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OF THE RIVER

Deep Fishing (part 1)

Part 5 is posted below, Part 4 is posted below, Part 3 is posted below, Part 2 is posted below Part 1

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The words "The only way I've been catching fish is in about 60' of water" are enough to make most bass fisherman put the boat back on the trailer and head home or worse to the bar. While it's intimidating to leave the comfort of pitching a jig to a lay down or a bush on the shore, it is hard to argue with the success that deep fisherman have on local lakes when the guys fishing the bank are struggling. In this series of articles I hope to demystify the aspects of deep fishing and help you to be a more versatile angler. I will cover the basic topics of where to find deep bass, when are the best times for deep bass fishing, how do you dissect a specific piece of deep structure, best ways to fish deep for bass (tackle & techniques), selecting and using your marine electronics more effectively and even let you in on a few tricks that even some of the best deep fisherman don't know about.

In this first article I will go over some of the basics of deep fishing and where to look for deep fish.

Where

One of the most important factors about deep fishing for bass is where it can be done. More than just which structure in the lake will hold fish does the lake support a deep bite period.

1) As a general rule the lake should have threadfin shad as large part of its forage base, lakes with gizzard shad as the primary forage tend to be less productive deep fisheries. For the most part the Missouri / Arkansas border is the most northern range of threadfin shad, above that line the water will freeze in the winter and the threadfin will die off.

2) The other major factor is the water's clarity. While it is not necessary for the water to be crystal clear like Table Rock or Bull Shoals, the water can be stained but not muddy, visibility of at least 3 feet is critical. The fish need to be able to see the bait in order to react to it.

If your lake meets these criteria there is a good chance there is a deep bite on it somewhere. So now what, where are the fish going to be?

Just like all other techniques, deep fishing is very seasonally oriented; the fish will be on different structure and cover as the year progresses. The easiest way to break this down is to look at each seasonal pattern individually:

Winter: Typically winter is one of the best times to go deep fishing. The bass will move to the much more stable temperatures of deeper water in late fall and stay there until they start to move up to spawn. They will tend to school deep and feed similar to a pack, once one starts the others in the school will feed as well. Locations will vary with each lake, but as a general rule the fish will move out on to main lake structure like channel swings, bluff ends, points and deep humps. The fish will be relating to shad and the annual shad kill that takes place when water temperatures drop, therefore

finding shad is critical this time of year to be successful. The easiest way to find the shad is to look for birds, just like saltwater off shore fisherman use birds to locate bait so should you. Wherever the bait intersects with a deep structure is a great place to look for fish.

Spring: While not typically thought of as a deep fishing time of year, spring can be one of the most effective times to find and catch some very large bass. This is the only time of year deep fish are not keying on shad exclusively, they have other things on their mind. Bass will use points, ledges channel swings and breaks to move from deep water to shallow spawning areas. Often times they will stop and use submerged trees or other cover on their way shallow water, or a front may push them back out deeper and they will suspend. In addition the water clarity can be clear enough that Kentucky or Smallmouth may spawn 20' deep or even deeper. Finally, after the spawn most fish will suspend in the deepest water close to their spawning location. Regardless, of which phase of the spawn the fish are in, there will be some deep fish available moving in or out of shallow spawning locations.

Summer: Just like in the winter, summer is a very productive time of year for deep fishing. Bass have completed their spawn and will move out on off shore structure to spend the entire summer on the main lake. Best spots to look for fish are at the end of points dropping into deep water, off shore humps, channel swings close to shallow water or ledges and saddles between islands and the shore. In the summer time cover becomes more important than in the winter, the angle of the sun is much greater and there is more light penetration moving fish into trees, rock piles and onto deep ledges. Much like in the winter the presence of shad is crucial to finding feeding fish, look for birds to show you where the bait intersects with a piece of cover on the right structure and you will find the fish.

Fall: This is my favorite time to fish deep, it is the most overlooked and under fished time of the year. Most anglers are beating the banks with crankbaits, spinnerbaits and jigs missing the absolute feeding frenzy that is taking place behind them. Just like the rest of the year, find the shad and you will find the fish. During the fall shad move into the creek arms and head toward the backs of the creeks, the bass will follow them all the way from the main lake into the very back of the creek. Let the birds show you where to fish, seagulls will show you the location of shad and in turn the location of the fish. Cover is not as important this time of year; the fish will actually use the schools of shad as cover and go into a feeding frenzy whenever a shad moves too far away from the rest of the school. Find the bait = find the fish.

In this article I have covered some of the basics on deep fish location, while every day on every lake can present differing conditions these general locations hold true throughout the seasons. In upcoming articles I will cover the best tactics and techniques for fishing deep, how to breakdown a specific piece of deep structure, choosing and utilizing your electronics and a few tricks and techniques to trigger fish into biting. Hopefully, once you read all of the articles in this series you will gain the confidence you need to move out from the bank and start catching a few fish deep. If you have questions or comments as this series of articles progresses feel free to contact me at eric@focusedfishing.com . Or if you are interested in a one on one deep fishing lesson, contact me and we can set up a full or half day deep lesson guide trip.

Deep Fishing (part 2)

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In the first part of deep fishing we discussed the seasonal locations that will hold deep bass. In this article I will cover the most important aspect of deep fishing, electronics. It is important to note that choosing the right graph and knowing how to properly set – up and adjust your graph is vital to your success as a deep angler. In this article I will get into the general information about all graphs and set up information that is specific to Lowrance electronics, keep in mind that other graphs will work for deep fishing applications and while the specific settings I will give you are for Lowrance they can be duplicated on other units.

