

Open Water 'Erie Walleyes

by
Captain Phil Cadez

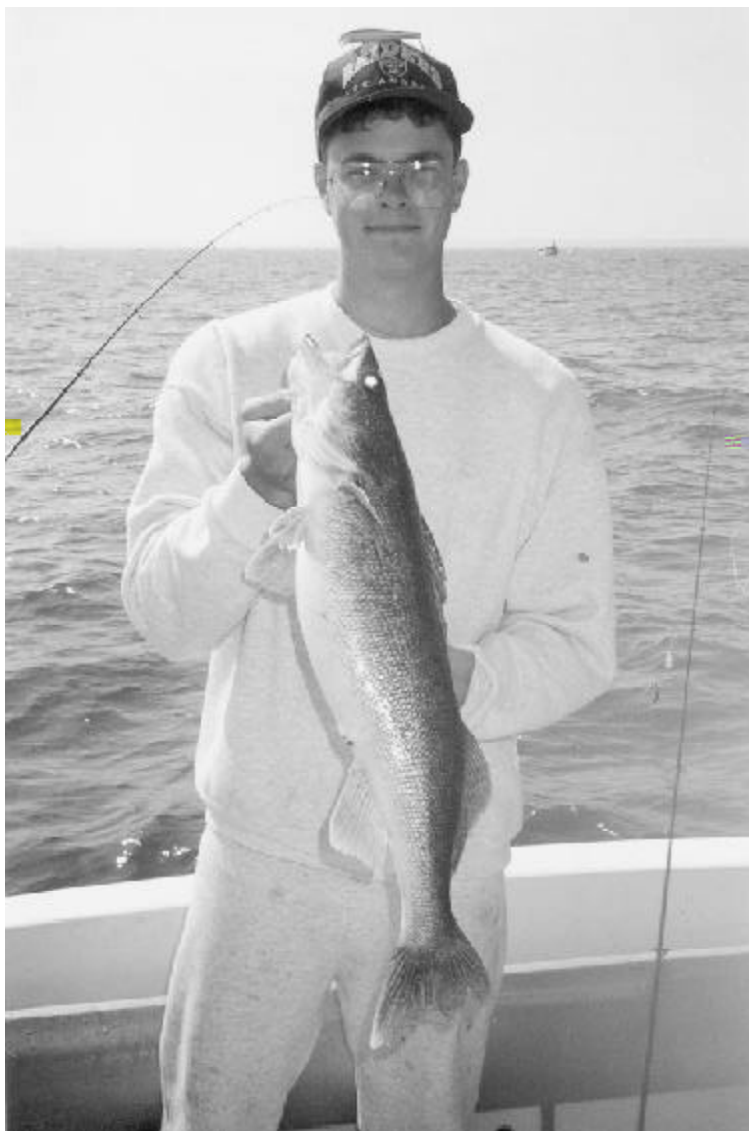
Walleyes are not a territorial fish like the smallmouth bass. They roam in schools or small packs searching for food.

They're a game fish – a predator. They'll see anything that looks eatable to them. They normally cruise the rocky bottoms searching for food but as the water warms up and the vast amount of boats chase them they will tend to seek open water. By open water we mean north of the reef areas. An area we refer to as the flats. You can go from West Sister to the Bass Islands and north of Niagara Reef to Middle Sister and the clay bottom will stay a constant 32 to 34 feet.

With the zebra mussels inundating all of the rocky bottoms of Lake Erie, we have noticed the cleanest water that's possible on such a large body of water.

Snorkelers and scuba divers have enjoyed this clean water searching the various wrecks that dot the Western Basin. The only thing

clean water does for fishing is make it tougher. Walleye usually will not surface in bright sunlight to feed. They will spook easily in clean water.



**An eight pounder walleye taken last July.
Photo by Capt. Paul LaCourse.**

There is really no set pattern that walleye move in after leaving the reefs. The only tools we have in locating these illusive fish are updated fish locators and marine radio. With such a vast area covering many square miles you might check with local bait shops that sometimes post "hot spots" for fishing. This will give you a place to start. Also observe charter boats that tend to pack up in a area. However, do not get too close to them or spook their fish – remember it's their livelihood. Give them a reasonable amount of room. Never drive up their drift at over a slow trolling speed.

After you've located a possible starting area observe your fish locator. If you're in 30 foot of water try zooming in on the bottom 10 feet.



Walleyes can be at any depth but starting at the bottom is the best place to start looking. If you locate a small pocket of fish go up wind and drift over that spot. If successful, mark it with your loran or GPS. You can also mark your "hot spot" with a marker with a line and 50 ft. of line and weight.

