

CAMPING OUT FOR THE **WIN**

By: Spencer Berman

There are two very general approaches to casting for muskies on any given day. One is to run-and-gun, fishing as many spots as possible in order to find at least one active fish willing to strike your lure. The other approach is to camp on a spot and wait until the fish decides it's hungry. The latter is usually considered boring by most fishermen as it usually involves just staying in one small spot for an extended period of time. However, it can be a seriously productive tactic; and knowing when to employ it can be the difference between success and failure.

Last year, during the PMTT event on the Madison Chain in Wisconsin, the bite was hot in shallow, weedy areas. One of the local community holes, a shallow weedy bay with inflowing water, was on everyone's mind. Word had spread that two anglers in the Muskies, Inc. league had caught nine fish in one evening on this spot only a few weeks earlier. Needless to say, when the tournament started Saturday morning, my partner, Matt Quintano, and I were far from alone while fishing this small area. On Saturday, we were one of roughly 15 boats working the tiny area and around 12 of the 31 fish for the tournament were landed there. The fish that were caught were a very nice average size. Matt and I worked the little spot all day and ended up losing one upper 40-inch fish that nearly jumped into another tournament angler's boat, which demonstrates just how packed the tiny area was with boats.

Due to the number of fish caught there and the fact that the leaders on Day One, Lance and Darrell Seasor caught all of their fish in that spot, the morning of Day Two found even more boats working this one little area. In the first two hours, there was not one fish caught and a number of the boats started to leave. By about 9:30 a.m., two and a half hours after blast off, at least 10 boats had moved on to other areas. However, at 9:45 a.m. the window opened and in 20 minutes there were four fish caught and a couple lost in this area. Matt caught a nice 41.5 incher. After that little blast, a number of other tournament boats pulled into the spot and began fishing it as well. This brought the number of boats back up near 25 or 30. From 10:05 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. there were zero fish landed and once again, a lot of boats became tired of fishing the same one acre of water and left. Just before 12:00 p.m. the fish turned on again and there were five more fish caught in this tiny honey hole. During that period, I had two fish swing and miss my Hellhounds. My partner Matt once again came through and landed a beautiful 44 incher on the Hellhound that he had been throwing all day. We ended up taking 4th place in the tournament and this tiny weed flat ended up producing the 2nd, 4th, and 6th place teams in the tournament. It also accounted for more than half of the points registered, as well as the big fish for the tournament.

There are a couple of major points to take away from this story. First off all, Matt and I, as well as almost every other team in that area, were casting gliders simply because that seemed to be what the bite was on and it was working. Having said that, how is it that every fish in this area had seen literally hundreds of casts with gliders going by them and yet all the fish were caught in short spurts over a two day period? In muskie fishing isn't it common

practice to simply run your boat along a spot, fan cast the area at 0.4 to 0.8 miles per hour and then move on to the next spot, frequently saying, "Shoot, I thought we would get one there." The question that begs to be asked is how a group of anglers did so well simply camping on a small spot, throwing the same lures rather than covering water and moving on after their initial pass did not produce results. The reality is that camping in areas that have high a concentration of fish is actually an extremely effective way to consistently put fish in your boat. However, rarely does anyone other than tournament anglers employ this strategy.

WHY CAMPING WORKS

When you are dealing with muskies that do not see a lot of lures in their lifetime, such as when you are on a secret Lake X or somewhere in Canada, it seems that sometimes you can trigger fish to bite outside of the windows. However, even in this scenario, most pros would agree that converting fish outside of prime periods is always going to be tough. On the other hand, for most of us we are going to spend the vast majority of our time fishing areas where the muskies are going to see pressure. When this happens it seems like the feeding window periods become even more important, especially when dealing with pressured muskies. By camping out and not leaving areas that you know are holding fish, you will be able to ensure that when the fish turn on, your baits

