

**December 2018
Ice-Open Water
Fishing Edition**



ODU MAGAZINE™

**Icy Lake
Trout**

**Crappie
Main
Streamed**

**Bass:
Cold
Winter
Days**

**Power of the
Perfect Match**

**Georgia Swamp's
Wild Hog's**

**ICE ZONE
OPEN WATER ZONE
HUNTING ZONE**



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EDITOR'S LETTER

Happy New Year! What a year. ODU Magazine's popularity continues to grow. We started out 2018 with about 14,000 subscribers and as of 12-30-2018 we are at 23,649. All organic! All by visitors connecting with us on our website (www.odumagazine.com), social media or through our digital partners and registering to receive our digital fishing magazines.

My partner, who has moved onto the great fishing hole up above, Larry Thornhill would be happy to see ODU continue to move forward. **On New Years I will raise a toast you Larry.**

What does 2019 have in store for ODU?

Thank you to all our subscribers for visiting ODU Magazine and sharing us with your fellow outdoorsmen and women. 2019 we will continue to deliver.

This Edition Of ODU: We have you covered in this edition. No matter if you are chasing bass in the southeast, or ice hole jumping in Dakota's. All three sections combine for 24 articles. Ice Zone! Open Water Zone! Hunting Zone! Look for crappie, bass, walleye, lake trout, brown trout and redfish fishing with hog hunting, a African buffalo story and much more.

ODU is nearing 24,000 subscriptions to our FREE digital fishing magazine. We are elated to know more and more anglers and outdoorsmen as tuning into ODU weekly. Here is the link if you would like to share the magazine with a friend > [REGISTER YOUR EMAIL HERE!](#)

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

And please, enjoy the outdoors.

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Thank You All!

**2019
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Crappie Main Streamed

By Jason Mitchell

Crappie inhabit so many different environments and ecosystems. What has always made ice fishing so much fun for me is the simple fact that each body of water will have its own personality. And that my friends is fun to figure out. There are some fisheries where we often find crappie on rock structure for example and yet other lakes or reservoirs where we find fish using locations that might seem unusual. Not only do crappie respond to the environment and structure (or lack thereof) but fish also respond to the fish community present. On lakes where there are a lot of large bass or a high density of walleye, you will notice some tendencies (burying in weeds during daylight or not using rock structure for example) but you will also notice differences if there are not the other predators present in high numbers.



From Canadian Shield lakes to natural lakes across the upper Midwest, many of the predominate patterns are basin related or weed related. Good stands of green weeds like coon tail hold fish especially if those weeds are situated along a sharp break or off a point that is close to a basin or hole. Perhaps the most classic pattern involves suspended schools of fish that roam out over the hole or basin. There are so many great fisheries however where you can throw this knowledge right

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out the window. Past seasons, we filmed different episodes on fisheries that probably don't follow the norm of what is so often preached about winter crappie.

Shallow dish bowl lakes and lakes that lack classic structure often fish much differently. Case study is Lac que Parle in south west Minnesota. We filmed an episode on this shallow fishery this past season, headquartered out of Watson Hunting Camp. This long shallow lake is perhaps fourteen feet at the deepest but there is very little structure. The fish roamed along vague contour edges that slowly dropped from the shoreline out into massive eight to ten foot flats. Finding fish resembled the hole drilling that is sometimes required to find perch over large expansive flats. Pods of fish seemed to follow lines where the goal was to just get over the flow of fish where you marked small schools of fish moving through in fifteen minute to half hour intervals. We have seen this vague pattern play out before on similar fisheries where the sweet spot wasn't so much an individual piece of structure or even a magic depth. The fish seemed to roam an expansive edge where if there was one universal pattern, it was a distance from the shoreline. Might be fifty yards or two hundred yards depending on the depth and taper of the bottom. That lesson is a lesson you can take to the bank on shallow, flat fisheries and the distance from the shoreline lesson just doesn't apply to crappie. We have used that rule for figuring out perch and walleye movements on similar fisheries.

Reservoir crappie patterns don't get a lot of ink either. There are great reservoir crappie fisheries located in the Great Plains States of the Dakotas, Iowa, Nebraska and northern Kansas. Because these reservoirs often cycle much more with water levels, the fishing can be boom and bust but



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the boom years are special. Pipestem Reservoir and Jamestown Reservoir located in central North Dakota both offer solid crappie fishing. We recently filmed an episode on Pipestem Reservoir with guide Jerad Newgard. We have also filmed crappie fishing episodes on the upper end of Lake Oahe near Beaver Bay with Curt Reeffer. Lake Oahe might be producing some of the best winter crappie fishing in the upper Midwest for fish over thirteen inches. Reservoir crappie fishing is often about reading structure if there is a defined river channel or creek channel present. When we filmed on Pipestem for example, we found fish on the edge of the old creek channel where the channel swung close to the shoreline. Any curve or split has potential and in the case of Lake Oahe, any flooded brush or flooded tree near or along the old channel can be worth checking. You can find brush or trees by drilling holes and using your flasher but the fast and easy way is to explore these locations during the open water season and use side imaging in a boat. Large trees will also sometimes emit a gas where you can actually see the large white bubbles frozen into the ice particularly at early ice before there is snow.

Merritt Reservoir located in the Sandhills of Nebraska also offers the classic river channel submerged tree patterns but what makes Merritt somewhat unique is just how big and tall some of the trees are. We found crappies suspended off enormous cottonwood trees along the deep channels in water as deep as thirty feet. Many of these trees had been under water for several decades.

Regardless of reservoir, any tree or bush near structure can hold fish and a good bush or tree is relative to what is available in the area. On some reservoirs where there are few bushes or trees underwater... any bush or tree near the channel is a really good tree or bush. On reservoirs where there is an abundance of bushes or trees underwater, the best locations have bushes or trees with horizontal branches or some type of crown. A lone tree stump with no branches can hold fish but a tree stump that still has branches is often better. As a rule of thumb on so many of the reservoirs we have fished, you don't have to physically fish in the branches or right on top of the tree. If there is

enough of a gap between branches, you can but we often catch more fish by drilling holes right next to the branches, five to ten feet to the side. Which side can be determined by how the channel runs and if there is current. What can be surprising in some reservoirs is just how much current can move through these spots.

Obviously you have to figure out how high the fish are suspending. Most of the time, a good starting point is near the top of the crown for the more aggressive fish. What often doesn't get mentioned is how to fish the current. On many reservoirs, the current will pulse. That is the current will pick up and drop off. There might be an hour where you have a hard time picking up your lure on some reservoirs because the current is strong enough to push your lure out of the cone angle of your sonar. Then the current might lay down for an hour. This surge might happen every hour or every three hours. We

often see an intense bite window right at the beginning or end of the surge. Sometimes, you have to just set up on good location and play these current windows.

If there is a universal location that can really turn on for reservoir crappie... away from the old creek or river channels, that location is any valley or dip along the shoreline that funnels runoff at late ice. Look at the shoreline and look for the high banks, then look for the low bank in between where there is a dip or valley. Any terrain feature along the shoreline that focuses some runoff at late ice especially if it is near any flooded brush, trees or an old channel is a spot to mark. The later the ice the better and we often find crappie running shallow and often right under the ice.





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The beauty of fishing is there is no one size fits all formula for attacking every fishery. There is no rubber stamp pattern that can be applied everywhere. You can take the exact same fish and put that fish in a different environment and discover completely different patterns. So often as anglers, we can get in a rut where we learn a successful pattern in one particular ecosystem and then struggle when we encounter new water. Make a point this winter to figure out a fishery that fishes much differently than water you are much more intimate with and you will become a much better ice angler... I also guarantee that you will also have a lot of fun.

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Lure the BIG Trout

By Nate Zelinsky

In the sport fish category, it seems there is a select crowd that chase big trout. These anglers know the thrill of hooking a monster trout and it keeps them coming back regardless of whether it is a rainbow, brown or lake. The power and speed of the fight is unmatched by 95 percent of other freshwater fish.

When it comes to ice fishing you are faced with many decisions. You see the same simple decisions when you are fishing from a boat, but it's different when your entire world is limited to a small hole cut into a frozen layer of ice. These decisions need to be well-planned and executed.

Of all the species I target there is no doubt the oldest, wisest fish is a mature 40-year-old lake trout. These fish have been around the block and seen and done everything, so you must be on your game to create success. Trout are opportunistic feeders. They will take a meal when it's right, so it is your job to make it right.



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The Big Lakers

When it comes to targeting a predatory fish — whether it be a lake trout, walleye or northern pike — you need to understand the natural forage for that body of water. Open-water fishing anglers tend to not have an issue with fishing big baits. But once winter hits, anglers struggle with larger lures. When I say struggle, I mean it is a mental challenge to have the confidence to use something nearly the diameter of the hole. When I am guiding and I hand a guest a 40-inch heavy action Clam Rod, a summer-sized reel with 12 pound fluorocarbon line, and an 8-inch tube jig, their eyes almost pop out of their head.

Technically I'm downsizing from a laker's traditional-sized meal. A mature 40-year-old fish eats 10- to 14-inch rainbow trout, kokanee, or suckers on a daily basis. These fish are very used to exerting energy to attain the award of a big meal. A bass-sized tube jig simply does not pique the interest of the target species. So when I am targeting predatory fish (i.e. big lakers) my number one goal is to at least be in the same size category as the natural forage.

After I select the size my next thought is color. With color, I have three categories: bright, dark and natural. I carry a few options in each category or each bait. Bright colors include white, pink and chartreuse. Darks include black, dark green, purple, gold (turns dark at depth) and red (turns dark at depth). Naturals will be gray, blue, light green or similar.

Color choice matters more with older and more pressured fish. When targeting big fish of any species I tend to always start with a dark color. For me, this comes from confidence, but more importantly if the fish does not like the presentation, they do not leave the area. I then move to my naturals and finish up by trying the bright colors.

In my experience if you start off with the brightest shades you can spook the fish altogether as opposed to starting with the darker tones. With the darker hues, the fish will stay around even if they don't like the color. I am also very conscious of the wire color on my hook. I always prefer a nickel hook and or painted black matte finish hook opposed to any other finish that would actually stand out at depth.

The last trait I look for in my bait



selection is action. For lakers, the bread and butter bait is a 6- to 10-inch tube jig. This bait looks bulky and swims amazing when jigged. Even a slight move creates great tail action. It's the ultimate lake trout meal. Unfortunately, after time in the same areas with the same fish, lakers will become wary of the bait. Getting a strike can become impossible.

I was filming a show last year and sitting on a shallow water flat adjacent to deep water. We had big fish constantly replacing themselves while feeding on this flat. That first day, eight out of 10 fish that came into our Vexilars hit our tubes.



Day two, nine out of 15 hit our baits. Day three, four out of 25 hit our traditional tubes. This is a very common theme with lake trout. They educate themselves extremely quickly and it's important to keep them on their toes to keep your hookup rate high.

If I am looking for a bait with less body action but still includes swimming movement I lean toward Bondy Baits or 10-inch Lunker City Fin "S" Minnows to create a large profile. My go-to bait for tons of body movement is 6- to 10- inch salt water squids. I put a Kalin Ultimate Jig Head in the head of the squid as you would a tube and this bait delivers unmatched action.

Rainbows and Browns

Large rainbow and brown trout requires similar decisions. These fish feed on freshwater scuds, hatching insects, crayfish and minnows.

Shallow fish near weed beds focus on scuds but notice a larger meal, as well. Open water fish



are there for minnows and mud-hatched insects. The same color range of lures apply. In this case, though, the angler needs both tiny and larger lures. A thick, soft plastic like a crappie-sized tube works as either a scud or a minnow; if near the bottom it resembles a crayfish. The key here is presentation.

Some days the fish want a suspended lure and others you need to pound the bottom. From there, smaller plastics like a Maki Jami or Matdi on a Clam Drop Kick Jig catch the finicky fish and larger offerings like a Clam Blade Spoon move more aggressive fish to bite.

At the end of the day, keeping the choices as simple as possible is key while thinking about every decision and make sure you execute it well. Guided by the natural forage your fish is eating, think about three color options, then about three bait actions. Watch and try to understand your fish and

their habits and will you naturally start getting one step ahead of them, which will greatly increase your daily success.

Nate Zelinsky, of Conifer, Colo., is a professional fishing guide and ice fishing school instructor. He owns Tightline Outdoors, where he offers year-round guide trips and the largest on-ice school in Colorado.

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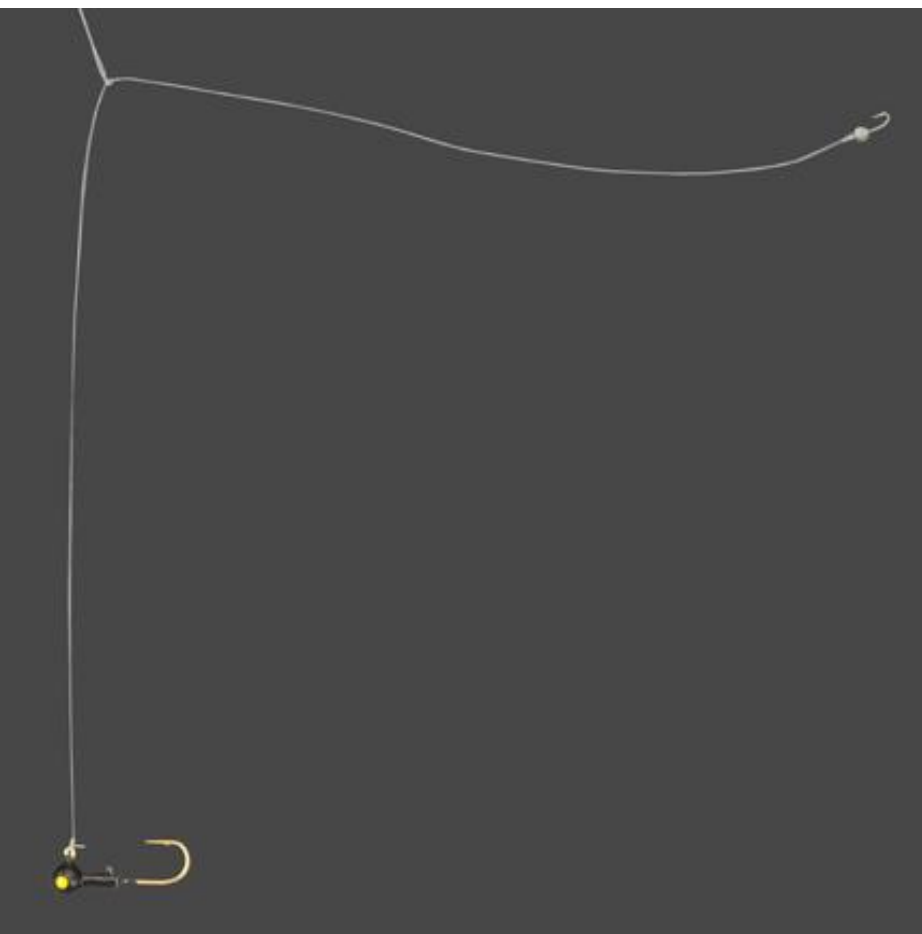
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Dropper Magic

By Tom Gruenwald

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

After punching yet another set of holes, I

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

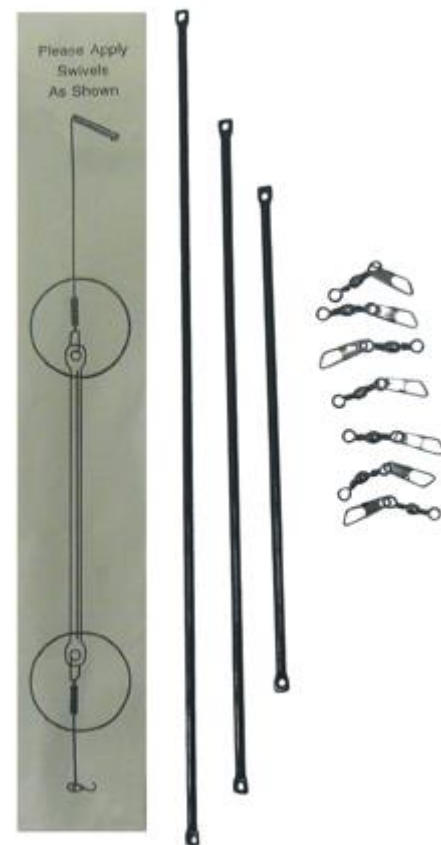
drop my transducer through the ice chips, where the Vexilar reveals fish stacked about ten feet thick, beginning about two feet off bottom.