Choosing the Right Graph:

There are several important factors that go into the purchase of a graph for deep fishing; pixel count, peak to peak power, screen size, etc... the following are critical:

Pixel Count: Basically this is the number of squares that make up the picture you see on the graph, the higher the count the greater the detail. For deep fishing I recommend a graph with a minimum of 320v x 480h pixel count, this graph will show you the detail you need.

Cone Angle: Measured in degrees this will give an idea how wide of an area you are viewing on the bottom. Anything over 15 degrees is sufficient.

Peak to Peak: This is the amount of watts the graph will put out; it is the total amount of AC current output from the graph's peak positive value to its peak negative value. A peak to peak value of 3000 watts or greater is ideal.

Screen size: I prefer a 7" diagonal or larger screen, it is much easier to see the detail.

Greyline: This is a Lowrance term, simply put it shows items

of differing densities with differing shades grey being the stronger signal (i.e. a rock bottom more grey than a mud bottom, or a fish laying on the bottom)

Zoom: Gotta Have It! I prefer a 2x & 4x zoom it allows you to look closer at your bait, the structure or the fish without having to adjust the upper and lower limits of your view.

Transducer Frequency: The higher the frequency the more detail. A 200kHz or higher is ideal.

Transducer Type: A skimmer transducer is preferred; it stands off of your trolling motor a little further than a pod style which seems to help limit trolling motor inference.

Most of these features will be listed when you are looking at graphs. If you are unsure ask for help or go to the manufactures website for assistance. Many websites have a tutorial as well that can help you set up and understand your graph. As to specific graphs that will work, here is a short list:

Lowrance:

Any of the LCX series starting at the LCX – 15

X125 – X136df (monochrome)

X102c & X107Cdf (color)

Garmin:

250 & 250C lower pixel count but will work

320C

Vexilar:

The Edge 507 lower pixel count but will work

Bottom Line:

320 Max, 480 Max, Tournament 5100 & NCC6300

Hummingbird

Matrix 37 or higher

565

Pinpoint:

7520 lower pixel count but will work

I am not endorsing any of these products. I have not used most of these but they all meet the basic criteria for deep fishing. I use and have been very happy with Lowrance products. The specifics of set up and adjustment detailed in this article are for Lowrance products as well.

Setting Up Your Graph:

Out of the box most graphs will perform well, there is a little bit of fine tuning we need to do to dial it in for deep fishing though. First thing, take the graph off of auto mode; you want to be able to control the graph. If the graph has a fish i.d. mode shut it off as well, if you are looking at cartoon fish on the screen everything except the bottom will show up as a fish. Next, let's get into the menu of the graph and do some fine tuning:

Sensitivity: As high as you can set it without trolling motor interference, usually around 90%. You will need to adjust it as change depths and as conditions dictate so be familiar how to adjust it.

Ping Speed: Crank it up all the way, this controls the number of times the transducer bounces, pings, a signal. More Pings = More Detail!

Chart Speed: Again, crank it up. You want returns as fast as they can be read by the graph.

Greyline: You want to be able to distinguish fish and bait on the bottom from the bottom. A group of fish or bait on the bottom will show as a line with very little or any grey between it and a line and a lot of grey. Set your greyline between 65% - 75%.

Surface Clutter: This is really an on the water adjustment. With increased air bubbles from wind, boat traffic and algae blooms this will need to be adjusted to remove some of the "noise" that appears at the top of the water column. Set it at low as a starting point and adjust it from there.

Upper & Lower Limit: This is an optional adjustment and it is an adjustment you will need to make throughout the day if you change depths allot. But by adjusting it, you will be able too get greater detail of a smaller section of the water column. Simply enter in the upper limit and lower limit in the boxes provided.

Spit Screen Zoom: Another optional adjustment, this allows you to view a zoomed image at the same time you are looking at the full image.

A side note, if at anytime you "mess up" the settings on your graph, most graphs have

a "return to factory presets" option in their menu so you can always go back to where you started.

On the Water Adjustments:

O.K., we've got a base line set up and now we need to see how it will perform. Move out into 50' – 90' of water and drop the trolling motor. Turn on your graph and start to look at the images, kick on your trolling motor and see if you are getting any interference, if yes, lower the sensitivity if no raise it until you get interference and then back it off. If you are noticing allot of clutter in the top 10' or so increase the surface the surface clutter setting to medium or even high. Note: this will limit what you see in that top 10' so if you move into shallow water or start fishing in that top ten feet you will need to adjust it. Now adjust the upper and lower limits and notice how you can bring in more detail by eliminating water that you are not fishing, and can get even greater detail by 2x and 4x zooming in the images. This is a good time to drop a lure over the side and follow it on your graph, if you are having a hard time following it or if it disappears off the graph practice keeping it in the cone with your trolling motor. Remember if you make a mistake you can always return to the factory presets so don't be afraid to experiment and see how the different buttons and menus work.

What Are You Looking At?

Experienced or not, the images that you see on your graph can be a bit confusing. Nothing will take the place of time on the water when it comes to becoming familiar with all of the different objects and being able to tell the difference between a fish and the tree or brush pile it is positioned over.

Remember that what you see and how it appears on your graph is effected greatly by the speed you are traveling over the bottom and the other objects under your boat. The faster you move the more the fish will be "arched" and the trees will look like trees, in short the more it will look like the simulator mode. Also, remember that all objects will appear to start deep move shallow and back to deep as you go over them, in other words all objects will be arched as you move over them. The more familiar you become with the images on your graph the more readily apparent what each object is will be. The following list will help you to get a better idea of what each item you are

looking at is:

- Groups of continuous horizontal lines with little or no vertical movement – Trees and individual limbs in those trees.

