

How To Catch Those Hard Fighting Striped Bass

By Steve Welch

Every Summer I enjoy pursuing those elusive big Stripers that Clinton Lake has to offer. I have for eight years now owned the lake record at 22.4 lbs and don't think it will ever be broken.

For those of you who have never tied into a striper over ten pounds just go out and tie your fishing line on the bumper of your car and tell the wife to gun it. I am telling you when they make their first run you had better have a death grip on that pole. I wouldn't even let my sons when they were little fight the fish out of the rod holders for fear of losing an expensive bait casting rig. They have caught there share of big ones though and to this day if I tell them I am going striper fishing it is drop what you are doing and lets go. Wish they would get that worked up over crappie but it is the fight that they want experience.

I mostly guide now for Crappie and have little interest from clients on the Stripes mainly because the success rate is somewhat limited and this puts a lot of pressure on me to produce. Back in the nineties you read about and saw pictures of many fish over ten pounds and I have had days when we caught a dozen fish over ten. But that was then this is now.

We have many years now of flooding and Striped Bass like their cousin the White Bass love to escape the impoundment and go over the dam. The spillway will offer good fishing for a short while then the fish move on down stream never to be seen again.

Another reason my success rate has dropped is do to 9/11. This closed off the most successful area on the lake to get fish on each and every trip. That is on the two underwater dykes up by the intake. This was their freeway to the screens that sucked all the shad through them and an easy meal for the always-hungry Striper.

I have other methods to catch these fish though. One is to drag spinner rigs in and around the gravel pits. Clinton has old submerged gravel pits giving these fish twenty-five feet of water to hide in when its hot. I just throw out enough buoys that I can tell where the drop off is and then find a productive depth and slow troll these spinner rigs. I do usually go up in blade size over what you would walleye fish with. I tip the spinner rigs with either a crawler or a live shad or small bluegill. I also use the many humps between the pits and Rt. ten cove. A striper will use humps, drop offs and creek channels as his holding area to attack from.

Another very successful method is to drag crawdads through these same areas just much slower. The availability of crawdads is somewhat limited though. Stripes do just love them and they are probably your best bait both on the lake and down at the spillway.

Yet another method is to cast heavy jigs with four to six inch twisters on them on top of the humps and bounce them down the drops like you would fish a Carolina rig.

Clinton Lake has its downfall and that is the summertime boat traffic and these pits are your high traffic areas. I suggest getting up there during the week or waiting to fish in the early morning hours or evenings. The boat traffic puts these fish in a non-feeding mode and boat control in three-foot waves isn't easy.

I could be persuaded to guide for them on a half day trip though just don't bug me about a twenty pound fish. We catch plenty of five to eight pound fish on the crawler rig and catfish and walleye and all you want of those ever-present drums. So its not a total loss and who knows maybe you will catch the new lake record because somewhere in there I know one exists.