

December 2017
Winter Fishing
Edition

ODU MAGAZINE

**DRILL
TWO**

**WHY
I
HUNT**

**A Smallmouth Mission
Kayak Tautog Fishing**

**Open Water Zone
Ice Fishing Zone
Hunting Zone**

**SPECIAL FEATURE:
Gideon**

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EDITOR'S LETTER

news that comes from this, is I have had a chance to look back a few our magazines and saved emails ... since going outside has been slowed.

Starting a magazine company is hard, but one couldn't be more thankful for the generosity I have received in the great articles and stories ODU has published to make each of these magazines full with quality pieces. In the coming days after this magazine hits, ODU will announce new writers who have joined in promoting ODU. That will be quite a fun project to complete.

You can learn more about our contributors by visiting our website (www.odumagazine.com) and scrolling to the bottom right to see who has already been added. More need to be added and will be.

When ODU Magazine was first thought of many years ago at ICAST, Larry and I set the standard for the digital magazine to be anglers writing for fellow anglers. We have grown to feature ice fishing in five magazines per season and have since added hunting coverage at the end of each magazine to better meet what our readers enjoy. Each year our ODU survey tells us that many of you hunt, all of you fish, most of you have either a motor boat, canoe or kayak and 10% of our readership comes from Canada. To name a few stats.

Thank you to all out readership for returning to ODU week after week.

This year in reflection comes inspired by a few articles written this year by a few of our contributors and several memories of the co-founder of ODU Magazine, Larry Thornhill.

I live in the northeast which is now blanketed with arctic weather, with days in the single digits and nights all starting with negative something. The good

Editorial Team Leader: Bill Schwarz, Bill@odumagazine.com

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Advertising inquirers for our fishing or hunting magazines, ODU Fishing and Hunting News should be e-mailed to:
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Interest in more about ODU Magazine and OutDoors Unlimited Media visit this [LINK](#).

Thank You All!



FREE

FISHING MAGAZINES

**Bass, Walleye, Crappie,
Bluegill, Catfish,
Redfish, Musky,
Stripers, Trout, Salmon.**

Fresh-Ice-Salt



As ODU moves forward we will continue to produce digital fishing magazines and look for more outlets to expand our already growing readership. Readership stands at over 17,000 subscribers and over 30,000 unique visitor per month to our website. Not to shabby.

>ODUMagazine.com will also serve up balanced daily posts about fishing, hunting, camping, hiking and conservation, in that order, with special columns from Dana Benner, Bob Jensen, Capt Mike, Dan Galusha and sponsored posting in the column "From the Desks Of The ODU Writers."

>Last year ODU Magazine had one contest on the Facebook group page that was very successful and for 2018 we will have four more. One will start very soon. Click below and join the group.

Link - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ODUMagazine/>

>For up and coming outdoor writers, ODU will continue to be an outlet to give more of these fine outdoorsmen and women a place to share their stories. Fishing and hunting articles make the best mix. Email Jennifer Gonyea at outdoorsunlimitedmedia@gmail.com for details.

>Fishing and Hunting Coverage. Bass, crappie and walleye fishing will undoubtedly be our major fishing topics to cover, but we will be on the lookout for more catfish, pike, musky, perch and carp. Hunting quality will increase as well, as we locate more whitetail, mule deer, elk, duck and turkey hunters who love to hunt and share their experiences.

What is in this magazine? This magazine splits open water fishing, ice fishing and hunting almost equally between 25 articles. Including: Freshwater to saltwater fishing. Ice lures to use and what to target. Flounder and tautog. How to target open water winter fish. A wonderful story from a new writer named Jofie Lamprecht, about his hunting companion Gideon. Have you ever hunted javelina? This digital magazine will entertain and teach without a doubt. Enjoy.

....WS

Thank you to all who have contributed to make this and past editions a success!

And please, enjoy the outdoors.

*Larry Thornhill and William Schwarz
Co-Founders of ODU Magazine*



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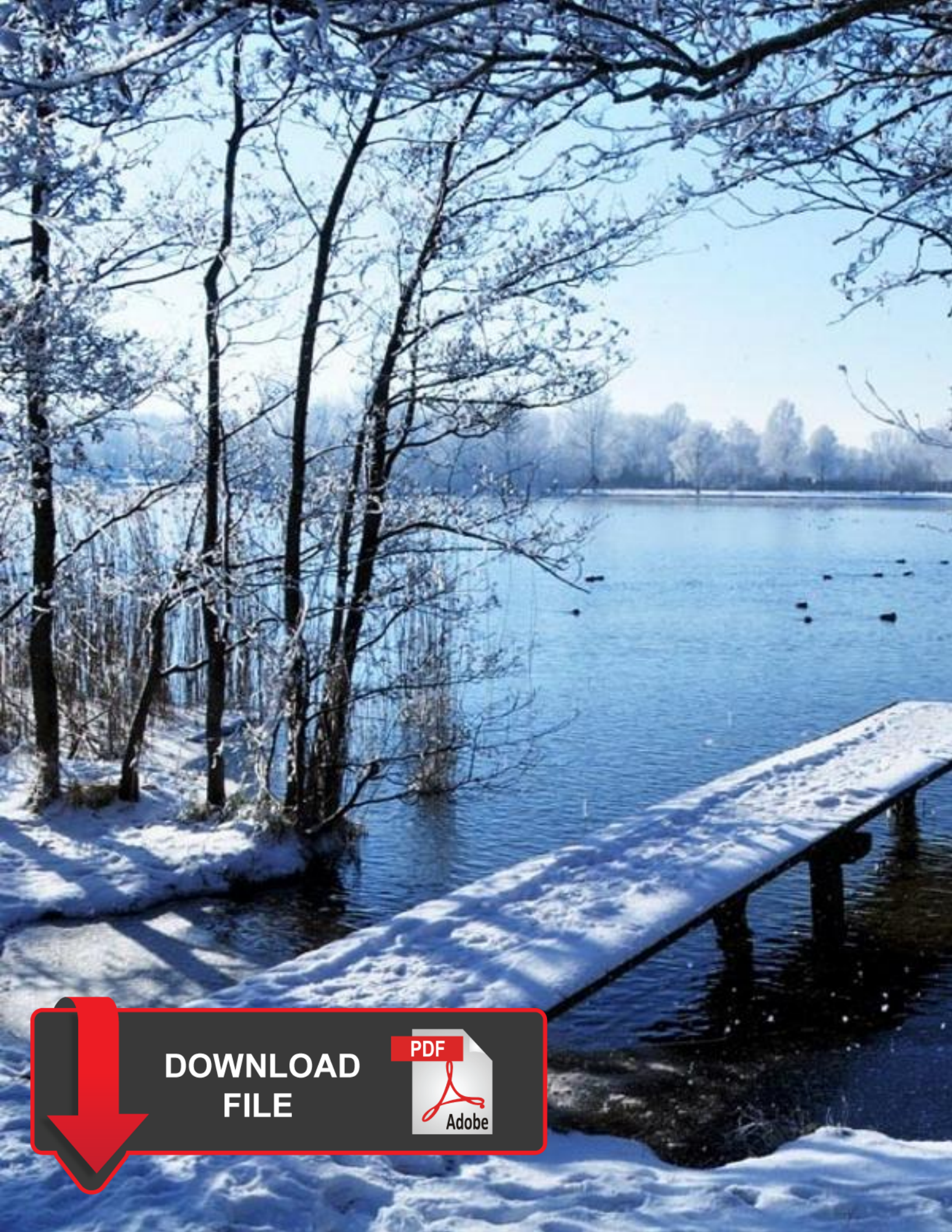
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WYMAN'S SMALLMOUTH MISSION

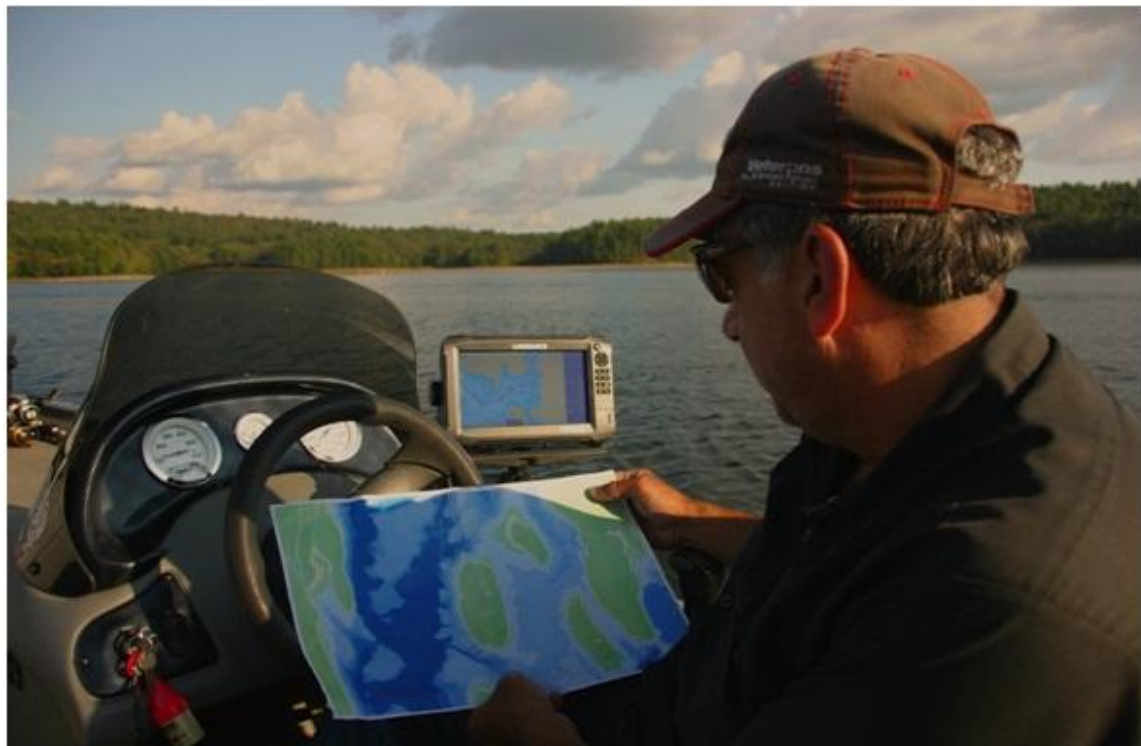
By Billy 'Hawkeye' Decoteau

Many years ago I was blessed to have befriended Mr. Spurgeon Aggerton, a former POW of WWII. Mr. Aggerton's respect and passion for America was certainly one to be admired and appreciated by those who knew him. Our relationship centered upon the sport of fishing, and although we traveled and fished many outstanding fisheries together none compared to our time spent together on Massachusetts Quabbin Reservoir.

Imagine spending the entire day on the water, yet perhaps never seeing another angler. A shoreline that is all natural undeveloped occupied only my protected wildlife. The sounds of a soaring American Bald Eagle followed by the splashing noise of its talons securing a salmon or trout for breakfast. I'll never forget witnessing deer walking peacefully along shorelines as well as an occasional sight of a Black Bear and her cubs or that of a Moose...Not to mention the extraordinary days we enjoyed catching outstanding smallmouth bass. Yes, that was and still is Massachusetts's Quabbin Reservoir.

Created in the 1930's Quabbin is one of the worlds largest unfiltered water supply systems. An extraordinary achievement of engineering Quabbin stretches 18 miles in length, covering 181 miles of shoreline. The 25,000-acre reservoir has a water capacity of over 400 billion gallons. Sustaining the primary drinking water for 2.5 million Massachusetts residents. Massachusetts's Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) regulates and manages Quabbin Reservoir fishing

*Dale Wyman compares his paper map to actual
on-the-water Lowrance Sonar readings.*

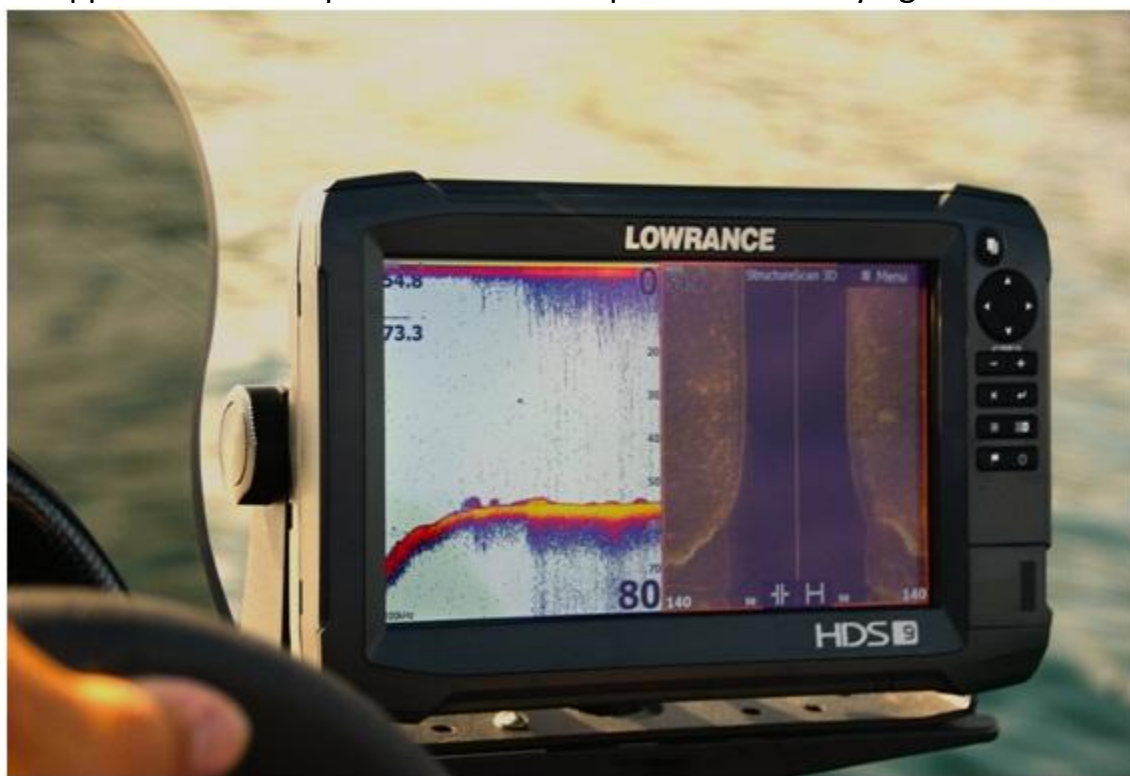


and boating regulations all designed to keep Quabbin Reservoir one of the most pristine angling bodies of water within New England. (www.mass.gov/dcr/watershed)

Quabbin's crystal clear water clarity has an astonishing 20-30 foot visibility range, while maximum water depth is 150' the average mean depth is 45'. Three boat launches provide anglers access to Area #1, #2 and #3, with Area #3 providing excellent warm water bass fishing. Maximum horsepower limits for 2-stroke outboards are 20 hp., and 4-stroke outboards are 25 hp. Each area operates 7-days per week and opens at 6:00 a.m. However, closing times vary and all boats must be off the water 1.5 hours before closing. Now factor in Quabbin Reservoirs open dates begin Mid-April to closings dates Mid-October and the challenge of chasing Quabbin's smallmouth bass become more difficult. This is one reason most bass anglers turn to chasing shallow water largemouth's after the spawn!

However, Massachusetts Dale Wyman is not a member of the most bass anglers' club! Wyman is an outstanding individual, bass angler, electronics expert and now a seasoned Quabbin student. "In April most anglers were catching smallmouth bass ranging from 3-plus to 5-pounds and an occasional 6 pounder," recalls Wyman. However, when speaking with seasoned Quabbin bass anglers Wyman was told those bigger smallmouths disappear after the spawn and don't expect to catch any again until next spring!

Accepting that statement as a personal challenge, Dale Wyman decided to learn Quabbin's massive underwater geographic contours. "In order to establish a better understanding of Quabbin it was imperative for me to do some extensive research", recalls Wyman. As a seasoned tournament angler Dale Wyman's knowledge of the Black Bass, during seasonal transitional periods had a proven track record within the tournament circuit. However, Quabbin Reservoir does not allow bass tournaments and is strictly for recreational fishing only! Therefore Wyman's quest required him to attain as much information as possible as to how Quabbin Reservoir's landscape was before its creation during 1930.



Dale's Lowrance HDS-9 with a split screen image of down-scan on deep hump at 55'

Photo: The Bass Bureau/Billy 'Hawkeye' Decoteau

Dale Wyman secured paper maps revealing the four towns, Dana, Prescott, Enfield and Greenwich, which were all evacuated then flooded to create Quabbin. "My research divulged underwater ponds, old roads, stone walls along with tributaries feeding into Quabbin. I then started a file of

information logged unto my computer. Which included all of my on-the-water Lowrance sonar trails, waypoints, water depths, contour lines, humps and extended points.” Wyman’s meticulous attention to detail included every smallmouth bass caught, weighed, depth, bait technique, water temperature, daily weather conditions, date and time caught.

Wyman was limited to venturing out on Quabbin only on weekends, holidays or selective vacation days due to working his full time job during the day. “The boat traffic during April and May included only diehard Quabbin bass anglers along with trout and salmon boats,” says Wyman. Having pre-planned each of his trips to target specific areas Dale Wyman dissected these areas utilizing his Lowrance sonars Down Scan and Side Scan imaging, to locate deep water humps, road beds isolated rock piles and what Wyman calls a bass magnet... old stone walls.
www.Lowrance.com

Revealing his log Wyman informed me, “When I started the surface water temperature ranged from 46-50 degrees, deep-water humps produced with blade baits. As the temperature increased pre-spawn bass moved unto staging areas in 15-20’, suspending jerkbaits as well as hair jigs became productive. Plus, I was still catching female bass weighing 4-5 lbs.”



JP with 6.1 lb. smallmouth bass caught on Wyman's Drop-Shot setup.

