Leave the hardware at home and still catch bass and trout

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
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To its credit, Lake Jocassee has become somewhat of a cottage industry for anglers who come equipped to fish it.

Being "equipped" means using downriggers to slow troll metal spoons and crank baits Great-Lakes style in an attempt to fool a hungry trout or even largemouth and spotted bass.

When it comes to catching fish, whether it be the numerous brown and rainbow trout or any of the several black bass species that call Lake Jocassee home, anglers have gotten away from the basics and tend to specialize in heavy tackle, such as downriggers and trolling spoons for trout or drop-shot rigs and jigging spoons for bass to get into deep waters at Jocassee.

However, when cold weather sets in, as it has over the last couple of weeks, sometimes less is more — with less meaning using old-fashioned minnows and light tackle to catch fish.

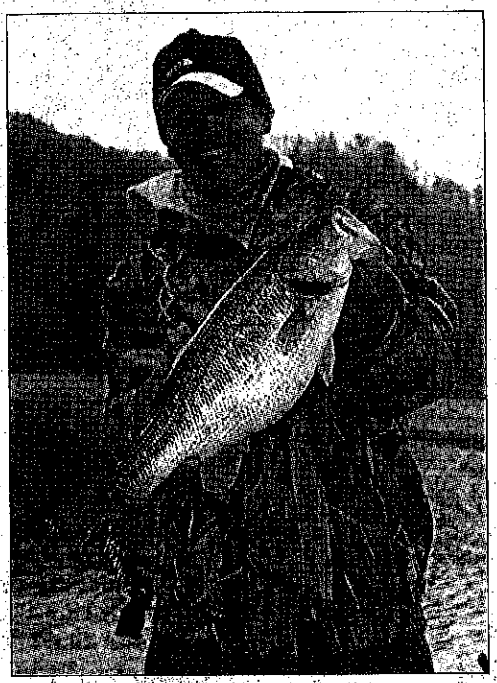
Slow-trolling live bait is a very productive tactic for catching striped bass and crappie in midland and piedmont reservoirs all over South Carolina. Fishing guide Steve Pietrykowski has used those tactics many times while catching striped bass and hybrids from Lake Hartwell. He's also learned from experience that deep-water fishing with live bait also produces extremely well at Lake Jocassee.

"Deep" at Jocassee is a relative term in the extreme. While 30 feet is extremely deep on the Santee-Cooper lakes and mid-level at lakes Murray, Hartwell and Wateree, a shallow flat on Lake Jocassee will run from 30-40 feet in depth.

"During the cooler months, we don't have to fish deep by Jocassee standards," Pietrykowski said. "The water column tends to even out and baitfish will seek out these shallow flats, which are readily found in the very backs of most of Jocassee's feeder creeks."

While medium and large store-bought minnows will also work, Pietrykowski prefers to match the hatch by cast netting blueback herring from nearby Lake Keowee, namely because netting bait from Jocassee is not permitted.

"I use light-action spinning tackle, six-pound test and 6.5-foot spinning rods," the guide said. "I do use a little different rig. It's a No. 4 mosquito hook to which I tie a three-inch dropper with a No. 10 treble hook as a stinger. Bass will usually just engulf the bait, but, since there are a lot of those first-year stocker sized trout in here too, the stinger will most often be what you catch the trout on."



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When the weather gets too cold and miserable to go fishing is the perfect time to head to Lake Jocassee for some of the best bass and trout action of the year.

Pietrykowski slows trolls with four rods from the stern of his boat and will vary the size-split shot, usually a No. 5 or a No. 7, to get the baits to different depths.

"Nowaday, people believe the only way to catch fish in this lake is by trolling a bunch of hardware," Pietrykowski said. "That stuff works; I do it all the time, but during the winter when the water temperatures are at their coldest, fish don't have to hold at 100 feet. We can catch them on live bait, using light tackle, anywhere from 20-to-40 feet deep."

PHILLIP GENTRY is the host of "Upstate Outdoors," a broadcast from noon to 2 p.m. Saturdays on WORD 106.3 FM. This week, the show will be talking live with Andy Montgomery, Bassmaster Classic qualifier from Blacksburg. "Upstate Outdoors" will be broadcasting live from the Greenville Boat Show at the TD Convention Center on Jan. 24. Contact Gentry at pgentry6@bellsouth.net.