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Tournament Trout Techniques for the Everyday Family Outing

by Dave Pitts



The right tactics can make you the camp hero instead of the camp zero. In this article tournament angler Dave Pitts offers some advice for bringing home the camp meal.

Being a tournament angler is not the only reason to use the following techniques; just wanting fish for mealtime around the ol' campsite might make them necessary.

Many anglers plan out where to go camping with their families during the summer months based on two reasons, word of mouth that fishing is good at a lake or they remember fishing was good at a lake in years past. However, once they get to the lake and start talking with other fisherman at the boat ramp, campsite, or local tackle store they hear, "you should have been here last week, the fish were everywhere, but now you can't buy a bite." These are words that strike panic, anxiety or dread into the hearts of many anglers; but they shouldn't. Take a microsecond and think, because the fact remains fish that were there last week or yesterday didn't pack up and walk out of the lake only to return another day.

Those fish are still down there and waiting to be enticed by your presentation, but how you ask, "what do I do when conditions are like this?" Meanwhile you worry about the kids, their friends, a wife, and perhaps a mother-in-law back at camp getting ready to tell the folks back at home how you, the great fisherman, brought everyone to a lake for some awesome fishing and got not a single bite. Uhhhh that alone sends chills up my back. Relax, sit back, and let me see if through the combination of my listening to the old timers over the years, and lots of years out there fishing, I can provide you with some techniques that can place a cork in any future camp sarcasm.

I want to point out some of the reasons people all of the sudden are triggered to eat something, or are struck with the desire to smack something or someone, and then you'll notice several parallels that fish have in common with humans. Most people love the scent of a hamburger, fried chicken or perhaps a BBQ. Ever walk around a County

or State Fair and smell the food? Breathe in, ahhh! Trout love the smell of nightcrawlers, krill, shrimp and other scents. Both species also can be turned off by smelling certain scents.

When people see others lining up at a burger stand or walking into the food concession area, they feel an urge to do so as well. When trout see other members of the school moving in the direction of the scent, they get the urge to feed. When you actually see someone eating a piece of chocolate, the hunger grows. You don't have a lateral line that is stimulated by the vibrations of others eating but you're stimulated to eat nonetheless, although you were not even hungry until then.

When people want food they go to the fridge, restaurant or grocery store. Go to where the fish feed such as a stream feeding a lake, points, or underwater structure. Go to places where bait fish or plankton hold



because that is where the fish go when they are hungry. You won't find them in the middle of a lake in a 50-degree water column without structure or food source. When they're not looking for food they will be where they have shelter or the perfect temperature to conserve energy.

Make your bait smell. I use scent dispensers on each downrigger full of scent, scent, scent and more scent. As my dear friend and Pro Fishing Guide Guy Ives of Sis Q Guide Service likes to say, "You're not fishing unless you leave a BIG scent trail." He's right. I love sticky gel scent in shrimp or krill flavors. I smear it on my spoons, spinner blades and even between my fingers to run it up and down the line for the first six to ten feet.

Make it look like other fish are feeding. I use Mack's Lure Flash Lite's in the three- or four-blade series attached to my downrigger ball or on my main line, which mimics a school of baitfish.

Make it look good. For the food I use a Wedding Ring Spinner on one rod and a Chartreuse Crystal or Ruby Crystal Imperial Spoon on the other, again I am smearing scent on the under side of these spoons, lures,

and flashers.

Put it in the kitchen. When trolling I constantly scan the surface for any type of fish activity, if you're fishing lakes where Osprey are found, watch them. They can be seen pulling fish off of the surface. Find a cloud on your fishfinder or as I call it a bloom of plankton. If you are not familiar with plankton blooms the best way I can describe it is it looks like someone was trolling an old two-stroke motor and mixed the fuel at a 1 to 1 mix causing an oil slick on the water's surface. Take a few minutes to watch and what you will find is millions and millions of microorganisms. When they are in such huge masses they will appear to have a reddish-orange tint, the forms they make take on the shape of spiral twine that will fall apart at the slightest of current change much like wisps of smoke falling apart at the slightest or air currents. It is truly an incredible sight.

