

## “CRYSTAL LAKE, ONE STEP AT A TIME”



Crystal Lake, Benzie County, Super clear water= tough fishing!

On **July 28- August 4, 2012**, I vacationed for a week with family in a **cottage** , Benzie County, Michigan. **Crystal Lake** is a **glacial lake** that is **huge (8 miles by 3 miles)**, **deep (to 175 feet)**, and **extremely clear (visibility down 30+ feet)**. These factors alone made **fishing it a real challenge**. Most of the lakes I fish are smaller, shallower, and have much better water color, but **I welcomed the challenge**. What was **harder to accept** was the fact that **learning and succeeding** under these extreme conditions **must be taken one step at a time**.

This is the type of lake that Mr Perry would describe as a “**drinking water lake**” where the **fish would not move shallow enough** on their migrations **to be caught** by the average fisherman. Also, because of the clear water, it **likely** is a lake where **most fish movements** are confined to **night time**. Unfortunately, I chose to not fish at night, but my son-in-law did hook some smallmouth bass at night in the shallows.

Fish species available are **Lake Trout, Rainbow Trout, Smallmouth Bass, Pike, Walleye, Whitefish, Burbot, Rock Bass, Yellow Perch, and Smelt**. It is **commonly fished in the winter through the ice**, and I was surprised at how **few fishermen** (mostly panfishermen) **were on it this week**, not a good sign! With sunny weather, **air temperatures in the 90s’**, and **surface water temperature at 75 degrees**, fish movements were in a full **summer pattern**. Exploring the **shallows** revealed mostly **sandy or gravel, weed-free bottom** conditions and **few if any fish**. In the **10-20 foot depth** range there were a few scattered taller weeds where **some smaller panfish** could be caught and occasionally a smallmouth bass in **early morning or late evening**. The first **schools of baitfish/panfish** that showed up on the sounder were **in 27-28 feet of water**. These were found **on** the largest and most **gradual breaking (summer) structures** with **breaklines often a mile or two in length**. **Fish** were seen in great numbers **at 27 to 45 feet on breaklines**, but their depth in this range would change depending on the weather and time of day. A **short sand grass** was found **covering the bottom** wherever fish were seen, **down to over 50 feet**. Beyond 45 feet, few baitfish/panfish were seen, but an **occasional larger fish** showed up **on the screen down to over 90 feet**. I tried to determine where a

**thermocline might be** and the only indication showed on the screen at **about 120 feet**. Bear in mind that **my assessment** of this lake is **by no means complete**, due to its huge size, seasonal considerations, and time limitations.

**Presenting lures was a challenge**. I had **no problem quickly eliminating the shallows**, as well as depths out to about 25 feet. Working **deeper**, the **sand grass quickly fouled the lure** if I tried to walk the bottom. Yet **this is where fish were located** and I needed to fish it as closely as possible. At first a **perch rig was used with cut bait**. Many **Rock Bass and a few Perch were easily caught** from an anchored position with little trouble from the sand grass. My granddaughter and her friend had a ball catching them, and we **only kept Rock Bass over 9 inches, freezing up plenty of filets** for the future. The Rock Bass were **up to 12 ½ inches**, put up a great fight, and have a **firm, tasty flesh** from this lake. The next step was to use **jump lures**, in this case I selected **blade baits** and thought that chances would be greater to catch larger species of fish. These had to be used judiciously by **not allowing them to sink deeply into the sand grass**. Many areas where numbers of fish were seen from 27 to 45 feet were **cast in this manner with the same result: numbers of Rock Bass and a few Perch but no larger fish**. Trolling was next, but I was hesitant because I did not have a lot of experience **working above deep sand grass**. This proved to be a **great learning experience** for me. **Starting at 27 feet**, I let out **12 layers of 20 pound wire with a #700 Spoonplug** and found the **exact depth that it first ticked the sand grass, then wound in a couple feet of line**, knowing that the **lure was very close**. As I worked deeper, I was constantly **adjusting the line length** to keep the lure in position. Around **35 feet, I switched to an 800 Spoonplug** and continued **on down to 45 feet with up to 22 layers of wire**. I was using a **flutter spoon on a 3-way above the Spoonplug for a better chance to catch a big Pike, Walleye, or Bass**. I thought for sure there would be bigger fish present among the **masses of smaller fish I was trolling through**. The **result? More Rock Bass and a few Perch!** I **did get 3 hits from larger fish that were lost that week, and landed one 28 inch pike at 46 feet**, but my conclusion was that **the big fish were deeper** (Buck Perry: “If you are fishing thoroughly and not catching fish, you are not fishing deep enough”). **At this point**, I needed to fish deeper and **got out the JB-1 and JB-2 (John Bales) lures**. I did not have occasion to use them before this, but **found them to be an excellent tool**. The **week ended before I had sufficient time to learn how to present them well**. One must remember that **the deeper one goes, the more difficult it is, and the more accurate one needs to be in their presentation**. Also, we **must fish deep structure, not just deep water**. A **future trip to this lake would be in order** to work with larger lures, different lines, and map deeper structures.

I consider **the weeks’ fishing a success** because we **had a good time**, caught and **froze plenty of fish filets**, and I **learned a lot**, including improving my **deepwater presentation skills**. It reminded me that **we can’t expect immediate results in difficult situations**, and we need to **learn our fishing skills one step at a time!**

Chase Klinesteker CSI



Rock bass at 45 feet!