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

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

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

Whether this little assessment is correct or not I'll never know, but regardless of the reason, a moment after my spoon settles a foot or so above the school, the jig drifts into place and my Polar Gold premium rod registers an ever so slight bump, indicative of a take. Instinctively, I snap the rod skyward, and immediately feel the satisfying weight of what feels like a substantial fish thrashing below. Seconds later, I'm rewarded with a chunky, 10" yellow perch at my feet.



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

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

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

The same concept incorporating a lightweight flutter spoon and shorter, 2-4" dropper line tipped with a tiny, baited circle hook

is also a great way to attract fussy fish suspended high, holding in shallower water or over thick cover. Simply “pop” the spoon periodically, but gently, using long pauses between

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

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

Recently, anglers have begun experimenting with some new dropper rig

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





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

designs, too. One unique system uses a Palomar knot to position a teardrop style ice jig semi-horizontally. Being sure the hook on your jig is pointing straight up, simply add an extended dropper about 3-6" long featuring a lighter, secondary jig or plain hook at the end.

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

You can also create a vertical style dropper rig. Although droppers can also be tied directly off the hook of

any standard jig, this system works best when using horizontal jig heads featuring a collar or secondary eyelet to attach a vertical dropper line.

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

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

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

Work this rig by simply "ticking" your presentation using a slight, "skipping" action, somewhat akin to the motion of a water bug skimming along on the surface of still water in summer. The heavier base jig will directly mirror this action, while the lightweight dropper will respond by simply floating up and down with a slight, plankton imitating action.

Just keep in mind that strikes from fussy pan fish on this nearly weightless dropper can be difficult to detect. To solve this issue, use a premium micro rod such as an HT Ice Blue,

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combined with the lightest, thinnest diameter line you can find, and always jig with a continuous rise or fall, using a steady cadence. Should your rod tip hesitate instead of moving according to the rhythm you've established, drop your rod tip, then set the hook. Often, you'll be rewarded with a deep bend in that Ice Blue!

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

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

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

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Sonar For Ice-Fishing

By Bob Jensen



About this time last year, I had an interesting conversation with a friend that wanted to get more involved in ice-fishing. He is an accomplished open water angler: He has a nice boat that's rigged with sonar and an electric motor. He has several rods and reels and a couple of tackleboxes. We talked about the equipment that he should consider for ice-fishing. Early in the conversation sonar entered the picture. I suggested that sonar was the tool that many successful ice-anglers consider to be their most important piece of equipment. My friend had never used sonar in his very limited ice-fishing experiences and he really couldn't see the need

for it. He was going ice-fishing the next weekend with some friends, so I offered to loan him mine. He said that he would "take it along, but it really isn't going to help." Short story even shorter: When he returned it on Sunday afternoon after a day and a half on the ice, he asked me "do you want to sell that thing, and if not, where's the best place to get one?" He discovered what most people who fish through the ice discover: Sonar will help you catch more fish. Here's how.

***Not a big bass, but
the Vexilar showed
the dad and son
team of Rex and Dax
Clark that there were
fish below.***

In the mind of many ice-anglers, revealing the depth isn't a depth-finder's most important function: Revealing fish is its primary function. A depth-finder adjusted properly, and it's easy to adjust them properly, will show the tiniest of jigs. They will certainly show if a fish is below your hole in the ice. Many ice-anglers will drill a good number of holes in an area and then move from hole to hole searching for fish. They put the transducer in the hole, drop their bait down, and watch for a fish to approach it. If no fish life is detected in a couple of minutes, they move to another hole. They keep moving until they find fish. When they find a hole with fish underneath, they spend some time there. This is when the depth-finder takes on a new role.

Once we've found some fish, we're going to use the sonar unit to position our bait. When a group of fish is found, there will usually be some that are more aggressive. Let's say we're fishing for perch. Our sonar reveals some that are very close to the bottom. Lower your bait until it's a few

feet above them and see if they'll come up to it. If they do, they're often going to bite. If they don't, lower it so it's a little closer to them. Make the aggressive fish come up to the bait. Remember this: They'll usually move farther in clear water. You need to get it closer to them in stained water.

This brings us to another function your sonar will perform. We find some fish, and they come up to look at the bait, but they don't eat it. This means they're interested, but they're being choosy. If they look but don't eat, you need to do something that will convince them to do so. Try a different color or size. Maybe move the bait slower or faster. Try different presentations until you find what they want. If they don't respond to anything you show them, find a different hole but remember to come back to that one. At some point during the day, they'll eat.

Vexilar is the pioneer in ice-fishing sonar. They're easy to use and will reveal all you need to see to catch more fish. Whatever your needs or wants, they have a unit for you. Just realize that if you want to be more successful in your ice-fishing, and if you want your ice-fishing to be more fun, a sonar unit will be a huge step in that direction.

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How To Jig

By Joel Nelson

"The charm of fishing is that it is the pursuit of what is elusive but attainable, a perpetual series of occasions for hope." - John Buchan

My favorite quote about fishing sums up nicely how we approach a day on the ice or open water. Anglers are usually an agreeable crowd, and I find them to be a “glass half-full” group mostly out of necessity. Not all fish bite, and especially mid-winter, you need to focus on the next one more than the last one. Still, the question remains, how to attract the next one and actually seal the deal?

Your jigging stroke has the power to attract fish from distance and entrap them in a trance-like state, as they hang on your every movement until they have no choice but to commit. Your cadence, unfortunately, also has the tendency to draw them in close, only to get a strong snub upon a very close and tense inspection.

You want to know the secret to unlocking the bite, the absolute undisclosed truth about what it takes to convert those “lookers” to “biters?” The secret is that I don’t know. Really, I can’t predict what it is that an individual fish will like, on a specific weather pattern, on lakes with differing structure, predator/prey relationships, and oxygenation. Not knowing, IS the secret, which means that each and every trip is a different occasion for hope and ultimately, testing.

While I can’t offer a simple strategy for always knocking them dead, I can tell you my approach and process of elimination that has served me well throughout the years. I can also share some common issues with the way most people jig, hopefully helping you to eventually crack the code of the day, each and every time you hit the ice. For the sake of ease, I’ll generalize into two groups, perch/walleye, and panfish. I’ll also focus on what you should be seeing on your flasher to get the job done.

Walleyes

The first thing to remember with ‘eyes especially is that they’re predators, so I start aggressive. “Take their temperature” by starting with larger, and quicker jigging motions. Most importantly, jig 2-5 feet off of bottom to give them room to appear under your bait. Jig too close to the floor, and



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bottom hugging fish can only approach from the sides, giving you precious little real-estate on your flasher to observe them. After the first few fish, you should have a good idea of how aggressive they are. Are they spooking when you drop the bait in their face, or do they chase it to bottom, hovering over it while it lays in the mud? Similarly, will they follow the bait upwards, several feet off the bottom where they originated? Aggressive approaches for fish that are willing will yield the most efficient results, but we know that mid-winter fish are famously stingy. This is where you really break down the bite.

Sharp jigging motions now should only be used to draw fish underneath your bait and into the cone of your sonar. Once detected, every fish needs far more subtle motions. Focus on naturally wiggling the bait, first with small continuous spring-like jigging motions, as if you were drawing a small oval with your rod tip the size of a marble. Most fish are over-jigged at this stage, so that marble-sized stroke should be a good indicator if you're waving the wand a bit too heavily. From there, experiment with changing a few variables. First, the size of your jigging stroke; go from drawing a marble, to maybe something the size of a golf-ball or bigger, then maybe back to something even smaller yet, that you can only achieve not by jigging, but by simply squeezing the cork on your rod handle. Next, experiment with working that entire motion upwards in the water column. Will the fish chase? Do they only react when the bait is moving, or do they like it when you occasionally "kill" the bait?

Tough customers sometimes require the above and more, as you tease them off of bottom, watch them retreat, then approach all over again several times. This is where it's best to keep doing what you're doing on a per-fish basis. In other words, don't experiment with too many different jigging strokes for a single fish. Instead, let the fish leave, re-set your approach, then feed a new fish a new look. Study an underwater camera and learn what small taps on a rod-blank with your fore-finger can mean for the bait and how it jumps. Recreate what is successful, reject what is not, treating each fish like the individual it is, while looking for clues and general patterns for all of the fish you work. Of course, a target-rich environment is best for learning, and experience is usually the best teacher, especially when fish are not abundant.

Perch

Perch are aggressive school feeders that eat in a flurry. Commotion is what they thrive upon, often even when they're in an incredibly neutral mood. Active schools move about constantly, requiring as much drilling as they do dropping of jigs, but keeping their attention is of paramount importance. This is often best-done with some friends, with one person continually jigging aggressively while marking fish, and another experimenting with different baits and jigging styles around the edges. Once the sonar marks dry up, it's on the drill again to hunt



them down.

I break down the bite according to what they're eating, free-ranging invertebrates about the water column, or bottom-focused meals that emerge from the substrate. Bloodworm or bottom hugging invertebrate bites are all about being near the lake-bottom, putting the bait in the mud as much as above it, and potentially even using underwater cameras for bite detection. I remember several extremely tough Devil's Lake bites where fresh minnows and jigs layed on bottom were the only way to get bit. The struggling minnow was slurped up from bottom, but never while hanging anywhere in the water column. Jig-down into the mud, with a tight-line, stirring up mud and debris until you've created a visible cloud on your underwater camera. Study how fish react, learning how much to stir it up, and how much to wait it out.

Other bites above bottom, like that of an underwater insect hatch from mayflies or caddis, will often see caught perch spitting up these invertebrates around the hole as you pull them out. These bites call for aggressive jigging upward in the water column, as you work fish higher and higher to get them revved up. Playing keep away here can be vitally important, as I believe the school gets more active with more fish feeding about different depth ranges. Fire them up, and only then focus on catching them.

There's no one-way to skin a walleye or a perch, but these starting points are a good way to launch the every-trip experiment, while honing observational skills on your way to cracking the day's bite.

The previous segment focused heavily on the thought that each fish has its own mood, persona, and likes/dis-likes. Bluegills especially take this idea to a new level, often being among the most challenging species to tackle during an off-bite. I've sat on schools of giant gills for upwards of 3-days, re-visiting them from time to time until weather stabilized and their outlook on eating improved. In high-front situations, with bluebird skies and spiked barometers, sometimes there's very little you can do. While it happens, those lock-jaw moments are rare, and more often you're left with a challenging, yet possible bite scenario tied to a specific color, jigging stroke, or low-light feeding window.



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Bluegill

Trophy mid-winter panfish are legendarily difficult to coax. Over the years of photo and film-shoots, we would focus efforts early and late specifically to avoid a closed-mouth session of bad-water bluegills. If you're learning how to jig them into submission then, your best bet is to focus on the 3rd or 4th day of consistent weather, and a stable or falling barometer. Pair this with at least a half day on the ice to aid in your cumulative learning, either preceding or into and then out of a low-light period.

Big gills hang in the water column nicely, as relatively stationary and solid targets on your flasher. Your first opportunity to impress is on the drop, so resist a hasty drop into a brand new school until you have your wits about you. Some baits simply drop better than others, so watch your bait for the first few feet to see what it looks like. Hopefully there's no spin and the fall looks natural. Spinning reels and finicky gills have single-handedly brought upon the heavy selection of in-line or straight-line reels these days that allow line to evenly be placed on a spool without twist. Focus on slowly dropping your bait into a school of fish on a slack line. Are they rising to meet, or spooking in a refusal to eat?

The next drop try an artificial introduction to the fish on a tight line as you steadily control the bait's fall until just above them. Sneak it in. Then start jigging. Again, focus on initial reactions from your flasher. Does an aggressive lift draw them closer, or does a subtler jigging stroke tickle their fancy?

Technical gill bites are cause for a 2-step process that I like to call "lock-down" and "lift." I palm the reel, placing the rig on my thigh or hip while kneeling on the ice. This settles and steadies my hand, allowing for some more fine motor-skill movements. From here, I tap the rod blank with a

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fore-finger to attract, then squeeze the rod-handle in quick-but-subtle bursts to get the fish to commit. As reluctant fish close, or as they retreat, I start a slow-but-steady lift to hit the re-set button. I will drop on a slack line or slow and tight line depending on what my early research has shown to be most effective, only to start the process all over again. Of course, each jig fishes differently based on design. These are general starting points from which to form your own opinions and best-practices, but keep them in mind next time you tackle a tough gill bite for which there seems no remedy.

Crappies

Crappies during much of the ice season are easy pickings by comparison, mostly because they suspend over deeper water, giving our sonar cones a chance to grow in diameter and scan a larger underwater area. Bigger crappies however are often found in weeds or roaming edges instead of basins, such that they'll often jig up like a less-eager walleye. For finicky 'pies, your challenge to jigging is often two-fold. Control of the jig is of great importance, but it's made difficult by deep water and small sizes. On light bites, I'll err towards the side of bite-detection with a stiffer-than-normal noodle style rod, and when fish are a bit more willing to chew I'll use a stronger power and faster action rod than normal for better control.