- Single continuous horizontal lines with some vertical movement – inactive fish

- Single or multiple lines moving toward the surface in a fast uninterrupted manner – air bubbles

- Single or multiple lines moving toward the surface in a varied manner – active fish feed or chasing bait toward the surface

- Single or multiple lines moving both toward the surface and bottom in a random and varied manner – a school of very aggressive fish!

- Single or multiple lines moving toward the bottom – fish moving deeper, usually caused by the fish being spooked by your boat or lure. Note these fish can still be caught! Work them hard and you can catch them.

- Oddly shaped light grey "blobs" with dark outline – schools of shad, the tighter and rounder the ball the better

chance there are fish in the area.

- Oddly shaped light grey "blobs" on the bottom – could be shad or could be brush piles, cedar trees in particular.

- Additional lines lifting off and returning to the bottom – a fish holding tight to the bottom or the cover on the bottom

- A line or lines with shadows under them rising from the bottom – This is usually found around docks – dock cables.

In addition I suggest visiting www.lowrance.com and going through their sonar tutorial, it has animated graphics that will help you better understand how sonar works and how the images on your graph are processed to represent what is under your boat.

In Conclusion

Nothing is a substitute for time spent on the water studying and working with your graph, the knowledge you gain through experience is much keener than any other. In order to be truly proficient with your electronics you need to do your home work both on and off the water. With a little work you can gain the knowledge to give you an edge over your competition. In the next installment we will look at some specific equipment, lures and rigs that are very effective for deep fishing.

Deep Fishing (part 3)

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In the first two installments of this series we covered seasonal patterns for deep fishing as well as selecting, setting up and getting the maximum benefit from your electronics. In this article I will cover the specific tackle, lures and equipment for deep fishing. While choosing the correct electronics is crucial to your success as a deep fisherman, the selection of tackle is much less daunting.

Rod, Reels & Line:

When we discuss rods and reels for deep fishing we will look at both spinning and casting equipment. Spinning equipment will be used primarily for drop shotting, fishing grubs, tubes and other light weight baits. Casting equipment will be used for heavier tackle such as spoons, ice baits and football jigs.

When looking at spinning rods I prefer one with a medium light to medium action. I personally use a Falcon Low Rider LFS-3-166, which is a 3 power 6'6" rod with a very soft tip, a medium flex mid length handle. This rod allows the fish to play themselves out with less chance of pulling the bait out of their mouths. The reel I use is a Shimano 4000 series Stradic, it has a 5.7:1 gear ratio faster than most spinning reels, a large line capacity to help eliminate line memory and multiple and a very smooth multi disk drag system. All of these features make it easier to play and tire out a fish coming out of deep water.

Casting rods are going to be medium to medium heavy action, 6' 6" to 7' with a fast action and a light tip. I prefer a Falcon Low Rider LFC-5-166, a medium heavy action rod with a fast flex and a soft tip and a medium sized handle. As far as a reel is concerned I prefer a Shimano 6.1:1 Curado, it has a high speed retrieve, smooth drag and will free spool line quickly.

Choosing the right line is the next critical step when gearing up for deep fishing. Whenever I am drop shotting, fishing a grub or darter head on a spinning rod I will use fluorocarbon. Many deep fisherman prefer mono for it's stretch and forgiveness when fighting a fish in a tree, but personally I like the sensitivity and response that

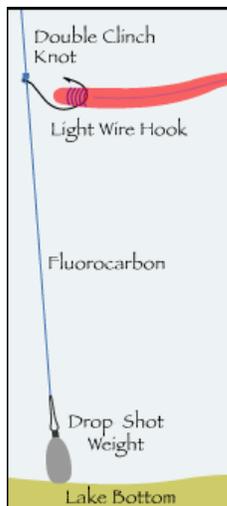
fluorocarbon provides. I use 8 lb. Seaguar exclusively for deep applications on spinning rods, it is tough enough to bring even big smallmouth out of a tree and has a small diameter so it has less drag. A tip for drop shotting is to tie a swivel about 12" – 18" above your hook to help minimize line twist. While fluorocarbon is ideal for finesse applications I prefer to use monofilament when fishing a spoon, blade bait or ice bait. Mono has the shock absorption qualities needed when vertically jigging a spoon or tail spinner, most of the strikes you will receive on these baits are vicious and require a line that will take it. My line of choice is 12lb. suffix mono; it has good stretch, small diameter and is abrasion resistant.

Lures & Rigs:

There are a wide variety of baits, lures and rigs used for deep fishing. The easiest way I can think of is to break them down by technique and tackle used to fish them. With that in mind we will cover the finesse baits and rigs first then more of the power style baits.

Finesse Deep Fishing:

Grubs: single tailed grubs fished on a 1/4oz. head, they can be cast and retrieved or fished vertically and shaken in front of the fish. This is a great bait to use when the fish are in a transition phase, moving from deep to shallow and back again.



Drop Shot Rigs: Most anglers know how to tie a drop shot rig

simply tie a polymer knot with a long tag end, feed the tag end back through the hook and tie a weight below. Unlike fishing a drop shot in shallow water, in deep water you will fish the bait up off the bottom and in the tops of trees. I prefer to fish a #4 circle hook and nose hook the bait. As far as which baits will work, 90% of the time I fish a finesse worm in a translucent color. Other baits that can be used are; grubs, senkos, flukes, creature baits and a host of "drop shot" lures. All of these are dropped to the fish and shaken. Primarily fished in trees and heavy cover this technique excels when the fish are holding tight to cover.

