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The ice fishing season is in full swing and ice anglers from New York, to New England and all across the northern half of North America are all in. This edition of OutDoors Unlimited Magazine is all about ending your season well, with tips and techniques to help you capitalize on your winter ice outings. With 20 articles inside, you can count on almost all styles of ice fishing being challenged.

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And please, enjoy the outdoors.

Larry Thornhill and William Schwarz

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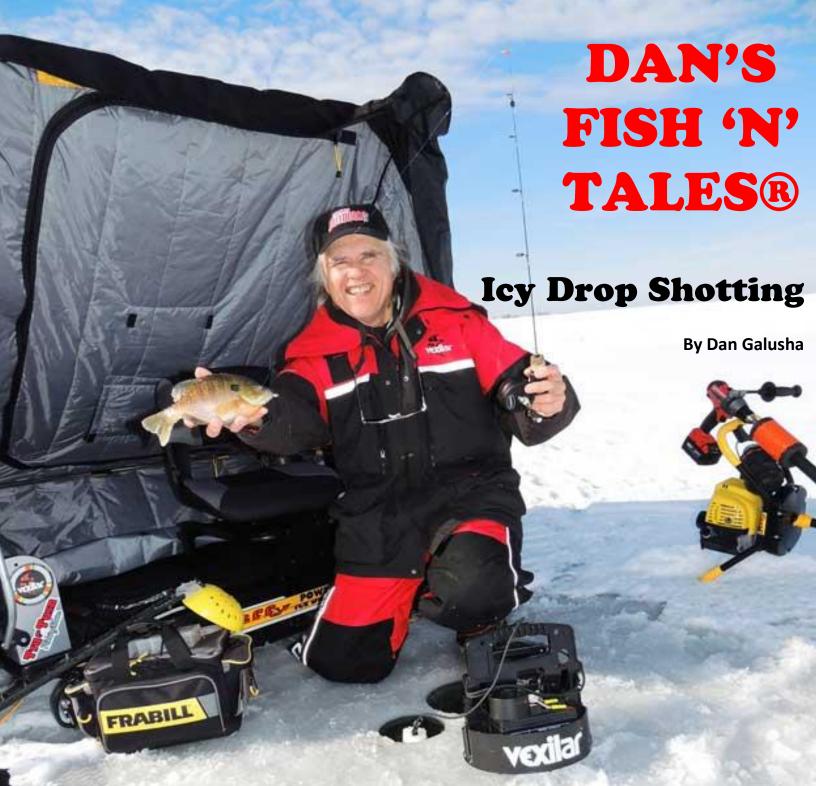
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During the past several years a technique has hit the bass fishing community with a storm, called drop-shoting. This same rig can be tailored to ice fishing, for panfish, by slightly downsizing, and, of course, not working it along as in open water.

When drop-shoting through the ice an angler should use smaller hooks and weights. This rig works better when used with a straight line rather than a float.

The hooks I use are Daiichi Salmon Egg in sizes 12, 10 or 8, and finishes of bronze, gold or Bleeding Bait, and the smaller size 6 StandOut. The size 4 StandOut hook is also a good choice if using a minnow for larger crappie. For the weight it is a BB size split shot. In deeper water, over 10 feet, I will sometimes go one size larger on the split shot.



Rigging is easy. The hook is tied to the line (A Palomar knot seems to work the best) high enough above where the sinker will be attached, that the bait will be presented at the distance above the bottom at the level where fish are holding. The split shot is then attached towards the bottom of the line. It is helpful to leave a little extra so that the weight can be changed slightly up or down. This eliminates the need for retying when fish may move during the day.



An adjustable Frabill Titanium spring bobber.

This technique is best for using when fish are holding 6 inches to 3 feet above the bottom. However, my preference is not to go much over 2 feet, and the ideal drop leader has been about 12 to 18 inches.

With drop-shoting the line is lowered until the weight hits the bottom. That is a great help in keeping the bait at the level in which fish have been found. If they move a little up or down, simply move the split shot to another area of the leader.



Bill Blomgren who is somewhat new to ice fishing, quickly picked up on how to catch bluegill suspended within a couple of feet off the bottom in deeper water.

My Vexilar FLX28 flasher unit, with the zoom feature for tighter bottom viewing, is a great asset in finding the fish holding level. This will provide an excellent starting location, and show if there are any changes in levels during the day.

My favorite locations for using the rig are bottoms with, rock, weeds, submerged islands, or no obstacles. Brush piles are not the best of places, unless it is used just to touch the top when fish are



The zoom feature on the FL22HD flasher, shows fish suspended about 2 ½-feet off the bottom.

suspended above the pile.

The bait used has been wax worms, spikes, Crappie Nibbles, and any of the newer Gulp series of panfish baits — primarily the Waxie, Euro Larvae and 1" Minnow. More up and down movement is normally needed when using the Minnow.

Once the sinker hits the bottom the line can be lifted occasionally up and down. This can be done with the entire rig, or by leaving the weight touching the bottom, and lowering the bait, then picking it up until the slight weight of the split shot is felt. This normally works better when setting the hook at least 3 feet above the weight so that there is a longer distance to fall.

Earlier it was mentioned about not moving the rig as would be done in open water season, but it can be moved across and around the hole. If moving it in this manner it is done slowly, with pauses.

A big benefit to this rig is strike detection. With a very sensitive rig, such as the Frabill's Straight-Line rod/reel combo, drop-shoting can be deadly, as the slightest of bites are felt or seen, especially when teaming the combo with an adjustable Frabill Titanium spring bobber. Another benefit is the strike/hooking ratio,

which is very good when using the type of hooks mentioned.

If you want to try something different for those bottom suspended panfish, give downsized drop-shoting a try.

For further questions on this, or any fishing subject, you can contact me through the Dan's Fish 'N' Tales® web site at www.dansfishntales.com which provides a link to the ODU Magazine web site, and the Dan's Fish 'N' Tales® Facebook page at www.facebook.com/dansfishntales - be sure to click on the "Like" button to follow some of my fishing tips and other information.

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



"Winter walleyes and panfish get high marks from me, but when the action slows down in midwinter, seems like you can always find willing toothy critters, even on the coldest, nastiest days," says third-generation Minnesota fishing guide Ty Macheledt.

From the large natural lakes of his west central Minnesota stomping grounds to North Dakota's Lake Sakakawea to prairie Macheledt's potholes, system for catching pike is a one-two punch of tip-up followed fishing by aggressive rod-in-hand combat with the unfairly maligned northern pike.

But he's not after two- or three-pound "hammer handles, "slough snakes," or "snot rockets." The fish that get Macheledt's blood boiling can peel 40 yards faster than wide receiver Calvin Johnson.

But first, Macheledt's gotta find 'em.

"In Minnesota, I always start by scouting with an Aqua-Vu Micro underwater camera, looking for weed edges with big pike food.



Spoonin' Mid-Winter Pike

That tells me where I should place my tip-ups. Once a flag goes off, I start jigging in the same area. Pike like to slash and dash. If there's food, there will be more on patrol."

"In lakes without good weeds, like some of the small Dakotas waters, I concentrate on main basin areas loaded with perch and just put in my time. Pike will eventually cruise through looking for lunch. You'll know when the perch scoot from your flasher and a big red mark appears."

To match the perch profile, Macheledt turns to ¼-ounce Custom Jigs & Spins Pro Series Slender Spoons tipped with a soft plastic. http://www.customjigsandspins.com/icefishing/hardspoons/proseries_slender.html

"I stumbled into the big plastics out of necessity. I had run out of minnows but found a pack of 3-inch B Fish N Tackle Moxis in my box. Tipped on the spoon, the tail activates nicely when you rip and let if fall." http://bfishntackle.com/3inch_moxi.html



Macheledt keeps color simple. "For spoons, I like gold in dirty water, nickel when the visibility is better. Perch patterns top the list. And for the plastic, again, typically something with green, yellow, orange, because of the perch connection."



Although he still carries minnows for rigging his search tip-ups, Macheledt is converting to a nearly all-plastics game. "You can really rip the spoon without losing your bait. Your presentation always looks the same and you keep your line in the water — instead of re-baiting all the time — which just leads to more hookups."

Macheledt advises a stout stick, heavy fluoro leader (20 lb. and up), and a spinning reel with powerful, buttery drag that doesn't freeze up in cold temps, like Frabill's heavy power 38-inch Gussy Series Ice Hunter Combo

http://www.frabill.com/ice-hunterr-series-jeff-gussy-gustafson-38-heavy-duty-ice-combo.html. "You've gotta have enough backbone to penetrate a pike's bony mouth. No fairy wands." The 36-inch medium heavy St. Croix AVID Ice Jigging Rod is another top contender. http://stcroixrods.com/products/ice/avid-ice-rods.

To hedge bets with big pike, Macheledt recommends Custom Jigs' Pro Finesse Drop Chain. "Where legal, attach a #10 Pro Finesse Drop Chain without taking off the existing Pro Series Slender Spoon treble. Just clip it on the split ring of the included Slender Spoon hook ... and you've got a super-effective stinger hook when using meat or plastic! Especially for the larger pike chomping on big perch, beefing up the profile can be key." http://www.customjigs.com/icefishing/hardspoons/profinessedropchain.html







The Curse of the Camera, And Other Fishing No-No's

By Bob Bohland

We have all had those days on the water, whether it be hard water or open, where you feel the sting of the curse coming around to bite you in the...well. Everyone has their own little curses. It could be a certain friend who seems to bring a cold-front with him wherever he goes, or it could be something that your forgot to bring with, or even the worst of all fishing curses, a banana or a camera.

I had a friend in college who was undoubtedly cursed at fishing. Could he catch fish? Sure, but anytime he came with on a trip the bite slowed for everyone else. During the crappie boom on Upper Red Lake in Minnesota, he was the only person I knew who could not catch a crappie. We tried breaking this curse to no avail, one of us would hook a crappie and hand the rod to him only to have the line break or have him lose it at the hole. He might be the only person I have ever seen curse out a 19" walleye as it came out of the hole. We all have a "cooler" friend, generally this person can't add up with a calculator how many times they have heard, "Well, you should have been here yesterday."

Many times for me, this person has come in the form of a camera man. I am not sure how the dynamics of the situation work as of yet, but put a video camera or still photographer on the lake with you and the fishing (and often the weather) will turn to complete garbage the moment they head out with you.

Some people have little habits they do or trinkets they carry to ward off the fury of the fishing gods. One angler I know has a Staple's "Easy Button" mounted on the dashboard of his boat, and every time something goes well while fishing he hits the button and exclaims, "damn, that was easy!" Some anglers name their boats, ice augers, and even their favorite fishing rods, all in the name of so-called "luck".

Every now and then, you will come across an object that can stifle the bad luck brought about by things such as cameras. One time on a trip in which we needed to get some promotional photos, we struck out on our first few lakes, only finding mediocre fish in spots where a few days prior the bigguns were ready and willing. We made a major move to a different part of the state and while getting our gear out of the trucks to bring into the hotel, one of the guys stepped on a horseshoe in the parking lot. Someone made a wisecrack that it must be his lucky day, so he put the horseshoe on the snowmobile trailer and brought it with the next day and wow, we caught some amazing fish even with the camera there! This guy went on to bring this horseshoe with him on several promotional shoots with great success, until he finally lost it off his trailer. Guess what? The next shoot he went in without his 'shoe was a tremendous failure, neither the weather nor the fish would cooperate!

My little good luck charms include a fish necklace, naming everyone of my augers, and whenever the fish disappear from my flasher, I pull up Facebook or Twitter on my phone and they will almost immediately reappear. I am not sure how that one works, but it always does. Whatever your superstition, don't let anyone fool you into abandoning it. Fishing is all about confidence; without it, we are just blindly going around a lake. Also, don't bring any bananas with when you head out on the water.

The Perch Pursuit

By Brian Bro Brosdahl

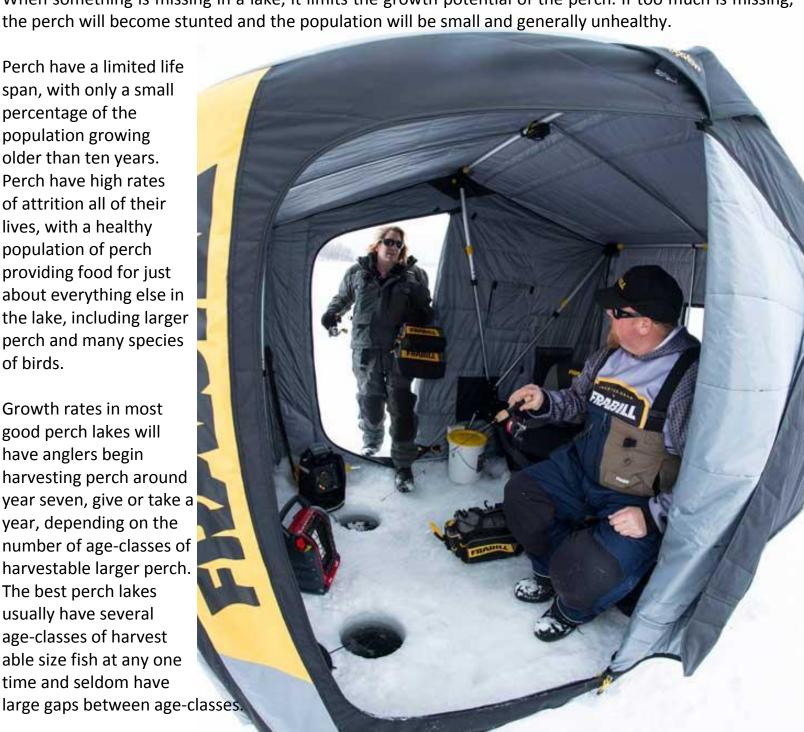
Perch have the potential to be one of the most prolific species living in fresh water if they have everything they need from the moment they hatch as an egg to the moment they end up flopping at the bottom of some lucky anglers' bucket.

