



THE SMALLMOUTH HORIZON

Helping to Protect and Preserve Quality Smallmouth Bass Fishing

October 2013

Dropping In On Smallmouth

By Jerry Pasdo

During late summer/early fall, some of the best smallmouth fishing in lakes is in deeper waters. Most of the smallies are at home below 20 feet, and around rock humps or other steep drop-offs. The drop shot rig is probably the best deep structure tool. It allows you place a deep presentation precisely on the spot, and it gets down there quicker.

For instance, the rock humps and drop-offs prevalent in the various bars and rock piles on Lake Mendota are a good target. By using sonar, a traditional picture can show the desirable transition from the soft bottom to the hard bottom.

Varying the slow movements in your boat, kayak or canoe, can give enough action to make your bait attractive. You could continue to hold the rod in your hand sensing for a bite, but you can just as well rest the rod against the boat and keep an eye on the rod tip.

You can use the current and wave action to create all of the movement, especially at the depths of 20 feet to 30 feet. The drop shot rests on the bottom with your bait anywhere from 12 inches to 18 inches above. The round drop shot is ideal for feeling your way around gravel, rock and other hard bottom areas. You can even sense the type of bottom structure by the vibrations transmitted up your line.

With some practice, you can even find and concentrate on hard bottom areas near the weed edges

which, in our lakes, usually are in the 14 foot to 18 foot range.

According to Joe Balog, a professional smallmouth tournament fisherman, "Another way to get bites, and it seems to get more important every year, is changing the angle of the approach. I drop on the spot and let the boat slide back in the wind and drag the bait 20 or 30 feet.

"Then I slowly troll back to the spot dragging it along – sometimes lifting and dropping, barely leaving the bottom. The bait slides down current past the fish, pauses in place while the rig is vertical, and moves back up current toward them. A look few bass have seen.

"Some days smallmouths show a decided preference for vertically dropped bait," he says. "In that case, I periodically reel the bait up and drop it straight down. They hit it on the fall. I consider it a reaction similar to flipping a jig for largemouths. You are in their house and agitating their response."

Your spinning reel equipped with 6 pound to 8 pound fluorocarbon line is sufficient in keeping the rig at the lake bottom and also sensitive enough to feel bites and the bottom structure. A medium light 6 foot to 7 foot rod is great when drop shotting in water less than 25 feet. However, when fishing deeper, one needs a heavier rod to snap the hook home in that deeper water.

Remember, smallmouths have a hard mouth and more muscles in their jaws. They clamp down usually placing the hook where it is harder to set. When fishing in depths less than 20 feet, a 1/4 ounce drop shot



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Trying day on the river

by Jerry Pasdo and Andy Davidson

Photo by Andy Davidson

At the beginning of our outing on the Wisconsin River, “the hardest working river”, it seemed like the floaters would be the ones working hardest. After about 100 yards of soft sand, the group was hit by a strong wind blowing up river. A gentle float down became paddle down and float up. Fortunately the winds subsided and the fish started to cooperate.

Approximately 50 sunbathing canoe folks, tubers, and kayakers floated down at various times during our trip, however, none interfered. The scenery was not the Flambeau or the Menominee due to the yellow, blue and green flotilla with flags, coolers, dogs, and voices. But, that didn’t bother the fish. Maybe they have grown accustomed to the rattling shadows floating above them.

Two last minute cancellations left Andy Davidson, Dick Marks, Stan Nichols, and myself as the only fishers on that stretch of river. We put in at the canoe launch below Sauk City and took out at Ferry Bluff approximately six hours later.

Some of us fished the bank and around the current breaks caused by stumps and down trees. Others fished below riffles and the downstream ends of the sandbars. As expected, the species ranged from

walleyes, large white bass, crappies, and, yes, many smallmouths. Only when we got back to our vehicles did we notice the temperature was 94 degrees at 5:00 p.m. While this is a stretch of river that holds fish, and lots of them, we may try to move to a more serene location of the Wisconsin River next year. An option would be a mid-week trip that would provide only eagles and turtles for nature’s fellow inhabitants.

Apple River stocking success

A September message from Fisheries Biologist, Aaron Cole reports, “We recently conducted a stream survey on the two stations of the Apple River that were done in 2011. We had two stream shocker tow barges, each with four people, so the stream was well covered. The stream conditions were ideal for shocking this year too.

“The good news is that we did catch a fair number of smallmouth bass between the two sites. The catch was greater at the Mains Crossing site. There were also many young of the year (fish spawned this spring) smallmouth at the Mains Crossing site. The largest fish at each site was 14.5 inches.”

