

For Big Crappie You Have To Go South

By Steve Welch

People ask me if I have ever been north on a fishing trip. The answer is no. I have a huge "glass" boat and don't want to run into a rock. I also know that it is crappie that I pursue when I take a fishing trip and there isn't any way that Wisconsin, Minnesota or Canada can match the size of crappie that you can catch in the south. Longer growing periods and dark fertile waters of the backwaters of the mighty Mississippi produce the largest crappie in the world. The three corp. lakes in Mississippi Arkabutla, Enid and Grenada have absolutely the heaviest stringers of crappie seen anywhere. I have only been to Arkabutla but I did catch two crappie sixteen inches long and numerous crappie fourteen inches long. The fish down there are much thicker for the length so a sixteen-inch fish will weigh three pounds if the season is right. The bait shop on Arkabutla has two five pound crappie caught from this lake a black and a white.

Another lake that I go to is just west of there about twenty miles across the border in Arkansas. It is called Old Towne and it is just an old backwater slew no deeper than four feet about a half-mile wide and five miles long. All completely full of Cypress trees. No speeding around on this lake. It will remind you of Reel foot. The locals all run their yoyos and trout lines to catch huge stringers of crappie. One local told a buddy of mine that he ran his trout line early one morning and had ten three-pound crappie hanging on it.

This lake is a great early season destination since it is only four feet deep it warms quickly. Watch out for the snakes it isn't unusual to see over a hundred in a day fishing.

Tunica Lake is another lake you can hit on your stay. All three of these lakes are just a short drive from the casinos. The wives can stay there or take the bus into Memphis to go to Beales Street or out to Grace land and let you go fishing.

All three of these lake fish a little differently. On Old Towne have plenty of live bait handy as well as your favorite jigs but keep them about the same size, as you would use at home. At Arkabutla you can go big with your baits. I prefer the biggest tubes I can get my hands on. Three even four-inch tubes will work. Stay with dark colors though, as the water is very dirty. Don't expect a lot of fish though. If you work hard at it all day you might get twenty fish but they are huge. Tunica Lake actually fishes better in June when they more stable water levels. You will see plenty of homes built on stilts for a reason.

Now let us talk a little about the lake that I visit most frequently, Kentucky Lake my home away from home. I go down every chance I get and now even the motel owners know me by heart. I flip flop each year on which end I like better. The dam end has good fishing later in the season for me. I can flip from crappie to huge bluegill or over to white bass. I have a ton of spots to fish and the boats are much larger if it is sight seeing that you like. If it is strictly crappie I am after then I go down to Paris landing just across the border in Tennessee.

My first trip of the year is usually in March or earlier if I get the itch. I look for a slight warming trend but watch the wind direction and speed. The wind can kill your trip down there. Anything over ten can make it hard to hold over your brush. Paris landing always gets the early nod. I fish the Eagle Creek, Big Sandy area or out on the Tennessee in Standing Rock Creek or Short Creek. Most fisherman go down to the power lines in the Big Sandy and drift but I prefer to hover over brush or stake beds and vertical jig tubes and live bait. I have over fifty GPS coordinates and can just motor from one to the other with no search time. That is what I hate about spider rigging too much time drifting between good spots. If the fish have started to move up into the shallows I will concentrate on Eagle Creek or Short Creek both have plenty of Stake beds to fish.

A good friend of mine Gary Mason once told me that he switches over to guiding for bluegills the third week of April so going early is a must for the crappie.

If it is the north end that I am going to then it will be more like early May. I fish in Sledd Creek or Little Bear Creek. Both of these fish alike. The mouth of both creeks is caulked full of brush and stake beds. I have a couple of small coves that I fish in this area as well. I also go through the canal to Barkley and fish Willow Bay and Demumbers. These both have a good ledge out in the mouth with plenty of brush on it. Barkley also has plenty of downed trees on the bank to fish that you can see. You must however wait until May because they start bringing the lake up to summer pool so you can use this shallow cover. The best bluegill fishing you can ever experience hits about mid month and lasts up through early June. So I always come prepared to fish for both when I go to the north end.

Lake Shelbyville isn't as far south as one might want to venture but none the less we have very good early season crappie fishing. I start guiding in February right after the ice comes off and that can be a very good period. The fish will move shallow for about two weeks and you can flat fill the boat with nice

slabs. Sun is the key and light winds. The deep fish will suspend up near the surface and some of the fish will move up onto the mud flats in the afternoon and can be caught in only a couple of foot of water.

So don't waste anytime on setting up your spring fishing trips and be ready to go down to Paris landing on the first good warming trend that you hear about. If you were to just guess as to when to go down. I like the last week of March up through the second week of April. Those three weeks are prime. I now only guide on weekends so if you are wanting to set something up with me this year you can't waste any time or I won't have any openings.