

First Ice: The Hunt for Walleyes

By: Tony Roach

I love all the seasonal changes—each and every one brings new experiences, new challenges. My wife often refers to it as the seasonal switch, for it sometimes happens just that fast. At no time is this more apparent than the transition from my fall hunting season to my early-ice walleye fishing. Sitting in a stand, staring at trees for days on end, my mind starts shifting toward ice and big walleyes. What gear will I need to get the job done? What's new on the ice product scene? And man, sure hope it stays cool enough to walk on some hard water pretty soon.

For me, the passion for ice fishing lies in the challenge of the hunt. How to find the fish, and then to figure out what they want to eat. First ice is one of the most exciting times— a new season, a new challenge, a new hunt!



The hunt always begins with finding the fish. For me, that means drilling holes at varying depths along the transition edges of key walleye structures—mudflats, gravel bars, rock reefs. In smaller lakes drill over weedlines adjacent to sharp drop offs. In bodies of water with lots of possible locations, I tend to start looking on smaller mid-lake structures, and eventually work my way up to larger structures. Whether big or small the answer to this equation is simple—limit your drilling to points, inside turns, and steep breaklines near feeding flats. Be sure to vary the depths of your holes along any particular structure. This keeps you from missing any fish that might slide up on top of the flat, or the ones that filter off the breakline to feed. If you're not marking fish with electronics or catching a few, crank up the auger, and keep on drilling. Just like trolling open water, the name of the game is covering ground. The walleyes can only hide so long.

Just a few short years ago, this style of hunting for fish on ice was extremely difficult. Thanks to great companies, like StrikeMaster, my job as a crazy ice driller keeps getting easier. Using my new Lazer Pro auger, I can drill faster, safer, cleaner and certainly easier than ever before. I absolutely love this machine—it is the ultimate ice auger. Anglers won't believe the way this thing performs out there.

Working high percentage areas with my Lazer Pro is a huge factor in my hard water success. Drilling and getting to the fish faster is always key.

Again, if the walleyes aren't showing themselves at one depth or location, crank up the auger and start rippin'. But if you find fish on the points and inside turns, stick around because there's a good chance the area is filled with walleyes.

Just like you, I'm hardcore outdoorsmen—just really like to hunt and catch fish. In a few short months the switch will again be flipped. The hunt will be on and new challenges await. See you out there!