

SPECIAL KAYAK FISHING SECTION, P. 74

GAME & FISH **EAST**

The Regional Outdoor Guide

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MAY 2023

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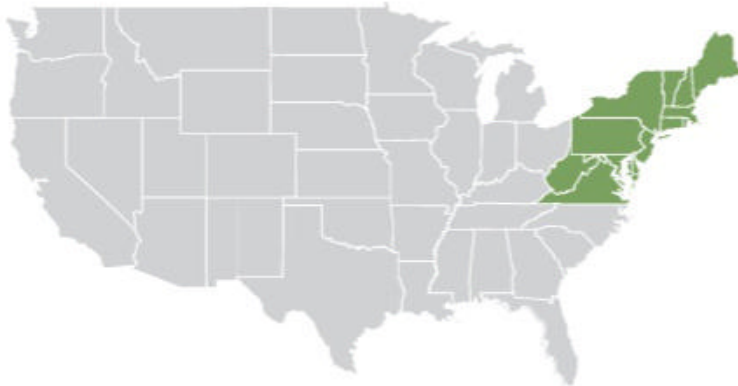
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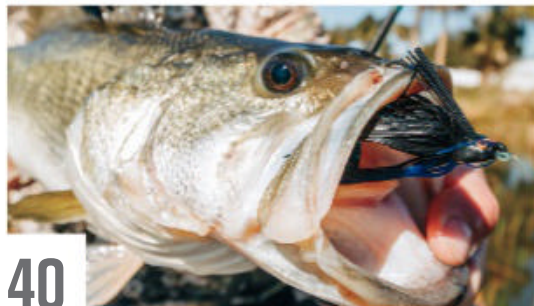
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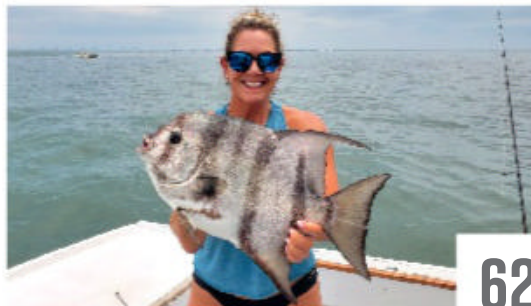
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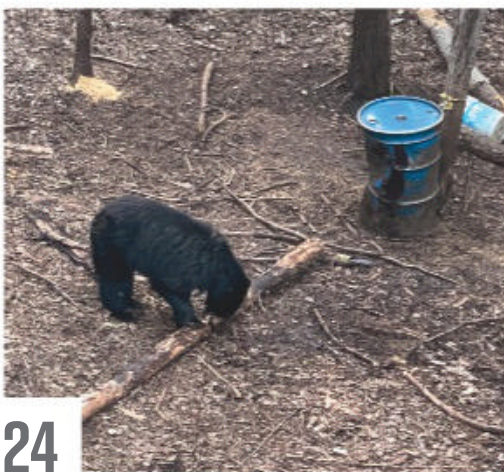
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WOODSMANSHIP

Whether you call it fatwood, pine knot, heart pine or pine “lighter’d,” as the guy who showed me where to find it did, the resin-rich heartwood at the center of old pine stumps might be the best natural firestarter in the woods. As a kid fascinated with anything to do with fire, I was amazed at how quickly splinters of the pungent wood burst into flame, necessitating just a single match to create a roaring blaze for roasting hot dogs.

Using pine lighter’d or birch bark to start a warming fire even when most of the surrounding forest is dripping wet or covered in snow is something I pride myself on. It’s just one of the dozens of little tricks I’ve picked up from older, wiser outdoorsmen in the four decades I’ve been roaming around the woods. They don’t necessarily make me a better hunter or fisherman, and while some certainly have a survival application, they’re just generally useful things to know how to do. The traditional term for skills like these is woodsmanship; a younger crowd might call them outdoor hacks.

Terminology aside, writer Scott Linden makes a great point about these skills in this month’s Do-It-Yourself department before sharing nine of them that he’s put to use over the years. These days, we count on devices to do or show us so much that it’s easy to forget the older, but maybe better, ways of getting along in the woods. Skills like knot tying, map-and-compass navigation and knife sharpening on a good ol’ whetstone are perishable. Quick, tie a bowline knot ... See what I mean? Linden’s piece is a good reminder to keep our woodsmanship skills honed for when we need them.

How to tell the difference between poison ivy and Virginia creeper (“leaves of three, let it be”), an effective and painless way to remove a tick (rotate it around its axis with a cotton swab) ... the list goes on. If you have an outdoor hack to pass along, share it with us on Facebook or Instagram. It’s never too late to learn a new one.

Adam Heggenstaller
Editorial Director

GAME & FISH

The Regional Outdoor Guide

PUBLISHER

Michael F. X. Cassidy

EDITORIAL

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Adam Heggenstaller

Adam.Heggenstaller@outdoorsg.com

EDITOR

John Taranto

John.Taranto@outdoorsg.com

REGIONAL EDITORS

Dr. Todd A. Kuhn

Chuck Smock

Drew Warden

ONLINE CONTENT EDITOR

Scott Bernarde

ART DIRECTOR

Brian Judge

ASSISTANT ART DIRECTOR

Andrew Tuchscherer

PRODUCTION

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Melissa Williams

Melissa.Williams@outdoorsg.com

ADVERTISING

NATIONAL ENDEMIC AD SALES

Jim McConville | (440) 791-7017

James.McConville@outdoorsg.com

WESTERN REGION

Hutch Looney

Hutch@HLooney.com

MARINE/FISHING ADVERTISING

Michael Cassidy | (407) 625-0992

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MIDWESTERN REGION

Mark Thiffault | (720) 630-9863

Mark.Thiffault@outdoorsg.com

NATIONAL AD SALES

ACCOUNT DIRECTOR

DETROIT OFFICE

Kevin Donley | (248) 798-4458

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NATIONAL ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE

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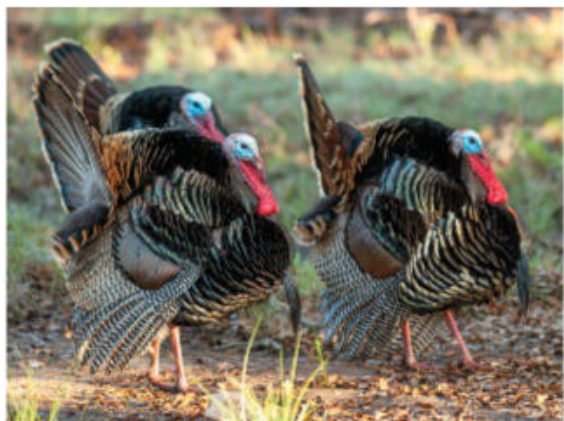
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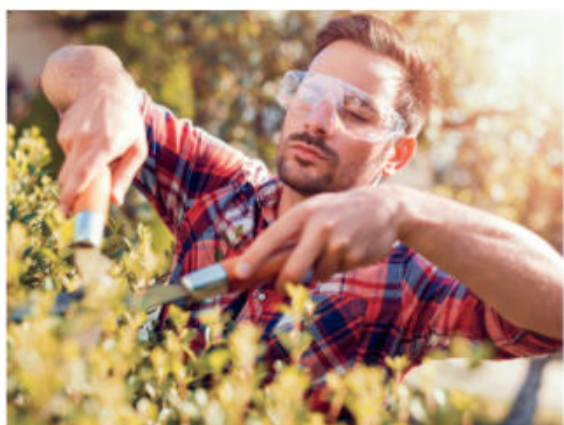
THE STRUT CONTINUES

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Lynn Burkhead's "Turkey Talk: Bob Dixon, Mr. Fox, and the \$31,000 Vest" takes a fascinating look at Mossy Oak's longtime support of turkey conservation.



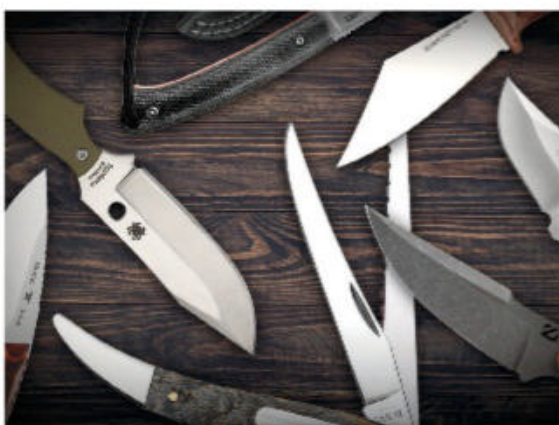
SPRING INTO ACTION

Check out "Great American Spring," sponsored by Toro, for videos and articles that will make projects around your home easier, leaving more time for fishing.



TOP 7 MM PERFORMERS

After the .30, the 7 mm is America's most popular hunting caliber. Read "Seven Great 7 mm Cartridges for Deer-Sized Game" by Craig Boddington to see why.



SHARP OPTIONS

If you don't have a good knife, hurry up and do something about it. Here's help: "23 New Hunting and Fishing Knives for 2023."



BIG BASS BONANZA

Bass anglers seeking a 10-pounder may be jealous about what's going on in Texas. Read "17-Pound Largemouth Continues Lake's Amazing Run" for the scoop.

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Mike Carney

EVP, GROUP PUBLISHER & OPERATIONS
Derek Sevcik

VP, CONSUMER MARKETING
Peter Watt

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Deb Daniels

SENIOR DIRECTOR, PRODUCTION
Connie Mendoza

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Kyle Morgan

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Tim Neher

DIRECTOR, DIGITAL EDITORIAL
Darren Choate

For questions regarding digital editions,
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CONTRIBUTIONS: Contact Drew Warden at Drew.Warden@outdoorsg.com for writer's guidelines. The Publisher assumes no responsibility for loss or damage to unsolicited material.

GAME & FISH MAGAZINE EDITORIAL OFFICE
6385 Flank Drive, Suite 800, Harrisburg, PA 17112
(717) 695-8171 | Fax (717) 545-2527

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23 am 2:06 to 4:06 pm 2:30 to 4:30	24 am 2:54 to 4:54 pm 3:18 to 5:18	25 am 3:42 to 5:42 pm 4:06 to 6:06	26 am 4:30 to 6:30 pm 4:54 to 6:54	27 am 5:18 to 7:18 pm 5:42 to 7:42	28 am 6:06 to 8:06 pm 6:30 to 8:30	29 am 6:54 to 8:54 pm 7:18 to 9:18
30 am 7:42 to 9:42 pm 8:06 to 10:06						

MAY 2023

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1 am 8:30 to 10:30 pm 8:54 to 10:54	2 am 9:18 to 11:18 pm 9:42 to 11:42	3 am 10:06 to 12:06 pm 10:30 to 12:30	4 am 10:54 to 12:54 pm 11:18 to 1:18	5 am — to — pm 12:06 to 2:06	6 am 12:30 to 2:30 pm 12:54 to 2:54
7 am 1:18 to 3:18 pm 1:42 to 3:42	8 am 2:06 to 4:06 pm 2:30 to 4:30	9 am 2:54 to 4:54 pm 3:18 to 5:18	10 am 3:42 to 5:42 pm 4:06 to 6:06	11 am 4:30 to 6:30 pm 4:54 to 6:54	12 am 5:18 to 7:18 pm 5:42 to 7:42	13 am 6:06 to 8:06 pm 6:30 to 8:30
14 am 6:54 to 8:54 pm 7:18 to 9:18	15 am 8:30 to 10:30 pm 8:54 to 10:54	16 am 9:18 to 11:18 pm 9:42 to 11:42	17 am 10:06 to 12:06 pm 10:30 to 12:30	18 am 10:54 to 12:54 pm 11:18 to 1:18	19 am — to — pm 12:06 to 2:06	20 am 12:30 to 2:30 pm 12:54 to 2:54
21 am 1:18 to 3:18 pm 1:42 to 3:42	22 am 2:06 to 4:06 pm 2:30 to 4:30	23 am 2:54 to 4:54 pm 3:18 to 5:18	24 am 3:42 to 5:42 pm 4:06 to 6:06	25 am 4:30 to 6:30 pm 4:54 to 6:54	26 am 5:18 to 7:18 pm 5:42 to 7:42	27 am 6:06 to 8:06 pm 6:30 to 8:30
28 am 6:54 to 8:54 pm 7:18 to 9:18	29 am 8:30 to 10:30 pm 8:54 to 10:54	30 am 9:18 to 11:18 pm 9:42 to 11:42	31 am 10:06 to 12:06 pm 10:30 to 12:30			

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SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
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4 am 12:30 to 2:30 pm 12:54 to 2:54	5 am 1:18 to 3:18 pm 1:42 to 3:42	6 am 2:06 to 4:06 pm 2:30 to 4:30	7 am 2:54 to 4:54 pm 3:18 to 5:18	8 am 3:42 to 5:42 pm 4:06 to 6:06	9 am 4:30 to 6:30 pm 4:54 to 6:54	10 am 5:18 to 7:18 pm 5:42 to 7:42

The moon's phases are listed as New, First Quarter (First Q), Full and Last Quarter (Last Q). Times listed represent the peak activity times for game and fish each day.

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By Richard Mann



Many hunters think of bears as big nasty critters that are hard to kill. Bears can be big; an Alaskan brown bear can weigh more than a half ton. Bears can also be nasty. Across North America black bears kill—on average—at least one person each year. But bears—most bears—are not hard to kill, and their size varies greatly by location.

Most black bears weigh less than 500 pounds, with the average being closer to half that. And while a 500-pound black bear might be twice the size of a 250-pound black bear, it's not twice as hard to kill. So, given their average size and the potential for danger, what are the best loads for bears?

First, we must set some parameters because brown bears and grizzlies are a whole different animal than black bears in both size and temperament. They're

also much more expensive to hunt and are nowhere near as widely dispersed. So, here we're going to focus on black bears and what guns and loads are appropriate for them. The other parameter we must set deals with how the bear will be hunted, which is typically with dogs, over bait or by spot-and-stalk. The ideal guns and loads for each type of hunting situation vary.

SPOT-AND-STALK

If you're planning to spot-and-stalk a black bear, and if you have a deer rifle, chances are that you're already well-armed. I killed my first bear in Montana with a .358 Win. and a 225-grain Nosler Partition; the shot was about 200 yards, and that bear weighed about 200 pounds. I also took a West Virginia bear of about the same size with a .30 Remington AR and a 150-grain Nosler

AccuBond at around half that distance. The farthest distance I've taken a black bear was on a hunt in Idaho. The range was just a bit beyond 400 yards, and I used a Steyr Scout Rifle in .308 Win. All three rifle-cartridge combinations worked perfectly.

At most sensible shooting distances, any cartridge delivering similar ballistics to the .308 Win. is ideal for black bears. If you're going to stretch the distance, it's advisable to step up to something like a 6.5 PRC or .300 Win. Mag. Hornady's new 7 mm PRC should be perfect for a spot-and-stalk black bear hunt where long shots are anticipated. To maximize penetration, which is never a bad thing, a partitioned, bonded or mono-metal bullet is a good idea, especially with smaller calibers or if you need to take a close-range shot with a high-velocity cartridge.

Bears sometimes look mean, and they can be. However, many common deer cartridges work just fine on black bears—even very large ones.



OVER BAIT IN THICK COVER

When bear hunting over bait, you don't need a gun with a lot of reach. Just as with a spot-and-stalk hunt, a good deer rifle will work just fine here, too. But when I'm hunting bears over bait, especially in thick cover that I might have to wander into to recover the bear, I like hitting them hard with the hopes of anchoring them on the spot. I've taken bears over bait with a varied selection of guns, including a 6.5 Creedmoor, a .45-70 Govt. and even a 12-gauge shotgun with slugs.

A 12-gauge slug hits hard and makes a big hole. However, my preference for hunting bear over bait is the .45-70. This is partly because there's a wide selection of loads that offer a broad power range, delivering from around 1,000 to nearly 3,700 foot-pounds of muzzle energy. Pick your power level; most .45-70 loads are suitable for bear. I also prefer the .45-70

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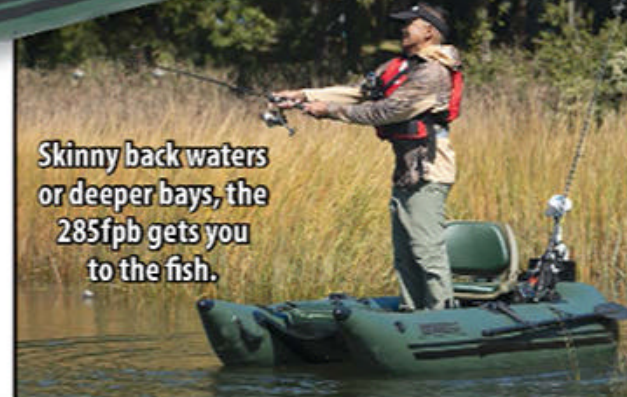
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to a shotgun slug because—given the 25- to 75-yard shot distances—I can place the bullet from the .45-70 with more precision. And, too, most .45-70 lever guns are compact and easy to handle from a blind or in a tree stand.

Handguns can also be effective over bait. With the best deep-penetrating loads, the .357 Mag. or 10 mm Auto should work well, but neither can compete with the .44 Mag. With any handgun cartridge, avoid self-defense loads that might lack adequate penetration, and stick to hunting-specific loads like those from Federal that feature the Swift A-Frame bullet.

If you do choose to use your deer rifle, pay particular attention to bullet selection. The range will be close, with bullets impacting at near muzzle velocity. This can overstress some common cup-and-core bullets that have worked to perfection for you on deer at distance. When hunting over bait with cartridges that have muzzle velocities faster than 2,800 fps, lean toward the premium bonded, partitioned or mono-metal bullets to ensure you get the penetration you need.

WITH HOUNDS

When hunting bears with hounds, shot distances are very short—often measured in feet instead of yards—because you’re shooting your bear out of a tree. Just as with spot-and-stalk or hunting over bait, a good deer rifle will get the job done. But here again, be practical in your bullet selection. Making a good shot and killing the bear as quickly as possible is essential in this scenario. You don’t want a wounded, angry bear at the base of the tree in the middle of



This big boar black bear fell to a downloaded .375 Ruger, but most cartridges offering ballistics similar to the .308 Win. will work.

a pack of dogs and a bunch of hunters. Once that happens, taking another shot becomes treacherous.

If your standard deer rifle is a bit on the heavy side, then weight is another consideration. You’ll very likely have to cover a lot of ground in a hurry, and the ground you cover is often some of the roughest in the area. Chasing after—and especially leading—a pack of hounds with a traditional long gun slung over your shoulder can be a challenge in these situations.



Pair cartridge choice for black bears to the conditions. Options vary from classics—.30-30 Win., .308 Win. and .45-70 Govt.—to the newer 6.5 Creedmoor and even some handgun loads.

If there were ever a perfect time for a takedown lever-action rifle, this would be it. I have a custom takedown Marlin 336 in .35 Rem. that separates into two 16-inch pieces. It easily fits into a backpack and can be assembled in about 20 seconds. Browning offers its BLR in a takedown version, and it’s chambered in a good selection of bear-capable cartridges.

BEAR MEDICINE

For most, the age-old cliché, “loaded for bear,” means you have a powerful gun with a lot of ammunition. If I were going to fight it out with a bear—brown or black—that’s what I’d want. But there’s a difference between going to combat with a bruin and hunting one. Sure, a wounded black bear can be dangerous, but a deer rifle with the right ammo will sort it out just fine.

If we’re talking grizz, well, that’s a bear of a different color. A good friend had to stop a charging bear on Kodiak Island. He brained it with a .35 Whelen and dropped it on the spot. When I asked him about it, he said he’d have not felt over-gunned had he been armed with a German 88 mm anti-tank cannon. **G+**

RICHARD MANN (2)

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SPIN TO WIN



SPINNING GEAR IS IDEAL WHEN TARGETING TROUT.

Story and Photos By Dr. Jason A. Halfen

Stream trout are perhaps angling's most perfect finned adversary. Gifted with exceptional eyesight—perfect for their gin-clear habitats—trout are ever wary and watchful for predators on the wing and the foot. Trout possess a powerful sense of smell; one their anadromous cousins use to return to the streams of their birth.

Stream trout are quick to detect (and reject) offerings that are tainted with synthetic materials such as insect repellent or sunscreen. Sporting streamlined bodies strengthened by life in the current,

trout make long, powerful runs toward the gnarliest cover and leap acrobatically into the air to throw lip piercings forged from sharp metal.

For trout enthusiasts, opportunities to catch these truly amazing fish across much of the country are plentiful. These range from rainbows and cutthroats patrolling classic freestone fisheries of the mountain West, to behemoth browns prowling the meandering streams of the Midwest's Driftless Region, to beautiful native brookies teeming within Appalachian creeks.

ROD SELECTION

Trout “purists” wielding long rods of bamboo, wispy monofilament tippets, and dainty assemblages of feather and fur might scoff at the notion of spinning tackle being the best method for catching trout. However, for most anglers, it is the best option for most stream trout angling situations.

Indeed, chasing trout with a spinning rod in hand can be just as technical a pursuit as any other, and often, quite rewarding in terms of both quantity and quality of trout brought to hand.

Effective spinning techniques for trout start with carefully matching the tackle setup to the fish and the conditions.



Many of the advantages of chasing trout with spinning tackle lies within the rods themselves. A dazzling array of spinning rod lengths, powers, and actions are available to support quests ranging from small-stream brook trout to migratory steelhead and everything in-between.

On a narrow, technical river, where abundant obstructions in the form of weeds and trees may abound, select a light-power, fast-action rod less than 6 feet in length. These attributes allow for precise, short-range cast placement and a fun, sporting experience with smaller

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brookies and browns. When venturing onto a wider, more open river with fewer overhead and streamside entanglements, step up to a longer rod—perhaps up to 7 feet long—with a medium-light power and fast action. These attributes enable you to cast heavier lures longer distances while successfully managing battles with resident browns and rainbows into the 20-inch class.

