the modern age has drastically helped define the new set of secret shared by panfish enthusiasts. Now, don't go home and tell grandpa that I'm saying he can't fish, instead just think of this article as the second chapter in the great book of panfish secrets.

#1: Stay Mobile – Portables, Augers and GPS

Yes, it might not be a secret to most, but it still seems to be the Achilles heel for most ice anglers. We sit way too long. The reason this is listed as number one on my list is because most days all it takes is a small move to put you on fish. Use the tools you have. Flip-over shelters come with builtin sleds designed to be pulled, why not put them



to use. Augers are becoming more and more efficient and user-friendly, why not burn some gas. GPS units are readily available at most tackle shops and they are more affordable than ever, why not plan your next move and take the initiative. The secret has been out for a while, now it's just time to take



action.

#2: Location, Location, Location

This one can rival the number one spot. Locating our target is usually half the battle. We constantly tell ourselves that only if we could find fish would we then be able to make them bite. While sometimes true, the fact still stands that if you can't find fish then you won't catch anything. Understanding panfish movements is the name of the game. Knowing that panfish will hold onto



green weeds at early is a good starting point. Knowing that panfish will use main lake basins much like grazing cattle can put fish on the ice during midwinter. Knowing that panfish will once again relocate in the shallows at late ice will help take away the guesswork of March fishing. These are simple ways of increasing your odds at catching fish. Understanding the structure in the lake and then adding that information into the seasonal equation will equal rewards.

#3: Proper Gear Choice – Rod, Reels and Line

It's still amazing how many anglers still fish in the Stone Age when it comes to gear. Too heavy of rods and line is one of the most common mistakes made when targeting winter panfish. Having the ability to feel and/or see the bite is crucial. Pool cue style rods are a thing of the past. The modern technology of spring bobbers and quick-tip rods are worth their weight in gold. Changing the rod is only step one, selecting the proper reel and line is the other half of the battle. Thin diameter lines are important when going after finicky panfish. Thicker only hinder lines the movement of the jig and also allow the fish to notice the unnatural appeal of what we throw in their face. We have three, two and even one-



pound test lines available from all of the popular ice fishing line companies, you need to use them. Matching the proper rod, reel and line will make a difference and can oftentimes be one of the easiest changes to make.

#4: Fish High Percentage Lakes

This means fish lakes where you know good numbers of panfish exist. This can imply lakes with both quantity and quality. If numbers are what you're looking for, then don't fish a lake with a small population of crappies. If size is what you're looking for, then don't fish a lake with stunted bluegills. Pay attention to the DNR programs and websites. Talk with friends and locals about fish populations. No sense in going after a monster sunfish in a lake that has nothing but dinks. All you're doing at that point is shooting yourself in the foot. This all goes back to doing your homework before hitting the ice. It will help you in both the success category as well as save on frustration and build confidence.





#5: Trust in your Flasher

We all like to bring friends on the ice, but none as important as our Vexilar. When trained properly, we can pick up even the slightest movements made by fish when looking at our flasher. Paying close attention to detail and specifics understanding how movements dictate the choices we make in jigging sequences and presentation options. As die hard panfish anglers, we need to focus on the little things that make a difference. Having the ability to shoot through shallow weeds to see our jig. Being able to cut down the amount of power needed to see our presentation. Watching one side of the red line (depicting a fish) moving giving off the feeling that something good is about to happen. These are all things we can train ourselves to see. We've picked our friends wisely, now it's time to trust them.

#6: Learn to Use Finesse Tactics

It's no secret but once again we find ourselves shying away from extreme finesse approaches. No longer can you use the excuse, "it takes too long for the jig to get down there." Instead we need to tell ourselves that those moments of frustration make all the difference in the world. The term "finicky" is being used more and more every winter. When situations turn finicky we need to oftentimes switch to finesse tactics. Downsizing to a smaller jig is the most common form. Tying on something out of your fly box is another important move. Figuring out ways to spoon-feed these fish into thinking that they're eating zooplankton is the name-of-the-game. This technique might come with a price (mentally of course) but the rewards are great.

