

The Big Sandy

By Steve Welch

I have thought about this for years and this year I am doing it. Most of you know I am a crappie fishing nut and every time I can get away I am on Kentucky Lake and to be more precise I am down on the south end at Paris Landing fishing the mouth of the Big Sandy.

Clients have told me for years why don't you guide down there during the winter so this year I am doing it. I started advertising it about two months ago and filled every trip for the month of March and then added another week. All of them booked in just a week or so. I guess my clients weren't kidding they really want to learn how I catch those big crappie out on the river channels fishing so deep.

To catch these big loaner crappie you have to first do some work on your boat. I have a Minn Kota 36 volt Fortrex trolling motor with plenty of power and a shaft long enough to always keep the front of the boat in the water. The 2095 has the trolling motor batteries up at the front of the boat which gives you weight up front to aid in keeping the nose down. I added two more pedestals up on the front deck of my Yar-Craft 2095 so all three of us can set and hover right over a big stump or brush right on a channel bend at least a mile from any shore line. This also gives us more weight on the nose. On the Big Sandy you will experience hovering in three to four foot waves and even the biggest bass boat doesn't have the weight up front so you are constantly fighting trying to keep your trolling motor in the water. You have the prop out of the water you lose all your momentum and thus you can't hover or work a drop off like I do with my walleye boat. Keeping the nose down is so critical I have even added four hundred pounds of sand in my front compartments when it gets real bad. The big Yar-Craft can work a ledge pushing four foot waves right out of the way.

Now, how do you find such a sweet spot on these ledges a mile from shore? I have four Lowrance HDS units in my boat. Two HDS 10's and two HDS 8's. All are networked so they all share waypoints. I have side imaging and structure scan on both the rear of the boat and the front. With these systems I can traverse down a drop off side scan and down scan simultaneously and also look at 2-d sonar to refer back and forth between images. Plus I am looking at a Navionics map that has all the old river channels and contours before the lake was created. If you try and do all I have listed at once on less units you must split your screens to such small pictures that you really can't see what is going on.

On my Navionics mapping chip I can move the safety contour settings to allow the danger colors of blue and even shallower dark blue out to a deeper zone. This puts the blue to very deep colored water of white transition to fifteen feet. This really helps in navigation on a flood control lake but what I really want it for is to work a ledge. I can go right along a ledge and watch my boat zig-zag from white to blue easily staying in fifteen to twenty feet. Then we are always looking for fish on these drops and brush.

I use this system at home as well to walleye fish. We use a heavy jig tipped with a minnow in both situations whether it be for crappie or walleye. We call this snap jigging. We use my 1/4oz. Deep Ledge Jig or even a 3/8oz. and we put the trolling motor on about four tenths of a mile an hour and slowly work the ledge by popping the jig off bottom from just slack line and trying to only pop it about six-inches to a foot off bottom.

The difference between crappie and walleye is when we come to a brush pile when crappie fishing on this ledge we then stop and get right over it and fish it vertically for a few minutes then start working the ledge once again. When you stop over the brush pile everyone needs to see how deep they are fishing so we can target the fish that tend to hover right on top of these deep piles.

We do this by using shorter rods so they are more apt to be right in the cone of your front depth-finder on 2-d sonar. Down scan will show you your jig from time to time but sonar is much easier. Down scan I really like because if you are over a stump it shows it so well you can actually see the roots and it looks like a stump. If you are over a stake bed you can see the two by two stakes and on down scan once you drift off the structure you know immediately. The cone on down scan is more of a slice in the water where as your 2-d sonar is a round cone. This also works to your advantage. When you are slowly moving up to a brush pile your 2-d sonar will hit it from the side and start to show you an image before you actually get right over it. If you are spider rigging and are using eight rods this info is quite helpful.

I always watch my client's jigs on the screen so I know they are working the spot correctly and like I said we do it with shorter 7 ½ foot custom rods. I have Norm of Norm's Custom Rods in Decatur make all my poles. We use a stout St. Croix flipping stick blank and turn it into a spinning rod. You don't want a limber rod to snap jig as you won't feel these heavy jigs as well. Besides that when you are snap jigging and working a drop off your line will be behind you somewhat and without the aid of this stout rod you won't drive a hook into these fish. I have seen it more than once a nice crappie well over two pounds come off because you were behind the boat as we work the ledge at .4 mph with your jig and you didn't drive that jig home.

I will be staying at the FishTale Lodge from March 3rd to April 7th and then back home to guide on Lake Shelbyville the rest of the year. I have plenty of openings left for Shelbyville so all you need to do is go to my website and scroll down on the front page for availability or simply call me at 217-762-7257. My schedule fills fast so don't wait.