Spinning rods in the 8- to 9-foot range, with medium power and fast or moderate-fast actions, are appropriate on flowing tributaries that support runs of large, migratory steelhead or browns. These rods support highly effective presentations for big trout—like casting large spinners or drifting spawn sacs—and have the perfect blend of power and forgiveness to handle anadromous trout pushing the 30-inch mark.

If you're looking for a good place to start your trout rod collection, the Trout Series from St. Croix—based in the beautiful Northwoods of Wisconsin—are handcrafted, trout-specific spinning rods that offer the optimum blend of durability and performance.

PERFECT PAIRINGS

Complete your trout spinning rig with the appropriate reel. Shorter rods used to target smaller trout balance well with a 1000-series spinning reel. Step up to a 2500-series reel for medium-length rods and a 3000-series reel when fishing the longest rods for the largest trout.

In all cases, select reels with durable, lightweight construction, smooth, high-quality drags and some sort of water-proofing system to enhance reel performance and longevity. Remember, stream trout fishing is often a full-contact, in-the-water experience where gear, quite simply, gets soaked.

Unlike bass or walleye angling—where braided main lines and fluorocarbon leaders have become the norm—most stream trout fishing applications are best served using monofilament. Select 6-pound-test line for your smallest combos, 8-pound-test for medium-duty tackle, and up to 12-pound-test when chasing large, migratory fish.

The stretch of monofilament is an asset when battling strong trout in tight quarters, while its chemical composition provides for near-neutral buoyancy—rather than floating like braid or sinking

Practice good conservation by keeping only those fish you plan to eat. Gently handle and release others to fight another day.



like fluorocarbon. In situations where slower, natural presentations are offered to highly-pressured or negative fish—like drifting a spawn sac beneath a float to winter steelhead—a two or three-foot section of a light fluorocarbon leader is often appropriate to ensure near-invisibility of the line at the bait.

LURE THEM

In many trout rivers and streams across the country, a well-focused selection of classic lures will often provide many seasons of success. Begin with in-line spinners—like those offered by Mepps or Rooster Tail—that provoke strikes from lurking trout by combining flash with vibration.

I like a smaller, slightly heavier spinner in many inland trout waters, as these characteristics allow me to fish spinners fast, while maintaining the lure close to the bottom. Don't be dainty when chasing migratory fish; rather, select a spinner that is well-suited for bass

or smaller pike. Remember, trout are apex predators in most of their natural habitats and won't hesitate to attack a lure that seems to be too large to anglers.

Fold in some floating, minnow-profile baits like original floating Rapalas in sizes 7, 9 or even 11 for the largest trout. Carry a selection of split shot weights to help pull the Rapala toward the bottom, where current is reduced, and trophy trout lurk.

Complete your tackle trifecta with some 1/16- and 1/8-ounce jigs. A black or brown marabou, or sparsely tied bucktail jig, expertly mimics many of the prey items that stream trout browse upon, and are excellent choices to fish through long, deep pools.

What else do you need for trout success with spinning tackle? Hopefully a pair of waders that don't leak, a net with a reasonably long handle, and a pair of quality polarized sunglasses. Of course, don't forget a creel when planning to invite a few trout home for dinner. **G-I**



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LESSONS LEARNED

TIPS AND TRICKS FROM EXPERTS IMPROVE YOUR EFFICIENCY IN THE OUTDOORS.

By Scott Linden

Guides and other experienced outdoor enthusiasts often share their knowledge during downtime in camp. Better pay attention.

I'll never forget watching someone's tent wheeling its way across the blustery desert because the guy lines were tied with granny knots. It was another reminder that as with most things in life, there is a right way to do something once, and plenty of wrong ways to do it then re-do it. The problem is, in this modern world, gadgets and gewgaws will do many things better than we ever could in city and suburban life, but "out there," not so true. And even if you were a Boy Scout, those useful skills and knowledge have a way of falling out of your mental filing cabinet.

So, here are some tricks I learned from guides, cowpokes, grizzled trappers and other folks smarter than I, who probably learned the hard way, too. Some will make your day afield more productive. A few will make you the "cool uncle" in the field and around camp.

SHARPEN A KNIFE

Chuck Buck, founder of Buck Knives, taught me this. Grip the knife, extending your index finger along the "spine," on the top edge of the blade. Try for a 10- to 15-degree angle of blade to whetstone—the key is maintaining the same angle for both sides of the blade—so

note where the spine lies in relation to the pad of your index finger.

If you have sharpening stone oil (or any other oil), use it. It keeps the friction (and blade-damaging heat) to a minimum. Be generous, because it also carries away the bits of stone and blade that gum up the sharpening process. Water or saliva will do in a pinch.

Make about a dozen strokes on the rough-grit side with moderate pressure on the blade. Stroke as if you're trying to shave a bit of the stone off, not back and forth, just the one direction. Swap hands, check your finger-spine angle, and repeat for the other side of the blade. Turn to the fine-grit side and do the same. Unless you're performing surgery, that'll do.

TELL TIME

Extend your arm to full length, palm vertical to the ground. Cock your wrist so you can see your palm with fingers stacked atop each other. Raise your hand until your index finger is just under the bottom of the sun. Count fingers between the bottom of the sun and the horizon. Each finger is about 15 minutes of remaining daylight (go ahead, there's time for one more cast).

WALK THIS WAY

Avoid twisted ankles—or worse—by stepping to the low spots in rocky terrain, rather than teetering on the tops of rocks. They could roll, you could slide. This works well when wading a boulder-strewn river, too. Save your leg muscles for the pack out when encountering tangles of big logs, by stepping over, not on, them. Wheezing and puffing up a steep slope? Take a hint from Himalayan sherpas who stop for a second as each leg is fully extended on the "up" step.

TAKE BETTER PHOTOS

If you want to make a statement, go to art school. To take decent shots to share with friends, read on. After a few establishing shots to create a sense of scale (tiny guy at the foot of monolithic cliff), fill the frame with your subject: friend holding trophy bass, dog with pheasant in his mouth, backpackers loaded up and ready to go.

Most magazine-worthy shots are a bit asymmetrical. Move the subject just a bit to the left, right, toward one corner. On most phones, remember to focus on your subject before you de-center it. The eyes really are the window to the soul,

and if they are invisible due to shadow, your photos have less personality. Have your subject push up his hat brim and take off his sunglasses.

LEARN A FEW KNOTS

The ability to tie a few helpful knots separates the men from the boys. You'll find a multitude of uses for a trucker's hitch, taut line hitch, bowline, square knot and two half hitches. Hint: Make knots easier to tie, from fishing line to cargo rope, by giving yourself more "tag" end to work with. To learn how to tie knots for specific tasks, watch them in action at animatedknots.com

CRACK A COLD ONE

Open a beer or soda bottle without an opener. Grasp the bottle's neck with your non-dominant hand like a baseball bat, so only the cap shows above your grip. With your other hand, insert a spoon, cigarette lighter base or other rigid tool under the cap edge, using the knuckle of



When sharpening a knife, try to maintain a blade angle of 10 to 15 degrees to the whetstone, and make smooth strokes in one direction.

your thumb as a fulcrum. Carefully lever the cap off; you don't want to waste any.

STAY WARM IN A SLEEPING BAG

Wear dry sleeping apparel. The clothes you wore all day likely are full of perspiration and will wick internal heat from your body. Eat or drink something warm before bed (I prefer hot buttered rum). Buy a sleeping bag with enough room in the foot area; toes compressing insulation are a sure route to misery. Use a sleeping pad to insulate you from the cold ground or air circulating below your cot. Put a waterproof ground sheet (vapor barrier) under you or your

tent to prevent bone-chilling moisture from seeping into your sleeping bag.

SAVE YOUR ROD TIP

When busting brush hiking to that favorite stream, turn your rod around so the tip is behind you. You'll tangle less, and minimize chances of catching your tip-top on the ground, in the bushes or

against a tree trunk. Once you get to that honey hole, you'll have one less excuse for not catching fish.

USE A BINO BETTER

Keep your eyes on the prize. When you see a big buck, for instance, slowly lift the binocular up to your eyes while they remain focused on the target. He's still there, isn't he?

Most of these tips won't help you wiggle out of a survival situation, catch more fish, or connect with that 8-pointer you've been hunting. But you'll be the envy of your peers in the outdoors—even if they won't admit it. 

SCOTT LINDEN



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ACCESSING PRIVATE HUNTING LAND

FINANCIAL INCENTIVES FOR LANDOWNERS ARE KEY TO ENSURING MORE HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES.

By Andrew McKean

One of the more head-turning results of the National Deer Association's latest report on the status of wild deer and deer hunting in North America was the revelation that nearly 90 percent of deer killed by hunters in the Midwest, Southeast and Northeast last year were tagged on private land.

That's astounding, especially considering the mantra of "Public Land Hunters" and "Keep It Public" that's resounded through various conservation groups over the past couple of years.

The reality is that, for most American whitetail hunters in the crucible of deer hunting, private land is where it's at, or at least where the deer are at. The NDA report didn't detail how hunters secured access to this bastion of buck habitat, but I can guess it was a combination of paid leases, land owned by friends and family, and old-fashioned door-knocking.

Not one of those access solutions is particularly durable, which is why I maintain we need to pay closer attention to how we hunters both retain and grow access to the most perishable commodity in rural America: private-land hunting access.



Sign of the times? Opening private lands to public hunting is one of the tools federal and state agencies are using to manage deer populations.

The NDA report suggested a couple of solutions. One, widespread adoption of the sort of private-land access brokerage programs that are so popular in the western U.S. Montana's Block Management Program is a good example. In that case, private landowners are paid a lump enrollment plus additional money for every day a hunter accesses their land. The payments are derived from a portion of hunter license fees, which has created a sort of perpetual motion machine of access generating more license fees, which then pays for more access.

Surprisingly, only a handful of states east of the Mississippi River have adopted this sort of user-pays/user-benefits system. The NDA report indicated that only three of 13 states in the Northeast offer a formal private-land access program, and, unfortunately, the trend is negative. Just nine years ago, six of those Northeastern states had access programs.

The trend is slightly more positive in the American Southeast, where four of 11 states surveyed offered formal access programs last year.

The lack of participation in formalized access programs might be because Eastern landowners aren't especially interested in allowing just anyone to hunt their land. That's borne out by a concurrent survey of hunters conducted by the American Hunting Lease Association that found that 80 percent of respondents had a prior relationship with the landowner before accessing the land for hunting.

That same survey indicated that most of the hunting access was granted for free, without expectation of either a cash payment or in-kind gratuities. Some 69 percent of respondents told surveyors with the American Hunting Lease Association that they were not worried about losing their private-land access, but also that they were resistant to paying for hunting access.

One way to read these two surveys—one focused on supply of and the other on demand for hunting access—is that American deer hunters have a lot to lose. One generational change can turn a free hunting spot into a pay-to-play property. That's where access programs can take some of the uncertainty out of this arrangement that's helping wildlife agencies manage deer populations across the eastern U.S.

But there's another player on the field. It's the United States Department of Agriculture, which delivers provisions of the Farm Bill, revised every five years or so. The Farm Bill for the last couple of iterations has included a provision that allows farmers to get additional federal payments for providing hunting access to their land. The program is called Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP), and it has opened some 3 million acres in 15 states to free public hunting.

The federal program increases payments going to farmers for conservation benefits if they allow some public

hunting. It's not a huge acreage (considering Montana's Block Management Program provides hunting access to more than 6 million acres), but a provision in this year's Farm Bill would reauthorize the program at no less than \$150 million over five years. That investment could double or even triple the scale of the program.

Congress will debate provisions of the 2023 Farm Bill this summer, and there's never been a better time to help shape the outcome to ensure federal funds work for hunters, landowners and wildlife managers. Here are a few provisions to push for as VPA-HIP is renegotiated:

- Extend the duration of these access contracts from annual to five-year awards. That longer-term arrangement would ensure program continuity.
- Pay premiums for small parcels of high-quality land. Many of these Farm Bill payments go to large-scale farmers who receive other USDA program benefits. But smaller landowners, like many of

those in the East and Northeast, would be more willing to participate if the rental rates increased. Surely access to an acre of prime Ohio whitetail habitat is more valuable than access to an acre of South Dakota wheat stubble.

- Allow states and private groups to match Farm Bill payments. Imagine how many more participants we could have if local conservation groups contributed to a kitty that doubled or tripled the VPA-HIP payments local farmers received.
- Consider a "known participant" roster for hunters who access private land enrolled in Farm Bill programs. One of the barriers to entry for some private landowners is they'd like to know hunters who access their land will be ethical and responsible. State programs that certify participants through advanced hunter education courses could ease those concerns and put more public hunters on private land, ensuring this vital link between landowners and hunters remains intact well into the future. 



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A black bear is the central focus of the image, standing amidst dense evergreen foliage. The bear's dark fur is thick and textured, and its eyes are fixed on the viewer. The background is a soft-focus forest scene with various shades of green and brown. The title 'LOOMING LARGE' is superimposed over the lower half of the image in a large, white, sans-serif font.

LOOMING LARGE

THE WILD WOODLANDS AROUND HIGH LEVEL, ALBERTA, ARE HOME TO
BLACK BEARS OF INCREDIBLE SIZE, STEALTH AND, AT TIMES, SPUNK.

By Drew Warden



NICK TREHEARNE PHOTOGRAPHY

Bouncing along on the ATV through northern Alberta's mixed stands of poplar, birch and spruce among wide-open muskeg swamplands, I felt it: the unmistakable excitement—and unease—of venturing into an unknown wilderness. Shawn Mack, a guide at W&L Guide Service and son of owner Wally Mack, expertly drove us on the scant path he and his brother Kristen, another guide, had carved out in the bush weeks earlier with chainsaws.

The route saw us juking fallen trees, bounding into and out of small depressions and cruising through open stretches among grassy bogs. Each minute, it took us deeper into the region's wild public land (crown land, as the locals call it), which seemed to extend indefinitely. In one open spot, Shawn stopped the ATV, peering down at the soft mud.

"That's a bear," he nodded, gesturing toward an impression in the dirt. "Decent one, I think."

Black bears were exactly why my traveling companions and I had journeyed thousands of miles into another country amidst a global pandemic. The trip itself had already been delayed two years running due to COVID. Meanwhile, in that time, the bears hadn't been hunted at all by outsiders, and we'd be among the first to do so this spring.

I was excited for the opportunity—and nervous. It was my first bear hunt, and other hunters' stories had stoked an already-overactive imagination. In the months, days and even hours leading up to this, I'd envisioned countless ways I might perish by claws and teeth deep in the Albertan hinterlands.

The previous day at camp, roughly 10 miles outside the town of High Level, fellow hunters spoke of various hair-raising first- or second-hand encounters. The wildest involved a hunter shooting a black bear that had climbed all the way up his stand until it had one paw on the very platform where the hunter stood. However, the most dangerous scenario, all seemed to agree, was having a cub in the tree above you with an angry mama bear on the ground below.

I hoped to avoid both situations. As Shawn and I veered off onto a different track toward the stand I'd be hunting, my heart thumped along in excitement mixed with a bit of fear.

SETTING THE TABLE

W&L Guide Service operates 35 baiting sites spread across roughly 200 kilometers (124 miles) of crown land outside of High Level. The typical site is quite the spread. A rotting beaver carcass inside a plastic bucket is hung on a ridgepole between two trees. Cabled to another tree, meanwhile, is a 55-gallon drum filled with bait, which bears can access through a small opening in the side. The bait is an array of oats, chips, doughnuts, bread, syrup, grease, pop and more, which guides blend with a concrete mixer in camp. They also slather some icing on the barrel and often on a nearby log or fallen tree. Depending on the spot, the hunter sits in either an elevated, hand-built, triangular wooden platform between three trees or a more conventional metal ladder stand.

My first evening sit (bears are most active then, and High Level's May sunsets often occur around 10:30 to 11 p.m.) would be on the triangular-shaped variety. However, after pulling into the bait site, I'd barely noticed the stand before my eyes spied something dark and formidable in the woods beyond. A black bear was already there and tentatively advancing toward the bait through the trees.

Shawn left the ATV running and started rebaiting the site. As he worked, he had me watch the bear with my gun in hand. While he strung up the beaver, another bear approached from our right, a singular mass of black fur partially obscured by the spruces. I was immediately on edge.

Any time the first bear came too close, Shawn bluffed him back. The second, meanwhile, seemed content waiting at a distance for dinner. Once Shawn finished with the bait, he had me get in my stand.

"Should be an interesting sit," he said, grinning knowingly before throwing a leg over the four-wheeler and leaving me alone amongst the trees.

JUMPING RIGHT IN

Shawn's statement was a prescient one. Hours passed like minutes as the two bears performed an elaborate show, which I observed from my front-row seat. It proved a healthy mix of comedy and drama.

The first bear struggled mightily—and eventually successfully—to get at the hanging beaver. He'd scale a ridgepole tree, latch onto the bucket with



W&L Guide Service uses metal ladder stands as well as hand-built wooden stands. Bears have been known to climb into both.

JEFF JOHNSTON

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BEAR NECESSITIES

Take good gear for Alberta bruins.

On my hunt, I used the synthetic-stocked **Mossberg Patriot Predator in .450 Bushmaster** (\$568; mossberg.com) and the walnut-stocked standard **Patriot in .308 Win.** (\$669). Their spiral-fluted, dual-lug bolts and detachable box magazines proved utterly reliable. Meanwhile, the user-adjustable LBA trigger broke perfectly. Both guns have hassle-free optics mounts and are great for bear and other big game.

A wide field of view and good light transmission in low light are key for baited bear hunts. Shots are often close, and most activity happens late. **Swarovski's Z8i 1-8x24** (\$3,188; swarovskioptik.com) and **Z8i 1.7-13.3x42 P** (\$4,166) both offer a wide field of view and have the new Flexchange 4A-IF reticle, which I loved. The illuminated dot reticle has a switch for bright daytime or low illumination. Hold the top intensity switches for 3 seconds, and you also get an illuminated circle around the center dot. It's great for seeing your aiming point on a bear's black fur.

For baited bears in thick forest, you want loads that penetrate deeply and carry ample energy. The **.450 Bushmaster 250-grain FTX Hornady Black** (\$40; hornady.com) and **.308 Win. 165-grain SST Superformance** (\$44) loads delivered. The FTX's one-piece, high-antimony lead core, mechanically locked to the jacket with the InterLock ring, worked flawlessly on my 7-foot black bear. And the Superformance's progressive powders and SST (Super Shock Tip) bullet provided rapid expansion and a devastating wound channel in my second bear, which collapsed inside of 15 yards.

A hardy case to securely and legally transport firearms, like **Plano's Field Locker Element Double Long Gun Case** (\$299.99; planooutdoors.com) is crucial on long journeys. Its high-density, customizable foam offers custom-fit protection, and the wheels and reinforced padlock gates make safe transport through airports easy. It also has a heavy-duty waterproof Dri-Loc gasket and a pressure-release valve to equalize pressure due to altitude or temperature changes. The hard case held up over six flights and lots of rough handling, and the rifles inside remained perfectly zeroed.



the beaver, fall on his rear and then get right back after it. Sometimes, he'd be suspended in the air, with nothing but his teeth clamping down on the bucket.

Meanwhile, the inevitable confrontations between the two bears over food provided ample drama. Whenever the second one came too close to the bait, the first would run him off, the brief foot chases serving as cautionary reminders of the bears' speed (up to 30 mph, according to some sources). Several times, I worried the dominant one would drive the submissive bear right up my tree, but thankfully he didn't.

Then there were clashes when both would rise on hind legs, slap and nip at each other, all while bellowing a series of guttural clicking noises. At one point, after winding me, the dominant one—curious of my presence—put his front paws on my stand tree before I shouted him back down. A third bear even joined the mix later.

It was like sitting inside a Planet Earth documentary, except with a 360-degree view and a real, though minimal, risk of bodily harm. Incidentally, Shawn later described this as his favorite part of hunting black bears over bait: watching them interact with the goodies, each other and the world around them.

Many people have reservations about hunting animals over bait. The typical argument is the method isn't as sporting as, say, spotting and stalking an animal from a distance. To the contrary, though, setting up and managing bait sites is a ton of work. Plus, hunters get ample time to watch and judge a bear, which helps prevent shooting a sow with cubs or taking a younger male.

Before we left camp, we'd all been encouraged to take only bigger boars—those larger than 6 feet. As a newbie, I didn't want to make a mistake on a smaller bear, especially on the first sit. So, I exercised perhaps more restraint than needed. It didn't help, as I discovered, that bears can be difficult to field judge, as even veteran bear hunters in camp admitted.

Despite the built-in reference points of the hanging beaver (roughly 8 feet off the ground) and the barrel itself (about 4 feet tall), I never felt fully confident in taking a shot. I ended my night without notching a tag, but I'd seen three bears and some of the most incredible wildlife viewing of my life. Hardly an unsuccessful sit.

DREW WARDEN (BOTTOM); RON SPOMER (OPPOSITE)

Two evenings later, however, I was still coming up empty. Subsequent sits had been in different stands than the first night. The second passed uneventfully, with nothing but a raven to occupy me. On my third sit, a bear came in late, but did so timidly, which made me question his size; the bigger bears, I was told, usually approach with some swagger. Unfortunately, not long after I was able to compare his size against the 55-gallon drum, he plopped down on the ground and didn't move the rest of the night, despite my yelling.

Others in camp found success, though. Linda Powell, Mossberg's director of media relations, took an excellent 7-foot-7-inch boar the second evening. Meanwhile, fellow hunter and writer Mike Dickerson shot two 7-foot-plus bears less than 30 minutes apart—from the same stand—with his biggest matching Linda's in size. Sean McGee, Hornady's director of operations, also shot a 7-footer, while another writer, Chad Adams, took one measuring 6 feet 8 inches. I was beginning to feel a little left out, and the pressure to tag a bear was slowly mounting.