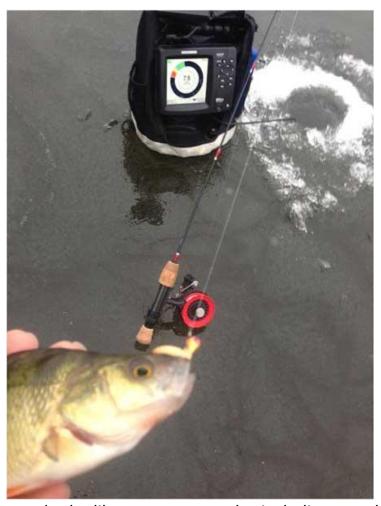
Smaller lakes seldom provide everything perch need at all times of the year in all phases of their life, so the perch are limited in some way and don't usually grow to their full potential.

When something is missing in a lake, it limits the growth potential of the perch. If too much is missing, the perch will become stunted and the population will be small and generally unhealthy.

Perch have a limited life span, with only a small percentage of the population growing older than ten years. Perch have high rates of attrition all of their lives, with a healthy population of perch providing food for just about everything else in the lake, including larger perch and many species of birds.

Growth rates in most good perch lakes will have anglers begin harvesting perch around year seven, give or take a year, depending on the number of age-classes of harvestable larger perch. The best perch lakes usually have several age-classes of harvest able size fish at any one time and seldom have





One or two poor age classes of perch in a row will lower the size of perch anglers are willing to keep. Any gap between age classes usually has a negative impact on fishing until a new dominant age class of perch takes their place.

The best known perch lakes are usually large lakes, including legendary lakes like St. Clair Lake, Onieda, and Champlain.

Perch are eating machines. They travel in huge schools and mow through food like a high school football team going through a buffet. It takes a constant supply of food to fuel a big school of perch.

Perch are also spawning machines. They lay their eggs on standing weeds like a bunch of third graders with arms full of tinsel allowed to go nuts at a Christmas tree farm.

Perch are delicious to eat with liberal limits. Almost

everybody likes to eat perch, including perch lovers from Montana to Maine. Anglers from Wisconsin, Minnesota and North Dakota are particularly fond of perch and target them most of the winter.

Fishing for perch can provide anglers with great action during the winter because the fish are usually concentrated into larger schools. Once anglers locate a school of keeper size perch, there are usually more fish nearby.

Perch often have at least two good options for food during the winter, which often splits the population of perch into two or more patterns.

The first challenge is to figure out where most of the perch are feeding by identifying the most abundant food source. This does not mean anglers should ignore the second or third options, because secondary patterns may be the best pattern for the largest perch, with the smaller perch preferring more abundant smaller prey.



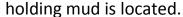


The basic breakdown in perch location is usually split between deep and shallow water in most lakes. There are usually schools of perch in both locations, but the split is seldom 50/50. The most common scenario is most perch will use one pattern, with the rest of the perch split between secondary patterns.

The most common pattern for perch often changes seasonally and can be different between lakes, depending on what options they have for food at different times of the year.

Deep is a relative term and can mean different things in different lakes. Deep is where the mud is when it comes to perch. The basin of the lake is the deep water, regardless of how deep that might be and deep water usually implies an insect pattern for perch.

Deep water in some lakes might be less than 20 feet, while deep water in other lakes might be deeper than 50 feet. It all depends on what type of habitat the lake has to offer and where most of the insect





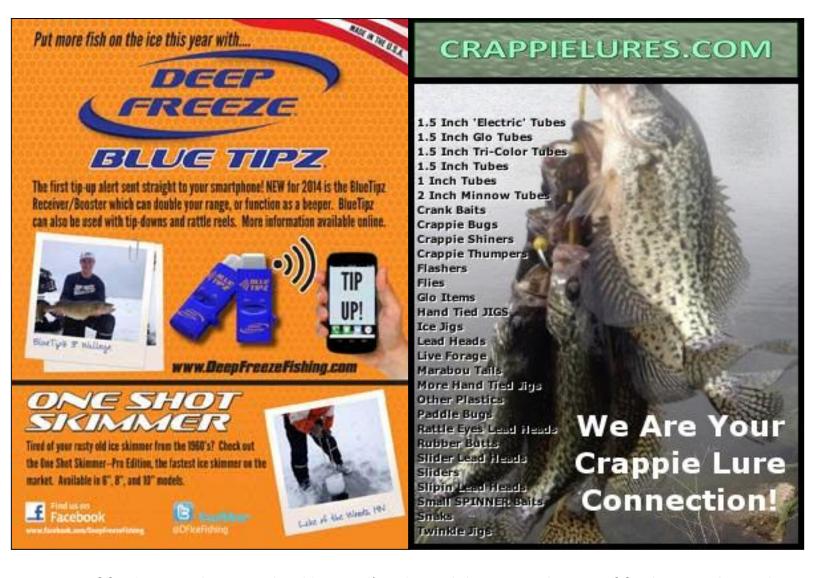
Shallow" water is also a relative term when it comes to perch. Shallow usually means shoreline flats, the tops of mid-lake humps and bars and other areas with hard bottom and a mixture of weeds, rocks and sand.

Shallow perch are usually feeding on minnows crayfish, with young-of-theyear perch and shiners often key forage. There are also insects feeding the on decaying weeds and hiding in the rocks, so shallow patterns for perch often implies multiple food sources.

Perch are opportunistic feeders and seldom feed on just one thing. They usually have a main course and then supplement their diet with whatever else they can find, regardless if they are feeding in deep or shallow water.

One of the biggest wild cards in jumbo perch lakes is the





presence of freshwater shrimp. Lakes like Devil's Lake with huge populations of freshwater shrimp have the potential to grow the largest perch in the shortest amount of time.

Perch able to enjoy a diet rich in

freshwater shrimp are often huge. Shrimp are omnivores, so they are able to feed on both plant and animal matter. Freshwater shrimp can be in either shallow or deep water depending on what they are eating.

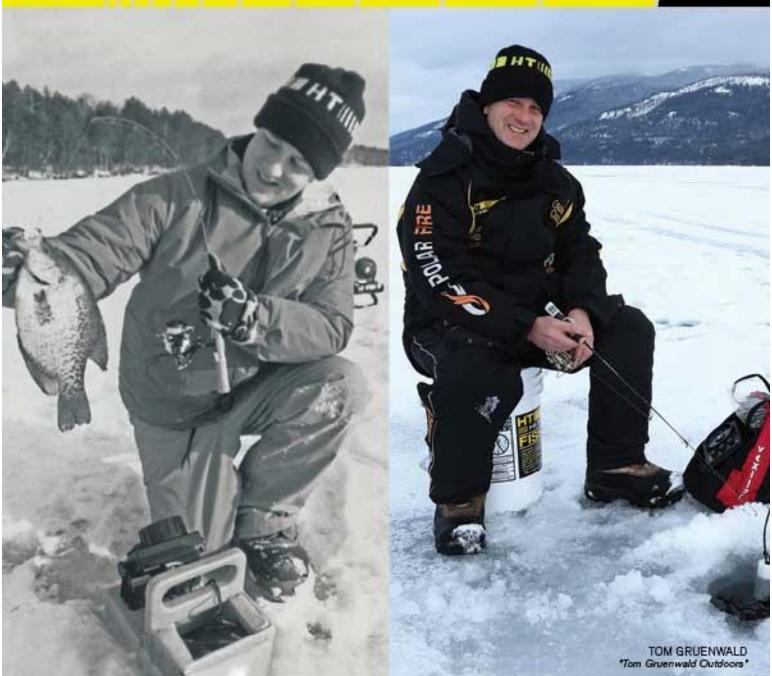
Perch feeding on freshwater shrimp can often be more difficult to catch, because they usually have full stomachs and anglers' presentations are no match for the natural food in the lake.

Perch with abundant food usually have a short window of feeding activity and will be in a neutral or negative feeding mood the rest of the time. Weather conditions can also shut down the bite, so anglers may have to adjust their presentations to match the mood of the fish.

Perch often live and feed on flats, so when shallow perch get inactive, they may drop into a depression, fall of the side of structure or burry themselves in the weeds.

Inactive perch in deep water may not have anywhere else to go, so they will just drop tight to the bottom and rise off the bottom again when they are actively feeding.

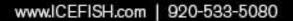
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Started in a basement shop over 40 years ago, HT products have truly weathered the test of time! Our proven track record of quality and durability, and our passion for ice fishing has enabled us to offer the largest selection of ice-fishing products available at industry-best prices. See over 1000 ice fishing items or find your nearest HT retailer www.icefish.com.

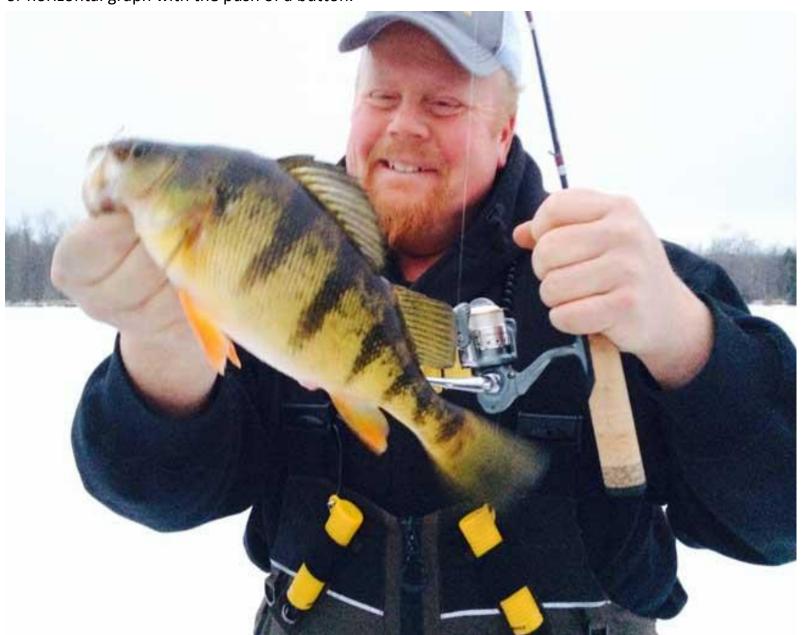




Perch resting on the bottom can be harder for anglers to coax into biting. One tactic I like to use for tough perch bites involves downsizing to a # 12 Northland Bro's Bloodworm with a single maggot or wax worm. I like to pound it into the muddy bottom and then slowly lift the bait, feeling for a bite.

The Frabill 371 Bro Series rod spooled with 3 lb. test Northland Flourosilk has a soft "Quick-Tip with an orange bead, so I can easily see the extra weight from light biting fish, without using any type of spring bobber.

The separation I get from my Humminbird 688 allows me to see the perch, even when they are hugging the bottom. I can quickly switch from my LakeMaster map chip in the GPS mode and to traditional sonar or horizontal graph with the push of a button.

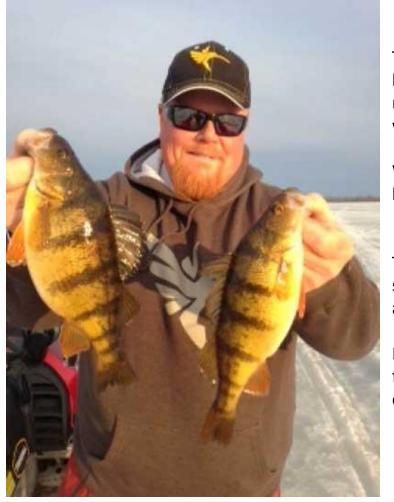


When big schools of perch are active, I like to use a Northland Buckshot Glider Spoons or a Tungsten Sliver spoon tipped with a minnow head or an Impulse minnow head or Impulse perch eye.

I use my Aqua Vu micro camera in down view mode, so I can actually see when the fish take the bait, so I know the perfect moment to set the hook.



ODU MAGAZINE VIDEO BLOCK (www.odumagazine.com)



The dark color of my Frabill Side-Step Thermal fish house absorbs the heat of the sun and blocks out most of the sunlight, so I can sight fish in shallow water or see the screen better on my Aqua Vu.

When I was a kid, perch were considered trash fish or bait stealer.

Times have sure changed. Perch are one of the most sought after fish through the ice in the United States and Canada.

For more information on lakes in the area you will be fishing, check with your local bait shops, and outfitters or hire a local guide.

Good Luck Fishing Brian Bro Brosdahl



When Big Fish Happen To Panfish People

By Mark Strand

"Thinking back over the years, on every outing, somebody catches a trophy something."

Dave Genz

Whether it's a largemouth, smallmouth, walleye, northern pike, muskie, or another species, it's amazing how consistently at least one big fish is reeled up through the hole during a day on the ice with Genz and his group. In almost all cases, the outsized fish has a small hook firmly embedded, and the battle takes quite a while on a 'panfish' rod.

Dave Genz for years thought of these catches as accidents, but recently stopped thinking of them that way. "It happens too much," he says, "to be an accident."

On almost every outing with the 'Genz clan,'
somebody catches a big fish, even though
most fishing takes place during midday
hours and the baits being used are designed
to catch panfish. Here, Jesse Roberts holds a
giant pike caught from Ash Lake near Orr,
Minnesota. Jesse is Dave Genz's grandson,
and a good angler in his own right! (Photo:
www.davegenz.com)





We had a lengthy conversation about this during the summer of 2014, and Genz racked his brain recounting countless trips, on which most or all fishing took place during daytime hours – because that's how the Genz pack rolls – and one big fish after another returned to his memory banks. These big fish are being caught when the sun is up, on small baits we think of as panfish fare. The classic notion among anglers – and it's not unfounded – is that the best fishing takes place during the magic hours of sunrise and sunset, especially sunset. Any good catches during the midday hours, in the old days, were considered unrepeatable gifts from God.

