

There are times when I start to wonder if I still qualify to be an outdoorsman. In general, to be an outdoorsman requires one to spend time in the outdoors; something I have not done in over a month. The closest I came to an outdoor outing was watching fishing and hunting shows on the TV.

Thankfully the recent below normal temperatures have finally provided decent though not always great ice conditions throughout Southeast Wisconsin. The question for me last Saturday was not if I was going to go out for some ice fishing, but where.

My good friend Jeff Waltz of Ixonia had let me know a couple days before that he and his brother John were going to be headed to one of their favorite spots in Jefferson County to try for some northern pike.

I decided shortly before noon that I would go fish with them instead of a local lake; so I took the one hour drive up to the river backwater where the Waltz brothers were already fishing.

This location has historically produced some big pike, but it requires a half hour of brisk walking to get to. It is located pretty far off the beaten path which provides almost certain isolation, but if you get skunked it meant that a lot of effort was expended for no fish.

Unfortunately, when I arrived about 1:30 pm, Jeff informed me that they had not had even one flag indicator fly on their tipups in the 3 hours they had been fishing. With me adding 3 tipups to the 6 that they already had out, we hoped that we could find some active fish.

One hour later, the situation had not changed. No flags.

We decided to pack up and leave for another lake. While it was nice just to be out on the ice, we really wanted to land some fish and this spot seemed to be dead. In addition, John had to head home anyway which meant we would be back down to 6 tipups.

A 20 minute drive brought us to a very small and hardly occupied Waukesha County lake. Jeff said this lake was loaded with pike though we would be lucky to catch one over 24 inches.

We began to drill our holes in various locations, but as we moved towards a deeper bay, the ice started making a strange cracking noise as we walked. Jeff is an experienced and diehard ice angler who is willing to fish on ice thinner than I like to, but in this case even he was nervous about the ice. We decided to stay out of that bay.

Within minutes of getting my first tipup rigged with a minnow, the flag indicator flew on it and the shaft was spinning indicating that a fish was running with the bait. Unfortunately it must have been a small fish as the only thing I was left with after attempting to set the hook was limp line.

We finished putting out our tipups and it wasn't long before Jeff had his first tipup flag fly which ended up being a 20 inch pike. We were finally on the board.

Over the next hour we would get an occasional flag that would produce a relatively a small pike between 20 to 22 inches.

About 30 minutes before dark, we had one of those flurries of activity where a flag would pop up and while landing the fish another flag would fly. It kept us scrambling to keep up.

At one time I set the hook on what felt like a tiny pike, but when I yanked the fish through the hole it turned out to be a fat perch measuring 12 inches long. After a couple quick photos, I let the fish go figuring that it wasn't what I was fishing for and the one fish wouldn't make a meal.

Another fisherman noticing the large fish came over and told us his kids had also caught 2 fat perch measuring 8 and 9 inches. It appears that this little lake is a sleeper location for some big perch.

By the time we decided to pack up and leave, we had landed about a dozen pike and lost another half dozen. It was definitely nice to get out on the ice and get some fishing action even if the pike were small. As we walked off the ice, the topic of conversation mostly centered around the big perch that obviously inhabit that lake. The next time I go there, I intend to target those big perch and maybe bring home a handful for a meal.

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