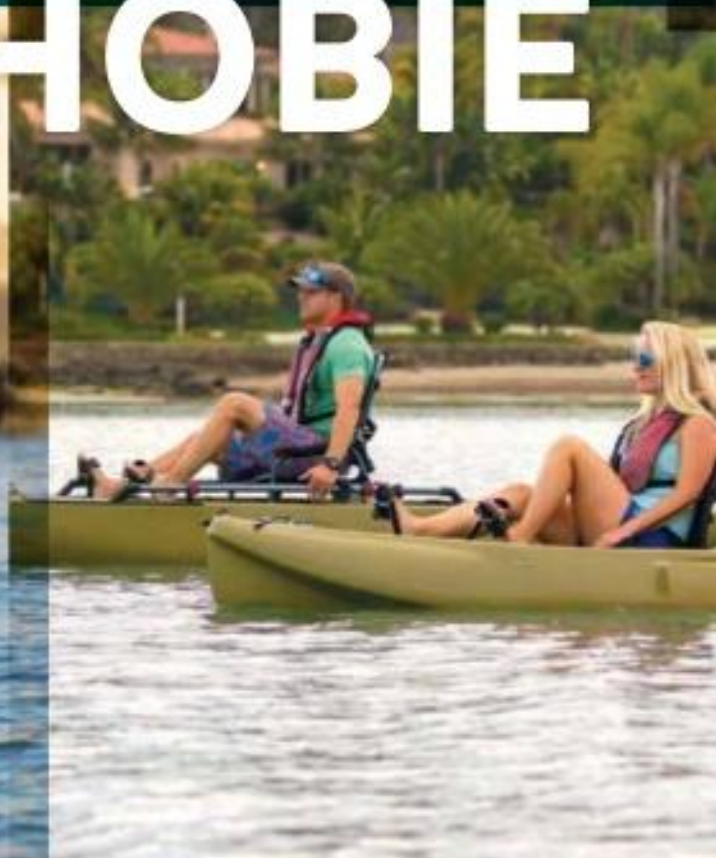
Photo courtesy of Dale Wyman

After the spawn Wyman worked drop-offs extending from spawning flats. “I concentrated along sharp contours ranging from 18’ to 25’ and come late July-August, I targeted rocky humps within water depths of 25’ to 40’.” Wyman’s arsenal now included dropshot rigs worked vertical over these deep-water humps as he located both baitfish and bass. “We were continuing to catch smallmouth bass in the 3-4 lb. range on every trip. Then in late August my friend ‘JP’ landed our biggest smallmouth of the year 6.1 lbs. on a drop-shot rig. I remember it well, my Lowrance sonar revealed several bass directly under the boat near an isolated rock pile. I suggested JP allow his drop-shot rig to fall straight to the bottom. As I watched JP’s rig fall on my sonar the bass moved towards his drop-shot rig. Instantly JP was hooked up

The Hobie logo is displayed in a stylized, cursive font within a blue diamond-shaped frame. The background of the advertisement features a man in a white shirt and tan cap fishing from a blue Hobie kayak on the ocean. A fishing rod is bent, indicating a catch. In the distance, a small yellow boat is visible on the water.

Hobie

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replying this is a hog!”

It was mid-September when Dale Wyman and I finally were able to get together for a day on-the-water at Quabbin Reservoir. I was more excited than a bird dog pup on its first hunt! Not only had it been over ten years since I fished Quabbin, but I was about to meet for the first time face-to-face Dale Wyman the man I had spoken to several times and had developed a deep respect for.



With his waypoint locked in Dale Wyman points to several smallmouth bass on the hump.

Photo: The Bass Bureau/Billy ‘Hawkeye’ Decoteau

Cloud cover paired with a slight lifting fog greeted us as we launched from Area 3#. I was overwhelmed at how low the water level was since my previous visit. Dale informed me it was at 85% pool, as he suggested we try a near by hump topping out at 25’. After twenty minutes and few large Rock Bass we went for a long scenic twenty-five minute boat ride. As we stopped and idled Dale monitored his Lowrance unit zooming-in until he locked in on his pre-logged waypoint. “This 50’ hump has steep drop-offs along the side with a slow tapering point before it too drops off to 80’.” Wyman’s Lowrance screen revealed several small pods of baitfish plus bass scattered throughout the hump and staged along the contours.

Dale suggested we utilize his pre-rigged drop-shot setups. “I eliminated several drop-shot baits once I discovered Rein’s 4” Bubbling Shaker in Watermelon Red Flake was the most productive.” Wyman’s drop-shot setup consisted of an 18-foot fluorocarbon leader tied to braided line, tungsten cylinder weight on the bottom, and Aaron Martin’s G-Finesse Gamakatsu Drop-Shot Hook was impelled through the nose of his 4” Rein’s Bubbling Shaker. Dale Wyman exclusively uses high-quality spinning outfits for his drop-shot technique.

Upon Dale’s command we let our drop-shot rigs fall straight to the bottom. Instantly, Dale was hooked into a surface leaping 3 lb. smallmouth bass. After several zigzag drifts across the hump and only two smallmouth bass, we moved to the long deep tapering point. Dragging our drop-shot rigs along the edge of the steep drop-off Dale managed one more smallmouth about the same size as I lost a smallmouth at the boat.

For the next several hours we rotated from waypoint to waypoint. “I have logged over 500 waypoints this year,” replied Wyman as we idled to one of his deep-water stonewalls. Each of Wyman’s



Dale Wyman's Go-to Smallmouth producing Drop-Shot Rig.

Photo: The Bass Bureau/Billy 'Hawkeye' Decoteau


6.1 lb. smallmouth during the month of August when the weather conditions were hot.”

From the back of the boat I could see sections of the stonewall in 20-25'. With that I decided to make a long cast along side the stonewall working my bait from shallow to deeper water. My theory proved to be productive, however the size of my smallmouth bass averaged 2 lbs. Dale on the other hand worked the deeper water ranging from 25-35', his smallmouth bass averaged in the 3 lb. plus size. Turning to me Dale replied, “As you can see you managed a few more bass bites than me. However, all of my smallmouth bass were much larger than yours. I believe this is exactly what most of the smallmouth bass anglers do on Quabbin; they stick with quantity not quality. Therefore they never increase their percentage ratio to land the larger smallmouth bass.”

Continuing our milk-run pattern of waypoints, we came to the conclusion that each of these areas produced only two-three smallmouths. However, each of our smallmouths were indeed quality bass averaging 3 plus pounds with several that Dale landed tipping the scales just over 4 lbs. With just a few hours before we had to head back to the Area #3 ramp before closing

waypoints is sub-divided into seasonal transitions. Thus, allowing him to follow the transitional movements of smallmouth bass from opening-day to closing-day on Quabbin Reservoir. While logging the high percentage areas, Dale Wyman has been able to eliminate his search time and go directly to these waypoints.

Maneuvering his boat into position, Dale explained that this particular stonewall had been productive throughout the entire year. “Bass as you know do not all spawn at the same time, and this stonewall became a staging area for both pre and post-spawn smallmouth.” Adding, “In fact this is where my friend PJ caught his




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boats

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Dale suggested we work our way back by targeting deep-water rock piles and stonewalls. After a brief fifteen-minute run Dale idled to a specific series of waypoints. As I looked around there were two boats trolling in circles and we appeared to be in the middle? Dale informed me those boats were targeting Salmon and Lake Trout, and then informed me to look at the Lowrance screen. Sure enough a small hump rose up out of 80' topping off between 40-50' marking bass and several rock piles.

Sticking to our drop-shot technique Dale enticed a smallmouth to take his bait as he slowly dragged it across the top of the hump, and I managed to get hung up in a rock pile. After Dale released his bass, we freed my rig and moved onto another waypoint this time revealing a large stonewall.

The stonewall had isolated piles of rocks and openings, Dale informed me there was an old road bed that ran through the opening he discovered from his old paper maps. Retrieving my drop-shot rig there was rich green vegetation on my weight. With that Dale suggested I cast back to the same area. Slightly shaking the Rein's Bubbling Shaker then pausing produced a sudden hard hit from a smallmouth. Upon landing the bass Dale and I were overwhelmed with how green this smallmouth was...Once again proving bass are chameleon's taking on the color of their surrounds.

Dale decided to switch from his drop-shot rig to a 3/8 oz. hair jig paired with a craw-trailer. "There must be thousands of crawfish hiding within all of these rocks. On several occasion I have been able catch some big smallmouths with the hair jig." implied Wyman. Making several cast to the isolated rocks failed to entice any action. However, when Dale re-aligned his boat and cast to the stonewall everything changed! As Dale laid into his hook-set a huge smallmouth bass exploded on the surface after several hard runs coupled with astonishing surface acrobatic performances Dale managed to land his bass.

Looking exhausted yet smiling immensely Dale held his smallmouth for a snapshot before weighing his smallmouth.... When the scales finally locked in the official weight Dale Wyman's big smallmouth of the day weighed 5.31 lbs.



Dale Wyman lands another smallmouth bass over

3 lbs. from a deep-water hump.

Photo: The Bass Bureau/Billy 'Hawkeye' Decoteau



***The Author with his green smallmouth bass
caught from a green patch of vegetation.***

Photo: The Bass Bureau/Dale Wyman

water temperatures slowly dropped to 67 degrees on the surface. Wyman's determination and never-give-up attitude proved to be key elements to his success as he finished the year with his personal best smallmouth weighing 5lbs. 7 oz.

When the 2017 Quabbin season closed Dale Wyman had accomplished his quest. "I have logged over 600 way-points just within Area #3. Throughout the entire Quabbin season our monthly average size bass was in the 3 lb. range, while our larger smallmouth bass averaged between 4 to 6 lbs. I'm looking forward to chasing these Quabbin smallmouth in 2018!"

No doubt Dale Wyman will become a more proficient Quabbin Smallmouth Bass Angler when the gates open in April 2018. To enjoy reviewing pictures and information on Dale Wyman's 2017 Quabbin Quest log unto Dale's YouTube site by searching Dale Wyman Quabbin 2017.



***God Bless,
Remember, "Just Have Fun"
Billy 'Hawkeye' Decoteau***

While our day on the water together ended, Dale still had one more month to complete his goal of catching quality smallmouth bass within the 3-5 lb. range during the entire 2017 Quabbin Reservoir season. As the days and weeks worked closer and closer to October 15 Quabbin's last open day for 2017, I stayed in close contact with Dale.

Dale continued to target the same depth ranges within 35-50' concentrating on humps and isolated rock piles with schools of baitfish. During October Wyman noticed big balls of baitfish as the

***Dale Wyman with a 5.31 smallmouth caught on
September 17, 2017***

Photo: The Bass Bureau/Billy 'Hawkeye' Decoteau





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IT'S MORE TO CRAPPIE FISHING THAN JUST WHAT YOU CAN SEE!

By Bernard Williams, Outdoor
Writer, Magnolia Crappie Club



The sport of crappie fishing has exploded beyond our wildest dreams. No one could have envisioned that we would be spending upwards of \$70K for boats, \$10K+ for depth finders, \$2K+ for trolling motors and paying \$8 to \$10 or better for crankbaits, not to mention what poles and other tackle cost. Back in my day, it was used strictly for table fare, food. Don't get me wrong, crappie filets still make a delicious meal, but crappie fishing has become more than just something for the dinner table. Crappie guiding, for instance, has become a lucrative business. It's quite common down here in the south to pay \$500+ per day for a 2-person, 8-hour trip, even more, when you include food and lodging.

The professional crappie circuits are attracting more and more weekend anglers. The prize money has grown to astronomical amounts. American Crappie Trail gives away a Ranger Boat at every tournament and close to \$50K in prize money and the ACT classic is paying over \$125K in cash and prizes. On the flip side, who ever heard of paying \$300 to \$400+ for entry fees? The sponsor money makes it all possible, and boy are they pouring it into our sport.

When you get that big money and tough completion in any sport it involves more than chance. It takes 20% skill, 30% practice, 10% equipment and 40% mental. Yes, it becomes a mind game. Not only do you have to outsmart the fish you have to out-think the other fishermen.

Many fishermen believe all that's needed is a decent boat, tackle, and the right bait and you're set. This is true to a certain extent, but to really be consistently competitive you've got to do something the other fishermen are not doing. You have to work harder and smarter in practice, pay attention to the details and work together as a team. Yes, I said to "T" word, it's the bottom line and the winning solution.

Gerald Swindle, a Professional Bass Fishermen said, "Winning is determined by that 4-pound mass located between your ears. If you concentrate on the right things and keep the negative thoughts out, then you'll be successful." I couldn't agree with him more, it's called staying focused. Ok, how you do not think about the negatives, I'm saying if they do arise, snap that rubber band I told you to wear around your wrist. Replace those thoughts with positive thoughts.

By staying focused, I mean transforming your mind to a state that you phase out everything but what you're doing and trying to accomplish. Becoming engrossed in your surroundings, keeping an intense

eye on what's happening in and around you, doing your homework before you leave the bank, reading the signs early on and making the necessary adjustments quickly.

For instance, if I see birds diving on a spot, it's time to see what's up in and around that spot. If I see baitfish breaking the water, it's time to investigate. If I'm catching more fish going with the wind than against, I need to quickly identify that fact. I can't mention everything in this short space but I think you get my drift.

Pay attention to every little thing that happens when you catch a fish. If you're not catching fish and others are, pay attention to what they're doing. I often ask my partners, what hook or how deep did that last fish come on or what color skirt was that last fish caught on? The usual answer is, "I don't know or I'm not sure". That's a sure-fire strategy to get beat most of the time. Sure sometimes you can do no wrong, it's your day. That's not the case 99% of the time. I'm referring to the days that you have trouble buying a bite. It's those days that you need all the help you can get. Usually, it's a few hundreds of a pound that separate 1st and 2nd. If you finish 2nd, you can always look back and say what you could have corrected.

I've talked with several consistent winners and all say the same. "Make every bite count; pay strict attention to what's going on in and around your boat, stay focused, watch what you're doing, plan your work and work your plan, let the fish tell you what they want instead of trying to force-feed them and don't second-guess yourself". It's no way to you can "Count Airplanes, Day Dream, Bird-Watch, Talk on the Phone or SLEEP" and stay fish-focused at the same time. It's pretty much the same with any endeavor you choose in life. Pay close attention to the smallest details, same in fishing as in baseball or golf, follow through.

If you start the day off with the right mindset, continue the day focused on your game plan, make the necessary adjustments during the day and don't second-guess yourself, you can feel good at the end of the day knowing you've given it your best shot. If you didn't win you can still feel good about your efforts. You take what you learned and apply them to a future adventure. Repetition is the key to unlock the winning door; repeating the good and positive things, not the wrong things.

So to sum it up, the crappie fishing game is a lot like the game of life, it's more to both than what you can see. I'm not saying we should worry about the unseen; all I'm saying is expect the unexpected and don't be shocked or surprised when something out of the ordinary happens, "Deal with It" and move on. If you're in the right mentality your solution is right in front of you, if not, it's close by. Now go out there and win you some tournaments.





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OPEN WATER OBSERVATIONS

By Bob Jensen

I'm pretty sure the 2017 open water fishing season is over for me. While it's still fresh in my mind this is the time of year that I like to look back at the just-completed season. I enjoy taking note of the things I learn from every fishing season. Following are some of those things:

It's always interesting to see trends in how we fish, and how the fish force us to alter our ways of fishing. For instance, when I started fishing largemouth bass way back when, a spinnerbait was a major part of my arsenal. Spring, summer, and fall, there was always a spinnerbait on one of my rods. In fact, the biggest largemouth bass I've ever taken came on a spinnerbait. A spinnerbait is a very versatile bait and it's still a bait that I really like to throw. However, I'm not throwing it as much as I used to. More and more, many bass-chasers are using a swimming jig in place of a spinnerbait.


A swim jig is a rubber-legged jig to which we add a piece of plastic. A good example would be a Jungle Jig. I've been using Jungle Jigs for years. They've put so many fish in the boat for me. Another jig designed specifically for this technique is Strike King's Tour Grade Swim Jig. The head design on this jig makes it perfect for a swimming retrieve.

We fish a swim jig pretty much how we would fish a spinnerbait. Cast it out and start reeling. Experiment with speed and rod action: Sometimes a little lift/drop works well. However, don't fish it on the bottom as tradition would have us do with other types of jigging. Fish a swim jig where you would fish a spinnerbait and how you would fish a spinnerbait and you'll catch bass.

Equipment continues to improve. The quality and function of our rods, reels, line, sonar, boats, motors, even clothing has come so far in just a few short years. We still have to make the fish bite, but we can find them easier and quicker now, and we can present our baits so much more effectively. I know that fishing and catching is better now than it was back in my guide days in the early 80's.

Our equipment isn't the only reason we're catching more and bigger fish. In many cases, self-imposed

catch and release has been a big help, especially with muskies. However, we can't count on voluntary catch and release for sustained good fishing. Many areas have implemented rules and aggressive conservation measures to create and perpetuate good fishing. Two of my favorite places to go fishing are two very different fisheries. Clear Lake in north



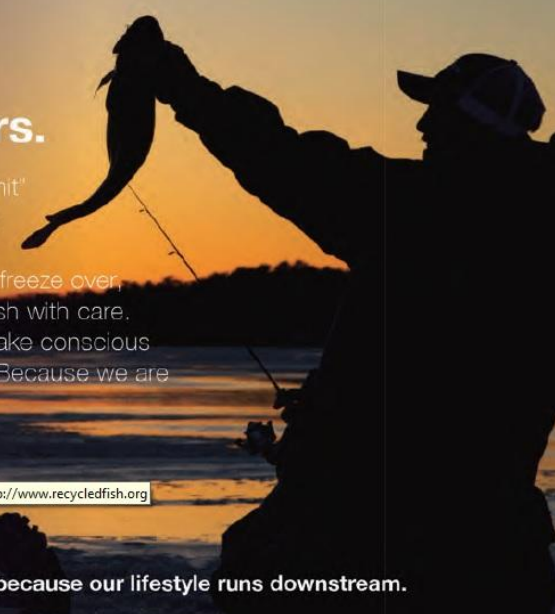
We are more than ice anglers.

We hear a lot about "limit your catch, don't catch your limit" when it comes to open-water fishing. How you shouldn't dump your bait. Why you should let the big ones live to fight another day. But when the snow falls and the lakes freeze over, we don't forget those valuable lessons. We still handle fish with care. We still leave the ice cleaner than we found it. We still make conscious decisions at home to help improve habitat downstream. Because we are more than ice fishing fanatics.

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central Iowa has become an outstanding fishery for several reasons, one of which is renovation. Clear Lake has a very developed shoreline and also lots of walleyes, crappies, muskies, and yellow bass.

Lake Kabetogama is completely different than Clear Lake. It is pretty much wilderness and is world class for walleyes and smallmouth bass, and can also put out some really good crappie fishing. A good number of years ago a slot limit was put in place on Kab, and it worked. It worked really well. Today on Kab you get lots of eaters, but there is always a very good chance to take good numbers of big walleyes.

Looking back at last year open water, I continue to be optimistic about fishing in the future. For now though, I'm getting excited about being on the ice.

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MY FAVORITE BAIT TIME

Capt. Mike Gerry

With the colder water ahead we are gaining ground on the time of year my favorite bait produce some great catches. I know lots of folks don't really work spinner bait as it gets colder but for me it's the bait of choice as we get into the cold water winter months. It's also true that if you look back into the history of Lake Guntersville the record bass of 14 lbs. 8 oz. was caught in the cold of February on spinner bait.



The change you have to make in your spinner bait this time of year is paramount to making it work for you; just picking up your favorite spinner bait may not be the success you're looking for, you have to make a few adjustments. One of the first things I do is go lighter weighted spinner bait like a 3/8 or maybe a 1/2 oz. I know this doesn't always make sense because as the water gets colder the bass go deeper but you must be able to slow down the bait and many times making the bait lighter is the one way to do that. You can also make some changes to the blades I always have been an advocate of double willow blades and this remains true for me all year around. However, if you increase the size of the blades by going up a blade size or more especially the front blade really helps slow down the bait especially when the bait is dropping or helicoptering to the bottom. This also adds vibration as the bigger blades tend to add more action to the drop and vibration to the movement. As always for me I am a big believer in gold color blades I guess it's because my lake is generally always stained and gold shows up better in dirty water. Another trick to slowing your winter time retrieve down is to add a trailer to the blade, swim baits this time of year are ideal trailers as you can add them in many different sizes allowing you to match the hatch the bass are feeding on in your area your fishing.

Slow you're retrieve tick the bottom make the spinner bait do something different and you will catch bigger bass in cold water than any time of year. To me this is time for you to turn to Picasso's INVIZ- Wire Pro double willow spinner bait.

