

New Years Pike Fest 2013



Matt Game, Ben Wilson, Steve Nixon and Sam Benning of Eau Clair, Wis., with their catch of January northern pike with the author and year 'round tour guide, John Andrew.



Addam Johnsen, Fred Vicers, and Kevin Peterson of Milwaukee, caught these pike with Wisconsin guide John Andrew.



Andrew O., of Chicago, Ill., caught this pike with Wisconsin guide John Andrew.

BY JOHN ANDREW

This time of year is always fun for the family to get out on the ice and do a little fishing. Be careful to check ice depth before taking mom and the kids out. In this article we will discuss three locations and three techniques for catching northern pike through the ice, although there are several others. Pike are great eating, from pan-frying to pickling them, but they are underrated due to the "Y" bones and the outside skin is a little slimy when cleaning the fish, although the meat is very tasty.

Most of us know that pike relate to the weeds most of the year, suspend over deeper water and will sit on the bottom away from the weeds. All these locations have specific techniques for catching them. Yes, we all can simply put a golden shiner down to the area we think there are pike and probably catch a couple. The following three locations and three techniques will help you catch a lot more. We are only using tip ups for the fishing described in this article. Yes, you can use rod and reel but in these examples we are not.

LOCATION NO. 1

In this area we are fishing very shallow, from three feet to five feet deep to the bottom and we are in an area that has very thick and dense weed growth two feet off the bottom. We rarely ever see pike swimming above the weed growth (with the underwater camera) in this location. Instead we see pike swimming right through the dense weeds—yes, right through the weeds.

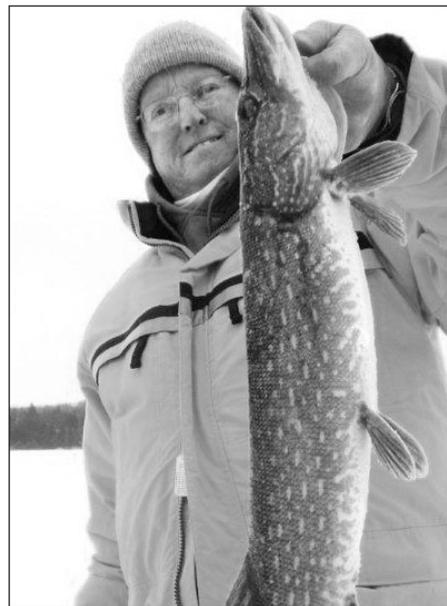
We are fishing close by to a swampy area or an area with cattails along the shoreline. This puts out slightly warmer water than the rest of the lake. This area may be slushy on top of the ice when the rest of the lake is not slushy. The young-of-the-year panfish are relating to this area and are inside the shallow weeds. These are not tall weeds. In some lakes, this weed growth looks like a two-foot-thick carpet growing along the bottom of the lake.

TECHNIQUE NO. 1

Here we want our golden shiner directly above the weeds—not one or two feet above the weeds. We need the fish to come out of the weeds to our bait. Most baitfish will go motionless when a game fish appears from cover, including your Shiner, so too far above the weeds in this location is bad. A very thin seven-strand wire leader that is tied straight to the hook is very important for maximum results. When this leader material becomes bent or curly from striking or caught fish, retying back to the hook so the leader hangs straight to the hook is also a critical concept for continued success. Also, a colored hook and a colored split shot absolutely makes a very big difference. Remember, we need to get them up and out of the dense vegetation where they are dwelling down inside.

LOCATION NO. 2

In this location we are fishing next to or slightly away from: rock bars, sandy points with a drop off, long sloping shallow bays that go into deep water, extended under-



Ede Shinton of Minocqua, Wis., caught this pike while fishing with the author John Andrew.

water shallow shelves off the shore line and out from current areas. The northern pike are suspended out in the water column. Once in a while they are suspended away from a weed bed, but normally when they are near weeds they are in the weeds or very close to the weeds.

TECHNIQUE NO. 2

When fishing suspended pike, they can be several feet off the bottom, not just one or two feet off the bottom like walleye. Let's say it's 30 feet deep; the pike could be 10 or 15 feet off the bottom. When we put our bait down to the fish, we are still going to put our baits above the depth at which we believe they are suspended. We may only have the bait 10 feet below the hole and sometimes even less. Using a larger golden shiner is what works for us, and a colored hook, along with three or four colored split shots for added attraction. This works for us in all the above-described locations. Remember, we are using tip ups for all the fishing described in this article.

LOCATION NO. 3

Pike that are sitting on the bottom is our next location. Many of us have seen this in the springtime when the pike are in the shallows on Canadian lakes; we simply toss over a jig, rubber bait, small spoon or pike-sized fly and we get the pike to react to our bait or lure.

This also happens in the wintertime under the ice, but they are deeper and less aggressive and more apt to hit our golden shiner or sucker minnow. Yes, they will take artificial baits but we are using live bait in this description. The locations we are fishing for these bottom-related pike are soft bottom areas of the lake. This could be the large, extensive mud flats we catch walleye on during the summer months; in the middle of large or small bays far from any weed growth; outside a current area in the slack water; at the bot-



While fishing with her parents and the author, John Andrew, Shelly B. of Crandon, Wis., caught this pike.

tom of a deep ledge, off the side of a rock bar; or off a long, underwater point extending off of shore. These are bottom-hugging fish.

TECHNIQUE NO. 3

These bottom-hugging pike are usually always the biggest pike we catch each winter. We do not get dozens of them but they are the biggest. In this application I like to use a large sucker minnow from four to six inches long. These baitfish, when hooked, always are moving and never slow down. This is good for what we are doing in this situation. Another good trick to use is the fly fisherman's spike that inserts into the fly line and the leader ties to the round end of the spike. We put a tiny zero-sized colored Colorado blade (which is barbed) up the shaft of this tiny spike and poke it into the meat above the tail of the large sucker minnow, just far enough so the blade can still freely move and flash around. In conjunction with a colored hook, colored split shot and a fine seven-strand wire leader tied directly to the hook, the final and most important critical concept to our success is only hooking the bait on one side. Do not go through the bait from one side to the other side.

Poke the hook gently through the skin and come back out a small distance from where you started. This way the pike can't turn the hook into the sucker minnow when the strike happens. Use a treble hook or straight hook. This technique works! Keep your presentation about 1-1/2 feet off the bottom.

What a great way to start the New Year!

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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