

Break Line Basics

by
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The key to finding and catching big walleyes is quite often found along a change in depth or drop off (a.k.a. break line).

Break lines can concentrate fish, and concentrations are exactly what you're looking for just about 100 percent of the time. The idea is to keep your bait in front of as many walleyes as you can for as long as you can. The end result should be more fish in the boat by the end of the day, and more walleyes is what it's all about. By getting a bait in front of the heaviest concentrations of fish you can greatly improve your odds of finding the willing.

Within a large school of walleyes there will almost always be a few that will be active enough to take a bait, even if the rest of the pack is not. The fact is they don't always do the same things at the same time, even when they're stacked up in a dense concentration. Finding said concentrations often starts at the break line, wherever that may be.

You can refine the activity along a break line even further and try to determine whether the walleyes

are actively feeding at any given time. A good rule of thumb includes the shallowest fish you find being the most likely to take a bait.



along the top, the middle, or at the base of the break are the biters. Quite often you'll find a group of fish spread out up and down a break line but only certain ones

A deep to shallow feeding movement is a classic one, and occurs both in deep water as well as in shallow. For example, walleyes holding on a deep off shore hump will often hold along the break line of the edge and move up on top during peak times of activity. The same thing happens on shallow rocky bars and reefs where walleyes hold along an edge which could be five feet deep or shallower, and move up into super shallow water when the timing is right. In either case the break line is where you're likely to find the heaviest concentrations, but not necessarily where you'll locate the heavy

feeders.

Break lines by themselves are not enough to pull in active walleyes, but a break line combined with a good feeding opportunity certainly is. Break lines or drop offs that lie next to a big feeding shelf is the stuff that quality time on the water is made of. Breaks next to shelves, rocky bars, or even flats are what you're looking for, and where and when will depend on the characteristics of the lake system you happen to be on, and time of the year.

A break line next to a big deep hump might be holding absolutely nothing if you get there too early, or if the water is too dark, or if it's below the thermocline. Time spent where they're not is time wasted, and a situation to try and avoid. The thing is there will be some time wasted in your search for the mother of all schools of walleyes but you can try and keep it to a minimum.

Finding likely break lines begins by gathering a little basic knowledge about a system, and then taking a hard look at a good map. A detailed map with latitude and longitude markings can be a big help, especially if you have an accurate G.P.S. to help exploit the information. A chart plotter like the Raymarine can keep your search time to a bare minimum, which allows for more time spent with a line in the water. By transferring break line readings into the G.P.S. you can take a direct heading for potential hot spots and the Raymarine can get you to within three meters of what you're looking for. A G.P.S. can be critical for finding off shore break lines on big water, and may be just

about impossible to do so without.

Once you've found what your looking for take a good look with your depth finder and see if anything is around before you drop them a line. If you're marking fish try to find the tightest groups or concentrations, and take note of exactly where they're located. Try looking up and down the break line and even up directly on top of the accompanying structure. A good plan of action would include going back and working the shallowest fish first, and heading deeper from there.

Don't let the first fish you mark stop you from investigating thoroughly before you get a line in the water. Even if you mark what looks like the mother load take a little more time and check it all out before trying to put a few in the boat. It requires a good deal of self control but can pay big dividends in the long run. How you approach a break line will depend on the time of the year, and the type of structure, and just how tight the fish are bunched up. Fish that are spread out require a different presentation than those that are piled into a tight area. Tight schools likely call for rigging and jigging techniques, while loose groups may be more efficiently worked with much quicker trolling methods like lead core and crank bait combinations. Lead core can allow you to run a bait at an exact depth, and do so quickly resulting in more water covered (and explored) over the course of a day.

Lead core is a weighted line that sinks, and allows anglers to get their baits to run deeper than they are capable of on their own. It

also has little stretch, and transmits the rhythmic vibration of a properly running crankbait back to the rod tip. You can literally see how your bait is running by concentrating on the tip. If it's consistently twitching, you're running clean. If it pulls back hard and pops forward, you're digging into the bottom. Reel up a little line and watch the tip, and keep picking up line until it runs free. It's OK to occasionally bang into the bottom; That can help trigger fish into striking. But a bait that's constantly grinding into the bottom will be constantly hanging up. Also, a small change in depth can get you back digging into the bottom, or put the bait too high to be in the zone. Constant monitoring of the rod tip is a necessity, and one of the most important keys to successful contour trolling.

It takes some time to get comfortable with the whole affair but once you do you'll be in control of a tool with an unmatched level of precision.

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