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JAY YELAS' STRATEGY FOR WINTER BASS IN THE GRASS

By Shane Beilue

Let's face it: winter time fishing often separates the hard-core anglers from the rest of the pack. Frigid temperatures, along with the onset of multiple hunting seasons this time of year, can make for an empty parking lot across most reservoirs across the country; however, if you derive a significant portion of your income from bass fishing, you go looking for the bass regardless of season. Professional angler Jay Yelas is just the type to be found backing his Ranger into the water on a cold morning midst the dead of winter.

Yelas' bass credentials are no secret to fans of tournament bass fishing. He won the 2002 BASSMASTER Classic, was BASS Angler of the Year in 2003, a two time FLW Angler of the Year and has earned over \$1 million in career winnings while casting for cash among the nation's best tournament trails.

Yelas begins with framing up the topic of winter bass fishing. He explains, "I consider winter fishing as

November through February and it's actually my favorite time of year to be on the lake. An angler does need to adjust his mind set in the winter since the water's cold and the fish aren't as active; therefore, you may not catch as many fish, but you can definitely catch bigger bass this time of year. Additionally, many guys have switched to hunting so the lakes aren't nearly as pressured and you will often have the whole lake to yourself."

Yelas' favorite scenario for winter are the many hydrilla choked lowland reservoirs found across the southern U.S. and include such heavy hitters as Sam Rayburn, Guntersville, and the various TVA lakes. His strategy on these reservoirs can be summed up quite succinctly, as he explains, "Winter time fishing on these lakes is all about finding hydrilla fields and throwing lipless cranks." His color selection depends upon the stage of winter. Shad or baitfish colors such as chrome blue back dominate up until early January, then he adjusts his approach, as do most other anglers in the know. "In January and February, I think bass will be caught on red or orange lipless cranks 'till the end of time," he laughs. "It's a well known color that's been successful for so many years and it continues to work in these months year after year, so just adhere to the 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it' mentality."

As Yelas describes, "This pattern starts in early winter, when the water is still in the 60's and the hydrilla begins to collapse down on itself once it quits actively growing. The bass move from being positioned within the grass in the summer to being on top of it in the winter. The pattern continues to get even stronger as the water moves into the 50's and can remain strong as the deep freeze sets in and moves water temps into the 40's. The key is



adjusting your retrieve to the water temperature. Colder water typically means slower retrieves; however, you just have to experiment. I've had days where I literally just crawled it over the matted grass and other times in February I've had to burn it fast with a high speed reel to make them bite." Yelas adds that most of the time, a moderate, steady retrieve is a good starting point, and then experiment with the retrieve throughout the course of the day. He adds, "Ideally, you want to let that lipless crank sink to where you can just start to feel the grass, then rip it out with a quick snap of the rod tip. That erratic motion as the bait rips free of the grass mat is when the bass will often grab it."

Yelas requires a specific set up to get the proper effect when ripping the lure during the retrieve. He relies on a Lew's high speed reel (7:1 ratio), as well as Lew's braided line – typically in 30# test - to

minimize line stretch. He also likes a 7'3" Kistler rod in Med-Heavy to Heavy action.

Yelas focuses his search efforts on lowland impoundments around creek channels and drains, focusing primarily on the backs of creeks more so than main lake areas. Main lake flats can also be attractive, providing that the flat has a deep water route meandering through

the area. A prime example of such a place is the famed Black Forest flats on Lake Sam Rayburn, which provides several acres worth of sprawling flats along the main body of the lake, but also contains multiple drainage paths that house the bass in the winter and pre-spawn periods. He further explains his approach, "The home for these bass during the winter is going to be the creek channel; however, they will adjust their location day to day depending upon the water conditions. On warming trends or when the lake is on a slight rise, you'll often find the bass moving from the creek drops up onto the adjacent flats in 4-5' of water. The colder conditions can actually be better because it concentrates the bass back to the creek channel drops or even right into the channel depression. I like to look for creeks that bottom out around 10-15' under these colder conditions and will often cast right down the channel and yo-yo the lure slowly over the submerged grass to get the strikes."

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KEEP WARM WHILE FISHING THIS WINTER

By Bob Jensen

Winter is not far off. In fact, depending on where you live, it's already here. The Midwest provides lots of fishing opportunities throughout the winter months for both open water and ice anglers. Many anglers like to go ice-fishing, many others enjoy fishing in the open water in rivers below dams. Regardless of where you go fishing, you need to stay warm. If you're not warm, you're not going to enjoy your fishing like you should. With the advancements in clothing, there's no reason not to stay warm when you're on the ice or in a boat in the late fall, winter, and early spring. Following are some ideas for staying warm in the winter.

Most outdoors-people have heard about layering their clothing. Layering refers to wearing several layers of lighter clothing instead of one big heavy jacket, and layering really does work. By wearing several layers of clothing, you can add or subtract a layer to match the conditions.

Layering starts with the layer of clothing next to your skin. This could be the most important layer. You want to wear underwear that will wick moisture away from your skin. If moisture is trapped next to your skin, you'll be cold before too long. Cabela's makes several types of underwear that will match your needs very well. I've had very good results with their E.C.W.C.S. underwear. This stuff is available in several weights so you can select a weight that best matches the conditions you think you'll be faced with.



It was a chilly, late fall day when Travis Carlson caught this slab crappie from Lake Kabetogama in northern Minnesota, but his Guidewear kept him very comfortable. Kab is known as a world-class walleye and smallmouth lake, but it also has a good population of crappies, and most of them are big ones.

Next comes a flannel shirt or hooded sweatshirt. Many folks like the hood, as it can be pulled overhead to prevent wind from blowing down your neck.

A vest is the next layer. Again, you have choices here. Some outdoors-people like fleece, some prefer a nylon shell. The fleece feels really good.

You're now at the outer layer. Cabela's Guidewear is very popular as an outside layer, as is their Outfitter's fleece parkas. Guidewear will double as a rainsuit throughout the year. Guidewear is really good stuff that you'll find many uses for.

Oftentimes an open water angler will need to dress warmer than an ice fisherman. Ice anglers are moving from hole to hole a lot, and they're frequently popping new holes: Ice fishermen can be pretty active at times, and pretty sedentary at other times. If you're drilling holes, take a layer of clothing off. When you sit down to fish, put that layer back on.

In years past, being outside in the winter was often a test of endurance. Nowadays there is no reason to be cold when you're outside. Keep these ideas in mind and you'll enjoy your time outdoors in the winter even more.

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Flatties of Tampa Bay

By Capt. Sergio Atanes



Tampa Bay offers a smorgasbord of species to fish for, including redfish, snook, trout, and cobia, just to mention a few. As a charter captain, the most requested inshore species is snook with redfish a close second. One species often overlooked is *Paralichthys lethostigma*, or in layman's term Southern Flounder.

Southern Flounder are frequently called "doormats". These fish can easily camouflage themselves and can be found around sandy or muddy bottoms along the edge of grass beds and channels. These doormats average in size from 2-4 pounds with many tipping

the scales at 8 pounds. A strong fighter on light tackle and rated as one of the best in food value, most Southern Flounder are caught by accident while drifting the flats or cuts for redfish and trout.

Although Southern Flounder can be caught all year long, I find the cooling fall season as prime time for catching doormats. October, November and December are my favorite months to catch them, when other fish are slow to strike the flounder are always ready for an easy meal. Flounders are bottom feeders, and in order to increase your chances at the big ones I recommend several techniques that have worked for me over the years.

Live or Bait Fishing: Drift along the outer edges of grass beds or along side of channels with structure or rubble. A ¼-ounce jig head this method works best in 2-6 feet of water. Hook a small piece of shrimp on the jig or if you prefer a medium live shrimp. Bounce the jig along the bottom and the drift of the boat will do the rest of the work. In deeper water (6-10 foot), I recommend a 3/8 ounce jig head.

Artificial: A 3/8-ounce jig head with a 3-inch tail works during cold fronts. The last several years with the introduction of artificial baits with fish attractant built in or the use of products like The Fish Bomb (shrimp cocktail) can make a big difference in the amount of fish caught. Anchor on the outer edges of grass beds or deep water channel casting up current or tide. The secret is to bounce the jig along the bottom with a slow retrieve. Flounder will only travel short distances for food, so the presentation must be close. The more casts the better chances of catching fish. We must not forget the old standby D.O.A. Shrimp.

Dock Fishing: Is another good way to catch the big ones, while the heat generated around the concrete piling on cold windy days is a natural attractant ¼-ounce sinker setup as a Texas rig with a glow



bead between the hook and the sinker for the big ones. It's my belief that the glow bead just draws attention in the dark bottom and turns the flounder on to strike quicker. Seawalls that have a quick drop into sandy bottom with grass patches are also key spots.

Bridges: Flounder tend to sit and wait for their bait so try fishing the bind side of the bridge where the tide is moving bringing food to them. Here I use 3/8-ounce sinker setup with the glow bead all the time, casting along the edges of the shoreline and working the shrimp towards the drop.

Tackle-My favorite rod is a 7 ft. TFO (Temple Fork Outfitters) medium light action rod in the 10 to 17-pound test range, medium size spinning reel like the Quantum Smoke 30. Fall months usually means windy days so I prefer using Fins Windtamer 15-pound test braided line. It's one of the best lines I have found in helping keeping wind knot down to a minimum. Most of my big founder fishing is done around docks and braided line seems to be the most proficient.

Locations

1. Old Tampa Bay
 - Big Island cut west end of Howard Frankland Bridge.
 - 4th street bridge on incoming tide.
 - St. Pete side of Gandy bridge just outside the rocks.
 - South end of Picnic Island the rock piles.
2. Tampa Bay
 - Edges of the rocks along the St. Pete Airport.
 - Sandy areas on the outside of the artificial reefs east of the Vinoy Resort.
3. Terra Ceia Bay
4. Bird Key
5. Flounder Pass

Southern Flounder will offer a change of pace and taste, so don't overlook the doormats of Tampa Bay. Please e-mail any questions concerning fishing or tackle and I will be glad to respond.

Good fishing and tight lines.

Captain Sergio Atanes is a native resident of Tampa and has been fishing the water of Tampa Bay and Boca Grande for over 45 years. He is owner and operator of S & I charters which is one of the largest charter booking services in the West Coast of Florida with 55 professional captains on staff. Capt. Sergio Atanes can be reached at (813) 973-7132 or www.reelfishy.com





Inshore Kayak Tautog Fishing

By Shawn Barham

In my home waters of Long Island sound there aren't too many things that excite me more than the fall run. During this time of year as the weather and water temperatures start to drop, it gets the fish into feeding mode. There's usually tons of baitfish all over in massive schools and most of the time there are predator fish smashing them out of the water. There are striped bass, bluefish, and false albacore up and down the coastline in a feeding frenzy. Most of them are fattening up for their fall migration.

As much as I love bass, blues, and albies the fish that I really love during the fall is tog. Our fall tautog season usually opens around October 10th and stays open until December 6 and has a four-fish creel limit with a minimum size of 16 inches (regulations vary from state to state so check your local regs). Tautog, commonly known as blackfish, can be found around rock piles, reefs, wrecks, and bridge pilings. They love sticking close to structure looking for crabs and other crustaceans to forage on. If you can find some good structure, then chances are you can find some good tog fishing.

During the early part of the season when the water temperatures are anywhere from the mid to low 60s to the low 50s is the best time to get some decent fish from a kayak. There are a ton of good places that

are ideal for a kayak due to the ability to get right into some shallow water structure. Traditionally tog are known to be in deep water holding tight to structure but when the temps are right they can be found in some real shallow water looking for a easy meal. On the coastline there are plenty of jetties and rock breakwalls that are excellent spots to target tautog. They provide the perfect habitat for the fish to find food and plenty of rock caves for them to hide in if they sense danger. The only downfall at these spots is their popularity with tog fisherman. I like to avoid the crowds as much as possible and I have found some good spots that hold decent fish by just doing a little exploring.



Finding Good Structure

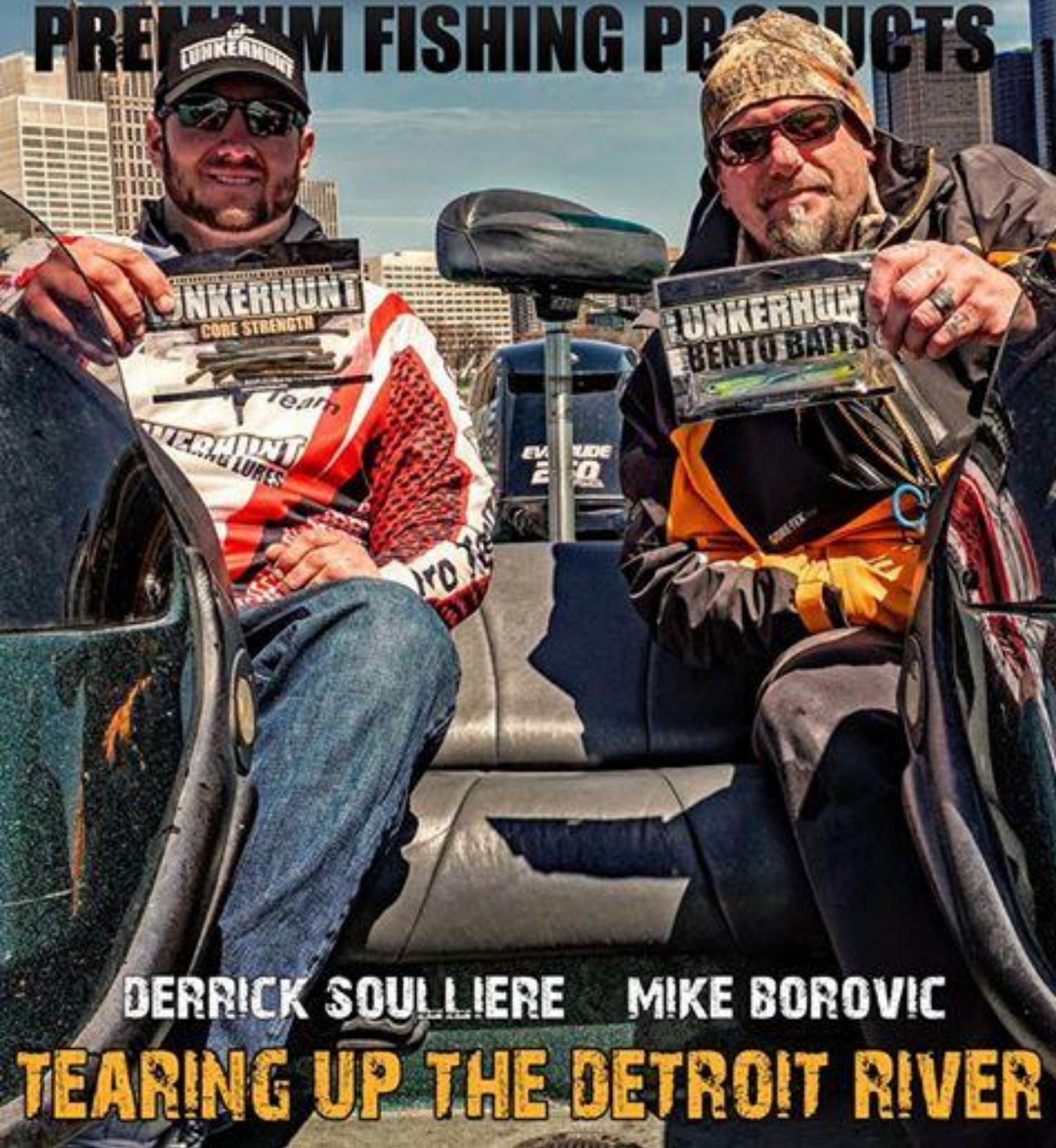
There are a ton of inshore rocks and boulder fields along the Connecticut coastline. Many of these spots are looked over by boaters because they are a hazard and they tend to avoid them. These are the places that I like to target first. Just like when fishing for any species of fish, a spot with little fishing pressure will usually produce some quality fish. These tautog are a slow growing fish and when they find a spot they like they will visit it frequently. I have found some amazing tog grounds that are passed right over by many fishermen that will zip right past going to more popular fishing grounds. These low pressured spots are gems and if fished correctly they will produce some good fish.



The use of electronics is very helpful when looking for tog water. I use a Lowrance Elite Ti with side imaging and this unit is amazing at helping find some prime tog structure. The ability to be able to see what's to the side of you with amazing detail is such an asset when trying to locate good structure to target these fish. Good electronics will also give you things like water temp and the ability to mark

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and save your spots. Keeping a personal log of what spots are good is also a good idea.

Water depth is something to pay close attention to also. I personally like water in the 10- to 20-foot range but I've caught good fish in water as shallow as 2 feet. I found that when the water temp is on the warmer side the tog will go into some skinny water, especially during a flooding tide. If I am on the water during the incoming tide, I usually start in the shallowest part of the water. If I don't find anything shallow, I start slowly moving out into deeper and deeper water until I find a good bite. I try my hardest to position myself on the high side of a dropoff or right on top of a bunch of submerged boulders. Little drop offs and crevices will usually hold some good blackfish.

When I fish for blackfish I usually anchor up over the structure I want to fish. I have seen some people who like to drift or hold themselves over structure without the use of an anchor. From what I've observed, fishing in this manner is easier around bridges and water with slower current. I prefer finding some good structure and trying to position myself with the use of a anchor. I also have a Hobie anchor trolley installed on my kayak to assist me in my anchoring and positioning of the kayak. Another thing not to forget is the fact that you'll be anchoring in some places that are known for claiming anchors.

Finding a good wreck anchor is important. For smaller kayaks something as simple as a boulder works fine. With my Mirage Pro Angler I had to get a little more creative. I found some old brake rotors in my uncle's scrap pile a few years back and tied them together with some cheap rope from Walmart. I remember when my fishing buddies first saw this I was the laughing stock of the local fishing community, but it worked so well that it became almost like the local kayak standard. Also, anchoring in a kayak can be difficult and dangerous if not done correctly so please be careful. Some spots can have very strong current and can become very dangerous for an anchored kayaker so always pay attention to the water conditions and what's going on around you.



Rods, Reels, and Lines

When I'm targeting tog from the kayak, I like a few different setups to get the job done. Over the past few years blackfish jigs have become really popular and they work rather well when used properly. They are especially good when fishing shallow water on lighter tackle. When I fish jigs I opt for a medium heavy rod in the 7-foot range with 20- to 30-pound braid with a 30-pound fluorocarbon leader. I prefer a low profile baitcasting reel but this technique works well with medium spinning gear also. When it comes to jigs there are tons to choose from, but you need to be careful when purchasing them. Try and find something with a good hook. Blackfish are very strong and if you get into a good fish they will test your tackle.

Lately I have been using a little bit heavier gear when I target tog. I have had a few situations where I hooked into a good fish and my medium-heavy gear was way out gunned. Fishing light tackle is fun but after being owned by a few large fish I decided to step my tackle up a bit so in the future I can be ready when I hook into a trophy fish. I had a rod custom made to my liking just for tog fishing. The rod itself is a spiral wrapped Lamiglass 7'6" GSX 70/20 equipped with a Accurate Valiant 300 reel. This combo has a ton of stopping power and that's what's needed when trying to keep a trophy tog out of the rocks. It's the difference between a fish, and a fish story! On this rod I use 40-pound braid attached to a 60-pound mono shock leader. When I fish this combo I usually fish a simple high low rig which is just a weight on the bottom and a hook on top. I choose my weight depending on the depth and the speed of the current. Most of the time I use something in the 1- 2-ounce range. I also like a strong hook so I go with Gamagatsu 4/0 live bait hooks.