What if you knew, ahead of time, that it would just be a matter of time before you hook into a fish that challenges the limits of your tackle, potentially the biggest fish of that species you've ever caught? This is the real potential Genz and his friends have happily celebrated for many years, and you can, too, if you keep a realistic, smallish, irresistible bait in the water.

Allure of Small Baits

This is far from a scientific statement, but all other things being equal in fishing (which they never are, but anyways), fish seem to show a preference for smaller baits under the ice than they do in open water. The difference is especially glaring when you compare ice fishing to the warm summer months. This apparent universal truth lends support to Genz's notion that "small jigs that fish heavy" are the best choice for most ice-fishing situations. Why might that be? Most likely it's because fish metabolism slows down in cold water, and fish get a better look at what they eat under the ice than at any other time of year. There's no escaping the truth that 'small baits' catch everything, including eye-popping lunkers, especially when those small baits are consistently presented in a natural manner.

Just Lucky?

As random as these big-fish-on-small-bait catches might seem at first glance, there is a formula that makes sense, that can lead you in the right direction.

- Seek out places that produce big sunfish, crappies, and/or perch.
- Fish those areas hard with baits chosen to tempt panfish.
- Happily accept whatever bites come your way, and don't be surprised if you or someone in your group tangles with a big one.



Call them incidental catches if you want, but where big panfish are, big predators prowl, and the same baits that lure panfish will snag giants. You're trying to catch a big bluegill, but are you going to complain if a big pike chomps down on your jig and tries to make off with it, or are you going to set the hook and go for the ride of your life?

"Generally speaking," says Genz, "if a lake produces large panfish, there are large predator fish in those same lakes. In other words, if a lake is full of stunted bluegills, there probably aren't a bunch of big pike in that lake."

ODU MAGAZINE VIDEO BLOCK (www.odumagazine.com)

Landing That Pig

So you set the hook and it feels like you have the bottom of the lake on, only the weight is moving off and shaking its head. It's one thing to be tight to that fish, and another to get it up on your side of the ice.

If you are using one of the latest ice rods, that performs like a long rod in miniature, it will flex and act as a shock absorber for the line. And speaking of line, if your line is fresh, "it's amazing how strong 2-pound or 4-pound new line is," says Genz. "And the drags are so much better on our reels now than they were even a couple years ago. With a good drag, even in the cold, you don't have to backreel a fish anymore. You just let it take line when it has to."





Same jig. Bigger, wider-gapped hook. When the Drop[™] pounded onto the scene last year, the ice fishing world tell in love with it. You already know the tungsten craftsmanship, killer colors and angled hook orientation for better hooking percentage. But sometimes the hook itself can be a bit on the small side, when you want to bulk up with waxies or maggots or a Maki[™] plastic. We needed Drop[™] jigs with bigger hooks, so we made them. This is a big deal, it opens up a whole new world for the Drop[™] Jig.



Drop Jig XL









Rare will be the fish you can't tame if you take your time and it doesn't bury you in weeds or wrap the line around a stump or some other cover. Let the fish fight, keep the line tight, and eventually it will be finning directly under the hole. The trick at this point is to get the big fish's head started up the hole. They don't like to have their heads directed into the hole, so they tend to resist. When you're using light line and a small hook, there's a limit to how much pressure you can put on the fish without tearing the hook out or breaking the line.

Enter the value of a gaff hook.

If you're a Boy Scout, you're packin' a gaff and can ask somebody get it out of your Fish Trap as you battle the monster. But Genz has made good use of the impromptu gaff he fashions out of a 'walleye' rod and treble hook.



"Most of the time," Genz says, "somebody walleye has a rod along. Just tie on whatever lure you have with the biggest treble. We have some great video of a big pike Steve **Pennaz** caught on 2-poundtest. I took a walleye rod, tied on a Blade Spoon with a treble hook, wound the bait tight to the rod, and gaffed the fish with it.

"We drilled a second hole, and when the fish's head came into the hole – that's all you could see – I reached down and stuck the fish in the jaw with the Blade Spoon and got his head started up and it was over."

Note: Dave Genz, known as Mr. Ice Fishing, was the primary driver of the modern ice fishing revolution. He has been enshrined in the National Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame and Minnesota Fishing Hall of Fame for his contributions to the sport. For more fishing tips and to order his new info-packed book, Ice Revolution, go to www.davegenz.com.



WALKING ON WATER

By Tom Gruenwald

Ice fishing has quickly become one of the fastest growing participant sports in North America, and for good reason.

Swift modern snowmobiles

with heated seats and handles, powerful four wheel drive four wheelers and tracked vehicles with all the comforts of home carry anglers conveniently and comfortably to even the most remote locations—regardless of the conditions—while storage sleds towed behind them store, organize and protect gear in route to any intended hotspot.

"With so many astounding innovations available, it's no wonder ice fishing has become one of the most exciting, fasting growing sports in North America."

Since most popular waters in North America have been mapped, productive locations are easier than ever to identify. Maps—paper or electronic—reveal bottom structures such as flats, points, sunken islands, rock piles and submerged objects, plus indicate the depth, bottom content such as mud, sand or



rock, and presence of cover like vegetation or wood, making possible to find spots likely to hold before traveling onto the for ice, even anglers who have never fished these places before.

And since prime locations are also referenced by



Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates, today's maps can be used in combination with these technological advancements to reach such choice locations efficiently. Anglers simply look for features most likely to attract the fish they're seeking, enter the associated coordinates from the map into a GPS, and are led directly to their desired destinations.

Once there, today's premium ice augers, both hand and power models, slice effortlessly through even the thickest ice, quickly. Modern sonar then makes it possible to confirm the depth, bottom content and cover type match the expected features, determine whether or not fish are present, and if so, exactly how deep and thickly grouped they are. Sonar even provides clues regarding the size of the marked fish, as thicker bands indicate larger, more substantial fish.

VP9A9904edit300If desired, underwater cameras can then be lowered to actually see and identify specifically what type of cover and species of fish are there. Anglers can also use sonar or underwater cameras to watch their presentations, see how the fish react, and consequently determine which lures and baits are most effective for catching them!

For anglers fishing outside, amazing new developments in advanced winter clothing systems keep anglers incredibly warm and comfortable in even the coldest weather—and thanks to specialized materials that wick moisture away from your skin while shedding outside moisture—dry, too, regardless of how active you are or wet the weather.

Plus these items are packed with practical features, including padded knees, neoprene cuffs, neck wraps, wind gators, ice breaking zippers and multiple pockets, making it possible to spend increased time on the ice, more comfortably than ever.





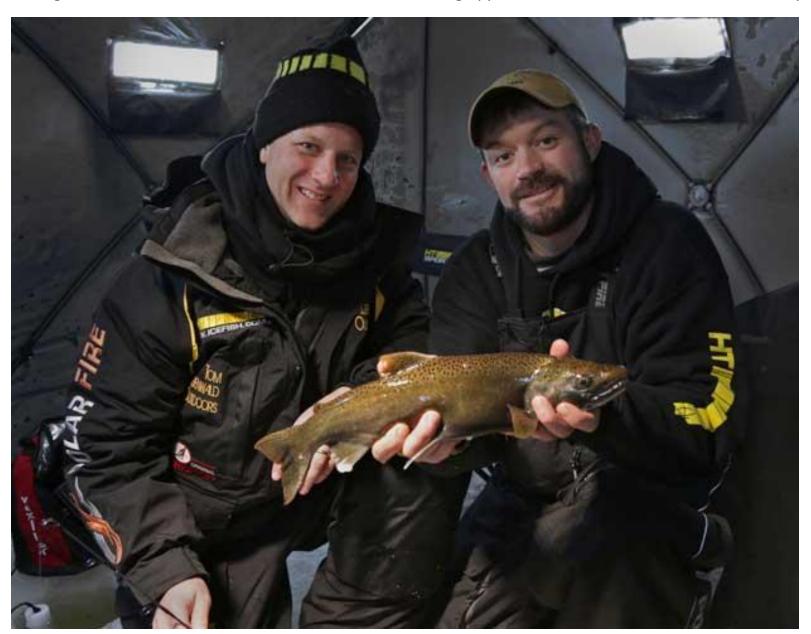


Vexilar, Winnebago White Out In extreme winter conditions, portable shelters provide another option. Most units are lightweight, self-contained and set up in minutes, allowing anglers to block out cold and wind, then fish in complete comfort without cold fingers—plus holes, rod guides, reels and gear won't freeze-up or fill with blowing snow.

But that's not all. Other accessories, such as portable propane heaters and disposable foot and hand warmers can be used to further combat cold. Shelter anchors secure portable shelters. Cushioned bucket seats and folding chairs with backrests provide comfortable seating, inside or out. Ice cleats minimize slipping.

And the fishing equipment itself is better, too!

Ice rods, for example, come in a variety of constructions, lengths and actions, each specifically designed for fishing certain species and efficiently implementing specialty techniques. HT, a premium ice tackle company, offers hundreds of high performance models designed to fit most any application. HT's wispy micro rods are perfect when fishing light lines, tiny hooks and baits for smaller, pan sized fish; ultralight and light action models work well for standard float fishing applications, while their medium and heavy







designs are perfect when fishing heavier lines and larger baits for big fish, especially in deep water.

Specialized, high-performance spinning reels like HT's Accu-Cast models, have been engineered with angled rotors to align your line coming off the reel with the rod guides to minimize line twist, plus liquid smooth, multi-bearing drive gears, multiple setting drags and infinite anti-reverse—even elongated necks that allow you to retrieve while wearing gloves—and this entire package is designed to balance perfectly on modern ice rod

designs!

tip upHT also offers a full line of devices called "tip-ups," which can be used to catch a variety of fish, but are typically reserved when pursuing larger game fish. Tip-ups consist of frames supporting line filled spools and highly visible "flags" that pop up to indicate bites. Baited lines are set at the desired depth. When a fish strikes, the line filled spool turns, releasing a trip mechanism that causes the bite signaling flag to spring upward. The angler then approaches, grasps the line, sets the hook and pulls the fish onto the ice.

Like ice rods, there are a variety of different tip-up designs, each with specific advantages. Polar underwater tip-ups use underwater spools to prevent lines from freezing, and feature unique mechanisms that guarantee freeze-proof trips. Polar Therm tip-ups are engineered similarly and not only guarantee against frozen trips, but custom designed hole cover frames eliminate hole freeze overall while preventing blowing snow and light from entering holes. Polar Pop-Ups use adjustable magnetic trips to minimize resistance to lighter biting fish; wind tip-ups such as the Windlass jig presentations, and high profile Arctic Bay tip-ups feature flags waving three feet above the ice, making them visible from long distances in even the deepest snow.

When filling reels or tip-up spools, today's advanced fishing lines, including soft, micro-thin monofilaments, super strong, yet relatively thin diameter Spectra designs, virtually invisible fluorocarbons, various non-stretch super braids and abrasion resistant braided Dacron are available in a variety of diameters, strengths and colors, providing distinct options designed to meet even the most discriminating angler's requirements.

hgb-s lure and when it comes to lures and hooks, there are simply more designs, styles, sizes and colors to choose from than ever before! A seemingly endless variety of micro jigs, ice flies, jigs, plastics, spoons, swimming baits, lipless cranks, rattle baits, blade baits, tail baits, even specialty hooks allow ice anglers to experiment until they're able to determine what combination is producing best. Chosen

carefully, each will help you catch more fish, no matter where you're fishing or what species you're targeting.

Finally, to help take care of equipment, different types of rod and tip-up storage cases are used. These are constructed of either rigid plastic or soft nylon, and feature multiple compartments for storing rods, tip-ups, ice skimmers, line, tools, tackle boxes, lures and other accessories such as floats, spring bobbers, swivels, weights, hooks and more.

So there you have it! With so many astounding innovations available, it's no wonder ice fishing has become one of the most exciting, fasting growing sports in North America. Of course, there are specific winter patterns that may be used for

successfully locating different fish species in a variety of unique environments—and countless strategies, methods, tactics, techniques, tricks and tips for using various combinations of the tackle described to significantly increase winter catches given varying environments and changing conditions.

PICT0019 HTIt is my most sincere privilege to have the opportunity to share these basic principles



involved with productive, modern ice fishing approaches with you, and I look forward to introducing much more specific information about select strategies, along with some of the unique and advanced methodologies used for catching many different species through the ice, right here on TGO, where it's "all ice fishing, all the time."

Stay tuned. Keep watching our TGO television shows, reading the pages on <u>WWW.TGOFISHING.COM</u> and following TGO on our social media to learn more...and in the meantime, good fishing to you, my friends!

Tom Gruenwald is truly passionate about the outdoors and is recognized as one of the world's foremost authorities on the sport of ice fishing. Throughout the years, his expertise has been sought for in-depth ice fishing presentations, seminars and advanced contributions to various outdoor periodicals throughout the world. He's appeared as a guest on numerous radio and TV shows, authored four ice fishing books and now hosts his own TV show, "Tom Gruenwald Outdoors,".



WALLEYE ON THE EDGE

By Jason Mitchell

By midwinter on many bodies of

water, walleye location can often trend towards off shore structure and in many cases, deep structure. With the advent of map chips, more anglers are discovering and fishing these locations. A mistake I have made in the past when fishing deep structure is relying too much on what the contour line on the map charts. What is more important than any contour is the transition. The transition between one type of bottom and another. Could be an edge where gravel meets mud. Could be where large boulders transition to smaller rock. This edge is often where it is at for finding offshore walleye. Sometimes the transition lines up with a contour but so often it does not. When it does not, you end up focusing your attention on the wrong contours and miss the mark.

