



From Henry Gilbey's ADVENTURE FISHING by DK Publishing

Just as many European anglers prize the sea bass above all other fish, in the US fishing for largemouth bass is something I can do to our religion. An entire economy seems to rest on this somewhat weird-looking fish, with tackle shops, guides, motels, and bait collectors all relying on bass anglers for their income. As in Canada, the fishing is carefully managed to try to ensure that everyone has a satisfying trip and will come again. There is also a "Bass Tour" in which professional anglers make a circuit of several bass-holding states with their boats to win serious money in

fishing and competitions.

My first largemouth bass trip was to be on Lake Tohopekaliga, not far from Orlando. This large expanse of water is about as perfect as it gets for supporting a huge bass population. Largemouth bass in the Florida like to feed hard soon after first light, slowing down as the heat and barometric pressure rise. Fishing can be successful as the day wears on, but many anglers make the most of the beautiful early mornings, setting out on the lake in the half-light to fish while it is cool and quiet.

“Big mugs of coffee were cradled gingerly as Jamie's boat race through the maiden-crane grass...”

Monster mouth - Pike and pollack are equipped with large mouths, but a Florida Bass is more like voracious tunnel that has evolved to engulf its prey.

Racing down to the brightening shore of Lake Tohopekaliga at 6 a.m., I had no real idea whether it was day or night. Only a few hours of sleep separated me from my flight across the Atlantic to Orlando. It didn't matter; long-distance casting champion Roger Mortimore and I had heard much about largemouth bass fishing, and our guide, Jamie Jackson, had assured us that this local lake was fishing very well, comforting words to traveling anglers.

There can be no better wake-up call than ripping across southern the grass-like surface of a lake at nearly 60 mph (100 km/h), dressed in only light pants, T-shirt, and sunscreen. Florida men like to get their fishing fast, and who were we to argue? Big mugs of coffee were cradled gingerly as Jamie's boat race through the maiden-crane grass and on to our fishing spot.

Beginning at dawn

All thoughts of tiredness and jet lag were quickly forgotten as the boats slowed and came to rest perhaps 33 yd. (30 m) from a big grass bed. Over went the anchor as the sun began to peek over the distant trees and the Mercury and started its inevitable climb.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Lake Tohopekaliga lies south of Orlando and is just one of several vast expanses of water within the State of Florida. With depths of around 10 to 13 ft., (3 to 4 m.), it is the perfect habitat for largemouth bass. Plentiful submerged a hydrilla weed is used as cover by the bass, and large shoals of golden shiners and other small fish provide an inexhaustible food supply for the voracious predators.

Temperatures during the summer seem higher than they are because of high humidity. July and August are up and hottest, with an average maximum of 91°F (33°C). Winters are mild; the average minimum temperature in January (the coolest month) is 48°F (9°C).

Rainfall and sunshine Central Florida has a wet season from May to October, and a dry season from November to April. The hurricane season is from June to November; on average, there are two hurricanes per season.

Key fish in the lake are the largemouth bass.

Other fish found in Florida lakes include another four bass species: the peacock bass, shoal bass, spotted bass, and Suwannee bass.

Prime time for largemouth bass is between November and March, during the spawning season. Florida peacock bass is best fished from February until May, but all bass species are fish successfully year-round.

“We were hooking leaping fish just after the other...”

Roger and I had come to the lake and time of year when largemouth bass fishing is done mainly with live bait. Just as European sea bass are voracious predators, so their freshwater cousins like nothing more than engulfing smaller fish, as many of them as possible. Jamie had picked up a supply of golden shiners from the huge local tackle shop, and they were swimming obliviously in the aerated live-wells, ready for their intended purpose.

As I broke open my camera gear and loaded up with film, Roger cast out bait towards the reeds, and clicked his multiplier into gear. Jamie is a professional bass guide and fishes these waters day in, day out; when he says the bass will initially feed around the maiden-crane grass, it is wise to listen.

Frantic fishing

I had hardly gotten started when Roger swept back his rod, wound down tight, and hooked his First American bass. The fish jumped out of the water, shook its huge mouth, and then tried to

run for the sanctuary of the reeds. On Roger's face was a look of sheer delight, and that look was one I often saw among the bass fanatics we met in Florida.

Things soon got really hectic. We were hooking leaping fish just one after the other, and it was like a juggling act trying to work cameras, catch fish, stay calm, and take it all in. It seemed that we could do no wrong, since the fish attacked one bait after another. But we knew that, without our guide, we would have no idea where to look for fish in the huge Lake Toho waterway. Jamie put us on to them, and we were simply reaping the rewards.

