

Underwater Tactics: Bass on the rocks

by Ken_Cook

Even without a calendar and temperature changes, there's an easy way to mark the arrival of summer: the massive quantities of pleasure boaters taking to local lakes. Now don't get me wrong, I love being out on the water as much as anybody and I understand that people would want to ski or tube or just enjoy the scenery. But if you are like me and trying to catch a fish, you'd prefer to avoid the traffic. Ken Cook is the 1991 Bassmaster Classic champion and a 14-time Classic qualifier. A former fisheries biologist, Cook lives on his ranch in Meers, Okla. So when looking for a place to catch bass that's usually off the radar for most pleasure boats, you can either target the really skinny water in the backs of coves or head for the riprap. Though skiers might not enjoy running wide open across the jagged rocks, these areas are home to quality fish just about any time of year. And if you don't have a boat - or if the ramp is too crowded to launch - you can fish these areas from the bank, too. For those of you who might not know, riprap is a man-made structure of natural rock and/or chunks of concrete that is stacked on the shore to prevent waves from eroding the banks and - in the case of navigable rivers - maintain channel depths. You can find these areas near dams or bridges, and most pros like myself never pass these areas up when fishing a tournament. Riprap usually signals that there is a steep bank with close access to deep water and a current - all recipes for success when bass fishing. Within the riprap there is ideal habitat for crawfish as well as other baitfish that come in from deeper water to feed on the algae. Bass, being opportunistic feeders, move into the riprap looking for easy meals on this type of prey. For fishing riprap, I like a crankbait like most people. But when the bass are holding deeper than the crankbait will dive, I switch to a three-quarter-ounce spinnerbait with two willow leaf blades. This is especially effective in the summer with the numbers of shad in and around the riprap. Blue and metal flake colors match the baitfish, but I put the spinnerbait over the top by adding a Berkley PowerBait 4-inch Bungee Twin Tail Grub. I let the heavy spinnerbait sink to the bottom and fish it with a hop-and-stop retrieve that bounces off the rocks. Because of the abrasive rocks, I rig this bait with 20-pound Berkley Trilene MAXX on a high-speed Abu Garcia REVO Premier reel and a 6-foot-10-inch medium-heavy Fenwick Elite Tech rod designed for spinnerbait fishing. If the bass are bunched together in a tight spot like a corner or culvert, I will pick up a spinning rod and cast soft plastics on a quarter-ounce jig head. I'll cast a PowerBait 3-inch Power Grub on 10-pound Berkley Trilene 100% fluorocarbon line from as many different angles to make sure I get to as many bass as I can in that area. Though there could be hundreds of feet or a couple miles of riprap, not all areas will hold fish. Look for areas with prominent features or some kind of irregularity like a corner, point or proximity to a channel. Also, look for area where the riprap ends and the normal bottom begins. This can be in anywhere from 6-12 feet of water and bass will often relate to that edge and wait there for an easy meal. Once you figure out what that depth is, you can focus your baits in that depth of water in hopes of enticing a bass to strike. I've caught a lot of bass out of riprap in my career. And while it might just look like a bunch of rocks to all the other boaters out there on the water, once you figure out how to locate and catch fish out of these areas, you may decide to fish there all year long.

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