When open water fishing, it is easier to find the sweet spots you. You hover across a spot and suddenly start hitting big rock with your jig and learn the location that much better.

because your presentation will tell With ice fishing especially with no prior experience on a location, determining the transitions can be much more difficult. So often, bottom composition can be fleeting where a band of rock or gravel is unpredictable. The change in composition for example might cut perpendicular or across the contour line instead of following it. So often on deep reefs with rock, big rocks are often near small rocks but are the larger rocks on top of the structure or the sides? Knowing exactly what is below you beyond what the map chip tells you will make you a much better walleye angler.

On reefs for example that have really large boulders on the top of the structure, I often watch anglers bop onto the top of the spot and drill a few holes because their map shows structure. So often with really large boulders, the fish don't position directly above the boulders but are often riding the sides or

slots between boulders. If you just fish the very top of the structure, you miss those fish. Often where those big boulders transition to smaller rock is the sweet spot.

One obvious way to learn more about the structure you are ice fishing is to fish the location from a boat and learn the location, even saving some way points. Another option is to drop down an underwater camera. I don't use underwater cameras a lot when I am actually walleye fishing as it is slower to hop around and so often the best bite is low light where you can't see anything but what a camera is really good for is getting a better understanding of what you are fishing when the sun is high. I can't tell you how many times I had a mental picture in my head of a particular location only to drop the camera down to find out I didn't really know as much as I thought I did.



Another trick I like to do when fishing from hole to hole is turn up the range on my Vexilar so that I am on the sixty or eight foot scale. Turn your scale up on Normal Mode so that you can watch the intensity of the second and third echoes change. Most bottoms will reveal a second echo and most bottoms where the first echo is will look red. When you get over rock and larger rock especially, the intensity of the red in the second and third echo will really light up. By watching the second and third echo, you can find where bottom compositions change and by drilling enough holes, you can land on the edges.

Why are the edges so important? Because walleyes are often not as random on this type of structure. What you will find is that a large majority of the fish will slide up on a location from a specific direction and that they will often take the exact same routes as they move. I have watched one angler smack several fish on one side of a large boulder for example while an angler nearby on the other side of the same rock saw nothing. There might indeed be fish scattered across a particular piece of structure

but the fish will often be the most concentrated with the highest amount of traffic on specific parts of the structure that will often correlate with an edge. Tuning these locations can often mean the difference between seeing a few fish and running into several.

When you really learn a location and get a lot of confidence in what you are fishing, what also happens is that you can maximize your time by spending the majority of your time in the sweet spots and wait out fish movements. You know that when a pod of fish cruises through a specific location, there is a very high probability that they will swim under you. With walleye fishing, this can be so important because most of the windows where we catch fish are when the fish make a move. When they are cruising and alert, they are easier to catch. When this activity revolves around sunrise and sunset, you might not have a lot of time to look through the entire spot and fish a lot of holes before the window of opportunity expires. That is why sitting over the exact right location can be so crucial.

With large boulders for example, I am often the most successful focusing on the edges versus going

right in them when I am ice fishing. Rocks also don't have to be very large as big rocks are relative. I love fishing around large boulders for big fish, but some other great locations could be where small rock or rubble transitions into mud. Could be a band of gravel that intersects sand. Walleyes are very similar to whitetail deer in how they often use edge habitat. Most of the time, how these transitions lay out trumps depth contour. In other words, fish will relate to an edge that is the of a change result in bottom composition over a change in depth.

When you are fishing this winter, look past the contour lines and get a more intimate understanding of the structure you are fishing along with how fish are moving across and relating to that structure and I am confident that you will catch more walleye from these types of locations this season. Imagine scouting out deer with just a contour map. Now imagine scouting out an area with an ariel photo and a contour map. By putting in the work to really fine tune bottom compositions and focusing on edges, you end up finding the right place at the right time much more.





Keep Warm On The Ice

By Bob Jensen

It got cold again! That's good and that's bad. It's good, because the ice is getting thicker and safer across most of the ice-fishing region. That means more anglers will be on the ice in the near future.

It also means that it's easier for those iceanglers to get cold, and usually getting cold is not a fun part of ice-However, it's fishing. not necessary to get cold when you're icefishing or doing anything outdoors this time of year. There is so much outstanding clothing, affordable, and outstanding clothing, that there really is no need to get cold outside unless you're unusually extreme cold. And if it's unusually cold,

it's better off to stay inside. Here are some ideas for staying warm on the ice.

Here's the main thing to remember about keeping warm in the winter: If you get too warm, you're going to get cold. If you're drilling a lot of holes in the ice, or walking from hole to hole a lot, you're going to get warm. When we get warm, we sweat, and if that sweat gets trapped next to your skin, you will eventually get cold. We want to be wearing under-garments that will wick the sweat away from your body. Garments made from cotton are not the answer: Cotton traps the sweat. Cabela's MTP and Polartec base layers are a great place to start.

My next layer is usually a hooded sweatshirt, and I then slip into water resistant bibs. I prefer the bib style because it offers more protection from the wind to areas that could be exposed, and I like the



water resistant feature because there are times when I kneel next to the hole to land a fish. The water resistant feature keeps me dry, and therefore warmer, and more comfortable.

Next goes on the outer layer: I like parka length because, again, it provides more protection to areas of skin that could be exposed to the elements. My favorite is Guidewear for both the bibs and parka. In fact, the same Guidewear that I keep in the boat for summer fishing works great for ice-fishing.

Round this out with a cap and boots. Wear a stocking cap or something of that nature. Heat escapes from an uncovered head. Set up your fishing position so your back is to the wind, and pull your hood up over your cap. If you're facing into the wind and you pull your hood up, you get a swirling effect, and that can be not-so-pleasant.

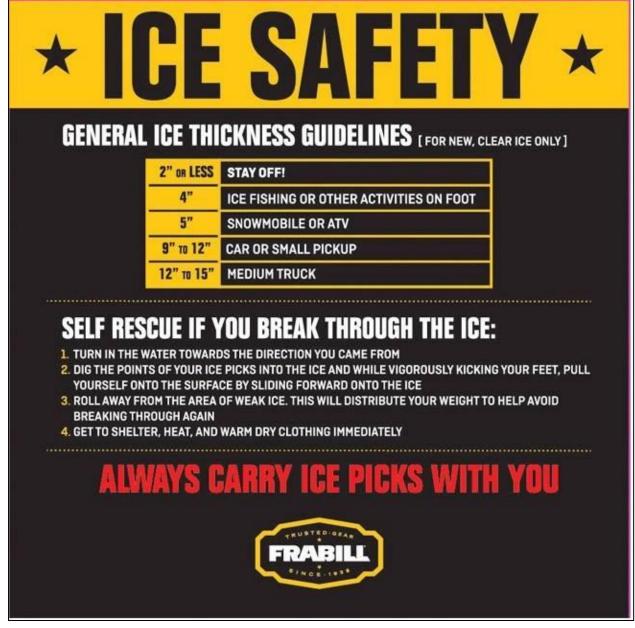
If your feet get cold, you're going to be cold and uncomfortable. Boots can be a personal thing: Some folks like big boots that are very warm, but can also be heavy. They're great for keeping warm, but they

make walking around a lot of work.

There are lots of lighter weight boots available that do a great job of keeping your feet warm if you keep moving.

And then, probably the best way to keep warm on the ice is to fish from a permanent shelter that has a heater inside. This year I'm spending quite a bit of time in an Ice Castle house. lt's warm. it's comfortable, and it's also very easy to move to follow the bite.

The reality is, it's not necessary to get



cold when you're ice-fishing. Dress properly and you'll enjoy your time on the ice even more.

To see the newest episodes of Fishing the Midwest television go to www.fishingthemidwest.com. Visit us at www.facebook.com/fishingthemidwest.



ice Force Pros Name Go-To Baits For Favorite Frozen Lakes

By ICE FORCE

For every great destination lake in the Ice Belt, there's a few go-to baits and tactics that produce fish every winter. Following are several ICE FORCE® pro-staffers' picks for their favorite frozen lakes.





Mille Lacs Lake, MN

ICE FORCE pro-staffer and in-demand Mille Lacs fishing guide Tony Roach favors large Rapala® Jigging Raps®— up to size 7 — noting that many anglers "overlook the larger sizes." But when he's in "full blown ice trolling mode," he says, he likes the larger size.

"Drop it down, pound the silt, lift it up," he instructs. "You're trying to get a reaction strike and see what kind of fish you've got in the area."

Rapala's new No. 4-size Ultra Light Rippin Rap® is also a "great fish-catching tool on Mille Lacs," Roach says.

In daylight hours, Roach favors natural color patterns for his Jigging Raps and Rippin' Raps. Blue Chrome, Silver and Perch are among his favorites. In low-light conditions, he swears by glow and UV color patterns. "That UV, it's like a beacon in the night," he says.

Upper Red Lake, MN

Whether you're targeting eaters or big fish on Upper Red Lake, try tipping a VMC® Tumbler Spoon with a live minnow. Glow Red Shiner is a good color.

"My all-time favorite spoon in the VMC line-up is, by far, the Tumbler Spoon," says ICE FORCE prostaffer and Upper Red Lake guide Brad Hawthorne. "It looks plain until you put bait on that thing and send it down the hole.""

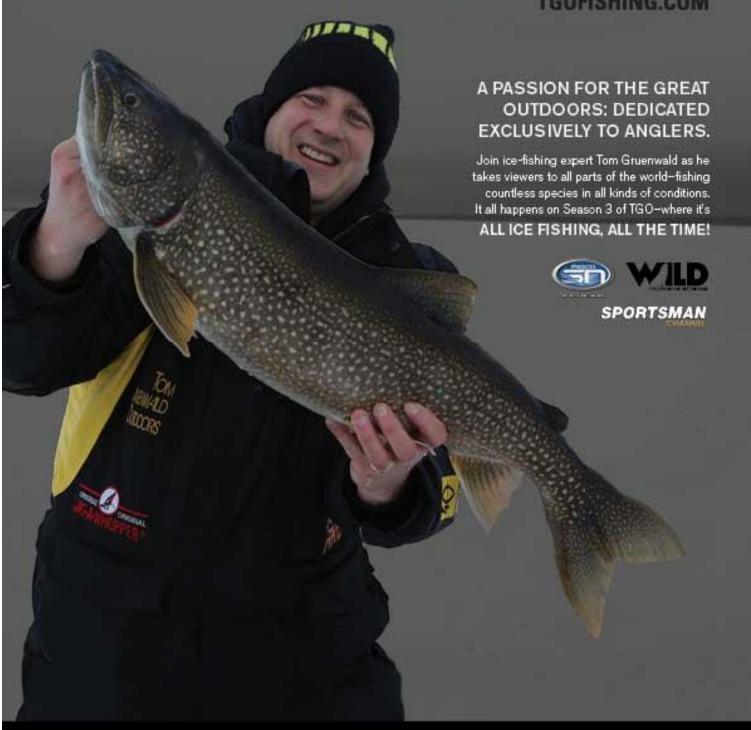
While Hawthorne will sometimes rig a Tumbler Spoon with a minnow head, he'll often hook a live minnow through the head to get a unique action.

"I can get it to do circles, it's amazing," he says. "By keeping that minnow hooked through the head, you're actually keeping it alive," he explains. Another trick is to drop the Tumbler-live minnow combo into the mud.

"If you get a fish [to appear on your flasher] and he's not responding to your jigging action, drop it right on the bottom," Hawthorne instructs. "When it falls right, that minnow goes head first into the mud and really freaks out. And the walleyes can't resist it. They can't not hit it. They may look at it for two or three minutes, but when it wiggles, there's no disconnect in that walleye's brain whether he should eat it or not."



GRUENWALD OUTDOORS ALL ICE FISHING, ALL THE TIME! TGOFISHING.COM

















Lake Bemidji, MN

As soon as he can step foot on Lake Bemidji, ICE FORCE Pro-Staffer and Fathead Guide Service Owner Bryan "Beef" Sathre will be hoofing to where he fished cabbage the last time he launched his boat before putting it into storage for the winter.

"I'll be throwing a Wax Tail Jig in 8 to 10 feet of water around that cabbage," Beef says. "The perch will be thick up there in the mornings and evenings."

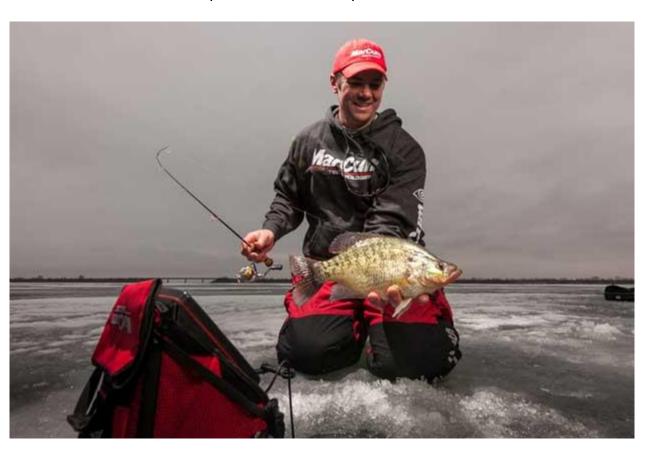
One of his favorite Wax Tail colors on Lake Bemidji is Pink Chartreuse Glow.