Bass fishing is heavily influenced by barometric pressure. Out on the water, Jamie would hold his barometer aloft and study it. As the needle rose and the heat of the day increased, the bass would cease to feed and moved out to slightly deeper water. This move to deeper water is said to relieve pressure on the bass's, ear bones. For this reason, fishing often takes place in the early morning.

Placid Vista fishing in Lake Tohopekaliga was very different from unusual sport in tidal waters. I was it to reach my prize as it reluctant into had. Holding a bass by its bony jaw causes it no harm.

Wrenched from the Weed Early on our second day I hooked a powerful fish that fought with single-minded determination to snag me up in the thick weed. Abandoning any form of subtlety, I had no choice but to lock the reel and try to wrench the fish from its sanctuary. Water cascaded as the bass leaped clear of the water, but the hook held. Jamie slipped the net under my prize, and I was left to admire more than 10 lbs. (4.5 kg) of largemouth bass.

And that was bass fishing Florida; take care to slipped the fish gently backing to the water, crack open ice cold drink, pick out another shiner, and then get to it again. Flick the float toward the reeds, tighten up on the line, and be ready to set the hook in that boney mouth. The very rapid ride back to the harbor is just part of the service.

Another beauty - My friend, Roger, lever's in a bass while our guide, Jamie, leans out with the net. Jamie then eased out the hook. No one could mistake the predatory nature of this fish.

Alternative locations.

Mexico Intrepid traveling anglers for largemouth bass are heading for lakes such as Baccarac, Aquamilpa, and El Salto, as well as the Sierra Madre mountains. All contain trophy-sized bass. Guides are often available.

Cuba Fishing in Cuba is not yet developed as a tourist facility. The waterways are now only being opened up, and there is great potential for largemouth bass fishing.

Texas and California The largemouth bass tend to be found in the more southern states of the US. While Florida is the "spiritual" home of the species, thousands of other lakes in the south hold populations of these weird shaped bass. Professional bass competition tours in the US take in a lot of different lakes and states.

Great Britain - Live baiting for sea bass is a long-established fishing method off the British coastline. It works because it appeals to the voracious, predatory instinct of the fish. European anglers fish mainly for sea bass (although I have seen largemouth bass caught in Spain), as do the large number of Americans who fish for the mighty striped sea bass in US coastal waters.

Tackle & Techniques Using lures to catch largemouth bass is very popular and successful on Lake Tohopekaliga; one look in the local anglers' tackle boxes reveals how many varieties of lures will interest this fish. But we were fishing Lake Toho at a time of year when the locals knew live-baiting worked bass. When you are fishing away from home, you listen to what the locals say.

Our live baits, called "shiners," were transferred directly from the holding tank of the local tackle shop to the live wells on Jamie's boat; we never suffered any losses. The baits can be expensive, and you may use a lot of them if the bass the bass are feeding hard, but the quality of the fishing more than justifies the cost.

The shiners were hooked up and fished beneath a very simple float set up. The secret is to get the boat as near to the grass as possible, in order to present an irresistible meal to the patrolling bass. Jamie anchored the boat as close to the grass as he good without scaring the fish, then made any adjustments to our position using the electric motor.

When the float dips, it is essential to give the fish a little time to take the bait properly. When you strike, you must strike very hard, for these bass have extremely tough mouths. Set the hook, and then bully the fish away from its potential sanctuary in grass; do all that correctly in the fish is yours.

Largemouth bass are good to eat, but we wanted to return every one. That we did so very easily indicated that they are tough and resilient predators.

Barometer Rising barometric pressure causes largemouth bass to cease to feed.

Live bait -- In Florida live bait is preferred to fishing with lures at certain times of the year.

Ready for action This mounted lure is made especially deadly by its to treble hooks.

Rubber lures Sometimes the wiggle of jelly worms can make them attractive lures.

Netted bass A landing net is used to get the bigger bass into the boat for unhooking.

Lake fishing for largemouth bass

Rods Jamie used short spinning-type rods that were powerful enough to set the hook, but you could easily use lighter gear and really let the fish fight.

Reels We used simple bait-casting multipliers like ABU 5500 or 6500. You do not cast far, and you control the spool with your thumb; overruns are not a problem.

Lines Jamie loaded the reels with 20 to 30 lb (9-14 kg) mono. This enables you to bully fish from the weeds.

Hooks The locals prefer special wide gap hooks when they are live baiting.

Floats Use simple bobbers that can be moved up and down on the line easily, but can also be locked in place.

AJ's Freelancer Bass Guide Services wishes to extend a special thanks to outdoor writer extraordinaire Henry Gilbey, long distance casting champion Roger Mortimer and the publishers at Dorling Kindersley.

To order your own complete copy of this book containing over 170 full color pages of exciting fishing adventures visit www.amazon.com. To see a complete list of books published by DK publishing visit www.dk.com.