Darter Head Worm: Just as the name implies it is a finesse worm on a darter style jig head. Drop it down in front of the fish and shake it. Best colors are translucent, white or shad colors. This method is best used in open water away from cover when schools of shad are over open water.

Power Deep Fishing:

Spoons: More deep fish are caught on spoons than any other bait. Depending on light penetration spoons in silver or white will catch most of the fish. Bright sunny days, less than 50' deep a silver spoon is my choice. If it is cloudy or partly cloudy and the fish are deeper than 50' I will use a white spoon. The most popular sizes are 1/2 oz & 3/4 oz depending on

depth and the size of bait fish. Most jigging style spoons will work. Pop them up with a shark jerk and follow the line as it falls, you want the bait to fall on a controlled slack line. Spoons work everywhere and can be fished in cover or in open water, they are one of the best triggering baits you can use.

Tail spinners: These baits have been around for years but have really gained popularity with deep fisherman over the last couple of years. Little George was one of the first and is still one of the best examples of this bait. As you work this style of bait you will feel the blade vibrate, if the vibration stops you are getting bit. Allot like spoons these baits work well in cover or away from it.

Blade Baits: Originally designed to be fished horizontally, this heavy this baits will also work vertically. You will fish these baits with more of a sweeping lift than a hard pop like you would a spoon. With it's two treble hooks the blade bait is best suited for open water in and around schools of shad.

Rapala Ice Baits: Another recent innovation to deep fishing, these baits have been used by ice fisherman for decades. When the bait is lifted and dropped it will swim in a small circle. Much like the blade bait the multiple hooks make this bait tough to fish around cover.



Rapala Ice Bait

Football Jigs: Yet another bait that has worked its way into the

deep fishing arena. A ¾ oz. Jewel football jig fished on the bottom in 30' – 50' has accounted for more money won on Table Rock the past three years than any other bait. Cast it out, let it fall to the bottom, and then pop it off the bottom all the way back to the boat. Most strikes will happen on the fall so pay close attention. Pea gravel deep flats and chunk rock flats are your best bet with a football jig deep, most of the fish will come off of an irregularity in the bottom.

In Conclusion

While not as important as selecting your electronics, choosing the right lure at the right time is critical to catching fish whether in 6" of water or 100' of water. The list of baits and tackle in this article, while not totally inclusive, are a good representation of the tackle you will need to be a successful deep fisherman. In the next article in this series we will spend a day on the water from start to finish looking for deep fish on a variety of structure and cover. If you have questions or comments as this series of articles progresses feel free to contact me at eric@focusedfishing.com. Or if you are interested in a one on one deep fishing lesson, contact me and we can set up a full or half day deep lesson guide trip.

Deep Fishing (part 4)

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In the first three articles of this series we have covered where we expect to find deep

fish every season, how to select and set up your electronics and the specific tackle and equipment you will need for fishing in deep water. Now is the time to bring this all together. In this article I will take you out on the water for a typical day of searching for and trying to catch deep fish on Table Rock Lake. The data for this article comes directly from my personal log book from fall of 2004; this was a day in late November while I was pre-fishing for the December Central Pro Am.

Conditions:

Air temperature range: 36 – 53

Water temperature range: 48 – 52

Water Clarity: 12'

Wind: SW 5 -10 mph

Weather: Mostly Sunny

On the water:

A cold start for the day and with it being a practice day I decide against making a long run this morning. I launched at the port of Kimberling, Idled out to the buoys and made a short run to a bluff end leading into a major creek arm. As I pulled up to the bluff I noticed a few sea gulls circling around the bluff end and a loon swimming on the surface, both of which are a good sign. Watching my graph on the console as I slowed to idle speed and noticed a large school of shad suspended over a tree top. The tree topped out at 40' below the surface and the overall depth was 72' deep. I stopped the boat and dropped the trolling motor. I noticed immediately that the shad were less than ten feet from the top of the tree and that several fish were suspended in the tree. The fish weren't feeding on the shad but they were fairly active; moving in and out of the tree. With this in mind I dropped a drop shot with a Yamamoto 4" cut tail worm, followed it as it fell through the water column on my LCX-15MT and stopped it as the weight reached the very top of the tree. I began to shake the drop shot and noticed a fish from the top of the tree moving toward my bait. He swam up to it but did not bite, I kept shaking the bait with no success, I decided to try another bait and started

to reel the bait up, the fish followed along with two others. Whenever you have more than one fish interested in a bait you stand a very good chance of catching one of them. I immediately let the bait fall past all three of the fish and noticed that as it got to the deepest one it stopped moving, I set the hook and began to fight what turned out to be a 17" , 3lb. football Kentucky. As I unhooked the fish I looked at the graph in time to see a feeding frenzy taking place, the one fish moving through the school of shad had gotten all of the fish started. Since I was prefishing I decided against catching any more of these fish prior to the tournament so I moved on.

I moved to another productive fall area, a deep flat in a major creek arm. Coming off of pad in about 75' of water I noticed a group of 10 – 20 gulls circling above the water. I idled up onto the flat over a couple of trees and watched my graph as the bottom rose and the depth changed from 65' to 45'. A large cloud of shad appeared on the graph; they were pretty strung out and didn't appear to be balled up or at all frightened. I dropped the trolling motor and began to scan the bottom with my Lowrance LCX-15MT. I zoomed in on the bottom at 4x zoom and notice a line coming off of the bottom and then disappearing back into the bottom, definitely a fish. Just like in the trees I had just left on the bluff end there were fish and bait here, the fish just weren't active. Nothing to loose so I pulled out a Falcon casting rod with a Rapala ice bait tied on, an ice bait will actually pull fish off of the bottom when they are inactive, it swims in a circle above them and entices them into striking. I zoomed out on the graph dropped the bait and watched for any movement from the bottom. As the bait fell I noticed the shad begin to tighten up on the graph, becoming more ball shaped than stretched out and about the time the ice bait was 10' from the bottom a line began to swim toward it. I continued to let the bait fall and stopped it just above the bottom. As I lifted and dropped the rod tip I could feel a vibration coming from the bait as it swam, when the vibration stopped and I had hooked up with a fish. Again the bottom exploded as other fish started to chase after the one I had hooked; I brought the 2.5lb smallmouth into the boat and released it immediately. The feeding frenzy was in full swing when I looked back at the graph, the fish that followed the one I boated had decided to feast on the school of shad that were above them. At this point just about any bait would catch these fish; again I decided against caching any of these fish prior to the tournament and moved on.