#7: Artificial Presentations

Ah yes, the mighty plastic. Nothing more stands out in my mind as being the most popular trend in ice fishing. Everyone is flocking to them and for good reason—they catch fish! Teaching yourself to become a plastic ice angler can and will increase your overall productivity. We have the ability to really play the whole color spectrum and size chart. We can also incorporate drastic changes in scent and texture. But one of the biggest attributes is the fact that we fully control the movement of the presentation. What the fish devoured happened because of what we just did to it. The ability to include aggressive and negative techniques without changing your presentation is no made simple. Finesse tails dance like luring appetizers that no panfish can pass up. Artificials are here to stay!



#8: Upsizing is your Friend

On the flip-side of the whole finesse aspect, we have the much underused concept of upsizing. We are quick to downsize but are oftentimes reluctant to upsize. However, I would go as far to say that it's a fifty-fifty split on importance when triggering panfish into biting. Upsizing is typically done to match the forage, but it still gets passed up more often than not. Go into the garage and grab your open water panfish tackle box and throw it in the portable fish house. Break out the tubes, plastic grubs, hair jigs;

basically all the go-to presentations we use during the open water months. They will work under the ice and the results can be amazing!

#9: Think Natural – Color Choices

We are overrun with bright and flashy colors. Chartreuse, hot pink, ten different shades of glow; colors that sometimes catch more fishermen than fish. It's time to start thinking natural. Grab the browns, purples, blacks, blood reds... the colors that actually imitate forage in the wild. I promise you, fish will still notice your offering is there if you use natural colors. In fact, you might even see that fish are less skittish and more willing to devour whatever you throw in front of them. I'm not saying to leave the gaudy colors at home, but rather bring out your "earthy" side and see what happens.

#10: Don't Give Up!

We will have bad days, keep pushing forward. Use what you learn from every fishing trip. No matter the outcome of a trip there is always something positive that



comes from it. When something doesn't seem to be working, try something else. Don't get stuck in a rut and remember there is always another step that can be taken. Change colors, change sizes, change action, do something different. Oftentimes we tend to sit and stare when nothing seems to be working. Biggest rule here: if something isn't working, change it!

These Top 10 Secrets are in no way the only list out there, they are just ways in which I try to focus on when looking to ice more panfish. Don't be afraid to add more numbers to this list or take certain ones out. Either way, figure out a method that works the best for you and put it into action!

Good Fishin',

Matt Johnson owns and operates Matt Johnson Outdoors (<u>www.mattjohnsonoutdoors.com</u>) where he enjoys taking people on guided ice fishing trips and providing information about his favorite sport—fishing! You can contact Matt at <u>mattjohnson@mattjohnsonoutdoors.com</u>



Right now, there's a hidden hot spot in your favorite lake, and most years it never gets touched. "There's this lake I've fished my whole life," says legendary ice angler and guide, Brian "Bro" Brosdahl. "Thought I knew it pretty well. Then several years ago, I ran the entire basin in a boat armed with Side Imaging. What an eye-opener. Discovered a sweet spot that had likely been untapped for decades, maybe longer. It was just filthy with crappies and big sunfish. Still is."

The truth, Bro says, is that every waterbody in the Ice Belt has secrets to share, if only anglers will "listen." Whether it's a reservoir in the Rocky Mountains or Dakotas, a pond in Pennsylvania or a big lake in Minnesota or Michigan, the surface conceals an assortment of unusual fish attractors—submerged brushpiles, old Christmas trees, crosshatched logs, sunken boats and other alien objects. At times, they literally swarm with fish.

About Artificial Attractors

In some states, anglers and fishing clubs obtain legal permits to place artificial cover, while in others, placing foreign objects or simulated structures into the water is a major no-no. Occasionally, state fishery agencies sink artificial cover in waterways to augment fish habitat, provide sanctuaries for young fish or to create new angling spots particularly in fisheries lacking natural cover, such as vegetation. In some areas, locations of state-sanctioned attractors are marked and even published on lake maps.

Elsewhere, beyond intentionally placed attractors—legal or otherwise—nature itself has, over decades and even centuries, deposited into the water more abnormal structure than you might imagine. Erosion relocates dead trees and organic debris;



