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Fall Walleye Fishing: Trick or Treat?

*By Chad Richardson
Part one of two*

Fall has always been touted as the time to cash in on that great late season bite. It has also been noted as the best time of the year to catch that trophy walleye. This may be true for the traditional walleye belt states but walleyes have expanded their native range primarily through stockings to the south, east and western states. For those of us that live in these non-traditional walleye waters, Fall may be more of a trick than a treat and here's why.

Air and water temperatures in the northern latitudes of the mid-west typically drop rather quickly in the fall. The forage base in the Midwest and northern waters has typically

dwindled by this time and walleyes start to "feed up" for winter. This combination of ideal water temperatures, relatively stable weather and a dwindling forage base all make for some pretty good fishing in traditional walleye country, that's the treat. The trick is that these conditions do not hold true for other regions of the country because the weather and forage base can vary so significantly that the months of October and November can actually make for some pretty difficult fishing.

My experiences come from the southern Great Plains but I believe
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Tip of the Month

Glow Power!

With hard water just around the corner, savvy ice anglers are looking for a way to put more fish on the ice and subsequently in the frying pan. Glo Hooks from Mack's Lure Company are proven performers when it comes to doing just that.

Glo Hooks have many advantages that have proven to be attractive to a wide variety of fish species. The first and foremost of which is their bright coloration without the heavy, action-dampening problems associated with lead jigs. The colorful substance on a Glo Hook is light but durable, and allows the bait to move naturally. Bright colors attract fish in the darker waters associated with wintertime, when the ice limits sunlight penetration. And several of the colors offer even more... they are phosphorescent. While sunlight charges them each time they are brought up from the depths, you can "supercharge" them, for even more intensity and duration of the colorful attraction, by hitting them with the flash of a camera or an LED light each time they are brought the to the surface.

Anglers looking for that extra edge this ice fishing season should add some Glo Hooks to their ice fishing tackle selection.

the logic could apply to anyone living in nontraditional walleye water with a unique forage base and different weather patterns than what the Midwest experiences. In the southern Great Plains, fall fishing is drastically different for a number of reasons. For starters, summer seems to linger on forever. We can still have several 80-degree days in October with very mild nights. This equates to water temperatures that are often still in the mid-sixties. Water temperatures never seem to make it into those magical 50-degree temps until Thanksgiving and then it often times turns immediately to winter, plunging the water temperature into the 30's. So in essence, we really don't have a true fall, it's more like a late summer and then winter. Granted, there is a small window of opportunity from Thanksgiving to about the first week in December when we have fall-like conditions (in some years) and a few fish can be caught, but by then the weather is unstable and finding a good day to venture out is sometimes tricky.

Secondly, most of our reservoirs have an extremely high forage base of gizzard shad. The problem is not that walleyes aren't feeding, it's that they are doing nothing but feeding. I had suspected that one of the reasons fishing was so tough in the fall was that walleyes simply had a buffet of shad in front of them most of the time, and that provoking them into eating anything other than the filet mignon of bait fish (shad) would be difficult.

A Lund pro-staffer, Rich Farmer and friend of mine experienced this phenomenon last fall when he was fishing one of his favorite flatland reservoirs. Rich and I were discussing the difficulty of fall fishing one day and I told him that I thought it

was because the fish had full bellies of shad and therefore were not easy to catch. He agreed but added another dimension to the theory based on an experience he had. He was fishing on a typical hot early fall day when he noticed huge schools of shad concentrated in a small cove. He also marked larger fish below the shad on his graph; now in Kansas those fish could be any number of predators but he hoped they were walleyes. After trying nearly everything in his box to no avail he grabbed his cast net (we also do a little hybrid striper fishing down here and a cast net is a necessary piece of equipment) and caught a few shad. Rich baited up a shad and tossed it in and immediately nailed a walleye. He and his partner caught walleye on every shad they had and when they ran out they resorted to the tackle box again trying everything that looked and moved like a shad but could not get a taker. They then broke out the cast net again and managed to scrape up a few more shad and bingo, the walleyes bit.

I realize that this is not groundbreaking information because we know that walleyes can be very picky at times and that's part of the process to figuring out what it takes to catch them. My point is that even when walleyes are well fed they will still eat if the right thing is presented in front of them. During this time of year I also believe that walleyes in the southern Great Plains are so in tune to feeding on shad that they develop a search image that basically makes them almost blind to anything other than shad.

It would be sort of like when we go eat at a buffet. We start out with an assortment of different foods on our plate; by the second trip you have eliminated a few of those choices and now just have a few of the things you

liked the most. Now depending on how big a boy you are, you will make a few more trips but the chances are you are pretty full and don't really need to eat any more but there was that one item that you just can't get enough of (plus you have to get your money's worth) so you go get some more and if you think about it you have developed a search image for it too. Most of the time you don't even look at the other food there, you go straight to what you want, much like a walleye might.

