

Walleye Opener (Deep Water Concept)

BY JOHN ANDREW

The ice went out three days before opening day and as the alarm went off at 4 a.m. that Saturday morning, I was going over in my mind the location of the weed bed we were going to fish, trying to decide where to position the boat in conjunction with a strong south wind. Anchoring was and still is an important method, when fishing weeds in the wind. Presque Isle Lake has very, very clear water and wind is my friend when fishing any clear water environment, at this time of year in particular. Remember, we are discussing lakes, not a river environment.

My guests and I headed across the chain of lakes, moving through the large waves when I noticed they were becoming too big for us. The date was 1983 and I was guiding out of a smaller boat. As I turned the boat slowly to head to another area to fish, I turned on my Lowrance X-15 B paper graph to look for a particular rock bar upwind.

It was still dark and I could not use my landmarks to locate the bar, as we were far from shore. While watching my graph over deep water around 65 feet, I noticed small piles of rocks on the bottom of the lake. As we began reaching shallower water, around 60, 55, up to 45 feet, the humps and rocks stopped showing up on my graph until I got to about 30 feet deep and then they reappeared. When I turned the boat and went back down the

drop off, I noticed some of the arches were actually about six inches or a foot off the bottom.

After retying my guest's line to heavier jigs tipped with a two-inch red tail chub, we dropped our lines down to about the 65-foot depth and drifted up the slope of the rock bar. We never did get into the shallow five to 25 feet of water I was going to actually focus on, since we limited out in about three hours of fishing.

This was the deepest I ever caught walleye at any time of the year and they ranged from 16 to 24 inches long. A new era of walleye fishing was being created, for my guests. The next morning as the wind dropped off and the waves shrank down to a controllable size, we went back to the weed bed and fished in seven to 13 feet of water. Although we caught four walleye, there were two other boats in the area and we could not work the weed bed as well as I would normally have done.

When I mentioned we were going back to the rock bar, we limited out on the morning before, the two guests moaned and said, "That was a fluke. We won't catch anything there." Once we got to the right location, we started off casting a 1/8-ounce jig and minnow towards the five-foot top and worked them down to about 25 feet. After 30 minutes of working around the bar with no results for our effort, I retied on heavier jigs and moved out to the 65-foot deep area.

On the way down the ledge, I could again see what looked like deep rocks. We worked vertically with our jigs, slowly, from 65 feet up to about 45 feet and stayed in that depth for the next 2-1/2 hours. We limited out a second time in the same location.

This was all the conformation I needed. The oncoming days and weeks my guests and I worked sev-



eral different rock bars and ledges in the same depths and produced limits of walleye. Now, we continued to fish shallow on the same lake at twilight conditions and catch fish, but during the daytime we fish deep. "How is that possible?" my guests used to ask, and they still ask that same question every opening day when I tell them we are starting out in 65 feet of water vertically jigging. Remember, not all fish spawn along the shoreline. I am not saying that walleye spawn in 65 feet of water, but they could and some do spawn deeper than the shoreline.

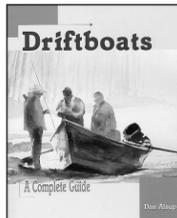
Now that several years have passed, this deep water connection on opening day has been found to work on many, many deep, clear lakes all across Wisconsin, Minnesota, New York, North Dakota, Canada and certain areas of the Great Lakes.

The critical concept for this method of fishing does not only work in the fall as some may think. The lake turnover event in the spring dictates when the deep water connection shuts off, and when the deep, clear lakes turn over in the fall, this method of fishing takes off again. Does this also happen on other lakes as well? The answer is yes, perhaps to a lesser degree. I guide on two-dozen different lakes at any one time during the course of the year. My guests and I will say that on some lakes, this "deep water concept on opening day" is hard to beat.

This method of fishing works on many lakes. They do not need to be clear water, or 80 feet deep, although it does seem to work better on lakes that do indeed develop a thermo cline.

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