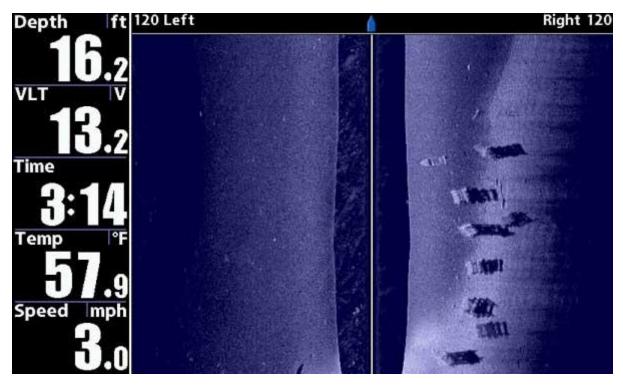
What Lies Beneath

Discovering Hidden Hotspots on Ice

By Ted Pilgrim with Brian "Bro" Brosdahl

storms sink boats; wind blows all manner of objects into the water where they eventually sink to the lake floor and are forgotten. Below, however, fish often move right into these unexpected homes. Anglers sharp enough to find them can enjoy some amazing fishing.





Treasure Hunting

In his role as a guide tournament and Brosdahl angler, spends hours and days freeze-up prior to searching for fresh, untouched locations in his boat. Often, he's not merely scouting for tournament targets; Bro especially savors spots he can tap during Northcountry long winters.

"To find these little

sweet spots, I use two tools. First, my Humminbird Side Imaging sonar sweeps water like a pair of underwater binoculars. I set the unit to blanket 150 feet of real estate on both sides of the boat. I run just off the first breakline, back and forth between 10 to 35 feet of water. The unit draws precise details right on-screen— small rockpiles, isolated old trees or the little crib I found on my favorite lake. Move the cursor over the spot, drop a waypoint and you're golden.

"Once found, I use my Aqua-Vu camera to zoom-in on the spot like a microscope. I want to see who's home. The camera shows me the exact size, shape and complexity of the cover; reveals any fish in the vicinity and even tells me if they're active, plus what they're eating.

"On almost every lake I've searched, I've uncovered at least one of these underwater jewels. Found a big tractor tire on Leech Lake in Minnesota and it held a bunch of crappies. On lakes along the Mississippi River, I've come across virgin white pine logs, lost during timber operations over a century back. Where two or more are lying on top of each other, the logs become a magnet for crappies, rock bass, perch, and smallmouth bass. Even walleyes use these things. At a recent FLW tournament I caught nice 'eyes while drop-shotting with nightcrawlers around fish cribs."



Fish Cover vs. Underwater Garbage

While Bro is dead-set against introducing artificial cover, he's not opposed to fishing the objects if they're already in place. "There's way too much trash left on the ice by anglers each winter. Stuff ends up in the lake, not good. There's crud on the bottom you wouldn't believe. I'm no philosopher, though, so I won't attempt to explain the difference between garbage and fish habitat. Either way, if I find it, and it holds life, I'm going to drop waypoints and fish the thing."



Thursday, February 19th

3pm-5pm: Arrival/Check In at Dunham's Bay Resort and Social

5:00 - 6:00: Dave Genz Seminar -Know the Jig, Feel the Bite

6:00 - 7:00: Dinner

7:00 – 9:00: Topic Seminars Topic 1: Meet the Pros Topic 2: Ice Fish 101 Topic 3: Understanding Electronics Topic 4: Roundtable Q&A

9:30 - 11:00: Social

➡ ➡ Friday, February 20th

6:30 - 7:30: Breakfast Buffet 7:30 - 8:00: Guide Assignments 8:00 - 1:00: Fishing 1:00 - 2:00: On-Ice Lunch 2:00 - 5:30: Fishing 6:00 - 7:00: Dinner 7:00 - 8:00: James Vladyka Seminar 8:00 - 10:00: Topic Seminars Topic 1: Fishing Plastics Topic 2: Tourney Tactics Topic 3: Fishing Plastics

Topic 4: Roundtable Q&A

Z 10:00 - 11:00: Social

Saturday, February 21st

7:00 - 8:00: Seminar Tim Moore

8:00 - 10:00: Topic Seminars

Topic 1: These will be

Topic 2: determined by

- Topic 3: participants
- Topic 4:

10:00-11:00: Social

Sunday, February 22nd

7:30 – 8:30: Breakfast Buffet 8:30 – 9:00: Event recap 9:00: Departure



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The difference, Bro says, between a true fish attractor and a pile of debris lies its structural complexity and whether it offers overhead cover. "The best brushpiles have a whole mess of branches and limbs jutting in every direction. Bluegills and crappies flock to these piles. Cribs full of sticks are likewise much better than those made from old pallets that lack additional limbs. I love old cedar trees. Oaks, too. They seem to last longer, while other species of wood often disintegrate after a few years. The key attractors almost always offer a canopy; some form of overhead protection."