Bait is another important piece to this puzzle. I use some type of crab 90 percent of the time. My main choices are Asian shore crabs or green crabs. I have fished with clams in the early parts of the spring season a few times but in my opinion, nothing works better than crabs. When I go on a trip I like to bring a variety of bait. Sometimes it doesn't matter what you have, and the fish will eat anything, but other times they will get very picky and key in on one type of crab. Also make sure you have plenty of bait. Blackfish are well known bait thieves and you don't want to run out of bait on a good bite. It's always better to have too much bait than not have enough. I also recommend having a decent landing net. You don't want to have that trophy fish next to the 'yak and not be able to land it.

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I hope this article was helpful and maybe taught someone a few things about the wonderful world of kayak tog fishing. If you've never tried it, you should give it a try. You'll be shocked at how much fun these fish can be. Good luck and tight lines!

Check back weekly for new videos and stories by the Hobie Fishing Top Guns.



Taking a kid fishing? Pack snacks, put life in the live well, and don't get distracted staring at your electronics.

Above all, allow your lil' tykes to "determine the experience," advises Rapala Pro-Staffer Joel Nelson, father to two spirited young sons. "I struggled mightily with it at first, but I've learned a lot in the last couple years," he

says.

PACK SNACKS AND BRING MINNOWS WHEN YOU TAKE A KID FISHING

For Nelson, letting his kids determine the experience can mean exploring near the landing before even launching his boat. "It might be an hour and a half of walking through the woods looking for grubs and night crawlers, checking out frogs, looking for turtles and finding coon skulls or some crazy stuff," he says.

Once on the water, Nelson advises, start the kids casting right away if they're old enough.

"If it were just you out there, you'd probably spend a lot of time looking at your electronics, driving around looking for fish," Nelson says. "But that kind of stuff to kids is pretty boring. But if they get to cast, even if it's not productive, that's an active thing they can be doing."

Younger kids are often engaged and entertained by minnows. "Consider buying live bait and putting it in the livewell," Nelson suggests. "Kids love fish in the livewell — even baitfish. They want to touch them, interact with them. It spurs discussion and keeps up their interest level."

Another option is boxing the first keeper boated. "Kids enjoy peeking into the livewell throughout the day and checking on that fish," Nelson says. "Even if you don't catch a ton of fish, if they can keep busy casting and looking in on that one in the live well, you can usually keep them engaged a good part of the day."

To help ensure at least a few bites, do a little research to find a "numbers lake." If you have the time, pre-fish it to key in on a "numbers" pattern.

"The hardest part about fishing with kids is getting those first bites and getting their attention," Nelson

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says. "Spending half a day figuring out a pattern is not the kind of thing they have the tolerance or patience for. If you can scout out the lake a day in advance, or even hours before, do it."

Even if you own a boat, you might consider fishing from a dock or shore. "My kids love it, because then they are in control of being able to walk around, drop the rod, run around, chase each other or whatever," Nelson says. "A boat can seem like a jail cell sometimes to kids — can't touch this, can do that, can't run around."

And the biggest tip?

"Snacks, snacks, snacks!" Nelson says. "You need to ration them though, because if you burn through all your

snacks quick, it can mean your day of fishing is over pretty fast."

That being said, letting your kids determine the experience includes allowing them to pull the plug on the day, even if you'd planned on staying out longer. "The last thing you want to do is keep them out on the water if they're miserable," Nelson says.

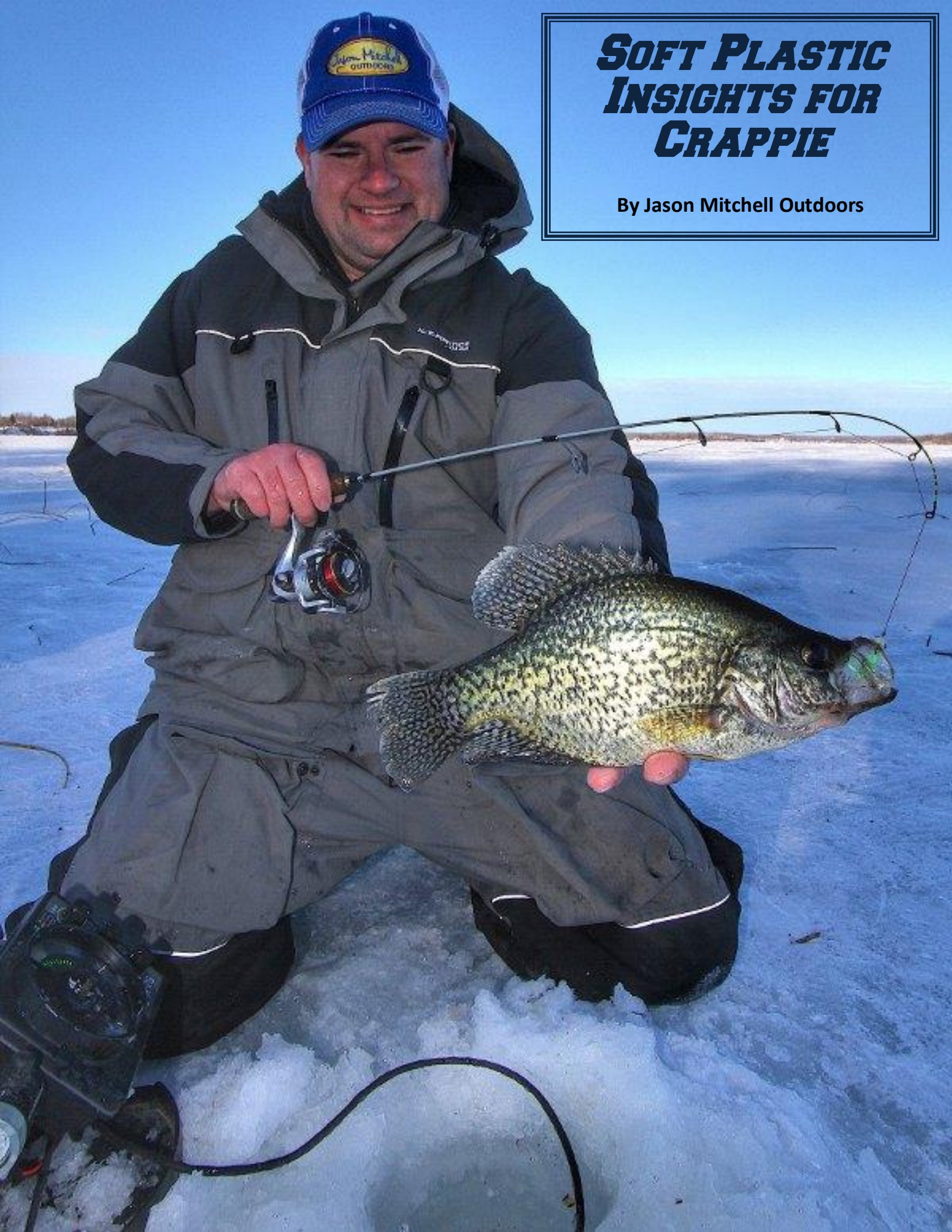
"I've been on fishing excursions with my boys that take 45 minutes to drive to and then we fish for less than a half hour and then we go home. It's all part of the gig."

ICE FISHING ZONE



SOFT PLASTIC INSIGHTS FOR CRAPPIE

By Jason Mitchell Outdoors



Some of the greatest lures of all time don't necessary look like anything in particular but at the same time have the general appearance of something that a fish wants to eat. Trout anglers often fall back on a simple wooly bugger which we can argue can look like a caddis fly larvae or perhaps a damselfly nymph... not really a spitting image of anything specific but looks kinda, sorta like a lot of things. A classic tube jig is one of the greatest smallmouth bass lures of all time... kind of looks like a crawfish, maybe a goby... could be something else depending on how you fish it.

As more ice anglers embrace the soft plastics, classics are beginning to emerge. While soft plastics fished correctly simply catch anything that swims, there is no doubt that the combination of tungsten paired up with soft plastic is particularly deadly on catching crappie through the ice. The original white Maki plastic has quickly become to winter crappie fishing what the classic motor oil tube jig is to smallmouth bass.

The classic Maki doesn't look like anything specific, could be a young of the year fish, perhaps an insect larvae or water beetle. Like so many productive lures, the shape, profile, action and water displacement

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aren't necessarily a dead ringer for any specific living thing but just an overall look that mimics several living organisms that fish eat. During the winter, the diet for black crappie can range from zoo plankton like Daphnia to larval insects like Chironomid, aquatic insects like back swimmers, crustaceans like freshwater shrimp or other fish; spot tailed shiners, young of the year perch, dace minnows or fathead minnows. Black crappies are notorious for foraging on zoo plankton because the fish's gill rakes allow them to filter feed. Typically suspending schools of black crappie are consuming a lot of zoo plankton with larger forage items mixed in to the menu when the opportunity presents itself.

Despite the fact that so much of a black crappies diet during the winter can consist of tiny microscopic invertebrates and zoo plankton that are less than a quarter of an inch long, some of the greatest jig and plastic combinations ever developed might measure an inch or more. Matching the hatch is often a phrase or cliché that gets thrown around a lot in fishing circles but some of the most effective presentations for winter crappie follow a different mantra.

Winter crappie locations might mean a flooded brush pile or submerged tree along a channel edge on a reservoir. Natural lakes might have weed and reed patterns. Regardless of ecosystem however, crappie are notorious for suspending and roaming over open water. Over this massive abyss, matching the hatch isn't practical because finding and catching fish is often a game of straight up logistics. Use a realistic duplication of a backswimmer that is a quarter of an inch long and fish that drift by ten feet away... might not ever see you. Fish six feet below you might not see you. So often, larger easier to find and see profiles catch more crappie simply because more fish come over to investigate. Once the fish close the distance and get close enough to scrutinize the bait, the lure simply has to look similar to something the fish has eaten before.

So often when using these larger soft plastic profiles that might measure an inch or more, the



presentation becomes a game of keep away where you attempt to keep the presentation above the fish so that the fish has to accelerate and rise. Bigger profiles move fish from further away. Attempt to get an aggressive reaction from the fish. So often when working soft plastics, there are often two basic thought processes to experiment with... be the bug

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or be the minnow.

Replicating minnow movements might mean more abrupt slashes and snaps on the upstroke to raise fish. The smaller movements that happen as the fish gets closer might resemble upward hops with stops and shakes mixed in. Replicating bug movements might consist of simply quivering the tentacles and vibrating the rod tip to impart a pulsating action to the soft plastic. You can still raise the jig and pull fish up but the actions are more methodical while pulsating the soft plastic tail the entire time. From there you can mix and match to the mood of the fish and the situation you are fishing. Remember as well that you can “be the minnow” or “be the bug” with the same fish interested in the same jig. Mix and match until the fish either bites or swims away.

Now this isn't to say there are not situations where small bug profiles shine. Not to say that tiny finesse plastics don't catch crappie because they do. Day in and day out however, many ice anglers have discovered that bigger is often better for the simple fact that fish can find and see the presentation from a greater distance. The more fish you can pull into the cone angle of your electronics and the more fish you get a chance at, the more fish you can possibly catch.

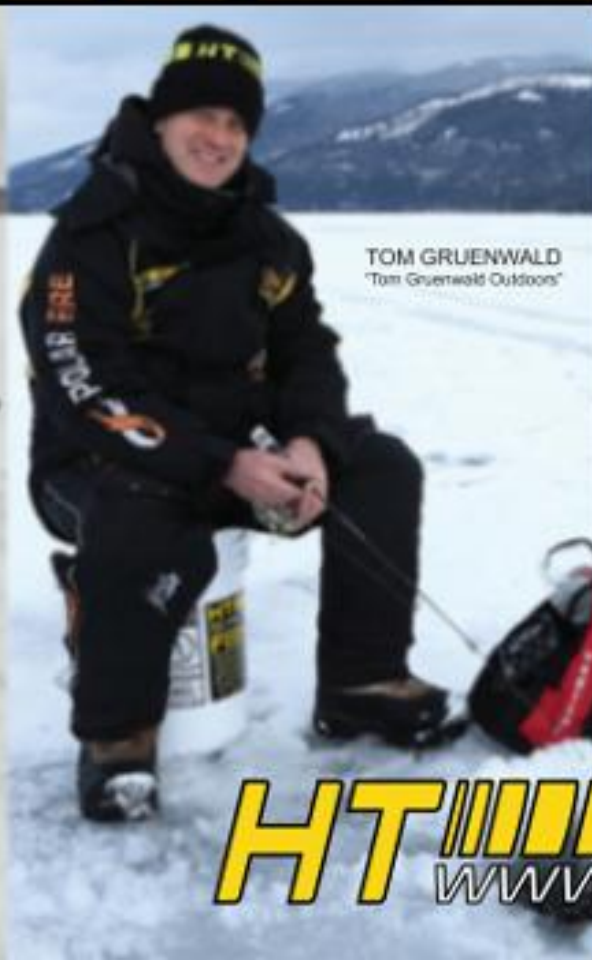
The original Maki is about an inch-long profile that has five tentacles, resembling more of a squid than anything a crappie actually eats but this easy to find profile set the trend that has caught so many crappies for ice anglers over the past decade. Other profiles that fish big in the water include the Maki Draggi and the Maki Jamei. As these soft plastic designs became more popular, ice anglers demanded even larger profiles like the Maxi Maki and the Minni XL.

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Despite the fact that crappie might be sucking in zoo plankton, these fish are indeed predators that have a mouth big enough to fit a golf ball. Soft plastic options that fish can see from several feet away can simply catch more fish. Finding fish is simply the most important component of catching fish and the soft plastics that are changing crappie fishing do a really good job of also enabling the fish to find you. You will find more crappie suspended over the abyss this winter and catch more fish if the fish can simply find you. A profile, a silhouette, a contrast of color that is twenty or more feet away can simply be enough for the entire pack to roam your direction.

The combination of the larger profiled soft plastics in conjunction with horizontal tungsten jigs enable you to fish through water faster and the added weight of tungsten also displaces more water and imparts more action on the soft plastic. The entire system working together can be seen and felt from further away. Start out fishing big in order to track down the fish. If need be, you can always scale down after you accomplish the most difficult task (finding the fish). Most days, however you won't have to scale down. Throw the matching the hatch ideal out the window this winter. Simply attempt to find and contact as many fish as possible and you will catch more crappie this winter.



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DAVE GENZ:

LEADER OF A REVOLUTION

BY STEVE WEISMAN
AND CLAM OUTDOORS



“Anglers soon found that mobility greatly improved fishing success, and often times fishing a new hole often meant a bite. At the same time, coming back later to the very first hole would often mean another bite.”

I know we are still in hunting mode, but oh my, ice fishing is coming. Yes, it is.

Earlier this fall I spent time at the Clam Pro Staff days in Rogers, Minn. There were 200 ice fishing fanatics together under one roof, and that definitely gets a person fired up. A full day of seeing new products and visiting with other pro staffers makes for a great day.

While up at Clam, I talked to my good friend, Dave Genz, who really started the modern ice fishing revolution. It’s been said many times over the past 40

years that Genz brought ice fishing out of the stone age into the space age. He started so many things, but the one I think that revolutionized things the most was the Fish Trap that he invented in the late 1970s.

Yup, that’s the portable ice shack that folds over like an accordion or a clam. Look out on area lakes, and you will often spy a sea of blue, the color of its direct descendants marketed by Clam Outdoors. At the same time, other manufacturers have designed their version of the original and have taken their place

alongside the blue portables. Even with all of these other designs, it is the sea of blue that has set the bar in ice fishing.



IN A GARAGE

It all began in Genz's garage, and the first ones were made of cotton canvas, metal electrical conduit piping for the moving parts and a wood base. Definitely heavier than today, but with nothing like it, those first Fish Traps brought about more angler mobility. They certainly beat being outside in sub-zero weather. Anglers soon found that mobility greatly improved fishing success, and often times fishing a new hole often meant a bite. At the same time, coming back later to the very first hole would often mean another bite.

As I visited with Genz, he mentioned his partner in those early days: his wife, Patsy.

"She sewed all of the cloth on her sewing machine for each trap," he said. "We did five in the first year, 20 the next and then 80. She sewed the cloth so that none of the conduit was showing. Finally, we went to a tent and awning company. It's funny, it cost us less to have that company make 100 than the 80 we made ourselves the year before."

Then, of course, came the rest of the revolution, once again spearheaded by Genz: the fishing system, the mobility, the Vexilar locators, actual ice fishing rods, the ice-specific tiny ice jigs, the presentation cadence, the augers, the heaters, the clothes...The list goes on and on. What a feeling it must be to know that you are at the forefront of this entire process and now carry the title of Mr. Ice Fishing. The fishing industry evidently feels the same way, and in 2011, Genz was inducted into the Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame.

ICE TEAM

In 1997, Genz helped develop Ice Team. It's hard for me to believe that this is the 20th anniversary of Ice Team. In the early days, Ice Team sponsored the Trap Attack tournaments that eventually led to a National Championship. It was pretty cool that one of the yearly qualifiers was on West Okoboji's Emerson Bay in Northwestern Iowa. After fishing for those sight-biting bluegills himself and learning just how finicky they could be, Genz made sure that one of the qualifiers was on Okoboji.

My son and I actually fished that qualifier several times and qualified for the National Championship. In 2004, we placed third in the National Championship. I won't go into the two crappies that I let flop back down the hole that really cost us. Just being around and talking to many of those teams was an education in itself.

Since those early years, Ice Team has become less about competition and has evolved into a group of professional anglers designed to educate and inform others about becoming better ice anglers as well as mentors to others. An Ice Annual magazine offers new techniques and fishing destinations, while the IceTeam.com website offers anglers the opportunity to "talk" about whatever fishing topic is of interest.

For many years, Genz spent the winter months traveling across the Midwest, and then to the Rockies and finally to the East Coast, bringing anglers into the sport of ice fishing and then mentoring them, helping them learn more and more. Each time we had a qualifier at the Iowa Great Lakes, Genz would give one of his presentations. We could hardly wait to see what was coming next. What was neat about his presentations was that Genz would never hide the facts. He told us exactly what to use, how to use it and where to go.

Although he doesn't travel like he used to or do all of the seminars, Genz remains a true ambassador for the sport of ice fishing, providing the inspiration to continue to learn. If you ask him a question, I'll guarantee you will get all you need to know and probably much, much more.





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TACTICS FOR THE MID-WINTER BLUES

By Brian 'Bro Brosdahl

Winter is long enough in much of the Ice-Belt to be broken into early ice, mid-winter and late ice, with the ice fishing season lasting more than four months in many areas.

Most years there is enough ice on the lakes in my part of the country (Northern Minnesota) for anglers to drive vehicles on the lakes before the New Year arrives.

I am busy on the Bro-Road Show from early November through February . By the time I am able to get on the ice for my winter guiding season, the fish are already starting to settle into their mid-winter patterns.

The mid-winter portion of the ice fishing season is the least active part of the year for most warm water species. The metabolism of the fish is at the low point for the year, so the fish don't have to feed nearly as often as they do during the warmer parts of the year.