Crappies will often stratify according to size on your graph, with the better fish in the school either feeding high, or more often, sitting lower in the water column and protected by more enthusiastic biters above them. In such situations, fish fast with heavier tungsten or spoons to blow past the little-guys, but still stay above the better fish. Crappies seem more unwilling to follow a bait down, with bluegills, and then especially perch being more willing to chase down.

For that reason, your crappie jigging cadence should be upward-centric. The up-down keep away game seems to work only with the very most aggressive crappies, and you'll need to keep the bait quiet more often for really tough customers. The "lock-down" method works great as a fish really studies your bait, with crappies being notoriously light biters. What you may mis-interpret as a simple shake from your hand, may actually be a crappie sucking the bait in, before quickly pushing it back out.

I like to focus on being still or at least very subtly controlled when jigging as a crappie approaches,

knowing that my ability to detect his strike is as difficult often as simply getting him to commit. Whether crappies or gills, the right sequence and strategy can change throughout the day as fish's activity levels grow and fade. Interpretation: What worked yesterday or even an hour ago may not be the order of the minute, so keep experimenting, and keep pushing as you learn while you lift your rod in observationally-patterned motions.



SIGHT ICE FISHING IN THE WEEDS

By Scott Seibert

Sight ice fishing has been around since the dawn of man who first ventured onto a frozen lake or river and chiseled a hole in the ice, then peered down the hole to see if he could locate any fish.

Sight ice fishing can be a good learning experience. You can learn more about your jigging action and how fish react to your cadence. You will also learn how fish bite and you will discover why you have missed a lot of fish. Sometimes the initial bite is so quick and so subtle you may not have time to react. Seeing is believing when it comes to the interaction of angler and fish.



Author Scott Seibert demonstrates you can use sight ice fishing to catch a nice Crappie. Photo Submitted by Ginny Riege

“Anglers have used fish finders or flashers using sonar technology for many years to gain a glimpse of the underwater world. The trouble with these units is that it can be difficult to interpret sonar signals. For many it might be just as difficult to build a mental image of what the underwater world looks like.”

Today, with the latest in technology, we can still look down the hole in the ice and ice fish but our tactics have changed. We have sonar units, underwater cameras, GPS and electronic mapping. We can use this equipment to also help us find a very key element and that is location of specific structure known as weeds.

The angler who wants to sight fish should find a shallow bay or weed flat that has green coontail or cabbage. The greenest weeds will provide a number of elements that can help with sight ice fishing. The green weeds provide oxygen to help keep microorganisms and bugs alive. This

provides a place where smaller fish can come to feed and where predatory fish can lay in ambush to eat the smaller fish.

A clear-water shallow bay or weed flat will allow the angler to view what type of fish inhabits the weed bed.

Once I have located my weed bed I drill a series of holes in and around the weed bed. I like to drill an 8-inch hole that will provide me with a large enough window to see my jig and the surrounding structure.

Searching this area is done with my Vexilar Fish Scout Underwater camera and my Vexilar FLX-28. The Fish Scout is a color camera that helps me identify the green weeds and the FLX-28 on the low power mode so I can see my jig instead of weeds.

Anglers have used fish finders or flashers using sonar technology for many years to gain a glimpse of the underwater world. The trouble with these units is that it can be difficult to interpret sonar signals. For many it might be just as difficult to build a mental image of what the underwater world looks like.

Whether you are ice fishing or fishing open water, underwater fishing cameras take all the guesswork out of seeing underwater. With a very clear image one can now easily identify fish species — I try to target blue gills and crappies so if I see a Northern Pike I can retrieve my jig before it's bitten off. One can also see the type of bottom and any other associated structure such as fallen trees, weed beds and rock. Simply put, using an underwater fishing camera is like watching TV from a recliner in your living room.



As soon as my hole is drilled and free from ice chips, I lower the camera until it is just above the lake bottom. Turning the cord slowly, I look to see what is surrounding my ice shelter. It would be great to see some fish, but if not I don't fret. I make sure to turn the camera at least 360 degrees.

I may do this a few times stopping to look for anything that catches my eye. Is there any structure in the general area that will attract fish? Are there any weeds surrounding my fishing spot? If there are weeds, I ideally look for healthy weeds that are green in color. Are there drop offs around and/or any boulders that may bring in the fish? This simple procedure is an excellent way to note why a successful spot in the past is attracting fish or to understand if a new spot holds any promise prior to fishing it for a long time. If it does not look promising, I pack up and move to another spot that does look promising.

I also use my camera to help create a pocket in the weeds. I like to drop my camera down in the weeds and then spin it around to form that pocket I can fish in.

Fish are wary. This helps them survive and can also make them difficult to catch. They utilize their excellent senses of vision and hearing, detect motion with unerring accuracy using their lateral line, and also use their sense of smell. Therefore, a cautious approach is required of an angler.

Once I find the spot I want to fish, I pull my Fish Trap Scout over the hole and start viewing down the hole. I will use the Vexilar FLX-28 to see if there is any movement below the hole. Looking down the hole for a lengthy period of time can give you a stiff neck, so I use the sonar unit to scout for me. Once I see a line on my unit I will ease over the hole and see how the fish is reacting to my presentation. Again, a word of caution is to be very still and have very little movement.

With either natural bait or artificial lures, the presentation must be realistic. It should appear that the offering is part of the normal food chain. Hunger is certainly a major motivating factor, but fish also respond as predators and strike something that moves. At times, they even exhibit antagonistic behavior when biting an intruder to drive it away.

The key to triggering the fish to bite is a good presentation. If your jig is spinning it will scare

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the fish away. The correct line, jig weight and jigging motion will stop the jig from spinning and spooking the fish.

My jigs of choice are the new Clam Drop jig #10 in gold, glow white, and glow red tipped with maggots. I also have a second rod tied with Duckbill Drop jig in gold and Firetiger/white glow bar. I usually start off with the gold and red jigs tipped with maggots or wax worms. I might even switch that to Maki plastics in the Jamei white or a red Spiiki. Another tip, when using wax worms T-bone them on the hook to give them a different action. T-boning or “wacky rigging” is hooking the waxy in the middle of the worm, both ends undulate. If the water is stained I will switch to all white, so I can visually identify the bite and set the hook.

My rods and reels of choice are the 20-inch Ultra-Light Ice Spooler and the 24-inch Ultra Legacy Series combo spooled with 2-pound Vicious line.



Sight ice fishing is just another technique you can add to your arsenal when you are on the ice this year. If you are planning a trip try some sight ice fishing and you will learn a great deal about your technique and the fishing environment under the ice.

COVERING THE BASIN FOR ICING WALLEYES

**By Gary Parsons and
Keith Kavaiecz**



Anticipation would be a great word to describe what every ice fisherman is feeling this time of year! Chances are the walleyes still have their fall feed bag on, which means they will be fairly aggressive. This can make for a really fun bite at first and last light, all the way up to at least an hour after dark. In tannic water it can make for a great bite all day long!

Of course, in order to hook into one of these fish, you first must find them. So, when it comes to location, we like to look for basin areas that

are from 15 to 30-feet deep. The best place to target walleyes is close to drop-offs and within a few hundred feet of the base of them. As winter rolls on, they will become harder to catch since they will begin to roam the basin, making it a little more difficult to pinpoint where they are. However, during early ice they will still be found closer to the drop offs.

It is important to note that this isn't the only early season pattern, as shallow weeds and weed edges can produce in some lakes, but the shallow basin areas can usually hold good populations of fish. The best spots to locate them is off points, inside cups and areas between drop-offs that are close together, such as in between two sunken islands that are close together.

Now that you know where to find the fish, it is time to catch them. This means it is Hot Box time. When we say Hot Box, we are referring to the JT Outdoors Hot Box, which is a heated aluminum box keeps holes open up to 20 degrees below zero!

We like to use it with a dead stick (snare rod), although at this time of year some prefer the more conventional tip up flag option. The 36" Snare Rod, also from JT Outdoors, has an integral Nitinol (an alloy blend of nickel and titanium) spring bobber that is virtually indestructible and kink resistant. It also



contains a highly visible indicator bead at the end to let you know when you have a strike. The rod itself is a high-grade fiberglass with a super slow action. This provides a parabolic action, which allows the rod to load ultra-subtly.

Once the fish grabs the bait, the spring bobber and rod loads the fish. When the fish begin to feel this tension, they react by trying to swim away, which in turn puts further load on the rod and the fish end up setting the hook themselves.



The length and long bend of the rod give plenty of time for anglers to get to the hole and land the fish. Not only can no other method or set-up match the sensitivity of this system, but it gives anglers the ability to spread out lines as they would tip-ups yet be able to fight the fish with a rod instead of pulling it up hand over hand.

While you can also jig, it is important to remain mobile. It is imperative to spread lines from the base of the drop-off and into the basin to get bites. We like to give our Hot Boxes about 45 minutes in one location before moving. We move more while jigging, as we rely on our Lowrance Ti2 to mark fish to be sure we're on them.

When it comes to bait; suckers, shiners or larger fatheads work well with the Hot Boxes. Set the depth of the bait anywhere from 6-inches to 3-feet off bottom, depending on the water clarity. If the fish will come up for the bait, you'll get more aggressive bites and catch more fish, so always experiment with your set-ups until the fish tell you what they want. Jig set-ups can be spoons, Moonshine Shiver Minnows and plain jigs with minnows. We use many of the Clam, Moonshine and Sidewinder spoons, and most of the time we have a minnow head on the spoon too.

While it may be hard to avoid the itch to get out on the ice, we can't stress enough the importance of waiting until the ice is safe enough to do so! Always take along and wear a float suit such as the IceArmor by Clam Rise and Ascent suits. It is also important to wear ice picks this time of year so if you do break through you have the means to crawl out.

Be sure you are constantly using a spud to check the depth of the ice as you make your way out. If it becomes unsafe turn around and come back another day. If there is enough ice to take a four-wheeler or sled out, be sure to pack a Nebulus Emergency Floatation Device. This product could save your life if you break through the ice on your machine.

While early ice is very productive and a great way to get your Next Bite, it can also be treacherous. So, have fun, but always remember to be careful!



Early Ice Walleyes

By Chip Leer

Early winter offers walleye anglers who travel light and fish smart a chance to savor some of the season's finest fishing.



Using common sense about ice safety is step one. My general rule is 5 to 6 inches of good clear ice to start walking, and I test the ice every few feet with a chisel or spud bar to avoid any unpleasant—and potentially tragic—surprises.

The first ice period is magical on all types of walleye fisheries, from natural lakes in the Canadian Shield to prairie potholes, large reservoirs and the Great Lakes. However, focusing on lakes (and areas of lakes) that freeze up first will allow you to enjoy the action faster than waiting for late-freezing spots to ice up.

Top early ice fishing locations include a variety of hotspots that held walleyes in late fall. To avoid marathon hikes, I limit myself to sweet spots on structure situated a short walk from shore—half a mile, tops.

My favorite areas include humps and points offering the fish easy access to the lake or bay's main basin. Key depths vary by lake. To pinpoint the strike zone, drill a series of holes over differing depths and contours—then move quickly through them searching for fish.



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The fastest action typically occurs during a short flurry of activity around sunset. A modest assortment of lures will serve you well when the bite is on, without bogging you down as you move from hole to hole on the hunt for the next fish.

I pack a pocket-sized tackle box with a selection of heavy, fast-dropping jigging spoons like Northland Fishing Tackle's Buck-Shot Rattle Spoon, along with a few lighter, slower falling options like the Northland Glo-Shot Spoon, Forage Minnow Spoon or Buck-Shot Flutter Spoon.

I fish fast-dropping spoons first, followed by the fluttering options. Both types of spoons are typically tipped with some type of plastic such as an IMPULSE Perch Eye or Minnow Head. Northland's iconic Puppet Minnow is another standout right now that's perfect for both aggressive and subtle maneuvers.

Avoid the temptation to hover too long in one spot, especially during prime time. Give each hole a few minutes to produce before pulling the plug and moving on to the next. The idea is to keep moving and catch as many active fish per trip as possible, because the first-ice flurry won't last forever. All too soon, the hot bite will cool off—and it won't heat back up until late winter.



Based in Walker, Minnesota, noted fishing authority and outdoor communicator Chip Leer operates Fishing the WildSide, an outdoor sports marketing and communications company. For more information look to www.fishingthewildside.net.

Ice fishing for lake Trout

By Tim Moore

The crisp air, the frozen surface of a lake, the silence broken only by the sound of ice augers and snowmobiles, and the pursuit of one of New Hampshire's only wild trout. In winter, many of New Hampshire's lakes become a wonderland dotted with ice fishing bobhouses, sometimes numbering in the hundreds. These are some of the things that drive hordes of ice anglers onto some of New Hampshire's frozen lakes each winter to catch lake trout through the ice.

The ice fishing season in New Hampshire on lakes managed for lake trout is from January 1st through March 31st. As soon as the season opens and the ice is safe enough to fish, anglers from





around New England flock to lakes, such as Winnepesaukee, Winnisquam, Squam, and the Connecticut Lakes for their chance at one of New Hampshire's many lake trout.

On lakes managed for lake trout, the minimum length to keep lake trout is 18" and the limit is two fish per day. Anglers are allowed two lines per person through the ice, regardless of their fishing method, and are limited to a single hook with a single hook point when using bait. Treble hooks are legal, but you cannot place bait (any ingestible substance) on them. Additionally, New Hampshire has a lead ban which prohibits the use of lead sinkers and jigs weighing 1 ounce or less, regardless of size. Spoons and spinnerbaits are exempt from the lead ban.

Safety

Just because the ice fishing season is open, anglers should never assume the ice is safe, even if they see others on it. Temperature, wind, and current all effect how and when ice forms. The first time onto a new water body, every angler should check the ice thickness for themselves, as the thickness can change from several inches to a few inches (or less) in a matter of feet. General ice thickness guidelines state a minimum of 4" for foot travel, 8" to drive a snowmobile or ATV, and more than 12" to drive a vehicle on, depending on the size of the vehicle.

Safety gear usually includes a spud bar for checking ice thickness, ice safety picks to self-rescue should you fall through, a throw rope that can be used to rescue you or someone else,

creepers or ice cleats for traction, and some anglers wear ice fishing suits with added buoyancy built into the liner.

Jigging and Tip Up Fishing

The two most common ways to ice fish for lake trout are jigging and tip up fishing. The debate over which method is best has gone on for many generations and will likely continue for many more. Both techniques are extremely effective. Which one works best usually depends on the day and angler preference. Some days lake trout want to chase their prey, which makes jigging an

effective method. Other days the fish will only eat live smelt, and tip ups will far out-fish the jig rods.

