

SPRING

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Tactics For Shallow Water Greys

You're done battling the long icy winter that seemed to last for eternity itself. But now it's finally time! It's time to launch the boat and load the

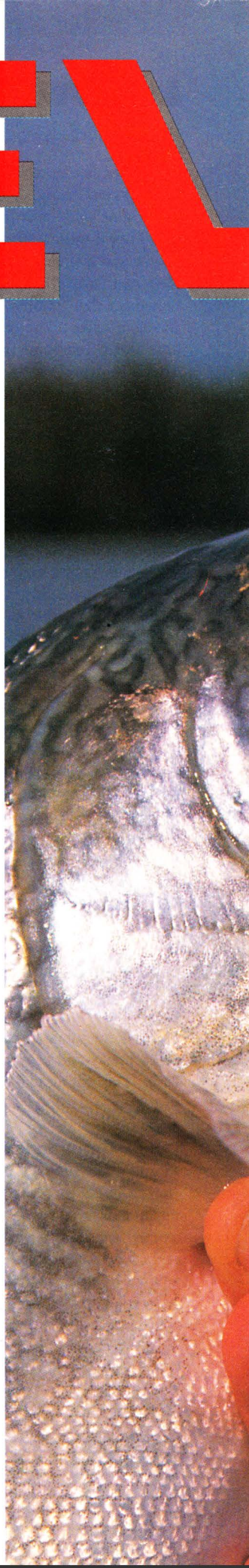


More and more anglers are getting a "big bang" out of jigging for lunker greys

fishing tackle. The water's open and the lake trout are waiting somewhere under its unreadable surface. It's been a while, but you still haven't forgotten the memory of last year's head-shaking lakers. You aren't the only

one. An estimated 25 million lake trout are caught annually by Canadians. That means that there's an epidemic running rampant throughout Canada. Yes sir, a whole lot of people have spring laker fever.

* By John L. Field



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La Reserve Beauclere, Quebec

WALKERS

EARLY SPRING LOCATION FACTORS

Sun and air temperature are the biggest influences on water temperature in lakes. And, water temperature and its effect on the lower food chain is what largely determines laker location. Lakers and their food fish prefer water in the 7-11 degree Celsius range. After ice-out, water temperatures may reach only around 4 degrees Celsius, making baitfish and lakers seek warmer water often near warmer tributaries, discharges or other sources. Darker runoff will heat faster than clear water and will also attract fish.

As spring conditions progress, the surface of most lakes warms up albeit unevenly. The shallows will warm fastest, especially the northern ends receiving the southern sun. The depths of a deep lake will be mostly unaffected though and will stay cold. And, don't forget the wind: it will push and hold warm (or cold) surface water against a shoreline or bay.



Jackson's Lodge, Waterbury Lake, Sask.

Current often means fast action especially with the versatile lead jig and bait combination.

The food chain also affects lake trout location. Plankton appears first in warm water causing the bait fish to follow to feed on it and they are themselves followed and devoured by the trout. Plankton also shuns brightness and will move up or down to avoid it. Again, the bait fish and trout follow. Therefore on dark days trout movements tend to be shallower and on bright days deeper.

What are these "baitfish" that trout follow so faithfully? If a fish fits into the mouth of a laker it's a meal. The main laker forage species are perch, shiners, ciscoes, sculpin and alewife. The only time lakers are finicky is when the slobbs stuff themselves until fish tails stick out of their gullets. But that only occurs where food is over-abundant.

SHALLOW WATER HOT SPOTS

The most difficult hurdle to clear for catching lakers is finding them. After a lake sheds its ice, concentrate your search in the 5-30 ft. range. Lakers will wander throughout this band early to feed sporadically. Favourable temperatures will exist mainly along shorelines and shallows near deep water are especially good bets. Points and islands are always high percentage spots too. If hydrographic maps are unavailable for waters you're on, you can visually scout shore-

It's amazing what Silken Lauman



lines for boulders, ledges and drop-offs. Sonar can be used to discover the underwater features.

Rivers are also a good bet since they draw baitfish. In fact, an ideal combination in a lake is a quality laker population and a tributary full of spawning suckers.

SHORE TACTICS: BAIT & LURES

When lakers are located in the shallows, consider them an easy target for shore fishing. The highest percentage locations to find shallow lakers are near currents, boulder-strewn shorelines or near reeds adjacent to deep water. You should use bait as a passive approach when water temperature is below 7 degrees Celsius. Live or dead bait can be equally productive. If you're fishing bait in current, a sinker and leader or lead jig work well but in a lake, a spinning rod, slip bobber and quick-strike rig are a better choice. That way you can keep a live bait from swimming into bottom snags or dead



Plummer's Lodge, Great Slave Lake, N.W.T.