The size of the fish as well as the size of the prey help determine how often a fish has to eat. If walleyes can find enough larger prey to eat, they might be able to grab one big minnow and go several days or longer between feedings.

If walleyes are eating smaller minnows, they may have to catch a half dozen or more minnows to get a stomach full, which usually means the fish have to feed longer and more often to get enough to eat.

Walleyes are the species of fish most anglers want to catch in my part of the country, regardless of the time of year. Walleyes don't have to feed constantly during the winter to get enough to eat, so most of the fish wait for prime-time to feed.

Walleyes like to make feeding movements when they get hungry. When they get active, they begin to hunt for food and move to areas where they think they can find minnows of the variety and size they want to eat. Once the walleyes are done feeding, they go somewhere they feel safe to rest and digest their food.

There are two low light periods everyday, one at dawn and one at dusk. This means walleyes have two opportunities a day to join other walleyes in a feeding movement. There may also be night feeding movements in many lakes.

Each low light period will have a portion of the walleye population participate in a feeding movement and a portion of the population will stay behind. There are almost never any feeding movements where all the fish participate and there are also very few low light periods when none of the fish decide to eat.

The weather conditions, the amount of forage, how many fish ate the previous feeding movements all combine with other factors to determine how many walleyes will feed during the next low light period.

Stable weather and pre-frontal weather conditions usually means more walleyes will feed for a longer period of time, while unstable or post-frontal weather conditions usually means fewer walleyes will feed for a shorter period of time.

Smaller fish like crappies, sunfish and perch often have to feed more frequently than larger fish like walleyes and northern pike because they are eat much smaller prey.



-Walleye
-Pike
-Crappie
-Blue Gill
-Perch



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Perch like to eat insects, crayfish or minnows, while crappies and sunfish often eat microscopic prey like zooplankton. Small fish usually have to feed more often than larger fish because of the tiny prey they eat.

Anglers fishing during mid-winter have to make decisions on where to fish and what to fish for based on the daily weather patterns, the long range trends and the bite patterns of the fish. This may mean changing locations, switching species or even switching lakes to be able to stay on an active bite all day.

I like to set-up a couple of Frabill Bro-Series Side-Step Houses or Bro Hub Houses on a good contact point for walleyes and let my clients fish the morning bite for walleyes.

I usually go scout another spot while my clients fish, to try and have my next move ready when the bite slows down for walleyes.

The best move on most walleye lakes is to target walleyes during the low light periods and then switch to perch and maybe northern pike during the day, when those species are more active.

Sometimes clients pressure guides to stick with trying to catch walleyes all day, even if the lake doesn't have a reputation for a good day bite.

Anglers need to expect fish to have lower activity levels during mid-winter and make their decisions accordingly. Success usually depends on making the right decisions at the right time.

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The type of lake, the species of fish and the types of presentations anglers use can all have an impact on how many fish anglers catch in a days worth of fishing.

The old phrase of being in the right place at the right time certainly applies to ice fishing. I believe what I see on my Humminbird Ice7. If I have fish coming through that won't bite, I need to know for sure what they are, so I will drop down an AquaVu Micro5 camera because seeing is believing.

If the fish are walleyes, then I may be in the right place at the wrong time and need to return for the next low light period when the walleyes are more likely to bite.

I always have multiple rods rigged for different presentations, so I am ready to switch species or change tactics. I use Bro Series Rods rigged with 4 or 5 pound test Sunline FC and use small quick-change snaps so I can change from Puppet Minnows to Buckshot Flutter Spoons or smaller Buckshot Spoons more quickly.

I also have several Bro Dead Sticks rigged if anglers want to fish a second line. I usually rig the dead sticks with a plain glow hook and a split shot and use a live minnows.

I really love the New Northland Forage Dart when extra finesse is needed to catch fish. I have caught almost everything on the Forage Dart. They can be rigged in many different ways with live bait or Impulse Plastics to catch perch, crappies, sunfish, sauger and even finicky walleyes when the conditions get tough.

(Brian 'Bro Brosdahl is a fishing guide, multimedia outdoor promoter, product specialist and ice fishing innovator. He can be contacted bbro@paulbunyan.net or online on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook).

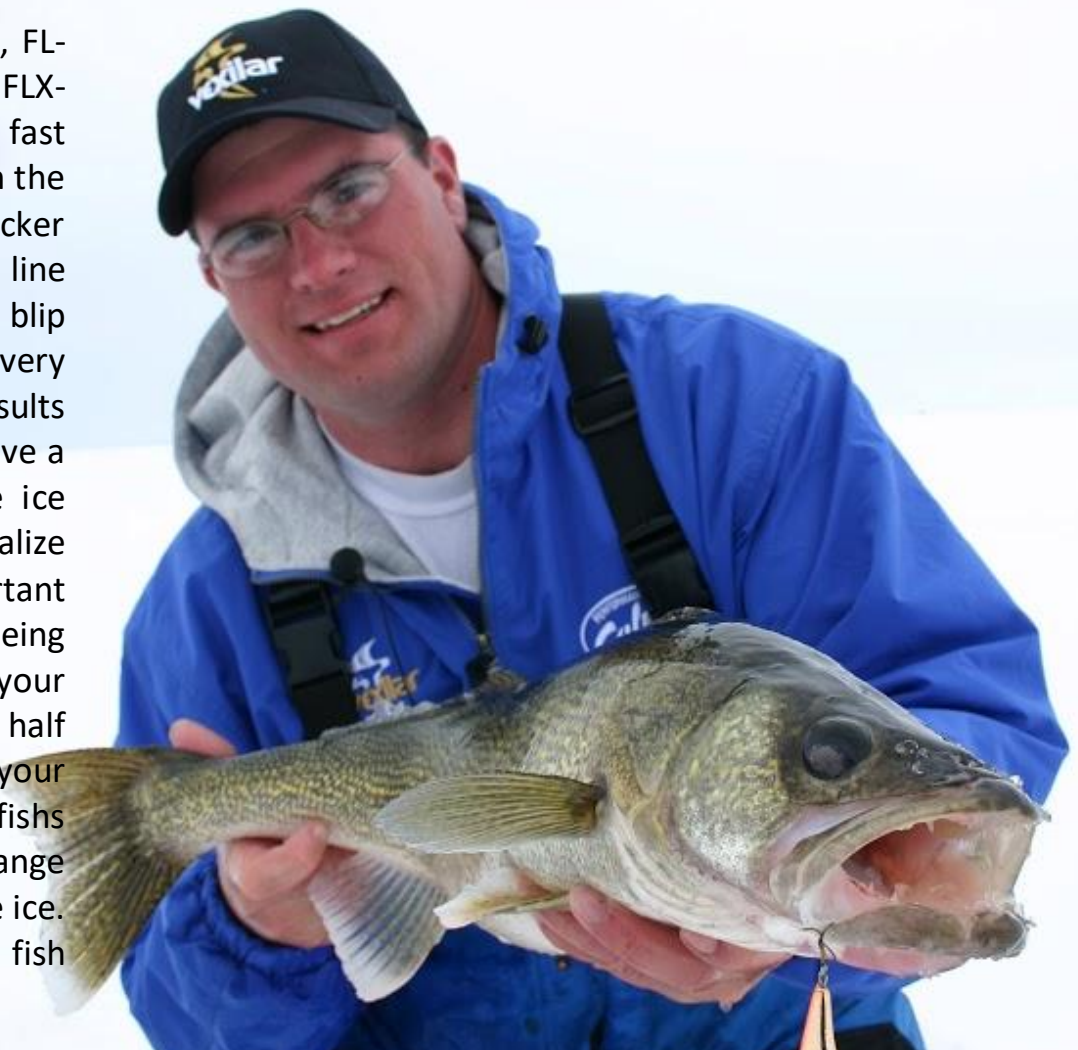


USING YOUR VEXILAR TO THE FULLEST

By Matt Johnson

Were all familiar with 3-color flashers. Weve used them for years and they have become a foundation for most ice anglers. Having the ability to see whats below you and react accordingly is something most of us would never forfeit. Its to the point now that if we leave our Vexilar at home then we turn around to get it. Fishing is just not the same without your flasher staring you in the face when battling with a finicky fish. But do we really use our Vexilar to its fullest? Its not just a tool that shows the bottom, the fish and your jig, its much more than that

Whether its an FL-8, FL-18, FL-12, FL-20, FL22HD or the FLX-28, your Vexilar has fast become your best friend on the ice. Seeing that green flicker turn into an orange line followed by a solid red blip drives tingles down every watcher. Then when it results in a solid thump only to have a plate-sized bluegill on the ice moments later do we realize how exciting, and important our Vexilar becomes. Seeing the fish in relation to your presentation is more than half the battle, but using your Vexilar to determine the fishs mood can drastically change the way you put fish on the ice. Understanding how a fish reacts to various jigging





movements can help boost your success rate. For example, things like when to slow down, when to speed up or when to do nothing at all. These are all things we need to pick up on when using our Vexilar.

Fish are simple creatures. They need to eat to survive and like humans they go through various feeding patterns and variances in appetites. When a fish comes in fast only to stop abruptly and leave your offering alone we need to then evaluate the situation and decide that the jigging action was important, but the appeal/look of the presentation needs a minor adjustment. You called the fish in with action, but once the fish got a look at what was moving it decided to shut its mouth. Changing color, up-sizing or downsizing, adding scent these are a few ideas in which to increase your triggering power in this situation. Case in point, watching the fish's behavior on your Vexilar allows you to take out some of the guesswork and make changes based on how fish react to what you're doing. Don't just settle



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for the old saying, fish are down there but they just aren't biting. Be smarter than that; use your Vexilar to help you make your next move.

We all know that the stronger the signal the more red the line becomes but what about determining the size of the fish? Or better yet, the direction a fish is facing or whether or not that fish is aggressive or negative? Your Vexilar can tell you these things. Of course the obvious is to assume the larger red blips are larger fish, and this would sometimes turn out to be true. However, fish with larger air bladders will also show up as larger marks. This is the reason why jumbo perch show up as large blips, because we all know that those jumbos have air bladders the size of golf balls. Larger gamefish like pike and walleyes have larger air bladders than panfish, but what we were also seeing is the orange and green marks of the fish's extremities. What I mean is, the longer the fish, the more potential there is for a change in signal. As those larger fish move, the transducer picks up on those movements and shoots back orange and green lines surrounding your once single, solid red line. This oftentimes looks like more than one fish if Mr. Pike is on the prowl, but as you pay closer attention you will realize that those red lines are stretching and not separating. Fish that change body position to a more vertical posture will give off those stretching characteristics, so when those sometimes pesky pike rise to check out our tiny ice jig that is why we see a larger red line. Telling the size of a fish is possible with your Vexilar, so don't listen to grandpa.

Determining the aggressive level of the fish is also easy to do with your Vexilar. The obvious is simple, when a fish flies in and crushes your bait then you have an aggressive fish. OK, you got me there. But when you have fish that decide to swim in slow but constantly quiver then I wouldn't throw out the aggressive card just yet. Just because a fish doesn't slam the bait doesn't mean it's not aggressive.

Watching your Vexilar and picking up on those short rapid movements can tell us that we have a fish that wants to eat, we just need to find out what that desired menu item is. Then on the flip-side we have those fish that slowly rise to the bait, seem as if they are motionless, and then slide away. Those would be our negative fish and it might be time to find a new spot. Determining whether or not the fish under you are aggressive or negative can save on frustration and valuable fishing time.

What about the idea of reading below the bottom? Sounds ludicrous I know, but not impossible. In fact, its very doable and important when targeting bottom-hugging fish. This phenomenon is made simple by watching what is below your actual bottom. Movements below the bottom indicate fish coming out of weeds or fish that are off to one side where the bottom depth is slightly deeper in one spot. I can assure you that the bottom is not moving with the intent of teasing you, but rather because a fish is starting to build up the ambition to soon attack what youre offering. Next time youre on the ice pay attention to what your bottom is doing, youll be surprised just how much activity goes on that you might have ignored.

Have you ever thought of the idea that weeds are really our friends? I know its important to focus on green weeds when available, but what Im referring to is having the ability to use either Low Power mode or the S-Cable to see through the weeds. While fishing in thick weeds we oftentimes throw in the towel because we cant see our jig but lets take a lesson from Rocky and not give up without a fight. Switching to Low Power mode cuts your watts from 400 to 200 and allows us to drastically cut down on the amount of weeds we pick up on our Vexilar. By adjusting our sensitivity we can soon find out that

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not only can we see our jig, but we are successfully targeting and catching fish amongst the once overlooked weed flats. Ask me where my favorite areas to fish on the lake are and I'm going to the weeds, and having the ability to fish the weeds helps solidify my decision.

These are just a few simple ideas to add new ways to interpreting your Vexilar. The idea here is to not always just look at things at face value. Step outside the box and use your Vexilar as not just a fish indicator, but rather a learning tool that will teach you a lot more than you know about the underwater world. If you get a chance to use your Vexilar in coordination with an underwater camera, then you can see exactly how fish react and what sort of signal you're receiving. Sight fishing is another way to build confidence in what your Vexilar is telling you.

Don't have a Vexilar Flasher?

Understanding the mood of the fish will help you decide what to throw next. Understanding the size of the fish you are targeting can make your decision to move easier. Understanding how to effectively fish thick weeds can pay off with great rewards.

Understanding how to use your Vexilar to the fullest will help make you a better ice angler. Turning the unit on is only the first step, but by the time you turn it off make sure you got the most out of what that underwater world has to offer!



GOING WITH THE FLOW

The Nextbite



he
NEXTBITE

f you just got done packing away hunting gear and are pacing around the house constantly checking the long-range forecast, chances are you are an "early ice" fisherman. You know that this is a

great time of year to get on some fantastic bites!

One early season pattern that a lot of people overlook is the bite on flowages. Some of the most popular flowages for ice fishing can be found in Wisconsin, such as the Chippewa, Turtle, and Petenwell flowages.

During early season ice it is important to be sure that you are extra cautious when venturing out, especially on a flowage where there are springs and current. Ice safety should be top of mind! A Nebulus Emergency Flotation Device, which inflates in less than 30 seconds and holds 3-4 adults can keep you out of the frigid water while you wait for help to arrive should you break through. We also



wear the new IceArmor by Clam Ascent Suit. Not only does this suit have good floatation, but it also has more freedom to move than other ice suits.

When heading out on a flowage, we look for places where the river comes in and areas where it narrows down. Any place where there is a narrow channel between back bays can also be hot!

While a lot of people like to concentrate on channel edges, we like to concentrate on channel edges that have a tapered flat. It is on top of the flat where we like to set up, especially on shallow flats with weed growth between the channel edge and shoreline.

Since the water in some of these areas is only 2-3 feet deep, it is easy for the fish to be spooked by the noise we make on top of the ice. It is also hard to register a fish on sonar in these shallow depths, so jigging isn't very effective. This is where tip-ups and JT Outdoors Hot Boxes come in!

The Hot Box is a foldable aluminum "box" that fits over the ice hole and is equipped with a small heat-generating lantern inside. Gone are the days of holes freezing over!

It's open on the portion of the box over the hole, and with the use of their rod-holder option, it creates a jigging station. One cool thing about using a Hot Box is the ability to get a second chance at catching a fish. If a walleye takes the bait and then drops it, you can use the rod to jig the bait just enough to entice the fish to bite again.

Fish this time of year aren't looking for a lot of movement, which is why the tip-up and Hot Box bite is so effective.

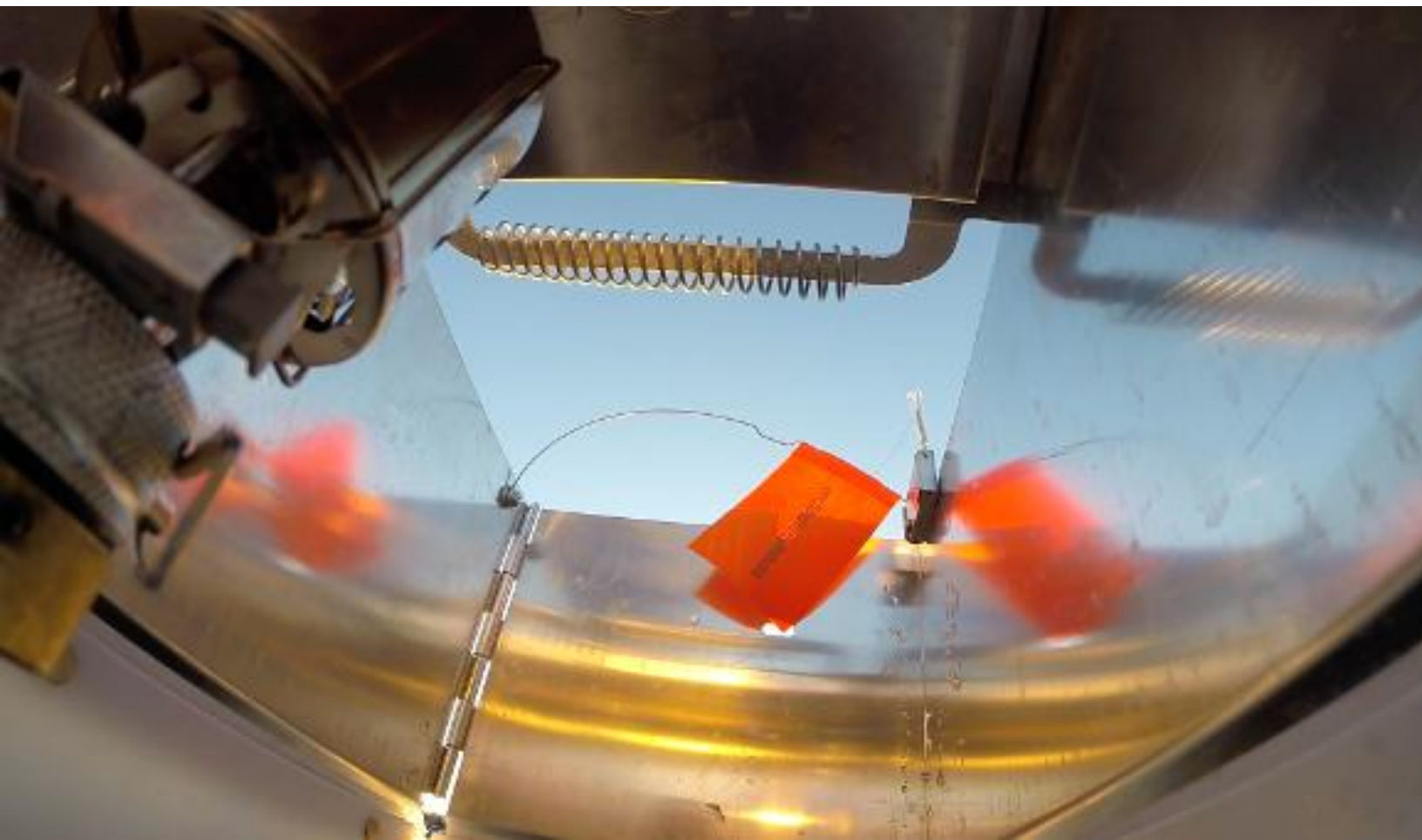
Trebles are our hook choice for tip-ups and we use single hooks for Hot Box. Ideally we like to use rainbows for bait, but large fatheads and small suckers also work really well. Hook the bait behind the dorsal fin so it can move freely and naturally. That's all you need! We don't use any additional attractors on these rigs.

