3-pronged approach to Keowee bass

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
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Regardless of how you, me or the calendar feel about the early spring that arrived in the Upstate in March, the progression of time and temperature since then has put every fish that swims into its customary summer pattern.

That includes the largemouth and spotted bass living in Lake Keowee.

Summertime fishing at Keowee takes a three-pronged approach. Early and late in the day, bass, primarily spotted bass, will use long points and humps to feed on the surface. As the day wanes, those same bass will move off into deeper water and suspend — or basically just hang out like birds flying high in the sky, choosing not to relate to anything in particular.

At the same time, what relatively little fish holding structure is available at Keowee, mostly in the form of boat docks and other manmade structure, will also draw a few fish looking for relief from the summer sun.

Bass fishing guide Brad Fowler of Pendleton has been bass fishing Keowee since the days of his youth. He recalls when the predominantly largemouth bass fishery gave way to the spotted bass that were introduced back during the 1980s.

The bigger, some say more fickle, bass became outnumbered and outgunned. The upside is that a pretty consistent topwater bite emerged.

"Spotted bass found Keowee to their liking because there wasn't a lot of structure in the lake so spots tend to swim together in packs and move vertically in the water column," Fowler said.

Beginning at first light and lasting for only an hour or so — unless the random cloudy, windy day shows up — spotted bass will move up on long points, humps and other terrain located close to deep water to corral and feed on baitfish. A hard bait like a Heddon Spook Jr, Lucky Craft Sammy or any number of noisy top water plugs can create a flurry of action that comes and goes all too quickly.

"The remainder of the day those fish just roam," Fowler said. "It's like there's no rhyme or reason. They might hold 40 feet deep over 100 feet of water or they may hold 20 feet deep over 60 feet of water. Your best bet is to just bump around using a drop shot rig or a shaky head worm."

For the nomadic fisherman, keeping one eye on the water and one eye on the sonar is the best method. Knowing how to read and interpret your electronics is a must. Even the slightest indication of a mark out in open water could give away the location of a pelagic school of spots.



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Guide Brad Fowler says Keowee anglers will have their best luck using one of three approaches this summer.

The final phase of summer Keowee bassin' is man-made structure. Though the vast majority of homes that line Keowee's shoreline are as well manicured below the surface as they are above, some docks will hold bass simply due to their preferred location over a natural drop off or other terrain feature. Some may be dotted with an old stump or even a few pieces of woody cover.

"Most bass look to boat docks for shade," Fowler said. "A docked boat that hasn't moved in a while may collect algae and some baitfish or bream, but for the most part, it's relief from the sun that draws bass under docks."

Another option is to look for shade and vertical structure around one of several bridge crossings over the lake. The combination of shade, cover and moving water created by wind or current moving through the bottleneck makes bridge crossings and other concrete cover a potential summer holding spot. Whether he's fishing boat docks or bridge pilings, Fowler sticks to the two aforementioned vertical baits to do his bidding.

"I like to cast around the docks, but sometimes you'll have to just pitch the baits in there and work them out," he said. "In a location where I can easily put the boat over the fish, then it's a vertical presentation, shaking the baits and looking for that reaction bite."

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