**FISHING REPORTS AND INTERPRETATION**

Buck Perry always stressed that, to learn the most, we should record the information we gain from our fishing trips. This includes weather, water, mapping, and presentation details. Some Spoonpluggers use fishing reports or logs to record the information, which can be helpful in interpreting a fishing situation.

August 7-14, 2021 our extended family took a full week’s vacation at a cottage located on Big Whitefish Lake about a half-hour north of Grand Rapids. Interpretation of a fishing situation requires as much information as possible to “figure out” a lake or fishing situation, and fishing reports help do that. Information that is most useful comes in 3 main categories: #1) WEATHER AND WATER, #2) MAPPING AND INTERPRETATION, and #3) PRESENTATION. Other information about a lake may be helpful also such as ramp, boat traffic, terrain, bottom hardness, thermocline, etc. Information can be put on an 8X10 sheet that has the above categories with extra details written on the backside. First, on the left, I put the date of the trip, who I fished with, and fish caught (see log sheet).

1. WEATHER AND WATER---Information about water and weather conditions is the most important of all because water color and the weather are so critical in affecting the behavior of fish. During the week our family spent at Big Whitefish Lake, the weather was very hot, but looked good for fishing. Daytime air temperatures were in the mid 80’s to 90 degrees, sunny to somewhat cloudy, and no severe cold fronts came through. However, the water color was very clear, and a lure could be seen to a 15-foot depth. Unfortunately, the lake had to be selected because of cottage availability, not water color. The surface water temperature was around 80 degrees, and several of the fish caught were noticeably sluggish, skinny, and affected by the hot weather. Seasonal factors are recorded in this section of the log. At least 2 pike were caught that turned belly up after just a short fight, indicating heat stress.
2. MAPPING AND INTERPRETATION---This section is to record the name of the lake, the lake type, and structural details. Big Whitefish Lake is a natural glacial lake with a marl bottom that is fed by springs. The main structure types are bars and a steep, irregular, weedline to over 20 feet. On the contour map of Big Whitefish Lake, structural details were studied to locate potential migration routes. On-the-water trolling and following breaklines indicated where time should be spent. Areas with the best access to the deepest water in the area were selected to fish, both casting and trolling. The best looking areas were numbered on the contour map, so even the sequence they were fished could be written down.
3. PRESENTATION---Most fishermen place the biggest emphasis on this category, but it can be broken down into simply depth and speed control. Both trolling and casting should be used, as they represent different depths and speeds. Recording the lures used, depths, speeds and what was caught gives one an indication of what works at that time. On Big Whitefish, due to the heavy, deep, and irregular weedline, only a few fish were caught trolling Spoonplugs, even at the weedline base and deeper. Casting produced the most fish for the week. Largemouth bass, northern pike, and rock bass were the species caught, although there were no real trophies. A slow jump presentation with a semi-weedless chatterbait was used to catch most fish, although other similar presentations could have worked.
4. OTHER INFORMATION AND RESULTS---Big Whitefish is a 500-acre lake that was not heavily fished that week, but could be a lake where fish are more active at night. The launch ramp is gravel with only 10 parking spots. Zebra mussels are present. There was an indistinct thermocline between 20 and 30 feet, and boat traffic was minimal even on the weekend. With all the information gathered on Big Whitefish Lake during the weeks’ vacation, it is a lake I would likely not fish in the future. A different season, water color, or weather condition could prove otherwise, but I now have a log sheet with the details needed to continue from there or to advise others about that lake in the future. By writing everything down on the log, I have reinforced it in my mind. This exercise shows how complex it is to interpret a fishing situation, and that it may be accurate only for a given set of conditions. For more on interpretation, check out my website chasesfishes.com.

This article wasn’t written to produce a final interpretation of Big Whitefish Lake, but it does demonstrate the complexity of the environmental and fish behavior issues which are inherent in fishing. The amazing part is that a true genius, Buck Perry, has given us simple guidelines to follow in order to catch fish by just executing those instructions. The closer we follow those directions, the better our results will be. Thank you, Mr. Perry!

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