Traveling to the next major creek I decided to try the main creek channel to try to find another area the fish may be holding in. As I came off pad I in 85' of water I looked

around for any sign of bait or fish. I idled for quite a while watching both my graph and the surroundings until I noticed a group of Loons on the surface about 100 yards in front of me. Looking at the graph I noticed I had traveled back to where the creek channel was only about 50' deep, there were a few trees but it was mostly a clear bottom. I shut off the Yamaha and dropped the trolling motor. As I expected there was a fairly large school of shad right in the gut of the creek ranging from 10' – 30' deep. Unlike at the last two stops there were four or five distinct lines below the shad swimming into and out of the school of shad. These fish were actively feeding on the shad and I couldn't get a spoon in my hands fast enough. Since these fish were already feeding and I wanted to get a bait in front of them as fast as possible I chose a ¾ oz. spoon. I watched on the graph as the spoon rocketed toward the bottom through the shad, it cleared the shad and at about 35' a line that had been coming off the bottom met my bait, my line stopped sinking so I set the hook. It is important to notice that I never felt the bite of this fish because the fish was swimming up at me, my line just stopped. When I set the hook it felt like a good fish, the images on the graph were a mess lines moving up and down, chasing the fish I had hooked and in a massive feeding frenzy with all the bait. I boated the fish it was another football shaped Kentucky between 3 and 4 pounds. Again, since I was prefishing I didn't want to catch anymore of these fish until the first day of the tournament so I, moved on.

Feeling pretty confident in the areas I had found I motored in and out of several creeks and found similar scenarios in about half of them, the fish were either on deep main lake bluff ends, deep flats or in the main creek channel. The key in all areas was locating the bait. I hadn't tried many main lake saddles or other structures so I went to a main lake flat that drops into deep water closer to the dam. I idled around it for a while and saw several inactive fish on the bottom as deep as 50' all the way up to 25', I had seen allot of small groups of shad but no major schools. I decided to try a football jig because of the number of fish I had seen on the graph close to the bottom. Stopping the boat close to where the flat dropped into the channel I tied on a 5/8 oz. Jewel PB&J football jig with a cinnamon / purple flake Yamamoto twin tail grub and slung it toward the shallower water. Unlike in the heat of the summer when a slow drag is the preferred retrieve, in the fall the fish tend to be aggressive when they see a big craw fish on a flat so you want to make as big of a commotion as you can on the bottom. When the bait hit the bottom I made a couple of big jerks to pop it up off the bottom and then let it fall back, make sure it falls on a controlled slack line because most of the bites will come as it falls. I continued to pop it off of the bottom and let it

fall all the way to the boat, I made three more casts, generally I will fan cast an area from left to right, on the fourth cast about half way back the line went slack as the jig fell. I set the hook and felt a good fish shake its head and start fighting. When fighting a fish on a football jig it is important to keep tension on the line at all times, any leverage you give the fish will result in it throwing the jig. After a good tussle the fish came to the boat a nice 3lb. smallmouth, I released it and decided to try to find a few more areas holding fish like this one for the tournament as well.

I found a couple of additional flats that were holding fish so I was getting very confident with my chances for the tournament and called it a day. I finished 14th in the tournament, had 4 fish on the first day all of which came deep and of course lost a couple that felt good. The second day I had limit of fish, caught seven keepers and about 30 short fish, I caught all my fish the second day in the area of the creek channel where the fish were schooling in practice, it was still loaded with fish but most of them were only 14 ½ " long. Every fish caught on the second day was caught between 12:30 pm and 3:00 pm, neither myself or my partner caught a fish before 12:30pm.

In Conclusion

I hope this helps you start to put all of this information together, while not a typical day on the water, I would say I have had more than my fair share of days like this while deep fishing. Some of the things I gathered from this experience were:

The importance of seasonal patterns and the effect they will have on fish locations – most of the fish caught were in and around major creeks following migrating shad.

The importance of locating shad – even the fish caught on a football jig were still near small schools of shad.

The importance of birds – everywhere I caught fish, both in the tournament and in practice there were birds present. They lead you to the shad and in turn the fish.

The importance of getting that first fish to bite – regardless the size of that first fish once one of them starts feeding the rest will instinctively follow suit.

The importance of paying attention to your line and your electronics – with most of the fish I caught that day I never felt a bite, the line stopped moving or I saw the fish bite on my graph.

The importance of sticking with a pattern when you know it will work - on the second day of the tournament I had been to 6 other locations that I had caught fish on in practice none of them produced, I went to my seventh and we caught over 50 fish in 2 ½ hours.

In the fifth and final installment of this series we will review all of the information in the previous articles, discuss some specific "tricks of the trade" to trigger fish into biting and cover in depth the one thing everyone that fishes over 25 feet deep **MUST KNOW**; how to properly deflate the air bladder of a bass so it can be released. If you have questions or comments as this series of articles progresses feel free to contact me at eric@focusedfishing.com. Or if you are interested in a one on one deep fishing lesson, contact me and we can set up a full or half day deep lesson guide trip.

