

The Eastern Lake Erie Fishing Report

by
Joe Fischer

As one golfer once said “golf is a game full of misery coupled with brief moments of ecstasy”. This also seems to be an adequate description of the offshore walleye fishing this year on the Eastern basin of Lake Erie. In general the early part of summer produced poor walleye fishing with small interludes of good to excellent fishing for the experienced fisherman. The fishing became better as mid-summer approached but still was somewhat spotty with fishermen experiencing few good to excellent days.

The early season night near shore fishing however, was good with some excellent catches of walleye at Hamburg and also Dunkirk. These fish were in the 2-4 lb. class and it appeared that the summer season might be fairly good but the very erratic late spring weather quickly affected the walleye fishery.

Walleye fishing during the Annual Southtowns Walleye Association tournament was very difficult as many people had trouble catching any fish, not just a big one! Many of the experienced walleye fishermen went several days without a walleye and this is with 6-8 poles in the water trolling for 8-10 hours per day! The weather was poor with several days of cold, wind and rain and whatever else Mother Nature could concoct up. Linda Cizkowski long lining a Fire Tiger

Thunderstick caught the prizewinner of 12.41 pounds. This fish was landed without the use of a net as Linda said earlier in the day their net holder collapsed and the net fell overboard! Once again this tournament produced large walleye with over 34 fish exceeding 10 lbs. The overall total catch however, was undoubtedly the lowest in recent memory. No pattern for fishing seemed to be prevalent during this tournament with the few fish caught being scattered and at various depths. This annual tournament by the way, is the largest and best run walleye tournament in North America. If you're interested in trying it next year give Southtowns Walleye a call at their office at 716-825-7619. I'm sure you won't be disappointed.

The early summer poor walleye fishing pattern continued with many Charter Captains opting not to even run charters because the fishing was poor. Many of the fishermen also noted a almost total lack of forage, which the walleye tend to follow and feed on. This pattern continued until mid July when the weather and fishing seemed to improve and possibly some of the Western and Central Lake Erie basin walleye migrated to the east. Quite a few walleyes from the relatively good 1998-class year are also starting to show up in the 16" range. These fish should be the perfect eating size next year. It was not unusual to be catching 4-8

lb. walleyes on one side of the boat and 16-18" walleyes on the other side!

As in previous years Dipsy Divers, wire line, downriggers and planer boards were required to get the lures down and away from the boat in the ultra clear Lake Erie water. “My plug of choice is still the Ronesky plug in either black or blue and silver” stated walleye expert Teddy Malota, who has given many seminars on the use of Dipsy Divers and other tackle at the monthly Southtowns Walleye Association meetings. Teddy also makes his own customized Worm harnesses that have proven to be very effective and are used by many of the experienced walleye fishermen on the lake. Worm Harnesses and spoons were quite effective with the colors of choice for this year being copper, watermelon, fire tiger, black&purple, etc. Most experienced walleye fishermen will start with a color and if it doesn't produce in ½ hour, its time to change. This routine continues until the proper color and depth is found for the particular day. What the walleye may prefer can change quickly as sun, clouds and wind can all change the appearance of a lure in the water. Teddy also recommends speed changes which is accomplished by turning frequently which will accelerate the lures on one side of the boat and slow down the lures on the opposite side. Care however, must be

taken to not turn too sharply as the lures can easily become entangled. The areas of the lake that seemed most productive were between Dunkirk and the Cattaraugus Creek in 70 to 90 feet of water. A large school of walleyes was somewhat stationary in this area most of the summer and the problem was generally to find out what they preferred to eat on any given day!

The old adage that 10% of the fishermen catch 90% of the fish was never truer than this year on the Eastern basin because the walleyes were hard to find and you had to "pay your dues" to be successful!

What caused this relatively poor year? Undoubtedly the weather played a major role as the lake remained cold until mid-July, which slowed the annual walleye migration from the Western Basin. The constant rain also washed a lot of food into the lake. The excessive rain by the way, did help alleviate one problem with the lake levels moving to almost near normal by mid-July. A drop in the overall walleye population also played a role.

Warm water New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) fisheries biologist D. Einhouse of the Lake Erie Fisheries Unit in Dunkirk indicated that possible walleye regulation changes will be evaluated for the New York State waters of Lake Erie. With several other stakeholders on the lake reducing quotas the NYSDEC is getting a little pressure to consider changes. The most likely scenario

for New York State waters of Lake Erie would be a reduction of the daily catch limit from 5 to 4. I do believe that the New York State Lake Erie walleye fishermen would probably be opposed to such a reduction in catch limit as New York has been a leader in Conservation of the resource with a 5 walleyes per day limit, closed seasons and a ban on Gillnetting unlike some of the other users of the resource. The U.S. waters of Lake Erie have banned the use of gill nets and have minimal commercial fishing whereas Canada continues to have a large commercial fleet (over 200 licenses) utilizing gill nets that are indiscriminate in the size and type of fish caught. The DEC assured me that any possible regulation changes would not take place until the fall of 2002. This will allow for an extensive public comment period. It is too early to tell what is going to happen on this hot issue, I'll have more on this in a future article.

From Night Fishing, page 24

breaklines precisely, troll about 1 mph whether fishing a shallow-lipped crankbait or deep diver. If you feel your lure wobbling, slow down. It should be your arm moving forward and back, forward and back, that imparts the look of a dying minnow. Forget planer boards or snap-on weights - you'll miss light biters.

A #13 Rapala is the standard; a #18 is the largest. Martin doctors his lures with prism tape on the sides and glow in the dark eyes. It's a trick learned from hours

sitting with the lights turned out watching the action in his aquarium tank. Even his human eyes - far less sensitive than a walleye's - can detect the faint flicker of dim light reflecting from the sides of a minnow.

Other good crankbaits are Rebel #030 Fast-Tracs or Bomber long model A's.

Attach hard baits to the line with a cross-locked snap to achieve the best action with the exception of short-lipped lures, which he ties on directly. Use two #5 split shot or three #7s split shot a couple feet in front of the lure to achieve maximum depth. Don't be afraid to use heavy line. It won't spook the fish and you can pull most snags free without break offs.

When's the best time to catch nighttime walleye? All night long. But it's going to peak when the moon is rising or setting. "If you aren't catching fish when you see that happening, go back to where you caught your last one. Then, they are really going to be popping." Martin's grandpa taught him that. Must be so.

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