

## Winter Ledge Fishing on Kentucky Lake

By Steve Welch

When asked what you do in your spare time since I am a full time fishing guide. My answer is simple I go crappie fishing down on Kentucky lake to be more exact I go to Paris Landing and fish the Big Sandy. I have fished all over this massive lake but the winter ledge fishing is what I love the most. From mid-December to late March you can find me down there every free minute I get. This year will be different I am taking my guide service down there and doing some guide work. My clients have bugged me for years to do some guiding down there so I thought why not.

I got in touch with my good friends the owners of Fishtale Lodge and rented one half of a cabin for myself for the entire month of March. My clients can either rent the other half when they come down or one of their motel rooms. This is a top notch facility and anyone that is anyone stays there. I have seen many top Elite Series tourney fishermen while I have been there.

Why do I love this end of the lake so much....first of all, Kentucky Lake runs south to north so the Big Sandy is the extreme south end of the so you are getting warm water fed from Alabama. You are actually fishing in Tennessee. Second, I get to show off all my Lowrance electronics and my GPS mapping skills. You see down there everything is off shore so no line ups of trees on the bank to return to your secret spot. There is no visible structure and you must find channel bends and drop offs with brush put on them.

I run Navionics mapping to locate the old river channels and then I use my side imaging capabilities to scan these drop offs and find brush. I can even see fish hiding on these drop offs. I then put a waypoint on the spot I want to fish. Since all four of my Lowrance depth finders are networked that waypoint I just put on the side image unit is now on all four units. This system is second to none and with huge ten-inch screens to look at the trees just pop right out and they actually look like an oil painting of a tree and you see every branch in perfect clarity.

Those that know me well will tell you that guy is a crappie fishing nut. My wife of almost eleven years has never been on a vacation with me that the boat wasn't in tow. We even went fishing on our honeymoon so I knew I had a keeper.

I still get a thrill of that feel of a big crappie nailing your jig and for me even better in deep water. Why less slip ups and you have time to get a net and prepare everyone for a big fish coming aboard. Shallow water it is too easy to lose that fish. Besides everyone can fish shallow, catching fish deep requires a lot of knowledge and proper equipment. Especially down there on the Big Sandy you will be at times over a mile from shore in four directions.

This brings up my brand new Yar-Craft 2095BTX. Lake Shelbyville the lake I make my living on is a deep lake and has tons of big boats on it in the summer. So big waves are the norm as it is on Kentucky Lake but down there it is more wind than pleasure boats. I wanted a boat that could take big waves and was a deeper boat so all my clients young and old would feel comfortable. I also wanted a big tiller motor with power steering so the entire middle of the boat is wide open. I have the perfect Mercury Verado four stroke 200 Hp and it runs like a dream and is very quiet.

Fishing on these deep ledges you must have an entire system for it. My boat has three pedestal seats up front so I can see each and everyone's jig on my depth finder. You must be able to see what your depth is because a brush pile might be six-foot tall in twenty-five feet of water and if you just let your jig go to the bottom right in the middle of that brush pile you just missed that big fish that is on top of that brush.

We do this by using shorter rods designed more for walleye fishing and spool them with no-stretch Fireline Crystal braided line. I have found eight pound is about right. Six breaks too easy and ten doesn't get as many bites in clear water. These shorter rods allow us to stay right in the cone of your depth finder since we vertical fish right over the top of brush.

Like I said it is a system fishing deep and looking for one big crappie hiding right on top of a brush pile or on an old stump right on a channel bend in twenty to thirty-feet of water. Spider riggers can't duplicate this system. They have advantages in other fishing styles but not here. Your depth is critical and being a foot to shallow or deep makes all the difference.

This is one reason my Deep Ledge Jig came to life. We needed a jig that could get into these deep brush piles and not get hung up and a heavier jig to feel it better in thirty-feet. You tell folks you use a 1/4oz. jig to crappie fish and they think you are nuts. We fish this jig by swimming it back and forth even with the top of brush rather than jiggling it up and down. This jig has been perfectly balanced to hang horizontally no matter what plastic you put on it. This allows us to bounce into branches and get deflections this will get you strikes. With the 1/4oz. DLJ and the braided line with no stretch those big crappie just about pull your arm off they hit so hard.

We love this jig so much we made three other sizes 3/16, 1/8, & 3/32 to use in other situations. We also make them with a small willow-leaf blade. This jig and our new Brush-bug style is our secret weapon for big fish. I have a DLJ spinner on all the time but these new Brush-bugs are just what we needed for winter. Crappie love a bug style jig in cold water since they change up their diet from bait fish to bugs in the winter.

All of our jigs were designed by myself and my partner and since he is an engineer he made all the solid works to give to the machine shop to cut these precisely on the C & C machine. They are unique and can't be bought just anywhere. We have them for sale on our on-line store and at several retail stores around Lake Shelbyville. These are all listed on our website which is on the bottom of the article.

Like I said I am a crappie fishing nut and especially love catching big crappie. For me it is the winter time that I get the big ones. We caught a big black last winter that was 17 ½ inches long right behind a 16-inch white crappie. I have caught a dozen two pounds or more in a single day and thirteen-inch fish are like the eleven-inch fish we catch on Shelbyville one right after the other. Down there you get to keep 30 fish per angler over ten-inches so you get to take plenty home but that is not my reason for going. I want a four pound fish and preferably a black crappie. Down there they exist and thus my thrill of fishing there. Your next bite could be that all hanger.

The best compliment I ever got was from Sharon the owner of Fishtale Lodge. While a bunch of us were paying our bill during the Crappie U.S.A. Classic I was standing quietly in the back and in front of some of the toughest crappie tourney teams in the country she said you see that Steve Welch standing behind you if they were to hold this tourney during the winter he would kick all your butts. I have never seen

stringers like he brings in. Lodge customers will wait to see what he has every day and ask when he might be coming in.

I have about 1400 waypoints in the Big Sandy alone and plenty more both north and south of the 79 bridge so I am at home down there. I know all the local restaurants and most of the waitresses as well. So I am one of the locals during the winter.

If you are interested in going on a guided trip with me down there all you need to do is go to my website at [www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.Com](http://www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.Com) and check my availability list. I already have nearly half the month booked so don't wait to get in on this fantastic fishing.