

# Break From the Pack

The subject matter I write about has always had a strong focus on education, whether it be about fish location and behavior or in presentations and the associated lures used to elicit a positive response. I would like to continue on with that theme and implore some of you (probably the majority of you) to self-educate yourselves.

What I am referring to is the now all too common practice of following the crowd...particularly as it relates to ice fishing. In this case, there is no strength in numbers. Ever notice that by mid-winter on any given body of water that there are a couple of large clumps of houses tightly packed together? Do you honestly think that the majority of fish are congregated directly below this horde of followers? I'll answer that with an emphatic, "Absolutely Not." By the time the crowd has gathered, the bite is long over. This is due to the fact that no matter how good the structure below is or how hungry the fish may be-they simply will not linger long will all the commotion going on above them. Any semblance of common sense should tell you this.

Unfortunately, many folks lack the confidence to strike out on their own to see what may await them. Throw in some typical human characteristics such as uncertainty and an unfounded fear of the unknown and you have satisfied the basic ingredients for what I term "herd mentality." It's time for a change-have some pride and try something new this year-break free from the pack. It's not as frightening as you would anticipate and I will personally guarantee you that there is no boogymen that attacks the solitary angler.

This applies to not only spots on a particular lake...but entire lakes themselves. Over pressure has the ability to not only drive fish out of a specific area, it also sours these fish's attitude towards feeding in general. Yet you'll still see crowds lingering for long periods, despite dismal results. Always keep in mind that large groups of fisherman attract more fisherman-not more fish. Time to move on and strike out on your own.

What you can do is take some of the information gleaned from these spots when the fish actually bit. What depth, water clarity, was it on a flat or sharp break, weeds present or not, what time of day, what lures and bait, and so on. Armed with this knowledge, you can begin your search for areas with the same characteristics and employ similar tactics once found. This is the key information you should be seeking, not wondering where the so called "hot bite" is.

You will not find numbers of fish on every foray in the unknown. I would have to say the probabilities are probably one in two. But in every outing where the fishing is poor, you gain an immense amount of knowledge and experience. You are eliminating water for this time period and learning spots that may become great at another time. The more areas you know intimately, the better all around fisherman you will become.

A word of advice and caution is in order: Should you find your own personal Mecca, for God's sake; keep it to yourself or you can be assured that everyone with a fishing license will be on it before you can return. If you can't control yourself and have to broadcast your feats, keep the lake and location out of the story. If pressed, simply refer to your lake as Wonder Lake. As in, "you can continue to wonder what lake I caught them on."

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