

# Hard Water Perch Fishing



Duncan Bachman and his granddaughter, Becky Bauchman, caught these perch while fishing with the author on a windy, cold, January day, inside one of his 12 heated and insulated ice houses.



Hunter W. of Joliet, Ill., caught this jumbo perch while fishing with his parents and the author in the beginning of March 2012.



Melvin Grasser of Milwaukee, Wis., caught this jumbo perch while fishing with the author in January of 2012.

BY JOHN ANDREW

As winter is fast approaching, some people have already started ice fishing on the smaller ponds in our northern region. As a year-round tour guide for fishing, my clients are very excited to catching perch through the ice. These tasty fish offer some of the best table fare for the winter sportsman.

With my 12 wood, heated and insulated ice houses on seven different lakes, the guests are always catching fish at one of these many locations.

We begin by fishing locations that are deeper, such as off the sides of rock bars, down at the bottom, near or in the soft sediment. Other locations are out in lakes or ponds that have deep brush, around 15 to 50 feet deep or off a long underwater point that sticks out into the lake, connected from the shoreline. These spots are all marked earlier in the open water season with a hand held GPS. This allows us to make quick contact with the fish when the lakes are frozen over. For people just getting started ice fishing, I recommend the use of a handheld GPS during the summer time so they can easily find the fish during freeze up.

Starting out with a small ice rod, reel and two-pound test line—yes, two-pound test line. The light line is very important for consistent catching and proper presentation of the bait, using mostly wax worms, wigglers and some pieces of night-crawler for the bait. Now please do not misunderstand, you will catch perch on heavier line and other baits. I am only

describing what we use and what works for us. Tying on small ice jigs or small ice hooks in the size range of 1/64 or 1/32 ounce is standard and normal.

Using a spring tip rod is very common. This tip is made out of very soft spring material and allows you to see the tip of your rod move even at the most gentle of bites from a fish. Although, I like to have my guests use a tiny slip bobber (which I have installed before they get there). This is much easier for them to see and to focus their attention on, by looking down into the ice hole at the bobber, rather than staring at the tip of their rod. The slightest twitch of the bobber and they are instructed to set the hook. This works! Remember, you are in a heated ice house; the slip bobber is free and clear of any ice building up to block the line from moving freely through the bobber.

The use of an underwater camera has become one of the most important tools for the fisherman. During open water fishing, the underwater camera has truly excelled the knowledge of the people who use them. This is also true with the ice fishermen. How does this help us? Well, for example, if we walk around the ice and drill 25 holes all about 20 feet apart, we can start fishing in each hole until we catch fish or, we can go from hole to hole and put the camera down to simply see if there are fish there or not. Then, once we see fish, we can go directly to that hole where we see all the fish and start fishing.

In my situation, I would locate the fish with the camera and then move an ice



Henry Harris, Greg Mason and Phill Calstrom from Morris, Ill., caught these jumbo perch while fishing with the author in January of 2012.

house directly over that spot and have the guest start catching, not fishing. No more just sitting on a bucket waiting for a bite. We now know before we ever put a hook down if there are fish there or not. This piece of technology will not work well in those dark coffee-colored lakes, but anywhere else this truly does work and works very well.

Perch fishing can be very easy once we locate them, but there are times when several factors come into play to help get them to bite. One very important issue is the color of the hook or jig head we are using. This can easily be decided by lowering our hook to a desired location where we already see fish on the underwater camera and watch the reaction of the perch to the hook. We do not bait the hook at this time but only observe the behavior of the fish to the color we are presenting to them, remember we can already see the fish with the camera so watching the reaction of the fish to the color of the hook or jig head is a very critical concept to this test. Some colors will actually spook or scare the fish and other colors will get no response and then you will discover how some of the fish will actually move toward certain color hooks or ice jigs, with no bait on the hook. This is very important. Now it's time to put the bait onto the hook with the color that got the most positive response from the perch.

Watching the actual fish in color or black and white—depending on your camera—is truly remarkable. We can see what kind of fish, the size of the fish, how our behavior excites or spooks the fish, and the clients are going to learn more in just a few minutes than some of them ever have learned in the past.

Fishing in the weeds is also very good during the ice period. Using your camera and locating perch on the sloping deeper part of the weeds is a very good location. Also very mild current areas are good choices. This can be down where two lakes are connected by a small channel, then fishing away from the channel out a short distance into the lakes at six to 15 feet deep. You must be able to find the narrow channel between the weeds, which signifies the actual channel. This area is very good for perch fishing.

Good luck and tight lines.

*The author, John Andrew, owner/operator of the AnglersChoiceGuideService.com is a two-time world record holder. He can be reached at 715-892-3020. John Andrew is a fulltime resident and fulltime, year-round tour guide for fishing and hunting in the state of Wisconsin, specializing in Vilas, Iron, and Oneida counties.*

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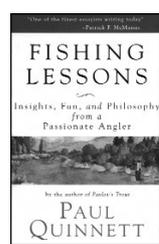
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