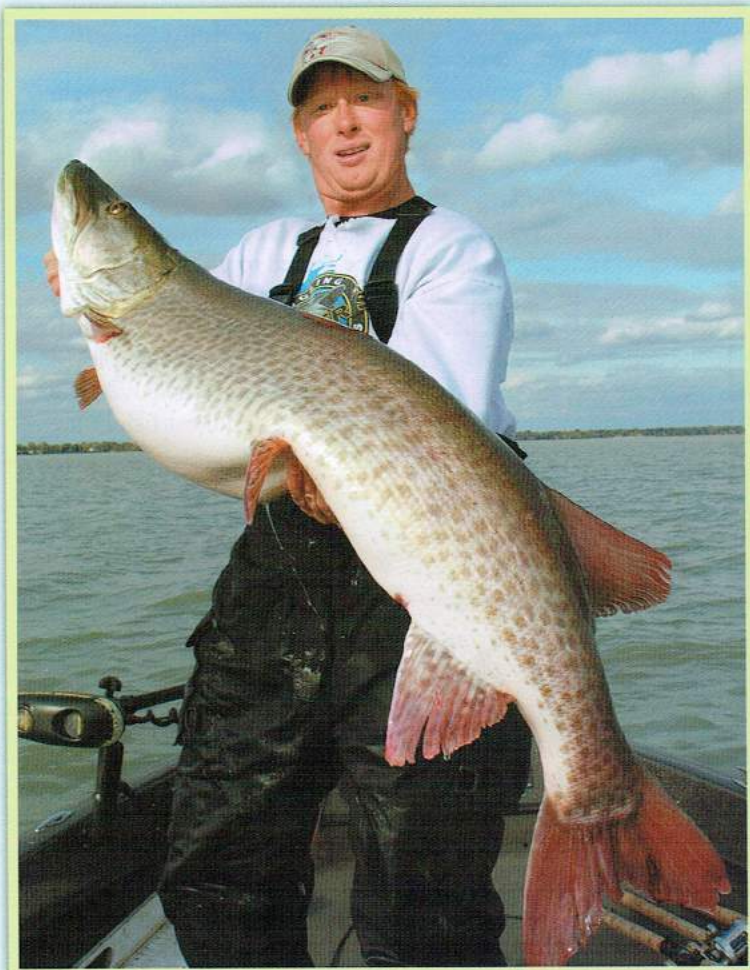


Client, Bob VanderMeer, holds a massive 55.25 x 26.75 muskie caught from Lake St. Clair with the author.

will be right there in a position to get those fish to eat.

It is probably safe to say that muskies don't eat all too often, even during summer. Such limited feeding means that simply doing one pass through an area might not really tell you that there are not fish in the area, but only that the window is not open. On the other hand, if you camp on an area that you know has fish, you will be assured that when a group of fish decide it is time to feed, you will be around fish and ready to take advantage of their heightened activity.

Another instance that camping can be an effective approach is when fishing just becomes plain tough. The tougher the fishing, the more stock you should put into the few areas that you know have muskies in them. Under these conditions, it becomes even more important to give fish tons of opportunities to eat a bait, considering that the feeding windows on difficult days can be few and far between. The tougher conditions will also make it less likely to trigger a strike outside a feeding window, thus making it more important to hunker down and wait the fish out.



The reward for camping on a spot known to hold big fish can be huge. Just ask the author!

T's Tackle

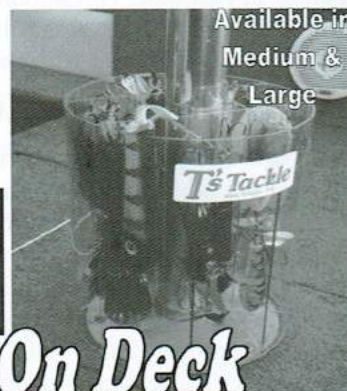
WWW.TSTACKLE.COM



Big Bump

Direct Print Rule

262.334.4949



On Deck

Pedestal Base Lure Storage

...And Much More Available at:
tstackle.com

Or, a quality tackle retailer near you
(See website for locations)

WHERE TO CAMP

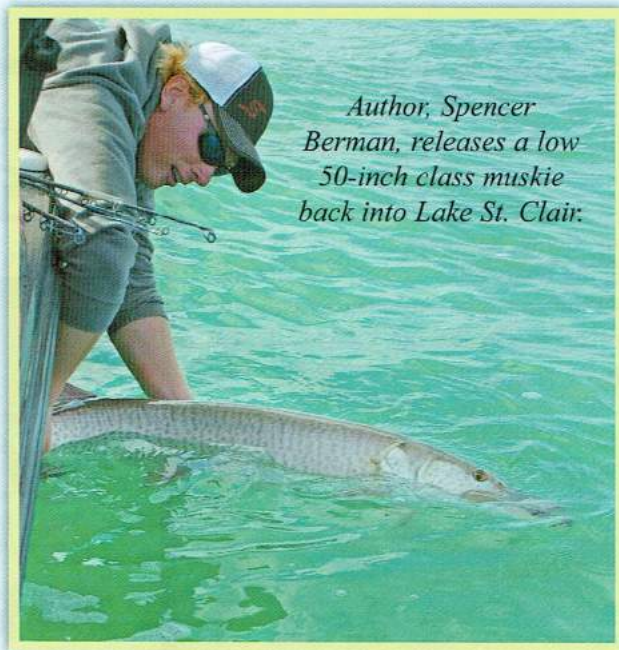
The most obvious problem with camping on a spot is that you are not able to cover water and you might not know if there is another spot that is holding more fish. What you need to do is be careful to pick areas that you know contain large numbers of fish and then have faith in your strategy. In order to determine where the best places are to camp, there are a couple of different things you can do. First, if you are fishing in deeper water, your graphs are going to be key in determining where you should be positioning your boat for the day. I employ all Humminbird electronics and can honestly say that their down imaging, side imaging and now the 360 imaging has really changed the way I fish open water. By using these advanced electronics, you can determine when and where to camp much more effectively. When you're in these open water locations, you need to be looking for schools of baitfish and the tell tail hook marks that mean muskies are lurking around the bait. When you locate a good number of bait schools and muskies in an area, you can then decide to hunker down and camp until they decide to eat. A quick tip when fishing open water is to take note of baitfish schools coming closer and closer to the surface. This is a telltale sign that muskies are beginning to feed as the muskies use the natural barrier of the surface to corral their prey. When you see this, hold on tight because it won't be long!

