

When hiring a guide, I believe that the ultimate goal should be learning new methods and tactics for catching fish. Finding a hotspot or catching fish for me is secondary.

That was my purpose last year when my wife and I went out with friend and guide Lee Tauchen to fish for smallmouth bass on Lake Mendota.

When our day was done with Tauchen we had landed almost 20 smallies in 6 hours of fishing. I recall him describing the outing as “below average”. I decided right then that I would return this year to put what I learned into practice.

This year my son Devin joined Kristy and I to chase smallies on our own on Mendota.

Before heading out on the water we stopped at the local bait store to get some jumbo leeches and a fishing report. We also talked to some anglers pulling off lake as we were launching.

The news wasn't great from either source with both indicating the smallie bite was slow.

The other not so positive news was that the wind was already blowing at 15mph. At almost twice the size of Lake Geneva, Mendota can develop large waves and I was concerned that we were going to have trouble holding near the weedlines.

We launched the boat and headed for our first destination across the rough water. Once there we rigged up our poles with slip-bobbers and leeches which is considered the best method this time of year to catch smallies on Mendota.

I also set up one rod in a rod holder with a drop-shot rig baited with a Berkley Gulp leech.

We were over halfway through our drift when I hooked into a 15 inch smallie. A short time later, my wife hooked into a 13” whitebass that jumped and fought more like a largemouth bass.

Right about that time, I noticed the wind had backed off considerably and was down to maybe 10 miles per hour. Things were definitely looking up.

About 15 minutes later a 17” smallie inhaled the Gulp Leech and Devin landed the third fish of the day. When Devin caught a 15 inch walleye just minutes later, I was really starting to believe we had dialed in the bite.

That's when the wind died.

As most fishermen know, a bright sunny day without wind is not good for the fishing. This case was no different as the bite died with the wind.

We left the lake for lunch then returned an hour later to find the lake in the same state, almost flat calm.

I decided to head to a point on the southeast side of the lake and we were fishing for a short time when Devin hooked a fish, but got his line cut. That likely meant one thing, a northern pike had grabbed his leech and its sharp teeth had cut the line.

I had just finished getting him rigged back up when the drag on the drop shot rig was sounding indicating a fish was one.

It turned out to be a pike and I was lucky to land it without the line getting cut. We moved to a different location figuring the pike were dominating that point.

We spent the next hour on the calm water not finding any fish and getting roasted in the sun.

It was obvious that the smallies were unlikely to cooperate so I decided that catching pike, even small ones were preferable to catching nothing. So we went back to the point, put on some deep diving crankbaits, steel leaders and started casting.

Devin hooked into and landed a healthy 24 inch pike. Not big, but at least a fish. A short time later I hooked into one that felt like it was buried down in the weeds. However, when it made a strong run, I knew it was a good size fish.

Considering I wasn't using my heavier pike gear, I had to allow the fish to make several runs before it was near the surface and in a position for Devin. The pike when landed turned out to be a 35 inches long. We quickly snapped a couple of photos then got the fish quickly back in the water. We then called it a day and headed home.

We definitely did not catch the smallmouth bass like I wanted to. I think the weather conditions were the biggest reasons and my lack of experience fishing smallies on this large lake was also a contributing factor.

However, it's tough to complain when you put a 35 inch pike in the boat.

Terry