

Lake Pleasant ICE



by *Darl Black*

photos by the author

Why would a group of ice anglers leave Presque Isle Bay's world famous winter Yellow Perch fishery to go to a nearby 60-acre lake? Well, could it be the arrival of a Great Lakes freighter to the Bay's shipyard for wintertime repairs disrupted the ice cover? The result was the ice pack breaking away from shore with cracks and flooding of ice extending into Misery Bay.

These anglers were outdoor writers in Erie at the invitation of Dave Lefebre for his Erie Extreme ice fishing media event. They decided against using boards to reach the ice pack and then walking around in water on the ice. But, Lefebre had a backup plan. "We can be on Lake Pleasant ice in about 30 minutes."

On the drive to Lake Pleasant, Erie County, Lefebre briefed the group. "This lake is basically a big bowl ringed by weed beds. With 40 feet of water in the center, the spring-fed lake supports trout fishing year around. In addition to Rainbow Trout and Brook Trout, we will likely catch Bluegills, Yellow Perch, Black Crappies and perhaps Largemouth Bass."

"The lake's small size will allow us to spread out, drill lots of holes and quickly locate some fish. There are two distinct zones we need to explore. First, we look in the shallows where fish will

be associated with weed beds. Second, the open water of the lake where some species are likely suspended."

Lefebre recommends flashy minnow-looking jiggling baits for Brook Trout and Rainbow Trout. "Trout are very active in cold water so anything shiny will get their attention. You can catch them on plastic, too, but lures like



The size of this Yellow Perch from Lake Pleasant, Erie County, is impressive.



Some lures used for Lake Pleasant trout.



Jeff Samsel is a frequent visitor to Northwest Pennsylvania. This was his first visit to Lake Pleasant, Erie County. He enjoyed the variety of species caught through the ice.

blades, spoons and jigging raps are generally better. You can likely get away with 2- or 4-pound-test line,” said Lefebre.

On the other hand, Lefebre stressed the need to use 1-pound-test line in order to maximize the panfish catch. He suggested tiny plastic baits on $\frac{1}{80}$ -ounce jigheads for perch and Bluegills around the weeds. However, when fishing for suspended fish in the open water column, he recommended a $\frac{1}{16}$ -ounce tungsten jig head with a soft plastic body because more weight would be needed for deeper water.

Upon arrival, ice chips flew as the gas powered auger drilled multiple holes in the ice. With no bites initially, we fanned out to drill more exploratory holes to better identify points along the weed edge in the hope of finding fish.

Then, Jeff Samsel scored the first fish through a hole—a very plump Yellow Perch. It was followed by another, then nothing. Several yards down the weedline, it was Steve Chaconas’ turn to catch a perch.

Members of our group continued catching a perch or two now and then. We assumed that small packs of perch were moving up and down the weedline, and when one of these fish spied a tidbit offered by an angler, the perch slurped it in.

Lowering an underwater camera into a hole verified our postulate. We watched a small group of perch approach from a distance. One or two perch swam up to the micro jig and stared at it. When the angler gently moved the jig, a perch would inhale it. However, while watching slow-moving perch on the camera, every so often, something dashed by the lens. “Trout,” responded Lefebre.

Within minutes, one member of our group had landed the first Rainbow Trout. And, our afternoon on Lake Pleasant was just beginning. By the time the sun touched the horizon, we caught every species Lefebre mentioned.

“Lake Pleasant’s trout add a fun element,” said Samsel. “Being coldwater fish, trout seem super-charged during the winter, showing up out of nowhere to blast your bait. If you are looking to catch trout, don’t be afraid to use lures that offer a bit of flash. Experiment with some bolder jig presentations you use for panfish to catch trout as well.”

Lefebre’s guests also enjoyed the experience of fishing the open water of the lake basin.

“Although more time-consuming to locate suspended fish, it pays to explore the water column on a lake like this with your electronics,” said Samsel. “You are looking for marks high in the column over 40 feet. Then, by watching your sonar, you can lower a lure to the exact depth. You can make an educated guess about the species, but you can’t be sure what they are until you catch one.”

With so many lines in the water focusing on fish at different depths, before we left the lake, the suspended species had been figured out. Trout were cruising 4 to 7 feet below the ice while perch and Bluegills were 20 feet and deeper. During the late afternoon, crappies mysteriously made an appearance immediately below the ice layer.

As we headed back to Erie, all agreed that our day on Lake Pleasant ice was truly a fun-filled educational experience. And, when discussion turned to where to fish the next day, everyone voted to return to Lake Pleasant. □

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