

## Fishing for Smallies at Night on Dale Hollow

Although I am not a native Tennessean, I have spent many an evening on Dale Hollow chasing after the glorious smallmouth. Without doubt there is no better water to find the smallie of a lifetime. With the slot limit in place, the quality has certainly gotten better in recent years. If there is a place that you have a chance at a 6 pound plus fish, this is it.

As the water temperatures raise and boat traffic increases, your best chances of successful smallmouth fishing is without doubt at night from mid to late June thorough summer. Make no mistake, the fish are still feeding and will bite aggressively at times. You can still catch some fish during June during low light conditions but on sunny days, stay in the A/C during the day and spend your time under the stars.

It is important to note that smallmouth at this time of year are solidly in their summer pattern and a highland reservoir like Dale Hollow makes them quite predictable during this seasonal pattern. I have found the majority of my fish on the lower end of the lake but there are certainly fish to be caught in other areas. The lower end just has a plethora of areas that meet the criteria that we are looking for, main lake points and islands adjacent to deep water. A lot of guys like to fish grass beds but I have personally had the best luck fishing rocky points surrounded by deep water. By deep water, you could be fishing a point that is 15' on the crest, then dropping to 50, 60, 70 or even 80' of water at the break. As typical summer pattern dictates, the fish will be where there is access to food and security in close proximity. With the ultra clear water at Dale Hollow, the security part of the equation is even more prevalent. The lake is very infertile and water clarity yields secchi disk readings of nearly 20' in the summer. Dissolved oxygen content is good to great depths even during the summer months. Don't be afraid to fish up in 40' of water to find the fish.

Equipment is key to night time smallie trips. Even if you are familiar with the lake, it gets REALLY dark at night. There are little or no identifiable landmarks to aid in navigation. I HIGHLY recommend a GPS with a detailed map of the lake. This will aid in making long runs when you can't see the front of your boat.

Before I got my GPS I was scared to venture too far from the dock. Now I am confident going anywhere that I want to go with no worries of getting lost. Make sure you have working running lights, this one is huge. In Tennessee you are legal to run WOT at night and lots of guys make use of that ability. Not only will you be ticketed, it could save your life. Black lights can be a valuable tool to make detecting bites a little easier. Coupled with fluorescent line, black lights can make a huge difference in detecting light bites. I personally don't like fluorescent line thus a black light doesn't serve me well. It is hard to say how many bites that have gone undetected but usually the fish bite pretty aggressively. With decent line and a good quality rod, detecting bites is usually not an issue. I have had bites that nearly jerked my rod from my hands from 30+ feet or more. I like a 6 1/2' G'Loomis MH casting rod with 12# fluorocarbon coated line such as Yo-Zuri Hybrid or P-Line CX Premium. The fluorocarbon gives you good abrasion resistance to combat the rocky terrain yet gives excellent sensitivity. I like a Shimano Curado 200B as a reel. A spinning outfit will work as well but I like the hook setting power of a fairly stout casting rig. Whatever reel you choose make sure that you have a good smooth drag that is set correctly from the start. You need enough to get a good hookset but enough give to let a good fish run. The smallies in Dale Hollow are a tad meaner than your average brozeback which is saying something. If you get a good one hooked with a drag to tight, kiss it goodbye. You can get these fish to bite a plethora of baits but I prefer soft plastics. My bait of choice is a 3.75" Hooked Up Bait Co. tube texas rigged with a 3/16<sup>th</sup> oz bullet weight. I also like a craw type bait such as a Gene Larew Salty Craw or a Zoom Critter Craw. Although not specific to the lake I really like the Mustad Ultra-Lock EWG hooks in a 2/0 size for the 3.75" tube size; they really hold the bait well and are very sharp and strong. Smoke colored tubes with purple flake, while green pumpkin and watermelon seed craws are my favorite colors.

I concentrate 100% on points off of the main lake. Points inside the bigger hollows can be productive as well depending on the depth and how deep into summer it is. I like rocky points with stepping breaks along the sides. Start about 40 yards inside the point, working all the way out to the tip and again 40 yards on the other side. Be very aware of boat positioning, you certainly do not want to be sitting on top of the fish. Start deeper then work shallower until you find the fish. Typically I like to start out by keeping my boat in 25-35' of water and cast to the first break. Do this and you are headed in the right direction. Fish perpendicular to the bank at first until you can establish where the fish are positioned. Once you have that figured out you can move to more of a parallel approach to your presentation. When fishing perpendicular, make sure to work the bait all the way to the boat, this will aid in finding the depth that the fish are using. If the bite slows, start the process over as they will move on you throughout the night. When you reach the tip of the

point, move out even farther from the bank. Typical of points, they can run quite a ways out into the lake. Maintain bottom contact at all times, this will dictate a slow presentation and some patience. You will be tempted to put on a heavier weight but your aggravation will compound as you begin to get hung more in the rocks; 3/16ths seems to be the best overall weight in most circumstances. As your bait falls over the breaks, this is usually when the bite will happen. Maintain a tight line as much as possible. It may be that you need to free spool a bit to keep contact with the bottom but keep a finger on that line. As typical with soft plastic techniques, be very aware of the feel of your bait. There are times when a fish will pick up your bait and head for deep water, giving a weightless feel to your lure. If you don't detect this quickly, the fish will be under you before you know it. Once you do figure it out, the bait has likely been spit and an opportunity for hookup lost. If you don't get bit on this point, move on to the next one. The key here is to keep yourself in productive areas, avoiding areas that are unlikely to hold fish. Pay attention to what produces and try to duplicate it exactly.

Happy Hunting.