

# A NEW RIVER WALLEYE ANGLER

## LT. RAYMOND FLETCHER GETS INTRODUCED TO WALLEYES

BY TERRY BITZ OF  
OUTDOOR CONVERGENCE

Walleye have never ranked as my favorite fish to pursue, but one of my favorite fishing trips of the year is to fish for walleye on the Fox River near DePere as the fish make their spring spawning run from Green Bay.

This year, Bill and I had a guest joining us for the annual trip, Lieutenant Raymond Fletcher. Raymond is a civil engineer for the Navy and is currently stationed at the Great Lakes Naval Base.

This would be Raymond's first exposure to river fishing for walleye and it would quite an introduction as fishing for walleye on the Fox is an event. Not only can the fishing be quite spectacular, it draws a huge amount of anglers. I told Raymond as we headed to the river that we could expect company as the water would eventually be packed full of boats.

We launched the boat just after sunrise into the muddy, stained water and motored up to near the dam. We would start a drift at just above a deep hole and allow the boat to drift downriver to try and gauge where the fish were at. It would also give us a chance to observe other anglers to see if they were catching fish.

We were using 3/8 ounce jigs tipped with fathead minnows. We started out using three different colors in order to try and determine if the fish had a color preference. The fish can be notoriously picky.

As we moved down stream, it became quickly apparent the fish were not holding in shallow water. We would see an occasional fish being caught and most of those were being hauled in by boats holding on the edge of the river channel.

I adjusted our drift to place the boat on the edge of the channel and almost immediately Bill set the hook on a fish. It was male walleye measuring about 17".

"At least we got the skunk out of the boat"; said Bill.



Lt. Raymond Fletcher Holding His First Walleye

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It did not take long for us to complete our drift in the fast river current. Bill had caught a couple of fish while Raymond and I had missed hooking a couple of our own.

After starting our next drift, I was able get on the board with my own walleye. Now it was Raymond's turn.

It would take about an hour, but Raymond finally connected with his first walleye. It was the cookie cutter sized fish that seemed to be flooding the river this year. We made sure to photograph the fish.

The north wind continued to pick up as the day progressed. It made boat control a bit more difficult and just as worse, kept us bundled up in layers of clothes. It felt like the temperature was dropping though I suspect it was just the wind chill. In previous years, we were able to shed out outer layers of clothes by the middle of the day, not on this day. It was cold. Most of the day we bundled up and wearing stocking caps and gloves.

I set the hook on a nice fish and it pulled some drag. This fish measured just over 22 inches.

Early in the afternoon, Raymond set the hook hard on a fish. Whatever was on the other end had no intention coming up to the surface. I looked over to see that his pole was doubled over and straight down below the boat. Just as it look like he was about to gain ground on the fish, it got off. A collective groan went out around the boat.

"That was a big fish"; said Bill giving voice to what was running through all of our minds.

Fishing the Fox on a weekend in the spring is like a dance. While trying to fish, you have to constantly keep your foot on the trolling motor to adjust your drift to try and avoid the many boats that are packing the river.

Complicating matters is that there are a small percentage of anglers that like to anchor in the current. If you hook a fish, you often end up trying to do multiple tasks and it can get hairy quickly.

In response to my comment to the lack of size of the fish, Ramond said, "These fish look plenty big to me."

We finished the day having caught almost 40 walleye with most of the fish measuring about 17 inches. We also did not land any fish over 24 inches which is a rarity. Still, everyone considered the outing a success; we caught fish and had a great time with a new friend.

"Lord, thank you for blessing us with a good day of fishing"; said Bill as we drove away from the launch.

Raymond and I replied, "Amen".