Some anglers say you will only find plankton in the shady areas in coves of a lake. Nothing could be farther from the truth, I have fished daphnia blooms with intense hot sun directly above beating down, what I have noticed is it seems to grow thicker in sun light. Daphnia, a copepod, is a form of freshwater shrimp that thrive in cold nutrient-rich waters. Some call them "water fleas." Parthenogenesis is the Daphnia's ability to self-replicate without fertilization of any form (a type of asexual reproduction). The offspring are exact genetic replicas of the parent (clones), and any differences in the physical state of the clones is due to environmental conditions.

I receive a lot of questions regarding leader length. I believe it is most importantly dictated by the lure used. Many anglers rig close to flashers or dodgers with every lure they have when targeting kokanee or trout. Anglers need to understand if you're fishing with lures that generate their own action; rigging those lures too close to a dodger or flasher will cause them to lose the action in the lure. I set up a minimum of 30 inches behind my attractor for that type of lure. For Bugs or Hoochies that rely on action assistance I rig them closer such as 8 to 10 inches.

I long line off the ball, in some cases more than 100 to 175 feet, and there is a reason for this.

I use 10- and 12-pound balls on my wires, which causes less wire arc and a more true correlation with my graph reading of fish and my downrigger ball to the fish I am targeting. Too many anglers try to save a few dollars by purchasing six-pound weights only

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Cookin' Your Catch

Bluegills on the campfire

It always seems that food properly cooked over an open fire tastes so much better than anything cooked indoors. Maybe it is the hunter-gatherer from our distant past that comes out and makes it more fulfilling to catch a bunch of fish and then cook and eat them the way our ancestors did. This technique can be done using whole fish with the head and entrails removed, or using filets with the skin left on.

First burn the campfire down to a good thick bed of hot coals, making sure all the flame is out. Place a grate about 10 inches above the coals.

Put the fish on the grate with the skin side down.

Baste the fish with butter. If you are using filets, also add a little salt and pepper to the flesh side of the filet. Some like to add a little sprinkle of lemon pepper or garlic powder. For filets, you may want to baste one more time during the cooking process to keep them from drying out.

Cook about 4-5 minutes per side for whole fish. If they are over an inch thick, it might take a little longer, but keep on eye on them. Don't leave the fish because if your coals are hot, they will cook fast and you do not want to let them over cook.

For filets, cook about 5 minutes, then take a fork and stick in the filet and twist it a little. When the flesh flakes easily, they are done. Ummmmm... enjoy!

Trolling For Friends

By Hall of Fame Angler Stan Fagerstrom

I happened to be down at the dock when an old timer eased his boat into one of the slots and tied up.

"How they bitin'?" I asked.

"I got a couple," he said, "but they were so darn small I didn't even know they were on until I reeled in to check on my bait. I'm gonna run up to the store and get sumthin' to eat and then go back out again."

I watched as this senior citizen began putting his tackle in order. He had obviously been trolling for trout. As soon as I got a look at the spinners he had been using ahead of his nightcrawlers I immediately knew why he'd been having difficulty telling when he had a hit.

The heavy, multi-bladed metal spinning rig he had attached to his line was the problem. Those metal blades and all that weight would have fought harder than a 12-inch trout!

I had my own boat in a slot near by. I walked over and removed one of the lightweight trolling rigs I had attached to my rod. Then I walked back to where the old timer was still working on his gear.

"Here," I said, "give this rig a try when you go back out. The blades on this troll are made of plastic. They don't have anywhere near the drag that you've been contending with on the heavy spinners you've been dragging around. That thing you're using must bend that light rod you've got almost double all by itself it pulls so darn hard."

The old timer took the lightweight trolling rig I handed him. He inspected it with interest. "Thanks," he said, "thanks very much. I've never seen or used anything like this. You bet I'll try it. I'll use it when I go back out

after lunch."