Jigging is generally more active and allows anglers to be more mobile. Spoons and bucktail jigs are common lures among lake trout anglers. Spoons use sight and vibration to attract lake trout in hopes of triggering their predatory instinct to make them bite. Bucktail jigs work great when paired with a ½" x 2" strip of belly meat from a white sucker. White suckers can be purchased at bait shops near almost any lake trout lake. An effective jigging method is to drop your lure to the bottom, pound it a few times to stir up some silt, and reel up a couple feet before jigging.

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Rods for lake trout vary by length and power, depending on the size of the lures an angler is fishing and the size of the lake trout they are targeting. Rod selection is also subjective based on the preference of each angler. Some like very heavy rods, or even wooden jig sticks, and others prefer stout rods with some bend to cushion big lake trout head shakes. Most anglers fish 36" – 40" heavy rods. The roof of a lake trout's mouth consists of hard bone, which requires a hard hook-set to help prevent losing fish.

Mobile anglers will often use a run-and-gun technique to hunt lake trout, while others will sit in one area and chum. Run-and-gun fishing allows an angler to cover more water and put their lure in front of a greater number of fish and is most effective with highly-pressured fish, or on days when lake trout are less active due to bright sun and high barometric pressure. The general rule is that lake trout will be more active on cloudy low-pressure days, and less active when the sun is bright, or the wind is blowing hard.

When lake trout are active there is no need to go on the hunt. It's usually best to sit and let the fish come to you. Chumming is an effective tactic to attract lake trout and keep them around. Although chumming is illegal in some states, New Hampshire allows it. Most anglers will stop at their local bait shop and pick up a sucker on their way to the lake. The white-skinned belly meat of a sucker makes great bait on a jig, and the softer back meat makes great chum. Cut the back meat into ½" x 1 ½" strips and drop 2-3 pieces down the hole. As the meat falls it not only releases scent that attracts lake trout, but the slow sinking action will attract fish that can't smell it but can see it. Be careful not to over-chum or you will fill the fish up and leave them with no reason to bite your lure.

When tip up fishing, you are relying on the movements of the lake trout and the liveliness of your bait to attract lake trout. Tip ups allow anglers to spread their lines out over a greater area and wait for a flag to pop up, indicating a strike. Many anglers prefer this method because the in-between time allows them to be more social, and many love racing each other to the next flag. Tip ups are often rigged with some sort of braided nylon line. Attached to that is a swivel and 6' – 8' of fluorocarbon line with a hook. A small non-lead spit shot is used to keep the bait at the desired depth.

Electronics

The use of electronics for ice fishing has increased dramatically over the past several years. More and more anglers are discovering the effectiveness of sonar flashers and underwater cameras. Sonar flashers, such as those manufactured by Vexilar Inc., give anglers a real-time look at what is going on under them using colored lines on a circular display to identify targets, such as their lure or fish. Flashers allow you to see where your lure is in the water column, where a fish is in relation to your lure, how a fish is reacting to your lure, and when there are no fish under you.

Underwater cameras are a staple for many lake trout anglers who prefer to sit and chum. The underwater camera allows you to observe exactly how a lake trout is behaving, and some cameras can even record the footage. Cameras are more time consuming to set up than flashers or other fish finders, which is why many anglers who use them are more stationary. Once you lower the camera into the water you must then find your lure, so you can observe how the fish are reacting to it, but once you



do you can get an accurate picture of exactly what is going on beneath the ice. You can tell if the lake trout are eating only the chum you drop to them, if there is more than one fish, if they show any interest in your lure, and much more.



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Where to Look

When lake trout spawn in the fall they do so in 30'–40' of water. Many of those fish remain at those depths throughout the winter, but that is not the rule. While most avid lake trout ice anglers target those same depths all winter, some believe bigger fish will be caught in deeper water. Inside turns, humps, and steep drop offs are key areas as they are all prime feeding areas for lake trout.

Conservation

Many studies have been conducted about growth rates and health of New England's lake trout populations. Some studies suggest that lake trout grow 2" – 4" per year for the first four years of their life. Then growth slows to 1" or less. On average, a 34" lake trout can be over 40 years old. Some studies also suggest that putting small fish back and keeping the biggest fish will alter the genetics of a lake trout population and stunt their growth. Besides, if the only lake trout that are put back are smaller, eventually that's all that will be left. I strongly encourage my ice fishing clients to practice catch and release and offer to help my clients measure and photograph larger fish, so they can have a replica mount made, and avoid killing bigger trophy-sized fish.

Thanks to the management efforts of the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, lake trout numbers are strong enough that they do not require any stocking efforts. They are abundant in most of the lakes they inhabit. Average size varies from one water to the next. Most days, anglers can easily catch several fish. Some prefer to put all the catch back, while others claim to enjoy the flavor of lake trout fried or smoked. Regardless of their preferred angling or eating method, it's usually the fun and comradery that keeps most people coming back day after day, winter after winter.

Tim Moore is a full-time licensed New Hampshire fishing guide and the owner of Tim Moore Outdoors, LLC. He guides hundreds of ice anglers from around the world on Lake Winnepesaukee. He is also a member of the New England Outdoor Writer's Association.



Moving on the Ice

By Bob Jensen

A lot of the time when we talk about ice-fishing, we talk about being mobile, especially from the middle of the season on. We refer to this mobility as "trolling on ice". In short, "trolling on ice" means you drill a good number of holes and move from hole to hole until you find the fish. This is usually a good technique, but there are times when it works well to "drop anchor" and just fish a certain area very thoroughly. Here's what "anchoring on ice" is all about.

"Anchoring on ice" appeals to some folks for different reasons. First of all, some ice-anglers either don't want to move around a lot, or they can't.

However, there are some ice-anglers who can move around as much as they want, and they still prefer to "drop anchor" and just work a particular spot.

And then there are those folks who fish from a permanent house, so moving can be a chore. However, it is becoming a lot easier to move the large shelters that once were considered permanent. We'll talk about that in a little while. For now, just know that fishing from a somewhat anchored position on the ice can be very productive if you keep a few things in mind. Following are some of those things.

When fishing from an "anchored" location, I like to get as many lines in the water as I legally can.

Sometimes we'll even put a tip-up out near the shelter. More lines in the water usually mean more fish. If you can use two lines where you're fishing, I like to have a jig rod in my hand and a bobber rig down another hole close by.

If several anglers are fishing from the same shelter, everyone should be doing something different: Maybe using different types of lures, or different colors, just something different. Let the fish show you what they will respond to the best.

On the bobber rods, rig one with a plain hook and a minnow, another with a small jigging spoon and a minnow hooked lightly through the back. Set the bobber depth according to the species of fish you're after. Walleyes and perch usually like to be near the bottom, panfish will often be higher. Again, let the fish show you what they want.

Now, about shelters that look like a permanent shelter but are actually very mobile. We've been using the shelters from CORE ICE. These shelters are large and hard-sided, but they are also very lightweight yet very durable. They're also extremely easy to move, so it is very quick and easy to change locations if your "anchored" spot isn't producing.

Mobility on the ice is a good thing, but if you prefer to fish from one position, you can still be successful. Get over the fish, let them show you what they want, then give it to them. If you do, your success on the ice will increase.

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First Ice Walleye Lessons

By Jason Mitchell

In so many cases, the fall sets up the early ice bite. At the very least, what happens as the lake freezes sets the course for the beginning of winter. There are variables each winter that influence the location of where we find walleyes at early ice. Some of the outcomes of some of these variables can be predicted ahead while other outcomes are figured out after the fact. If there is a lesson I have learned over and over, that lesson would be that we cannot predict ever outcome

ahead. Just like there are upsets in World Series and Super Bowls that prove pundits wrong, there are situations in fishing that are difficult to always prove correctly. At the end of the day, we still have to keep an open mind and fish through locations and patterns with a process of elimination strategy. With that disclaimer, there are still some guidelines that serve us well when trying to figure out walleye at first ice.

Learn How to Fish Shallow Walleye

If there is a lesson that has been a hard lesson at times, that lesson would be simply not looking shallow enough at early ice. Can't tell you how many times we found aggressive fish in less than



six feet of water. Shallow is a relative term but in my mind, shallow is anything less than ten feet.

There is an art however to really dialing in shallow bites. If there is one mistake many anglers make, it is underestimating the impact our presence has on shallow fish. We wouldn't expect to catch fish in four feet of water after driving a boat over the spot during the spring yet many anglers make the mistake in the winter of simply having too much commotion over the spot when ice fishing. You can get away with much more commotion when you get thicker ice and snow cover but plan on fishing being spooky at early ice when you are dealing with little ice or in some cases, no snow cover. Don't drive your quad right over your fishing spot. Keep your walking to a minimum.

Over the years, I have come to the realization that I usually catch more fish if I simply plant down on a good spot and drill the bare minimum of holes and sit still. In most cases, there are not a lot of people out right away. Pressure is light and that is an advantage. You can sit on key spots and work the natural flow of fish that wander underneath you.

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(www.odumagazine.com)

Drill your holes and let everything settle down and wait for the sun to get low, that is the basic program on most water. At first ice, we often find walleye relating to shoreline related structure. Either tall standing weed lines or some type of rock or gravel bottom. I say tall standing because I have learned over the years that weeds don't have to be green to hold fish at early ice. If there is good water circulation and oxygen which usually isn't an issue at early ice, there are often fish holding off cabbage for example which is often brown by late fall. If the weeds are brown, that is fine as long as they are still not down. Brown is fine, brown and down is not so ideal. Other weeds like coontail, milfoil also hold fish. Tall stands next to a subtle dip are often prime spots but don't overlook the corners

and pinch points on large shallow flats. These fish often travel like mobs and all you have to do is intersect a few of these mobs during each outing. The peak activity often occurs at sunset or shortly after dark on many fisheries but water that is really turbid can see a daytime bite in shallow water.

Wind Effect

Strong winds late in the fall during the freeze up period especially can have a drastic effect on early ice walleye fishing. Strong winds can really mess with water clarity and set the tone for early ice walleye. This wind affect can really become evident on large bodies of water like Lake of the Woods and Devils Lake. A tell-tale sign at early ice is a lot of broken up ice that is rough and jagged. This turbulence not only seems to effect water clarity and visibility but also seems to move fish around during the process. As the sediment settles, the bite often gradually improves.

As a general rule of thumb, the chaos of this type of freeze up often seems to push fish deeper and bad visibility combined with deep fish is often a tough combination. On Lake of the Woods, we have combated this situation by focusing on river fish that moved up to follow the shiner run that occurs in the fall. Instead of going out on the lake past the island for example, we fished further in hoping to intersect fish that were moving from the river out into the lake. Ice safety is always a factor at early ice and river ice takes much longer than lake ice but the advantage of rivers is that they do clean up much faster than large lakes.

First Strike

Always easy to over analyze situations but at early ice, the first people to fish many locations often score big. The key to success is really to be safe and diligent by simply being in the know. If you are the first person to walk out on five inches of ice with a spud bar and diligently pick your way to a good spot, you are typically going to experience the best fishing. After word travels and people realize that there is

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good enough ice, the spot will cool off when more people arrive. When more ice develops and you can take a quad safely out on the ice to reach new spots that are further than walking distance, the first people in the know score. The people who figure out after the fact get the scraps. Being in the know takes some diligence.

Don't over think location. There are great spots that are no secret and if you are the first lure on that spot after a month of no angling pressure, you are usually going to encounter fish that make you look good. Don't compromise safety to get on ice but always think like a hunter. Fishing fresh ice is important all through the winter but seems especially critical at early ice because a little bit of clear ice and shallow water in particular combine to create short opportunities. On average, we might only get two days off a spot where the fishing could be considered good. Doesn't take long to wear out your welcome.

Follow the Fall

As mentioned above, the best locations and patterns at early ice are simply a continuation of the fall. Lakes that were fishing poorly in the fall often have a tough bite at early ice. I often head to locations at early ice where we caught fish a month prior. On Devils Lake for example where I live, if a flooded road bed was hot in October and November, that is where I will start at early ice. Usually, finding fish at early ice is that simple. If a spot was quiet in the fall, very seldom do I find much has changed three

weeks later once the lake gets ice. Obviously, people who put in time on the water during the fall have a great advantage at early ice. If you don't get to spend a lot of time on the water during October and November, you can still follow fishing reports and general activity to narrow your focus. If a particular lake is simply fishing well during the fall and getting some attention, that is a great starting point for example. If the fish are not on shallow weeds on a particular lake during the fall like they are some past years, that is still relevant information for early ice. Particularly when you have to walk out and drag your gear on the ice, the more shortcuts you can take the better. You have to be strategic and pick your spots because if the spot doesn't pan out, it is not always easy just to pack up and walk to another spot. There is no broad stroke approach when you are on foot.

Early Ice Safety

Early ice is one of my most coveted windows for finding and catching walleye through the ice. Especially in states where the walleye season closes during the late ice period, the early ice time is perhaps one of the best periods to find some of the most incredible fishing. Prioritize safety over catching fish but make a point to experience this opportunity if you are physically able. Always test the ice with a spud bar and have the proper tools like ice picks and a floatation suit like Clams popular Ascent Float Suit or the new Rise Float Suit. Carry a throw rope in your sled or Fish Trap and use common sense. The reward is some of the best walleye fishing of the winter.

The Author, Jason Mitchell hosts the popular outdoor program Jason Mitchell Outdoors which airs on Fox Sports North on Sunday mornings at 9:00 am. More information can be found online at www.jasonmitchelloutdoors.com. Follow on YouTube, Facebook and Instagram.



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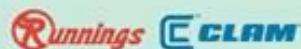
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Power of the Perfect Match

By Jim Edlund

Holmes and Watson. Jordan and Pippen. Lennon and McCartney . . .

When two complementary forces join talents, things like genius, championship performance and all-time awesome music inevitably follow. The power of the one-two punch extends to inanimate objects, as well, and certainly to fishing tackle. Of course, that doesn't mean it's cool to Texas rig your favorite plastic worm on a treble hook. Nor does it explain why anglers can be so painfully picky about swimbait selection or choice in finesse worms, and yet impale said bait onto whatever jighead's lying on the deck.

The job of any good jighead is to bring out the unique talents of baits that best match its design. Disparate jighead styles deliver softbaits at different speeds, actions and depths, each performing a singular, premeditated presentation. Collars and keeper configurations are made to match and pin certain baits firmly in place. Jig-hooks vary by anatomy: size, gap, throat, shank length, wire gauge and more; with justifiable reasons for each. While a mismatched jig and bait might still

catch fish, a perfect pairing can stimulate an onslaught of bites.

“We recognized early on that because ElaZtech baits are different—softer, livelier, more buoyant and much more durable—than traditional PVC baits, designing a super-tuned rigging system would take fishing ElaZtech to a whole other level,” said Daniel Nussbaum, talented fisherman and president of Z-Man® Fishing. “Sure, you can rig your favorite ElaZtech bait onto a plain jane jighead. But to take full advantage of each bait’s action, longevity and fish-catching performance, grab the right jig for the job.”