If you are on a deeper flat that is in about 3-8 feet of water, you can use a Lowrance to see the fish approaching the bait. You will be amazed at how many fish will come up to the bait, but not bite. By knowing the fish is there, you are able to give just a little bit of movement to get the bite.

We are currently experimenting with the Lowrance FishHunter Pro, which is a new floatable sonar that can also be cast out in open water. This new device will send a wireless signal to your phone or tablet. It is inexpensive and about the size of an apple, which makes them easy to carry around. This is a bonus for ice fishing, since space for gear is always at a premium!

One mistake that a lot of people make this time of year is not putting a jig rod in their hands because they don't think that it is effective to jig until later in the season. This is simply not true! You just have to be very subtle with your approach. Set up in water over three feet deep and let the bait sit near the bottom. When you see the fish approaching, do a little jiggle and the walleye will smash it!

While bites on small clear water lakes tends to be early in the morning or in the evening, the tannic water on flowages allows for a bite all day long. This gives you a great opportunity to reel in The Next Bite!



ICE-FISHING IDEAS

By Bob Jensen



There was a skim of ice on the pond this morning which served as a good reminder that ice-fishing is getting closer all the time. While we're probably still a couple of weeks away from getting on the ice, now is a good time to think about some of the things we can do this year to have a successful ice-fishing season. Here are some of those things we should think about.

The first and most important thing to remember is that you don't need to be the first person on the ice. Every year someone tries to get out there before the ice is safe. Make sure the ice is safe before you

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attempt to walk on it.

With that in mind, remember that first ice can provide very good action. As soon as it's safe, you should be out there.

Early ice is usually thin, and often there is no snow on top of it. That means that the fish can detect your presence very easily. You need to be super quiet and super still when fishing on thin ice.

Even though it can be fairly warm early in the ice-fishing season, many of the most successful anglers like to fish from a shelter because the shelter can hide an angler's movements. If an angler is fishing outside, that angler is backlit by the sky, and the angler's movements are easy to see by the fish below. However, the fish see the shelter as just a dark object, and the movements of the angler inside the shelter can't be seen as easily.

Early in the ice-fishing season, it is usually a good idea to sit on a spot longer than you might later in the year. Because of the thin ice, it works well to give a spot more time to produce. The more you move around, the more you're going to spook the fish. Later in the year when the ice is thick and there's snow cover, the fish won't detect your movements, so you can move around more.

Line that is hard to see will be better for spooky fish. P-Line FloroIce is perhaps the lowest visibility line out there. It provides outstanding sensitivity and strength.

Also, tiny baits are usually better when the fish are finicky. If you're after panfish and you've got to convince them to bite, go with something like a Hard-Rock Mooska jig tipped with live bait or one of the Impulse Helium jigs. Move them slowly and make the fish bite.

Early in the ice fishing season, the water is often quite clear and the fish will usually be in shallow water. This can be a great time to watch the fish. You can learn a lot about fish and fishing by watching how they relate to different lures, lure sizes, and lure actions. Even if the catching isn't so good on some days, you can learn a lot of things that will help you catch more fish next time out just by watching the fish.

Always remember our first reminder: You don't need to be the first one out on the ice. If you remember that, you'll enjoy lots of ice-fishing early in the ice fishing season.

To see past and present episodes of Fishing the Midwest, recent and older fishing articles, and fishing video tips, visit www.fishingthemidwest.com.

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ICING WINTER WALLEYES

By Mike Frisch

A great time to catch winter walleyes is during the month or so after when safe ice first forms. Walleyes now are often still feeding aggressively before the tougher bite of mid-winter usually sets in. Here are some suggestions for finding and catching walleyes during this often-productive period.

Finding walleyes is obviously a key to fishing success, regardless the season they are pursued. I target lakes at early ice that had a good fall walleye bite as the fall open-water action usually continues to early ice. On some of the shallow “prairie lakes” I fish, that usually means walleyes holding on the edges of flats with remnant weed growth.



On bigger, deeper lakes it often means targeting the points and turns along flat edges that drop into deeper water, or classic off-shore structure like sunken humps and islands. Some of the same GPS coordinates that mark productive spots from fall open-water fishing trips can often be used at first ice as well!

The afternoon “daylight-to-dark” period, is usually when the best fishing action occurs, regardless the lake chosen. If possible, it is best to try to get on the ice as early as possible to get holes drills, houses set, and lines in the water to avoid spooking shallow walleyes when they get active. Incidentally, this year I will be fishing from the revolutionary new hybrid wheel/skid CORE ICE house when pursuing walleyes through the ice. These are hard-sided houses, yet very lightweight so I can fish from the comforts of a “permanent” ice house while still having the light weight and maneuverability of a portable ice shelter.

Being on the right spot at the right time and fishing comfortably will up the odds for angling success

considerably. The use of the right fishing lure is also important. For me, the right lure is a jigging spoon tipped with a minnow head. The always reliable Buck-Shot® Rattle Spoon is a "go to" jigging lure at early ice. The Super-Glo Perch pattern in the 1/8-ounce size has long been my favorite.

The last couple years, however, I have experienced days where spoons with a more fluttering action work well. Last winter I had a chance to sample the all new Glo-Shot™ Spoon. This spoon has a fluttering



TRY MICRO SYSTEMS FOR PANFISH!

By Tom Gruenwald

For a variety of reasons, winter pan fish are notorious for becoming super finicky, and when they do, knowledgeable ice anglers react.

If you haven't tried today's micro gear, you really should. Begin with a super fast action, micro ice rod such as HT's Polar Lites PLC-24MI, Polar Lites PLC-27LM, Polar Gold PLG-25UL or Ice Blues IB-18, IB-24, IB-30, IB-36 and IB-48. These are among the lightest, most sensitive ice fishing rods available, and combined with a lightweight, high quality spinning reel spooled with premium, micro light line of $\frac{1}{2}$ - 2# test such as HT's IBL Ice Black Line, you can fish high power tiny micro jigs in sizes #12-16 such as HT's famous Marmooka Jigs. Tipped with a wiggler, spike, wax worm or tiny minnow, you'll soon come to understand and reap the rewards of the micro system advantage!

action when it falls, but comes with interchangeable Glo-Shot™ Sticks that add to the spoon's attraction during low light periods, times when walleyes often bite best.

Regardless the lure chosen, both can be fished on medium action ice rods and I prefer line that handles well during winter's cold. Floroslik is fluorocarbon coated line that resists freezing and stays limp and manageable in freezing conditions. Spooling with 8-pound Florosilk line is a good choice when jigging winter walleyes.

Jigging spoons are most productive when fished in conjunction with a winter sonar unit as fishing success and enjoyment go up when I can "see" bottom, the jig, and any fish that approach it. This allows me to raise or lower my bait and adjust the jigging cadence to the fish's liking.

I've been using the new FLX-20 flasher sonar unit and am extremely impressed with its features and ease of use. Early ice walleye in shallow water can also, however, be caught by anglers using a more affordable unit like the

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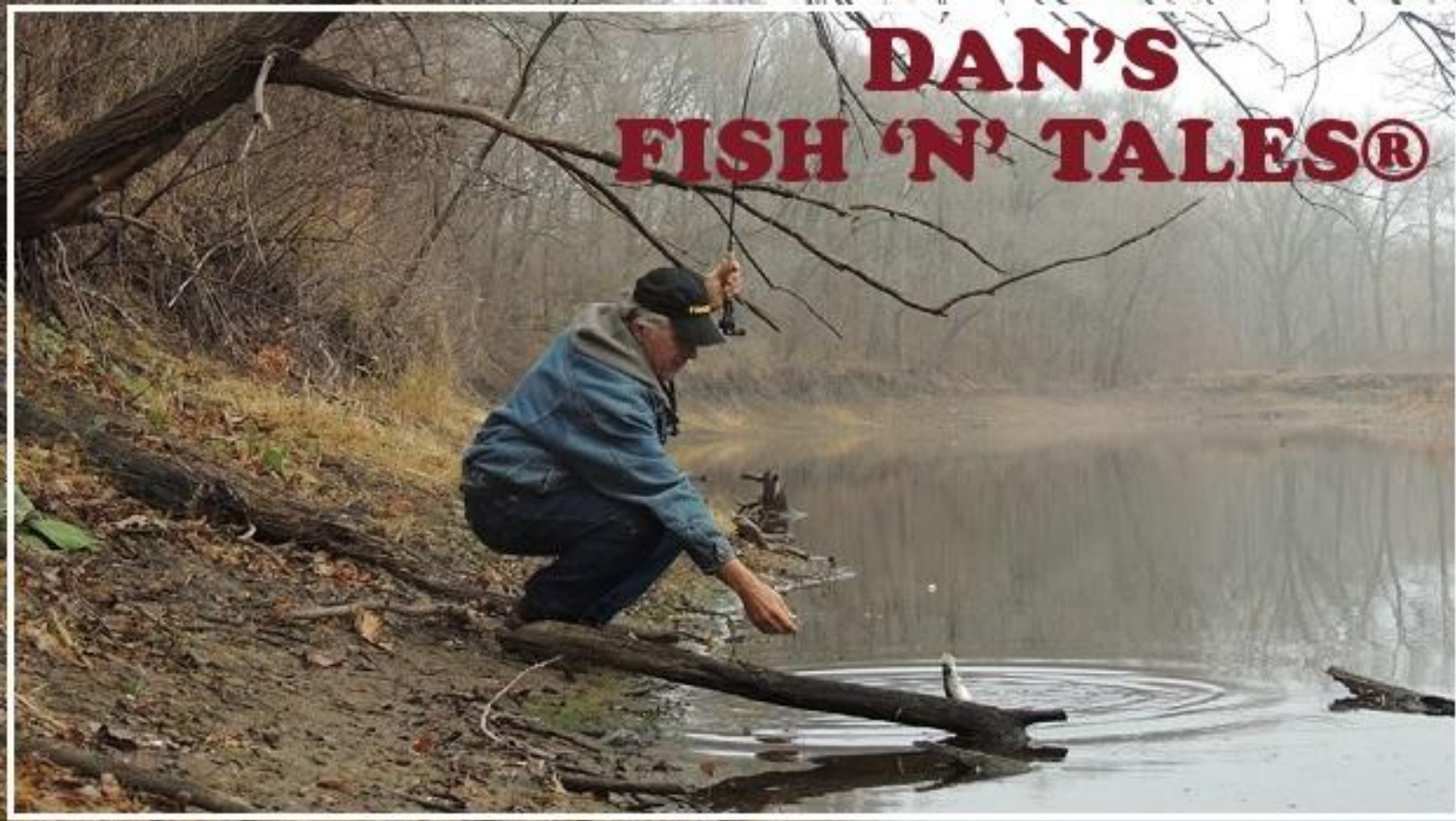
classic FL-8SE unit. This unit does everything the early ice walleye angler targeting shallow water needs at a more affordable price.

This is a great time to head to your favorite walleye lake and target still-biting early ice walleyes. The suggestions just offered can, in fact, help anglers score big when it comes the early ice walleye fishing success!

Mike Frisch is a western Minnesota fishing guide and co-host of the popular Fishing the Midwest television series. Learn more by visiting www.fishingthemidwest.com or following Fishing the Midwest on Facebook.



DAN'S FISH 'N' TALES®



DRILL TWO

By Dan Galusha

Drilling holes is a mandatory part of ice fishing. It can be anything from an axe, as in the old days, to a top of the line power drill. Whatever it is, holes are a must.

My way of drilling uses two drills – 8-inch, Jiffy Pro4 or Pro4 Lite and 6-inch, K-Drill electric. The Jiffy units are fueled by propane, which makes them quicker to start and less mess than normal gasoline models. A K-Drill is a specially designed lightweight unit to be used with an electric power tool drill, but primarily to be used with the Milwaukee M18 Lithium ION Fuel model. I've tried the drill on two different power drill heads, and the Milwaukee is definitely the way to go. It also has a float so that if it comes loose, as has happened with other such



drill designs, it will not sink.

The Jiffy is my powerhouse that drills a lot of holes (several hundred in my case) on a single tank of fuel. It is the unit used to make the “fishing hole”.

As for the K-Drill it does double duty. First, it is a quick way to drill a location hole where I can insert the Vexilar flasher’s transducer to search for places to fish. It is light enough to move around quickly, and drill a lot of holes. However, once a spot is found then the Jiffy can drill a hole right along side. This way when a fish is hooked the transducer does not need to be pulled out of the way, or left to tangle with the line. The smaller hole also confines the transducer a little more to keep it in line with the “fishing hole” area.

The K-Drill assembly is dropped into a hole to see how well it floats – it works!



The author's choice of drills to take on the ice - Jiffy Pro4 Lite and a Milwaukee M18 Fuel power drill with K-Drill drilling assembly.

Second, it is perfect for using when the ice is in the 3” to 4” thickness range, at which time lighter equipment is best to carry, or when doing some quick hole hopping. In either of these situations the K-Drill is designed so that it can drill a hole within the outer edges of a hole so that it can make a larger one.

Taking less and lighter equipment on the ice is always desired, especially when towing a sled or shelter by hand. The K-Drill weighs around 10 pounds, and the Jiffy Pro4 Lite is 18% lighter weight than normal power drills. So, carrying both is not only beneficial to fishing success, but really isn’t all that much heavier than most gasoline powered units. Plus, as mentioned before, if the situation is present for grabbing a single lighter weight unit for whatever reason, the K-Drill is there with power instead of having to crank through the ice with a hand drill.

So far we’ve discussed drilling two holes for a single angler, but in a shelter there can be more than one pattern used, if there are two anglers. One is drilling two larger holes on either side of a smaller hole if a single flasher is being used. Then both anglers will have to keep track of their jig



This is the two-hole system so that the flasher has its own protected transducer hole.

on the dial. If there are two anglers that each have a flasher unit then drill 4 holes in whatever pattern is decided at that particular moment.

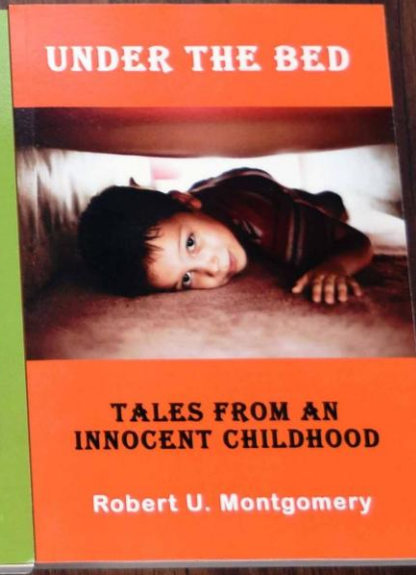
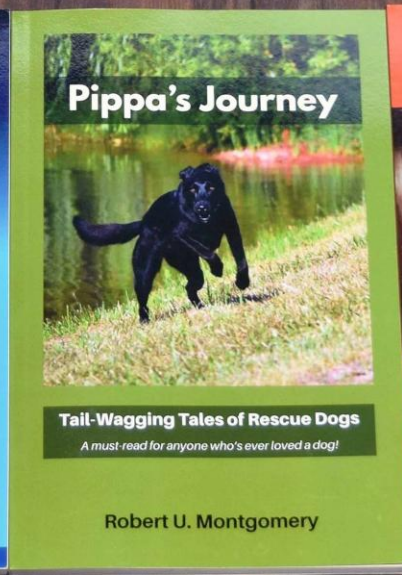
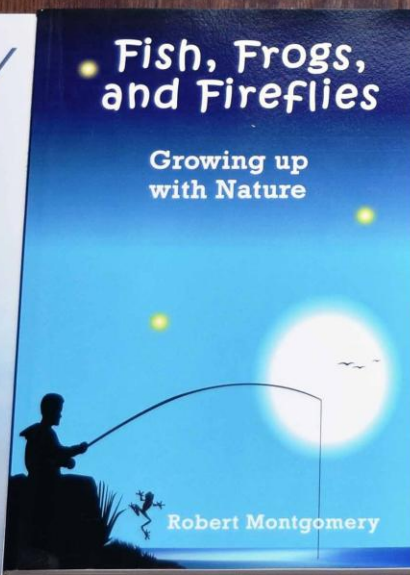
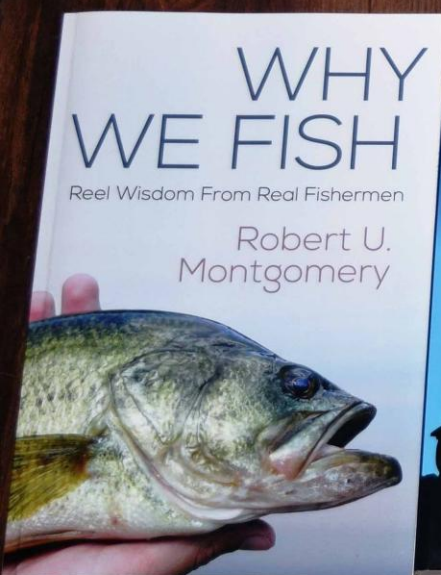
The two drills mentioned are selected because of power, weight and easy starting, but a person can also lessen the weight, but have more work, by having a 5 or 6-inch hand drill to do the job mentioned for the K-drill. It can be combined with the 8-inch power unit, or electric unit with an 8-inch drill or 6-inch for drilling out larger holes as previously mentioned. The later combo would be the lightest.

Next time on the ice think about “drilling two”.

If you have questions about this or another fishing subject drop me a line through the Dan’s Fish ‘N’ Tales® website at www.dansfishntales.com or Facebook page at www.facebook.com/dansfishntales.

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

BOOKS BY ROBERT U. MONTGOMERY





Catch Bigger Panfish From Community Spots

We've all seen it happen—a crappie bite starts and word gets out. Like bums on bologna sandwiches, the ice turns into a free-for-all. Common sense would tell us to find fresh ice or try another lake, but depending on where you live or ice conditions, that's not always easy. And it might be your favorite lake or home waters—so then what do you do?

Brainerd, Minnesota's "Panfish" Phil Laube is no stranger to conditions like these, living in the northern epicenter of all things ice fishing. There, ice fishing's a pastime second only to breathing.

"Sure, most of the time I'll fish areas away from the crowd—or try a different lake—but especially during early and late ice, fishable areas are limited. Naturally, those spots get a lot of pressure. But I've found you can still extract some quality panfish from 'community hole' type spots," says Laube.

His secret? Going finesse when surrounded by legions of power players.

"Over the past four or five years I've downsized presentations when it seems like community hole anglers are fishing bigger jigs or dunking crappie minnows. It's just like open-water bass fishing, sometimes going smaller is the key to catch pressured fish. Another thing: crappies can switch from a minnow feed to micro-invertebrates in a heartbeat. That's sometimes the case, more than the fishing pressure itself."

As the video demonstrates (next page), Laube relies on two key baits, a gold 3mm or 4mm Custom Jigs & Spins Chekai Tungsten Ice Jig and a size 14, 12, or 10 lead Custom Jigs & Spins Diamond Jig in orange tiger. He fishes both on light to medium-light power St. Croix Legend and Frabill ice



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rods paired with a Frabill Straight Line reel and 2-pound monofilament or 3-pound Seaguar Abrax Ice fluorocarbon.

“I always start with a gold Chekai tungsten to hole-hop—and a lot of times that’s all it takes. If fish are still tentative, I’ll grab my rod with the lead Diamond Jig, which has a slower rate of fall to keep really skittish fish in the transducer cone. I stick to one larvae or a Wedgee plastic and keep jigging minimal. Small rod lifts usually gets crappies to bite.”