For walleye, Beef will lace up a Rattle Spoon or a Tumbler Spoon, bouncing them on the bottom. "I won't have to move too far, because early-season ice up here, if you can still find green weeds, you're going to find fish," he says. "That's true on most of the lakes across the Ice Belt, I'm sure."

He favors the Glow Blue Shiner and Shiner color patterns for both spoons.

Leech Lake, MN

For early-ice Leech Lake walleye, Beef says, "deadsticking is phenomenal." As soon as he can safely reach deepwater humps, he'll deadstick a 1/16th oz. Tear Drop Jig tipped with a big, live shiner. "I try to keep the jig as small as I can so it doesn't reduce the action on the shiner and it can go crazy," he says.



With his deadstick rod set up over one hole, Beef will jig a Rattle Spoon tipped with a fathead minnow head in his second hole. "It's a pretty sweet spoon, because if you want to aggressively jig it and get that rattle going, you can, but you can be really subtle with it too," he says,

If he needs to call in early season walleyes from a distance, Beef will tie on a Tingler Spoon and bounce it off the bottom outside weeds on a transition area between sand and muck.

"If I can get in that muck a little bit, I use the Tingler Spoon to stir up the bottom," he explains. "Then I'll lift it up and the fish will come through all the stuff that's stirred up – and that's when it's game time."

Beef favors the Glow Blue Shiner and Shiner color patterns on Leech Lake as well.



ODU MAGAZINE VIDEO BLOCK (www.odumagazine.com)

Lake Of The Woods, MN

ICE FORCE pro-staffer and In-Depth Outdoors TV Host James Holst has found both big and eater-size walleyes plentiful in trips to Lake of the Woods in recent years.

Holst and his co-hosts have had success calling in walleyes from a distance with a technique that elicits vibration, flash and sound – lift up the bait slowly and then drop the rod tip to get an enticing shake and wobble. Rapala Rippin' Raps work great with this technique. Gold Chrome is a good color.

Fish your Rippin' Rap higher than you're probably used to. This technique is most effective two to five feet off the bottom. This allows bigger walleyes to ambush the bait from below. Although Holst targets big fish with this technique, he says you'll also catch all the eaters you want with it.

ICE FORCE pro-staffer and Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame Legendary Guide Tom Neustrom targets Winnie walleyes with Jigging Raps and VMC Tumbler, Tingler and Rattle Spoons.

Early in the season, Neustrom's go-to Jigging Rap size is No. 7, but if he's fishing in really deep water, he'll upsize to a No. 9. He fishes Jigging Raps on a 24- to 30-inch, 6-pound-test Sufix[®] InvisiLine[™] Ice 100% Fluorocarbon Leader connected via a small barrel swivel to a 10-pound main line.

"You've got to have that barrel swivel, because the bait swings around and you'll get line twist without it," Neustrom explains.



He usually ties direct, but will sometimes connect with the smallest clip he can find, so he can change colors and sizes quickly.

The Tingler Spoon is one of Neustrom's go-to baits when he's fishing in 20 feet or less. "It's got a really nice slow drop," he says. "It swings around a little bit and kind of flutters as it goes down. A lot times, I've dropped that on fish and they'll come up and whack it before it ever gets to the bottom. They'll come after it."

Neustrom likes the Tumbler Spoon for its unique, "swing drop" and the additional flash provided by a small, metallic attractor blade. "I think that little flicker in the back helps sometimes," he says.

Walleyes suspended off the bottom will often hit the Tumbler Spoon on the drop, before it hits the bottom. "They'll come up and just rap that thing," Neustrom says. He fishes it in slightly deeper water than he does the Tingler.

"As soon as I drop it down to [a fish], I'll lift it about a foot and a half to two feet, bring it back down, bring it up, bring it back down, and then I'll sit there with it and I'll just jiggle it and shake it until he bites it," he says.

In 18 to 25 feet, Neustrom can call in walleyes from 10 to 12 feet away with a Rattle Spoon. "I drop it to the bottom, raise a little mud swirl and do a really nervous thing with the spoon to get those rattles going," he explains.







Hunting for Hotspots

By Bob Bohland

Finding new and productive lakes. It is always the most difficult part of moving to a new area. Most rely on bait shop talk or internet forum chatter, but this always ends up being too little too late. When I lived in the Twin Cities I never had a shortage of spots on local lakes to hit for good fish, especially since most anglers in the area were convinced they had to travel a long ways to get on fish, and bypassed a large amount of fishable water. But having recently moved to central Minnesota, I am in new and undiscovered territory. I too tried getting tips from buddies in the area and internet traffic, but found way too many people on these so called "secret honey-holes" for me to be happy. So what is the solution? Grab a map and start hunting!

Obviously, the best way to find a great honey hole is to get firsthand knowledge of a lake from a close friend. However, the guys I normally fish with are as tight-lipped as me when they find a good bite. Most of the time if I don't go scouting with them when they find a new lake, they keep it under their hats (and I respect them for that). So what is an angler to do? Well, two of the best resources are the Minnesota DNR Lake Finder and their Recreation Compass.

The Lake Finder search engine allows an angler to search for a specific lake name and get the information that pertains to the body of water. It should come as no surprise that Minnesota has several lakes that share the same name, so you can also narrow your search by county. Not only can you get detailed lake maps from the Lake Finder, they also include lots of data from the most recent survey. The stats comprised in this may be a little dated, but they give a great starting point.

While the Lake Finder tool is good for scouting out specific lakes, the recreation compass is amazing for finding those little specks of blue near you that many may overlook, especially the ones that the guys at the bait shops don't even know the name of. Zoom into the area you are interested and click on water that looks interesting to you.

Another great service that is available is the Navionics Mobile App. Being able to carry maps in something as small as my cell phone is beyond handy as it gives me real time info on where I am relative to structure, and even allows me to measure distances between fishing areas.

Do your own homework this year and you can be greatly rewarded for the effort. Just remember to keep it under your hat, so your spot doesn't turn into the town honey-hole.





Late-Ice Walleye Fun

By Jeff Samsel

Jason Feldner understands late-ice walleyes. A long-time guide on the legendary waters of North Dakota's Devils Lake, which freezes hard and thick and stays frozen for a very long time, Feldner typically ice fishes through the middle of April, and he has been on the ice as late

as mid-May.

Beyond the fact that Devils Lake ice sticks around for a long time, walleye season never closes. That means Feldner and other anglers can continue targeting walleyes as long as safe ice permits. That's good news, because the latter part of the ice season, well after walleye season is closed in some states, delivers some of winter's best fishing.

"The later we have ice any given year, the better the fishing usually is," Feldner said.

About the time some states' walleye seasons are closing, the best ice fishing is just getting started on North

Dakota's Devils Lake.

Walleyes Moving

The primary change in walleye behavior that occurs

during the latter part of the season involves the location of the fish. As days get milder, snow begins melting and the sun begins showing itself more, the walleyes start moving out of the deep main-basin areas they have inhabited through the middle of winter. They stray onto shallow flats, which warm faster than deeper water, and cruise near the shore, eventually staging near spawning areas.

At Devils Lake, like many lakes throughout the ice belt, the walleyes spawn over gravel bottoms along the lake's edges and spread themselves around the lake. In riverine systems, many fish spawn up river arms, so the fish begin working their way toward those river arms and even up into the rivers late in the season. Added caution is critical in those types of waters because ice with current beneath it tends to be some of the first to thin late in the year and the thickness can be very inconsistent, even within a small area.

Feldner focuses his efforts on areas with gently sloping banks, usually where he knows that broad flats with at least some gravel along the bottom stretch out from those shores. Because the walleyes move often and don't necessarily key on specific defining structures, he typically drills a bunch of holes (often 100 or more) before he starts fishing. He roughly parallels the bank but doesn't drill in a line. Instead he drills in a zigzag pattern so that he covers a significant stretch of bank but also can experiment with a range of depths.



From early March, when the fish tend to start abandoning their deep spots, through the end of the ice season, Feldner mostly fishes for walleyes in 4 to 12 feet of water.

The Right Stuff

Because Feldner's approach calls for a lot of searching, he wants an aggressive, noisy lure that he can use to call in walleyes from a broader area. When he first starts hole-hopping and is trying to determine the best depth to work and the general area that is holding the most fish, Feldner normally fishes with a Lindy Darter. Often he fishes a Darter plain. Sometimes he adds a small minnow head to one treble, just to provide a bit of scent.

Once Feldner has located walleyes, he might experiment some with offerings, although often the Darter is tough to top and the only bait he needs. Other offerings he'll commonly experiment with include a Lindy Rattl'N Flyer Spoon and a 360 Jig. Both send out sound and vibration, but neither is as large nor as loud as a Darter.

"For either, you have to experiment every day with fishing it with just a minnow head or adding a whole live minnow, hooked through the back," Feldner said.

Late-Season Tips

Feldner typically begins in search mode, fishing in run-and-gun fashion. He drills a lot of holes for a reason, and when he first begins fishing any given day, he won't stay in one place for long without catching fish or at least seeing them on his electronics.



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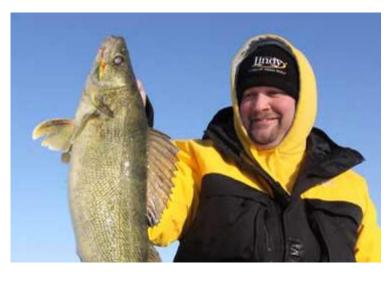
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"You have to hit a lot of holes sometimes, but when you find them, it can be fast and furious," Feldner said.

Often a handful of holes, either at the shared depth or in a small area, will produce better action than the rest. Once Feldner identifies those holes, he'll rotate among them and mostly disregard others he has drilled.

Walleyes are still walleyes any time of the year, so the best bite typically occurs early in the morning and



just before dark. Therefore, Felder always makes certain he's in place and ready to fish at prime time. That said, the fish sometimes will bite throughout the day, more so than they would have a month or two earlier. If Feldner goes out for the morning bite and the fish stay somewhat active, even if it's only a bite very half hour or so, he'll often stick with it. That said, it's sometimes as if someone has turned off a light switch.

Feldner has noticed that the afternoon bite typically heats up sooner on days close to the full moon than at other times. During those days, walleyes are likely to start biting about four hours before dark, instead of a more typical two hours before dark, so he always pays attention to moon phases and plans accordingly.

Because the walleyes can get somewhat spooky in the extra shallow water, Feldner pulls one more trick from his bag on mild days. If the air temperature is above freezing, which it commonly is through the middle of the day during the final few weeks that Feldner fishes in a season, he'll go at mid-day just to drill his holes. When he returns, closer to evening, he doesn't have to worry about scaring the walleyes by drilling a bunch of holes in shallow water. The holes and the walleyes are already waiting for him. Want to Go? To plan a trip with Jason Feldner or to learn more about ice fishing or summer fishing Devils Lake, visit www.percheyes.com. Feldner also offers lodging by the lake and can put together fishing/lodging packages.



"This one turned away from my spoon," Jon Thelen told me as he slipped a Frostee Jig from the mouth of a walleye he'd just landed. "Without the dead-stick, I wouldn't have caught it."

A lifelong ice angler and the host of Fish Ed television, Thelen was using a set up he often starts with -- working two holes at once with two completely different offerings -- and the fish he'd just caught illustrated why he sets up the way he does. He'd worked the fish up off the bottom with a jigging lure, and just as he'd expected to feel a hit, the float on his dead-stick rod darted out of sight.



Double Trouble Walleyes

By Jeff Samsel

If walleyes are Thelen's main



attraction and the approach is mostly stationary, he virtually always fishes with two rods. He keeps a jigging rod in hand and a dead-stick rod (which simply refers to a rig with a bait that is not actively worked but left in place for the fish to find) beside him. Each set-up has a distinctive function, and they complement one another.

Many anglers use two rods when they fish for walleyes. In fact, fishing one actively in hand and keeping the other stationary is somewhat common. Too often, though, the idea is simply that two baits are better than one, and too little thought is given to how to maximize the productivity of each offering.

Thelen doesn't do anything randomly. It's not his make-up. His rigs and presentations are always strategic, based on his fullest understanding of fish behavior and tested through countless hours on the ice. Knowing that to be the case, I asked Thelen about his two-rod approach, including what he fishes on each set-up, how he presents each and the philosophies behind those choices.

Jigging Rod

"My jigging rod is the one I expect to catch fish with," Thelen said, "and it's the rod I use to gauge the mood of the fish and figure out how to make them bite."

For that reason, there's no silver bullet for the jigging rod. Lindy Darters, Rattl'N Flyer Spoons, 360 Jigs, Slick Jigs and more sometimes fit into the equation, and Thelen mixes up lures, colors and presentations until he figures out what will trigger the most strikes any given day.

The part of the season, color of the water, amount of snow on the ice, fish on the sonar, depth of the structure and much more play into the equation, so even the jigging lure that Thelen begins with varies quite a bit. That said, Thelen's most common jigging strategy is to begin with the boldest lure and the most aggressive presentation that he believes might trigger strikes, and then gradually works back toward more subtle offerings and deliveries until he finds what works.



"If they'll hit a Lindy Darter fished aggressively to make a lot of noise, that's what I want to catch them

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on, because that gives me the best opportunity to catch the largest fish," he said.

The jigging rod stays in Thelen's hand, and the jigging lure's mark is the one he watches the closest on his electronics as he tries to read the fish's preferences and as he anticipates strikes.

Dead-stick Rod

Once Thelen finds the right jigging lure and presentation, if he can draw a fish up off the bottom and get it interested, he can coax an estimated 60 to 70 percent of those fish to bite. Some fish will reject even the right bait and presentation for that day, though, and that's where the dead-stick set-up comes into play.

