

Teeth, eyes & fantastic fillets

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By JOHN L. SLOAN

“Hard to find a better eating fish than a walter.” Said Harold Dotson. “They aren’t much to look at and they don’t put up much of a fight but they sure plate up right nice.” Made me look again at the five fish cooling on the bag of ice in the Coleman cooler. I was starting to get hungry.

A walter is a slang name for a walleye. They are a member of the pike family and have all the attendant teeth that go with that group. They also have weird eyes. They are often called “marble eyes”. In daylight, they appear to be blind.

Senor Dotson and I were putting along on the carp arc, a small pontoon boat with a 25-hp kicker and a pump that pumped water right out of the lake and allowed a hot fisherman to cool off. We had four rods in holders-two with night crawler rigs and two with weighted, long-lipped crankbaits. The crawler rigs were winning 4-1.

We were just above the Hurricane Bridge on Center Hill and it was just about as hot as you would expect a July day to be. In a few days, the holiday crowd would take over the water but this particular afternoon, we had the lake just about to ourselves. My crawler rod bowed and I “sot the hook”. This time it was not the bottom and in short, order, walter number six graced the bottom of the cooler.

We finished up with a total of eight that afternoon and enjoyed a mouth-watering dinner that night. Walleye really are great table fare. The fillets are firm, white, and sizable considering the skinny body on the fish.

Over the years, I have caught quite a few walleye and their cousin the sauger and a crossbreed thing called a saugeye. As stated earlier, you can catch them a variety of ways. My favorite is on a 1/8 ounce jig and twister tail, often tipped with a minnow. That style of fishing is not nearly as much work as trolling the big rigs.

However, when using the light, 6-8 pound line, you must attach a couple feet of light wire leader or the toothy suckers will bite the line in two.

Walleye are phlebotomists. They love to draw blood. If they can't bite you, they will try to fin you with a high, needle sharp dorsal fin. If that fails, they will figure a way to get the hook in your finger.

After a day of successful walleye fishing, I am usually about a quart low. The sight of them turning golden brown quickly brings me back to full.

There is no better shore lunch known to man than freshly caught walleye, French fries, sliced onion and canned corn or my preference, canned, cut asparagus.

In Canada, I have enjoyed many a lakeside repast just like that. Mickey Pope was my favorite walleye partner and he could flat fillet a walleye while I built the fire. We caught a ton of fish together.

As far as I am concerned, the best walleye fishing is in Canada. I have caught them all over the country. One cold, blustery day, somewhere in Ontario, we took a day off from bear hunting to catch around 100.

We had many, as in over 30, that topped four pounds. You throw those back. The 2-pounders are the best eating. The problem with Canadian walleye fishing is the presence of their larger, toothier, meaner cousin, the Northern Pike. They tear up a lot of tackle. (Mickey called them "Normans". Never found out why.)

One way to fish for them you don't see much anymore is under the lights. There was a time; here in TN that fishing at night under floating lights or hanging lanterns was the way to catch walleye. It was a simple kind of fishing. An enjoyable way to spend a few nocturnal hours. Some nights the bluffs on Center Hill would be lit up like a New York street.

You simply anchored on a likely drop-off, one where you felt sure the fish would be and when it got dark, you set out your lights. Soon, you would have baitfish schooling under the lights.

You could then either use the baitfish as bait or drop a minnow straight down under the school. No telling what you might catch but often it would be a walleye.

They are an easy fish to fillet...maybe the easiest. Zip-zip and you have a beautiful fillet.

Place it in icy salt water to soak for a few minute then rinse well. In a bowl, mix ½-cup buttermilk and ½ cup Half-and-Half with two eggs. Beat well. Dip fillets and shake in well-seasoned cornmeal. Fry quickly in good oil heated to 400 degrees. When it is golden brown, it is ready to eat. Add a homegrown and some onion and whatever you like and we are talking a repast suitable for the Solon.

I think I shall have some tonight.

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