Deep Fishing (part 5)

By Eric Prey: Eric Prey is sponsored by: Ranger Boats, Bill's Marine, [Jewel Bait Co.](#) and Anglers' Tackle Box as well as the owner of Focused Fishing guide service. eric@focusedfishing.com

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In the first four installments of this series we have covered all of the basics of deep fishing. This article will serve as a review of that information; we will cover some specific tricks to trigger deep fish to strike and finally detailed instruction with illustrations on the proper way to deflate the air bladder of a bass for release. If you read only one section of this series please read that portion of this article, if you are going to fish deeper than 25' for bass you must know how to properly care for them so they can be released.

Review:

In the first installment we discussed seasonal locations for deep fishing and whether or not a lake will even have a deep bite. The first thing you need to know is whether or not there is a population of threadfin shad in the lake. The northern most limits of threadfin shad is the Missouri / Arkansas line without threadfin shad the potential for a deep bite is low, also if the water clarity is less than 3' you are most likely wasting your time trying to catch fish deep.

Seasonal patterns:

Winter: As a general rule the fish will move out on to main lake structure like channel swings, bluff ends, points and deep humps. The fish will be relating to shad and the annual shad kill that takes place when water temperatures drop, therefore finding shad is critical this time of year to be successful.

Spring: Bass will use points, ledges, channel swings and breaks to move from deep water to shallow spawning areas. Often times they will stop and use submerged trees or other cover on their way shallow water, or a front may push them back out deeper and they will suspend. In addition the water clarity can be clear enough that Kentucky or Smallmouth may spawn 20' deep or even deeper and after the spawn most fish will suspend in the deepest water close to their spawning location.

Summer: Best spots to look for fish are at the end of points dropping into deep water, off shore humps, channel swings close to shallow water or ledges and saddles between islands and the shore. In the summer time cover becomes more important than in the winter, the angle of the sun is much greater and there is more light penetration moving fish into trees, rock piles and onto deep ledges. Much like in the

winter the presence of shad is crucial to finding feeding fish, look for birds to show you where the bait intersects with a piece of cover on the right structure and you will find the fish.

Fall: During the fall shad move into the creek arms and head toward the backs of the creeks, the bass will follow them all the way from the main lake into the very back of the creek. Let the birds show you where to fish, seagulls will show you the location of shad and in turn the location of the fish. Cover is not as important this time of year; the fish will actually use the schools of shad as cover and go into a feeding frenzy whenever a shad moves too far away from the rest of the school. Find the bait = find the fish.

In the second part of this series we discussed the importance of choosing the right graph and learning how to use it. In that article I detailed which graphs from the major manufactures will work for deep fishing, how to set up the graph both in your garage and fine tuning it on the water as well as what some of the objects you see on the graph actually are. If you are unclear please print the article and use it as a guide when you buy and set up your graph.

In part three I detailed the equipment you need to use from rods and reels to line and baits. We discussed the types of rods and reels for both finesse and power deep fishing; for finesse fishing we looked at spinning rods and I prefer one with a medium light to medium action. I personally use a Falcon Low Rider LFS-3-166, which is a 3 power 6'6" rod with a very soft tip, a medium flex mid length handle. This rod allows the fish to play themselves out with less chance of pulling the bait out of their mouths. The reel I use is a Shimano 4000 series Stradic, it has a 5.7:1 gear ratio faster than most spinning reels, a large line capacity to help eliminate line memory and a very smooth multi disk drag system. For power fishing I prefer casting rods that are going to be medium to medium heavy action, 6' 6" to 7' with a fast action and a light tip. I prefer a Falcon Low Rider LFC-5-166, a medium heavy action rod with a fast flex and a soft tip and a medium sized handle. As far as a reel is concerned I prefer a Shimano 6.1:1 Curado, it has a high speed retrieve, smooth drag and will free spool line quickly. Line is simple, fluorocarbon for finesse fishing and monofilament for power fishing. We also looked at the specific baits and rigs from drop shot rigs to

football jigs, how to use them and how to tie them.

Part four was a day on the water; I took you out on Table Rock Lake as I pre-fished for the December 2004 Central Pro am tournament. We spend the day searching for fish in several different locations using a variety of baits to catch several fish. This article really helps tie all the loose ends together and make sense of how and when to use the different baits and rigs.

Tricks of the Trade:

O.K., let's talk about a few tricks that those of us that deep fish use to more fish in the boat.

- "Playing Hooky"

The number one concern you should have is your hooks, change them from "stock" hooks to sharper hooks. I use Gamakatsu EWG hooks exclusively. If you are loosing fish, change your hooks, you may not see a burr or something that is keeping you from hooking up well but it is there. Remember, you are setting the hook from 40' -70' away you need sharp hooks!

Add a hook! On a spoon add a second hook to your rig by threading the line through the eye of the spoon and then tying your line to a second treble. This will allow the spoon and hook to stay together better than if you add the hook above the spoon. I prefer to use a feathered treble, again from Gamakatsu.

- "Double or Triple Play"

When fishing a drop shot rig in open water change the weight at the bottom of your rig to a jig head with a single tail grub, it will double your chances of getting bit. Also tie a second hook and bait on your drop shot, maybe a swimmin' minnow or grub above a finesse worm, if a feeding

frenzy begins you may catch two or even three fish at a time.

- "Make 'em bite"

Spoon tricks:

If fish are suspending below you spoon as you pop it up and down, lift it twice as high and hold it, when the fish move up drop it and they will hit it as it falls.