I didn't see the old timer again until just before dark. I was preparing to take my boat out of the water when I heard him holler.

"Hey! Wait a minute," he called, "I want to show you sumthin'. I also want to ask you a couple of questions."

I walked over to where he was preparing to dock. As soon as he'd tied up he reached into the back of his boat and held up a stringer that held a half dozen trout. A couple of them were beauties.

"That spinner set up you gave me is great," he said. "What the heck is it called? Where can I get a couple more of them?"

If you're an experienced trout troller yourself you may have already guessed the answer to those questions. The trolling rig I'd given the fellow earlier in the day was a Mack's Lure Flash Lite Troll. If there's a slicker set up for trolling than these lightweight rigs I don't know what the heck it

would be.

I explained to my new friend that Flash Lite Trolls are available with either three or four blades and that the blades are available in different sizes.

I asked him if he'd noticed less drag than he'd experienced while he was pulling the heavy metal spinners. "Are you kidding?" he snorted. "You already know the answer to that. That's why I caught more fish. The drag from the plastic blades is so light I was able to tell when a fish was after my bait. I knew when to set the hook."

Before we parted company that day I told my newfound friend that he should pick up a copy of the Mack's Lure catalog. I explained that the company's catalog had would give him all the answers he sought about the plastic-bladed trolls. I pointed out that there were other Mack's Lure plastic bladed spinner rigs and that more and more anglers around the country were using them successfully. He wasn't into computers so I wound up giving him the company's address as well as its toll-free telephone number.

I went home that night feeling good about the day's experience. I had helped a fellow angler find a new way to get more enjoyment out of his fishing trips. If you know someone who is still dragging those heavy, rod-bending metal spinners behind their boat you might want to consider pointing them in the same direction.

It's a great way to "hook" new friends!



Stan displays the Flash Lite Troll that helped his new-found friend catch more fish.

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to find out that the fish were not hitting. When trolling at 2.0 m.p.h. and above while using light downrigger weights they will ride higher in the water column. When you are targeting deep fish, you could be 10 or 15 feet above them; well out of their strike zone, even though your cable reading says you are

a foot above the targeted school of fish.

Let's say I mark fish at 35 feet and my downriggers are set with one at 45 feet the other at 80 feet in this scenario, since I am long lining, I have ample time to adjust both offerings to optimal depth. I would place one at 33 feet and the other at 37 feet, and I will not troll through them. I will target a slight

distance away from a school of fish. In doing so, more times than not, it allows the larger fish that hold to the bottoms and side of schooled fish to attack first.

When they say no fish are biting, I troll faster. If most anglers are trolling 0.9 to 1 mile per hour, I will troll 2.0 to 2.3 miles per hour. I believe this forces a fish to make a quick decision eat it on impulse or the meal will pass. I believe this applies for trout, kokanee, or salmon. I also make curves in my trolling pattern; this varies the speed of your lures even though you are trolling at one constant speed. Inside rods will always slow more so than the outside rod which allows you to fish two speeds and two different water column depths.

Other things I noted are lake kings and coho salmon like deeper open water, "koks" like colder water. Early in the season I have found spinners and spoons hook more fish. Kok's are aggressive but the number one difference between trout and kokanee is the fact that kok's do not feed on minnows they feed on zooplankton, this alone tells me I want to use something that makes them mad. Bright colors on flashers, spoons, and spinners they can see will stimulate an instant response.

Make them mad on the water and they will love you at camp.

Photo of the Month

We want your photos! Send your photos to bernie@mackslure.com.



Jim Reath of Escanaba, Michigan hoists a chunky Bay de Noc walleye caught on a Mack's Lure Smile Blade spinner. This fish took spinner Jim tied himself with one of his favorites: a purple 1.9 Smile Blade.

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Photos, stories and comments are welcomed and encouraged. Please forward all content materials to bernie@mackslure.com.

THANK YOU!