On the other hand, when you are fishing shallower water where modern electronics can sometimes struggle, your decision on which areas are going to be the best to camp on are not as cut and dry. The shallow cover makes it hard for you to tell exactly how many fish are really holding in an area, simply because your electronics can't tell how many fish are buried in the rock crevasses or in the weeds. In this situation, you still need to use your graphs to determine how much bait you can see in the weeds themselves or just above them. Additionally, try to determine if the weeds grow out to deep water and what type they are. Obviously weeds that allow more flow through them will attract more fish, so spots like a bed of cabbage among milfoil will be a prime area. Next, and most importantly, when camping on shallow water locations be sure to do your homework. Try to figure out which spots have been putting out the most fish lately either by looking at

tournament results, networking with other fishermen, or simply putting in your time. This information will allow you to determine where the best spots to camp will be, by allowing you to base your decision on which areas have been producing the most fish.

LURES

Now that you have a good idea of why the concept of camping works and how to determine when and where to do it, you need to consider what lure you should throw. Although most anglers who sit on a spot for a long period of time like to go through their tackle box, I believe in doing pretty much the exact opposite. I like to pick the top lures that I feel are going to produce that day and then simply keep them in the water. If the bite has been on bucktails, then that's what I am throwing. If it's open water and it seems rubber will be the best, then that's the ticket, and so forth. My logic behind this is simple. When you go back and look at tournaments as examples, you will see that in almost every muskie tournament held in the muskie's range, the bites always come in short bursts with long gaps in between where there were no fish caught. You know that the whole tournament field is spread over the lake and that they are throwing all sorts of different baits. With that in mind, when you have three hours where not one fish is caught and then in 25 minutes, 10 fish get boated, which scenario do you think is more likely? Is it realistic that 10 different anglers all put on the "magic" bait at about the same time and then caught a fish on it, or do you think that the fish turned on and the people who caught fish were the ones who stuck to their guns and kept good, high percentage baits in the water and waited for the muskies? In my opinion, the latter is a clear choice. Having



Author, Spencer Berman, releases a low 50-inch class muskie back into Lake St. Clair.

said that, what I like to do is pick a couple of lures that I think are going to be hot and then fish with them for long periods so that when the fish do turn on and you get that chance to trigger a fish you are throwing a productive lure.

When you have been out and have a good idea that a certain lure is going to be hot, I like to have one or sometimes two of them in the water. If you are fishing with three people, I prefer to have the last person throwing something a little different either in color or bait style. On the other hand, if you are a bit unsure, then I would have the people in your boat throwing different high percentage lures so that you cover your bases. This may help determine which bait is going to be the key to your success on that given day based on how they produce.

Why is a technique that is so effective in tournaments not being used by your everyday anglers? The simple answer is that most anglers would rather be forced to give up the sport than camp in one spot all day. However, camping can be a downright deadly tactic when applied properly. In fact, when the conditions are correct and you are fishing pressured lakes or tough conditions, it can often be the person who covers the least water that ends up with the biggest and most fish of the day.

LAKE ST. CLAIR GUIDED MUSKIE HUNTS WWW.SPENCERSANGLINGADV.COM

A photograph of Captain Spencer Berman, wearing a black jacket and a baseball cap, smiling while holding a large muskie. The fish is held vertically, showing its full length and spotted pattern.

**CAPTAIN
SPENCER
BERMAN**

CONTACT SPENCER TODAY
(419) 410-0498
SPENCERSANGLINGADV@GMAIL.COM

SPENCER'S ANGLING ADVENTURES
4.5 HOURS FROM CHICAGO - 5 HOURS FROM INDIANAPOLIS
3 HOURS FROM COLUMBUS - 2.5 HOURS FROM CLEVELAND

SPENCER'S ANGLING ADVENTURES

Spencer Berman of Spencer's Angling Adventures operates a highly successful guide service targeting waters of Indiana and Michigan, particularly Lake St. Clair, as well as in Minnesota. He is also a frequent participant in the PMTT and took home Team of the Year in 2013 with his partner. He is considered to be one of the new up and coming muskie pros by fellow fishermen.