Perfect Pairing #1 – Trout Eye® Jighead / 3-inch MinnowZ™

Among fifteen unique Z-Man jigheads and over fifty ElaZtech softbaits, Nussbaum highlights four of his favorite perfect pairings. “A 3-inch MinnowZ on a 3/16-ounce Trout Eye jighead is a versatile player—it’s my ‘stranded on a desert island’ survival bait,” he divulges.



A jighead with an interesting backstory, the Trout Eye jig comes from South Carolina seatrout guru Ralph Phillips, who discovered a predator’s primal attraction to the unmistakable eyes of baitfish. The U.S.-made Trout Eye jig is poured with the largest 3D eyes possible, set into a flattened teardrop shape. Strategically placed to bring out subtle rolling action on paddletail baits like the MinnowZ, the jig’s forward eye position helps the whole lure slide through sparse grass with ease. Back-to-back conical keeper barbs secure ElaZtech and other softbaits tightly to the base of the jig’s collar, while a heavy-duty, 2/0 Mustad UltraPoint hook penetrates quickly, and won’t straighten under heavy loads.

“Think of the 3-inch MinnowZ as an aggressive paddletail,” notes Nussbaum. “When you rig it on a Trout Eye jig the whole body moves with a really sweet side-to-side roll, while the tail wags the dog; looks just like the panicked swim of a minnow and catches everything—seatrout, redfish, bass, snook, and more.”

Perfect Pairing #2 – HeadlockZ™ HD Jighead / SwimmerZ™

First introduced to beat back Australia’s brutally strong gamefish, the HeadlockZ HD jighead is an amazing jig and a perfect match for Z-Man’s SwimmerZ— a super-soft, split-belly paddletail that’s produced world-record barramundi. “The SwimmerZ is one of my favorite paddletails for big redfish and largemouths,” says Nussbaum. “The 4-inch version teams up nicely with a 4/0-size HeadlockZ HD, while a 6-inch SwimmerZ on an 8/0 HeadlockZ is ideal for bull reds and stripers and holds up to the teeth of big pike.”



Matching Z-Man’s tough-as-nails ElaZtech baits, the HeadlockZ HD boasts bulletproof jighead construction, built around a custom, heavy duty 3/0, 4/0, 6/0 or 8/0 Mustad UltraPoint hook (jig-weight is engraved in head for easy ID). Riding high on the hook-shank is an ingenious, split bait

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keeper. The design greatly eases rigging and prevents ElaZtech and other soft plastics from sliding off the jig collar.

Exceptionally balanced for use with larger, bulkier baits, the HeadlockZ' 90-degree bullet head amplifies body roll, which produces accentuated tail-thump and vibration. "This combo represents one of Z-Man's most underrated big fish baits, one you can tie on and catch fish with all day long."

Perfect Pairing #3 – Finesse ShroomZ™ / Finesse TRD™

The definitive lure for Ned Rig-style fishing, casting a Finesse ShroomZ / Finesse TRD combo might be the smartest bass-catching decision you can make. Simple, unassuming and almost immune to fishing pressure, this little 2-3/4-inch finesse bait and refined mushroom-shaped jighead regularly boats over 50 per day for Ned Kehde and other skilled finesse fishers. Of course, the beauty of the bait is that less-experienced anglers also hook oodles of fish with it.



Kehde himself admits the key to success is a method he calls 'no feel.' "That means we cannot feel what the jig-and-softbait combo is doing or where it is during the retrieve," says Kehde. This is largely attributed to Kehde's preference for a light jighead, in the neighborhood of 1/16-ounce. Proving the combo's astonishing versatility, Kehde and his friends have ascribed six different finesse retrieves, including the swim-glide-and-shake, hop-and-bounce and drag-and-deadstick, among others.

Creating the illusion of a single edible critter, the mushroom shaped Finesse ShroomZ head flows seamlessly into the nose of the sub-3-inch Finesse TRD. The unique head shape moves smoothly over the substrate, pivoting and activating the ElaZtech material with each interruption in the jig's path. The jig's minimally invasive "hangnail" keeper barb pins finesse baits like the TRD surprisingly tight to the jig; some anglers add a drop of superglue to the underside of the jighead for an even better bond.

A model of simplicity, the Finesse TRD itself glides seductively on the drop, tail shimmying just enough to speak of something alive. Imbued with custom salt content for a precise sink rate, anglers like Kehde often chose to increase buoyancy by stretching the bait and removing salt.

Perfect Pairing #4 – NedlockZ™ / Slim SwimZ™

A rising star in swimbait circles, the 2-1/2- and 3-inch Slim SwimZ offers an intelligent design that gives it some interesting underwater moves. Rigged on a downsized NedlockZ HD jig, the finesse paddletail bait comes to life, even at slow retrieve speeds. Molded in lighter 1/5- to 1/15-ounce sizes, the NedlockZ HD sports an extra-heavy-duty hook that allow for heavier tackle and drag settings than Finesse ShroomZ jigheads. The jig's innovative split keeper allows for effortless



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rigging, holding both ElaZtech and soft plastics firmly in place. The medium-length hook shank is a fine fit for the Slim SwimZ and other finesse baits.

“We crafted the Slim SwimZ with an inward-curved tail,” Nussbaum says. “The configuration lets you activate the bait at extra slow speeds. Or fish it fast for even more action. When you pull it, the tail scoops water, producing a high-velocity, high-action wiggle. We’re getting great feedback from folks catching big crappies, white bass and even walleyes. And when bass key on small forage, this compact combo scores big.”





Lake Alan Henry, Texas

By Shane Beilue

As you drive southeast from Lubbock, TX on HWY 84 along the miles and miles of table flat cotton fields, the terrain suddenly drops sharply around the small town of Post. The topography becomes characterized by mesquite thickets and rocky canyons along the Double Mountain fork of the Brazos River, which is the framework for which Lake Allan Henry is situated. Constructed in 1993, the 2800 acres lake bucks the trend that everything is bigger in Texas; however, don't tell that to the bass that swim the depths of these waters.

Classified as a highland reservoir, Lake Alan Henry has two predominant species of bass: largemouth and Alabama spotted bass, both of which grow to trophy size in the predominantly

deep clear water. Consider the lake record largemouth is 15 pounds; and, early in the lake's impoundment, the lake was kicking out trophy bass at the same rate as legendary Lake Fork, Texas. The Alabama spotted bass are what makes this lake unique, as this strain of bass grows larger than the more common Kentucky spots found throughout the state's reservoirs. The lake record for the Alabama spot is just shy of 6 pounds and 3-4-pound spotted bass are not uncommon.

Norman Clayton is a Lubbock resident and spends over 75 days a year guiding client at Alan Henry. His personal best for each species in the lake is a 4.5-pound spot and has landed two largemouths over 12 pounds. He provides some insights into different habitats and techniques for catching both spotted and largemouth bass.

He adds, "Actually the two species often act pretty similarly in this lake, as you can catch them together in the same schools from time to time. The spotted bass are typically more nomadic than the largemouth and are usually caught along the steep rock banks and in the deep creek channels as they chase schools of bait fish. What makes the spots such a challenge is that you can wear them out on a particular bank one day and not catch a single fish from that same stretch of bank the next day. They just move with the bait and if the bait moves, so will the spots."

The lake is characterized by deep, clear water with visibility often 6-8' near the dam. The upper river and feeder creeks are typically more stained, and the largemouth population tends to dominate these upper reaches, positioning in the acres of brushy shorelines; however, Clayton points out that its not uncommon to catch spotted bass in this dirtier water, as well. In other words, there are no absolutes in bass fishing.

For techniques, Clayton often reaches for a shakey head worm or a crankbait to drag along the steep rocky banks. Jerkbait and topwaters



are also key lures that produce large numbers of fish around the brush and rock. When the fish go deep, drop shots and slabs can be productive when a school is located along creek channels and points. Finally, Clayton points out that the spotted bass will often suspend over and beside deep, submerged treetops. Counting down a swim bait to pull through these treetops can yield good results.

As expected, the spawn of the year receives the most fishing pressure, which Clayton believes causes the bass to position deeper than expected for the spring season. As he continues, "Since the lake is so clear, there is a lot of sight fishing, but with all the fishing pressure at that time, a lot of the big fish will spawn in 10-20'. The best way to catch these deep spawners is to blind cast a jig and work it slowly and hope you drag it through their bed."

Norman Clayton can be reached at (806)792-9220 or nclayton42@sbcglobal.net

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Walleye Fishing Lake Erie's Western Basin

By Captain Juls Davis

"Winter is coming", has been a favorite quote of mine since I got sucked into HBO's "Game of Thrones" mini-series on streaming video last year. It's a fitting saying for this time of year now too. The water temperatures are dropping to the mid-thirties on the big lake, and just a bit lower than that here on land. It's getting cold, and the lake will freeze up soon. Something I don't look forward to each year.

For those that don't know me, I'm a 55-year-old woman who has been fishing since I was 4 years old. Like most, it was my father that instilled the love of nature and the outdoors in me. I didn't chase the elusive walleye until the mid 80's when I started going to Lake Winnebago on weekend camping and fishing trips with a boyfriend at the time.

Prior to that, I was happy chasing bass, bluegill, and pike on the 3400 acres pond my



parents live on. I didn't even know tournaments existed until one morning, while sleeping in the back of my truck out on a point on the west shore of Bago, that I was awoken to the sound of engines growling down the lake. I looked out the window and saw 100's of boats flying by, and I thought to myself, "What the heck is going on?" I found out later that day, that there was an annual walleye tournament being held, so I went and checked it out. I thought it looked like a lot of fun.

Later that summer, I was invited by a National Walleye Pro to go prefishing with him on the lake, when their event was going to be competing there in June of 1999.

Then, I was invited to go fish my first tournaments on Lake Sakakawea that August, both a pro/am and a team event, and I was hooked after that.

After a few years of fishing the amateur side of the pro/am walleye tournaments, I was urged to compete on the pro side, and did so. I fished against the big boys of the walleye world, including my husband at the time, for 9 years, before the 2008 economic slump caused me to rethink my future. My husband kept competing, while I turned to doing the walleye tournament coverage of the top three circuits for Walleye Central. In 2010 my husband and I divorced, amicably, and in 2011 I aced my Coast Guard exam to become a licensed Charter Captain here on Lake Erie. I have been happily taking customers out for 8 seasons now, and I'm still loving my job!



Back to winter, let's just say, "I do not ice fish", so during the winter months, when the days are too cold to get out, or too rough to chance it, I put the Ranger to bed in a nice heated storage building and get to work on my equipment for the upcoming season. Re-hooking crankbaits, tying crawler harnesses, and organizing them all by colors is an annual task performed in the anticipation of spring here on Lake Erie.

Lake Erie is a magical place. Anglers come from near and far to fish the "Walleye Capital" of the world. The walleye population is self-sustaining, so no stocking occurs here. Up until this year, the 2003 hatch was considered the record holder for the largest walleye hatch in the history of Lake Erie's walleye hatches.

In the fall of 2003, the ODNR had a trawl count on the young of the year at 183 per hectare (almost 2 acres). The hatches in the following years, were anywhere from below average to average, until 2015. In 2015 we had a very good above average hatch, that was noticeable by the fall, when most people were perch fishing, and catching a lot of baby walleye on their perch minnows.

However, the total walleye count for the lake, or should I say guesstimate, was around 38-40 million walleye back in 2015.

Fast forward to 2018. The good news is, this season was the all-time record-breaking walleye hatch for Lake Erie's Western Basin. The ODNR counted 255 young of the year per hectare in

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their trawl net this past fall. That's almost half more than the 2003 hatch! The estimated total walleye population is now near 100 million.

With that said, I think the fishing is going to be fantastic, but also frustrating. There are going to be so many little fish in the system for the next couple of years, that are faster and hungrier than their adult cousins, and who will get the angler's offerings much faster. But, once we get through those first few years, the fishing will be absolutely phenomenal again. Just like back in the early 2000's when we were catching the late 80's through 90's fish. If we caught a small one, it was unusual. The average was 3-8 pounds, and each year those big fish got bigger and 100 pounds for 10 fish wasn't an oddity.

It's only December, but the excitement of this year's hatch has me looking forward to fishing in the spring already!

When I moved down here to Port Clinton, from Wisconsin, back in 2001 I was first taught that when the ice went out, they started out... basically, ice fishing from the boat, then, jigging the reefs, and then to trolling as the water warmed up. I wondered about that, because we would be trolling deep into the cold months of fall and early winter without changing tactics, so why wouldn't it work in the spring when the water temperatures were nearly the same?

After experimenting in those early years of my Lake Erie adventures, we came to find out that, "Yes, indeed, you can troll crankbaits as soon as the ice is out" and catch fish.

We start out trolling in areas known to us as migratory routes, as the walleye make their way



west to the reefs and rivers, where they will spawn. I call them, “Super highways”. There are three of these highways near the Bass Islands. There is the “South Passage”, the “Middle Passage”, and the “North Passage”. All three of these passages filter walleye going back to where they were before they made the long journey west, to spawn.

Tagged fish from Lake Huron have also been documented as swimming all the way down here to spawn in the Maumee River, so we have walleye from all over that fill the Western Basin during the spring. It’s why this area is a favorite destination for many walleye anglers across the country as soon as the ice is out and a boat can launch from the ramps.

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My favorite crankbaits to use in the early spring include but are not limited to the following: Bandits (Deep Walleye 5/8th), Smithwick Perfect 10’s and Top 20’s, Rapala Deep Husky Jerks (12”), and the Reef Runner’s 700 & 800 series baits. From stock colors to the plethora of custom painted colors, the color pallet that walleye like varies from day to day, so having a variety to choose from will help you catch more fish.

Speeds are very slow in the spring. We start out trolling at .9 to 1.0mph and increase it as the water warms. But, don’t get stuck on that speed, because there are some days where faster speeds, even in that cold water, out produce the slow speeds. Experiment and figure out what they want on any given day.

You can also listen to your marine radio, if you’re on channel 79, to listen to what’s working for

some folks. Many of us are very helpful that way and will report what baits and programs are working best for us, so that others can try and duplicate it and catch their limits too.

If you prefer jigging, the reef complex offers excellent opportunities to catch a big walleye during the spawn. The males show up first and hang out while they wait for the females to show up. The females will come in, drop their eggs, and move back off the reefs as quickly as possible. Limit catches of nice eater sized males is very common during the spring and are easiest to target.