Although Laube champions gold and orange jigs for murky and tannin-stained waters, he carries a wide selection of colors for versatility on all waters.

“With 22 colors—and a lot of glow/UV options—there’s a jig for every situation. Orange Puffer looks like a champ for ‘gills and same deal with the new pink patterns for crappies. And all in the small sizes I like! Honestly, they all look good!”

For 2018, Custom Jigs & Spins has added 10 new glow and non-glow colors to the hugely popular Chekai Tungsten Ice Jig series in all four sizes (5mm, 4.5mm, 4mm, 3mm). New colors include Wonder Glow, Gold Glow Tip, Orange Puffer, Circus Clown, Pink Clown, Pink Eye, Rainbow Tiger, Lemonade, Fireball, and Junebug. These new additions bring the total count of Chekai color options to 22 unique, fish-catching patterns!



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(see page 26 for specs and complete details)

CATCH MORE FISH THROUGH THE ICE

By Bob Jensen

With the ice-fishing season upon us, now is good time for some reminders about improving your chances for success through the ice. Following are some of those reminders.

Just as in open water fishing, probably the most important key to catching fish through the ice is that you've got to be fishing where the fish are: It sounds simple, but a lot of the time anglers just aren't fishing where

the fish are. With the sophistication of today's sonar units, there's no need to spend time where the fish aren't. If you're using a modern sonar, and if you have it tuned properly, you'll see if fish are down there. The anglers who catch the most fish don't spend more than five minutes on a hole if they don't see fish. Early in the season when the ice is thin and there isn't much snow on the ice you might want to sit on a hole a little longer to prevent spooking the fish, but later in the year, keep moving until you find them.

Once you have fish located on your sonar, don't drop the bait right on them. Slow the bait as it falls, and stop it a couple feet above the fish. We want the fish to come up and take the bait. If it plummets right through them, it could spook them, and even if they don't spook, they typically won't go down to take a bait. We want to keep the bait above the fish. The most active ones will go up to get it. If they don't, lower it a little bit closer to them. Make them come up to get it.

Eventually the action will slow on the hole you've been fishing. You'll still be able to see fish down



there, but they don't want to bite. Try a different bait, or a different color, or try a different action. By doing so, you can usually get a few more to bite. When you don't see them anymore, or when they won't take your bait regardless of what you put down there, it's time to move to the next hole.

When it comes to sonar for ice-fishing, you can't beat Vexilar. They've been making sonar for ice-fishing a long, long time and make the units that have the features you need.

When panfish like bluegills and sunfish are the quarry, you will do best going small and light: Small baits and light line. One of the baits in the Northland Helium series of baits would be a good choice.

Along the light side of things, you want light line. Light line handles the tiny baits better, but it's also less visible to the fish. At times in clear water it's possible to look down the hole and watch fish come in and look at your bait. It's interesting to see how closely they examine it at times. Light, invisible line will make your bait look more natural and the fish will be more likely to eat it. P-Line FloroIce is a very good line choice, with 4 pound test being as heavy as you would want to go.

Last thing. Perch are abundant in many areas, they're willing biters, and they're great on the table. The past few years we've been using a lot more plastic for the perch. They like it just as well as live, and you can catch a lot more fish per bait with the plastic. Use it with a small spoon or jig and just quiver the bait. Impulse Mini-Smelt and Bloodworms are perch-catchers.

Now we just need to make sure the ice is safe. When it is, try the ideas we've just talked about and you'll catch more fish.

To see past and present episodes of Fishing the Midwest, recent and older fishing articles, and fishing video tips, visit www.fishingthemidwest.com.

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Visit www.icefish.com to find your nearest Polar Thunder Tip-Up retailer.



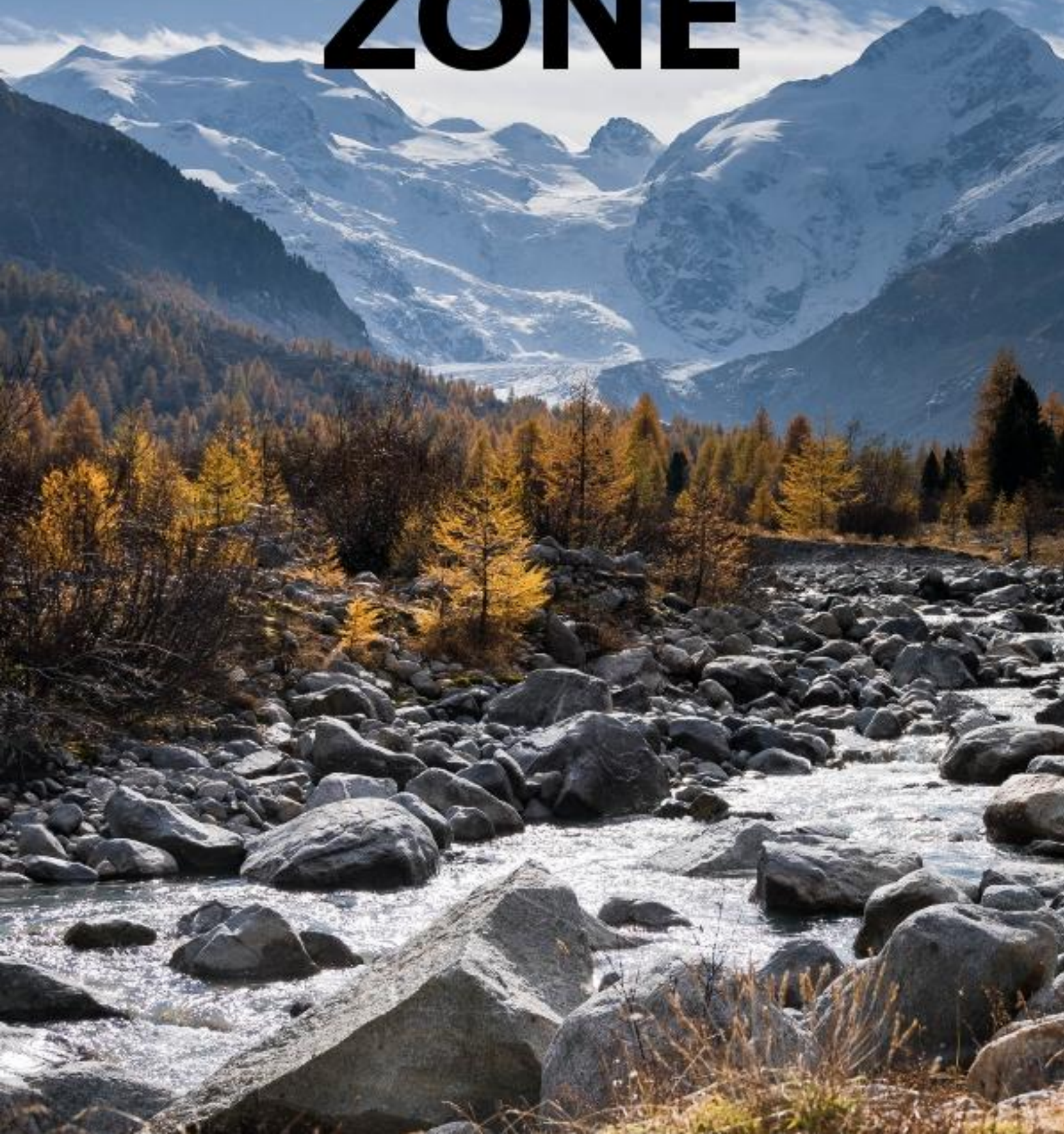
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HUNTING ZONE



JAVELINA HUNTING

By Margie Anderson

Of all the game animals in Arizona, the javelina seems to be the one surrounded by the most tall tales. I've heard people say that javelina will attack humans, that they stink, that they are wild pigs, and that they are very easy to hunt. None of that is true. Javelina will run when they are scared. They don't see well, and if you are in the way, it may seem like they are attacking, but they are really just trying to get away. They have a gland on their backs that has a strong odor, but it's not like you'll keel over at 30 yards from the stench. Finally, javelina are not pigs—they are peccaries, and they are not all that easy to hunt. Hunter success rates in Arizona have held steady at 25 to 30% for years.

So how do you try to be one of the lucky 30%? As with any animal, the more you know about them the more likely it is that you will

be able to find them. Javelina are not very big—the biggest one I ever heard of weighed sixty-five pounds. Thirty-five to fifty-five pounds is average. They are about two feet high at the shoulder and three to four feet long. Javelina are covered with dark grey bristles and have a light stripe on the neck. They are herd animals, usually living in groups of six to fifty animals. Most herds



Javelina season in Arizona is in January for bowhunting and in February for gun hunts. The deadline for permit applications is in October. If you want to hunt javelina in 2018, you need to get your 2018 Arizona hunting license before the application deadline. You can still get leftover permits (if there are any) starting November 27, online and by mail. Any that are still left over will be available to buy at all Game and Fish Offices December 4. Go to azgfd.gov for details. The Arizona Game and Fish Department has a separate regulation booklet for javelina, spring turkey, and bear. This booklet is usually available in late summer or early fall, and you need to get one and study it so you know what hunt number you want to apply for and what the fees and regulations are. You'll be able to hunt without a permit during January if you are a bowhunter – check the regulations booklet for details on how to buy a tag and which units you can hunt in. You can pick up a regulation booklet and applications at sporting goods stores around the state, or online at www.azgfd.gov.

average around ten or so individuals. The entire herd will dash for safety if they are spooked, but a wounded or cornered one will fight.

I usually see javelina when I am deer hunting. Last fall my husband and I were trudging up a hill when he suddenly said, “look at the javelina!”. I looked around, searching the hillsides, only to discover that the whole herd was less than twenty yards away, calmly munching on prickly pears. I swear they know when javelina season starts, because they are invisible then. During javelina season, though, I see a lot of deer!

A javelina herd will stick to a territory that is usually not more than one square mile. They need a permanent source of water and they like places like mesquite thickets, marshy areas around rivers, and caves. The herd will have up to twelve bedding sites scattered around their territory. These bedding sites may be in caves or thickets and will be large enough for the entire herd to stay in. The best bedding sites will have shade and protection from the weather, escape cover, and usually loose soil.



Javelina are omnivorous—they will eat prickly pear cactus, berries, nuts, fruit, acorns, insects, eggs, snakes, roots and tubers, and will dig up the nests of field mice to eat stored seeds. Evidence of rooting is almost a sure sign of javelina. Bites on prickly pear are not so sure—cattle eat the pads too. However, a javelina will shred the pad and a cow will take

cleaner bites. Javelina droppings look a lot like that of a medium-sized dog.

To discover if you are in javelina territory, keep your eyes open and look for signs of rooting, bedding sites, etc. Javelina tracks are small—about 1 3/4 inches long-- and consist of two comma-shaped halves that form a little heart. The pointed end is in front. Javelina have two dew claws on the front feet and one on the back feet, but you won't see these in their tracks unless they are in deep snow or mud. Deer and pronghorn tracks are very similar to javelina tracks, but are further apart. Javelina tracks will have about eight inches of space from one to the next. Pronghorn tracks will be about a foot apart and deer tracks will be 20 inches or so apart.

Once you have decided that you are in javelina country, slow down and start looking really hard. Javelina can seem almost invisible and many hunters walk right past them without ever being aware of it. Your best bet is to walk slowly for a few paces, then stop and look around. Remember that they have a keen sense of smell, so keep the wind in your face if you want to remain undetected for as long as possible. They also have very sharp hearing, so be as quiet as possible and don't assume that they won't see you. They may not have the sharpest eyes in the desert, but they have certainly spotted me a number of times. Be as stealthy as you can until you get close enough for a shot, and remember to keep the wind in your favor.

The herd will be most active early in the morning and late in the evening. If daytime temperatures are over 80, they may be active mostly at night. When the herd is moving, the females with babies lead the way and set the pace because the babies are slowest. The one bringing up the rear will most likely be a sub-dominant male. If you flush a herd, the dominant male may sit tight and remain hidden while the rest run, so keep that in mind.

Using a spotting scope to examine hillsides is a good way to locate javelina, especially if they are lying down. Find a spot with a good view, brace your elbows on your knees (or use a tripod), and examine every bush and rock in view. You can spend hours doing this before suddenly discovering that an entire herd is just across the way. Once you've spotted them, it's time to move in.

Many bowhunters wear socks over their shoes during the stalk to cut down on noise. Javelina really hear well, so wear clothes that don't "rustle" and walk carefully. If you spook the herd from far away they will be gone in a flash. You will know that the herd is getting antsy by the sounds that they make. A woof is a warning sound and may mean that one of them has heard or smelled something he doesn't like. If he's smelled you, you're pretty much through—a human smell will send them packing. If he has just heard you, though, all may not be lost. Try woofing back (some hunters moo like a cow instead). If you woof, they may think you are another javelina and may even trot over to investigate because you are not part of their herd. Normally, the dominant male will investigate, because that's his job.

If you do spook them away and they run, sit down and wait for a while. They usually won't run far unless you chase them. If you wait for a bit, you may be able to relocate them by sneaking along in the same direction they took. You may even hear them before you see them—they make little grunting noises almost continually while they eat. When you can see the herd, sit down and check them out through your binoculars. The big boars will have calloused areas around their elbows. Keep your eyes on Mr. Big and try to fix in your mind where he is in relationship to the rest of the herd. In fact, if you are rifle hunting and are close enough, now is a good time to take a shot. If you are a bowhunter, wait until you are about 25 yards away before taking a shot.

Javelina hides make good leather and the meat is tasty—my favorite way to cook javelina is to barbeque it in a pit dug in the ground. Javelina are not the easiest animals to hunt, but they aren't the hardest either. Do your homework before the hunt starts: scout your area. Once you've located a herd of javelina, chances are you can go back and find them year after year.



SHOOTING WITH BUGS

A few years ago SIG sold a 22-caliber pistol called a Mosquito. It was very popular with a lot of people, but it was discontinued. Now there is a dead ringer for this firearm called a Firefly, manufactured by German Sports Guns and distributed by ATI.

From what I understand, GSG manufactured the Mosquito, which is why the carbon copy with the Firefly. While I prefer black the test model sent in from ATI was the tan.

Design wise it has everything thing a person wants. It has an easy slide action, single/double action, slide release, easy operating safety, de-cocking lever, a quick teardown lever, adjustable rear sight for windage, 3 front sight posts (tall, medium and short), yellow dot sights, two slide springs, and an easy loading magazine for 10 rounds of 22 caliber.

My set up was to use the medium front sight, which is factory installed. I recommend using this if at all possible as changing to one of the others will raise or lower the spot of impact by around 7.5". It did not have to be changed, but the rear sight did have to have a slight adjustment.

Ammunition was mainly CCI Mini Mag, CCI Standard and Federal HV Match and HV Hunter, with some Remington Thunderbolt. The Mini Mag preformed about the best as a velocity of 1260 fps is recommended for both pistols. The Mosquito, which my friend loaned me to shoot in comparison, was the same. It probably needed a little adjusting for my shooting, but being a friend's pistol I didn't want to change the adjustment.

Shooting was great, but best in single action. Pulling the trigger for double action was a bit difficult, as the trigger pull was extremely heavy. I allowed two other people who are Scott County Conservation rangers to try it, and they said the same. This was the only negative, especially if it was for a smaller person with less hand strength, and they wanted to use the double action.



The tan ATI/GSG Firefly on its first shooting. All shots fell within the 8-inch target, with the majority hitting the center 4-inch area.



A disassemble Firefly, which is made easy with the teardown lever for cleaning and changing the spring.

The reach for the de-cocking lever is just slightly difficult, but it is manageable with a slight canting of the gun to use the thumb to engage the lever. No huge minus for that.

Cosmetically a difference that I noticed between the two pistols was that the Mosquito had a black hammer, whereas the Firefly's was silver. I'm not quite sure why the company has changed that part.

All in all, I would give the Firefly a strong 4 stars, and a full 5 stars if the trigger pull was lighter in double action. However, in some ways I can

see that the harder pull might act as a safety feature.

Bottom line, if you are a fan of the Mosquito or want a decent 22-caliber pistol for target shooting for under \$300, I would recommend it. Just remember, to test out the ammo to see what will work best for your situation.

My Dan's Fish 'N' Tales® You Tube channel has a video regarding the tan Firefly at https://youtu.be/6ztSbH_BTz0. There is also one showing how to teardown the Firefly for cleaning and changing the spring at <https://youtu.be/i1YwigH4ODg>.

I want to thank ATI/GSG for giving me the opportunity to test the Firefly, and Roger for loaning me his Mosquito for comparison, so that I am able to pass along the results to my audiences.

If there are any questions drop me a line at the Shoot 'N' Plink™ webpage at www.dansfishntales.com/shootnplink or Facebook page at www.facebook.com/shootnplink.

Until next time, shoot safe and have a great day of plinking.

Shooting results on a 6-inch target with the SIG Mosquito.



Why I Hunt!



By Dana Benner

The other day I got a call from my friend Stan wondering if I was interested in going on a deer hunt in Vermont. He had planned to go on November 21st and though I had originally planned to chase “The Ghost” in Dunbarton on this day, I said “yes”. “Why?” Because I love Vermont. What I experienced on this day just confirmed my belief in this state.

Even though Stan has hunted this area before, has a camp there and grew up in Ryegate, this was going to be my first time hunting deer here. A few years ago I hunted grouse in this area and I have fished for trout on the Wells River, just few miles away. Because of this lack of experience I spent an extra amount of my time on my gear.

On this trip I carried my Henry .30-30 and Federal Fusion rounds. As Ryegate is located in the northeastern part of Vermont I packed extra warm clothing into my Blackhawk pack and I brought extra first-aid gear to include some SAM splints. I had already decided to dress in multiple layers that included Smartwool wool socks and a heavy wool pullover made by Stormy Kromer. I also packed my meat snacks from The New Primal and some homemade trail mix.

Stan picked me up at 6:30AM and after a two ride we arrived at the spot we were going to hunt. It was cold with the temperature reading in the mid-20s. There was also snow on the ground. While the snow cover was really nothing more than a dusting, it was enough for passing deer to leave tracks.

Grabbing our gear I went right to work and it didn’t take me long to pick up the deer tracks. Most of the sign I found were does and they had come through earlier in the morning, probably sometime around first light. Vermont has a buck only rifle season so does are off the list, but where there are does there will be bucks. We just needed to find them.

The funny thing about Vermont is that everything seems to uphill, and uphill we went. As we gained elevation the smell of balsam greeted me. There is nothing like the smell of balsam. Here Stan and I opted to take different paths. Perhaps we could push a deer into a position where one of us could get a shot. Per the map, the direction we were traveling would eventually take us to a powerline and it was here that we decided to meet.

My path took me into a forest of balsam and hemlock, while Stan's path went into a grove of hardwood of birch, ash and beech. With the dusting of snow on the ground it felt like I was part of a Christmas card. I moved slow, checking every possible location where a deer may be bedding down. The path I was on was the remains of an old logging road. Though the forest had reclaimed the road long ago, it was still fairly easy walking and it was the path the deer were using as evidenced by the number of tracks I saw.

