

Fishing Rip-Rap in Rivers

My favorite type of structure without a doubt is rip-rap. Rip-rap can best be defined as rocks or concrete placed on banks for erosion control. Rip-rap is most commonly found on the outside bends of a river, around bridge footings, and along seawalls. Rip-rap banks provide excellent cover for crayfish and other forage, drawing many species to its bounty. For the sake of this article, mid-stream rock piles will be included.

What to use

Crankbaits. I find the most effective bait for covering rip-rap quickly is a crankbait. I prefer a crank with a crayfish pattern, but, of course, you always want to “match the hatch”.

Tubes. The most versatile tool in your box is the tube. If you are working rip-rap, you will want to Texas-rig your tube to keep the hook from hanging up between rocks.

Jigs. Crayfish are the most prevalent forage found in rip-rap. A jig with a craw trailer can be deadly.

Spinnerbaits. Minnows like to school over rip-rap. Slow rolling a spinnerbait will draw fish up from the rocks.

Techniques

Fish it parallel! Regardless of what you are using, fish it as close to parallel with the bank as possible. I learned that one hot June morning when I took my dad out on my favorite flow for some smallie fishing. Not being a seasoned basser, my dad kicked my backside from the back of my boat. I was fishing perpendicular to the bank while he was throwing at a slight angle to the bank and dragging his tube behind the boat, thus keeping his bait in the strike zone longer. If you choose a crankbait, select one that runs slightly deeper than the water you are fishing. You want to make the crank to tick the rocks, creating noise and giving it an erratic action. Most of your strikes will come right after the bait hits a rock. For tubes, I like to use a series of three to four hops and hesitate for a few seconds before hopping it again. A fast retrieve with an occasional rip of the rod to produce an erratic swimming action is an excellent way to draw some nasty strikes. When using jigs with a craw trailer, I will always use a swimming action by lifting and lowering the rod letting the bait settle back to the bottom for a few seconds before continuing. Nothing will grab the attention of a smallie faster than the sight of a crayfish darting around. When the fish are tight-jawed, sometime a little wiggle while the jig rests on the bottom will get some pickups. Slow rolling a spinnerbait is the best way to draw fish up from between the rocks. Work the bait slowly letting it crawl over the rocks and then sink down between them before lifting it again.

Rock piles and shoals

Have you ever drifted down a deep stretch of river and seen a disturbance on the surface and wondered what was causing it? Chances are it's a shoal or a rock pile. Shoals and rock piles break the current and therefore attract fish. Fish tend to face into the current and wait for food to drift by so they can dart out and grab it. The disturbance you see on the surface is actually downstream from the obstruction, so your casts need to be several feet in front of the boil. Fish will locate themselves all around the shoal so you need to work it thoroughly. Start at the front. Yes the front. As the water lifts it leaves a pocket of slack water in front of the shoal. Work the sides next. Work the entire length of the side of the structure as fish will stage behind anything that breaks the current. When you finally get to the back, most of the fish will stage closer to the sides and you will get them when you work the sides, but occasionally you will find fish in the slack water directly behind the structure. Regardless of where on the shoal you are fishing, remember to cast upstream and work your bait back with the current. Good fishing!