

Finding Bass and Keeping Warm

By Bill Walker, Tournament Director of the Keowee Anglers

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How can I find and catch bass on Lake Keowee in winter? AND, how can I stay warm and comfy in the process? After all, when I'm cold, fishing is no fun!

In last January's Sentinel I wrote a well-received article about finding and catching bass on Lake Keowee in winter. Since the seasonal cycles tend to repeat, I suggest that you read that article to learn about catching bass this winter.

"What good does that do me?" you say, "I can't find last January's Sentinel!"

Well, if that's your problem, you're in luck! FOLKS has just revised and updated the fishing page on their website. It now contains most of my fishing articles for the last two years plus some of the more adventurous articles from further back. To find my article from last January's Sentinel, go to the FOLKS home page at www.keoweefolks.org, click on the **Waterside** menu at the top and, when you get to the next page, click on the fishing icon. The January 2014 article about "Winter Bass on Lake Keowee" is there!

Now let's focus the rest of this article on keeping warm during winter fishing. Here are my basic guidelines for keeping warm and comfy while winter fishing.

First and foremost, don't fish when the weather's too cold. I personally draw the line and declare it's too cold for fishing to be fun when I occasionally have to dunk my fishing rod into the relatively warm lake water to get the ice out of the line guides. And even if I don't quite have to do that, it can still be uncomfortably cold. So I generally stay at home in front of a warm fire with a warm drink and a book if the air temperature, including forecast wind chill, is less than 40°F. There will be another day to fish!

Don't fish in the early morning. Not only does the sun feel warmer later in the day, but also the sun shining on the water makes the fish more active later in the day. So, while most of the year I prefer fishing from the crack of dawn until the morning sun hits the water, in January and February I prefer fishing the last two hours of daylight. I find that after the sun has warmed the water a bit during the day and the light level drops in the evening, some bass do tend to move up onto the points and into the ends of the bays looking for food.

Another reason not fish early on a winter day is the fog. A cold, damp fog can not only penetrate a lot of layers of clothing, it can also be extremely disorienting and dangerous. Don't underestimate it! If I do go out in the fog, I only fish the shore near home. I've personally seen a few close calls where anglers have relied on their electronics to go bombing out through the fog confident they could avoid the points and shallow shoals. What they forgot was that their electronics doesn't help them against other boaters who are doing the same thing. True, the odds of a collision in the fog are small, but consequences of a collision on the water can be disastrous ... don't risk it.

Dress warmly in layers. In the winter I start with long underwear so that even my legs have at least two layers. Then I build out the layers from there. I pay special attention to my extremities. I wear extra thick socks, sometimes two pair! I wear a thin pair of gloves through which I can still feel my fishing equipment and can still handle my lures. Once your fingers get too cold, they don't get warm again. But be careful: thick wooly gloves tend to get caught on fishing hooks! My hat comes down over my ears and is warmly lined with thick rabbit-fur! (Remember, a lot of body heat can be lost through the head!) I also have a knit wool cylindrical neckpiece that slips all the way down over my head and goes around my neck to fill the gap

between my layers of sweatshirts and coats and my hat. My winter outer coat has a hood that goes up over my head for extra warmth, but I find the hood a confining nuisance and don't like to use it while fishing unless absolutely necessary, so my neckpiece and hat allow me to freely move my head and put off using my hood. And, if necessary, I can pull that neckpiece up in front to cover my face all the way to my eyes.

Always bring one more layer of clothing than you think you need. You can always take it off in the boat if it's too much, but if you need a layer you don't have, then you must go back in. You may not need that extra layer if you're sitting still fishing, but as the day wears on and the sun drops toward the horizon, the winter temperatures can drop quickly. And remember the wind chill of a moving boat! (Because I wanted to fish in winter, when I bought my last boat, I made a point of getting one with a windshield that went all the way across, protecting me and my passengers from the wind chill and damp bow spray of a boat moving through waves ... and, boy, am I glad I did!) If you don't have a windshield, bring rain-suit pants as an extra wind-breaking, spray-protecting layer for your legs!

I personally resist the temptation to bring a hot beverage, or to drink one before I go out. While a hot beverage can feel really good, what goes in the top end tends to come out the bottom end. And when I'm all bundled up in layers of warm clothes on the deck of a bobbing fishing boat with gear and hooks all around, it's nice not to worry about opening things up to eliminate body fluids.

One last thing: think about what you would do in the winter with evening coming on if, heaven forbid, your engine doesn't start to bring you home and you end up being out there longer than you expected as the day gets colder and colder. It happens. If that happens to you, you may be thankful you brought your cell phone to call for help! Hmmmm, now that I think about it, maybe TWO extra layers of clothing would be good idea!

So, in winter I mostly like to fish sunny afternoons with no wind. The sun helps keep me warm, and the lack of wind allows me to position my boat for very slow movement over the creek channels for controlled use of my drop-shot rig. And if I want to fish the shallows, I do it late in the day as the light is fading, wearing extra layers of clothing in preparation for falling evening temperatures. All that helps keep me warm, and when I'm warm I'm comfortable enough to really enjoy my fishing!