Next month I will cover some interesting research that will help with your fall fishing, and give you some great tips on fall techniques. Stay tuned!

Cookin' Your Catch

Northern Pike Chowder

This is a great way to fix northern pike into a hot meal for a rainy day in camp or cabin lunch. You will need a couple small northerns or one up to about four pounds (approximately 1 1/2 - 2 pounds of filets).

Debone the pike fillets and chop into bite-size pieces. In a pan of hot water add three parts chopped potatoes, one part chopped onion, one bay leaf and salt and pepper to taste. Boil until soft, using just enough water to cover the potatoes.

Add the pieces of fish to the mixture and boil about five more minutes. Add one-half stick of butter or margarine and one can of canned milk to mixture and heat for 5-10 minutes on low heat. DO NOT BOIL or milk will curdle.

Enjoy your northwoods pike chowder!

California Mother & Son Team Are Kokanee Catching Experts

By Hall of Fame Angler Stan Fagerstrom

Are fishermen made or do we just come that way? I'm of the opinion there are a bunch of folks out there who feel as I do where that question is concerned. My contention is the majority of us who love to fish were "hooked" from the time we first drew breath.

I'll bet Tammy Mitchell would agree. So would Connor, Tammy's 11-year-old son.

Tammy and her son live in Kelsey, California. They live there, that is, when they aren't off fishing somewhere. And fishing is something this mother and son team does a bunch of. Most often they go after kokanee in one or another of the Northern California lakes that hold these good-eating landlocked salmon.

Have they been successful? You can believe it! If you need proof just consider that young Connor was recently named the "Angler of the Year" for the junior division of California's Kokanee Power organization. You win that award by earning points given for fish caught in Kokanee Power tournaments.

Kokanee Power is a non-profit organization of members and volunteers who are dedicated to the enhancement of California's inland kokanee, trout and salmon fisheries. The group has more than 1,000 men and women who volunteer their time



Connor Mitchell of Kelsey, California was recently named the Angler of the Year in the junior division of the Kokanee Power organization.



Tammy and Connor Mitchell consider the Wedding Ring spinner such as this one to be the "Secret Weapon" in kokanee tournaments. Conner likes pink while Tammy leans towards orange.

and donate financial resources to accomplish the organization's goals.

Like other members of this California fishing group, Tammy and her son participate in other activities besides taking part in the tournaments. They've provided tackle and helped with the teaching of other youngsters just getting into fishing.

Not all members of Tammy's immediate family of four are all that fired up about fishing. Bill, her husband, is a geologist and really not into angling. Neither is Tre, Connor's older brother.

Visit with Tammy as I have and it doesn't take long to discover that here's a woman who takes her fishing seriously. What she doesn't know about it she sure as heck suspects. One of the things I found out in a hurry was the regard both she and her son have for the Mack's Lure products they favor for their kokanee angling.

Wedding Ring spinners are right at the top of their favorite lure list. "Connor regards the Mack's Lure Kokanee Pro Wedding ring as his secret weapon," Tammy says, "He favors a pink color best and I like an orange shade."

I asked this likeable California lady exactly how she presented her Kokanee Pros to the fish she and Connor are trying to catch. "First," she says, "we attempt to determine where the fish are feeding. That may vary, depending on water temperature and plankton growth, from near the surface to as deep as 140-feet."

They get their lures where they want them with a downrigger. "We use a dodger ahead of our Kokanee Pros," Tammy says. "We use from 16 to 18-inches of leader between the dodger and our lures. We find that this set up gives our lures the action we want."

While husband Bill isn't into fish-

ing himself, he has encouraged Tammy and Connor to pursue the sport they both so obviously love. Tammy and Connor now have their own boat and motor and everything that's necessary to go with it. They take their boat and trailer wherever they choose to go and do their own launching as well as take out.

Tammy has loved to fish for as long as she can remember. "I first fished with my grandpa as a child," she recalls. "I loved it. Grandpa was also the one who introduced me to the Wedding Ring spinners. Once we found them we got rid of the heavy metal blades we had been using."

Connor also needed no encouragement where fishing was concerned. "I started taking him almost as soon as he could walk," Tammy says.

"Like me, he's loved it from the very beginning."

And that's why I posed that question in the beginning of this column—just what is it that makes some of us want to catch fish from Day 1 while other family members don't give a toot if they ever pick up a rod. Again—I think some of us are born that way.

I know I was. I'm convinced Tammy and Connor Mitchell were too.



Photo of the Month

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



Dave Graybill was in the right place at the right time with the right stuff to catch this beautifully-colored steelhead. Right Place: Methow River near Pateros, Washington. Right time: October 8th. Right stuff: Mack's Lure Rock Dancer Jig.

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

