

## “FISH PERCH OR CUT BAIT”



11 ½ inch Lake Michigan Perch

Actually, I **did both**. In the last month or so, I have been almost obsessed with fishing for **Lake Michigan perch**, mostly **out of Holland**. After one successful outing where I caught a limit using blade baits, I returned several times, gaining more knowledge with each visit. I quickly discovered that **blade baits were not the total answer, just a tool used in our control of depth and speed**. On Tuesday, August 16, 2011, the weather was calm and sunny, so I returned, hopeful to get into the fish. There were about **50 visible boats** fishing perch in the area, and I anchored in one group just north of the pier. **Few if any baitfish were seen** on the graph and only scattered small perch were being caught. My **bladebaits were producing no fish** so I decided to pull anchor and begin looking for baitfish. By now I have some knowledge of the breaks and breaklines the fish use in the area, so efforts were concentrated there. With rod holders and a couple salmon rods, **lots of territory can be covered trolling**, and also there is a chance to catch big fish. When I come across **a good baitfish school**, I **throw a marker**, pull in the rods, and **go back to anchor and cast to the school**. Be reminded that these schools do not stay put. They will move along breaklines, as well as to shallower or deeper breaklines from 15 to 40 or more feet. **Baitfish schools take on many forms on the graph** sounder, from thick and

tall to low and thin. Perch are often identified as being scattered groups close to the bottom, but I would recommend **not being too hasty in eliminating schools that don't look like perch.**

Several areas where boats were grouped were checked and **there was little action that day.** In the early afternoon a **dense and tall school of baitfish was located** south of the pier in 24 feet. No other boats were around the area, and it **didn't appear to be perch,** but it was decided to **stop and cast anyway.** After much effort casting bladebaits, only one keeper (over 8 inches) and one **small 6-inch perch** were caught. At this point, I began to have **regrets that some live bait was not brought along!** Glancing at the small perch, I was reminded that cut bait could be an option, so out came the **knife and a perch rig.** The rig was put on a **stiff spinning rod with 14-pound Fireline** for better feel. A small piece of **white cloth** was put on each hook for better visibility **along with a ½ inch chunk of meat.** Immediately I began getting hits with occasional keeper sized fish getting hooked. Since **most of the action that day was from small perch,** a slightly **larger chunk of meat helped concentrate efforts on the few larger fish** present in the school. Casting the rig out and slowly dragging it back to the boat seemed to work best, although **most hits occurred close to the boat or just vertical.** The **slower speed of live bait** seemed to be **the key,** and after a couple of hours, **15 perch from 8 to 11½ inches** were boated. **Once the thick school of baitfish left, the action stopped.** Buck Perrys' advice to check all depths and all speeds rang true again.

I am still learning much about perch fishing in Lake Michigan. It is most certainly an exciting and delicious experience!!

Chase Klinesteker