How a bear approaches bait provides clues to its age and size. Younger, smaller bears often come in more cautiously. However, sometimes large bruins will sneak in, too.

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The author took his first-ever black bear with Mossberg's Patriot Predator in .450 Bushmaster and Hornady Black ammo.

This is a shooter, I told myself. If he gives me a chance, I'm taking it.

I settled my scope's illuminated reticle near his vitals and flicked off my rifle's safety. I just needed him to cooperate now.

Eventually, he did, placing his right front leg far enough forward for a comfortable broadside shot. I took up the trigger's slack, then pressed gently, touching off a Hornady 250-grain FTX bullet from about 20 yards away.

The bear bucked at the impact and darted off to my right. He took a few

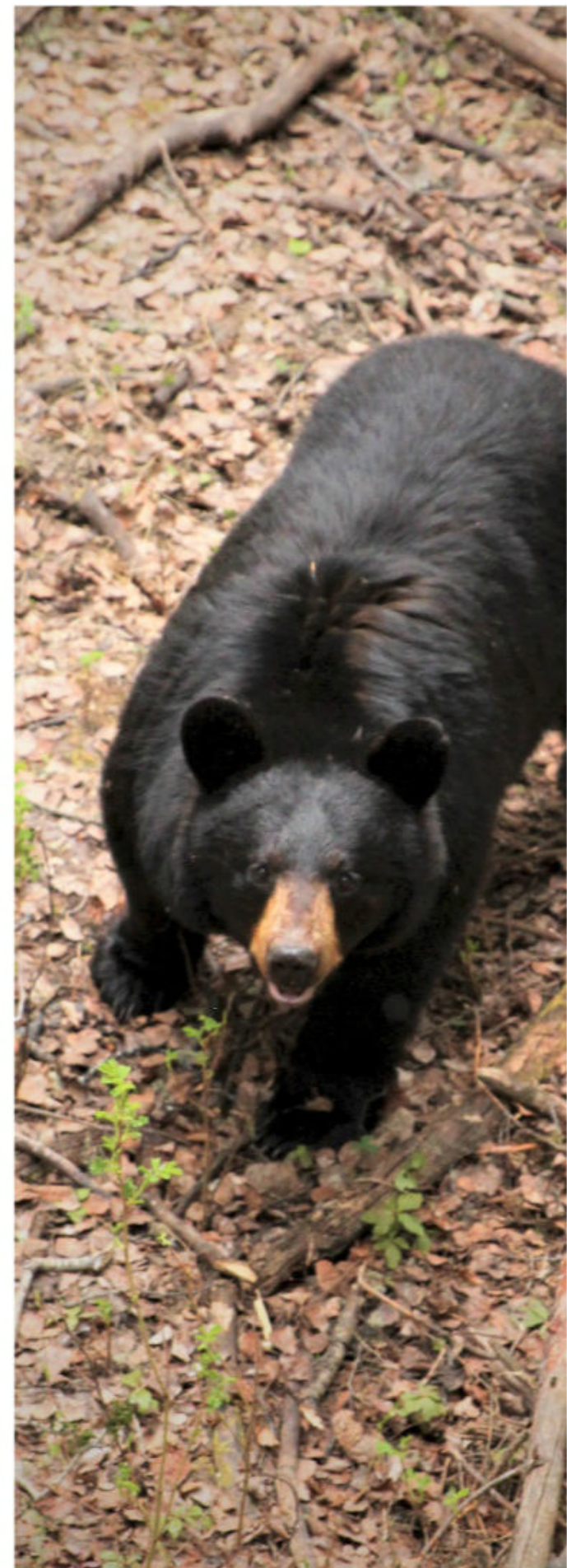
FINDING REDEMPTION

My fourth sit would be in a stand called "Tolko," due to its proximity to land owned by Tolko Industries, a large lumber company. The stand was another hand-built platform, like the first night, but had rails on which to rest my rifle. It also had more limited firing lanes between trees, and to my right, past a few poplars, was a large clearing with another thick stand of spruces beyond it.

The first few hours passed without action. Around 6 o'clock, out of the corner of my left eye, I saw a bear ease in stealthily from the trees. The disparity between approaches was incredible.

Some bears you could hear ambling through the woods a football field away, ungracefully snapping branches and rustling leaves. Others, like this one, walked almost noiselessly, silent black masses sliding through the forest.

The bear made a big circle around the bait, coming within 15 yards of me, before finally sauntering into the site. He licked at some icing on a log for a while, but a tree blocked my shot. Then he moved past the bait barrel briefly and started pawing at the hanging beaver. When I saw that he could reach it standing on his hind legs, I knew he was big, and when he'd passed by the drum, his back had been just a little below the top.



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steps into the clearing as I cycled the rifle's bolt and chambered a fresh round. Then he ran along the timber's edge before angling back into the same stand of trees he'd left. I saw him stagger and go down, then try to run again, before ultimately collapsing near some fallen trees 40 yards ahead in the forest. I sat back in my stand, incredulous and trying to fully take in the moment.

Back in camp, the mood that night was quite celebratory. Every hunter in our group now had at least one bear down,

Hunting over bait allows hunters to watch bears for long periods, which helps ensure females with cubs and young males aren't taken. It's also quite the show.

SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



Centuries ago, Persians, Tibetans and Mayans considered turquoise a gemstone of the heavens, believing the striking blue stones were sacred pieces of sky. Today, the rarest and most valuable turquoise is found in the American Southwest— but the future of the blue beauty is unclear.

On a recent trip to Tucson, we spoke with fourth generation turquoise traders who explained that less than five percent of turquoise mined worldwide can be set into jewelry and only about twenty mines in the Southwest supply gem-quality turquoise.

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and Linda and Mike had both tagged out on two each. The fourth night had been a great success.

In the end, after six evenings of hunting, our group would score six bears over 7 feet, including the one I'd shot from the "Tolko" stand. The rest were all around 6 feet or better, with some approaching 7 feet.

I finished filling my tags on the last night by returning to the same stand I'd hunted on the first one. With less than two hours of legal hunting left on the whole trip, I took that very first dominant boar I had seen on my initial sit with a well-placed 165-grain Hornady SST from a Mossberg Patriot in .308 Win. at 15 yards. Upon impact, the bear spun away from the bait, blood dumping from his exit wound, and piled up about 6 feet from the base of my stand. It was a perfect end to a great week of hunting.

All told, our group took 11 bears with four different cartridges—.350 Legend, 6.5 PRC, .308 Win. and .450 Bushmaster. Even better, all were large boars—a testament to the sound judgment from hunters and the impressive size of the bears that roam Alberta's woodlands. 🐻



BACKWOODS BASECAMP

Ample creature comforts may come as a surprise at these remote quarters for bear hunters.

Wally Mack's W&L Guide Service (wlguides.com) pursues black bears from a comfortable camp just outside High Level, Alberta. The perfect staging ground for outings into the wilderness, the camp has an assortment of cabins with cots, mattresses and pillows as well as wood stoves or heating units. There's a separate kitchen and dining area where Wally's wife, Louisa, prepares fabulous homecooked meals. Hunters will also appreciate the shower facility with on-demand hot water.

While the camp's look has changed significantly in its history—beginning first as a wall-tent camp more than 25 years ago—it's always been set up near High Level. According to guide Shawn Mack, this is due to the area's phenomenal bear population and the abundance of huge black bears. The camp's biggest spring black bear measured 8 feet, 6 inches and weighed more than 600 pounds. Shawn also says the camp has had a 100 percent success rate, aside from hunters who've passed on really good bears in pursuit of true giants. Overall, it's an exceptional place to stay and hunt if you're looking for lots of action and a trophy black bear.



The author's second bear fell on the last evening of the hunt. The feisty boar dropped less than 15 yards from where he was shot.

OREN WARDEN (2)

Strike King
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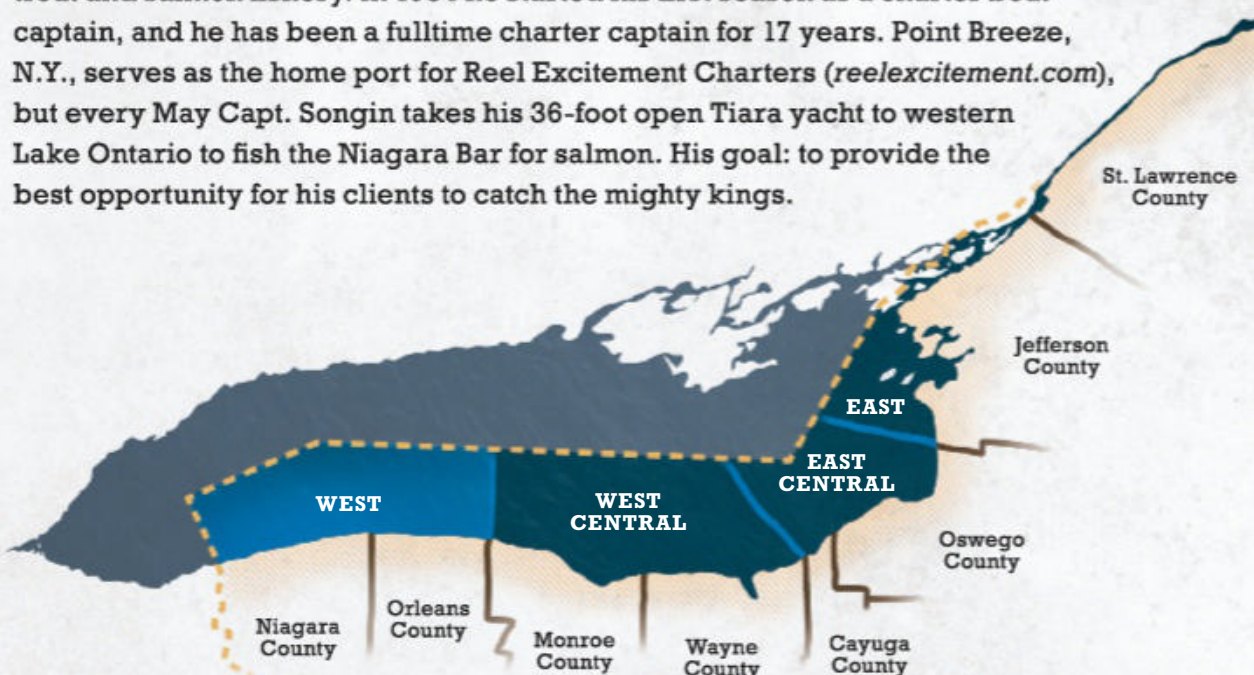
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Although Capt. Bob Songin used to be an avid smallmouth bass fisherman, a friend took him to Lake Ontario in 1980 and “that was the end of my bass career.” Capt. Songin quickly became enamored with the lake’s trout and salmon fishery. In 1984 he started his first season as a charter boat captain, and he has been a fulltime charter captain for 17 years. Point Breeze, N.Y., serves as the home port for Reel Excitement Charters (reelexcitement.com), but every May Capt. Songin takes his 36-foot open Tiara yacht to western Lake Ontario to fish the Niagara Bar for salmon. His goal: to provide the best opportunity for his clients to catch the mighty kings.



ON THE WATER

with **Capt. Bob Songin** of Reel Excitement Charters

Name your favorite fishing tactic for May.

I like to fish the top 60 feet of water, typically with spoons, focusing on kings with some cohos mixed in.

What’s your go-to lure when targeting salmon?

A gold 42nd spoon [such as that offered by Dreamweaver] works well in the color of water we’re fishing in May. It’s a dark-green, emerald spoon on a gold blank with a gold and silver ladderback on it. The primary food source for salmon in the lake is alewives, and that’s what this spoon imitates.

Describe a typical day on the lake in May.

We’re looking for eight kings and four cohos [a four-person limit for Lake Ontario]. We leave the dock at 6:30 a.m. and return to the dock at 2 p.m. Usually at that time of the year, though, the fishing is so good that we don’t have to spend that much time out there.

What surprises anglers most about Lake Ontario?

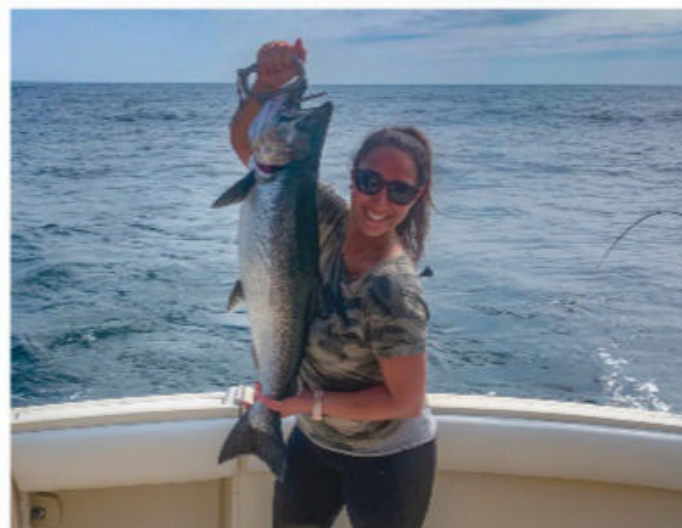
The strength of the salmon—it’s the truth! First-time lake anglers don’t expect a salmon to bite a lure and run off 500 or 600 feet of line. A lot of time after the fish makes that first run, the client is too tired to land the fish. I’ve seen a lot of “community” fish landed where one guy hands the rod off to another on the boat because he’s tired of fighting it.

How long does the fight last?

An average king weighs 15 to 19 pounds in May, and it will take a good 25 minutes to land one. The water is colder in May, and salmon are cold-water species, so the fish fight really hard right to the boat.

Why is booking a charter a good way to get into the action?

Especially for people new to the fishery, booking a charter gives them an idea of what’s going on in terms of the fish’s habits and what we’re doing to catch them. All they have to do is bring something to eat and drink—that’s important when we’re out there for eight hours—and they get a lot of enjoyment and knowledge without having to do much of the work.

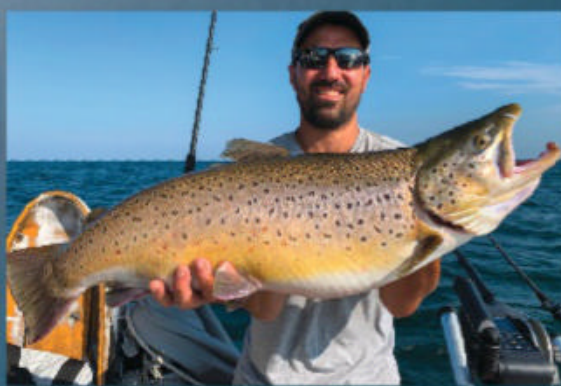


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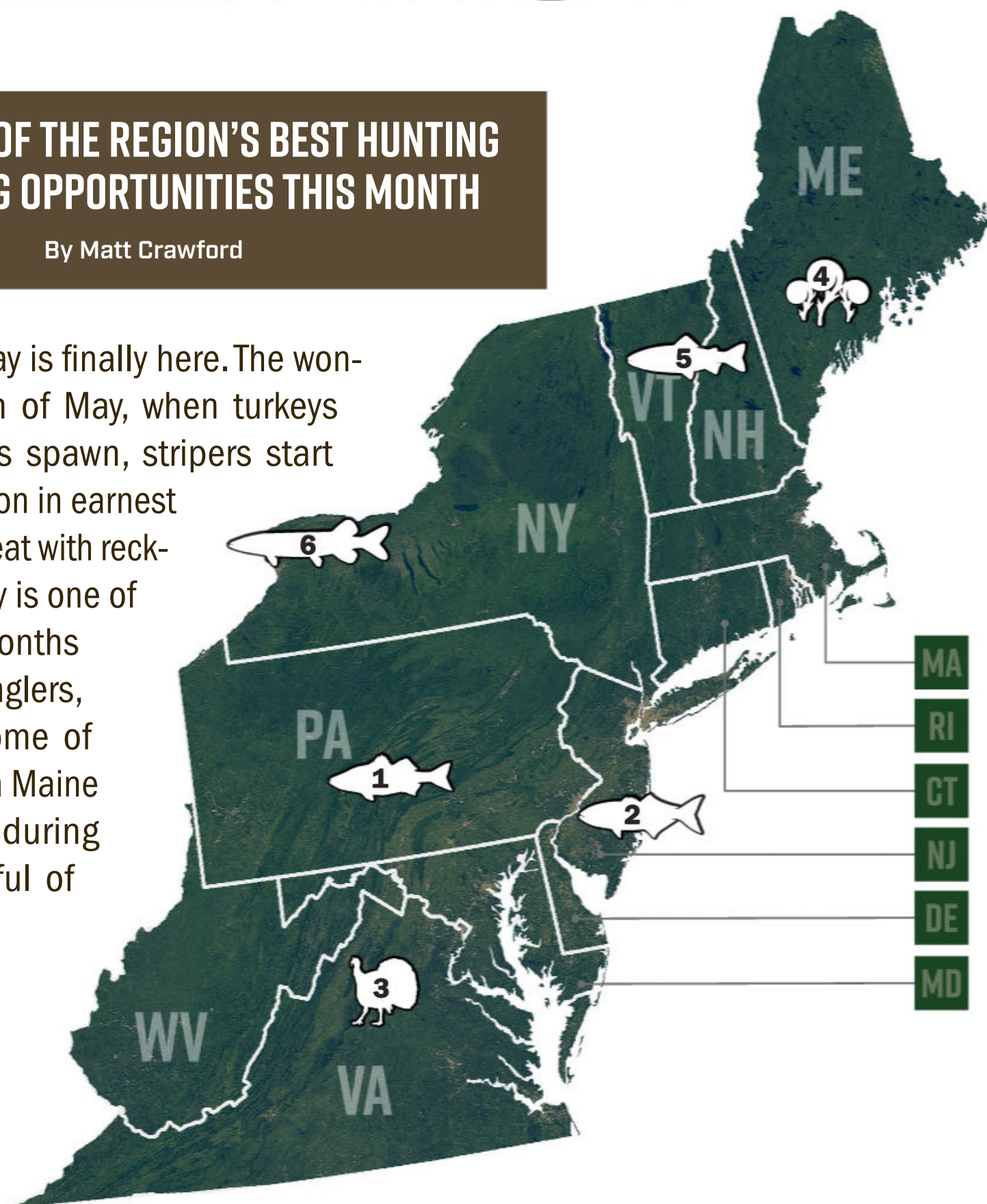


AROUND THE EAST

A SAMPLING OF THE REGION'S BEST HUNTING AND FISHING OPPORTUNITIES THIS MONTH

By Matt Crawford

At long last, May is finally here. The wonderful month of May, when turkeys gobble, bass spawn, stripers start their migration in earnest and trout begin to eat with reckless abandon. May is one of the can't-miss months for hunters and anglers, and these are some of the best bets, from Maine to the Virginias, during this most bountiful of spring months.





BIG LAKE FUN

Despite being almost 30 miles long and more than 8,300 acres in size, Raystown Lake in south-central Pennsylvania still makes yearly lists of “hidden gems” in the Keystone State. With healthy populations of largemouths, smallmouths, stripers, walleyes and trout, it’s high time to explore the big reservoir in greater detail. Stripers remain the main attraction here, and live bait is the ticket this time of year. As the month progresses, the striper action is best in the northern part of the lake (from Seven Points Beach up to the Raystown Dam). Home to Pennsylvania’s state-record striper (53 pounds, 12 ounces), Raystown is serviced by several guides in the event you don’t feel like a DIY adventure.



SPRINGTIME BLUES

Up and down the coast, one way to tell that spring has arrived is to check the local fishing reports. If the bluefish are in, so is spring. Blues can be caught from piers, rocky points and wide-open beaches on a variety of baits. This month, they’ll be found biting almost any bait that swims from the Chesapeake Bay up to about Cape Cod. I like using Kastmaster spoons with a stripe of blue. Super effective and easy to cast, they are also rugged enough to retain their finish even after endless tussles with toothy blues. While bluefish can have a strong taste and oily meat, they can be excellent to eat if smoked correctly.



GOBS OF GOBBLES

From West Virginia to Downeast Maine, it’s spring turkey season in the East. Bird populations and hunter success rates vary widely from state to state, with Rhode Island’s yearly spring harvest usually just shy of 300 birds, while Virginians tag close to 20,000. Generally, the past few years have been extremely beneficial to turkey hunters in the region. Maine, for instance, set a record in 2022 with 7,081 birds taken. Maryland saw a spring turkey kill last year that was just 2 percent off the record thanks partly to turkey numbers being at all-time highs in the central and southern parts of the state. If you’re up for a public-lands challenge, block off a week and try hunting birds in Vermont, Maine and New Hampshire and cross the “Northern New England Slam” off your list.



FIND THE FIDDLEHEADS

Know what pairs well with a wild turkey roast? Or a mess of walleye fillets? Or a plate of pan-fried brook trout? The ubiquitous fiddlehead fern, that’s what. Each year at this time, fiddleheads begin cropping up in river valleys and stream ravines, roadside ditches and the wet seeps of woodlands. The University of Maine extension says fiddleheads are best at about 2 to 6 inches tall when a portion of the tasty stem can be harvested, but while the fiddlehead is still tightly curled. The easiest way to harvest fiddleheads is by snapping them off by hand or cutting them with a knife.