If you see fish running from your spoon to the bottom, chase the fish to the bottom and hop it on the bottom and then rip it up to see if they follow it.

If fish are just swimming with you spoon try shaking for 10 seconds and then pop it. This will often trigger a strike.

If you see fish surface while fishing a spoon cast to the spot they surfaced at count down about 5 and the rip and pause the bait back to the boat. Strikes will come as the bait falls so pay attention.

Tail Spinner Trick:

Tail spinners can be very effective when a spoon isn't getting strikes, the extra flash is a real bonus and when you are work multiple fish it can be more effective than a spoon When fish are suspending under the bait try raising it up about 5' – 10' if the fish starts to follow it drop it to them and they will strike.

Ice Bait Trick:

A Rapala Ice bait falls really slow and needs to be worked with slow steady lifts and drops. If fish are running to the bottom with other baits drop an ice bait to the bottom and slowly reel it off the bottom many times this will "pull" the fish off the bottom. When they come off the bottom work the bait normally to get a strike.

Drop Shot Tricks:

Drop shots are great around standing timber, in order to work the bait in the trees make sure you use the right weight and the right hook: a tall thin weight as opposed to a bell sinker or round ball weight will slip through the branches better. Owner makes a special weedless bend drop shot hook for use in grass and timber it works much better in timber than an open octopus hook will.

When "working" a fish by shaking a drop shot a long lift followed by a free fall drop will often entice a strike.

Deflating a Bass Air Bladder (Fizzing):

Nothing in this series is as important as learning to correctly deflate the air bladder of a bass so it can be released. The following is a detailed description with illustrations of the only method approved by The Missouri Department of Conservation to deflate an air bladder. There has been a lot of talk in recent months of "a new method to fizz a bass" by inserting the needle through the fishes mouth and into the air bladder. Unfortunately when using this method you run a much greater risk of damaging the fish's internal organs and causing death. Please take the time to learn the proper technique before you decide to go deep fishing, if you immediately release the fish there is no need to "fizz" the fish but if it is out of deep water for more than 30 seconds it will need to be "fizzed" in order to survive.

Equipment:

An 18 Gage hypodermic needle, available at tackle stores, drug stores and veterinary supply stores

A small wire tool to clean the needle with (I use a threading tool from a mojo rig).

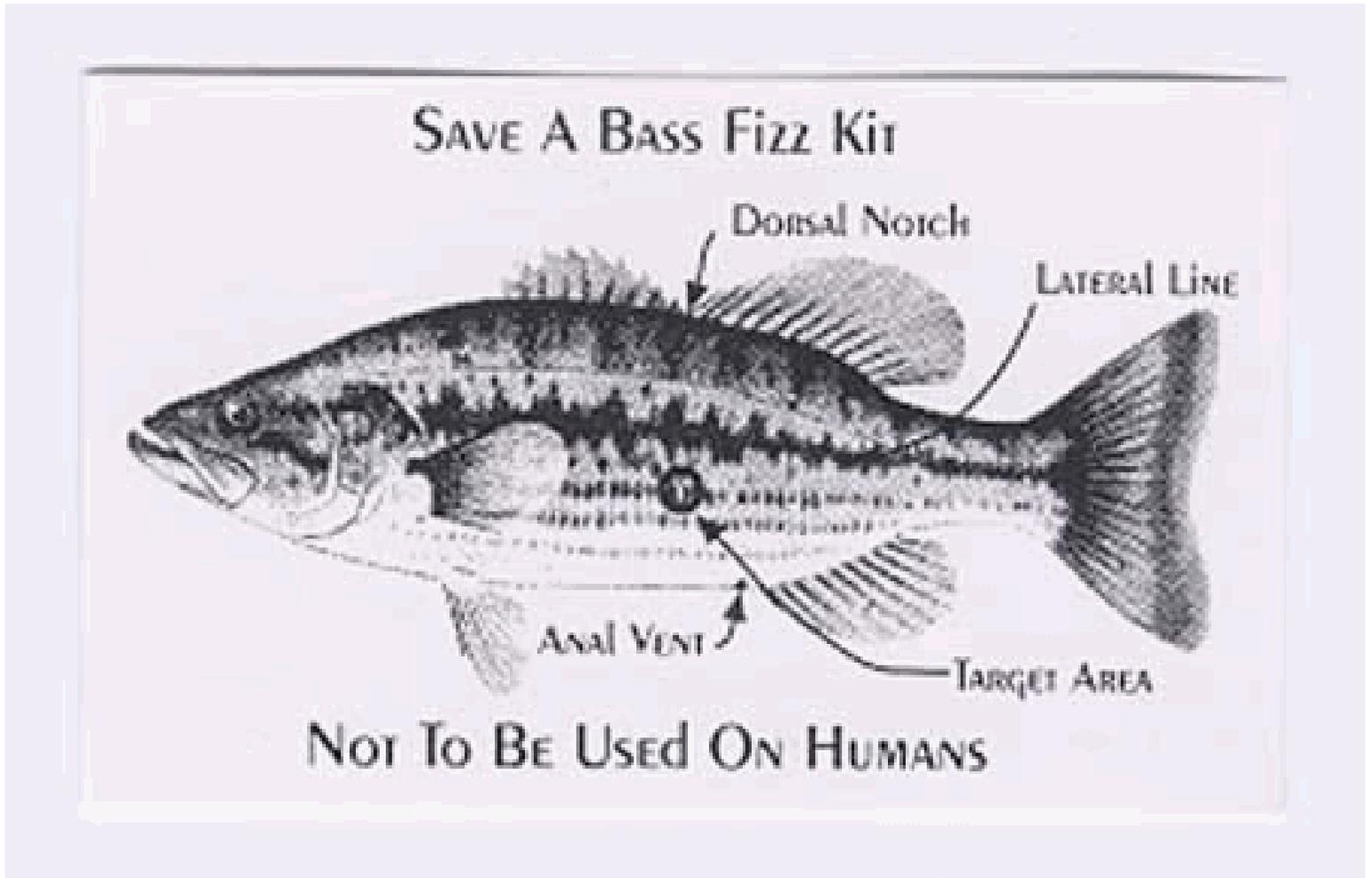
Technique:

This method works for Largemouth, Kentucky and Smallmouth as well as Meanmouth.

