



# Shore Fishing Night 'Eyes

By Rick O'Banion

If you think that you can only catch monster walleye while fishing from a boat, think again. Walleye go on the prowl seeking baitfish at night, and at many times of the year, spawning shad, alewife, shiners and smelt move into shoreline areas after dusk. This in turn brings the walleye within casting distance to shore as they follow the immense schools of spawning baitfish. Understanding these migrations will help you to effectively fish walleye from shore.

Most Great Lakes baitfish prefer to run into rivers and streams from the large lakes to spawn. Every baitfish species moves close to shore at different times and the first baitfish to migrate in the year are the smelt. This normally happens the first full moon phase in April. The shiners will make their migration after the smelt, then the alewife. Finally, the shad will move in towards shoreline areas in the fall. The clever angler will research when and where these baitfish migrate locally in waters where walleye are present.

When baitfish are spawning, walleye are often very aggressive and more than willing to take a well presented lure. One way to take advantage of this is to use a method I call 'Pier Walking'. The walking method has existed in many forms for many years. I have been using it for over 10-years and have had more success with this shore fishing method than any other. I have caught more trophy walleye walking the pier than many anglers get from their boats. This has everything to do with knowing how walleye hunt. As a top level predator, large walleyes reduce their

tendency to hunt in large schools. When they reach a particular size, they are just as effective hunting alone or in small groups of similar sized fish. Walleyes often use piers as ambush points. Since piers are usually constructed by laying concrete slabs on top of pilings, they are afforded a unique spot to hide and attack the spawning prey as they swim by.



A typical pier construction is shown in this photo. Note the potential ambush areas underneath of the pier slabs

## The Happy Accident

Many years ago, I was night fishing with a bunch of guys looking for late summer

salmon. We would always head to the end of the pier and toss spoons until our arms fell off. This particular night was a bit too slow for my liking so I decided to pack it in. While I was getting my things together, I remembered a rumour I had heard about walleye in the area (even though, in my arrogance, I assumed that since I had not caught any they did not exist). I decided to toss out a green Rapala Fat Rap for a few casts. Being the lazy one that I am, I figured I'd just cast and start walking the half mile back up the pier to my car. At first I was a little wary about the crankbait hanging up on the side of the pier as the line swung closer to it, but this was an older lure and I decided to press on.

No sooner had the line come parallel to the pier when I felt the lure come to a dead stop. Even though I figured I was snagged, my first instinct was to set the hook. I was lucky I did, as I set the hooks right into my first ever 10-pound walleye. After this I was totally hooked! I began fishing the pier for walleye every night. I walked upstream and downstream with dozens of different set-ups, lure colours and sizes, and after a few years, I had the pattern down. It cost hundreds of dollars in lost lures and spoons, but now I catch far more fish than bottom.

## **Equipment**

There really is no need to go and spend a substantial amount of money on a rod and reel for this type of fishing. What you are looking for is a rod about 9-feet long with strong backbone and a sensitive tip. My personal choice is a custom made 9' 6" IMX Graphite rod made by Backwoods Premium Rods, but anything over 8-feet will do. The longer rod gives you greater flexibility in how close to the pier you present the bait. Remember the fish are either under the pier or near its base looking for food. A smooth

baitcasting reel is best in this situation, but any quality reel with a good drag system will do fine. I have been using Power Pro line for quite some time and I will fish with nothing else. It can handle anything you can throw at it and it rarely breaks. In areas with high zebra mussel concentrations, a good quality leader is a must. Getting right down into the bottom structure is imperative to catching these fish on most occasions, and in doing so your line will run across the zebras and there razor sharp shells. Maxima Fluorocarbon is unbeatable in this application, as it reduces the need for frequent re-ties.

Bottom bouncers in 3/4 oz to 1 1/2 oz will do in most cases, but if the swivels are suspect, replace them. The use of the 'L' shaped bouncers allows for constant contact with the bottom and keeps the snags to a bare minimum.

Choosing a body bait that either offers a close resemblance to the natural prey in clear water or a wide wobble and bright colour for turbid water is ideal. I have found orange and chartreuse the best bet for walleye in murky water.

## **Pier Walking Presentation**

It is important to figure out the depth and contours of the bottom at the base of your favourite pier. There must be enough water to allow effective cover for the fish and having at least eight to ten feet is perfect.

Start by making a short cast and begin walking up the pier at a moderate pace. If there is a strong current, walk upstream in order to offer the best possible lure action and retain control of the lure. Make sure you are maintaining intermittent contact with the bottom and adjust the amount of line out to accomplish this.

It is important to know the feel of each lure's own unique wobble in order to know whether the lure is fouled up with weeds, as a fouled lure will not catch fish.

Alter the speed and direction of the lure while walking, as this will grab a big walleye's attention fast! Walleye will usually strike at the point when the lure slows down. When a big walleye hits, they simply stop the lure dead. You may actually think you are hung up on bottom for a second, but those monster headshakes will tell you otherwise!

Different times of year call for different strategies. Early in the season when the water is cold, a slow-moving smaller bait is needed, and Rapala Husky Jerks suit this mission well. Hot N' Tots, Fat Rap and Frenzies are also good choices. Just remember, when using a bottom bouncer to use smaller lipped stick baits. As the year progresses, up-size your lure and speed up your presentation.

By mid-summer I start rippin' the lures very quickly and the Rebel Fastrac is the ideal lure for these times because of their ability to hold a great wobbling action at the higher speeds.

As the fall arrives, beef up your lure to the biggest you can. Even a 10-inch stickbait is not too big for this time of year. These fish

are chowing down for winter and will eat anything in their path. Pier fishing on the Great Lakes, especially in the autumn, can also net you some large trout, bass and musky.

As you fish a certain area more, you will learn where the depth changes and what bottom structure to look for. You will most likely notice that the best spots, while treacherous on tackle, hold the most fish.

Don't be afraid to experiment. Sometimes a small in-line planer board can reach walleye just outside the normal attack zone or be used to present over suspended fish. And if your

favourite lures aren't working, switch to a worm harness or even a blade bait.

Always try different speeds, depths, lures and colours. I find the fish prefer something different all the time, even the very next day. The fish usually seem more cooperative at times I'm not afraid to experiment, so never be afraid to add your

own twist and make the presentation unique! Even on days when the fishing is slow, I am enjoying the outdoors getting exercise and some fresh air.

***Rick O'Banion is an avid walleye angler and a state-of-the-art graphics and web designer. Check out his website at: [www.tmf.ca](http://www.tmf.ca)***



**The author holds a monster walleye he caught pier walking using the methods described in his article**

Photos: courtesy of author