We crossed the opening of the powerline and began climbing the ridge on the other side. Here there was evidence of more recent logging activity. Stan took one side of the logged area and I



took the other. On my side the ridge went higher so I decided to head for higher ground. I found a spot in a hardwood grove and decided to sit and wait. I had a commanding view of the logged area, the powerline and a path through the hardwoods. I also had a spectacular view of the Green Mountains on one side and the White Mountains in New Hampshire on the other. With the mountains framing me it was almost a spiritual experience.

As the morning wore on the temperature rose. Blue jays flew through the branches of the trees that surrounded me. Cows bellowed on the farm in the valley below. Partridge berries, their red fruit standing out from the snow, covered the ground. As I scanned the area for any movement I was relaxed. I lost all sense of time. What seemed like minutes were actually hours. All was good. It wasn't until the walkie-talkie cackled that I came back to the real world. It was Stan. We had sat for about three hours and neither of us had seen a thing. We decided to call it a day and leave this magical place.

So why do I hunt? It is the feeling of being alive. It is pounding of my heart when I reach the top of a ridge. It is the smell of balsam and hemlock on a cold, crisp morning. It is the red berries standing out against fresh snow and it is the thrill of seeing and following the deer tracks. It is the view given to me by the Creator. All of these things make me realize just how small I am in the world as a whole and it is humbling. This is why I hunt.

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GIDEON

By Jofie Lamprecht

There are some stories that must be written. If they are not, they will only be remembered by those that were there in the heat and dust, with thirst on their thick tongues, and their minds wandering far away when they should be concentrating on the task at hand. Stories lost because they were not written.

For some stories, not all the cast be named - dignity and pride is involved. Not all hunts are error-free and glorious. Not all hunters have glory every day, even though every day is glorious in Africa.



I write this story for my friend Gideon. Our path has been long. Thirty-two years I have known him. He was young then, and I was younger. We had an African-American (I hate this term immensely) on safari with my father and myself – we being European-Africans, eleventh and twelfth-generation European-Africans, my father and me. Our client was from Detroit, Michigan, Muslim, and a delightful fellow. Fit, strong, heck of a sense of humor, and dressed in all-khaki safari gear. We hunted out of Volker Grellmann's Eagle Rock hunting camp on farm De Hoop, north of Omitara in eastern Namibia. I was a seasoned hunter at a mighty six years old, also khaki-clad, binoculars around my neck, and I was ready to go.

This is where I met Gideon - 20 something at the time, born and raised in Namibia and from the Oshiwambo tribe, and with a smile that could lure you out of depression.

We now go back to the future to 2017. Gideon is in my full-time employ, after more 30 years of service with Mr Grellmann. He is both my left and right hand. With a single look, things thoughtfully get done.

Collecting our client Duke and his wife Lanny, we drove up to my favorite place, Waterberg National Park. Permits and bag limits being smaller and way pricier than the old days, we were after a single Cape buffalo on a week-long safari. We arrived in camp. I had already sighted in my .375 H&H by Rigby rifle I was loaning to Duke. So, it was lunch and up to the plateau.

Our team included the indispensable Gideon, Dylan my young apprentice, and my wonderful camp crew of Wayne and Mercia. Thomas the game ranger and I go way back to my first years' hunting in the park – always friendly, always a big smile, always positive – all the things a state official should be, but usually are not. We spent the first afternoon driving around and showing our guests the lay of the land, and discussing the next dawn's legal first-light hunt.

Duke was in his 70s, with multiple joint replacements, and we both agreed that the beach-like sand of Waterberg was going to tax him to the extreme, and decided we hunt via what I call "remote control." Duke would guard the truck and we would track buffalo, check if there were any notable heads among them, and if so, retrieve him and lead him to the buffalo.

All very simple in theory. Applied theory is usually more difficult.

We started on our first full day in the spring heat of a dry and dusty Waterberg. I decided to go to the least desirable, most difficult area to hunt in the park. We cast around the water and immediately the soup-plate drag mark tracks across the road were evident. Wordlessly we collected our gear and headed off on the track, Gideon leading, me second, Dylan with my spare .470 double over the shoulder, and then Thomas to make sure we followed the rules.

After a mile or so Gideon turned to me and said there were at least two bulls feeding together because their tracks overlap each other. The pace is brisk. The once 8-foot high "rose-thorn" bush had apparently been burnt the year before by lightning. Visibility, though limited to a maximum of 50 yards, was much better, but still a grey expanse of slightly undulating dunes. A herd of eland cows crossed our track, and we stopped to let them pass so as not to create alarm.

The sun, higher and brighter, burnt our backs, double barrels now thawing in hand. Gideon stopped to contemplate the



track. “What’s going on?” I asked, and waited. “They are close, we need to be extra vigilant,” he said. We slowed our pace, heads scanning the grey bush like a Wimbledon game. We crested a low dune and the tracks looped lazily left. We paused. Scanned. With a touch on the shoulder we continued.

I grabbed Gideon by the shoulder and pushed him down. Twenty yards in front of us there was a big black shadow in the grey rose-thorn. Illusion? The four of us froze, and as we stopped moving, so the shadow moved. The buffalo was now noisily plucking up grass while bulldozing through the grey bush. To our left was a second one feeding. Too close. The bull on the left was a giant. Not very wide, but with huge bosses, a good drop, and his tips came all the way up. A sure shooter. Crouched, we now started backtracking to get out before they sensed us. We’d had the wind in our faces all morning, but as we turned, so did the wind. There was a crash behind us, then the thundering gallop of two buffalo fleeing our scent. It was over. Those bulls would now go and crawl into the most horrid thorns – this track was dead. Time to start over.



Skipping a day, I decided to try and find the big-footed bull again, and along the rhino path, in the same place as before, were the soup-bowl-sized drag tracks. The truck was parked in the shade to repeat the same format - Duke was going to guard the truck and the team was going to see if we could catch these bulls unawares and get Duke in for a shot.

We easily followed the rhino path for a couple of miles. This bull was on a mission. The dragging tracks



swung off the path and our pace slowed as the buffalo started feeding. We were catching up. The tracks took us further than we thought they would be, a few miles. It was late morning when Gideon turned and said, “We are very close.” The seemingly never-ending sea of grey bush with scant shade had lulled us, and my concentration was coming and going. It was a hot August day, and I thought to myself that even if we found the buffalo, how could we get our client in there?

The tracks zigzagged and a black ghost appeared in front of us. We all four sank to our knees in unison. We waited a full minute before I slowly stood to see if they were still there. Two bulls, including the brute I saw two days ago, were 30 yards away. One was busily feeding, the other already bedded down, but in the sun. In the soft white sand we crawled back out on our tracks. There was no shift in wind, and no crashing of bushes this time. At a safe distance we had an indaba about what our plan of action was. There was a road about a mile and half to the south that we could get Duke to, and then bring him in on foot. The problem was that the buffalo would move. As the midday sun burned their black bodies, they would seek shade. Scanning the sea of monotonous grey, I could see no shade to speak of. This meant that the buffalo would push themselves under grey thornbrush, and be very hard to see if they were not moving.

We marched in the direction of the road, excitement building – this might be our day. After a few hundred yards we hit a rhino trail, freshly used, that was conveniently going in our direction. Getting to the road I looked at Dylan: “Straight down this road about three miles, and take the first road left. A mile - and you will be at the truck.” He turned and marched to bring Duke a lot closer to from where we

started.

I stretched out and took a nap in the shade of a shepherd tree, only to be woken 20 minutes later by ticks crawling all over me. Gideon and Thomas chuckled – they'd chosen the tick-free scant shade, while Bwana-big-gun lay in the ample shade – my mistake.

The truck rumbled up in record time. Duke was told the plan and we went back down the rhino trail, a few hundred yards from where we had been, hoping the buffalo would rest in the only shade for at least a mile around. However, a herd of gemsbok had claimed the shade as theirs, and unhappily scampered into the sun as we approached. We put out a camping chair for Duke to catch his breath, have a drink of water and bandage the arm he had ripped on a rose-thorn bush. His blood thinners did not help in stopping the flow.

Once we had rested his mechanical joints, we crept close to where we left the buffalos. The bedded-down bull was gone, melted into the grey. This project just got a lot harder. We stood silent for a few minutes, till I heard a crunch of branches off to our right. I scanned the chest-high bush and saw our prey, head down, feeding slowly away. Project on again.

We slowly circled the bushes and advanced – every step carefully placed, the sun beating down on us, bleaching the energy out with every step. A movement caught my eye. With my Leica binoculars I picked out the big boss I had seen two mornings before. This was our bull. At 30 yards, bedded down - I



got Duke up on the sticks. “Do you see that shadow?” Duke nodded. “That is your bull. Wait for him to stand.”

Making my best buffalo bellow had no result. My antelope snort, however, had the desired effect. The buffalo stood and took several steps in our direction. Duke was ready with the .375 H&H by Rigby. The safety was off, and as the “t” of “shoot” left my lips, the ringing silence under the noonday sun was broken. The buffalo charged forward and started veering to our left, passing us at about 40 feet. I had no chance at a backup shot with Duke to my left. I kept everyone quiet. “Where did you hold?” I asked Duke. “Right between his eyes,” was the answer. I discussed this shortly with Gideon. With half the day behind us, our day just got a hell of a lot longer.

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We advanced to find his track. Saw melon-sized marks gouged where he went from zero to full speed on his short stumpy legs; the turn and the exit. Gideon was taking slow, deliberate steps, his eyes locked onto the trail. We needed blood. We didn’t even know if or where he was hit...

Gideon bent down and plucked a piece of grass. Blood - a smear rather than a drop. The tense situation got more so.

The spoor was relatively straightforward to follow – the sheer size of it - and fresh. His gallop gave way to walking after 100 yards. Good sign? Gideon kept stopping and backtracking. Taking longer. I let him work. You cannot hurry this process. Finally, after two hours of this back and forth, I pulled him aside



and asked gently, “What is going on?”

“I am not sure that this was our buffalo,” Gideon explained, “I have not seen blood for a long time.”
“This must be him – that track is unmistakable!”

“And if you shoot the wrong buffalo – what then?” he said. Good point, I thought.

Gideon backtracked to the last blood. He then worked his way forward, grass-by-grass being examined. Each speck on the ground looked over, nothing left to chance. The concentration needed for this is incredible – kids of today struggle to watch a 90-second video, never mind hours of complete concentration with the sun beating down on your neck, having walked many miles before, and who knows how many more. We sat and waited. Too many feet would hide any sign for Gideon to find. He bent down and examined a leaf – smiled, showing his incredibly white teeth. Success! A speck of blood no bigger than the head of a needle - we were on the right track.

We continued. I took over every time we got to a thick patch of bush, my Heym .500 NE ready for any nasty surprises. Hours slipped by.

A sudden crash of bushes and everyone freezes – I point my rifle, not at a sight, but at a sound. Finger close to the trigger. No sight of him. This stuff is a thick grey mass of millions of hiding places for Black Death. They disappear so easily, like a shadow.

Again we were stopped by Gideon a mile later. He backtracked. No blood where we spooked the buffalo. "I will not shoot unless I am sure," I reassure him. We both contemplated the huge tracks at our feet. "Let's go." The drill was repeated with the sun well past its zenith and starting to sink to the horizon.

Thick bush. I lead. CRASH. Whadup-whadup-whadup, as the giant hooves flee again. We go forward. Two places where he has bedded down. Blood evident on both. Gideon stares at me. "This buffalo is hurt. He is not going to go far. You need to be ready."

We pushed on, the bush staying the same monotonous grey. A few hundred yards up ahead we saw a small stand of trees. Shade. He must be headed there. We stayed on the track, and as we approached the trees I took the lead again. I cleared the shade – nothing. "He stood here and rested," Gideon said, pointing at the small blood pool. From the shade the track turned 90 degrees. It was now four o'clock. Gideon turned and gazed in the direction of the tracks. "He will not be far."

Duke is beat. This has been an unplanned LONG walk for him. To his credit he kept up, and battled on without complaining, his shirtsleeves soaked in blood from the rose-thorn, a bottle of cool water in his hand the whole way, replaced as needed. We put down the chair for him. "Ten minutes, and then we push again," I tell the group. "This guy has a bullet goodness knows where, and we will catch up to him. If we see him he is fair game. Three guns - shoot at will. Weigh him down. We need to stop him. Let's be careful."



The 10 minutes passed all too quickly, and we stepped out into the glare of the now not so hot sun, legs stiffened from just 10 minutes of standing, and a serious case of baboon butt developing.

Not 10 minutes later I heard a serious commotion from behind. Looking back I saw our ranger, Thomas, pointing forward, mouthing a word that I struggled to make out. We all stopped. He pointed with hooked finger: "Black rhino." Great, I thought, what else can go wrong today? We would have to loop around the rhino and then pick up the track on the far side. More problems for Gideon.



I slowly slid to the side to see what Thomas was talking about. A shadow. I raised my binoculars: A hump. Too dark. A head raised... I had stared at those bosses a few times in the last days. This is our guy. I looked down at my Heym double rifle and raised the 100-yard leaf-sight, stepped out from behind the bush, and as the butt touched my shoulder, the shot went off.

The buffalo explodes forward in warhead-like fashion – the second barrel fires – no clue where the second bullet went. He slows and sticks his head into a thick patch of bush. Opening the double, empty shells clang and fly over my shoulder. I look back at the rest of the team. "Shoot!" is my simple instruction. Dylan steps forward, a tall, lanky reed at 17, raises the .470 NE he is carrying, and wallops the buffalo from behind. The buffalo's butt sags as I close my double and take aim. From my left, Dylan's left barrel is set loose, and there is a thud of the bullet. He, two for two; me, one and don't know. I look back at him – a smile of surprise and joy of the hunter's horn crosses his face. He had just shot his first

buffalo. A glorious collaboration.

Duke had front row seats to the action – if we had not reacted like we did, we might still be tracking that buffalo, or worse – someone could have gotten hurt.

I beckoned over Duke and Thomas, the gunbearer for that day, and handed him the loaded .375 H&H. I grabbed Duke by the shirt and we went to the bush that our long-pursued target has disappeared into. Coming close, I could see the buffalo, lying down. I pointed, and Duke sent a blast his way. “Reload, shoot.” Duke repeated the smooth action and shot again, both shots flying true.

We approached as the outsized-footed brute rolled on his side and gave a final death bellow. We waited a few minutes before I went in for the final safety check.

Hugs and high fives all round, Gideon’s smile the biggest. A potentially dangerous and disastrous day averted by not only skill, but experience. One of the best all-round tracking jobs I have ever seen. We had our prize.

Next question - where in the hell were we? We had not cut a road all day. I took out my GPS – three miles to the nearest road. We handed Duke the two last bottles of water, and we set off to fetch the truck. Duke got to enjoy his trophy while we had work to do.

Hitting the road, I looked at Dylan, still with a silly grin on his face, dirty, bleeding a little, tired and happy. I pointed down. “Whose tracks are these, Dylan?” He bent.

“They look like mine from earlier today?”

“Well then, you know where the truck is, right?” His tired and



ringing brain thought for a second, then he put his head down and started plodding towards the truck.

There was no “making a road” through this grey sea of bush. It would have taken us a day. The shortest route was straight through. The team carried machetes – ‘pangas’ as they are locally known. They chopped here and there where it was bad, but the truck did the brunt of the work. I can still hear the scratching and screeching from thorns on metal to this day...

With the sun touching the horizon, I rushed the photo shoot a little, later wishing I had taken 10 more minutes. It had been a long, taxing day for all of us. We loaded the brute and drove back on the Cruiser-bulldozed road we had made. I passed sandwiches out to the crew. To all, but Gideon...

In his mid-50s, after 19 long miles in the sun with soft sand underfoot, he started jogging in front of the truck, clearing branches as he went, for almost three miles back to the road.

This man of unmatched patience, concentration, as well as endurance. What an honor it is to work by his side.

May the sun warm our backs for many more days, may the tracks lead us to our quarry, and the hunting Gods keep us safe.

Walking behind you, Gideon, has been one of the rare and distinct privileges of my life. A toast to you.





A REAL-LIFE SNAKE CHARMER

Put an underwater camera in people's hands and you never know how they'll use it next. "The past couple years, the folks from Discovery Channel's Bering Sea Gold have been using our Aqua-Vu HD cameras to prospect for underwater treasure," says Ben Gibbs, president of the popular marine electronics company. "Captain Vernon Adkinson employs as many as eight of our high definition cameras at a time and says they help his team find a lot of underwater gold."

Finding fishing hot spots or hidden treasure aside, Gibbs notes that his company's underwater cameras have been deployed for everything from aquatic rescue operations to well and sewer inspections to chasing ghosts. "Several years ago, National Geographic tried fitting a small Humboldt squid with one of our cameras in hopes of filming a rare giant squid in the wild. Les Stroud of TV's *Survivorman* even used one of our Micro cameras to try and film a Sasquatch."

So it didn't surprise Gibbs or anyone else at the Central Minnesota angling-electronics company when they learned about Steven Bostwick and his rather slithery adaptation of their cameras.

"In the work I do as a herpetologist, it's important to find and track hallmark species and individual

animals for migration and reproduction studies,” says Bostwick, an Iowa-based rattlesnake researcher.

“Timber rattlesnakes love to inhabit large limestone rocks and overhangs to use both as den sites and summer nesting areas. Prairie rattlesnakes use both limestone overhangs and large mammal burrows for dens and nesting. With both species, birds of prey are their main predators, so you see why these snakes retreat underground when danger approaches. It can make my life as a herpetologist difficult, in attempts to record the snakes’ movements.

“Out of necessity, I came up the idea of using a field camera on a pole,” Bostwick notes. “When a colleague showed me the Aqua-Vu Micro II underwater camera, I knew it would be perfect for this application and for quietly probing into the dens and burrows, to identify the animals for tracking data. The Micro camera has a tiny, thumb-size lens that’s both lightweight and super rugged. It plays clear, live video on a handheld 5-inch color LCD and has its own rechargeable power source, perfect for portable field use.”



To convert the classic fishing camera into Bostwick’s ideal reptile research tool, he attached the lens to the end of a 10-foot length of PVC electrical conduit. Next, he ran camera’s cable inside the tube and routed it back to the Micro II screen. “I also made sure to orient the camera and conduit so I always knew which end was up. When you go underground, it can get

confusing, so orienting the view is important.

“What’s really cool,” Bostwick adds, “is that the Micro-PVC set up works really well as an underwater pole camera, for looking under boat docks and other shallow cover when you’re fishing.”

Back among his slightly scary research subjects, Bostwick recalls typical days in the field. “It’s real common in the spring for rattlesnakes to stage at the entrance of the den, still underground, because it’s not yet warm enough to emerge. This is where the pole camera set up has been invaluable, allowing us to observe the snakes where we couldn’t previously do it.

“This past summer, I was just approaching one of my timber rattlesnake den sites at the top of a hill when I heard the quick escape rattle of a nearby snake. Before I could get a good look, the rattlesnake crawled under a big rock and disappeared. I was able to run the Aqua-Vu pole camera right

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beneath the rock and find the tunnel where the snake was hiding. The camera gave me a great look of the animal, which I immediately recognized, due to its marking—a little blot of color I’d placed on the snake’s tail during a previous capture.

“The Aqua-Vu has greatly aided my tracking and movement research, letting me literally enter the rattlesnakes’ world, sight unseen. The data I’ve compiled continues to tell us lots of valuable information about the reproduction, migration and population of these marvelous animals.”