YOUR OWN FLY-FISH CAMP

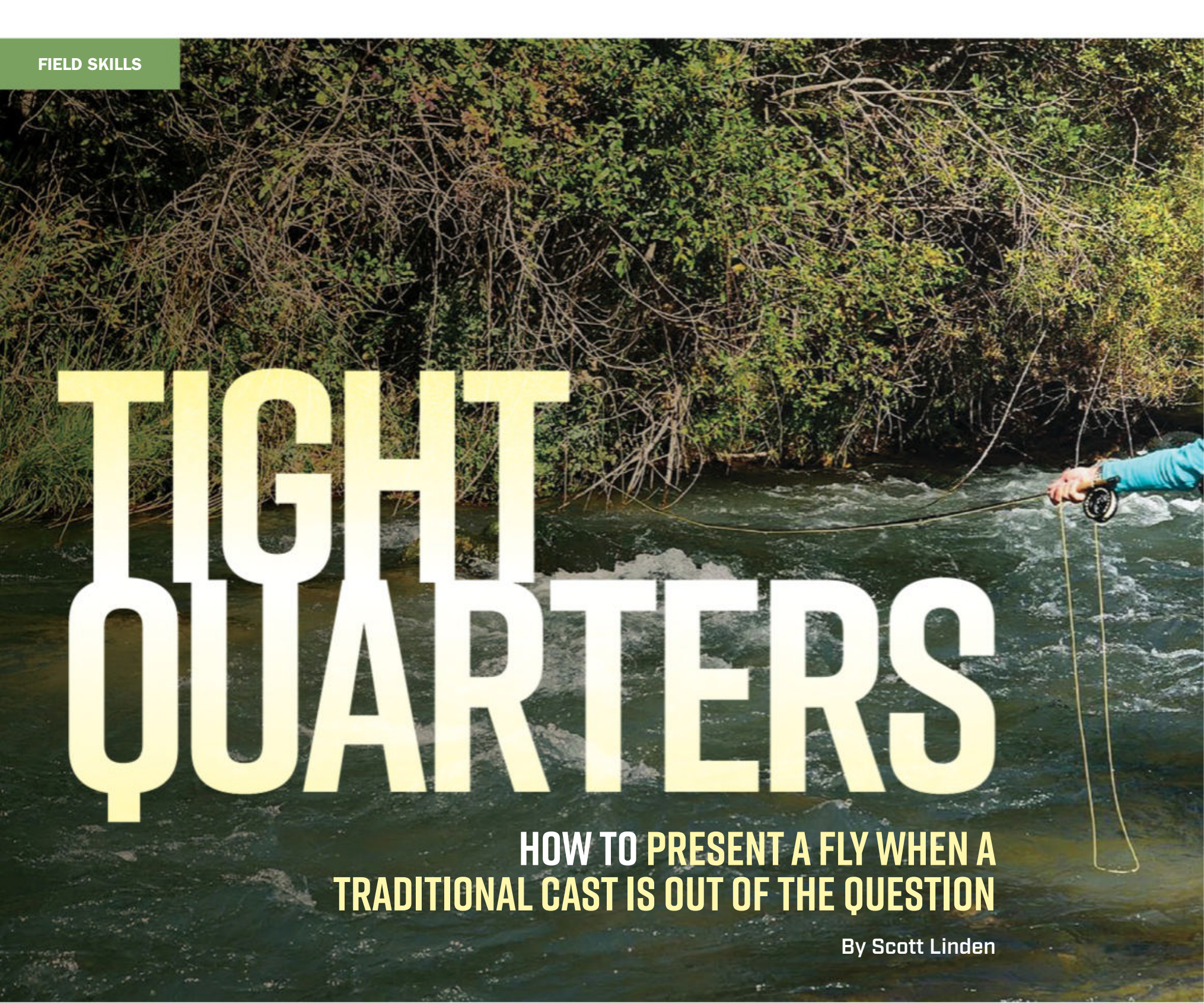
What do you think a private, eight-room cabin with full-service meals on a remote brook trout pond would cost for a night? In Vermont, you and up to 15 friends can rent the whole place for about \$100 a night, per person. Seyon Ranch is part of the Vermont State Park system, located in the 27,000-acre Groton State Forest. It includes access to rowboats for fly anglers to use to catch the pond’s thriving population of brook trout.



A PRODUCTIVE STRETCH

Is the lower Niagara River the single most productive stretch of river in the entire Northeast? Most likely, but don’t take our word for it. Just type “Lewiston, N.Y.” into your GPS, hook up the boat and go. This month there are football-size smallmouths begging to be caught, muskies as long as your leg and lake trout galore in the short but wide section of the lower Niagara. There is an excellent public boat launch in Lewiston (and another that’s in Youngstown near where the river flows into Lake Ontario) that will give you access to spectacular smallmouth water. The smallies are about to be on the spawn in full force and will willingly inhale a well-placed dropshot. That tactic might produce a stray muskie, too, since you can never be sure what you might bring to the boat in this jaw-dropping fishery.





TIGHT QUARTERS

HOW TO PRESENT A FLY WHEN A TRADITIONAL CAST IS OUT OF THE QUESTION

By Scott Linden

The biggest fish of the day was rising sporadically right under an overhanging branch. Like the stream itself, the casting window was small, with my only approach being downstream of the rainbow lazily finning in the crystal-clear water. The entire creek was less than a dozen feet wide, sparkling and gurgling through a claustrophobic tunnel of shrubs and gangly trees. The tips of branches bobbed in the current—another impediment foretelling a lost fly and spooked fish.

The coin-bright male would leisurely rise, float back and out of his lair, sip in a small caddis, then dart back to his safe haven. There was a 2-foot hole in the rank tangle overhanging the dark slot that was the rainbow's hiding place.

"Ain't gonna happen," I said to myself before remembering a hokey tactic—more of a parlor trick, really—known as the bow-and-arrow cast. When I showed that fish to my buddy, he did an actual double take straight out of a Three Stooges film.

Perhaps calling these "trick casts" isn't entirely accurate. But they are less-common adaptations to casts, and you should consider adding them to your fly-fishing arsenal. Some are old-school—popularized in books decades ago, but now out of favor. Others came from pure, unadulterated happenstance or hair-pulling frustration as fish taunted me from water unreachable by traditional means. Over the years, they've all led to otherwise uncatchable fish in hand. One or more of them might pay off for you.

BOW-AND-ARROW CAST

Reel in until you have about a rod's length of line and leader extending beyond the tip-top. Hold the fly by the bend of the hook. Point the rod tip toward your target and pull on the fly to put some bend in the rod. Carefully release the fly without moving your rod hand. It's not pretty, but it's better than flipping the bird to that pig of a trout basking in its hidey-hole.

BACKHAND CAST

On another creek with sinister streamside brush, I stood knee-deep in a riffle as I watched a mid-sized brown lolling in the tailout of a pool. A boulder pile kept me from going farther across. Being right-handed, a "normal" cast would have hooked tree limbs, not trout. By

B&C BECK



When streamside brush prevents a standard back cast, take matters—and the fly—into your own hands and sling-shot your offering to the waiting trout.

bringing the rod across my chest on my back cast, my line sailed through the opening downstream and then forward into the bubbles. The trout vanished with a flip of its tail, but I saved the fly.

Cock your casting arm about 45 degrees inward, so it and your rod come back to your “off” shoulder. Power your back cast to ensure the line straightens behind you. When it does, hold that angle and power your cast forward.

BACKWARD CAST

Am I the only angler who’s always on the wrong side of the stream? Often, we struggle to maintain our equilibrium on slippery rocks in strong current with a forest in the way of our back cast. And we can’t move farther into the stream because there is no “farther.” The narrow

slot between our body and the vegetated bank cuts off hope of a decent cast to a pod of brookies cavorting in a tub-sized pool upstream. But turning a back cast into a forward cast might just work.

Face downstream to give your rod more wiggle room over the stream instead of being between your body and the tree-lined bank. Cast as usual but keep your back cast a little higher to avoid lighting your fly on the water too soon. Maintain equal power on both the forward and back cast, then lay your final back cast gently in front of the fish. Turn to face upstream in time for a slashing rise ... or at least the hope of one.

STEEPLE CAST

My favorite trout stream harbors rainbows that practically launch from the water when hooked. Even a small fish punches well above its weight on this tributary of a well-known river, so it pays to touch every piece of good-looking water: slow, deep slots between boulders, and roily water spilling into tiny pools.

However, massive timber looms on the banks—trunks and limbs reaching for fly and leader. If my back cast is really an “up” cast, though, I might put

my Parachute Adams where it needs to go. In these instances, I rely on the steeple cast.

First, sweep your back cast by lifting your casting arm dramatically upward. Keep the whole mess forward of your shoulder the whole time. The line should follow, straight up. Because you’ve got gravity working against your line, it’ll take longer to straighten, so allow an extra microsecond at its zenith. Then—and this is the key—punch it forward while your hand is raised. If you simply reverse your upward sweep downward you might hook yourself, or the entire line-leader-fly may splat in a heap right in front of you. Get your fly up and then quickly out of there like the Road Runner being chased by Wile E. Coyote. Add the sound effects if it helps.

None of these casts are rocket science, though they do involve some physics. You might want to practice on your lawn first, then on more open water where the effect of current and friction on the line makes things more realistic. Use these “tricks” and you’ll save a few flies, catch an extra fish or two and impress your fly-fishing friends to no end. Sometimes, that’s the best reward. 



To execute a backhand cast, cant your casting arm toward your off shoulder at a 45-degree angle before making your back cast.

Swim LESSONS

THE SWIM JIG IS ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE—AND UNDER-UTILIZED—BAITS FOR SHALLOW-WATER BASS.

By Shane Beilue

The blazing sun was causing me to wilt by mid-afternoon, and the offshore bite I'd been pursuing on my first visit to this small reservoir just wasn't coming together. Hoping to avoid the "skunk" with a change in strategy, I spied an oasis of green bushes on a distant shoreline that gave me hope for saving the day. After a short run and idle onto the flat, I fumbled through the rod locker in search of a 3/8-ounce jig-and-plastic-trailer combo on which my hopes now rested.

The move to shallow water paid off, with three bass in the 3- to 5-pound class boated and released within 30 minutes. The jig in shallow cover saved the day; however, the jig in this case never touched the lake's bottom.

Instead, I watched the suddenness of each strike occur as the jig was retrieved at a fast clip just under the surface of the water—the kind of excitement that goes hand-in-hand swim jig fishing.

NO FLASH, NO PROBLEM

I used to wrongly assume that any bass lure retrieved horizontally through the water needed to rattle, flash or vibrate in order to get the bass' attention. The swim jig does none of that, which is precisely what makes it so effective, especially in clear water under bright skies and with low wind. The subtle, natural movement of the jig and trailer offers no negative cues to hinder the bass from attacking it under these conditions.

Additionally, the weedless nature of the swim jig makes it uniquely qualified to efficiently track through the thickest of cover—especially wood cover—and elicit a response from bass hunkered down in the shade during the brightest part of the day. Though my primary application for a swim jig is to work around wood cover, these same principles for locating bass with the jig apply to docks, lily pads and other aquatic vegetation. What follows is a breakdown of how this bait can produce for you all summer long.



Swim jig fishing can be an exercise in patience. It might take hundreds of casts before you dial in the pattern, but once you do, the bites can come quickly.



AREAS OF INTEREST

It's well established that the majority of bass in most lakes will start to move away from the shoreline immediately after the spawn as they start to school up offshore. However, there is a smaller population of bass that will remain shallow, as long as they have adequate cover to hold them. As mentioned, I most often utilize a swim jig to target bass in wood cover (scattered buckbrush, willow bushes, etc.), as the wood offers bass excellent shade to ambush their primary shallow-water forage—bluegills.

Key areas within a lake for shallow bass in summer will typically be on or near the main body of the lake. If



A tapered head and forward line tie make swim jigs well suited to horizontal retrieves.

TACKLE TALK

Rod, reel and line recommendations for swim jigs

Fishing a swim jig is a power game, so gear up accordingly. For the rod, I prefer a 7-foot to 7-foot 3-inch length. Shorter rods reduce the ability to move line quickly from a hard-charging bass, and casting accuracy can suffer if the rod is too long. Rods with a medium-heavy power rating have enough strength in the midsection for a good hookset and can muscle a heavy bass away from cover, yet they maintain a soft enough tip to assist with casting accuracy, which is critical when trying to thread the needle in cover.

Bass attacking a swim jig in shallow water can only move laterally after the initial hookset, which often has them charging directly at the boat. Therefore, faster reel speeds of 7:1 or 8:1 will accelerate the line pickup to assist with keeping pressure on a fast-moving bass.

The choice of line material leaves room for angler preference, as both heavy fluorocarbon and braid can work well. Fluorocarbon offers the advantage of lower visibility than braid in clear water and comes cleanly through woody cover without catching or digging into the branches. Braid has the advantage of having no stretch, a welcome attribute when driving the hook home at the end of a long cast. If opting for fluorocarbon, 15- to 20-pound-test weights are necessary. Braided line of 30- to 50-pound test is adequate.



A medium-heavy rod around 7 feet in length is ideal for working swim jigs.

drawing up the perfect swim jig scenario in the summer, gradually tapering flats and points with scattered bushes in 2 to 4 feet of water are ideal. If these flats are in proximity to deeper water of 8 to 10 feet, so much the better. Another high-percentage area for bass in the summer months is any isolated wood cover located in the extreme back ends of small, shallow pockets just off the main lake. Also worth noting: Since bass need a line of sight to track the quiet movement of the swim jig, water clarity of around 12 to 18 inches is ideal, thus eliminating areas of the lake that are overly muddy.

SWIM JIG ANATOMY

Obviously, any jig can be swum on the retrieve, but the tapered head and forward line tie designed to track horizontally through the water are what separates a swim jig from other jigs. Swim jigs designated as “heavy cover” will have a heavier weed guard and a beefed-up hook intended to wrestle bass away from cover without bending or flexing. Since the jig is most often retrieved within a foot or two of the surface, jig heads of 3/8- to 1/2-ounce are preferred. A plastic trailer is a must, as it increases the overall profile of the jig and provides the primary action to the lure during the retrieve. Trailer options range from twin-tail grubs and craws to small paddle tails. The choice in trailer style varies by angler, but twin-tail grubs offer the least amount of movement, which is sometimes preferable in extremely clear water. Craw-style trailers and paddle tails offer more “kick.” Trimming a swim jig’s skirt to the bend in the hook will keep it

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from impeding the action of the plastic trailer, as well as provide more bounce and flair to the skirt during the retrieve.

Color choice can vary, too, though I typically start with a white jig and trailer, even when the primary forage is bluegills. White is very visible to the bass and allows me to see the lure from a distance to observe their response to it. Therefore, if the bass are flashing at the white jig but not committing, changing to a shade like green pumpkin or watermelon will often do the trick. Black/blue combos are often the choice in slightly off-color or tannic water, so a handful of jigs and trailers in various colors gives you options to experiment and adjust on the fly.

THE TECHNIQUE

Though the swim jig is an excellent lure for drawing strikes in open water, the real power of the lure is its ability to draw reaction strikes from inactive bass holding tight to cover. The concept of a “reaction strike” is to trigger bass to eat out of instinct rather than hunger. This is often accomplished with an abrupt change of direction or speed of the lure when the swim jig collides with the fish-holding cover. This erratic action appeals to their predatory instinct to attack anything that’s vulnerable, so look to impart that action as often as possible during the retrieve. For example, when fishing the swim jig around shallow vegetation, rip the lure free when it becomes entangled in the stems and leaves. In shallow wood, deflecting the jig aggressively off the branches will provide the appearance of a disoriented and susceptible baitfish.

A tactic that’s served me well around shallow wood is to make a long cast beyond the cover and use the rod tip to direct the line right through the top of the bushes when possible. If the bush is too thick to penetrate, direct the jig so it collides with an outer limb on the shady side of the bush. As the jig impacts the cover, give it a short, 1- to 2-second pause in the midst of the shade before resuming the retrieve.

SPEED KILLS

When swimming the jig in summer, the clearer the water, the faster the speed of your retrieve should be. This isn’t a matter of reeling as fast as possible; however, a faster pace imitates the fleeing panic of a bluegill trying to get off the



Swim jigs are designed to elicit predatory reactions from bass. A fast, pulsing retrieve helps complete the ruse.

flat post-haste, further taking advantage of the bass’ predatory instinct. Surging the rod tip periodically will flair the jig skirt and add to the erratic action of the lure in between the cover. Many anglers will keep the rod tip at roughly the 10 o’clock position and gently shake the tip to impart a subtle but continuous lifelike quiver to the jig’s skirt during the retrieve.

Successful swim jigging involves grinding it out in the shallows, making hundreds of casts in search of the key cover attributes that are holding the bass. Specific targets to focus on will be anything offering an increased amount of shadow in the water, such as a smattering of leafy bushes amidst a stretch of dead ones, or brush tops with horizontal limbs as opposed to more vertical limb structures. As the pattern emerges, seek these same characteristics for the cover type in as many areas throughout the lake as possible.

Keep your eyes peeled for the presence of bluegill pods in and around the various types of cover, as bass will always be very near their food source. In the anecdote

recounted at the outset, the presence of bluegill loitering under leafy green bushes as I dropped the trolling motor to start fishing immediately bolstered my confidence in the area.

Consider, also, that bass can be surprisingly shallow—even during the brightest part of the day. In addition to lounging bluegills, another attractor that draws bass into 1 to 2 feet of water is dragonflies hovering around the shallow bushes at midday. This is evidenced by bass occasionally jumping out of the water to capture them in midair. These ultra-shallow bass are often in small wolf packs and not prone to staying in the area for long periods of time. Therefore, a stick-and-move approach when covering water with the swim jig can pay dividends.

The swim jig bite is addictive. Dedicated anglers are often willing to go hours without a bite in search of that sudden flurry of action that results in a few solid bass in extremely shallow water. The strikes are very often visual and accentuated by the bass’ reckless abandon in their attempt to capture the fast-moving prey. **G-F**



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CHAIN GANG



CHAIN PICKEREL MAY NOT GET THE RESPECT THAT OTHER GAMEFISH DO, BUT THIS PROLIFIC BRAWLER PROVIDES FAST AND FURIOUS ACTION WHEREVER IT SWIMS.

By Al Raychard

I grew up fishing for chain pickerel, mostly on my grandfather's farm pond and in a river a short bike ride from my childhood home. Pickerel may not be the most aesthetically pleasing freshwater fish, but I learned early on in life that they are a joy to catch.

At this time of year, look for pickerel in shallow water, from a foot to 5 feet down. Once water temperatures warm

KEITH SUTTON



Chain pickerel have rows of jagged teeth. A knottable wire leader is advised to prevent break-offs, especially when targeting large fish.

into the 70s, the larger specimens might go as deep as 10 feet or so, but pickerel hunt by sight, and there's always better visibility in the shallows. This is where pickerel find most of their prey species, including various minnows, frogs, crayfish and a host of insects.

But the real secret to catching pickerel is cover. Pickerel are an apex predator, typically lying in wait to viciously ambush minnows and other small prey

species as they swim by. They do this by hiding in weed and grass beds and beneath lily pads and other aquatic vegetation close to shore. Brush piles, coves and shorelines choked with stumps and logs and beaver dams and lodges are hotspots. Shallow, offshore weed and grass beds and channels infested with aquatic vegetation that drop to deeper water can also produce.

BEST TIMES FOR ACTION

There are no bad times to fish for pickerel, just better times, especially at this time of year. Pickerel spawn when water temperatures get to about 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Pickerel do not feed a great deal during the spawning process, and some claim the fishing is slow then, but I have not found this to be universally true.

Despite the lack of interest in food, pickerel can be rather territorial of their spawning areas and quite aggressive. Also, pickerel are not typically found in large schools, particularly the larger specimens. They are mostly loners, but when the spawn is on it is not unusual to find several males competing for females, or females accompanied by several males. Because of that, the spawning period is one of the few times of year when pickerel can be found in groups, resulting in some reliable action from the largest fish.

PIKE OR PICKEREL?

Visual cues to help tell the two species apart

Anglers might find it a challenge to distinguish between chain pickerel and northern pike, but there are telltale differences to look for. To begin with, pickerel are far more prevalent than pike in Eastern waters. On average, pike are much larger and heavier, some tipping the scales in double digits. Pickerel state records are in the 6- to 9-pound range, but such hefty examples are rare. Most pickerel will run 15 to 17 inches or less and tip the scales at around a pound. Any specimen 20 inches or better and weighing 2 pounds or more is worth crowing about.

Look, too, at the distinctive body spots. On pike the spots are oval in shape and not linked. On pickerel the spots overlap, like a chain. Pike also have spots on their fins, something pickerel lack entirely. The jaw line on a pike extends closer to or just beyond the eye; on pickerel the jawline is shorter. Pickerel have a dark, teardrop-shaped mark under the eye, while pike do not. Pike are usually a dark shade of green; pickerel are typically a lighter greenish yellow.



Pickerel activity and aggression, along with angling activity, picks up after the spawning season. Water temperatures are warmer then, aquatic vegetation has fully emerged, bait fish and other foods are more plentiful, pickerel are hungry and feeding sprees ensue. Because pickerel hunt by sight and are opportunistic feeders by nature, good action can be found throughout the day. Some of the best action is often had during the morning hours once the sun hits the water. Late afternoon to dusk can be productive before darkness limits visibility. In murky and discolored waters where visibility is restricted and on overcast days, the action can be good throughout the day. Baitfish and other pickerel foods are also more active at these times and under these conditions. I have found fishing for pickerel can be especially productive following a period of hard rain or high-wind conditions. I assume this is because both have the potential of riling the shallow bottom, disturbing prey species and making food more readily available.

ROD, REEL AND LINE

On average, chain pickerel do not grow to great size. What they lack in length and weight, however, is more than made up for with aggression. Pickerel strike with fierce determination, and once hooked they conduct scrappy tugs, rolls and runs with abandon. Despite these attributes, it doesn't take heavy gear to win the day. Light- to medium-action spinning rods and reels spooled with 6- or 8-pound-test monofilament are perfectly suitable. I prefer casting flies for pickerel, and my 8 1/2- and 9-foot graphite rods, loaded with a 6- or 7-weight floating line, work nicely.

