

What to do when it's broiling hot?

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Just fish in the DAM SHADE

By JOHN L. SLOAN, June 8, 2011

It is a cool, 97 degrees. Even the trees are sweating. Not Judge Dave Durham, fishing guide Richard Simms and I. We are cool and comfortable bobbing gently in the shade of Chickamauga Dam. The dam rears high above us, providing plenty of cool shade. We are fishing for bluegill.

However, that is just temporary. The 'gills are just for bait. We are cat fishing on a day that will approach record heat. Probably we will use chicken breasts, cut in strips. The 'gills are just for insurance.

We have plenty of bait and I drop a half of one fish down with a heavy weight. In fact, we all do. Not much happens but we bob along, not even starting to sweat. Fifteen minutes and no action. Time to go to plan B.

"We have to go back in the holes." Says Simms, our host and guide. With his number of days on those waters, it pays to listen, but wait. The holes are coffin like chutes that go back 50-yards under the dam. That is where the water comes out when they generate. It is even cooler and darker in there.

I am fishing a piece of chicken breast, Simms' favorite bait on 10-pound line and a medium rod. Only the lightest of sinker is used. Tap!

I set the hook. The first of my three rapid-fire catfish hits the boat. In quick succession, Simms tags them and releases them. He has tagged and released 100 so far this year. Hiz Honor joins me in pitching into the hole and we both hook up. Mine weighs 13 pounds and his 10.

The day has begun.

Constantly listening for the siren that gives you three minutes warning they are going to generate, we move from hole to hole, steadily catching fish after fish and yet, not a drop of sweat. We lose count of the number of fish at 25 but we are sure we have caught and released close 175 pounds of sleek catfish, both blues and channel cats. Simms is busy not only catching his share of the fish but using the grippers to land ours.

The siren blares and we quickly back out and allow plenty of room for the flow of water that the generators produce. The birds swarm down and we drift with the current, in and around eddies catching a variety of fish including catfish. Then it is time to brave the sun for a while.

We drift downstream, letting the current move us as we drag the chicken breast strips behind us. The action is steady and though the sun beats down, a breeze helps and the water is cool.

Simms guides many days a year on Chickamauga and the tailwaters of the dam. He constantly produces for his clients, a variety of fish including catfish, stripers, crappie, bluegill and all three varieties of bass.

In fact, last Saturday, we caught a couple respectable smallmouth in the 2.5-4.5 pound range. You can reach him at Scenic City Fishing Charters, Inc. www.sceniccityfishing.com 423/894-3684.

He provides everything you need to do as we did, catch and release over 200 pounds of fish in less than seven hours. Of course, you can keep a bunch to eat if you like and are willing to clean them. We quit fishing at noon, stopped for a great lunch and were back in Lebanon by 4:30.

Hiz Honor, in spite of a busy work schedule and the excitement of an upcoming African trip with the other Hiz Honor, Bob Hamilton, did well. He caught a lot of fish, several in the 10-pound class. Of course, none as big as mine.

When it gets broiling hot, as it was last Saturday, just fish in the dam shade. Be sure, read the caution signs, use some common sense, and always...always, wear your flotation device.

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