Thelen fishes his deadstick in hole that's drilled right next to his jigging hole, and he keeps the rod beside him where he can grab it, close the bail and set the hook any time he sees his float slip under.

"I believe strongly in having a dead-stick bait

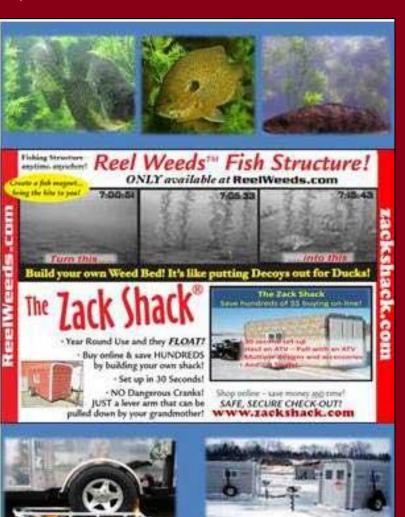
right next to the hole where I'm actively jigging, so if a fish does turn away from my lure that bait will be right there as a totally different presentation and an easy-looking meal."

While the jigging bait varies from day to day and sometimes even changes during a day, Thelen's deadstick rig remains constant. It's always a live minnow, hooked under the dorsal fin on a No. 6 Frostee Jig suspended beneath the smallest Thill float that will remain afloat.

"When a walleye takes the float under, I don't want it to feel resistance," Thelen said.

The Frostee Jig adds hint of color, which Thelen believes can serve as a strike-triggering mechanism. However, the primary reason he uses a Frostee Jig, as opposed to a plain hook, is that it provides just enough counter weight to keep the minnow fighting just a bit and to make it erratic and therefore looking like an easy meal to the walleyes.

Wherever Thelen is working his jigging lure anywhere in the water column, whether it's





from the bottom to 6 inches up or 12 inches off the bottom, he wants his dead-stick about to stay about 6 inches higher in the water column than the top of that range.

"That's really important," Thelen said, pointing out that working a fish up off the bottom is often the way to get that fish fired up and to make it strike. "When that fish is up, it's hot and wanting to bite. If it turns away from my jigging lure, I want that dead-stick right in its face,"

Thelen believes that when an angler hangs a dead-stick just off the bottom, the fish typically is already turned off when it goes back down, and it is far less likely to ever take that bait.

Before You Fish

Note that rod allowances vary by state and sometimes by waterway, and that in some cases a second rod permit is required in order to fish more than one line at a time. Check state and local laws before doubling up.

PANFISH TACTICS FOR SUCCESS

By Kevan Paul

Ice fishing for big panfish has to be one of the most rewarding species to target. Watching huge slab crappies and giant bull bluegills coming up out of an ice hole is something that everyone can enjoy. The thrill of the catch is followed up by these beautiful fish making great table fare. When I think about targeting these species there are a few things that come to mind.

Sight Fishing

Sight fishing is, by far, the best technique for panfish. It's so sweet to watch your bait get sucked in by a big crappie. It's also humbling to



watch them swim up, give you the fin and turn away. This is why sight fishing is an education. An angler who watches a fish's every move will learn and adapt to its needs. Many people think that to ice fish you just drop a line and hope. The anglers taking this passion to the next level continually educate themselves, learning from every hour spent on the ice. Even the all-time greats continue to learn from every success and mistake — though sometimes I think they may also be educating the fish.

That's why I find sight fishing to be so important. Not every trip is about catching limits of fish. It's about watching the fish's behavior and watching its posture. Those two things will teach you more than anything else.

Plastics

Plastics are a serious matter. If the goal is big pan fish, plastics are a vital part of the arsenal. Handpoured plastics are the way to go and Clam Pro Tackle has a great lineup of the best plastics on the market, Maki Plastics. There are so many different shapes, sizes and colors to choose from that everyone can find something that the fish will like. Each piece of plastic has its own characteristics and can be modified with a pinch or a snip.

The best places to start fishing with plastics are fisheries that have an overabundance of fish and clear water. Fishing in bodies of water where there is a pile of fish will help you build up some confidence. Fishing in clear water will allow you to learn and perfect a solid technique. Plastics will allow you to fish faster and they don't freeze up when hole-hopping.

Keep It Fresh

Mobility and the first drop go hand in hand. It's about giving fish a fresh look at the bait.

Mobility can mean moving from one spot to another or changing lakes. However you move, you'll want to be efficient by packing light and pre-drilling a lot of holes. This will allow you to do a couple of things: it will help you find the aggressive fish and it will give you a pile of first drops.

The first drop is something that I've learned to respect and embrace. The biggest part of the first drop is to experience it. I learned the hard way when I had a guy putting on a clinic 20 feet from me. The first drop down any hole will give you your best chance to catch a fish, often the largest fish in the school. This is especially true for crappies in 12 feet of water or less.

I like to start working my bait as soon as it hits the bottom of the hole. Lowering your bait at a very slow



speed will allow those distant crappies to swim over and take a look. Most crappies that have to travel to take a look will bite. Pink, white and purple are my go-to colors for slab crappies.

Early Ice

Early ice in the shallows is one of my favorite places to target big gills. I like to start my hunt along bulrushes and other forms of vegetation. This is where you will find the invertebrates that they will feed on. Keep in mind that these areas are typically shallow and with thin ice. Be careful and don't spook the fish.

Fishing early ice is one of the best times to target panfish. The fish are up along weed edges and they are vulnerable. I love to target panfish in skinny water of 24 inches or less. When fishing the weed lines look for points near deep water. This is the first place that they will stage up. Hopefully these ice fishing tactics will help you become a better ice angler and will lead you down a path of future success

UP AND AT 'EM FOR TRANSITION TIME 'EYES

By Mitch Eeagan



There are times when drilling just a few holes, sitting put and hoping a walleye wanders by is an okay technique. This, however, is not one of those periods.

Instead, ice anglers find themselves between those monumental moments in the hardwater season, midway between early ice and midwinter. It's a timeframe when walleyes are transitioning from feeding ferociously in the shallows to sulking in deep water.

History reveals that those who venture onto first ice find plenty of walleyes in skinny water, walleyes still found amongst the very structure they were holding in late fall. But many of those fish have left the area by now.

It's also a well-known fact that by mid to late winter, the majority of walleyes have migrated to a lake's main basin. Here they're found bellied up to bottom, feeding on what little forage comes waggling their way.

Get off your seat – walleyes are on the move... And you should be, too!

So what's the trick to catching walleyes during this transitional time of year? Do exactly what the fish are doing... Move. Not just once or twice during the day, but several times throughout the day. Although you may not take a limit of fish from one hole, chances are you will pick off walleyes here and there if you just get off your haunches.

Seek, and you shall find

Overall, this outdoor writer's lazy. I usually fish for walleyes in lakes I already know the lay of the underwater land better than the back of my hand.

In the brain of my Humminbird ICE 688CI HD Combo I already have GPS waypoints placed directly over key breaklines. This lets me beeline directly to my best spots. Many of these waypoints come from finding and saving them during the open water season. I merely download the waypoints onto a SD card and

then transfer them onto the portable 688. Simple, to say the least.



But what about on waterways where one rarely, or has never fished? This is where someone like Mark Brumbaugh – one of the top walleye tournament pros in the nation – rides in like a knight in shining armor. The Ohio resident travels the Midwest, fishing frozen waters as large as the Great Lakes, smaller reservoirs and natural lakes throughout the United States and Canada.

While Brumbaugh bores holes directly over breaklines, he's also looking for more subtle transformation areas on the bottom. And besides sonar, he also uses another type of electronics to do it.

"There's no doubting that the majority of walleyes are on the move between first ice and midwinter," says Brumbaugh. "And fish are scattered, so the best way to catch a limit is by moving often.

"Of course I am always trying to fish as close to cover, like weeds, rock and wood as possible. But I also like to fish right over more subtle spots; like, were the bottom composite changes, say, where gravel butts up to clay or mud. Anywhere two different types of bottom meet, for that matter. And you can find those areas easily with an underwater camera."

First, with sonar in hand, Brumbaugh plies the frozen surface drilling holes and checking depths. (And if he sees fish, immediately drops down a lure.) After depth is confirmed, he lowers the lens of an Aqua-Vu underwater viewing system and searches the fathoms for structure and variations in bottom



composite. If neither are visible, Brumbaugh cranks up the power auger and drills another set of holes, moving until a bottom irregularity appears.

Offering plate

Brumbaugh fishes fast when he's hopping hole to hole. He operates heavy lures that fall fast, not wasting time getting into the money zone. (Getting to the bottom quickly is doubly important during a fish flurry.)

One of his go-to baits is a 5/16-ounce Custom Jigs & Spins Slender Spoon — a 1-1/2-inch jigging spoon that flips on the fall, creating a lot of flash. The walleye guru attaches the spoon to an 8-pound-test fluorocarbon leader, which is connected to 10-pound-test superline via a small ball-bearing swivel.

A medium-action graphite ice rod lets Brumbaugh feel every flutter of the spoon and faintest tic even large walleyes are known for during transitional periods.

Brumbaugh suggests not exaggerating the lift and fall of a lure, either, as too much action can and will make a walleye turn tail. Just a quick lift of the rod tip of about ten inches, and a natural drop produces the intended action.

Another ploy Brumbaugh employs is tipping the spoon with a lively minnow or scented soft plastic. He suggests just nipping either in the lips so they waggle freely, adding even more action.

Up and at 'em!

Looking to land more walleyes than ever when the fish are on the move? Get up off your seat and relocate frequently.



Drill holes in the ice (lots) and use modern-day electronics to pinpoint your location precisely. Lower a heavy spoon nipped with live bait or fake, and set the hook at the slightest whisper of a bite.

Mitch Eeagan is an outdoor writer who lives off the land in the dense cedar swamps of Michigan's Upper Peninsula.





The Buzz on Box Fishing

Bob Bohland

Tip-up fishing for walleyes can be very productive mid-winter, especially when you need to cover a lot of ground. Rock humps, sand to gravel transitions and mud flats are all very good spots to look, but they



require a lot of water to be covered. This can be difficult to do when fishing out of a hard house or when the weather takes a turn for the frigid. Trying to fish with tip-ups at night, presents wholly different problems namely knowing when your flag has been tripped, and keeping your holes from icing over in this sub-zero environment.

While box fishing rigs are not entirely new to some anglers, many are hobbled together out of scrap wood laying around the garage, and are often heated by nothing more than a candle or a strategically placed handwarmer tucked inside. With no way to notify an angler when there is a bite, you are forced to constantly check your setup or risk gut-hooked fish. When you are on waters with a slot limit, this is the most painful thing an angler can do: releasing a mortally wounded fish to die because you cannot legally keep it.

After fishing with such technologically advanced equipment for years, a group of anglers decided that they needed to start their own business. This is how the company BuzzReel began. Their story of dads handing down fishing stories and how-to's is no different than we have all experienced, yet they took it to the next step and decided to let the secret out and market the family's invention, and it truly is a family affair.

According to Michael, "We spent many years on the frozen lakes of northern Minnesota using this equipment and never questioned it in our youth, it was simply the way we fished. Upon arrival to my friends ice house, one winter, I immediately noticed the simplistic reels hanging off the wall. A couple of pieces of cardboard looking laminate wood with a bell encased in a spindle of wooden dowels. 'What are these!' I asked. 'Where are all of your panels, alarms and lights?' They looked at me like I was crazy. And it suddenly hit me that what we grew up with on the lakes of our youth was not your standard equipment."

The current BuzzReel box offers such technological advancements such as LED lights that illuminate when a strike occurs, an optional buzzer (operated by a toggle switch inside the unit) can sound the alarm simultaneously. They are heated using 1-lb propane tanks routed through a low pressure regulator, gas valve and pilot assembly for a very efficient heating system (50+ hours per tank).



Recently, the team at BuzzReel has a patent pending on a link to your fish house that can signal an alarm box mounted to the wall. This will help angler's that are running multiple boxes quickly determine which line has a fish attached without running circles around their hard house in the cold.

The guys at BuzzReel are years ahead of anything else you can find on the market. Why pull your tip-ups at dark every night, when you can be notified from a long ways off when you have a strike. The fish are using all of their senses to find prey, why not use all of yours to fill the frying pan?





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Tippy Tricks and Tactics

By Matthew J. Breuer

The transition from hand-to-hand combat to the use of primitive weapons happened roughly 5 million years ago. Rocks and sticks were used to give fighters an edge over their opponents. It allowed them to keep some distance, yet strike at will.

In ice fishing, many weapons have made their way into ice anglers' hands over the years, improving their catch rates, ability to find fish, and more. One method of fish warfare often forgotten or overlooked is the tip-up, and even more overlooked are the upgrades in tip-ups and tip-up rigs. Time to get caught up, so you can have that edge over your fishy opponent on the battlefield anglers call the ice sheet.

Variations and Improvements

We are all familiar with the tip-up. A basic "t" with a built in spool, a triggering mechanism and a flag.

They come in wood or plastic, some are orange, some are black, some have flags, and others have bells. One thing they all have in common is that they are spooled with dacron line, and have to be "reeled in" hand over hand. I recall using old-school tip-ups as a kid, and getting cuts or burns on my fingers from fish giving hard head shakes or making big runs. I also recall having to clean up all of the tip-ups after a day of fishing. The lines were always a mess, tangled and mangled.

Then came along the greatest thing in tip-up fishing since bright orange plastic. The Arctic Warrior Tip-Up from Clam is a tip-up in which an actual rod and reel can be used to fight the fish. One can set the rig a reasonable distance away and watch for a flag to pop, announcing the fish is on.