PICKEREL HOT SPOTS

A selection of the best chain pickerel waters across the region

VIRGINIA: Top waters include the Nottoway, Blackwater, Chickahominy and Dragon rivers, as well as Chickahominy, Gaston, Diascund, Prince, Anna, Cohoon and Douthat lakes.

MARYLAND: Deep Creek Lake in Garrett County is a good spot in the central part of the state. The tidal sections of the Severn and Magothy rivers have good numbers. On the Western Shore, Saint Mary's Lake yields quality pickerel, and on the Eastern Shore the tributaries and associated ponds of the Choptank, Nanticoke, Marshy, Hope, Pocomoke and Wicomico river systems are all top-notch destinations.

NEW YORK: In Region 1, Deep Pond, Artist Lake, Twin Ponds, the Forge Ponds and the Peconic River all offer excellent pickerel opportunities. The same is true of Swinging Bridge Reservoir and Harriman Park lakes in Region 3. In regions 5 and 6, Lake George, Brant Lake, Saratoga Lake and the Black River have good populations. In Region 7, the south end of Skaneateles Lake, the north end of Cayuga Lake, Madison Reservoir, Oneida Lake and Tully Lake also have excellent numbers. The same goes for Hemlock Lake and Canadice Lake in Region 8.

MASSACHUSETTS: Pickerel are a true native of Massachusetts and not difficult to find. MassWildlife suggests Lovell's Pond, Middle Pond and Wequaquet Lake, all in Barnstable; Buckley-Dunton Pond in Becket; Great Herring Pond in Bourne and Plymouth; Greenland Pond in Brewster; Great Pond and Herring Pond in Eastham; and Onota and Pontoosuc lakes, both in Pittsfield.

VERMONT: Several lakes in the Green Mountain State are known for producing quality pickerel, including many of the bays of Lake Champlain, Lake Memphremagog, the Connecticut River, Lake Fairlee and Berlin and Salem ponds. Harriman Reservoir is also on the list. Numerous small ponds offer good opportunities, including Echo Lake in Ludlow, Sadawaga Pond in Whitingham and Gale Meadows Pond and Lowell Lake in Londonderry.

MAINE: Pickerel are not hard to find in Maine and are found in most lakes and ponds in the central, coastal and southern regions. Second Gardner Lake in Marion, Rocky Lake near Whiting, Crawford Lake in Crawford, Scammon Pond in Eastbrook, Great Pond in Aurora and First Chain Lake near Wesley are great bets. Elsewhere, Androscoggin Lake in Leeds, Branch Lake in Ellsworth, Brewer Pond in Orrington, China Lake in China, the south basin of Damariscotta Lake and Gardner Lake in East Machias are all excellent pickerel waters.



Even the smallest chain pickerel strike aggressively and will put up a sporty fight, especially on light-action rods.

AL RAYCHARD



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Leaders can be more important. Pickerel have rows of teeth that allow them to grip and hold prey. Although not sharp like a knife, the teeth are pointed and close together. While cut-offs and break-offs are generally rare due to the pickerel's small size, they do occur. Although pickerel generally are not overly leader-shy, and swivels and snaps can be used, a 4- or 5-inch piece of knottable wire leader or 8- to 10-pound-test mono attached directly to the main line works much better, especially in clear-water situations. Anglers casting flies can go the same route. When pickerel seek deeper water, fluorocarbon lines will help get offerings down, but I generally stay away from them in skinny water.



Pickerel are known to attack a wide range of lures, including spoons, spinners, topwaters and jerkbaits.

Most chain pickerel top out around 2 pounds, but larger specimens exist and are typically found in deeper water than the smaller fish.



LURES AND FLIES

Pickerel are not overly fussy about what comes their way. Flies, metal hardware, soft baits and natural baits are all productive. This includes old standards like a 1/4-ounce Daredevil, number-3 Mepps Aglia spinner, size-W5 Rapala Jigging Rap, size-08 Husky Jerk, Heddon Zara Spook, Mooselook Wobbler and Johnson Silver Minnow Spoon to name a few.

For flies, bucktail streamers work great and hold up better than their feathered counterparts. I've caught dozens on Mickey Finns, Wooly Buggers, Zonkers, Clouser Minnows and Lefty's Deceivers, matching colors to water conditions. Don't hesitate to experiment.

Sometimes a slow retrieve works. Other times you'll need to burn a lure through the water, occasionally adding a jerk or twitch. Make sure some lures and flies are the weedless type. There will be occasions when casting directly into grass, lily pads and other cover will prove productive. In most cases, however, casting parallel to weed edges, along submerged timber, adjacent to weedy drop-offs and submerged creek channels, off weedy points and near weedy backwaters and coves will do the trick.

The mouths of weedy creeks and streams following a period of rain are always worth investigating. The gush of water dumps cooler, more highly-oxygenated water downstream, bringing food with it and stirring the shallow bottom to expose even more food. Finally, mind those teeth. Carry a pair of long-nose pliers to remove hooks. A set of fish grippers will come in handy, too. 

KEITH SUTTON (2)



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TURKEY TALK



COAXING A GOBBLER INTO SHOOTING RANGE REQUIRES A THOROUGH UNDERSTANDING OF ITS DAILY ROUTINE—AND SAYING THE RIGHT THING AT THE RIGHT TIME.

By Zack Vucurevich

Even with as much time as I spend in the field, both for work and recreation, I fear I'll never be able to fully explain the daily activities of a tom turkey. However, as a biologist and land management consultant, working with landowners across the country to improve their wildlife habitat has allowed me to fine-tune my ability to understand the bird's behavior.

While I will use approximations and make certain assumptions throughout this piece as I outline the hypothetical daily routine of a tom, know that I intend nothing more than to get you started in the right direction of “thinking like a turkey.” While these erratic birds can leave us dumbstruck at some of the decisions they make, more often than not they behave just smart enough to leave us feeling silly.

EARLY MORNING (Dawn to 10 a.m.)

The woods begin to stir as the first rays of light illuminate the Eastern sky. A mature, 3-year-old gobbler has been clutching the limb of a favorite roost tree all night. As the last barred owl hoots, the gobbler cuts him off with a roaring shock gobble, announcing to the world, “This is my day! I am here, and I am ready to rumble!”

Before we go any further, let's pause for a brief synopsis of roosting behavior.



A typical tom will cover a lot of ground over the course of a spring day as he searches for hens to breed and food to fuel his travels.

During the spring mating season, a mature male turkey will reside within a home range of roughly 2 square miles. Within this home range, he will have four to six pre-determined roosting locations. As a tom navigates his home range, he will make a circuit, roosting in one place for a night (maybe two) before his adventures lead him to the next roost site. This is a gobbler's way of "spreading his seed," rather than following the same hens

around for the entire breeding season. This process continues until the bird ends up in the location where he roosted on day one. If you see or hear a bird roosting in the same spot two mornings in a row, those are most likely two different birds.

Let's now return to our 3-year-old, who remains perched in his roost tree near the top of a drainage, which he chose for its expansive views. He gobbles and drums from his limb but is reluctant to

fly down until he sees a hen. Lucky for him, a small group of hens likes what it hears and begins navigating toward the source of those buttery smooth tones.

As the hens crest the ridgeline, the tom flies down to an old logging road between the roost tree and the incoming hens. Once on the ground, the gobbling stops. The tom has what he wants—interested hens—and sees little reason to draw more attention to the party.

Early-Morning Tactics

Not only is fly-down the most exciting time to be a spectator in the turkey woods, it's also the best time to get aggressive with your calling. The birds are fired up after a long night, and it is time for you to match their enthusiasm.

Turkeys rely heavily on their eyesight, especially in the low light of dawn. For this reason, a gobbler will tend to choose roosting locations with good visibility to get a visual on hens or potential predators before he exits the tree. The top of an extensive drainage (such as where we find our tom), trees overlooking a body of water and the edges of a clearcut are all great examples of preferred roosting locations.

If you know where they are roosting, get there early, set up quietly, hide well and call loudly. If you haven't identified a roost site, pull out your favorite locator call and give it a rip every quarter mile or so to initiate a shock gobble and get yourself heading in the right direction.

Early in the morning, our tom is perfectly content tending to his hens on the logging road, and it would take an act of God to pull him away from the females. Your best chance of connecting with him is to get the attention of one of the hens in his harem and get her to break away from the flock to investigate the intruding hen you are impersonating. If you can convince a hen to come to you, the tom will surely follow.

Early-Morning Vocalizations

The first hour or so of daylight is when you want to be most aggressive with your calling. My favorite calls early in the day are yelps and cuts—crisp, sharp tones that carry for long distances. My secret weapon early in the day is what I describe as a studder-yelp, which consists of cutting with intermittent yelps sprinkled in. With this, I'm attempting to impersonate a moody, excited hen. Consider using a box call in the mornings to get more volume.

GO-TO LOCATOR CALL

My favorite locator call is the raspy **Primos Crow Call** (\$8.99; primos.com). It is affordable, easy to use and, most importantly, exceptionally loud.



BRUNCHTIME (10 a.m. to 2 p.m.)

Impressed by the performance the tom has been putting on, a hen allows him to breed. After copulation, she leaves him behind with the rest of the hens and heads toward her nest to lay a single egg. Each hen will lay one egg per day throughout her laying period, which lasts between 8 and 15 days, resulting in as many eggs in her nest.

One by one, the hens are bred and depart, leaving the tom behind on the logging road he's been using as his strut zone. He will remain here for some time, calling and displaying to seduce any straggling hens in the area.

With no response, the bird's empty crop takes priority, and he heads down the hill in search of food. He'll work the food sources for nourishment and attention from the remaining hens yet to be bred. A grove of beech trees, a stand of red oaks and an old locust tree dropping its last few remaining bean pods of the year are all on the brunchtime menu. With a full belly and more love to offer, the tom navigates his way toward the neighbor's hay field to make himself more visible.

Brunchtime Tactics

When mobile, I'll walk logging roads and let out a series of calls every time I get to a crest in the hill, a turn in the logging road, a change in terrain type or a point off the ridge, being sure to always call before exposing myself. After all, there might be a gobbler in full strut around the corner. For this reason, I use softer calls around corners and louder calls when calling off points and ridges.

If nothing is happening, I keep track of my progress. (This is a great time to utilize the "breadcrumb" feature on your favorite mapping app, as you will eventually walk back on the same path.) Your movement should be linear, not circular. My goal is to end up as far away from where I started the morning as possible by 2 p.m.

Keep an eye out for fresh sign as you walk. Scratching in the leaves, feathers, scat, tracks in the mud, torn locust bean pods and beech nut debris are some of my favorite indicators to encounter. If you discover a bunch of scat and feathers but no sign of feeding, you have probably located a roost tree.

Brunchtime Vocalizations

While moving, I am more concerned about the volume of my call than what particular sound I make. When trying to extend my call off the point of a ridge or down into a valley, I opt for a box to make yelps and cutts, as it's the loudest call in my vest. I'll switch to a softer pot call when approaching a bend in the road or a crest in the hill. I'll let out a series of soft yelps and purrs in these situations, just loud enough for a bird to hear if he is around the corner. Before calling, scope out a place where you can duck for cover quickly in the event the bird comes in on a string.

GO-TO BOX CALL

The **Woodhaven Cherry Real Hen Box Call** (\$94.99; woodhavencustomcalls.com) is my go-to when covering ground during brunchtime. It can hit those softer yelps in a pinch, but give it a little oomph and you can project your calls clear across the holler.



Once a tom has located a harem of hens in the morning, he'll strut and posture until each of them relents and allows him to breed.



On windy afternoons, toms will often gravitate to open areas where they can see and be seen. Look for them in shady spots that offer relief from the heat of the day.

LOAFING TIME (2 to 6 p.m.)

As wind speeds pick up in the early afternoon, our tom can no longer rely on his acute sense of hearing to locate hens. Instead, he is likely to be somewhere with high visibility. Agriculture fields, clear cuts, food plots, burned units and cattle pastures are all suitable habitat types to keep in mind. Because of the early spring this year, the pasture grasses in the hay field are already too tall for the tom to appropriately display, so he moves on to the cattle pasture next door. Here, the vegetation is so low that his spurs glisten in the spring sunshine.

He's in full strut when a pair of hens catches his eye by the creek. The gregarious nature of the hens gets the better of them, and they meander their way to the tom. With temperatures as high as they'll be all day, the three birds finally work toward the field edge to escape the sun and do what turkeys do best—loaf. This is the time of day that hygiene and digestion take priority in the turkey woods.

Here, within the twiggy confines of an edge-feathering project, the birds take advantage of the ash and soil exposed

from a recent burn and begin to dust. They preen their feathers. They peck at themselves and each other. They lay down out of apparent boredom. They get more bored and stand up. They lay back down and wait for the heat to dissipate.

As the hottest part of the day (around 4 p.m.) approaches, the tom and the hens get up and head toward a stand of mature white pines on a north-facing slope to enjoy the shade and quiet.

Loafing Time Tactics

This is the most challenging time of day to kill a tom. The birds are flocked up again, almost all the hens have been bred and they have nowhere to be with nothing to do. For this reason, you have two contradicting options; cover ground or take another nap.

Now might be a good time to start working your way back along your breadcrumb trail. Gobblers may have heard your calls earlier and, for whatever reason, were silent on their way up the hill to investigate. I call the same way I did

earlier, stopping at turns, crests in the ridge and other visual obstructions. Be sure to wait in silence for 2 to 5 minutes after each calling session to listen for a response. If you are getting close to where you started the day, having a snack might be in order as you wait for the temp to drop.

Loafing Time Vocalizations

I treat calling in the late afternoon very similarly to calling earlier in the afternoon, with one caveat: I put the box call away in favor of a pot or mouth call and call more quietly. The chances are good that if you encounter a tom on your way back toward your starting location, he will already be up on the ridge looking for the source of your calling from earlier in the day. Keep a mouth call handy if you hear a response and need to hide.

TWILIGHT [6 p.m. to Sunset]

Our tom and his lady friends stretch their legs beneath the old pines as the sun begins to kiss the western horizon.

His itinerary for the evening consists of following the hens toward their roost and enjoying whatever hors d'oeuvres they encounter along the way. He follows the ladies up the hillside, leisurely consuming coral berries, earthworms, beech nuts and perhaps an unfortunate salamander before the hens pitch into an old elm tree. Our tom continues along the ridge until he finds himself aloft in his second-favorite roost tree. An owl hoots as he settles in for the night. He's got a big day tomorrow.

Twilight Tactics

Twilight tactics are straightforward: You must get between the tom and the roost tree. What a turkey eats for dinner is more a product of convenience than a craving for some delectable yet inconvenient morsel. Think fast-food drive-through versus heading all the way to grandma's house for a cherry pie.

If you encountered new signs of feeding earlier in the day (scat, feathers, turned-up leaves), return to these areas and wait. Keep your call volume down and your gun up.

Twilight Vocalizations

I don't stray too far from soft yelps and purrs this late in the day. If you are fortunate enough to hear a response late in the afternoon, get your gun ready and shut up. He is coming. Turkeys aren't very vocal this late in the day, so if you have a gobbler willing to talk, you should have yourself a dead bird. 

GO-TO POT CALL

I don't enter the turkey woods without my **Bone Collector Sweet April** glass pot call (\$79.99; bonecollector.com). Turkey hunting and rainy, humid conditions go hand-in-hand, so having a friction call that works in these elements can save your hunt. If the Sweet April's calling surface gets wet, I simply wipe it off and continue calling (unlike with slate calls). Consider purchasing a second striker for changing tones from time to time, and simply to have a backup.



Late in the day, a tom will follow any hens he's with to their roost site, feeding along the way, before eventually meandering to his own roost.





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WANDERING

'EYES

WHERE TO FIND POST-SPAWN WALLEYES AND
HOW TO CONVINCE THEM TO BITE

By Jeff Knapp

Shallow water, especially areas with emergent weed growth, is a prime place to locate post-spawn walleyes in lakes and reservoirs.

ERIC ENGBRETSON/ENGBRETSON UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHY

When asked about the most appealing aspect of walleye fishing, many anglers will respond with something about the fish's quality as table fare. I'd counter that the species' ability to adapt to many environments, thereby demanding the utmost in angler versatility for consistent success, is the walleye's most compelling quality.

This adaptability is doubly apparent during springtime, when the fish have concluded spawning and are on the move. From rivers to dingy reservoirs to clear lakes, one must adjust tactics to keep up with the wandering walleye.

IMPOUNDED RIVERS

River fish by nature, walleyes are delightfully at home in flowing waters, including those impounded by dams—impoundments typically created for navigation and/or hydroelectric power generation. The pools created by such dams retain some qualities of a river, namely modest current.

Typically, a significant portion of the walleye population will be found near the discharge area of the dam as spawn-driven upriver “runs” are halted by the barrier. The habitat found here is conducive to spawning, as well. While warming water will eventually fuel a dispersal from tailrace areas, for the first month or so following the spawn a wealth of fish can still be found there.

Key areas to focus on include slack or low-current areas near the downriver side of a dam. Lock chambers and closed dam gates can create such spots. These areas can be restricted to boat traffic, so watch for buoys and signs warning of such. Even so, they present quality opportunities for shore anglers. The situation varies from dam to dam.

The downriver approach walls of lock chambers generally create slack-water areas beyond restricted areas and are a good bet for boat anglers. So is the first deep hole or two downriver of the dam. Some of the best areas feature rock bars or wing dams that break up the current.

Boat anglers can score on walleyes by casting or vertically jigging jig-and-minnow combinations, blade baits and jig-and-plastic combos. Concentrate efforts in the deeper pools during the day, then work shallower as the evening twilight approaches and 'eyes go on

feeding sprees. The evening twilight is also tops for the shore-based or wading angler since movements to thinner water make the fish more accessible.

FREE-FLOWING RIVERS

Free-flowing rivers that retain their natural riffle-run-pool character often harbor good walleye numbers. Lacking barriers such as dams, however, can make the fish a bit more challenging to find.

Though walleyes are sometimes thought of as being docile, timid fish, the truth is they are topnotch predators. As natural rivers warm, expect to find walleyes feeding in and around riffles and runs that feature significant current, as this is where much of the food is found.

Various species of shiners, chubs, darters and dace, among others, use riffle areas as their feeding grounds, feasting on the buffet of tasty organisms carried by the current. Naturally, walleyes follow, completing another link in the food chain.

For the boat angler, a sound tactic is to drift with the current, firing cross-current casts out into the faster water. The sweet spot is often where the fast riffle joins the slightly deeper run.

Suspending hard jerkbaits in the 4- to 5-inch range—baits such as Rapala's Husky Jerk, Bomber's Suspending Long A and Yo-Zuri's 3DB Jerkbait—catch the attention of feeding walleyes. Walleyes often respond better to a steadier retrieve, so resist the urge to impart much stop-and-go movement.

Soft swimbaits also excel in this situation. Popular models include Storm's WildEye Live Minnow and WildEye Swim Shad. These pre-rigged swimbaits, which feature a belly hook in addition to the classic single swimbait hook, are well-suited for catching 'eyes that zero-in on the lure in the faster current. Too, soft swimbaits allow the angler to control the depth at which they are fished simply by altering the rate of the retrieve.



On impounded rivers, walleyes can be found in deep holes below dams following the spawn. Tempt them with vertical presentations of jig-and-plastic combos.

A lot of high-potential water is missed during a drift since the boat is moving at a good clip, so it's smart to make multiple passes to cover all areas. Riffles too shallow to be drifted in a boat provide good options for the shore/wade angler.

LAKES AND RESERVOIRS: Shallow Bite

During the early part of the season, when water temperatures usually hover in the mid-50s, it's common for a fair percentage of the walleye population to be in shallow water. This is particularly true on lakes with dingy water.

The most productive areas will likely be close to spawning areas, so seek out bottom composition made up of gravel and smaller rocks, especially along what's commonly the windswept portion of the lake. If emerging weed growth is present—submergent species such as milfoil, coontail and various pondweeds—so much the better.

Walleyes can be scattered at this time, gradually dispersing from the shallows where they spawned. Thus, a mobile approach that covers the water is often most productive. This includes trolling and controlled drifting.

In this scenario (for daytime fishing) consider depths from around 8 to perhaps 12 feet. These are ideal depths to cover with shad-imitating crankbaits such as number 5 and 7 Rapala Shad Raps, and 2 1/2-inch Cordell Wally Divers. Baitfish are smaller during the early spring; therefore, smaller crankbaits tend to be more effective. Add a heavy split shot or two to when trolling over depths of 10 to 12 feet.

In the cool water of the early season, slower trolling speeds of 1.5 to 1.75 mph usually produce best. Line-counter reels make it easy to track line let-out and replicate success when it is achieved.

Breezy days—and it's usually windy during early spring—add controlled drifting to the mix. Position the boat upwind of the targeted area and drift over it while training a jig-and-minnow combo.

Early spring often includes some great nighttime bites. Target the same general areas, but move shallower—roughly 4 to 6 feet deep. Shallow-running Shad Raps and minnow baits are tops. Hand-hold rods when trolling at night so you can detect when hooks become fouled. Spinning rigs (as opposed to traditional level-wind trolling outfits) allow you to quickly clear hooks and then fire back a cast to resume fishing.

LAKES AND RESERVOIRS: Mid-Depth Bite

As water temperatures reach the low- to mid-60s there is often a noticeable shift in walleye location to slightly deeper water. This is especially true on clearer lakes and reservoirs that feature submerged weeds that extend into 10- to 15-foot depths.

Walleyes will still be somewhat scattered. A mobile approach that covers water is often best, with crawler harnesses leading the way. Crawler harnesses, also called spinner rigs, employ a two-hook, 4- to 5-foot snell that's typically baited with a nightcrawler. The leading portion of the rig features a spinner and a few beads. It's a classic combination of lure and live bait that accounts for thousands of walleyes nationwide each year.

