

## Slip Bobber Nuances for Walleyes *by Jason Mitchell*

As a guide, I believed that the most effective game plans just kept walleye fishing straight forward and simple. There are plenty of folks in this business who try to make fishing really complicated and you can make fishing akin to rocket science if you wish... I however made a living as a guide by dumbing the process down. I found that by keeping the process simple, I could accommodate people with a wider range of experience and skill levels without making fishing intimidating. I didn't want to set out and prove my angling abilities or show off some superior intellect... that is not what I wanted to be. My goal was to take people out and put them in a situation where they could catch fish, not watch me catch fish or feel intimidated.

Using slip bobbers to catch walleyes is incredibly effective if done right. I relied on slip bobbers an awful lot through my years as a guide. The reasons being that I could anchor on a good spot and not worry about boat control... a good anchor is the best boat control there is. My hands were free; I could deal with tangles, interact with the folks in my boat, not burn up a lot of gas and catch a lot of fish. Slip bobbers were also hands on enough where the people get to enjoy the hook set and everybody loves watching a bobber disappear.

Now if the bobbers are not disappearing, using slip bobbers are akin to watching the paint dry on a barn but in the right location... this simple system is deadly. The biggest myth there is regarding catching walleyes with slip bobbers however in my opinion, is just the light line, small jig mentality. There were a group of people who thought you had to add milligrams of shot to the line until the bobber just barely poked out of the water. Now I am not saying that you have to fish like a caveman but there are so many scenarios where anglers shoot themselves in the foot by trying to finesse fish to the point where they are just not efficient. For awhile, there was a mentality that slip bobbers had to be delicate and the presentation had to be natural, which meant; light line, small hooks and tiny amounts of weight.

Here is my take on this mentality of slip bobber fishing. When you combine a tiny little slip bobber and have no weight in regards to split shot or jig, it takes longer for the bait to reach the fish. If you can count to ten and your slip bobber is still lying on its side because the bobber stop hasn't pulled to the bobber, you are wasting time. Here is the other factor, small bobbers that have just a little bit of the tip poking out of the water can't be seen once they drift from the boat. I can understand trying to subdue the motion of waves on the presentation but there are better ways to do this without sinking the bobber to the point where you cannot see it. In all honesty, there are so many situations where some resistance is good for walleyes.

The reality is that every fishery is a little different and there are many ways to skin a cat. What we have found however is that we are often much more effective with slip bobbers by being somewhat unorthodox to conventional slip bobber wisdom. The basis of the system is this; put and keep good bait in front of fish. Some of the nuances however surprise some anglers.

I like to use the largest slip bobbers I can get away with. I am not talking jugs but if I were to pick one size, it would be the Northland Tackle Lite-Bite Classic 1 inch oval slip bobber. Why the larger float? Because it will hold up more weight which gets down to the bottom faster as soon as the bobber and bait hit the water. When running several rods, it is easier to manage the course or drift of each bobber. The other advantage is that I can fish further away from the boat and see the bobber in heavy waves. Walleyes don't have any issue pulling them under, they just disappear. Because I often had to deal with pike and flooded timber, I liked to use braided line for my main line from a durability standpoint but the bad part about braid is that bobber stops slide. Bionic is one of the better braided lines for bobber stops sticking. Use a heavier braid like 14 pound test so that the bobber stop can stick good.

Below the bobber, I rig a small egg sinker instead of using split shot and I tie on a snap swivel. Now why the egg sinker? Egg sinkers don't get tangled in the net so much or wrap up in itself as bad as removable split shot. Pull on the line and the tangle pops and untangles out of the net after getting a fish, just a little tip to speed up your get back in the water time. Below the sinker and snap swivel, we attach a short snell that either has a plain hook or a small jig. In timber, I would often rig up a snell that would break off versus the main braided line so I didn't have to chase bobbers around the lake. Another option if you are targeting big fish in really snaggy timber is to forgo the swivel and leader and just tie the hook or jig directly to the braid and use a bobber stop above the jig and below the bobber to keep from losing bobbers.

When the fish are biting well, you can use either plain hooks or small jigs and catch fish. Obviously, the number one focus is sitting on a good spot. Both plain hooks and jigs however have a place. There are times for example in strong winds where the swells were big when plain hooks and longer leaders were the ticket. I believe what was happening was that the waves were pushing the presentation up and down too dramatically and by using a longer snell and plain hook; the whole presentation was subdued with less up and down movement. Small jigs on the other hand can add a small flash of color which seems to help at times. A great

wide gap hooked jig for slip bobbers is the 1/32 ounce Fireball. Most 1/32 ounce jigs have tiny panfish hooks so a small jig with a walleye size hook is real beneficial. Bait selection can really vary from lake to lake but across the board, leeches are tough to beat below a slip bobber. Especially when using a plain hook, hooking the leech through the middle will increase the swimming motion of the leech and is too much for most walleyes to ignore. Half crawlers can be deadly behind the 1/32 ounce Fireballs, just thread the crawler so it can hang straight off the back of the jig. Minnows are another staple. Shiners are often lip hooked. Chubs and rainbows can be tail hooked.

Long rods with some back bone allow anglers to fish slip bobbers further away from the boat allowing you to make longer drifts and cover more water. We designed an eight foot telescoping slip bobber rod that was designed specifically for corking walleyes. One feature we added to the rod which can be used as a tip for any rods that you already own... every foot of the rod blank we marked with a white dot. This allows you to use the rod blank as a ruler for making quick adjustments to your depth setting. When running several rods, you will speed up your adjustment time dramatically as you hop from spot to spot. Our rods already have the markings but an angler can mark any rod with either tape or some other marking to create the same concept.

Slip bobbers are effective and efficient because you can sit on a good spot with a good looking presentation, i.e. Jumbo leech squirming and swimming frantically about a foot off the bottom, what is there not to love? My making a few adjustments however, you can fine tune this presentation to become more efficient when focusing on walleyes.