The tip-up uses a simple attachment that connects to any rod and reel combo with hook-and-loop fastner or tape and it provides the balance or pinion point. A person can simply open the bail of their reel, let the line down to the desired depth, set the line in a notch on the holder bar, and set the holder





bar in a notch in the attachment. When a fish takes the line, the rod tips forward, releasing the holder bar, and setting off the flag. Then the angler simply walks up to the Arctic Warrior, takes the rod/reel combo out, closes the bale, and sets the hook. The fish can now be fought and played fighting and playing with a reliable drag and an appropriate action rod. No more cut fingers or dealing with a mess after a day of fishing.

The Toothy Ones

Bigtooth Tackle and Clam Pro Tackle have teamed up and hit a homerun with the Zero Flouro Rig.

When many people think about tip-up fishing with Bigtooth Tackle, they think pike. The Zero Rig comes in three sizes, and is great for anything from walleyes and trout up to pike and muskies. The patent-pending design allows you to rig a minnow so that it hangs perfectly horizontal, but when the fish eats the bait and you rip into the fish, the hooks slide toward each other.

The less space between the two trebles while fighting the fish, the less chance of a hook catching on the bottom of the ice, and the better the chances of getting both hooks stuck into the fish. The fluorocarbon option works very well for lake trout and walleyes, which are very visual predators, as flouro is virtually invisible under water. The Zero Rig also comes in a wire version for those big toothy pike.

Tip-Up Tricks

Here are a couple of really cool tips that will aid you in becoming a more proficient and better tip-up angler.

If you're using a regular tip-up, buy some Dacron that's the opposite color from what you've got spooled up, and learn how to tie a bobber stop knot. Tying a visible marker on your line will save you a lot of time when resetting your line to the proper depth. Once you find the depth you want to be fishing at, tie a bobber stop knot at that spot so you can reset your bait to that depth with ease and speed.

Mark your holes. After drilling all of my tip-up holes, I'll walk hole to hole with my Vexilar and simple scribble the depth of each hole in the snow with my finger or rod tip. That way, I know the exact depth of each hole when I go to reset lines. I also do this while hole-hopping on a sharp break while not using tip-ups. It's a simple, time-saving method, and one every angler should keep in mind.

Put line counter reels on all of your rods that are set up on Arctic Warriors. If I'm fishing lake trout in 80



feet of water, and I want my cisco to hang at 24 feet down, I either need to guess, use my Vexilar every time I re-bait or check that hole, or use a line counter and let out 24 feet of line. Line counters are an incredible time saver, and teamed with a quality rod and an Arctic Warrior Tip Up, you cannot go wrong.

Silent Partner

Tip-ups don't take long to set up, and are very effective in fishing for anything from panfish to giant predators. Based on your state regulations, you should almost always have as many tip-ups out as your state allows along with your jigging rod to cover water. While fishing at sunset, I'll often set a tip-up much shallower than where I'm jigging. I know that when the tip-up starts to go off, it's time to move in shallower with my jigging as well. They aren't just for break lines... tip-ups can be used on weed edges or on flats, be it shallow bars or deep mud flats, having your set up spread out across the structure never hurts. Let your tip-up be your silent fishing partner. If you're lucky, it might even out-fish you.

WINNIPESAUKEE WHITES

By Tim Moore

As an ice fishing guide New Hampshire's Winnipesaukee, Lake my clients range from ice fishing first-timers to skilled anglers seeking local knowledge. Some of them come to Lake Winnipesaukee to fish for lake trout, but most come for the chance to catch white perch, or "whites" as the locals call them.

Lake Winnipesaukee holds of the some biggest white perch in North America, there are a lot of them, but for many anglers white perch remain elusive. Like anything, there is a knack for catching them, and armed with the right and a little gear knowledge, big white perch can be caught on every trip.

Where

During the winter, Winnipesaukee's white perch travel in large schools and feed aggressively on smelt. If you find the smelt, you almost always find the



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whites. They will chase schools of smelt and herd them into ambush areas. White perch are nomadic and always on the move. They move in and out of bays, usually working their way north or south, mostly along the northern half of the lake. The trick is to figure out where the whites will be and which direction they are headed.

My go-to spots include basins, outside turns (or points) and along steep breaks that lead to inside turns. I usually find fish in around 27 feet of water, but also as deep as 40 feet and as shallow as 10 feet. Start with a basin and if you don't locate fish, or the bite dies off, move to the nearest of the other go-to structures. The chances are the school is moving along and feeding on smelt.

When you find whites in a basin there is a good chance they've trapped a school of smelt. The whites will try to keep the smelt in the basin for as long as they can and gorge on them. When they succeed in trapping the smelt in a basin they will sometimes stay there for hours, offering consistent and often furious action. When the bite slows, wait a few minutes for the school to come back around, but don't wait too long because these schools are constantly on the move. If the bite dies off for more than 15 minutes make a move to another area, such as another basin or an outside turn.

Outside turns, or points, are good areas because white perch will hold on either side of the point and ambush schools of smelt as they move through an area. Pay particular attention to opposing points that create a narrow because narrows act like funnels and condense smelt as they move from one area to another.







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If you can find fish in an area where a steep break starts as a point and leads to an inside turn, you are in for some of the best white perch fishing that there is, especially during the last hour of daylight when whites feed most aggressively. The whites will push smelt toward the break, which forces the smelt to filter out to the sides. The smelt will most often choose the side that leads into the inside turn for the safety of shallow water.

The whites know this and will focus their attention on the end nearest the inside turn, and so should you. There are a couple of areas like this on Lake Winnipesaukee that are so fun, I sometimes make the trip to the lake to one of these locations just to fish that last hour of daylight.

When

First ice is always fun because oxygen levels will still be high and whites will be feeding heavily on smelt. You will not have to move around much. Sometimes you can just sit and wait for more fish, or the same fish, to come around. During mid-winter, decreased oxygen and colder water will cause white perch to become more sluggish and feed less aggressively. By this time the whites will also have scattered the smelt and the bite will slow significantly. What was 50 to 100 fish a day will turn to 10-fish days, but don't worry because it's only temporary. Once March rolls around the fishing will heat back up in a big way.

As daylight increases, snow-pack will begin to melt and precipitation will start coming in the form of rain rather than snow. All of the runoff created will re-oxygenate the water and trigger the white perch and rainbow smelt to form massive pre-spawn schools. To prepare for the coming spawn and the increased energy consumption that will occur just after ice-out, the whites will feed more aggressively than at any other time of the year. This is by far my favorite time of year to fish. Some days the fish bite all day long.



Regardless of the time of year, cloudy davs are always going to be your best bet. On cloudy, rainy, or snowy days the whites usually bite all day. On sunny bluebird days, focus on the hours around dawn dusk. and Be prepared to do a lot of moving around during the mid-day period because the whites will be less active. If you are considering calling it a day and you see

heavy cloud cover rolling in, stay put. As soon as heavy cloud cover rolls in, the bite almost always turns on, just as if someone had flipped a switch.

What

When fishing for white perch mobility and efficiency are two of the most important factors — sometimes they're even more important than lure color. Since white perch schools are nomadic they can be there one minute and gone the next. You need to be able to move quickly and often. Bring only what you need and don't lay all of your gear on the ice while you are fishing so you can pick up and

move when the fish do.

Quality gear that allows mobility and efficiency is the game changer. Clam Outdoors has a full line of products geared for the mobile ice angler. The Fish Trap Scout and Dave Genz (pictured) Legend Thermal are two great options that will greatly increase mobility and efficiency by letting you stay light, keeping gear in one place and elements escaping the needed. The auger, heater, rods, and Vexilar will easily fit inside the tub. Without some of the modern tools available you will be colder,



move less often, switch jigs or baits less often than you should, and catch fewer fish. As Dave Genz always says, "Keep it easy. If it isn't easy, you won't do it."

Two or three 26- to -28-inch light action or medium/light action rods with 4 or 6 pound test line will suffice. The lighter your line, the faster your jig will drop down to the fish, which is important when the whites are really on the move. Having multiple rods allows you to tie a different jig onto each line. Then you can cycle through your setups until you find the one that works best, rather than re-tying every time you want to switch jigs. Sometimes more isn't better though. The more rods you bring, the more time you will spend untangling them from each other.

Electronics play a vital role in finding and staying on fish. A Vexilar FLX-28 will allow you to pinpoint specific depths and show you where the fish are in the water column. Your Vexilar will quickly show you if the white perch are suspended 12 feet off the bottom in 40 feet of water, saving valuable time and keeping you catching fish rather than looking for them. Once you determine a target depth you can use your Vexilar to read how the fish react to your jig, or the mood of the fish, as we say. Most importantly, when the school moves on you will know it. Then the trick is to figure out which way they went and follow them.

The number twelve white/orange and white/red Epoxy Drop from Clam Pro Tackle (pictured) tipped with a Maki Plastic Jamei or Maki is one of the hottest lures for white perch that I have ever used. The



runner-up is a glowred Blade Spoon tipped with the same plastics. New Hampshire only allows a single hook with a single hook point for bait, so I change out the hooks on the blade spoon for a single siwash hook, which allows me to use spikes or plastics legally. The single siwash hook also

helps me unhook fish faster and get my jig back down to the school sooner. If the fish are finicky, like during the mid-winter bite, you may want to tip your jig with spikes or dillies. Sometimes the whites are keyed-in on smelt and won't eat anything else. This is when the epoxy drop really shines because you can tip it with a small smelt and get it down to the fish quickly.

How

Cadence is everything, but there is no one cadence that is the end-all. Vary your cadence until you find what works and stick with it until it doesn't. Sometimes a jig or spoon ripped through the water column a few times will call fish in from a distance, either from the flash or the vibration the lure creates. On sunny days when fish can see well, take advantage of the available light with something shiny. On cloudy days when fish are relying more on their lateral line system, use a lure that displaces a lot of water such as the Psycho Shad.

You often hear anglers refer to "pounding the bottom" to entice perch to bite. Pounding refers to ripping the jig up a foot or two and letting it fall back to the bottom. This creates a cloud of silt as though a dobsonfly or mayfly nymph was rising out of the bottom and will often attract wary or finicky white perch. If a school appears to be thinning, or suddenly disappears from the screen of your Vexilar, try dropping your jig to the bottom and pounding it a few times. Then lift it a foot or two off the bottom and resume your normal cadence. If there are still whites in the area they will almost always find this irresistible.

Put It All Together

On most days, one angler with the right gear and know-how can catch 20 or so white perch averaging 2 pounds each. On a really good day you can expect to catch upwards of 100. Stick to the key areas I described, stay mobile and efficient, and keep it easy. The easier you can make fishing for white perch, the more productive you will be. Also pay attention to changes in weather and fishing pressure as they will always have a significant impact on white perch locations and behavior. Stick with it and your persistence will be rewarded. The first time your Vexilar displays perch 12 feet deep you will be hooked. If you love to ice fish, this is an experience not to be missed.





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Keep Moving For More Fish

By Bob Jensen

As we get farther into the ice-fishing season, it becomes important that we vary our methods for catching fish a little bit. Early in the season when snow cover was light and the ice was thin, it was a good idea to sit on a spot for awhile. Now that the ice is thicker and has some snow on it, and the fish have been worked over some, in many bodies of water it's a good idea to keep moving if you want to catch more fish through the ice. Here are some ideas as to how you can be more successful with your ice-fishing right now and for the next few weeks.

During the first few weeks of the icefishing season the fish are kind of spooky. They've got lots of activity and

noise directly overhead, so it's understandable why they're spooky.



Now they're not so spooky. The thicker ice and snow cover hides and quiets the movement and noise from above, and they've probably also become accustomed to the overhead noise. An angler can move around more, and that ability to go to the fish instead of waiting for the fish to come to you is very helpful.

More and more, ice-anglers are finding that what we used to call "permanent shelters" are great for ice-fishing. However, these "permanent shelters" don't have to be so "permanent" anymore. The Ice Castle shelter that we use is easy to move, so it's very easy to move from spot to spot to find the bite.

However, I still like to take a portable shelter with me, even when we are fishing from the larger house. I like to fish in the Ice Castle, but I also like to pop some holes around it. I can fish a large area and chase the fish more aggressively, but I can also go into the larger shelter to warm up, have a snack, and keep fishing while I do so. I find that as the years pass, I enjoy the camaraderie that goes with ice-fishing, and that camaraderie is enhanced when everyone spends a few minutes together in the Ice Castle.



I've used a lot of different portable shelters in the past. The folks at Clam seem to keep adding features to their shelters that make them very nice to fish from and easy to pull from hole to hole.

Here's how we do it. We start at our first hole. If we don't see any activity, we move, and we keep moving until we find activity. Sonar will help you catch a lot more fish. A sonar unit will show you if fish are below your hole. If fish are there, you stick around a little longer. If no fish show up in five minutes maximum, it's time to try another hole. I've been using a Vexilar FL-12 the most recently. It's a basic unit but does a very nice job for what I need it to do.

Holes should be drilled at different depths, and at different locations on a structure. Some should be near the drop-off, some up on the top of the structure and some at the base of the structure. If you're fishing a popular structure that sees lots of fishing activity, you should spend more time out near the edge of the area away from the fishing activity. That's where the best biters will usually be. If you see activity on the sonar but can't get bit, try different colors, sizes, and actions until you find what the fish want.

If you're on good water, if you keep moving, and if you give the fish what they want, you're going to catch more fish, and that, along with the camaraderie, is a great reason to go ice-fishing.

To see the newest episodes of Fishing the Midwest television go to www.fishingthemidwest.com. If you do Facebook, please give us a look for current fishing stuff.