Structure edges, soft-to-hard bottom transitions, weed edges and stump fields all are fair game for a spinner rig. When the rig is fished behind a bottom-bouncer sinker, the presentation can be kept close to the boat. The rule of thumb is to fish a weight heavy enough to maintain about a 45-degree angle of the line to the water while slowly trolling .8 to 1.25 mph.

After the spawn, many of a reservoir's larger females retreat to deep basins, where they gorge on pelagic baitfish.





When water temps hit the low 60s, walleyes often disperse throughout the mid-depths of clear-water lakes and reservoirs. Cover lots of water by trolling crawler harnesses.

My partners and I fish heavy, 3-ounce bottom bouncers in 15 feet of water. This keeps the line much more vertical, allowing for a more precise presentation when working the spinner around outside weed edges.

Let out just enough line that the sinker ticks bottom only occasionally. Despite the name, the sinker should not consistently bounce along the bottom. Spinner rigs and bottom bouncers perform better when rods are placed in holders. Soft-action rods allow fish to “hang” themselves before the rod is removed from the holder, resulting in more landed fish.

LAKES AND RESERVOIRS: Deep-Basin Bite

In many lakes and reservoirs, a portion of the walleye population moves to deeper basins not long after the spawn, especially the larger females. It's typically the smaller males that remain in the shallows. The presence of pelagic baitfish such as gizzard shad and alewives increase the

odds of connecting with spring walleyes over deeper basins.

It's often necessary to stay close to the bottom to trigger these early- to mid-spring walleyes, which is where lead-core line comes in. Lead-core line—comprising a thin lead filament encased in a nylon sheath—permits precise placement of crankbaits.

Lead-core line is relatively thick in diameter, requiring larger trolling reels. Though the line is color-coded every 10 yards, using a line-counter reel will greatly increase accuracy. Short 5- to 6-foot rods can be fished close to the boat, while 7 1/2- to 8-footers place lines away from the boat, minimizing tangles.

It's fairly easy to fish lead-core line, as long as you pay close attention to your lines in the water. First, slowly pay out line until the lure starts bumping bottom. Then, recover line 5 feet at a time until it's no longer doing so. Adjust for depth changes by taking in line or letting out more. The most successful lead-core

trollers constantly tweak line let-out to keep the lure in the zone. Be aware, too, that you can get some nasty tangles fishing lead-core. Keep boat turns subtle. Troll with the wind when it's blowing hard. And try to keep boat speed consistent. Speeding up will elevate lures; slowing down will allow them to sink.

Use at least a 5-foot leader of monofilament or fluorocarbon line to separate lead-core and lure—much longer in clear water. Any number of minnow- or shad-imitating lures can be effective. Be willing to experiment with lure profile and color, watch the sonar to fish areas showing baitfish and gamefish targets you suspect are walleyes and rework areas that produce bites.

Finally, keep in mind the nomadic nature of walleyes, as well as the potential for different populations to be doing different things based on food sources and available habitat. It's all part of walleye fishing, and it's what makes it at once challenging and satisfying. **6+**

RUDEE! RUDEE! RUDEE!

WHAT THIS LITTLE INLET SOUTH OF VIRGINIA BEACH LACKS IN SIZE,
IT MORE THAN MAKES UP FOR IN VARIETY OF GAME FISH.

By John N. Felsher

JOHN N. FELSHER



Lined with homes, restaurants and hotels, the placid waters of Rudee Inlet offer relaxed fishing for a wide range of saltwater species.

The Atlantic coastline creates a perfect migratory route for fish moving north in the spring into Chesapeake Bay, and south in the winter as they seek more comfortable temperatures. And to get to Chesapeake Bay from the south, everything must pass by Rudee Inlet, just south of the bay. Rudee Inlet offers anglers in the Virginia Beach, Va., area their only direct access to the Atlantic Ocean.

“Virginia Beach has much to offer fishermen for inshore, nearshore and offshore species,” says Joshua Bourne with Wingman Guide Service in Virginia Beach (@WingmanGuideService on Facebook). “Besides the inlet, we have easy access to the Atlantic Ocean and Chesapeake Bay.”

Rudee Inlet covers about 3,000 acres and averages 10 to 12 feet deep, but some holes drop to about 30 feet. The system contains two parts: Lake Rudee and the smaller Lake Wesley. Both merge into Owl Creek, the outlet to the Atlantic Ocean. Rocky jetties mark the outlet mouth.

SMALL-CRAFT SANCTUARY

Many anglers depart from Rudee Inlet to fish the ocean or bay. However, the inlet itself can provide outstanding fishing for various species throughout the year. The best fishing occurs from spring through fall. Houses and other buildings surround the inlet, helping to shield it from the wind.

“The great thing about the inlet is that since it’s such a confined area, we can hit many spots in protected waters on a short trip even when the weather turns rough,” Bourne says. “The inlet offers a great place to fish for people with smaller boats or even kayaks because the wind doesn’t really affect it as much. Even on windy days, we can fish in protected waters.”

Daily tidal fluctuations periodically recharge the inlet with water directly from the sea, bringing in baitfish, followed by their predators. Most waterfront properties feature wharves and docks. These structures attract bait and create excellent cover for speckled trout, red and black drum, flounder, sheepshead and other species to hunt.

“When we get a bite, we never know what might be on the other end of the line,” Bourne says. “It’s very common

to catch several different species on the same day.”

More tolerant of cold water than most species, red drum (aka redfish) stay in the inlet all winter long. As the water warms, fish become more active. Most people use cut fish or live or fresh shrimp for drum bait. Crabs emerge from the mud in the spring and a drum likes nothing better than to crunch a crab.

THE HIT LIST

“In the spring, we find a good fishery for puppy drum,” Bourne says. “Baitfish like to hide around the pilings under the docks, and red drum get under the docks to stalk their prey. I like to find a dock with a sloping bottom under it. When fishing for reds, I like moving water—either an incoming or outgoing tide. When we have more current, red drum normally face into the flow. We might catch several drum under the same dock.”

Flounder also like to ambush bait around the docks. Sheepshead nibble the barnacles attached to pilings and other hard structures. Pull up within casting distance of docks or rocks and flip live shrimp, minnows or other bait around the pilings. Flounder might also hit any lures that would tempt a redfish or trout.

“In the inlet, we usually see a pretty steady flounder bite during the summer,” says Bourne. “As we get into May,



The Jamestown settlement is one of many interesting stops in this history-rich region.

AREA ATTRACTIONS

Things to see and do when not on the water

For history buffs, visiting eastern Virginia offers unlimited opportunities. Where Chesapeake Bay hits the Atlantic Ocean in Virginia Beach, check out First Landing State Park, where English colonists landed in 1607. You can even rent cabins or camp in the park where those first English settlers walked.

Soon after arriving in North America, the colonists sailed up the James River and established the first permanent English settlement in the New World. Today, you can see a replica of the Jamestown fort (historicjamestowne.org) and a church dating to the 17th century.

Eventually, the colonists moved their capital to higher, drier ground and founded Williamsburg. Today, visitors can walk in the footsteps of people like Thomas Jefferson in Colonial Williamsburg (colonialwilliamsburg.org), which is designed to give visitors an authentic 18th-century experience.

A short drive from Jamestown, explore the Yorktown battlefield, (nps.gov/york), part of the Colonial National Historic Park. See where General George Washington and his French allies defeated the British Army in the last major battle of the Revolutionary War, paving the way for American independence.

Local communities throughout the area can provide accommodations and facilities. Sample the famed Chesapeake Bay crab cakes and other seafood at many waterfront restaurants.



Warmer weather in mid- to late May typically signals the arrival of pods of huge bull redfish, which congregate about 2 miles off the beach.

SHUTTERSTOCK (TOP); COURTESY JOSHUA BOURNE (BOTTOM)

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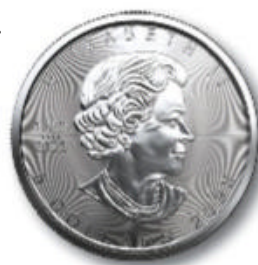
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speckled trout start biting. In the past few years, we've been getting more gray trout. In the spring of 2022, we were catching two gray trout to every three or four speckled trout. That shows the species is making a recovery. Gray trout have been highly overfished in years past."

Fast and vicious predators, trout like moving baits. Anglers catch them on various artificial enticements. Anything that looks like a shrimp or small baitfish might tempt trout. Most anglers use jig heads sweetened with soft-plastic trailers or live baits.

"Many people prefer to fish an area fast with various artificial baits," Bourne says. "That does work, but at times the fish home-in on live bait. We target gray trout the same way we target speckled trout. They often mix together and feed on the same forage. Many times, we'll catch a speck and a gray back-to-back on the same bait. Gray trout average about 14 to 16 inches. The species is making a big comeback, but the area doesn't hold many big ones yet."

BIG-WATER BITE

For monster tackle-busters, head just outside the inlet. Bull reds migrate up the coast and stay about two miles off the beaches, where they gather in huge numbers. Anglers also find enormous black drum around the jetties, barrier islands, reefs and other structures from late April through the summer. Tempt both species with cracked crab and live or fresh shrimp. Reds also hit live menhaden and other baitfish.

"Once we get consistent warm days in mid- to late May, we get a large push of bull red drum," Bourne says. "Besides the bulls that come up into Chesapeake Bay, more stay right off the Virginia Beach oceanfront in nearshore waters. In late summer we sight-fish huge schools of giant bulls where Chesapeake Bay meets the Atlantic Ocean."

For many people, May means cobia time. The vicious predators migrate up the coast as the water warms. Cobia habitually hover under seaweed, floating lumber and other flotsam. They also hang around jetties, buoys and other structures.

"By mid-May, we start looking for cobia," Bourne says. "They don't come into the inlet, but they stay just outside, attacking bait balls or swimming along with rays."



The many docks and other structures in Rudee Inlet are magnets for baitfish and, in turn, various predatory game fish species.

Fishing for cobia almost resembles hunting. Anglers climb high into their boat towers to look for fish.

"When someone spots a cobia, they toss a 2-ounce bucktail jig or a live bait to it," Bourne says. "Menhaden, spots and croakers make great live bait, but cobia really love eels. All the local bait shops sell live eels during the cobia run."

Rig an eel on a 7/0, 8/0 or 9/0 J-hook through the nose. Keep the rigged eel ready for action in a bucket or baitwell. After spotting a cobia, attach the pre-rigged eel to a line and toss the bait to the predator.

Don't add any extra motion. The natural movement of the eel will interest any cobia that sees it. Frequently, the eel sees the cobia and tries to get away. That usually prompts the predator to pounce. Let the fish take out line and swim around with bait a few seconds before setting the hook.

In the summer, bluefish and Spanish mackerel also cruise the nearshore waters just outside the inlet. These toothy predators love fast, shiny baits. Any

live baitfish—or lures that mimic baitfish—can work. Many anglers cast or troll chrome spoons.

"As the water temperature gets into the mid-60s, we always see Spanish mackerel and bluefish," Bourne says. "For Spanish and blues, we troll small Drone or Clark spoons at about 7 knots. Bluefish hit a bait trolled a little slower. Later in the summer, people start targeting king mackerel. We also see a large spadefish migration. They hang around buoys and other structures throughout the summer."

Bigger boats leave the inlet and head into the Atlantic to troll for marlin, mahi and blackfin, yellowfin and huge bluefin tuna. Some anglers also deep-drop baits for swordfish and tilefish. Many offshore anglers fish the reefs and wrecks for black seabass.

Whether fishing in the inlet, the bay or the ocean, the Virginia Beach area provides unlimited opportunities to put big fish of varied species in the boat all year long. Anglers just need to keep up with fish movements. 

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STRIKING GOLD

AT LA ZONA ON THE URUGUAY RIVER,
**MENACING DORADO WITH MONSTER
MAWS TEST THE STRENGTH**
OF BOTH TACKLE AND ANGLERS.

Story and Photos by Larry Larsen

The author's 52-pound dorado was the largest he caught at La Zona, and he had thrilling encounters with several other fish weighing more than 40 pounds.



I heaved the 6-ounce spinnerbait and trailer as far as I could toward the dam and let it fall toward the bottom. Powerful currents from the hydroelectric power plant's 14 open gates quickly swept the bait downstream and away from our boat. The offering started tumbling through huge rocks some 10 to 12 feet below the surface. I began a slow crank, keeping the bait at a depth where it bumped into the boulders about every 5 seconds or so.

The boat continued its drift downstream in the tailrace area as I retrieved my first cast of the day. I tossed it again as far upstream as possible and engaged the reel after the lure's 8-second free fall. On the second handle revolution, I felt the spinnerbait tick a rock, then a giant golden fish slammed it and took off pulling drag.

"Set the hook! Set the hook!" yelled my guide Elbio. "Again!"

I complied and the big fish took to the air, trying to shake free of the heavy lure. Three more surface-clearing leaps and a few reel-screaming runs treated us to a show of the force and tenacity that have made the Uruguay River's dorado famous. My hook stayed implanted in the fish's jaw, and I gained line after each jump. The guide finally used the BogaGrip to end the battle and weigh my first big dorado, a 32-pounder.

After that fish on my second cast ever at La Zona, the world's premier giant dorado fishery, my fishing buddy, Peter Kim, and I thought it was going to be easy. With the fish feeding even in the cold, muddy water, we figured we were going to catch the big guys all day long. Wrong. We caught only three more small fish under 20 pounds in that first "slow" morning session of four hours.

We headed for a big steak lunch at the lodge with our two other fishing buddies, experienced La Zona anglers Gary Clark and Hank Szopinski. After a full stomach and short siesta, we went out in two boats for another four hours. Activity improved substantially. Only eight dam gates were open, resulting in slightly slower currents. Peter and I caught a couple of 28-pounders and two more fish that weighed 30. His biggest dorado of 42 pounds beat my 40-pounder for top fish of the day. Clearly, we had come to the right place to find gold.



Battles with feisty dorado usually include several jumps and line-stripping runs. Stout, quality tackle is a necessity.

TOOTHY RIVER TIGERS

La Zona, a restricted tailrace area on the Uruguay River, lies below the massive Salto Grande Reservoir Dam and its 14-turbine hydroelectric facility. The catch-and-release fishery is located close to Concordia, Argentina, about 270 miles north of Buenos Aires. The river forms an aquatic border separating Uruguay and Argentina. Like the power-generating dam and lake above it, La Zona is shared by the two countries.

The dam acts as a barrier to the dorado's upstream spawning runs and concentrates the fish below the outflow. The permitted La Zona fishing area is about 3,000 yards wide and extends downstream about 700 yards. The turbulent tailwaters are born from the rocky topography of the river bottom and the varying dam releases through massive gates. The spillway water levels below the dam may fluctuate from 1 to 10 meters. Currents and surface chop also vary greatly, depending on power generation, weather and reservoir volume needs above the dam.

At extremely low water, the craggy outcropping is easily visible and a stark reminder of the hazardous habitat to be considered when gearing up for battling these giant fish. Dorado reach incredible sizes in big numbers due to the dam barrier, abundant food availability, unpredictable water levels and very limited fishing pressure. Boga, a carp-like fish, migrate up the river, and dorado love to feast on them, particularly in warm and shallow water.

Fishing access to the tailrace area at La Zona is by official permit only and patrolled by the dam police of the two countries. The area is open only four days per week, Friday through Monday. Currently only four boats can fish at one time. La Zona Lodge has the Argentina permit for two boats, and Uruguay has issued a similar permit to an outfitter operating in that country.

The freshwater dorado is unique to south-central South America. Waters in Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Paraguay and Brazil are home to the so-called river

tigers. In five trips specifically to dorado land, I've fished four of those countries. I am convinced La Zona offers the world's best fishing for trophy-size dorado.

The dorado has a muscular, salmon-shaped body cloaked in distinctive golden scales and appointed with orange fins. Conquistadors who ransacked South America looking for gold reportedly gave the dorado its name, which means "golden." The fish has superior speed paired with crunching, vice-grip jaws. They are lined with twin rows of conical-shaped, tiger-like teeth, which make sharp, extra-strength hooks imperative. Pre-made 12- or 18-inch stainless wire leaders or 200-pound-test Trik Fish monofilament leaders are necessary to avoid cut-offs.

La Zona anglers must be careful when lifting the monster-jawed behemoths for a photo. Appropriately, the dorado (*Salminus maxillosus*) is a member of the tenacious *Characidae* family. Its illustrious-toothed relatives (which I've also caught) include the fierce tigerfish in Africa and both the Dracula-fanged payara and razor-toothed piranha in South America.

The strong dorado strike with ferocity and entertain with explosive and memorable jumps. There are no better jumpers in the neighborhood. The fish is an acrobat when hooked and usually immediately erupts through the surface to dislodge the lure. I fought one dorado of about 40 pounds that jumped eight times. I had another surprising strike right at the boat, just 10 feet off my rod tip. I set the hook into the 24-pounder, which leapt skyward four or five times beside the gunwales during the intense 5-minute battle. Fortunately, it never landed in the boat.

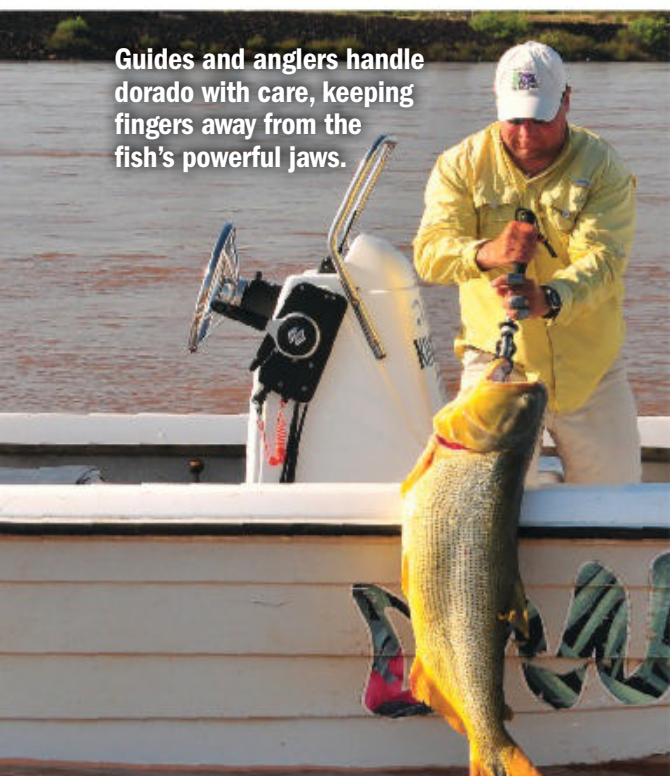
Gary and Hank had an even more intense La Zona battle when they tangled with a couple of trophy-size aggressors one morning. Gary hooked a



Dorado concentrate below the Salto Grande Reservoir's hydroelectric dam to feast on other fish in the strong current.

monstrous 48-pounder, and Hank hooked a 42-pounder within a few seconds of each other. Their lines crossed several times during the fight, and the anglers brought the often-airborne twosome to the boat at the same time. The circus-like action was certainly memorable.

Guides and anglers handle dorado with care, keeping fingers away from the fish's powerful jaws.



CHANGING CONDITIONS

As the power generation and dam discharge conditions change at La Zona, so does the fishing. Our second day was even better than the first as the dam gates were all closed and the still-muddy waters had dropped about 8 or 9 feet. A few rocks were even protruding above the surface. In the shallower water, Peter and I switched to gold spoons and caught a 42- and 24-pounder, respectively. We switched back to the giant spinnerbaits an hour later and added two more in the 20-pound class and a 34-pounder. Topping that, Peter landed a monster 49-pound dorado, the biggest of the morning, and Gary had a 48-pounder.

That afternoon, the temperature hit 90 degrees and 14 of the 20 dam gates were again wide open. The water level had risen 6 feet during our lunch recess, but the hungry dorado were still active. I caught and released 34-, 42- and 44-pounders on my favorite spinnerbaits. In the other boat, Hank had four trophy fish up to 48 pounds.

The following day was a literal blow-out, preventing us from fishing. Day-long

winds up to 40 mph, pouring rain and a 30-degree temperature drop hit the area. We were fortunately prepared for the harsh cold front and dressed for it the following day. Air temps started out in the 40s, but giant dorado were still on our minds. The muddy water had risen back to earlier heights, and most of the dam's gates were still open.

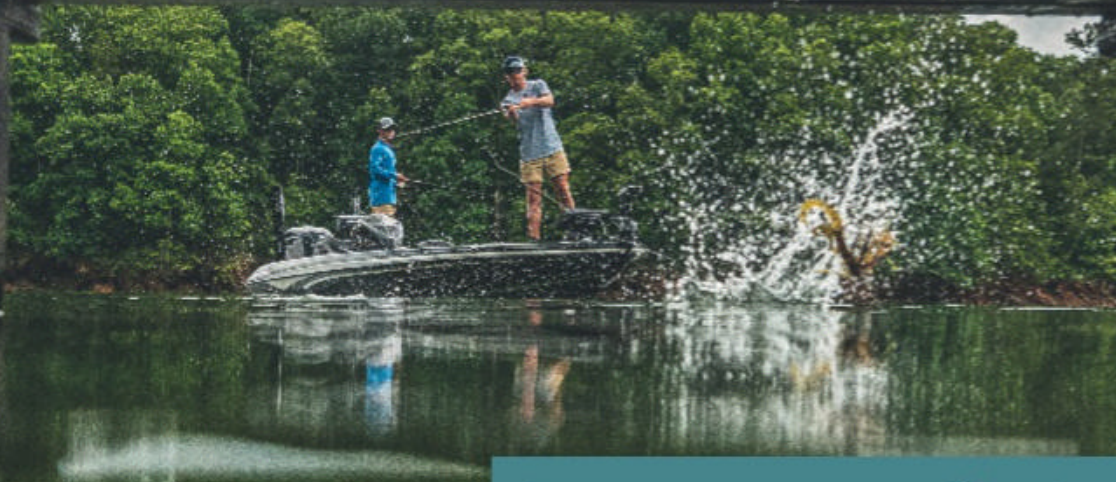
Downstream currents over the rock field and upstream winds around 30 mph prevented us from safely casting from the boat's bow and stern decks. We caught 16 fish on our spinnerbaits including a 40-pounder, but two battle royales topped the day. A 46-pound golden flash gave me all I could handle for about 15 minutes in the rough waters, and my final catch was the fish of my dreams!