That's the good news. The bad news is, spring also has the most unpredictable weather here too. On average, the number of days we can get out on the lake during April is 13 to 15 out of the 30 days possible. So, if you plan on coming over, plan on coming for more than a day or two, because those two days might have you sitting on shore. Check the weather forecasts or talk to your charter captain prior to making a long trip. He or she can tell you if you're going to be wasting your time. After a big northeast blow in the early spring, this end of the lake can turn to chocolate milk, and the walleye bite is super tough until it cleans up again.

Just remember, Mother Nature is not someone you want to mess with on this lake when the water temps are still below freezing. Many lives have been lost, due to nasty conditions, bad decisions, and inexperience. Don't let that be you! Be prepared, and be safe, and make good decisions, so you can live to walleye fish another day!

Whether you're an expert or a novice angler, bring your own boat or hire a guide, Lake Erie's Western Basin has something to offer for everyone. So, don't miss out and make your plans to visit us in Ohio for the 2019 fishing season!

Captain Julia "Juls" Davis -
Charter Captain, blogger, and
slave to her two dogs! For more
information, please visit my
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The advertisement features a large, detailed illustration of a walleye fish with its mouth open, showing a lure. Above the fish, a frog is perched on a log. The background is a stylized lake scene with reeds and a blue sky. The text 'SNAGPROOF WEEDLESS LURES' is prominently displayed at the top in large, bold, green and yellow letters. At the bottom, it says 'The FROG DAYS of SUMMER!' in orange and yellow letters, followed by the website 'www.snagproof.com'. A circular logo with the words 'SNAG PROOF' and a fish icon is also present.

Santee Cooper Lakes

By O'Neill Williams



Sounds funny, where is it?

Lake Marion together with Lake Moultrie form what is known as the Santee Cooper Lakes. These lakes are connected by a Diversion Canal. Lake Marion is the larger of the two lakes covering 110,000 acres, and Lake Moultrie covers 60,000 acres. Both lakes are located in the lower part of the South Carolina near Charleston South. The two lakes as connected cover land in 5 different counties including: Berkeley, Calhoun, Clarendon, Orangeburg, and Sumter. Clarendon County covers the most miles of shoreline of Lake Marion, and Berkeley County covers all of the shoreline of Lake Moultrie.

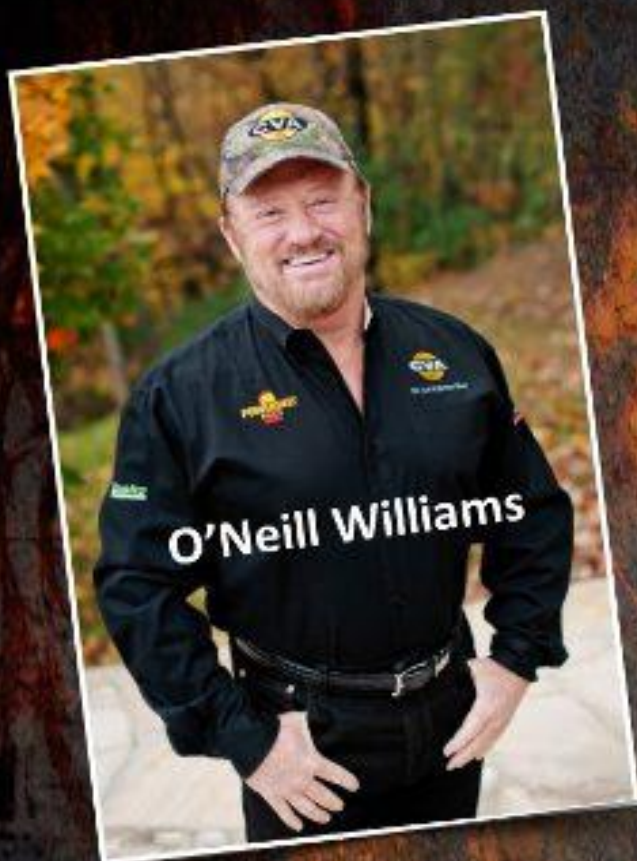
Hold on a minute, how many acres? 180,000! If you're a Georgia fisherman as I am, let me reference that for you. That's Clark's Hill at 70K, Hartwell at 56K at full pool and taking into consideration that both border on and venture deep into South Carolina they both are 'Carolina' lakes also, then add Lake Lanier at 37K and West Point at 26K all rolled into one. It's not Okeechobee but it's really big. At one spot on Lake Moultrie, it's 14 miles across shore to shore.

These legendary lakes were created during the early 1940's and have become a recreational paradise. People come from all over the United States to visit these lakes. The Cypress trees combined with the swampy wilderness add a scenic beauty to these lakes that set them apart from all the



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other lakes in the state.

Source: <http://southcarolinalakes.info/largest-lakes/santee-cooper-lakes-marion-moultrie.html>

Ok, we've started. Now about the catfishing. We could talk about how the Strippers were landlocked first in the Santee River when the dam was built and how they lived there then were hatched by the various States' Department of Natural Resources, but we aren't. This is about the catfish.

Who do you call to guide you on the lake for your first attempt? Call Captain Darryl Smith. He's on the Web at www.captaindarryls.com. How's the fishing?

Darryl fishes out of Canal Lakes Marina in Cross, SC. It's a good, safe, clean place to overnight and Mac Daddy's Restaurant is there with some good eats. Darryl will guarantee you a catch of at least 100 pounds of catfish per day. After all, he has twenty-three line class world records, has been featured on nineteen television shows and over four hundred and sixty magazine articles. You'll be fishing out of a 30-foot pontoon boat with a shelter, so you'll be dry and warm no matter what. I talked with Captain Darryl recently and he detailed the following to me.....he guides on the lake 320 days per year and has had clients from all 50 states and 67 countries and in 2018 averaged catching 60 catfish per day. His largest Blue weighed in at 140 pounds pushing the lake record of 143 pounds.

Wanna total that up again? $60 \times 320 = 19,200$ catfish per year.

Now you know whom to call. What about the fishing for cats? I've been fishing with Darryl three times; each time

producing a television show, once in the shallow backwaters filled with trees and stumps and two times 'out in the lake' over the sunken islands and old river channels. Without doing anything out of his normal techniques, we always caught a giant cooler full, about 50 or more cats ranging from 4



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pounds to 35 pounds. I think my largest Blue I caught with Darryl was 63 pounds. On many occasions, we'd have three hooked at once. Think about that too, at a 20-pound average, which is very conservative, we'd have 60-pounds of cats on at once. To complete the necessary television production, Darryl and I have never been fishing more than 5 hours. I'm going back soon.

What makes these lakes so fertile to be able to produce what may be the best catfishing destination in North America? Let us look. In simple terms, the water temperatures, amount of both freshwater and sea run baitfish, shad, clams, mussels, shrimp, menhaden, even black mullet abound. The various species of catfish; blues, channel, yellow, mud, flathead, etc. spawn up to seven times per year. It's the perfect catfish habitat.

So, what do you have to bring along? Tackle if you like, but Darryl has just the right stuff. You bring food and drinks and a big smile. Only other thing I might suggest is to be sure and bring some children and stick around a couple of days. You see, you don't have to be an expert angler to harvest a cooler full. It's perfect for children. The fish are very friendly and there's plenty of them. Darryl will set the rods and reels, bait up the rigs and make the casts. All you really need to do is start reeling when the rod tip dips. Think about what that might do for a child's confidence, reeling in catfish as big as they are. It's a dream to be made.

The Santee Cooper Lake bottom is paved with giant catfish. Drive over and get you some. You now know whom to call but don't wait around. I've already made reservations with Darryl and Canal Lakes Resort for 2019.



Boat Up-Keep

By Captain Mike Gerry

With the rising cost of bass boats in the past several years more and more people who have been flipping their boat year after a year or so must keep it longer and taking care of it is extremely important. My customers understand my fixation as I must keep my boat looking like new, it not only looks good, but having it sold every year causes me to be more understanding of the next person interest when they purchase it.

First, I become very insistent that my customers do not step on my seats while getting around the boat, I ask them to just use the hard surface step in-between the seats. Regardless of how good the boat company does on the quality, the seats do not hold up to you or anyone else using the seat as a step to get around on your boat. The material becomes weak over time as the sun and weather degrade the seats and they crack easily with stepping and movement. The seats also cannot take hooks being stuck in them, so keep your floors and seats free of hooks, pliers and your best friend sticking a hook in your seat.

Next, I wipe my boat down after every fishing trip, the stain from the lake water sets up very quickly and if you wipe it down immediately after fishing you can save a lot of work and eliminate the nasty grit that comes off the water. I also keep a cleaner spray or polish like furniture cleaner, Pledge to wipe it down with, you will be surprised how much of a shine and how easy your boats wipe down with a Pledge coating on it.

Lastly the carpet can be really tough to keep looking new, but there are a few things that help. Water is a great cleaner for boat carpet, when something is spilled on your carpet immediately pour and brush in some fresh water from the lake. Clear water removes most of the stain and allows blood and or other items like coffee to break down and become easily cleaned once you pull your boat out of the water. Clean it with carpet cleaner after that, and your carpet will remain healthy and looking like new! Brush your carpet weekly it helps keep the pile healthy and soft if you do.

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Spring Panfish Tactics

By Kevin Dahlke

As spring progresses forward, the crappies are wrapping up their ritual and coming right in behind them are the bluegill. The bluegill, inch for inch in size, is one of the hardest fighting freshwater fish with their side digging and unwillingness to giving up.

The sandy shorelines are starting to show the round disk-shaped depressions where these fish are preparing to spawn. There may be areas that look like a land mine field went off with so many of these beds visible in the very shallow water.

If you want to catch some of these bigger gills, fish in water that is a little deeper than the shoreline, out to the 4-6-foot range. We find that the smaller fish are in the shallower water and by going out deeper past these fish, the larger sized breeders are out there, not as visible as the others, but they still have those colonies of numbers of beds.



Utilizing a Hard-Rock Mooska Jig with the Impulse Water Flea underneath a float, this allows you to cover vast amounts of water. The Mooska Jig is made from heavy weight tungsten, which allows the bait to quickly get back down to where the fish are actively feeding.

With the gills in this phase of the season, after making a cast out, you don't have to leave the float sit still very long. Either slowly reeling the line back, or moving the float a foot or two at a time, this will keep your presentation moving and in front of

the actively feeding fish while covering water and locating them as well.

After catching a number of fish from an area, they may get hook shy, so either changing the color of the jig or plastic trailer, will get them biting again. Otherwise, make a move looking for another pod of these fish and start enjoying some of these hard fighting fish once again.

Many different areas of the lake will have these fish grouped up and, different areas will have them coming in to spawn at different times, extending your catching time. Get out there and enjoy this type of fishing and bring along a CHILD, there is no better opportunity at getting them hooked on fishing than right now during the spawn and teaching them about releasing these breeders back into the water.



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Source: U.S. Coast Guard 2017 Recreational Boating Statistics Report

Greetings from Eastern Long Island, New York!

By Alfred Allen



My name is Alfred Allen and I am a New York State licensed guide specializing in surfcasting for Striped Bass. This is my second season operating under the name of Long Island Stripers Surfcasting Guide Services (www.longislandstripers.com). I'm located in Jamesport, N.Y., on Long Island's "North Fork", and have lived in the area for 32 years. Eastern L.I. has a

unique saltwater fishery that allows you to fish in three very different bodies of water; the Atlantic Ocean, Long Island Sound, and the Peconic Bay estuarine system. There also is top quality fresh water fishing in various lakes, streams, and ponds. In today's article I will give you a summary of my 2018 season.

On Long Island, the Striped Bass season runs from April 15th –December 15th, and the months between that last striper in December until that first one in April can be dreadfully long. Weather permitting; I will often look to fish for holdover trout in Laurel Lake, a small, spring fed lake in located in nearby Mattituck. I got just such an opportunity in late February when I picked up this beautiful rainbow



trout, my first fish of the season! Annually in April the lake gets

stocked with 600 rainbow and 600 brown trout. These fish average about 10" long. This fish was approximately 15" long and was fat and healthy, a true holdover, and was released unharmed.



Unfortunately, the weather clamped down on us hard and the next chance I got to fish wasn't until April! But April is "bass time", and on my first trip out I picked up several "schoolie" striped bass from the mouth of the Peconic River. Although they were a little sluggish in the 48-degree water they were also fat and healthy.

But again, the weather shut down the saltwater bite, so I

ventured back to the lake and luckily timed it just a couple of days after it had been stocked! I picked up several freshly stocked Rainbows, beautifully colored from being in the hatchery.

In May the weather finally improved, and the fishing followed suit. I took Lori and Don S. out for their first time ever saltwater fishing from the beach. We went to a park on the Peconic Bay and I showed them how to spool their reels and tie on leaders and lures. They put on their new waders and I began to show them the basics of casting and retrieving small soft plastic lures. Before long, small striped bass were bending their rods! They had a



great time.

Later in May larger bass and big bluefish invaded the western portions of the Peconic Bay. They were following large schools of Atlantic Menhaden, or “bunker”, which come into the bays to spawn. This was the first bluefish I caught which weighed about 6 pounds. But bigger ones came in and were caught using cut up chunks of bunker as bait. A poor photo but this is me with a 36”, approximately 18-pound bluefish!

Mixing in with the bigger bluefish were legal sized (28”) stripers. I coaxed this 29” fish away from the bunker schools with a swimming plug. It was the only bass I kept

this year. I practice catch and release with most of the fish I catch but this one made it to the table!

In mid-June I took Jonathon J. and his three sons out to a beach on the Long Island Sound. Living in the Miami, Fla. area they too had never fished from the shoreline. But after giving them some lessons on casting small “tins” they soon had small bluefish, or “cocktail blues” bending their rods and creating all sorts of havoc! After sunset we set up a rod baited with bunker hoping for a striper but were very much surprised to catch a small sand shark, or dogfish. It actually was the highlight of the night!

On July 1st the heat came and stayed pretty much through the first week of September! When the water



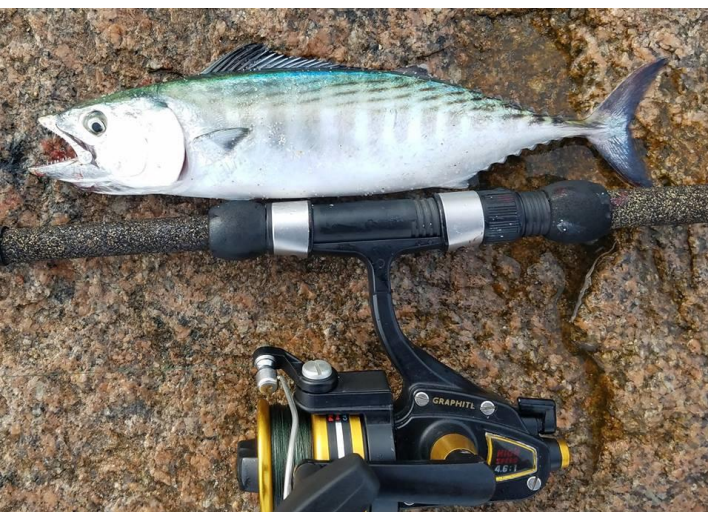


temperature at the shoreline gets too high the stripers go into deeper water and aren't, except for very late at night, reachable from the shore. When that happens, I head back to Laurel Lake for some freshwater action! Here is a nice pickerel, a slab sized bluegill, and a small largemouth bass that I picked up on July 3rd. The Lake in the summer was teeming with life!