Fish Death Traps?

"I've heard biologists refer to fish cribs as 'death traps," Bro continues. "The perception is that anglers can park over these things and pound 'em until every fish has been extracted from the lake. While there's certainly the potential to overharvest these attractors, the same can be said for any weedbed, deep basin or even an entire lake. The thing is, catch-and-release and selective harvest of big fish is still the issue. When is enough fish too many fish? It's up to us all to help manage our lakes by releasing the right fish, and keeping only enough smaller ones for a meal.

"Heck, I get a kick of out just finding these spots, using the camera to solve the mysteries of what's there and where fish are positioned. And then it's fun to figure out how to best fish 'em. Sometimes, you can simply work around the cover with spoons or plastics—this is especially true with crappies. Other times, you've got to penetrate through the canopy with a heavy tungsten jig. I like to down-view with an Aqua-Vu Micro camera, picking out small openings that allow the passage of a lure, which could conceal a bee hive of big bluegills."

The Secret Knock

Bro adds that just because you find a brushpile, sunken boat or clump of Christmas trees, there's no guarantee fish will be present. "In my experience, cribs and other attractors get used by fish in clear water way more than in dirty water. Also, in lakes lacking other cover, these structures can be important because they give small fish and crayfish a place to hide. It's also why you'll often have big bass, pike walleyes patrolling the and perimeter.



"Still, fish in some lakes rarely, if ever, use these hideouts. In other waters, they'll simply visit them to feed for short periods before moving on. Only way to know is to knock on the door with the camera and see who's home."

Bro adds: "In mid and late winter, when vegetation dies off, attractors can load up with crappies and big bluegills. During coldfronts, too, fish often dump off the flats and collect on brushpiles in deeper featureless water. When other spots turn sour in February and March, or have taken a pounding, it's nice to have a few of these little hideouts in your hip pocket."



A Cabin on Wheels:

Hunting camp is as much an experience as it is a place.

By Mike Borovic

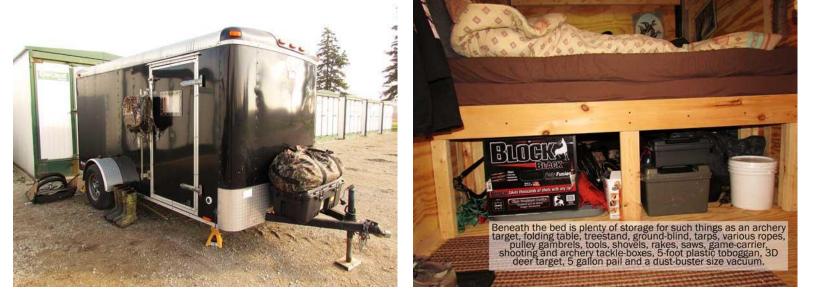


From a cozy wood-heated cedar log cabin to the backseat of my GMC pick-up... I have slept around.

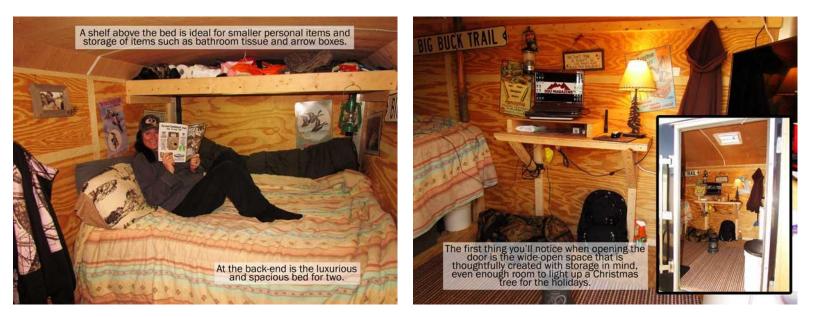
I've spent many nights crammed into the back seat of my extended cab and literally lived out of the

bed of a pick-up truck for weeks. I've also slept

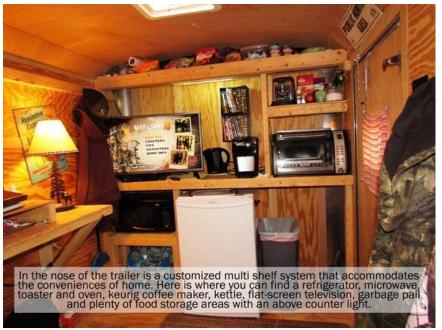
under the stars, and called an old abandon sugar-shack home as well. A four-walled canvas tent with



stove was sweet for awhile and nothing could beat that old wood-heated cedar log cabin nestled in the northern swamps of Michigan. A few campers were great, and a couple of cottages too, even that







the bed on its side and a 4-wheeler up the back ramp ready to go.