The monster fish struck my falling spinnerbait and immediately cartwheeled above the surface with a secure grasp of the jingling bait. It then bulled down into the depths, pulling drag. After 20 minutes, the giant had circled the boat four times. The powerful fish peeled braid from my Shimano Tranx baitcaster frequently and performed additional

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

GCX

Handcrafted in Woodland, Washington, the all-new GCX leverages G. Loomis' Multi-Taper Design technology to provide ultra-durable blanks with technique-specific powers and actions to boost effectiveness on the water.



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gloomis.com

aerial acrobatics. My guide for the day, Alejandro, finally placed the BogaGrip in the bruiser's mouth. The beautiful dorado weighed 52 pounds and was our biggest fish of the week.

TROPHY TIME

The fishery at La Zona has not always produced the monsters of today, according to longtime friend Bob Daly, who has made about 30 trips to the area since 2006. He is arguably the world's most experienced La Zona angler. Bob has caught and released around 250 dorado weighing more than 40 pounds and has eight topping 50 pounds to his credit. His

largest weighed 53 pounds, not far from the world record of 55 pounds, 11 ounces.

"When I first started fishing down there," Bob recalls, "we fished hard right up next to the dam and caught lots of smaller fish between 20 and 35 pounds, but 40s and 50s were rare. Then governmental regulations changed, and we had to start fishing 150 yards downstream from the dam. That's when we started catching more of the monsters. Starting the boat's drift a little farther away from the dam walls put anglers in an even better position to catch true giants."

Gary agrees with Bob about the improving trophy production. He has fished

La Zona more than a dozen times in the past 12 years and has dozens of dorado over 40 pounds to his credit. He had never broken the 50-pound class until a fantastic trip in 2019. He caught his first 50-pound trophy plus three more that size in the same week!

In the last few years before the COVID "time out" and since La Zona reopened, Bob estimates 400 dorado over 40 pounds and 25 over 50 pounds have been caught at the spot each year. An average catch may be 10 to 12 fish per boat per day. Typically, dark, tannin-stained water with a visibility of around 2 feet is ideal for catching these fish. Muddy and cold waters negatively impact such averages, according to La Zona experts.

Fishing at La Zona goes on year around, but few American anglers go during Argentina's cold winter months of mid-May through mid-August. During the spring season, mid-August through November, the river is at its normal flow and huge schools of big dorado migrate to the dam to spawn. Some of the largest fish that are hooked and released in October and November are heavy with spawn.

The period from December through mid-May is typically when the Uruguay River is at its lowest level. Drought conditions reveal the rock fields that encompass most of the tailrace area, and wise anglers fish them. Water levels may vary a lot in May and September through November.

TOUGH TACKLE

The primary lures that accounted for most of the dorado we caught in the muddy, 12- to 18-foot-deep waters during our trip were giant, 12-inch, 6 1/2-ounce GD1 Magnum spinnerbaits. The rugged K-Lures spinnerbaits are custom-built by owner Kermet Adams and designed specifically for 40- and 50-pound dorado at La Zona. The articulated head weighs 2 3/4 ounces, and the wire is heavy stainless steel that's .062 inch in diameter. Two large No. 8 spinner blades and the massive 8/0 hook are attached with Spro No. 6 swivels rated at 560-pound test. The double 10-inch silicone skirts in firetiger color and a beefy 8-inch chartreuse curly-tail grub enhance the monster bait's profile and attract hungry dorado.

Gary Clark was the first angler to discover the effectiveness of spinnerbaits on the giant dorado in La Zona 12 years ago. On his second visit to the area, he



With six private bedrooms and a large gathering area, La Zona Lodge impresses clients with both accommodations and meals.

TRIP PLANNER

La Zona Fishing Lodge is just 5 minutes from dorado.

La Zona Fishing Lodge owner Hector Bradanini began as an area guide offering day trips in 2002 and then added overnight cabin accommodations in 2013. In 2019, he completed the lodge hotel. American Airlines offers two 9-hour overnight direct flights from Miami to Buenos Aires' Ministro Pistarini International Airport. Upon arrival, anglers are met by a La Zona representative who transfers them to the lodge near Concordia, Argentina, via a 5-hour van ride.

The lodge offers six air-conditioned bedrooms with private baths and a main building with a comfortable lounge room above an extra-large dining room and kitchen. Excellent and overly abundant food and beverages are provided at breakfast, lunch and a three-course dinner by Chef Santiago Cattani. Since 2018, Chef Cattani has been a premier asset to the operation. His creative main-course dishes and desserts, complemented by Argentine wines, are similar to what is found in upscale restaurants.

The fishing area is only 5 minutes from the lodge. Each morning, anglers meet the guides and board 21-foot fiberglass, center-console boats on a canal leading to the Uruguay River. The lodge also provides excellent fishing equipment for those not bringing their own. The typical guided fishing package at La Zona is five nights' accommodations and four days of fishing. About 80 Americans in small two- or four-person groups fish these waters each year, according to Giuliana Bradanini, lodge manager.

Most U.S. bookings are from November through April, which are the warmer months of the year in Argentina. To secure a reservation, most anglers book their trips far ahead of time. For more information, check out La Zona Fishing Lodge on Facebook and Instagram (@lazonalodge).

caught several fish on spinnerbaits, but none of the baits commercially available then were heavy enough to stand up against the powerful fish. Gary started making his own heavier, more durable spinnerbaits for personal use at La Zona. He then started working with the guides there on developing the best techniques for success. The most effective retrieve turned out to be a very slow roll, bumping the rocks along the bottom.

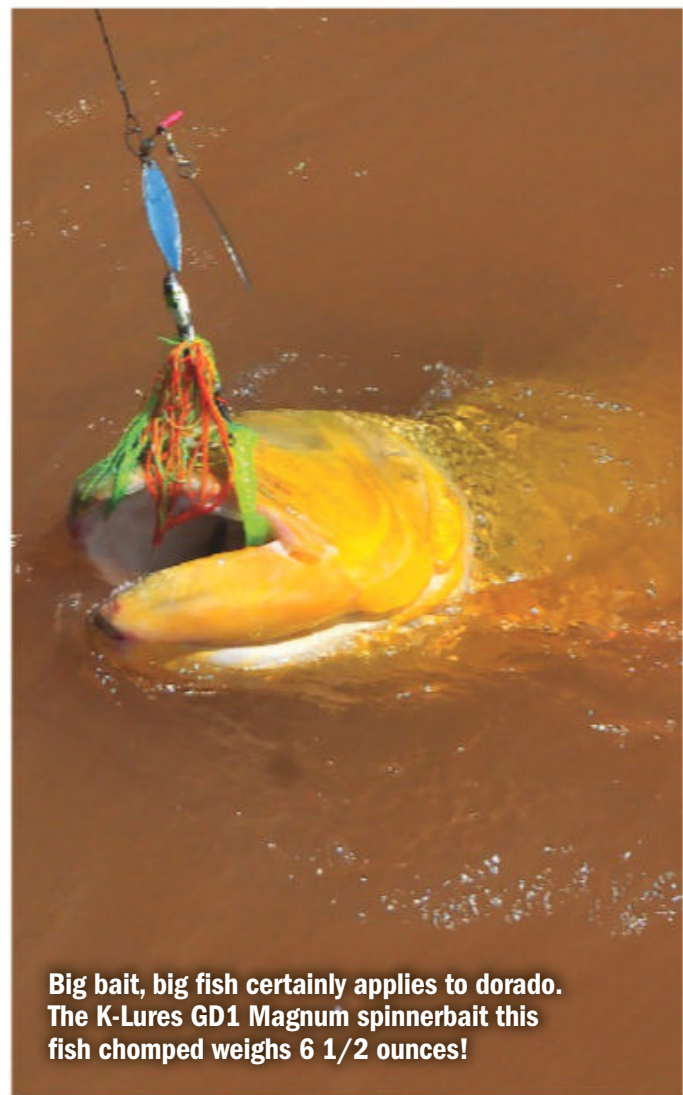
Today, GD1 Magnum spinnerbaits are typically the most effective lures in La Zona waters when depths are beyond a couple of meters. K-Lures' slightly smaller 5-ounce GD spinnerbait is more appropriate for bouncing through the emergent rock fields in the shallowest water. The single hook of a spinnerbait penetrates the dorado's toothy jaw better than a treble hook on some other big lures.

K-Lures also custom-builds La Zona 4 1/2-ounce shallow-cup poppers for use above the rocks in shallow waters. The dorado there brutally strike the 8-inch-long September Pop topwater poppers. At La Zona, cast big poppers as far as

possible and then reel as fast as you can. Use a high-speed, large-capacity reel and keep the rod tip high. Dorado tear after the wake-throwing plug and explode on it, according to Gary. If your arms are still in their sockets after the wrenching strike, hang on and continue cranking!

La Zona dorado can be destructive, so durable baits are vital. Big, strong crankbaits or metal-billed, deep-diving plugs are good options in mid-depth waters. Heavy-duty spoons, such as the 5 1/2-inch, 2-ounce Gold Papa Doc Big Game, tossed to shallow rock fields are also productive. Each day's top-producing lures depend on the water levels and water visibility.

Quality 7 1/2-foot rods with medium-heavy or heavy actions and baitcasting reels, such as the Shimano Tranx 400HG, spooled with 65- or 80-pound-test high-visibility braid are ideal for La Zona dorado encounters. La Zona is a bucket list destination for good reason, and you need to be prepared for memorable battles when you strike gold—or it strikes you. **G&F**



Big bait, big fish certainly applies to dorado. The K-Lures GD1 Magnum spinnerbait this fish chomped weighs 6 1/2 ounces!

Higher potency fast-acting liquid soft-gels **for Men**



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BEYOND ^{THE} BEATEN WATER

A CREATIVE KAYAK LAUNCH
IS OFTEN A BIG PART OF
**PLUCKING BASS FROM
HARD-TO-ACCESS PONDS AND LAKES.**

By Thomas Allen | Photos by Scott Niska

Kayaks are easier to get into the water than larger, trailered boats when a ramp isn't available. That's an advantage that opens access to less-pressured ponds and lakes.



The early June day was absolutely perfect. You just don't get many like that: high skies, 80 degrees, nearly flat calm, and the bass were a special kind of hungry as the spawn was winding down. Conditions were ideal for a kayaking largemouth slugfest—or so we hoped. It was to be an exceptional day based on company alone; my son Tommy, who has become quite the hammer on bass waters, was in tow, along with my two friends Alex Sherbinow from Old Town and renowned Yooper photographer Scott Niska, who was pulling double duty with the camera and rod and reel.

The goal was to conduct a road launch with a fleet of Old Town Sportsman kayaks on a beautiful lake that didn't offer a modern public ramp. Both Alex and Scott are fully capable anglers, and they were certainly impressed by the abundant bass habitat in the small lake before we even pushed the kayaks back. In fact, while we were still launching, Alex hooked up on a nice fish mere yards from the drop point. Of course, that initiated the trash talk that would last the entire day.

Right off the bat, we found a few top-water biters, caught some on crankbaits and got a couple on a Texas rig. The grand slam proved to be flipping reeds with a 1/2-ounce Strike King Denny Brauer Structure Jig dressed with a Rage Craw, green pumpkin across the board. The fish were shallow and feeding heavily on crawfish in pencil reeds wherever the pea gravel met larger chunk rock. We were literally calling our shots.

A jig and trailer, like the Denny Brauer Structure Jig and Rage Craw from Strike King, is a must-have combo in a minimalist tackle arsenal for fishing remote bass waters.



One of my favorite moments was watching my son pin down the pattern for himself. He backed out of the section of reeds we were fishing together and moved down the shoreline to an area we hadn't hit yet. He nosed his kayak to the edge of the vegetation, confidently stood up, and on the first flip lowered his rod tip and set the hook with gusto. He managed to keep his center of gravity while fighting the fish to the boat, unhooking a fine 3-pound Minnesota green bass.

There's nothing like untouched largemouths in a healthy fishery. Not only

was the lake full of lush weeds and ideal habitat for spawning bass, but it also set up right for the kayaks. Small, untouched waters like this offer excellent proving grounds for a developing angler or anyone looking for a great day of fishing.

AVOID THE CROWDS

I love where I live. There are countless farm ponds, small to medium lakes and even some renowned large lakes where the bass fishing is as good as anywhere on the continent. The Upper Midwest offers dedicated bass-angling

kayakers more places to find and catch largemouths and smallmouths than they could possibly fish in a lifetime.

The truly best options, however, often require research by evaluating maps, navigating private-land access or utilizing road launches, and in my experience the fishing can be life-changing. As a kayaker, I relish the added adventure that comes with accessing hard-to-reach waters. The extra effort adds an element of satisfaction much like that of a DIY project seen through to fruition. This isn't unique to the chunk of country I call home, of course. Kayaking lesser-known waters for bass is a rewarding option anywhere the fish swim.

I won't pretend that catching fish isn't a huge part of why we go, but most kayak anglers likely enjoy the process as much as anything. The size and quantity of fish caught is certainly of value, but the part of the story most often relived during post-experience cold ones is how the kayaks were launched. The level of accomplishment directly correlates to the degree of difficulty in slipping a kayak into the drink.

Customizing a kayak to your unique specifications then hauling and launching it is certainly vindicated by successful fishing—especially when getting there takes extra effort. Nothing proves the value of a kayak more than when you've located the right body of water that seems impossible to get to; you just know it's full of unpressured fish. I got into kayaks by accident but quickly realized that no matter how simple or extravagant the rigging, they provide a platform to fish water that most larger boats simply can't access.

Use an app like OnX that provides landowner info to secure permission to cross private property with kayaks and gain access to water.



SAFE TRANSPORT

Kayaks ride easy on this trailer from Yakima.

A sturdy and reliable trailer is critical for getting your kayaks down the road safely and to the access point that leads to the water's edge. Yakima has you covered with several options, but one version I especially like is the EasyRider.

The EasyRider (\$3,399; yakima.com) can carry from one to three kayaks rigged with a number of additional Yakima accessories, or up to four bare kayaks total. Plus, the aluminum trailer is more than capable of long-distance, cross-country expeditions on paved and gravel roads, thanks in part to its shock absorbers. It features a 500-pound capacity, and the tongue folds for easy storage.



The EasyRider is capable of hauling kayaks up to 19 feet long.



Sometimes launching right from the road is the best option. Parking will likely be limited, so have a plan for shuttling kayaks and people.

MANAGE THE LAUNCH

Bass fishing from kayaks in backwoods lakes—or simply small waters without ramps—often requires hiking to the water. Some of the best lakes don't have ramps, and they demand creativity. Launching in these waters certainly takes more work, but some planning will make your off-grid experience more manageable.

Many of the smaller bodies of water without hard ramps are often landlocked by private landowners, farm ponds especially. It's critical to garner permission

to cross someone's property to access a lake or pond. I use the OnX app on my smartphone for locating a landowner to request hunting permission, but I've found it handy for kayak access, too. I've also found most property owners are usually willing to allow kayak access. Just do the right thing: knock on a few doors, be respectful and ask. The worst they can say is no. You might also find an opportunity to make new friends.

Unless you're planning to launch from the road, a kayak cart of some sort will

not only protect the hull during the haul, but also make it easier on your back. With today's larger fishing kayaks, you need a sturdy cart, and it needs to be simple. The new Railblaza C-Tug R with Kiwi Wheels (\$169.99; railblaza.com) fits the bill for many scenarios a kayaker might encounter. It's highly adjustable, lightweight, breaks down and stows in seconds, and will support up to a 220-pound load. It's an ideal cart for navigating a gravel road, someone's yard or a maintained trail.

For the trail-blazing kayaker, the Wilderness Systems Heavy Duty Kayak Cart with no-flat or balloon-style wheels (\$239.99 or \$269.99; wildernesssystems.com) will help you get over rough and extra-soft terrain. This cart will support a loaded kayak up to 330 pounds. I've also seen anglers rig up a lightweight trailer that connects to a bicycle and run it a couple miles deep on a local bike trail to access a small creek that feeds into a nearly impenetrable lake (word was the bass fishing was second to none). No matter your objective, you must be able to cover some ground without dragging your kayak on it.



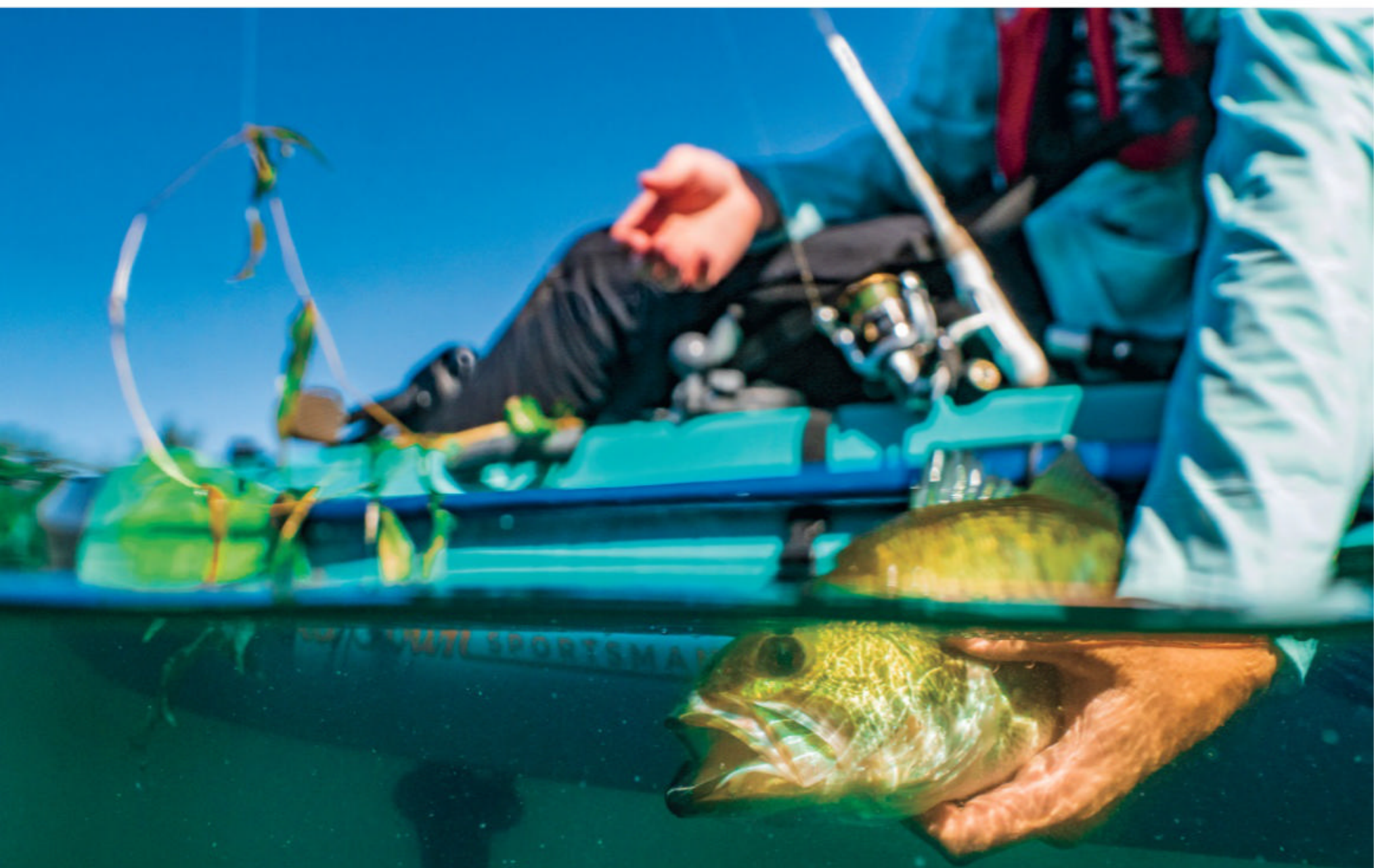
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When you find an out-of-the-way honey hole, keep the fishing good by practicing catch-and-release and by not over-pressuring the spot.

If you're road launching, suitable parking may not be available. That may mean someone else might have to drop you off and pick you up. It takes some coordination, but if you plan ahead, it's not hard. On the day I described earlier, we had to quickly drop off the kayaks at the launch site, drive the truck and trailer to the family cabin, and then get a ride back to the launch.

Bass anglers totally go overkill when it comes to being prepared—I carry well over 30 rods and just as many tackle trays in my bass boat. It takes asserted discipline to not overpack for a kayak trip. I'm still learning. I have a set-aside kayak tackle box that has one or two of everything I'm likely to need for the conditions, and maybe five or six Lew's rods and reels at the most. The time of year and bite will

determine the specific combos and gear I'll pack. I've found that I fish smarter with fewer options. Make an educated decision before you leave. If it's a primitive launch back in the woods, downsize even more and focus on two or three likely presentations. For a lighter load, my go-to baits include a jig and trailer, vibrating jig like a Strike King Thunder Cricket and Strike King Rage Swimmer, a mid-depth diving crankbait and a topwater option or two. That's the bare minimum.

The final piece of advice I have is to not divulge your secret kayak honey holes. If you've found a magical place, keep the details under wraps and don't overshare images or video that may reveal obvious landmarks on the social networks. Some things are best left to memory and imagination. I can attest

to how frustrating it is to show up at your top-secret bass lake and find some other person there who didn't put in the blood, sweat and tears that you did to find the place.

