

Last week, I finally had the chance to do something that I have wanted to do for several years. Spend a day in late June fishing for smallmouth bass (smallies) on Lake Mendota in Madison.

To make the day as productive as possible, Kristy and I went out with fishing guide and friend Lee Tauchen of Today's Angler Guide Service.

As you will probably recall, it was very hot last week and the day we went out, it was forecasted to be in the mid 90's. Lee however, was very upbeat. He explained that normally this time of year the smallies have finished spawning and relocated from the shallower flats and underwater humps to the outer weedlines. There a leech suspended under a slip bobber this time of year is almost a guaranteed way to put fish in the boat.

According to Lee, the recent weather conditions along with the season fish patterns added up to a good bite. He was having days with 40 or more fish being caught and commonly catching multiple fish over 18".

So we launched from Warner Park with high expectations and lots of ice water and sunscreen to do battle with those scrappy brown fighters.

First up was a weedline located on the eastern side of the lake. We set the slip bobber depth to about 9 feet and put leeches on the 1/16 oz jig heads that were suspended under the bobbers on 8lb monofilament.

When I asked Lee about his choice of line, he said "I used to use 6lb test, but too many clients had lost big fish on it so I went up to 8 lbs."

Lee also set up a couple of drop shot rigs that were rigged with Berkley Gulp leeches. These rods were placed on rod holders on each side of the boat to pick up "bonus" fish.

The basic tactic was to cast out a short distance, allow the bait to settle to its set depth and let it sit there for about 30 seconds. If there wasn't a bite, then we would reel the bait back about 5 feet and again allow the bait to settle. We would do this until we either had the bait back to the boat or hooked up with a fish.

The idea according to Lee was for us to find a concentration of fish in a feeding mood. If we were able to get some consistent action, then we would anchor up and fish that spot until the bite slowed. Then we would move on.

Well we did pick up a few fish, but not the action we wanted. So we moved to another spot on the east side of the lake which also gave us a good view of the state capitol building.

We did a little better in this location picking up a number of fish on both the live bait and the drop shot rigs. One of Lee's fish was a healthy bass over 16". However, the bite was

not concentrated on one spot so Lee never anchored up and instead we kept moving up and down the weedline.

The next stop was on south side of the lake where we found our best action of the day. Again, the bite was not on any specific spot, but we would pick up an occasional fish and never went for a real long period without a bite.

During this time, the wind had picked up considerably and felt more like 20mph than the forecasted 15mph. Lee was kept busy manning the trolling motors, netting our fish, watching the drop shot rods and his own bobber.

We probably stayed in that location for 2 hours before heading to a couple of other spots to finish out our trip

In the end, we had caught 17 smallies most between 14" to 16", a couple walleye, 1 largemouth bass, 1 white bass, and 1 large bluegill. Kristy and I thought that was pretty good for about 5 hrs of fishing. However, Lee said it was a relatively slow day and was disappointed that we did not come across any fish larger than 18". I certainly wouldn't mind having more "slow" days like that, but I guess that shows how good a fishery Mendota is and that Lee knows how to put people on fish.

I definitely plan to make trips to Mendota for smallies a more regular occurrence.

Lee Tauchen is a multi-species guide on the Madison lakes and the Wisconsin River from April through June. He guides exclusively for muskie in Minnesota on Lake Mille Lacs and surrounding waters from July through November. He can be reached at 608-444-2180.