So for all you handy fellas and gals, here is something to think about but before you go, come on in, grab yourself a coffee and have a look around. Welcome to our hunting cabin... on wheels.

Whatever you're needs may be, you can adapt a cargo trailer to any situation. Most of us just can't afford to buy a camper, and for some of us, it just may not be practical. You may even have one sitting in your driveway already, just waiting to be converted into a converted garden shed in the marsh was cozy, but I'm getting older and a little less tolerable about sleeping in discomfort.

Years ago I was struck with an idea to transform my 12-foot enclosed cargo trailer that was used to haul an ATV and ice-fishing gear into a hunting cabin on wheels. Accomplishing this, I have greatly increased my time spent in the woods chasing whitetails from

a 1 to 2 week vacation period to 40 plus days afield. And within the time it would take to drink a coffee (okay, maybe 2), I can still have



multi use trailer as well. The options are only limited to your imagination. For under \$250, I think I made



the right choice in getting the most use out of my trailer.

Hunting camp is as much an experience as it is a place.

Good luck and a safe hunting and fishing season to all.







Heaven on Ice

Minnesota's Grand Rapids area proves priceless to anglers wanting to tap late ice.

By Joe Balog

I used to think it was a cruel joke that God put so much water in Minnesota, considering it would just be frozen for a large portion of the year. And then I went ice fishing there.

Over the past few winters, I've traveled to Grand Rapids, Minnesota, and each trip was simply better than the last. To say this is an ice fisherman's paradise is an understatement. Lakes abound in every direction, from small, remote ponds to openwater giants, requiring vehicles to traverse. All seem filled with fish, too.

Recently, my annual trip found me fishing on the thickest ice I have ever seen. Large power augers required extensions to reach open water but once there, the fish cooperated nicely. While I'm a sucker for yellow perch anywhere I fish, and there were plenty of hefty perch all around, the crappies were my main focus. And, once our group got the fish dialed in, I wasn't disappointed.



Perhaps the most difficult aspect of catching crappies through the ice is initially finding them. Sure, they are most often in the main basin of the lake, but crappies often cruise shallow, and frequently suspend. In fact, I once caught crappies in deep water just off the bottom, and conversely right beneath the ice, on the same day.

On my recent trip the group immediately upped the odds, using modern Humminbird technology that's just as effective on the ice as it is in the boat. The first few areas produced a few small fish, but a quick review of a LakeMaster map revealed a large, deep-water basin with a sharp drop-off not far away. This would prove to be the hotspot.

Just a few short years ago, it was often necessary to drill dozens of holes just to get in the ballpark. However, with today's mapping technology, ice anglers can often start right on the money. To refer to these maps as accurate doesn't do them justice. These maps are exact. In fact, many LakeMaster charts have 1-foot contour increments, the result of extensive surveying.

LakeMaster topo charts work seamlessly with Humminbird depthfinders; the company's 597 unit leading the charge. Just like in the boat, this is a combo unit, featuring a liquid-crystal graph with a chartplotter / GPS unit. Everything is very portable, and the rechargeable battery lasts for several days.

Once we narrowed the search to the main basin area, anglers plied the waters with a variety of techniques, from micro-plastics to minnows. Jim Edlund, a veteran ice angler across the North Country, blazed the trail and helped me get directed.