Finally, when you find amazing spots, don't forget about conservation. In my neck of the woods, it doesn't take much to damage a fishery, and it may take years to recover. I've worked diligently over many seasons to keep up to a dozen hard-to-reach lakes in rotation for launching the kayak. I'd rather not hit the same place more than two or three times a year. They stay good because of that. Be conscientious, and practice catch-and-release. Paddling or pedaling on pristine waters to catch piles of big bass from a 'yak is truly as good as it gets—especially on a place you have all to yourself. 

New Blood Flow Breakthrough Helps Men Enjoy Strong, Long-Lasting Intimacy – At Any Age

Men across America are raving about a newly enhanced potency supplement that helps achieve healthy blood flow on demand

After age 40, it's common knowledge that performance begins to decline in many men. However, a new, performance empowering pill is showing that any relatively healthy man can now enjoy long-lasting, and frequent intimacy – at any age.

This doctor-designed formula, created by leading anti-aging expert Dr. Al Sears, has already helped men overcome low and sinking libido -- and has recently undergone a potency-enhancing update – with remarkable new results.

When the first pill -- **Primal Max Black** -- was first released, it quickly became a top-selling men's performance helper, promoting intimacy across America.

It worked by supporting healthy testosterone levels. However, Dr. Sears soon realized that this isn't the only challenge men face with performance. That's when he turned his attention to blood flow.

And this became **Primal Max Red**.

THIS PROVEN SOLUTION IS MORE MECHANICAL THAN HORMONAL

Truth is, once blood flow slows down for men, no matter how exciting it is, it won't be enough without the necessary amount...

So enjoying intimacy without healthy blood flow becomes difficult for most men.

Luckily, a Nobel prize-winning scientist discovered the simple answer to help support performance strength and confidence -- by boosting vital blood flow --

and enhancing this essential performance function.

Using this landmark Nobel Prize as its basis, **Primal Max Red** enhanced healthy blood flow for untold millions of men around the world with the use of strong nitric oxide boosters.

While **Primal Max Black** helped maintain optimal testosterone, **Primal Max Red** tackles a lesser-known challenge.

Director, Al Sears MD, who has authored over 500 scientific papers and has appeared on more than 50 media outlets including ABC News, CNN, ESPN, Discovery, Lifetime, and many more say, *"Less than optimal blood flow can be part of a huge problem that affects a lot of men. And it needed to be addressed once and for all, so men would not dwell on it. Then, once we optimized it and had a great deal of success, we set out to see if we could do even better."*

The former formula had excellent results. However, new research showed that for even faster, anytime, anywhere results, increasing the dose of a key compound was needed.

So, one of the three nitric oxide boosters in the new **Primal Max Red**, L-Citrulline, was clinically boosted to 9000 mg, and the results were astounding. Which is no surprise considering that 5000 mg is considered a "normal amount" -- giving the new version nearly doubled the blood flow boosting power.

Men who had previously been unsure about their power and stamina were overjoyed to be back to their



A new discovery that increases nitric oxide availability was recently proven to boost blood flow 275% - resulting in improved performance.

old selves and to get and maintain a healthy bloodflow when they needed it.

BETTER BLOOD FLOW, STRONGER RESULTS

The best way to promote healthy blood flow throughout the body is with the use of **Primal Max Red**. By using it, when exciting signals leave the brain, blood flows much faster like it used to.

This critical action is how men across the country are enjoying full and satisfying performance at any age. No need to bother with testosterone-boosting shots, blue pills, or shady capsules that have no effect.

Primal Max Red can effectively promote healthy blood flow that most men can use for maximum intimacy. This is leading to more greater capacity and satisfaction, coupled with long-lasting performance.

"There was a time when men had little control when it came to boosting their blood flow," Dr. Sears said. "But science has come a long way in recent years. And now, with the creation of nitric oxide-boosting **Primal Max Red**,

men can perform better than ever, and enjoy intimacy at any age."

Now for men across America, it's much easier to stay at their performance peak as they get older.

HOW TO GET PRIMAL MAX RED (AND FREE PRIMAL MAX BLACK):

To secure free bottles of **Primal Max Black** and get the hot, new **Primal Max Red** formula, buyers should contact the Sears Health Hotline at **1-800-906-7152** TODAY. "It's not available in retail stores yet," says Dr. Sears. "The Hotline allows us to ship directly to the customer." Dr. Sears feels so strongly about **Primal Max**, all orders are backed by a 100% money-back guarantee. "Just send me back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days from purchase date, and I'll send you all your money back."

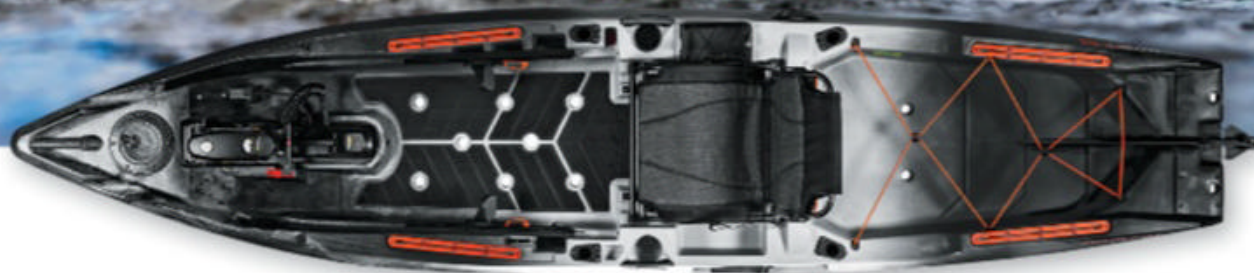
Call NOW at **1-800-906-7152** to secure your supply of **Primal Max Red** and free bottles of **Primal Max Black**. Use Promo Code **PMAXGF423** when you call. Lines are frequently busy, but all calls will be answered!

FIT FOR FISHING

WHETHER YOU FOCUS ON LAKES OR RIVERS, FRESHWATER OR THE SALT, THERE ARE KAYAK MODELS DESIGNED TO MEET YOUR SPECIFIC NEEDS.

By Outdoor Sportsman Group Editors

Kayaks built with fishing-specific features make time on the water more productive for anglers seeking small-craft adventures. From ample storage and electronics-rigging options to smart mounting solutions for accessories, kayaks designed for fishing help us find the bite and make the most of it—all while remaining easier to transport and store than larger boats. Our colleagues at *Florida Sportsman* recently put the latest kayaks to the test on the water, and the following models stood out for a variety of fishing situations. 



OLD TOWN SPORTSMAN AUTOPILOT 136

LENGTH: 13'6" | **WIDTH:** 37"

WEIGHT: 158 lbs. including motor

CAPACITY: 660 lbs.

MATERIAL: single-layer polyethylene

PROPULSION: Minn Kota trolling motor (45 lbs. thrust) with i-Pilot; paddle

MSRP: \$4,849.99

oldtownwatercraft.com

TOP FEATURES: Among other specialties (including the famed PDL pedal drive), Old Town Sportsman was an early leader in optimizing electric propulsion for fishing kayaks. The Minn Kota units built for certain boats in the Sportsman lineup are fitted amidship, keeping the bow and stern clean and uncluttered for fishing. The AutoPilot series kayaks (which includes a smaller

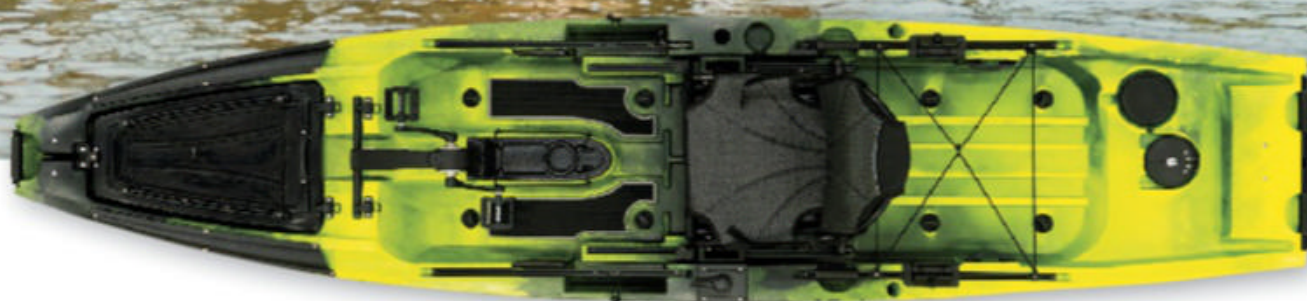
cousin to the 136, the 120) benefit from Minn Kota's GPS-guided Spot-Lock technology, which holds the vessel in precise position in wind and current—super helpful in moderate rivers, coastal tides and breezy lakes. A smaller kayak, the 106, also has Minn Kota power but in a manual configuration only.

WORTH NOTING: The AutoPilot models are the first and only fully integrated motorized kayaks that feature GPS autopilot (Minn Kota i-Pilot).

FISH IT HERE: Well suited and rigged for the tournament angler, the AutoPilot 136 is built to fight wind, current and waves. The ultra-stable hull is perfect for standing and hands-free fishing, plus it features hands-free (and totally snag-free) GPS anchoring.

'YAK GUIDE

For reviews of more kayak models and gear, plus how-to articles on rigging and fishing from them in all types of water, check newsstands for the exclusive *Kayak Fishing Fun* issue.



NATIVE SLAYER PROPEL MAX 12.5

LENGTH: 12'6" | **WIDTH:** 34"

WEIGHT: 125 lbs. fully rigged

CAPACITY: 500 lbs.

MATERIAL: rotomolded polyethylene

PROPULSION: pedal; paddle;
capable of being motorized

MSRP: \$2,999

nativewatercraft.com

TOP FEATURES: The rotomolded bow hatch reveals a bucket well positioned for installing a battery and access for

running transducer wiring. Bow-and-stern mounting provisions accommodate a power anchor or electric motor. Heavy-duty BMX style grips offer comfortable transport. The 2023 model includes a new spring-blade rudder. The Max 12.5 has dual horizontal rod storage with tip covers, three molded vertical rodholders (two behind the seat, one at your right hand beside the seat) and paddle storage. Sidekick wheel transport system is a likely upgrade to consider; the self-contained cart offers a simple route from your vehicle to the water.

WORTH NOTING: Dual electronics panels on either side of the angler are replaceable if you want to change your setup without drilling into your boat.

FISH IT HERE: The Max 12.5 is at home in freshwater and saltwater environments, making it a versatile kayak fishing platform. The Propel Pedal Drive 701 series offers smooth, lively, hands-free propulsion. Stability and capacity are strong suits, and both are departments of particular interest to any angler downsizing from a powerboat.

HOBIE MIRAGE PASSPORT 12.0 R

LENGTH: 12' | **WIDTH:** 34"

WEIGHT: 73 lbs.

CAPACITY: 400 lbs.

MATERIAL: rotomolded polyethylene

PROPULSION: Hobie MirageDrive GT pedal system with Kick-Up Fins; paddle

MSRP: \$1,999

hobie.com

TOP FEATURES: A good entry-level kayak in Hobie's line of MirageDrive boats, this is the new rotomolded edition of the popular Passport 12.0. It's a durable, lightweight kayak outfitted with all the basic features you'll need to enjoy a variety of freshwater and

saltwater fisheries, with numerous points for customizing and upgrades. Rudder is included, and control is positioned to the left side of the aluminum-frame, breathable-mesh seat. The 12.0 R would be a good choice for your first boat or one to add to your fleet to bring a new fishing buddy. Seagrass green, slate blue and ivory dune colors are available.

WORTH NOTING: A transducer cavity makes for simple installation of a

fishfinder. The Passport 12.0 R also has a Power-Pole Micro bracket indent, and a sail kit or Bimini sunshade (sold separately) may be easily added.

FISH IT HERE: Sturdy construction makes the 12.0 R suitable for all waters, and it's configured for accessorizing to accommodate nearly any fishing tactic. The speed and efficiency of MirageDrive propulsion are benefits during full-day or long-distance fishing trips.





BONAFIDE RVR119

LENGTH: 11'9" | **WIDTH:** 35"

WEIGHT: 85 lbs.

CAPACITY: 425 lbs.

MATERIAL: rotomolded polyethylene

PROPULSION: paddle; capable of being motorized (Torqeedo)

MSRP: \$1,649

bonafidefishing.com

TOP FEATURES: The RVR119 comes with channels at bow and stern to accommodate and quiet a bow anchor or stern drag chain. The stern tankwell is designed to hold a 13x13, 13x16 or 16x16 BlackPack Pro. Providing a

means to pull the kayak, tie down bags or organize rods for transport, the Triple Action Bow Strap is located just behind the forward Boss Strap rod and paddle stager. Fore and aft access plates allow entry into the hull for installing lights, wiring or other accessories. Aluminum foot braces may be converted into steering for a stern-mounted electric motor. Inserts are pre-installed on the gunnel for a YakAttack RotoGrip or LockNLoad Track Base. Groove tracks astern of the seat are provided for installing a Sidekick Wheel System for convenient transport.

WORTH NOTING: The removable DryPod for installing fishfinder, battery and transducer is interchangeable with other Bonafide kayaks. Also included are integrated Anchor Wizard pulley landings.

FISH IT HERE: The river-specific hull partnered with a uniquely designed skeg system allows tracking, maneuverability and stability in moving water. Trout, smallmouth bass, stripers, muskies—any moving-water target is on the hit list for this new rig.

CRESCENT ULTRALITE

LENGTH: 10'2" | **WIDTH:** 30"

WEIGHT: 49 lbs.

CAPACITY: 280 lbs.

MATERIAL: rotomolded polyethylene

PROPULSION: paddle

MSRP: \$799

crescentkayaks.com

TOP FEATURES: The UltraLite is one of the lightest rotomolded kayaks with true fishing capability in existence, but it's no lightweight in performance. This exact boat was used by tournament champion Drew Gregory to win the Bassmaster Kayak Series event on Grand Lake, Oklahoma, last year. A full-length keel delivers incredible tracking for a 10-foot craft, and it paddles and handles effortlessly, without getting blown around on open waters.

WORTH NOTING: Two YakAttack MightyMounts are located behind the adjustable seat for rod holders, visibility flags or lights.



FISH IT HERE: Remote backwaters, brush-lined creeks, winding rivers and far-flung locations away from launch sites are all spots where this rig shines.

JACKSON KAYAK COOSA X

LENGTH: 11'8" | **WIDTH:** 36"

WEIGHT: 98 lbs.

CAPACITY: 425 lbs.

MATERIAL: rotomolded polyethylene

PROPULSION: paddle

MSRP: \$1,899

jacksonkayak.com

TOP FEATURES: With high-low seating, a bow and stern designed to accommodate electric motors, and adjustable foot braces and paddle clips, the Coosa X takes comfort and convenience into account. There are ample gear tracks in logical points around the hull, including two small tracks at the bow for cameras or anchor accessories, plus Jackson's unique TriTrack multi-functional top-load track port and starboard in the cockpit.

WORTH NOTING: The Coosa X is equipped with a molded "drift chamber," a channel for drag chains and anchors to be used smoothly without installing any additional parts.

FISH IT HERE: With added volume in the bow for rivers and other moving waters, the Coosa X is designed to be Jackson's premier river and small-water fishing kayak.



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NRS PIKE IK

LENGTH: 12'8" | **WIDTH:** 38"
WEIGHT: 48 lbs.
CAPACITY: 375 lbs.
MATERIAL: PVC
PROPULSION: paddle
MSRP: \$1,395
nrs.com

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TOP FEATURES: With a bit more side-tube diameter than the NRS Kuda series, adjustable foot braces and a rigid keel insert in the bow, the inflatable Pike fishes very much like a conventional kayak, paddling surely and smoothly alongside any rotomolded model. Options for different skegs (fins), YakAttack accessory mounts, bungee webs and numerous tie-down points make it easy to add what you need for a day of fishing.

WORTH NOTING: The Pike combines a high-pressure, 4-inch drop-stitch deck that inflates to 8 PSI with 10.5-inch side tubes to create a super stable platform for sitting, standing or moving around as you cast.

FISH IT HERE: Unique design elements for enhanced on-the-water performance make the Pike inflatable rigged and ready to catch adventure in remote waters.

ESSENTIAL ACCESSORIES

Make your 'yak more fishable with these add-ons.

DAKOTA LITHIUM BATTERIES 1

As kayak and accessory evolution continues to occur, the need for more condensed power containment has been the motivation for many of the latest battery innovations. Companies such as Dakota Lithium have answered the call and continue to innovate as anglers seek new levels of rigging and simplification within the hulls of their fishing kayaks. Take, for example, the company's new 12V, 46Ah battery (\$399; dakotalithium.com), which weighs just 10 1/2 pounds and has a smaller footprint than two 23Ah batteries together. Lightweight lithium batteries are safe and reliable, and with the long list of amp hour options and overall footprint measurements, they make perfect sense. But they aren't cheap. Dakota Lithium offers an impressive 11-year warranty that provides confidence across the board. In the long run, it's less expensive to make a 100 percent transition to lithium power—a worthwhile investment.



Perhaps the first aftermarket addition every kayak owner should look to is hull protection. Rotomolded kayak hulls are indeed tough, but you want to keep the hull as pristine as possible for the life of ownership, optimizing trade-in and resale value when upgrading or passing the kayak on to another angler. For the bow, a favorite off-the-shelf solution is Berley Pro's famous Bumper Bro: a thermoformed, ABS abrasion-resistant plastic keel/nose protector that is custom-formed to fit perfectly on most of the popular kayak models currently made (\$49; mariner-sails.com). It simply glues on the bow keel of your kayak, and you have a tough, good-looking, sacrificial nose cap that can withstand the worst of rocks, concrete, gravel, oyster beds and more.

Available in square and round shapes to pad most seats, the Kayak Kusion (\$65; kusionkompany.com) provides lightweight comfort during long sits on the water. Straps with anti-slip cam buckles ensure quick and secure attachment. The Kusion is made from breathable, non-collapsible material in two levels of firmness, and the removable cover is offered in numerous colors and patterns.

A Type III, medium-profile life jacket delivering 16 1/2 pounds of flotation, the recently upgraded Chinook (\$159.95; nrs.com) combines PlushFit foam and a high-back design in a comfortable vest compatible with any kayak seat. Two large, zippered pockets hold tackle boxes and feature updated internal organization based on angler suggestions. Smaller pockets on the front offer quick access to tools and spools. The Chinook also includes a rod holder, strobe attachment point, reflective accents and a knife-lash tab.



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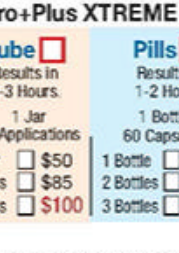
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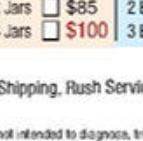



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FEAR, PRIDE AND NAPS

SOMETIMES THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH TAKING A SNOOZE.

Shane and his father had a three-day weekend near the end of turkey season, and they planned to hunt hard for all of it. They figured that with luck they'd both tag out, but after a tough Friday and Saturday chasing wary birds, neither had a gobbler in the bag. They were both tired, but Shane was optimistic about Sunday morning. That is, until lightning lit up the dark sky like fireworks on the Fourth. Soon thunder crashed, and boy did it rain! As they pulled off the highway to enter their hunting property, Shane's father could hardly see the road.

"I get one measly weekend to really hunt hard this year, and it pours," bemoaned Shane. "Just my luck."

"There's no pouting in turkey hunting, boy," the old man said jokingly. "It'll probably ease up in a couple hours, the sun will come out, and the big boys with the long beards will be fired up. And I'll be good and rested by then."

"Maybe," said Shane. "But you always tell me I can't catch a bass without a line in the water, right?"

"That's a fact."

"It's also a fact that I can't kill a turkey while sitting in this truck. God gave us rain jackets for a reason, so I'm heading out at normal time. Sounds like you're wimping out to me," Shane teased back.

"Suit yourself," said Shane's father, "but I can tell you there are few things in life better than a guilt-free snooze. Waiting out a storm isn't wimping out—you'll understand that one day. Sure,



turkeys can be taken in the rain, but I wouldn't know because I like napping in it better than hunting in it."

Shane's father eased the seat back, folded his arms over his chest and pulled his hat brim over his eyes. He was already snoring lightly when Shane opened the truck door, uncased his shotgun and sloshed off into the dark downpour.

An hour later the young man was soaked to the bone. Rainwater had seeped down the back of his jacket collar and piped through the length of his pant legs before making reservoirs of his boots. He began to realize that even if he could hear a turkey in this rain, he likely couldn't see one well enough to shoot. About that time a bolt of lightning flashed just above the treetops, and a clap of thunder rocked Shane from his watery seat under an oak.

Shane's father didn't even look up as his defeated son opened the truck door and splashed into the passenger seat. With great struggle Shane overcame the suction of his boots, finally pulling them off, before fishing around in the back seat for a dry t-shirt. Meanwhile the rain continued to pound the Chevy's hood as if it were angry at American automobiles.

"Well ..." said the older man finally. Shane could almost feel his father smirking underneath his hat brim. "What did you get ... besides wet?"

"Cold," said Shane.

"I don't doubt that, but I'm proud of you anyway."

"For what?" asked Shane.

"For having the courage to march out into the darkness alone when it was much easier to sit right here in this truck. That, and for having

the sense to turn around when you did."

Shane was puzzled.

"You see, son," said Shane's father without opening his eyes, "a man's biggest enemies are often his own fear, pride and guilt. You already overcame two of those things this morning. Now you just have to deal with guilt.

"Guilt about what?" asked Shane.

"The guilt hunters sometimes feel when they don't go hunting but they know they could have, maybe even should have."

"I guess I do feel that sometimes," said Shane. "Kinda weird. So what should I do?"

"Ease your seat back, pull your hat down and enjoy the patter of the rain as you dream about the two giant toms we're going to hammer this evening."

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