As we got into later September the Striper bite began to pick up. We also started seeing large numbers of false albacore starting pop up all over the Ocean inlets and in the L.I. sound. Mixing

in with them were small Atlantic Bonito. False Albacore, or "albies", instill a malady known as "albie fever"! Take one look at my eyes and you'll see a really bad case of it!

By mid-October quality sized bass were hitting the beaches with regularity. Unfortunately, we also started dealing with relentless winds that haven't stopped yet! I picked



up my best of the season, a 33" , 15 pound fish, on a night where I beached several over 28". Later in the month I took Laura Y. from San Jose, Ca. out looking for her 1st East coast striper and she nailed a 26" beauty!



As we entered the month of November the fall migration was in full force. Large bodies of fish began moving down the coast and fish of various sizes hit the beach. While this year it seemed the largest of the fish stayed out in deeper water, huge numbers of fish between 18-27" were on the water's edge. Sand eels were the bait they

were feeding on and any type of lure resembling them caught fish. These fish were feeding aggressively and were bursting at the seam's fat!

From the first of November until the day before Thanksgiving I caught well over 100 fish. But the cold has set in and as I sit here tonight, I feel like the season has ended. But if it has ended than I can look back at it and say I did pretty well!

I hope that you have enjoyed my journey through the 2018 season. I look forward to next year's already with great anticipation! Have great Holiday season and a healthy and prosperous New Year!





The (Fish) Eyes Have It

Slip beneath the dark watery surface and you're likely to lock eyes with aquatic life well before you discern the first fin, scale or tail. Baitfish eyes, in particular, reflect a perpetual, primal alertness. Some call it a look of fear; the same wild, desperate expression observed in the optics of the horror-flick victims.

"I learned many, many years ago while fishing offshore that the most productive lures, by far, were those sporting large accentuated eyes," observes Ralph Phillips, a pioneering angler and co-inventor of the new Z-Man Eye Strike Fishing Weedless Eye Jighead.

"Predator fish key on the eyes of their prey like no other anatomical feature," notes Phillips, one of the early inshore guides in the Charleston, South Carolina area dating back to the 1970s. "This undeniable fact inspired us to create the original Eye Strike Jig."



Seven years ago, Phillips met and befriended Dave Fladd, a fellow angler who happened to be an optical engineer by trade. Together, Phillips and Fladd began to concept a jig whose head was as Phillips says, “primarily just a set of oversized eyeballs.” Phillips provided the big ideas. Fladd made it happen; he composed exacting CAD drawings and fleshed out critical details, such as the precise angle and placement of eyelets. The duo even deep-thought jighead shape, aimed at performing specific tasks like grass deflection and exaggerating the body movements of different softbaits.



“At first, we just made the jig for ourselves,” says Phillips, “sort of the ultimate trout and redfish jig that married perfectly with our favorite Z-Man softbaits. We started by pouring the jigheads six at a time on my back porch.”

Then at a recent ICAST tradeshow, Phillips and Fladd crossed paths with professional redfish tournament anglers Mark and Michael Cowart. “These guys had some exceptional insights into weedless jighead design,” recalls Fladd. “So, we went to work together to build what was to be the perfect tournament jig. We believe we have it.”

“Tournament redfishing demands a totally weedless presentation,” notes IFA Redfish Tour pro, Mark Cowart. “The Weedless Eye Jighead triggers aggressive strikes with its large, lifelike eyes. The jig also utilizes a highly efficient weedguard system that slides through grass and timber with ease. We’ve fished the new design in Florida oyster beds, and through dense marsh grass in Louisiana. The Eye Strike Weedless Eye Jighead head has performed flawlessly every time.”

To achieve total weed resistance, Fladd evaluated numerous weedguard designs, including wire gauges of various sizes. “Weedguard design often becomes a tradeoff between hooking fish and sliding through snags. Eventually, we



formulated what we believe to be a superior design that both fishes cleanly through cover and hooks every fish that bites.”

Phillips and Fladd also constructed the jighead with a streamlined shape terminating with a precisely placed eyelet to eliminate any v-shaped feature or sharp angle that might otherwise grab plant pieces or obstructions. Molded into the base of the jighead, a conical dual trailer-keeper locks ElaZtech® and traditional softbaits securely in place. The team also selected a heavy duty, 3/0 black nickel Mustad® UltraPoint® hook, which they refer to as the ultimate jig hook for fresh- and saltwater.



“We don’t paint our jigheads,” says Fladd. “Instead, we let the eyes do the talking, distinguishing each lure with one of five different prominent optical colors. Gold and red are super effective in clear water. And some anglers also prefer a glow eye or chartreuse in darker conditions.”

When asked to call out their favorite jig-softbait combinations, the duo broke it down by species. “For speckled trout,” says Phillips, “a 3.75-inch Z-Man StreakZ™ has been really good to me.” Fladd opts for a pearl-white Z-Man MinnowZ™. When hunting big bull redfish, both anglers wield a Scented PaddlerZ™ or DieZel MinnowZ™.

“The slightly flattened shape of the jighead and the placement of the eyelet actually activates Z-Man paddletail baits,” Fladd observes. “In the water, you get a subtle wobbling action that almost resembles a spoon. The combination is honestly pretty hard to beat.”

Matching a wide variety of ElaZtech and other traditional softbaits, the new Z-Man Eye Strike Weedless Eye Jigheads are available in 1/8-, 3/16- and ¼-ounce weights and five eye-catching colors.



Cold Winter Days

By Captain Mike Gerry

When the cold wind blows off the water in the winter and you're wondering what I can do to get a bite, here are a few tips to think about! One thing I have always believed is that bass eat in the cold winter water when it's easy, their metabolism just won't speed up enough to chase or compete for food. So making a meal easy involves just a few thoughts and small size baits is definitely one that I like to try. I believe downsizing can make the difference when it's tough out there on a cold winter day.

Let's start with the most obvious, if you have been fishing a big monster worm and no results, downsize to a small finesse worm the change in size will be an easy meal for a lethargic bass. I personally like to Texas rig a "48" stick bait in the winter, its small, it gives some different movement and not everyone weights a stick bait and fishes it on the bottom. Finesse worms, tubes, small swim baits all get you the same results, good winter bass and a great winter day on the water.

Have you ever been fishing next to a crappie guy and watch him pull in a big winter bass and wonder

what is going on! Well this is a testimony for downsizing; the crappie fisherman is working a small jig and catches a big bass and the reason is simple he has downsized and made the bait an easy meal. Bass will eat a small jig designed for crappie in the cold of winter you just have to be the one smart enough to have downsized. Size matters and you just must control your thoughts to change to the winter conditions.

One of my favorite small baits in the winter is a ¼ oz jig, bass hang around the patches of grass in the cold of winter and a small jig worked slowly and dropped into the holes is an easy enticing meal. The pure fact small jig replicates a crawfish is a big testimony to success a small jig can have in cold water. Think small downsize and work your baits, so they are an easy meal and you'll love the results.

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Winter Is Full Of The Best Months

By O'Neill Williams



How So?

Let's start with this: For bass fishing, the water temperature is just about right for using skirted jigs. All summer long the crawfish have been holding up in their little mud chimneys having babies that were born over the summer. They've been growing, and low and behold, just about the right size on which a largemouth or spotted bass to eat. So, why not the bream, shad and little bass, aren't they good to eat too? Sure they are, but since it's been happening for the last few thousand years, the bass will now crunch on a slow moving little crawfish because it so easy and readily available. The bream, shad and other bite size fare are hard to find so the crawfish fits nicely. You see, the crawfish feeds on the decaying vegetation and algae that covers all the brush, remaining tree limbs and weeds and grass. He's right there for the taking. How does this help you? Use something that looks like a crawfish crawling along a limb or piece of brush. The trick is not to get in a hurry. Cast into a brush top or submerged tree and leave it there moving it as slowly as possible working along the limbs. Did I say slowly? I really did mean that. A couple of recommendations: Don't over tackle the bait, that is, don't use 30 pound line and extra heavy duty rod and reel. Remember it's winter, everything is slowing down so feeling the bite it critical. Light line, more bites, more fish, more smiles.

OK, how about the stripers? They're shallow now. No, not in shallow water. Shallow as in being near the surface, not close to shallow water. A freshwater striper is very sensitive to temperatures and will remain deep until the surface temperature

falls into the 50s. December? Yes, that's about right. So how do you catchem? Buncha ways. Trolling Capt. Mack's umbrella rig, or a live trout or herring, but always have a bucktailed jig tied on and ready to make that cast into surface activity. It's a trusted stand-by.

Crappie in December/January? You bet, once the water temperature hits 55, visit the big

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marinas and docks on the major reservoirs. Crappie gather there by the millions all through December and well into January and February. Extra small Road Runners with a tube jig will catch a limit in short order. Round up a hand held portable depth finder you can carry around with the transducer on a long pole to stick under the water from dock to dock or slip to slip. Don't fish until you find the schools of crappie. I like to use 4 pound line with at least two Road Runners tied on a foot or so apart. We call it a Christmas tree rig. Don't do much, just drop it into the schools and hold on. Remember, it's cold so you don't have to make the jig move at all, you can't keep it still even if you try. You'll have to get a long handled net because the light line and rod will not let you pull up a brace of two pound crappie at once.

Ok, there you are. Marching orders having been given, I'm going deer and hog hunting. Winter is good for those guys too.

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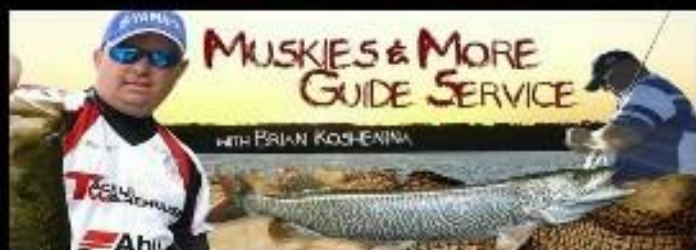
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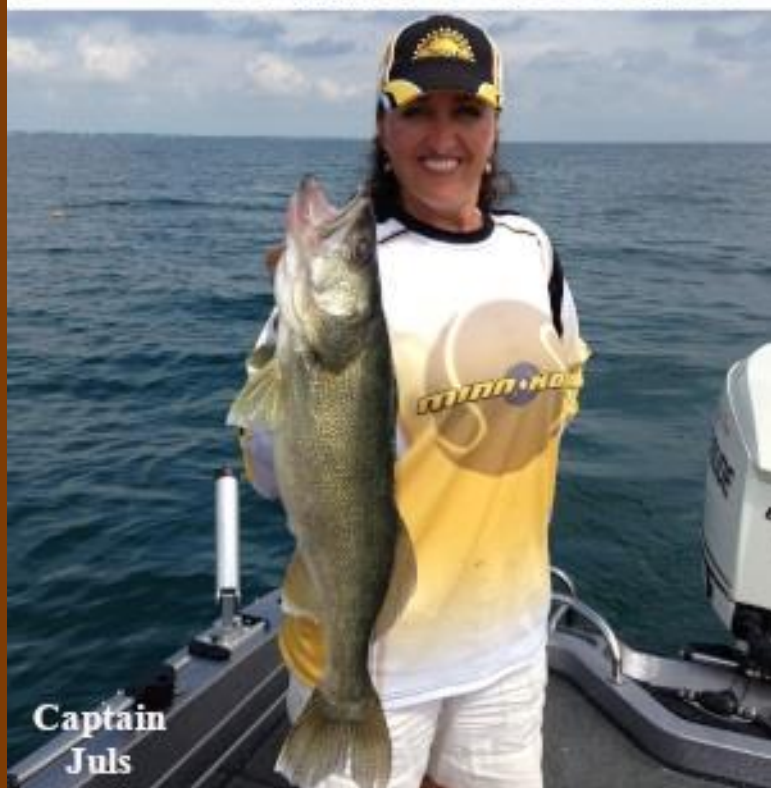
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**HUNTING
ZONE**



Wild Hog Hunting In the Georgia Swamps Is A Timeless Adventure

By Bill Vanderford

The coolness of winter reminds me of running through the heavy underbrush and kneedeep water in the Ocmulgee River swamp a few years ago while trying to keep pace with the distant yelps from dogs who were in hot pursuit of a wild hog. Even then, my mind drifted back to my first encounter with one of these unpredictable animals. The whole scene was *deja vu*. The setting, the people and the animals were straight out of an experience that happened to me as a youth during the 1950's.

Some friends and I had been deer hunting with our dogs in the Ogeechee River bottoms. A couple of us were on stands waiting for one of the other guys and the dogs to drive the deer past us. All of a sudden, we could hear a very painful tone to the howling of the dogs.

We immediately ran from the deer stands to the spot where we heard the dogs. Those crazy dogs were trying to subdue what appeared to be an over 500 pound boar hog with vicious looking tusks. The huge hog was slashing at the dogs, and I can still remember the black, bristling hairs that stood up on the animal's neck and the razor-sharp tusks that were already covered with blood from the dogs.

Then, the beast noticed me, and I was almost hypnotized by those piercing eyes that looked like they belonged to the devil himself!

That demon was definitely not Porky Pig! It was my first up-close meeting with something that life-threatening...and I was terrified! When the massive hunk of pork flesh threw the last dog aside and headed in my direction, I dropped my shotgun to the ground and clawed my way up the nearest tree. The hellish creature had ripped three of our dogs to shreds, and would have surely done the same to me. I felt lucky to be alive, and made a vow to stay away from wild hogs for the rest of my life. Nevertheless, here I was back in a swamp running after the dogs again toward a big hog.

A recent rain had swelled the river and flooded the Ocmulgee River bottoms. The roads were nothing more than shallow feeder streams, but soon the dogs were in hot pursuit of the hog scent, and we came into a small clearing, engrossed in a fierce battle with the dogs was what appeared to be that same "devil" boar hog that had been responsible for a few of my nightmares over the years. He was every bit of 500 pounds, had the same gleaming tusks, bristling hair and mean look in his eyes when he spotted me.

It was immediately obvious that the dogs couldn't control this monster hog, and he started charging in my direction. I didn't throw my camera down as I had the shotgun when I was younger, but it didn't take me long to climb the nearest tree with no thought of shooting a picture. Luckily the big animal ran right past my perch and quickly disappeared into the thick underbrush.