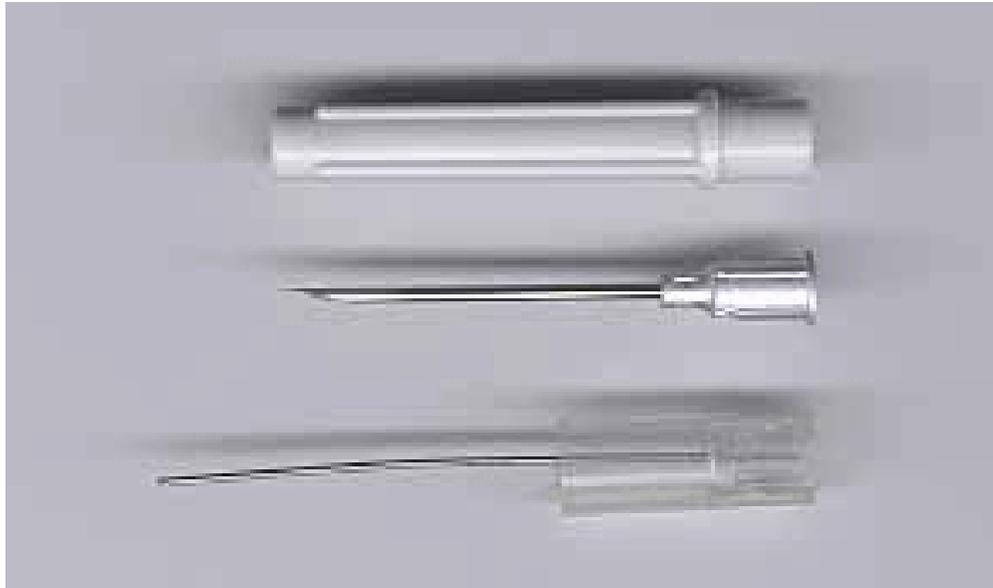
1. Lay the fish on it's side
2. On the dorsal fins find the spot where the two fins come together (The Dorsal Notch)
3. Draw an imaginary line from that point down to about 1" below the lateral line.
4. Make sure the needle is clear by blowing air through it.
5. Inset the needle under the scale straight into the fish's side.
6. Place the fish under water and check for air bubbles coming out of the needle.
 - a. If there is air allow it to bubble out until it stops
 - b. If there is no air, remove the needle check to make sure it is clear and repeat the procedure.
7. Remove the needle and make sure the fish can swim upright either in your live well or in the lake. If releasing the fish move it back and forth in the water a few times to help it get a little more oxygen in it's gills and it should swim off.

Illustrations:

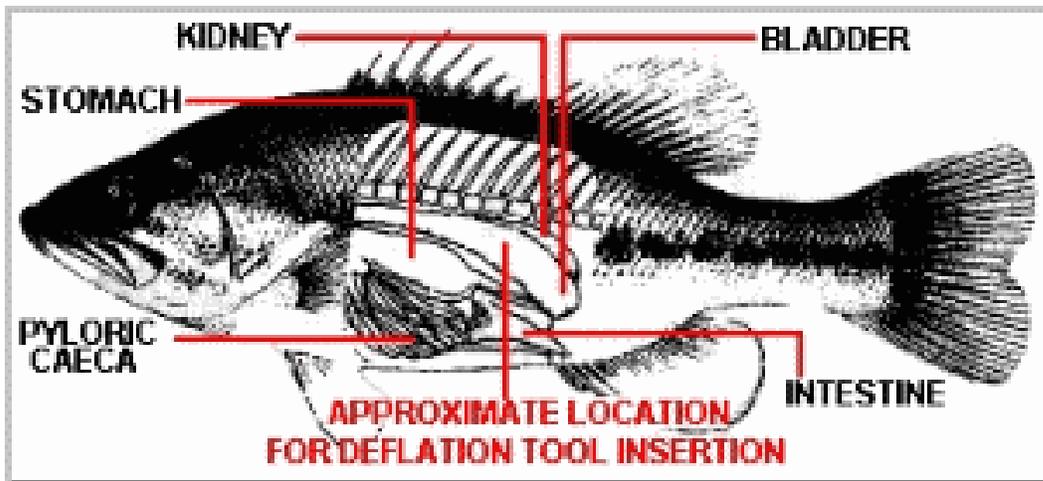
These illustrations help to better show the proper insertion point.



Target area is where the needle should be inserted.



A standard 18 Gage needle



Note the area of insertion and it's proximity to the kidney and stomach.

In Conclusion:

I hope this series has helped to demystify deep fishing for bass for you. Please study the deflation process and even print it and take a copy with you if you are unsure of how to do it before you start deep fishing. When you make the move off shore it can be one of the most rewarding moves you can make. If you have questions or comments on this series of articles feel free to contact me at eric@focusedfishing.com. Or if you are interested in a one on one deep fishing lesson, contact me and we can set up a full or half day deep lesson guide trip.

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