ODU MAGAZINE VIDEO BLOCK (www.odumagazine.com)



Finding Fish Under The Ice

Vexilar Pro Staff

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

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



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

Your first step is to understand the kind of water you are going to fish. This will mean getting a lake map and looking at the



types of structure you have available to you at this time of year. Remember, your ability to travel on a lake may be limited to foot power or poor ice conditions may limit the areas you can reach safely. It is always a good idea to know the roads and the various winter access points that surround any given lake.



When it comes to finding fish, every time you try to make rules as to where you SHOULD find fish, the rules change. Like catching sunfish at night, many would agree that sunfish don't bite at night, but in some lakes, you don't catch the really big onesuntil the sun goes down...go figure. Here are a few good guidelines to use to begin your search, simply because you will need to start someplace. The more you learn by fishing, the more you can refine the rules that govern the lake you are on that day.

Walleyes love deep, hard bottom areas. Crappies and perch love waters of over 30 feet with a super soft bottom, and sunfish love to hang off steep weedy break lines. Finding the right fish holding

elements for the fish you are after is fairly easy with a lake map. If the lake has one deep hole, then you would start there for crappie. If a lake is a maze of structure, then it is best to break the lake into small regions that you can work without getting too confused. Your first goal on most lakes is to establish the edge of the weed line. Most winter lakes get far clearer then they do in the summer, and some of the biggest sunfish in the lake move into the old weed line for protection from predators. Checking the edge of the weed line is even better if you are near a point or inside turn where the deep water comes closest to shore.

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

If you're targeting a break line, a series of holes placed only ten to twenty feet apart heading out from shore will give you a feel for what to expect as you move away from the weed line to find the clean bottom edge. In the weeds, your flasher display will show a great deal of green and orange signals above the bottom red band, even on the lowest gain setting. You will need to keep your gain turned down as

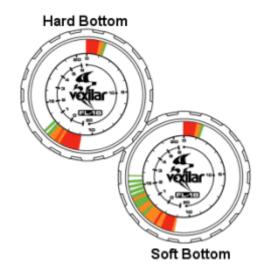
Vexilar Weed Tops
Fish ???

low as you can to make sure you find the true bottom in thick weeds, since the weeds themselves could appear as a red signal if the gain is too high. If you fish a great deal in waters under ten feet, you may find your FL-8SE will work best with the aid of an S-Cable or suppression cable, available from Vexilar or a Dealer as an accessory. The S-Cable attaches quickly to your transducer cable where it attaches to the back of your unit. This small cable will reduce the output of your signal by more than 50% to allow you to see through thick weeds to find true bottom. Summer anglers commonly use the "S" cable. The other Vexilar flashers have a special shallow water, or Low Power, mode built-in, so all you need to do is switch into the "LP" mode.

ODU MAGAZINE

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





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





edge extending farther and farther beyond the back side of the red depth band is one sign of the getting softer, when compared to nearby readings. Softer bottoms will absorb signals and make it harder to get a return signal. weak signal may even be shown as the bottom turning to orange or even green in mucky bottom areas. It is best to NOT adjust gain setting your

when looking for changes in bottom density.

Since you are hoping to catch fish holding on or very near the bottom, you seldom "see" fish on your flasher before you drop a line. This is why you will need to punch holes, lots of holes, and move from hole to hole to pinpoint pockets of fish. You will be surprised how quickly the fish will respond by coming to your bait if you are close to them. Give each hole just a few minutes of fishing time while you watch your sonar for fish interest. When using this technique, the first thing you will notice is that the very top edge of the bottom signal will begin to flicker and even pulsate. On many occasions you will have a small thin green line that sits just above the bottom signal and that green line will start to bounce as the fish approaches your bait. The signal will grow and eventually seem to pop up off the bottom and start to turn orange, then red, as the fish enters the area of your signal directly below your transducer. The fish didn't suddenly come in from below you, it was a distance away and you attracted them to your bait. Perch are also great for this kind of fish finding and catching technique. When fishing for bottom fish, you will need to do a lot of testing to find areas the fish are really holding in, don't rely on electronics to "find" your fish. Once you find action, stay of course, but don't be afraid to move when the fish signals or flickering bottom disappears. The advantage of electronics will be your ability to know if there is fish activity around your bait.

If you are fishing at a time when the fish are moving through the area, you can actually follow the school up or down a break line if you pre-cut your holes along a key migration route. Once the fish signals disappear, the fish often move up or down the break line at key times and that is whenknowledge gained from hole drilling can help. Say you set-up for walleye fishing at three in the afternoon on a point. Your daytime fishing action may take place in thirty feet of water, but as the sun hits the horizon, the fish pull up on the point in only 12 feet of water. By pre-drilling and knowing the bottom contour



the fish may travel, you can extend the prime time of fishing catching to a few hours instead of one quick flurry of action.

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

nature of the sonar signal itself being shielded by the shadow created by the rocks you are fishing around. When this condition exists, don't expect to see many fish when you get a bone jarring strike from a walleye holding tight to the bottom between the rocks. A narrower angler transducer can help reduce this effect if you find yourself in this situation a lot.

One big exception to fishing transition zones on lakes would be fishing for sunfish, crappie and perch on lakes with soft muck bottoms. These "mud lakes" hold an enormous amount of insect life in the soft "muck" bottoms and panfish know it. For this reason, they often school in great numbers over this area of soft bottom.

Finding fish schooling 18 feet down over 35 feet of water is common on many natural lakes with soft bottom areas. The use of your Vexilar flasher will become critical for you to find these nomadic schools of fish that range over these mud areas for most of February and March. Often referred to as "crappie holes" these deep water pockets of soft bottom will hold a large number of crappie and sunfish in the late winter months.

Using your flasher for finding winter panfish is almost a MUST. Seldom will you get into big numbers of panfish unless you are able to actually spot schools on your flasher first. This is where you can really cover some water since your sonar will be your eyes. Many prefer to drill holes even for this type of fishing recon since you are able to increase the gain on your unit to "look" for fish on the edges of your cone signal. Fish targets will appear as green lines randomly coming and going three to ten feet above

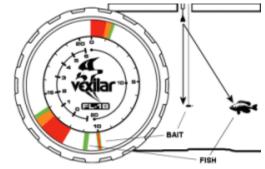


the bottom. It might even seem like interference to some, or look like weeds to others. We have heard reports of perch schools on Devils Lake ten feet thick! If you are still able to spot these green signals as you turn you gain back down to the one or two setting on your gain, you know the fish are very near you and very likely to respond to a bait as you drop it into the schooling zone. Once you find schools like

this, limits of panfish are often not far behind. Aggressive panfish anglers who travel in search of these schools will find their efforts

well rewarded.

Once you have pinpointed these schools, it is best to focus your attention on figuring out ways to get these fish to bite. We have already mentioned that we needed to turn the gain back to a more normal setting when you fish. This begins by setting your gain to have your bait show up as a thin red signal on your dial as it drops deeper



and deeper. It may be necessary to increase your setting, as you get deeper to keep the lure target red and easy to see. The most popular technique for fishing suspended fish is to stop the bait above the school and "bring the fish to you". This will be a great example understanding fish signals and how fish are NOT "coming up" to your bait. As in the figure here, a green signal two or three feet below your bait may actually be a fish two or three feet away from the center of the cone, but act the exact same depth as your bait. As the fish comes to your bait, they reduce the distance from the center of the cone and your dial will show this change as a change in depth. The colors of the signals will also change as the fish gets closer to the center of the cone. Since your small ice fly is shown as a red mark, it won't be long before the fish that was once a small green blip, will change to orange and then to a bright red. Once red, you should be ready for a bite. Like a video game, the fish will react to your lure action or bait offering and you can adjust your angling techniques to put more fish on the hook. This is one of the big advantages of using a Vexilar flasher. You are able to better understand the interest level of the fish and become a much more successful angler because of what you will learn.

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







With Deep Freeze Done, Temps Warming And Bites Heating Up!

By ICE FORCE

Come out of hibernation anglers! With the deep freeze over, bites are heating up across the Ice Belt.

On Minnesota's Upper Red Lake, ICE FORCE pro Brad Hawthorne is icing 15 to 40 eater walleyes a day on VMC Tingler Spoons and Rapala Rippin' Raps.

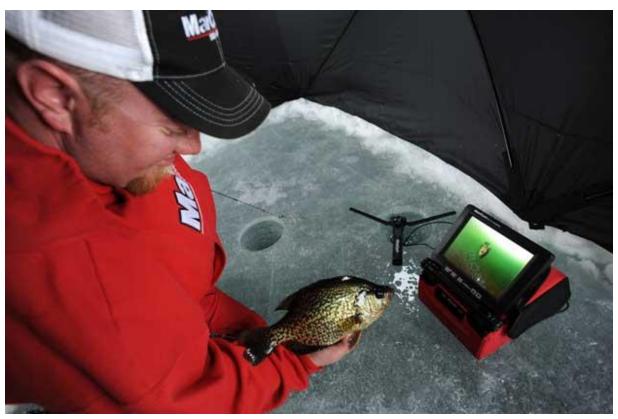
And Jumbo perch as big as 15 inches are wailing on VMC Tear Drop Jigs tipped with minnow heads for ICE FORCE pro Brian "Beef" Sathre in Minnesota's Bemidji Lakes area.

Tingler Spoons & Rippin' Raps

On Upper Red Lake, "ice conditions are improving, roads are getting plowed and the slotties are biting," says Hawthorne, a fulltime fishing guide.

Capitalizing on a bug hatch that's "just starting to pop," Hawthorne has been putting clients on walleyes recently by setting up over "mud holes" in 13 to 14 feet of water "away from the crowds," about four miles off shore.





"We're seeing the major fish movement out deep right now," he says, noting that on shallow, bowl-shaped Upper Red, 14 feet is deep. "Were still seeing 15 to 40 fish per day on that bite under stable conditions."

Tingler Spoons , tipups and the Rapala Rippin' Rap® have all "put fish in the pail," in recent weeks, Hawthorne says. The

Rippin' Rap has been his go-to bait when fish are aggressive. Blue-Chrome has been the hot color pattern.

Depending on the mood of the fish, Hawthorne jigs the Rippin' Rap with different cadences. The "traditional method" is to give it three big, upward rips and then shake it in place. If the walleyes don't respond to that, he'll "drop straight down and 'poof' the bottom, then pick it up and slowly shake it." You can watch Hawthorne demonstrate these tactics in a video on his Facebook page.

On most days, Hawthorne stays on the move, "running gunning" to and keep his clients on top of active, biting, fish. "The more active, the better they are," he says. "l'm looking numbers, not size Upper Red on Lake," he says. "I'm looking for 30 to 50 fish a day. And if it's not 30 to 50 fish a day, I keep the Otter portable shelters moving."





Hawthorne invites anglers that "have a little gumption in them" to visit Upper Red Lake and "reap the bounty" of exploring "virgin territory." Find new areas, he says, "don't be afraid to move around." But keep checking ice thickness and safety as you go, he cautions.

ODU MAGAZINE VIDEO BLOCK (www.odumagazine.com)

Jumbo Tear Drop Jig Bite

An hour and a half south of Upper Red Lake, Beef and his guide clients have enjoyed "a really good run of 10- to 14-inch-plus jumbo perch" on Leech Lake. "And our biggest ones were practically 15's." Leech is among many lakes in the Bemidji area that are "just starting to turn on," Beef says. The bite turned on as temperatures warmed after the recent cold snap.

Tipping Tear Drop Jigs with fathead and shiner heads, Beef has been calling in and catching those jumbo perch in 19 to 30 feet of water in "transition areas" where bottom content changed to mud.

"I've never had so much luck than I have recently on the Tear Drop jig," he says. The perch have been feeding so aggressively that jig color doesn't even matter. "It looked like a redworm hatch was going on in the mud, so the perch were just putting the feedbag on," Beef says. "And they're still doing it right now, so it's still going. And there's some token walleyes mixed in too."

Beef does not wait for the fish to come to him. Instead, he runs and guns, using MarCum sonar units to locate the transition areas where fish are biting. "You can see it on the LX9 or the LX7," he says. "It will



be like the in summertime when you're going across open water and you see a mayfly hatch coming up. You can see little dots down there, almost like air bubble-looking things."

When he sees something he likes on the MarCum, he drills a line of 20 to 30 holes. "If I don't mark any fish right away, I'll hole hop with the cameras really quick and make sure I'm on that mud transition, and once I do, I pepper the area."

Beef's cameras are MarCum VS825SD and LX9 underwater viewing systems. They help him hone in even further on the productive bug-hatch areas. "Every now and then, you'll see movement, almost like a crayfish would move," he explains. "And its fun, because you watch these fish just dive-bomb. They'll dive their heads right into the mud to get at those bugs. Then they come up with one and puke up all the mud."

After finding active fish with jigging rods, Beef would drill a second hole near the hot hole and set up an Otter portable shelter and run a dead stick in the second hole. "The jigging was nice because it would



draw them in, but we got more hits on the deadstick," he says. The deadstick rod was rigged with a minnow head on a Tear Drop Jig as well.

"We noticed that with too much action down there, they didn't like it, so that's why we went with just a minnow head," he says. "You could have done just as well with Euro Larvae or waxies too."

Throughout the jumbo-perch bite, Beef's jigging rods have been spooled with 6-pound-test Sufix 832 Advanced Ice Braid. "We're in crystal-clear water, but they are so aggressive, they don't care," he says. His deadstick rods are spooled with 6-pound-test Sufix Ice Magic mono in both the smoke and clear colors.

Beef's jumbo perch bite was hot from morning to evening, but not after sundown. "Once it got dark, that bite turned off and the walleyes and eelpout moved in," he says. "As soon as you'd see on the camera the perch move out, you knew there was walleyes coming through."

Although the walleyes have been "a little more finicky," Beef says, they will hit VMC Flash Champ and Rattle Spoons.