I hadn't used the gun on my first encounter with a huge boar hog, and not a frame passed through my camera during this confrontation. However, the "adrenaline rush" and relief to be alive after the experience was still the same.

During the return trip, I couldn't help but reflect on my visit. Despite the obvious dangers, the journey into the Ocmulgee River bottoms had given me an opportunity to relive one of the most vivid memories from my past. I had discovered that very little has changed in the Georgia swamps, and wild hog hunting remains a timeless adventure!

Bill Vanderford has won hundreds of awards for his writing and photography, and has been inducted into the National Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame. He can be reached at jfish51@aol.com or at his web site: www.georgiafishing.com.





A line up of the knives designed by
Chris Tanner. From top to bottom:
JX5, JX6, JX2, JX3, JX4

Chris Tanner: Knife Designer

By Dana Benner

Go on social media or turn on the television and you will find no shortage of outdoor “experts”. Let me say that there is no such thing as an “expert”. There are some that are really good at what they do, but nobody knows everything. All of us are always learning.

Outdoor writers, for the most part, try to entertain as well as share some knowledge with their readers. We don’t know all of the answers, but we tend to be smart enough to find people who do. For me, Chris Tanner is one of those people I turn to.

I first had contact with Chris Tanner when I was gathering information on the Jessmuk, a knife designed by Chris and made by L.T. Wright in Ohio. Chris was a wealth of information on the knife; information I would have been hard pressed to get without his help. During our conversations I learned that Chris is much more than a knife designer. Chris is also an outdoors products tester and blogger with a highly followed program on You Tube called PreparedMind 101.

Like me, Chris did his time in the military, in his case the U.S. Navy where he served as a Damage Controlman and was qualified as ships Fire Marshal. In this position he had to be able to process

situations quickly. “As DC men we are mostly preventative in the day to day basis. We spend a lot of time inspecting and looking for real or potential problems.”

I asked Chris about how much his military training has influenced his knife designs? “In the Navy I had to find and fix potential problems before they happened. When it comes to my knife designs, I like to anticipate what will be needed before it is needed”. Chris went on to say, “My knife design process was born from several years of testing knives. I’d test a knife and think, ‘If only someone would change it this way’ or ‘If only someone would invent one like this’. Eventually you start doing it yourself.”

As a follow-up question I asked Chris, “What makes your knife designs different?” “I think a lot of people are limited by making their knives LOOK a certain way. I don’t worry about how they look. I worry about how they WORK”, Chris said. “I begin with an idea about what I want to create. Then I outline exactly what I want to be able to DO. Then I simply draw it the way it needs to be in order to do that. My knives are different in that everything in them is that way for a reason. There is no ‘filler’. I stick with companies like Bark River and LTWK because they’ll make them (the knives) exactly the way I designed them.”

Of all of Chris’s knife designs, which one do you think is his favorite? “That’s a hard one”, Chris said. “It is like asking someone who their favorite child is. If I had to choose, I’d probably say the Jessmuk and only because I flipped a coin and it was tails. It is so versatile and it proved a major point I was trying to make. That point was that everything has not been done before and there is still room for new ideas. It is the knife I carry and use the most as a primary knife in the woods. Had the coin landed on heads, it would have been the JX5 Vengeful-1.”

What follows are some of the knives that Chris Tanner has designed.

1) Jessica X (Schrade) (SCHF43)
This knife measures 17.5 inches with a nine inch blade. The handle, which measures eight and a half inches works well to offset the long blade. The blade is made from 1070 steel and has a hollow grind. The curved handle and the barong hook at the end gives good flexibility to how this knife is used.

2) JX2 Jessmuk (LTWK) I have to admit that I am a bit biased when it comes to the Jessmuk as I own one. It was the first bushcraft knife to incorporate the sweeping blade design of the ulu into a typical fixed blade knife. Made



Chris Tanner Testing the JX5

with 01 tool steel and having a scandi grind, this knife will do just about anything.

3) JX3 (LTWK) The JX3 is a smaller knife and is the perfect companion for the JX2. It has an overall length of 6 3/8 inches and has a convex grind edge that measures 2 7/8 inches. The blade is made from 1/8 inch A2 tool steel.

4) JX4 Bushbat (Bark River) The Bushbat combines the aspects of a great bushcraft knife with a karambit handle. It has an overall length of 7 3/4 inches and a



blade length of just over 3.5 inches. Blade steel is A2 tool steel. Weighing in at just over four ounces it is the perfect EDC knife.

5) JX5 Vengeful-1 (Bark River) If you are looking for a great chopper this is the knife for you. It is a heavy knife, weighing a little over a pound. Chris designed this knife for heavy work. The blade is made from CPM 3V steel and measures a little over nine inches.

6) JX6 Companion (Bark River) Similar to the JX4, but without the karambit handle. The point is lower, making it closer to the centerline of the knife. The edge is ground higher to maximize cutting power. Overall length is 7 1/2 inches with a blade length of just over 3 1/2 inches. The blade is made of A2 tool steel.

Sources:

LT Wright Knives

www.ltwrightknives.com

Bark River Knives

www.barkriverknives.com



A Half-Life Of Buffalo Hunting

By Jofie Lamprecht

“YOU MAY KILL THE BUFFALO EASILY WITH ONE BULLET, BUT IF YOU DON’T, THE NEXT FOURTEEN .470’S SERVE MOSTLY AS A MINOR IRRITANT.” ROBERT ROARK, USE ENOUGH GUN

Just before my 12th birthday my father asked if I wanted to shoot a cape buffalo. Can you imagine my response? I was jumping up and down inside, but then asked – “really?” With my father a reward was always followed with a condition and this was a fantastic motivator to a young man like myself. The condition for the Buffalo hunt was that I must be able to handle a big caliber rifle in a dangerous situation.

“You never know what could go wrong and you need to be able to handle a big caliber with confidence” he said.



The challenge. When I was ready, I had to shoot five rounds with my father's rare Mannlicher-Schönauer .458 Winchester Magnum off of shooting-sticks.

That next weekend found me dragging my father to the range, my small sweaty hands clutching five massive .458 rounds... at stake was a Buffalo hunt, my reward for handling the punishment of the big rifle. My father has an almost a complete collection of Mannlicher-Schönauer rifles. These precision Austrian rifles are some of the finest, smoothest bolt-actions that you could ever lay hands on and they are deadly accurate.

Nothing could stop me now. We put up a target and taking the .458 Mannlicher-Schönauer in my small hands, I proceeded to load all five rounds in the unique revolving (spool) magazine. Ready. Load. Fire! I was expecting recoil, but I was not expecting that level of a

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE **MANNLICHER-SCHÖNAUER WALTER "KARAMOJO" BELL** AND ERNEST HEMINGWAY (PAPA) BOTH HELD THE MANNLICHER-SCHÖNAUER IN HIGH REGARD. BELL USED THE ORIGINAL 6.5MM MANNLICHER (.256 MANNLICHER) EFFECTIVELY ON EVEN ELEPHANT, AND 'PAPA' PRAISED IT AS A LION GUN. THE MANNLICHER-SCHÖNAUER (SOMETIMES ANGLICIZED AS "MANNLICHER SCHOENAUER") IS A BOLT ACTION RIFLE PRODUCED BY STEYR-MANNLICHER WITH MONTE CARLO STYLE STOCK, DOUBLE SET TRIGGERS (THIS OPTION WAS POPULAR IN EUROPE), FLAT "BUTTER KNIFE" BOLT HANDLE, WITH CARTRIDGES BEING FED FROM A SCHOENAUER SPOOL MAGAZINE (HENCE THE NAME MANNLICHER-SCHÖNAUER). ALL SCREWS WERE INDEXED THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE PRODUCTION LIFE OF M-S RIFLES AND CARBINES.

THE RIFLE CONTINUED TO BE MANUFACTURED IN VARIOUS FORMS (FULL, HALF-STOCK AND TAKE-DOWN MODELS) UNTIL 1972, AND ALTHOUGH PRODUCTION WAS INTERRUPTED DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR, IT EVENTUALLY BEGAN AGAIN IN 1950. THE MOST SIGNIFICANT MODIFICATION TO BE MADE TO THE RIFLE DURING THIS PERIOD OF MANUFACTURE WAS THE 1925 INTRODUCTION OF A MAGNUM-LENGTH VERSION IN .264 AND .458 WINCHESTER MAGNUM FOR THE U.S. MARKET. ALTHOUGH NO LONGER IN PRODUCTION, THE RIFLE REMAINS POPULAR DUE TO ITS AESTHETIC QUALITIES, COMPACTNESS, SMOOTH ACTION AND PRECISION AND QUALITY MANUFACTURING.

pounding! The big rifle pushed me backwards and I had to catch myself from falling flat on my back. What a rush! Again I shouldered the Mannlicher, worked the bolt and found the target over the sights. Four rounds later I put the rifle down, having successfully put all five slugs in the target. In the glorious morning light, the sun no less vivid nor the colors less vibrant, the heart had gone out of this contestant. All the rounds had been fired and my father was convinced. He scheduled our Cape Buffalo safari.



Traveling with firearms even in 1992 was a challenge. We were planning to drive in a north to Grootfontein and then veer northeast, crossing through all the diverse habitats that Namibia has to offer until reaching the Caprivi Strip (now renamed the Zambezi Region), Namibia's wettest region.

The challenge was to get our rifles through 64 km of Botswana by road before entering Zimbabwe, our final destination. Traveling in Africa is challenging and frustrating sometimes and we could not obtain permits for this 64 km of then gravel road through that country. Our rifles had to stay behind.

We spent a night at the elegant Elephant Hills Hotel, in the historic town of Victoria Falls. Listening to roar of the falls that the locals call 'the smoke that thunders', we ate delicious beef steaks and had a good night's rest before the real adventure began.

Driving into hunting camp on the shores of Lake Kariba, we stayed in a comfortable chalet style camp. My memories are of beautiful purple bougainvillea's and a huge green flood plain with the very low lake



several hundred yards from camp. It was October and it was hot – extremely hot – and humid. So hot, in fact, that we got up several times during the night to take a cold shower and we got into bed soaking wet to try and cool ourselves...

The main event had arrived. The contestant's heart was back. We had to use rented rifles supplied by the hunting camp. Although the rifles were of the same vintage as my father's Mannlicher-Schönauer collection, these rifles had seen too many safaris and had doubled as hammers, door stops and shovels. Held together with fencing wire, they left a lot to be desired. At the range,

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE CAPRIVI STRIP

THE CAPRIVI IS A NARROW STRIP OF LAND IN THE FAR NORTHEAST OF NAMIBIA, ABOUT 448 KM LONG. GERMANY EXCHANGED THIS AREA WITH THE UNITED KINGDOM FOR ZANZIBAR IN WHAT THE GERMANS NEGLECTED TO ACCOUNT FOR WAS THE FACT THAT MIGHTY VICTORIA FALLS STOOD BETWEEN NAMIBIA AND THE INDIAN OCEAN. VICTORIA FALLS PROVED A CONSIDERABLE BARRIER TO NAVIGATE ON THE WAY TO THE COAST.

DURING WW1 THE CAPRIVI STRIP AGAIN CAME UNDER BRITISH RULE AND WAS GOVERNED AS PART OF BECHUANALAND (MODERN DAY BOTSWANA). IN 1990, WITH THE INDEPENDENCE OF NAMIBIA, THE CAPRIVI BECAME PART OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA.



we fired at a tragically pock-marked Baobab tree and had to take a hammer to the open sights to get them to match the line of fire.

Our family is of the opinion that Zimbabwean P.H.s has the most stringent qualification exam in Africa. Not only is their theory intensive and all encompassing, but the practical that they must endure far surpasses any other professional hunting standards in Africa. Our P.H. left it questionable of whether he attended this rigorous process. He was terrified of elephant and made several bad decisions, frustrating my father to no end. Two P.H.'s on the same hunt is usually note a good idea.

The Mopani bees were already thick when we took up the tracks of a bachelor herd of Buffalo bulls. After a hellishly long and wearisome time on the track we found a bachelor herd of dagga boys in the bottom of a ravine. The Zimbabwean P.H. would not let me shoot since the border of the hunting area was right across the dwindling steam and the sun threatening to slip behind the horizon. I was frustrated at the chance of losing my bull.

My father started arguing with the Zim P.H. and all 12 years of my worldly experience stepped forward and simply said "I will kill the bull where he stands". And kill him where he stood I did. The shooting sticks went up, wire wrapped battered old .375 H&H ready to go. With the open sights I drew the bead on the bull's shoulder and started squeezing. I grew up with the European style 'double set triggers' similar to the before mentioned M-S, where the back trigger finely sets the front trigger where you barely have to touch it for the shot to go off. This squeezing thing was a new concept.



My father stood huffing and puffing behind me, video camera in hand, whispering in my ear “Shoot! Shoot! Shoot! Shoot!”. “I am shooting!” was my response. Finally the shot broke the silence in the otherwise tranquil ravine. The bull fell forward, closer to the trickle of water forming the boundary of the hunting area. “Shoot again” was the command, as I jacked in another solid and shot again at the shoulder of the downed buffalo. A quick 30 yard movement to our right put us above and behind the now barely moving bull. With a quick shot to the spine, we cautiously approached my prize and with disbelief the P.H. shook my hand. The two shoulder shots you could stick your index and middle fingers into with ease, and the spine shot had gone exactly where it was supposed to. We had no still camera, so after a

brief inspection the skinning knives came out and we caped the animal where he lay. A long branch was cut and with trouser belts we secured the skull still and horns to the branch and we took turns carrying the load for the long trek back to the truck. With no flash light, a tool permanently on my hunting belt now and roaring lions in the vicinity, it was close to midnight when the triumphant hunting party rolled into camp. Sleep was not a problem that night.

What a wonderful remembrance.

In closing – two sad notes. The shoulder mount of this Buffalo and the video of the hunt burnt in our Rooikraal Main Lodge fire in 2000. Destiny was at work and that dreadful fire was the main catalyst that brought me home after completing hotel school to the hunting life that I love so much. Thus starting my P.H. career, my destiny planned out for me. The only memory I have left of the hunt is a photo of me grinning ear to ear with a blood-covered buffalo head and cape at the skinning shed at midnight.

On the 1st of September 2015 my father, Joof Lamprecht, moved to the new hunting fields of the ever-after. I miss him. We will hunt again. But not yet. Not yet.






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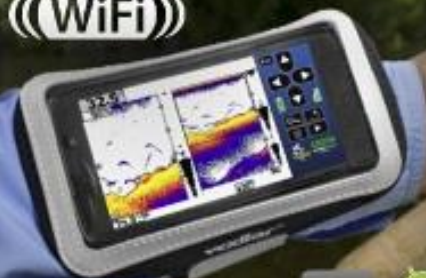
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