Edlund has played the game before with finicky crappies. This year, due to tremendous snow and ice cover across much of the region, the fish have been temperamental. extra Edlund pointed out the reasoning behind this winter's challenging bite: "Crappies doing are something biologists call suction feeding - quickly expanding the oral cavity and drawing fluid (and prey) in, rather than attacking prey. This calls for finesse – typically downsized jigs, a single or spike (maggot

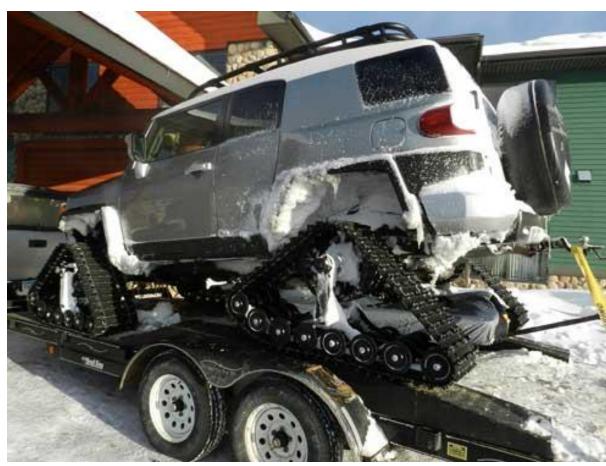


Eurolarva) or two, but even better, micro-plastics presented on light line (2-3-pound test) that mimic what they're eating."



Edlund proved his point on our trip to Grand Rapids. While others struggled and gobbed-up livebait on their hooks, Edlund found the key to be a proper looking presentation.

"I went down to three spikes, then two, then one." he noted. "As soon as I went down to one spike I caught fish, but most would just sniff. I then decided to try modified Custom Jigs & Spins Wedgee on a Chekai jig from the same maker. I cut the plastic in half lengthwise, and then sliced the end of one of the halves down the center to create a split-tail. The resulting bait undulates wildly on the fall and waivers in the water without jigging. That latter part is really important when crappies come up to sniff." Edlund went on to explain that, although we may not see these tiny movements of the bait, crappies do, and they key on it.



Time after time, Edlund would watch the fish rise to his offering and slowly suck the bait in. Using light line and the precision strike indicator of a St. Croix Legend Ice rod, we each were able to these filterdetect feeding strikes and land several crappies in the ten to twelve inch range. As daylight waned, the bite just got better, and our entire group, spread out over 50 yards, was catching fish. We kept enough for a group fish fry the

following night at the Gosh Dam Place in Deer River. The food was life changing. Perhaps the best fried fish to ever cross my lips.

Minnesota, specifically the Grand Rapids region of Itasca County, realizes they have an ice-fishing gem, and they intend to keep it that way. Daily catch limits may be lower than some surrounding areas, but they're more than reasonable to allow anglers a great fish dinner or two. Panfish, perch, walleyes, pike; all are here in big size and numbers. Accommodations are stellar, and many area resorts cater to ice fishermen. When I walk into a hotel, and, there on the front desk, is information about the heated fish-cleaning area and complimentary freezer space, I've found the right ice fishing destination.

To find yours, visit: www.visitgrandrapids.com.

Joe Balog is an avid ice fisherman from Harrison Township, Michigan, and a member of the Frabill and Humminbird pro teams.



NYS Winter Tournaments

This winter there are two main that tournament events are capturing the attention of NY anglers statewide: the NYS Ice Pro-Am Tournament Series (NYS IPA) NYS Winter and the Classic Tournament. Heavily sponsored by some of the largest names in ice fishing, these events feature large prize packages with the potential for large cash payouts.



The NYS IPA is a multi-divisional event featuring the Pro-Am Team Division (teams of 1 or 2 anglers) that requires the anglers to target multiple species and is scored on a point system to determine the winners, and the Open Division (single anglers) for novice to advanced anglers which is run like a traditional tournament where the 5 largest fish in each species category place. This year there will be two main IPA events (featuring both divisions) on Chaumont Bay/Black Lake and Sodus Bay, two Team-Only events on Chaumont Bay and Oneida Lake, and one Invitational event (location TBA).

The NYS Winter Classic is a new statewide tournament that will run from January 1st through February



22nd. Anglers can fish any waterway in NYS (ice, open water, rivers, tributaries, etc.) targeting 7 categories of fish: (lakers, Trout browns. steelhead/rainbows), Pike, Walleve, Pickerel, Crappie, Yellow Perch, and Panfish (sunfish/bluegill). There are 14 weigh-in stations spread across western and central NY (eastern sectors to be added next year). Anyone can fish this tournament. but all participants must possess a NYS fishing license and all NYS regulations This apply.

tournament has the potential to be the largest winter tournament ever run in NYS with cash payouts in the \$1,000's!

More information can be found at: <u>www.NYSiceproam.com</u> or <u>www.NYSwinterclassic.com</u>.



