

GREAT OUTDOORS

The wonders of technology

Electronics add another dimension to fishing



DALE BOWMAN

WILLIAMS BAY, Wis. — We began jigging for yellow perch in sand grass on Geneva Lake. But Friday was more about electronics than about catching big smallmouth bass with perch.

“It is an amazing time with technology,” Mark O’Neill said. “People spend a lot of money on this and only use about 20 percent of it.”

His moment of recognition came by accident. When he bought a new boat, electronics and a map chip for Geneva, the map was way off. That began a process that led through Dr. Bruce Samson, a Doctor Sonar, and O’Neill doing his own mapping.

“In the process, I learned way more about the lake,” he said.

O’Neill learned so much about electronics that he began teaching classes for Lowrance at Cabela’s and clubs. His guiding is more for on-water teaching of electronics. Throughout the day Friday, he took snapshots off his electronics when he saw something he could use in teaching.

O’Neill comes by his technical bent naturally. He is an engineer who designs transmissions for NASCAR at Andrews Products in Mount Prospect.

“In between, I go fishing,” he said.

We began the frosty dawn by putting 20 perch in the live well, jigging yellow ice jigs with Willy Worms tipped with a chunk of night crawler. With the colored jighead, it’s easier to see when a small perch nibbles. That basic fishing set the tone.

For fishing smallmouth with perch, O’Neill uses a modified



Learning more about electronics has paid off on Geneva Lake for Mark O’Neill (left) with big smallmouth bass, such as this one (top right). Dale Bowman (bottom right) grins over the 19-inch smallmouth that started the day. | DALE BOWMAN/FOR SUN-TIMES MEDIA

Geneva rig on medium St. Croix Avid spinning rods: 8-pound P-Line CXX with a slip sinker (a stand-up sinker) and a No. 4 hook.

“If you go bigger on the hook, you get less bites,” O’Neill said. “Chances are we will miss some fish, but we will get more bites.”

The perch are hooked through the lip, cast out and allowed to sink to the bottom. The bail is left open. When a smallmouth picks up a perch, the run is allowed. When it stops, it’s time to reel down and set the hook.

It takes touch. As O’Neill put it: “A lot of things have to go right.”

It took us six misses before I boated the first, a 19-incher.

“I am not targeting 50-fish days,” O’Neill said. “My target is 20-inch smallmouth.”

In the summer, smallmouth

SHOWTIME

What: Chicago’s only fly show, sponsored by ISA Bassbuggers and DRIFT.

Who: Regional vendors, fly-tyers, guides, casting instructors (including spey).

When: 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday.

Where: Batavia VFW.

Tickets: \$10; 9 and younger, free.

Free parking.

Info: illinois-smallmouthalliance.net.

are on the deeper secondary structure. But they are beginning the winter shift. We did better shallower, on primary drop-offs in 22 to 26 feet.

Friday was O’Neill’s birthday, which used to be his last fishing

day. But with his improved use of electronics, he has begun fishing longer.

“I usually go to Thanksgiving,” O’Neill said. “The only reason I stop then is you start to see salt on the road. The last two years, I was able to fish on Thanksgiving. Then it is skiing at Wilmot the next week.”

We ended up going about 6-for-20, with the longest a 20-incher by O’Neill.

To get out of the wind, O’Neill pulled into Williams Bay for a small hump a Lake Geneva Fishing Club member told him about. He found it.

As he stowed gear, I missed a couple, then caught a 15-incher to cap the day.

Yes, it was time.

For information about O’Neill, go to structure-fishing.com.

BUCK OF THE WEEK

Justin Kelm of Lockport arrowed an “awesome early-season 9-pointer” on the afternoon of Oct. 6 after a cold front pushed through. Kelm said the 250-pound buck already was pushing a doe.

Send nominations by Facebook (Dale Bowman), Twitter (@BowmanOutside) or email (straycasts@sbcglobal.net).



Hunting

Hunting for pheasants, rabbits, quail and partridge opens Saturday. Corn harvest through Sunday was 74 percent statewide. ... Deer harvest by bowhunters continues to lag. It was at 17,967 through Sunday, compared with 19,225 at the same time last year.

Stray cast

Lou Reed/Buck Perry.