

Erie "Eyes" Made Simple and Fun

by
Captain David Adams

Walleye fishing on Lake Erie can be productive and fun; yet, difficult or even strange. As Zane Grey once noted: "Every fishing water has its secrets... To yield up these

with odd taste will be caught on salmon spoons, which are suspended 80 feet below the surface or only at night on 2 1/2 inch plugs trolled in five feet of water; and

A little searching in the shallower western basin (25 foot depths are common) might be needed, but walleye can generally be found near the reefs, channels or islands.



Fishing for Erie 'Eyes, either with a captain or on-your-own make memories that last a lifetime.

mysteries, it must be fished with more than hooks."

But how do you catch walleye in the western, central, or eastern basin of Lake Erie? What is not a mystery is that any of the following baits will catch walleye: bottom bouncers, spoons, nightcrawler harnesses, plugs, minnows, and jigs. Then again, some walleye

yet, the strangest walleyes will be caught on green nightcrawlers trolled at high noon.

Lake Erie's Western Basin:
"Don't fish the dead water," says PWT touring pro and guide Keith Eshbaugh. "Use your fish finder and find the schools of walleye. If you don't get any good marks leave that spot."

Good starting points are from the launch areas at Toledo, Oak Harbor, or Port Clinton. Also, boat anglers can launch at Marblehead and troll near Kelly's Island.

Once you locate fish, use one of Eshbaugh's favorite baits - the bottom bouncer. Attach a 3-foot leader and a #4 or #5 Colorado



Trolling is often the preferred method for deeper central basin

blade to a crawler harness; then, drop the bait on the bottom. Begin trolling this top walleye producer slowly - 1.5 to 2.0 MPH - to ensure the best action.

Lake Erie's Central Basin:

With a relatively featureless bottom and depths ranging from 45 to 75, the best summer action on the central basin is the 73-foot depth range. While also holding the majority of summer walleye, it also offers the most choices to boaters. From Huron to Conneaut ports available to anglers include: Vermilion, Lorain, Cleveland, Eastlake, Geneva, and Ashtabula.

"For walleye, the central basin is the place to be during the summer," says Capt. Bob Kresse of Bandit Charters. "Here, the Dipsy Diver is the preferred tactic for catching roaming schools of walleye."

According to Kresse, match the dipsys with the Michigan Stinger Scorpion Spoon and keep trolling speeds slow. The #0 dipsy is generally set at 0 and trolled 150 feet behind the boat. The larger #1 dipsy is set at two or 3 1/2 and trolling lengths are varied from 110 feet to 200 feet. The use of more than one dipsy - with different settings - allows the angler to fish a variety of depths. The smaller Scorpion spoons work best at speeds of 1.8 mph to 2.0 mph. Favorite spoon colors are copper, shrimp, and blueberry muffin. Also, Kresse adds, "Line quality is important. Use 30-pound Spectra braided line, followed with a seven-foot fluorocarbon leader."

Lake Erie's Eastern Basin: Whether launching from North East, Pennsylvania or Dunkirk, New York walleye anglers will be greeted by deep water, structure (an underwater mountain stretches

from PA to NY) thermoclines, big walleye (10-pounders are not uncommon), and a short boat ride.

"Fish are adapting but anglers are not," says Capt. Ed Concilla of Walleye Wizard Charters, who has spent years plying the deeper waters of Lake Erie at North East, Pennsylvania. When fishing the eastern basin, the changes in water clarity and lower walleye numbers have made the walleye very boat shy.

Still, even with clear water and fewer walleye, simple trolling tactics are your best bet for taking lunker summer walleye. Trolling the worm harness, in the popular colors of watermelon, purple/black or green, behind a Dipsy Diver will bring savory walleye home for dinner.

With water depths at this part of Lake Erie reaching to 210 feet, Concilla favors the larger #1 dipsy, which is usually set at 2 1/2 or 3.

See Erie "Eyes", page 32



Walleye fun is for all ages!

Spring Walleye Success

Roll with the punches for consistent spring walleye action

by
Michael Veine

For the past dozen years, I've spent every fishable spring day plying the waters of the Western Basin for walleyes. I also run charters on other noted walleye factories including Saginaw Bay and Little Bay De

that much of Erie's early spring fishery is largely under utilized. In fact, I'm the only charter boat that I know of operating in the Michigan waters of Erie during early spring. Late spring was also fantastic with limit catches being

a fresh sheet of skim ice. My Lund Baron served as an ice-breaker as we plowed a path through the thin ice and made our way to the lake. As we cleared the harbor the ice gave way to the open, Michigan waters of Lake



Anglers often must endure cold, miserable weather in the Spring to catch big walleyes.

Noc. Last spring, Lake Erie provided the best walleye fishing I've ever seen anywhere, anytime, and anyplace. We managed to catch 40 walleyes that topped 10-pounds. Another 100+ bruisers were caught that weighed over eight pounds. The good news is

the rule. In fact, so many walleyes were caught last year that for a pleasant change, I didn't hear many people complaining.

On a frosty, late March day last year, plunging, overnight temperatures covered Bolles Harbor with

Erie.

We headed out to some waypoints where we had slammed hog walleyes the day before. My early spring forays on Erie typically don't produce many smaller, eating sized walleyes. Instead, my



These were the smallest of the 40 walleyes these three anglers caught, so you can imagine the hawgs they threw back. Photo taken by Michael Veine.

strategy focuses on the adult, prespawn females at their peak size and weight just before they spawn. When the conditions are right, it is possible to catch literally dozens of huge, adult walleyes in a single day. Because of the potential to damage the walleye resource, it is my charter boat policy to only allow customers to keep one, egg laden female walleye for the taxidermist; all other hens must be released. Regardless of what the law stipulates, I simply refuse to fillet out the future of the Lake Erie walleye fishery and it is my hope that the readers of this article will also exercise similar conservation measures. Lake Erie's many reefs attract schools of smaller males during early spring. Go there to catch your eaters. My strategy for trophies though avoids such places entirely.

