



HOT

BELOW A DAM, IN A CHURNING TAILRACE, FAST FOOD TAKES ON ENTIRELY NEW MEANING. CURRENT RIPS, BAITFISH WHIRL, AND WALLEYES ATTACK. IN TURBULENCE THAT MIGHT SEEM TOO CHAOTIC TO HOLD FISH, LET ALONE ACCOMMODATE BOATS, WALLEYES GANG UP AND GOBBLE SMELT OR SHAD SLICED AND DICED IN THE TURBINES.

Starting in fall and extending into spring, walleyes scoot upstream in search of spawning grounds. When a dam halts their progress, fish stack up, staying for the snacks. Even so, a rip-roaring tailrace might not seem the friendliest of environs.

Positioning themselves in the tumult of open gates, either beyond off-limits warnings customarily posted or in a short stretch downstream, walleyes occupy a combat zone where you have to fight the current and jockey for position with other boats. The route to deliverance: Getting lead and a lure down quickly, with boat control to keep them there.

For classic examples of the seasonal situation, look no further than the Missouri River, where deep water and strong flow

from regular releases serve up chopped smelt, focusing walleyes far better than lesser tailraces, with water trickling through their dams and a decided lack of bait. Enter the insight of fellow South Dakotans Mike Kulm and Jim Randash from the June 2004 In-Fisherman Professional Walleye Trail event in Chamberlain, South Dakota, where Kulm won and Randash finished second in the swirling tailrace below Big Bend Dam at the bottom end of Lake Sharpe.

IN THE MIX

The most efficient way to deal with the torrent is with heavy three-way rigs or bottom-bouncers. Heavy? Try 4 ounces, even 8 if the current is humming. Keeping close to bottom is imperative

DAM!

BY DENNIS
FOSTER*

When a barrier halts their progress, walleyes **stack up** in swift current and stay for the snacks

when walleyes tuck behind rocks or depressions that deflect current.

To rig up, Kulm spools 14-pound Fire-Line on a medium baitcaster, tying it to a 4-ounce bouncer with a 6-foot leader of 10-pound Berkley XT back to a floating plug—in Kulm's case, a Smithwick Rattlin' Super Rogue.

The next step is to work current seams and, specifically, the outermost releases. Outermost releases? Face the dam, and the gates farthest left and right offer optimum current breaks, since moderately slack water is associated with both shorelines.

To get in the mix, motor up to a current break with outboard running. Here, you need the prop's power to counteract current for more efficient course corrections than with an electric or kicker motor. After that, it's time to bust out the monster bouncer; let it out at a 45-degree angle behind the boat and drift with the flow below the dam. Get an angle greater than 45 degrees, and you lose control in the campaign to keep a lure near bottom.

LAUNCH TIME

Randash likewise favors the Super Rogue, but with a different approach. "It's important to get your lures up where no one else is fishing," he says, "particularly where boat traffic is prohibited." To hurl a rig long distances into a no-man's-land, Randash goes with a 1- to 4-ounce egg sinker, depending on current flow, above a barrel swivel and a 3-foot mono lead to his lure. On spinning tackle with 14-pound FireLine, Randash launches the rig upstream as far as possible while the engine is in gear.

For all intents and purposes, Randash coasts downstream at current speed. The trick is to release the boat based on the sinker's drop rate. If Randash holds in the current too long, the sinker will

pound bottom and snag. If he switches to neutral too soon, the bait sweeps down well above the fish. Randash makes his quick drifts for short distances of perhaps 50 yards before going up and starting over again.

With lure and weight in close proximity, the sound of lead knocking off rocks seems to alert fish that something is coming. After all, tailrace walleyes react to baits, lashing out instead of inspecting them.

Where lures are concerned, I veer from traditional stickbaits toward more of a banana-style crank with Reef Runner's Ripstick. This bent lure has a square lip, and the result is a wider wobble.

Another option is a spinner rig with plastic tail in which noise and disturbance are key elements. This can be achieved with a couple of unique blades from JB Lures. The company's Vibra/Flash is a #3 Indiana blade with a hole in it to create commotion. The Ventilator is JB's latest: A #3 Colorado blade with two channels formed on the concave side to funnel

E-Cell 74336 AD

Yakima 77792 AD

CURRENT AFFAIRS BIG-MOTOR MANEUVERS

The day after the '04 PWT tournament ended on Lake Francis Case, out of Chamberlain, South Dakota, I fished a Berkley artificial-only event with powerhouse pro Mike Gofron. (Incidentally, the PWT is returning to Chamberlain May 10 to 12 with the Super Pro Series to host an artificial-only tournament.) That's where I learned from Gofron a great way to control the boat when slinging jigs toward the dam. While Gofron maneuvered a bowmount trolling motor along a line of demarcation that boats were not allowed to cross, he had me start the big motor and ease it into gear at idle speed. The outboard supplied the power; the 36-volt electric trolling motor let Gofron steer from the bow. Then, with 6-pound FireLine on spinning tackle, we whipped 3/8-ounce jigs with black-and-pearl Power Minnows on a quartering angle as far as possible toward the dam. We reeled fiendishly to keep up with the jig, nailing white bass and walleye that grabbed our smelt imitations whisking in the current.

—Dave Scropo

water out small openings toward the tip. The effect is a vapor trail of bubbles.

To further enhance these rigs, I tie mine on a 3-foot section of mono with rattle beads. The added size, buoyancy, and noise help fish to find and eat the offering. On the hook end, snell a #1 Gamakatsu Walleye Wide Bend, then thread on a 3-inch Berkley Power Grub with the tail facing up for greater action. Spinners with red beads and #3 hammered silver or gold blades are hard to beat when tipped with a white Power Grub.

Go ahead, feed them fast food. There's no getting around it when current rips, baitfish whirl, and walleyes attack. ■

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