If the water is moderate to lightly choppy you might start off with a "walleye casting weapon" with a ¾ oz egg sinker. Cast as far as you can across the drift letting it settle to the bottom. As you start the lure

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on the line see the hook sharply and quickly lift your rod up and keep tension on the fish. Never horse the fish and never pump and reel as you would when ocean or salmon fishing. Slower is better and set your drag because the fish usually always dives near the boat. If you have the rod tip up and the drag set properly you should never loose a fish near the boat.

While casting you might want to let out a drag line with a drifting rig fished near the bottom. The dragging rig is made the same as the casting rig but is longer, approx. 24". And the beads and spinner will also be larger. Beads will vary up to ¼ inch in diameter and the spinner can be a #4 or 5 Colorado or Indiana style. One other difference on these dragging rigs are that most of these have tandem hooks at the end of the line. This enables you to double hook a nightcrawler trailer. You can use a 1 oz egg sinker or use a bottom bouncer off 1 to 3 ounces. A bottom bouncer is an "L" shaped wire with a lead weight through it about 16 inches in height. This keeps the lure off the bottom at least a foot.

On cloudy choppy dates you might want to fish high, near the surface. Feeding walleye will chase their prey wherever they have to. This high fishing usually works when by yourself, not bothered by boat traffic. Clean water does make it tougher to have successful days on this big lake but patience and the ability to adapt to new techniques will insure a successful day of angling on America's Greatest Walleye Lake.

See Open Water, page 36

From Spinner/Crawler, page 15

Just for kicks, I sent out a couple spinner/crawler rigs behind bottombouncers. I used four-ounce bouncers and kept the trolling speed at 2.0 mph. It didn't take long before we started taking walleyes regularly on the bottom bouncers that were running right behind the boat. That fast trolling, multi-pronged technique paid off with limit catches on several charters last year and we seemed to take the biggest fish on the crawlers.

Storage

The best storage method that I've found for spinner/crawler rigs is to buy one of those noodle floats that kids use as pool toys. I cut them into foot long sections and also cut a shallow slit around the tube every couple inches. The leader with the loop knot is wedged into the slit and then wrapped around the tube with the hooks buried into the foam to keep the rig in place. The tubes can then be stored in a bag or boat compartment. Send questions to veinemr@aol.com.

From Open Water, page 21

For information call 1 800 BUCK-EYE. Tell them the area you'll be traveling to and you'll get all the help you need. We feel this will be an excellent year to visit our lake. Plan ahead for charters or lodging because it gets very busy in the summer. You can also e-mail me at capt.phil@cadez-charters.com for information. GOOD FISHIN!

From Editor, page 2

There are some more changes in store for the magazine. Starting with this issue we include two new sections; **"Dockage for Lake Erie Fishermen"** and **"Lodging for Lake Erie Fishermen"**. Previously, this information was readily available on our web site at walleye.com but we decided to list a limited number of Marinas and Lodgings in the print magazine. These listings will be limited to those folks that are "Fishermen Friendly" to the nth degree!

Finally, we welcome Rick Olson and Norb Wallock to Lake Erie Walleye Magazine. Rick and Norb, both proven walleye tournament fishing professionals will be sharing their knowledge of walleye fishing on 'big water' to our readership. Welcome aboard Rick and Norb!

This past spring fishing was fantastic at times, when the weather cooperated. Included in this great fishing was the record breaking performance of the Professional Walleye Trail contestants this past April on Erie's western basin waters. The three hundred fishermen landed a total of 1,794 walleyes weighing approximately 7 tons. The winner, Pro Tommy Skarlis set a new record of 3 days, 15 walleyes and 138.28 pounds. Pro, Ted Takasaki broke the single day record of six fish, 50.40 pounds. There were 346 walleyes that exceeded 10 pounds. The previous record was 35 fish in excess of 10 pounds.

The tournament did generate some controversy with the large numbers of large female walleyes

taken during the spawning season. The INTERNET chat sites and discussion boards were riddled with views on this from all sides. What do I think? The image of 1,794 fish and 7 tons of mostly large female walleyes taken out of Lake Erie during the spawning season is disturbing. However, from a biological perspective, the number of walleyes taken during this tournament in terms of its future impact on the Lake Erie walleye population was in fact minimal.

Could the tournament have been held later in the spring, after the spawn? Certainly. I'm sure good arguments could be made to host a tournament at many different times of the year. Here is an idea, that I'm sure is not original. Why not harvest the eggs from the females taken during large tournaments held during the spawn season and contribute them to Fish Hatcheries! Sure, there are logistical concerns here, but it could work.

Tight lines this summer!!

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