As we neared my waypoints near the Wood Tic Peninsula, large, fishy looking marks started

showing up on the graph, so I fired up my Mercury, 4-stroke, trolling motor and started setting lines. I deployed a spread of six, minnow imitating, body baits presented behind Mr. Walleye, in-line planer boards. I set the baits back 50-60' behind the boards. Three-eighths ounce rubber core sinkers were installed one rod-length ahead of each lure helping take the baits to the desired depth without necessitating long setbacks. The rubber core sinkers also stop lure fowling debris from sliding down the line.

The water temperature was only 37 degrees, so our trolling speed was kept slow, below one mile per hour. We trolled for six hours straight without so much as a bump. The fish were still there though; the graph seldom lies; so we stayed in the same general area and played the waiting game. As the sun rose up, the water temperature climbed to a balmy 39-degrees

and the fish came alive as if a light switch had been flipped on. We managed to catch a baker's dozen of big walleyes with four of them weighing over 10-pounds.

Early spring walleyes, especially the adult fish, can be extremely finicky customers. The key to a successful presentation is the surface water temperature.

When the temperature is below 47-degrees, I keep trolling speeds under one mile per hour while pulling subtle action, shallow running, body-baits often referred to as stick-baits. Over the past several years, the old style Storm Jr. Thundersticks have been my overwhelming favorite, however last year I used Reef Runner Lil' Rippers and Smithwick's new 3-1/2" Rattlin' Rouge with awesome results. I prefer the shallow diving



Storm Thundersticks have been a top producer for years on Erie's spring walleyes, but last year Rattlin' Rouges and Lil' Rippers were the hot ticket. Photo taken by Michael Veine.

versions of these baits because they perform better at the slower trolling speeds that early spring dictates.

Over the past couple years, most of the early spring walleyes that I clean have gobies in their guts, so it's no wonder that lure colors like gold, black and brown have been producing the best in recent years. Body baits can be presented at nearly any depth using either rubber-core sinkers or Snap Weights.

As the chill of early spring gave way to the blossoms, flowers and green leafs of May the walleye fishing in the Western Basin literally exploded. We caught limits of fish every day that I was able to get onto the water and it usually didn't take too long either. Most of the fish were small one to three pounders, but on most days we were able to catch at least a few fish that had some impressive length and girth.

On May 19 and 20 the Michigan Walleye Tour (MWT) ran a big tournament out of Monroe, MI. I had been fishing the MWT circuit for several years, however last year I decided to take a year off from tournament fishing and instead ran charters on the tournament weekends. For several days I had been on top of a massive school of walleyes near the Sputnik, but on that Saturday, the fish had moved. We relocated towards West Sister Island and about three miles from the island, I started marking lots of fish tight to bottom. I deployed four bottom bouncer rigs using homemade crawler harnesses. We were in about 22-23' of water, so I used 3-

oz. bouncers. Two of the rigs were run off Mr. Walleye Boards, the other two were set straight behind the boat. I used my bow mounted Minn Kota Auto Pilot electric motor for a slow trolling presentation. It didn't take long before walleyes were hammering all the baits. We soon had to cut back to just two lines and still limited out five tickets in less than two hours. I had two kids on board and they caught the brunt of the fish and had a ball in the process.

The next day, I had three more greenhorns on board consisting of two ladies and a young girl. We headed straight for the same area near West Sister where we had left off the day before. It was a little choppy, perfect for pulling crankbaits, so I set out a spread of quarter ounce Hot N' Tots and #7 Shad raps in natural patterns. We ran six rods, however keeping them all in the water proved to be quite the challenge with the constant action. My customers had forgotten to take Dramamine, so two out of three had gotten seasick. Fortunately, it only took a couple hours to limit out and head back in. Later that afternoon I visited the weigh-in ceremonies on the last day of MWT event. I was shocked to see the impressive weights posted on the board. The fishing was so consistent that all 120 teams had taken a tournament limit. Lots of big fish were weighed in. One of the competitors, Lance Valentine, even managed to break the all time MWT big fish record with a monstrous 13 pounder.

Once the water warms past the 47-degree mark, Erie's walleyes

change their lure preferences from stickbaits to faster action crankbaits. This change over is caused by an influx of shad into the Western Basin. Storm Deep Jr. ThunderSticks and Hot N' Tots, Normark Shadraps and Reef Runner Lil' Rippers are some of my favorites. All of these deep diving baits can be trolled effectively at one to two miles per hour. By altering both the setback and the trolling speed and by attaching sinkers, a wide variety of presentations can be covered.

Crankbait color is a hotly debated subject but the generally accepted Lake Erie rule of; low visibility - use dark colored baits and high visibility - use bright colored baits is usually a good place to start. During low-light conditions or if the water is muddy, natural colors featuring black/silver or black/gold are good choices. If it's bright and the water is clear, fluorescent colors tend to work well. Last year black/silver, chartreuse/silver, fire/tiger, golden shiner and shad patterns all produced well for me.

Last spring, when the water was cold, body baits ruled. As the water warmed up, crank baits caught hundreds of walleyes on my boat. When the walleyes were down deep, crawler harness and bottom bouncers were the perfect combination. Remember though that there are no hard rules for catching walleyes though, so it often pays to experiment. A smart trolling spread will present a variety of baits in differing colors targeting various depths. When one rig produces, savvy anglers change the other outfits to the hot setup. Send your questions to veinemr@aol.com.