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is sufficient. Anything deeper than that, a 3/8 to 3/4 ounce round drop shot should be used.

The system has come a long way and now there is no need to tie a palomar knot and have your hook pointed upwards. You can purchase a set of 4 to 6 drop shot rigs which will have a barrel swivel above and below the drop shot hook. A size #1 Gamakatsu drop shot hook with the Tungsten drop shot weight is the tool of choice according to the Balog.

He uses that same size hook for everything from a 5 inch fluke to a 4 inch hand-poured finesse worm. He says, "I've tried a vast array and concluded nothing beats this hook."

Whenever fishing in a new water," he suggests "I always start with a 4 inch finesse worm." That style and shape has universal appeal and perfectly matches the drop shot tactics. But getting the bait to the fish is the prime directive especially in rougher water. Once you find a fish, you may get bites on almost anything. That's when it's time to start trying different baits, such as Senkos, leeches, or Berkley GULP worms. .

The baits are always nose-hooked so you can get the most action as possible out of your lure. Whacky rigging takes too long to get the bait down, especially in water exceeding 20 feet. Naturally, if your locator shows fish 4 feet to 5 feet off the bottom, you can adjust the rig by retying your hook and swivel, creating more depth.

As mentioned before, one nice thing with the drop shot is that you can rest your rod on the edge while you are casting with a different rod. When the fish grabs your bait, there is no need to set the hook. The fish hook themselves and all you need to do is pull up on the rod. Invariably they are hooked on the side or upper lip which allows for easy hook removal.

A recent experience on Lake Mendota included fishing with night crawlers on the drop shot hook. Even in this instance, four smallmouth were caught in a one hour period all of which were lipped hooked while the rod was sitting on my lap. But you do have to pay attention to your rod tip.

According to a recent presentation from local guide Ron Barefield, with our water temperature dropping, he suggests using drop shots in 35 to 40 feet of water on Lake Mendota. In our shallower lakes, I think fishing drop shot during this period of time should be in the deepest, hard surface bottoms to get the best results.

The versatile drop shot method can also be used in rivers where there is minimal current. In most cases, a cylindrically shaped drop shot weight, appropriately sized for the current, is a better bet. That design is less likely to drop into the rubble as your bait is drifting down the current.

Again, adjust your speed to the current, with the idea that you are always nicking the bottom with the drop shot. In the shallower water, such as a river current, one can use a braided line such as Sufix 832 with a 7 foot fluorocarbon leader. The leader will permit the bait to sink and you can watch your braided line float on the surface. This helps detect strikes before they reach your rod tip.

Try to minimize line drag, in any case. This set up is designed to keep your bait where the smallmouth are at this time of the year. It's also beneficial to use during the warmer parts of summer, when smallmouth are lurking in deeper water.

The drop shot should be another tool in your arsenal.

Parts of this article can be attributed to Matt Straw from a September 2010 issue of In-Fisherman, and from personal experiences of the author.



Our Next Meeting:

**Tuesday
October 15th**

Smallmouth and musky fishing on the Wisconsin River

Dan Boggs, Blackwater Fly Fishing

Dan is a tried and proven fly fishing guide. Having guided for the past 9 years

Primarily around the driftless area for trout he has developed a passion for showing people how to catch fish on the fly rod here in his home state of Wisconsin.

Dan is a certified FFF Casting Instructor and has helped many people get into and improve their skill in fly fishing.

He has a huge passion for the fish he goes after and loves to be able to share that with his clients. Smallmouth and Musky hold a very special place in his pursuit as they are explosive and exciting to go after and getting your blood going is a very good thing.



Upcoming Meetings:

Oct 28th	BFF - David Barron, Jacquish Hollow Angler	Jan 21st	WSA - T.b.a.
Nov 19th	WSA - Al Niebaur	Feb 18th	WSA - Ron Barefield
Nov 27th	BFF - Tony Ferrie, Simms Fishing Products	March 18th	WSA - Mike Jacobs
Dec 17th	WSA/BFF Holiday Party	April 15th	WSA Annual Fundraiser Auction

Wisconsin Smallmouth Alliance meetings are normally held on the third Tuesday of each month. The Badger Fly Fishers meet on the fourth Monday.

Both groups meet at the Mapletree Restaurant on Highway 51, in McFarland, Wisconsin. Programs begin at 7:00 p.m., dinner at 6:00 p.m. **Visitors and guests are always welcome!**