Big trout love big lures like this white K-16 Kwikfish.

bait from hanging up.

When the water finally warms up, so does the action. In water exceeding 7 degrees Celsius, lakers still hit bait but casting lures over more water will enable you to catch greater numbers of big trout. You can still do this effectively from shore but a boat covers even more area. Recommended lures include spoons, spinners, crankbaits, and even muskie jerkbaits!

TROLLING FOR GREYS

A quiet boat capable of trolling at extremely slow speed in a wind is needed to be really effective. High quality tackle is important as well. Big fish in open water can be handled with medium weight tackle, but they do know how to find rocks so be careful! Use medium-heavy tackle with 10-14 lb. test line to "flat line" for lakers up to 20 pounds. Heavy tackle and 20-25 lb. line is best for the giants of the far north. When trolling around boulders or in river current you might even need 30 lb. mono or braided dacron.

Lure selection is a geographic decision. In food rich habitats of southern Canada, smaller more realistic lures are better than in the infertile north where bigger is better. For the south, crankbaits like the Original Floating or Jointed Floating Rapala, and Bomber Long "A" are great early trolling choices. Spoons such as the Len Thompson, Daredevle, Lucky Strike Half Wave and Williams are also effective.

in gets out of her Subaru Legacy.

The only thing more amazing than what Silken gets out of her Subaru is what she gets into it. Because, with the seats down, the Subaru Legacy Wagon offers a spacious 71 cubic feet of cargo space. There's room for lots of equipment, lots of passengers, and even a golden retriever named Banner. The All-Wheel Drive Legacy Touring Wagon. It's for the rower who has everything. And wants a place to safely carry it.

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VIDEO AVAILABLE

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CATEGORY	KEY	CATEGORY	KEY
ROAD ACCESS	→	BOATS & MOTORS	→
FLY IN	→	GUIDES	*
HOTEL/RESORT	→	BAIT/TACKLE	*
LODGE	→	FISHING LICENSE	*
CABINS	→	FISH SPECIES	
OUTPOST CAMPS	→	PIK, MSK, BAS, WAL, PAN.	
HOUSEKEEPING	→		
MEAL PLAN	→	* AVAILABLE	

tive and don't require weights.

If you are on a fly-in up north and hoping for a world record at any moment, use the biggest spoons like the Husky Devle, Len Thompson #4, Lucky Strike Canoe and Cabela's 5 1/2" Spoon Blade. You can even put a hook on size "0" salmon dodgers or use muskie lures like the K-16 Kwifish in chartreuse or white! Lure colour doesn't seem to matter as much up north but metallics and high visibility colours seem most logical.

Troll or retrieve lures as if fish are always looking it over. Slow boat speed is essential because lakers like things that are injured. A fast bait resembles a healthy (and hard to catch) fish. Slowly sweep your rod forward before slowly allowing it to swing back again during the trolling run or retrieve. This causes the lure to flutter erratically like an injured baitfish and causes lakers to strike. A laker often tries to stun its prey, so if one hits and nothing is there, sweep again.

TIPS ON CATCH AND RELEASE

Cool water has more dissolved oxygen than warm water and is best for releasing lakers. But this is only if you have the choice because speed is essential above all else. Ideally a laker should never be removed from the water. Whenever possible, unhook the fish while it's in the water. A release cradle is ideal for this purpose because the fish sits, well controlled, in a harmless soft mesh. After the hook is removed, the entire cradle can be moved forward to revive the fish until it swims off under its own steam.

On high-floating Great Lakes boats, every fish must be netted. This causes a lot of damage. Extra time is needed to untangle lures and free up gill plates and much of the trout's protective slime is removed. To minimize net damage, use flexible rubber (or otherwise soft) net bags instead of the poly versions.

Many areas would benefit if larger, breeding fish were released and only the smaller ones were harvested. Some lakes, for example, have a surplus of 5 to 10 pounders and only a relative few 10 to 20 pounders. The removal of the small stuff would actually help balance the population, promising a better (and bigger) catch for tomorrow. Lakers, especially in northern waters, are very slow-growing fish. This means that trophy fisheries can easily be wiped out or saved by a single factor - you!

** John Field from Princeton, New Jersey is a professional writer and photographer and serves as Canadian Sportfishing's roving correspondent. He is an accomplished angler specializing in BIG fish especially lake trout, pike, muskellunge and walleye.*