

The Lake Ozark angling option

by Lee Keck

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Known to many as one of the top largemouth bass lakes in the Midwest, Missouri's Lake of the Ozarks draws thousands of bass anglers every year. In fact, Bassmaster Magazine recently listed Lake of the Ozarks as one of the top 30 bass fishing lakes in the nation.

It was the lure of some of this almost legendary bass fishing that brought Outdoor Guide Magazine editor Bobby Whitehead to this lake a few years ago. Whitehead loves to fish and an invitation to sample some great Lake of the Ozarks fishing was simply too much to resist.

But, as every bass angler realizes, there are certain times of the year when the largemouth action slows to a crawl. One of these times happens to be just after the bass spawn when these fish slip off to some unknown location to sulk and slowly recover from the rigors of the annual spawn.

It just so happened that Whitehead's adventure occurred right during this period. Local bass anglers and guides were all reporting poor fishing success. The bass bite at this time was basically nonexistent.

Though Alhonna Resort, his lodging facility, offered all the amenities one could need, he came here to go fishing. And, now any hope of some great largemouth bass fishing action was quickly fading.

For a fisherman, this was a true dilemma. What does a Lake of the Ozarks' angler do when the bass are not biting?

This is when Jack Uxa, one of Lake of the Ozarks top fishing guides, came to the rescue. With many years of guiding experience under his belt, he has experienced these difficult times on numerous occasions.

"We've got several options and they will all provide great fishing fun," said the veteran fishing guide. "We can go deep for crappie, catch some quality blue catfish or even test your skills at landing a few of this lake's huge gar."

After hearing this, Whitehead's rather sorrowful expression changed to glee.

"Let's try doing a bit of all of these options," Whitehead quickly replied. "They all sound like great fun."

Soon, the anglers were hopping in a boat and heading for one of Uxa's well-established fishing areas.

"Before we try for the other species, let's catch a few of these catfish," Uxa said. "We'll throw out a few of jugs baited with chunks of baitfish and see what we catch."

It was the hottest part of the day and Whitehead was really not expecting much to happen from this effort. Still, Uxa busied himself baiting hooks and throwing out jugs. Whitehead's job was to watch the jugs for any action.

By the time the third hook was baited and tossed in the water, Whitehead announced that one of the jugs was bobbing and heading down the lake.

After a brief chase, a plump three-pound blue catfish was hauled in the boat. By then, a second jug was heading downstream. This time, the fish was bigger and weighed nearly five pounds.

Whitehead was having a great time hauling in catfish after catfish. The action finally slowed after about two hours and Uxa announced it was time to go.

"Now we're going to try something really fun," he said while picking up the remaining jugs. "We're going to use relatively light spinning gear and catch a few gar."

Uxa's gar rigs were a bit different than typical fishing tackle. The spinning reels were spooled with a light braided line.

The lures were one-quarter-ounce Roadrunners with the hook point removed. In place of the hook, Uxa had attached a five-inch piece of frayed rope. "Just watch for surfacing gar and make a quick cast ahead of the fish," he explained. "Then reel the lure in just a foot or two beneath the surface."

After the third cast, Whitehead found himself battling one of these toothy creatures. The gar would hit the lure and quickly find their teeth tangled in the rope.

"Now, this is what I'd call real fun," Whitehead said while attempting to land a second fish. "These are big fish and they really put up quite a fight."

From that point on, Whitehead was hooked on gar fishing. Even during a relatively productive crappie outing the next day, he was anxious to do a bit more gar fishing.

During the three or so total hours of gar fishing, the anglers hooked dozens of big gar. Some of the fish would likely measure four or more feet in length. While not all of the big fish were landed, they would remain on the line long enough to enjoy an exciting battle.

"I have to admit that largemouth bass are the bread-and-butter fish for most Lake of the Ozarks guides, including me," Uxa added. "Still, there are plenty of ways to get out and enjoy some great fishing action when the bass are not biting."

Individuals interested in learning more about Uxa's guide service can call (573)434-2570 or see the website www.fishinglakeoftheozarks.com. For additional information regarding lodging, dining and other activities, call the Lake of the Ozarks CVB at (800) FUN-LAKE.

"There is always some kind of fishing action to be enjoyed here at the lake," Uxa added.

"Most of the time we can enjoy excellent bass fishing, but there are always plenty of other options for anglers."