

# FISHIN' FOR RIVER CATFISH



BY TREVOR KATCH

Imagine you, your best friend and a warm night.... Wait a minute, is this supposed to be a catfish article or a romance novel? Well, to be honest, most great catfish angling nights start out the same way; a warm night, a good buddy, some simple tackle, the right bait, and the right location. Cat-fishing can become as simple or as complex as any angler would like to make it. Let's face it, catfish usually get a bad rap, but there are very few anglers that don't like big powerful fish that will pull like freight trains. Give me until the end of this article and maybe I can change your opinion about this abundant species.

Location, as for most species, is the key to a great night of fishin' or at least one you tell the wife was a beautiful night to watch stars. Keying in on certain elements in rivers for large catfish will certainly up your odds in hopefully landing what cat fisherman like to call a "TOAD" (very large catfish). Dams that sustain a constant water flow will usually hold lots of cats but unfortunately this structure is usually more productive for anglers with access to boats. Dam areas always contain plenty of bait and will also have "washout" areas. This combination usually means that the bait that gets injured or killed will end up in the washout areas making it easy for a big old channel cat to put on the feed bag.

For the shore angler, areas of shoreline with access to a bridge will be a key location to fish. The underwater structures around bridges make very good areas for cats to search out bait. Like dam areas, most bridge areas will also hold current, and current areas are key spots that I always look for. However, understanding current and using it to your advantage, is another thing all together and that discussion may be better left to a future article.

My favourite areas to fish are creek arms coming off the main river, which provide ample numbers of big fish. When I get to this type of location, I usually fish the main river area before it gets dark and then turn to the creek arm once darkness has fallen. When fishing from a boat, set up directly in front of the creek arm anchoring the boat at the smaller creek mouth. This will allow you the option of fishing the main river or casting up into the creek arm. I believe bigger cats will use the deeper river section during light conditions and start to move up into the shallower creek arms once it gets dark looking for bait under the protection of nightfall. Keep in mind these locations hold deep water, shallow water, current and bait, so for my money I prefer to fish the creek arms over most other types of structure.



**The author displays a nice catfish taken on a Lake Erie tributary with the methods described in this article**

Setting up on rivers from a boat is quite simple, but I have come up with a few tips over the years to make things a little easier. First, make sure you bring a couple of good flashlights keeping in mind 'Murphy's Law'; if your flashlight is going to break or burn out or end up in the river it will happen when the cats are bitin' hard and

you can't see a thing. I would also bring a battery powered lantern or a large spot light that can be hooked up to the boat's battery. For obvious safety reasons, I would avoid bringing propane or any other fuel operated lanterns in the boat. An important part of reeling in a "TOAD" is making sure you've got two very large anchors. Try setting up your boat across the creek arm and having a partner take position in the front of the boat and when you reach the desired depth have your partner throw the anchor up into the air splashing it into the water and hopefully sending it deep into the bottom of the riverbed. Once the front anchor is secure, do the same thing in the back of the boat. I always attempt to keep very short ropes at either end of the boat; I do not want the boat moving at all if I can help it. The large anchors will ensure that the boat is not being pulled out of position by a large channel cat. Trust me, small anchors will not hold your boat still if you are holding on to a "TOAD". Finally, use good standard rod holders; bring a small cooler to keep cut bait fresh, beverages of your choice, some late night snacks and you are set. If you are fishin' from shore not much changes, just bring a good lawn chair and a sturdy rod pod so you are not going for a late night dip looking for your fishing rod... been there done that!

Keep tackle to a minimum when fishing for toad-sized channel catfish. I prefer a heavy-action 6-

foot rod and bait caster with a clicker system from a boat. An 8- to 9-foot rod in a 16-foot boat at night is a recipe for disaster, just do the math and you will figure it out on your own. I spool my bait caster with 50lb braid, and some good size assorted sinkers preferably bell sinkers that are hammered flat. Lastly, some 2/0 or 3/0 solid hooks (no bending aloud) and you're ready to go. If you are fishing from shore I recommend a longer rod for the long casting features that may be needed.

Anybody that has fished cats with me knows how I am about my bait and it's this simple. Over the years I have used just about everything, chicken liver, smashed frogs, dew worms, stink baits, you name it, I've tried it. To choose the correct bait you need to find out what type of forage is in the body of water you're fishing in. In the river systems off of Lake Erie I have found that the common shiner is the best bait to use. Cut it into 2-inch chunks and place it on your hook and you are set. I find that Lake Ontario tributaries are better fished with smelts either whole or cut into chunks. If you decide to go with chicken liver, the best tip I can give you is this; bring some magic thread (Spider Thread) from your trout box. Place the chicken liver on a larger off-set hook and start wrapping the magic thread around the bait and hook, almost like a butcher would wrap a roast. This stuff will keep the chicken liver from falling off your hook when making long casts.

When that nice warm night comes along and the kids are in bed and your wife is watching American Idol, call up your buddy, drive to the closest river, watch some stars and hopefully hook into a couple of big "TOADS".

*Trevor Catch is an avid angler and spends a lot of time fishing for catfish in river systems*