

Late Fall Bass Fishing on Lake Keowee

- Bill Walker

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The surface water temperature will soon pass below 70°F in most places on Lake Keowee. After that, it's likely to continue dropping through November and December toward its winter levels: 50°F - 60°F depending on where you are on the lake (not counting the "hot hole" where the water is generally a bit warmer).

The fall early-morning bite has started. As usual, the surface water temperature has cooled first in the south end of the lake. So, as I write, the fall early morning bite in the shallows has started in the south end and is working its way northward. At the Jocassee dam the water temperature is dropping as well, and soon I expect the early morning bite to start up there for the fall season. The last areas to cool will be the middle of the lake, particularly the area just north of the route 130/183 bridge where the water warmed from cooling Duke's reactors is released back into the lake.

Each day, when the early morning bite is on, it starts at the crack of dawn, that time when the stars are still visible and there is only a hint of the coming sun in the eastern sky. From then until sunrise, fish the shallows with surface, walk-the-dog lures (lures that zigzag along the surface as you jerk them), poppers, or shallow running lures with a rattle. I find that lures that splash and/or rattle are easier for the fish to find in the darkness at the crack of dawn! As the morning gets brighter, they strike at a wider variety of lures. And then finally, when the sun hits the water, they pretty much shut off in the shallows.

For the first hour or so after the sun hits the water, you may be lucky enough to catch a fish in the deeper water near the shallows where they were feeding at dawn. There you can try dragging a Carolina-rigged worm along the 15-20-foot depth contour on a cloudy or windy day. On a calm sunny morning you may do better dragging your worm around the 25-30-foot depth contour.

Also, as November starts and the water cools, the baitfish are working their way further and further up the creeks, and bass are starting to follow. If you see a ball of baitfish on your depth finder, look for bass to be hovering nearby, biding their time, waiting for a moment of their choosing to attack. Running a lure through or underneath the ball of baitfish may trigger a strike.

If you're lucky, you'll also see surface feeding frenzies as bass actually attack a school of baitfish. Casting a lure into this surface action can often yield a quick strike and a fish on your line. However, casting into this action is often easier said than done. The bass often start feeding far from your boat, and by the time you get your boat over there, the bass are gone.

You have a better chance of getting your lure into the action if you have a rod on the side prepared and ready with a lure you can cast a long distance. A large heavy, walk-the-dog surface lure can be cast a long distance with a stiff rod and thin line. Another lure that can be cast a long distance is a metal jigging spoon. Jigging spoons often are not quite as heavy, but solid metal jigging lures can be small with little wind resistance for their weight. Try casting some lures from your dock and select a few you can cast the longest distance. The longer your casting range, the better chance you have that bass will start a feeding frenzy close enough for you to reach them with your lure.

A word of warning ... if you do go out to try the early morning bite in the Fall, be sure you're prepared for two things: cold and fog. We've already had some cold mornings on Lake Keowee with the temperature in the 30s. Remember the moving boat generates wind-chill as well, so always take one more layer of clothing than you think you need. You can always take off what you don't need and stow it in the boat.

Fog is another thing. Do not, as I once did, underestimate the disorienting effect of dense fog. One fall day I had arranged to fish with a Lake Keowee buddy. By car we were ½ hour apart, but by boat it usually only took me 12 minutes to get to his dock. So we arranged for me to boat diagonally across the lake, around some islands and into his bay, to pick him up at this dock at 7:30AM. The forecast was for fog that morning. I didn't yet have GPS electronics, so the day before I took some compass readings to be sure that I could get to his place in the fog. The fog was so dense that I could only see about two boat lengths in front of me. Unfortunately I set out confidently knowing I had the compass readings. But in the fog I couldn't tell how far I had come on any compass heading. And I discovered I couldn't steer accurately enough with my compass because I had to be constantly looking out ahead to make sure I didn't hit anything, and every time I looked back I had deviated from the compass heading. Suddenly, I saw the depth get shallow very quickly. I barely stopped in time before running aground on a mid-lake shoal. I turned off my main engine and used my trolling motor to work my way around the shoal. Then I wasn't sure exactly which way to go from there! I had a pretty good idea, because I recognized the shoal. But I still felt quite lost, with nothing to do but carefully head out in approximately the direction I thought would lead to his dock.

To make a long story short, after I had been going through the fog for an hour and 45 minutes on trip that usually took me 12 minutes, I felt that I was pretty close to his dock, but I couldn't see anything around me but fog. So I stopped the engine and listened. Suddenly I heard his voice coming out of the fog: "Bill, is that you?" If he hadn't called out, I'd have gone right by his dock. I turned on my trolling motor and steered toward his voice until his dock loomed into sight in front of me. After that, I needed a drink! Instead, we had a cup of coffee until the fog lifted!

Remember, taking care of yourself and your boat is more important than catching fish. Wear lots of warm clothing this fall and respect the fog. It's important to be around to fish another day!