

# GO FOR THE GOLD

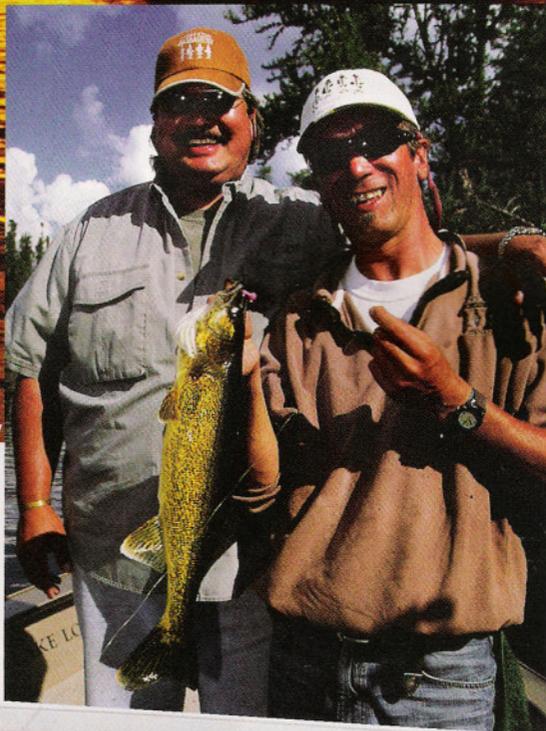
There's More Than One Way  
To Catch Canadian 'Eyes, 'Eh?

by Dave Csanda

**A**s experience grows, methods and tactics evolve. Canadian 'eyes are a case in point. Not so many years ago, anglers felt all they needed was a handful of jigheads and a couple packs of 3-inch twistertails to catch 'eyes. Just pitch 'em at a river mouth on any far-north fly-in, and freshly caught shorelunch was in the bag.

While that basic premise is indeed a good one and will pay off bigtime in most cases, it's not the only approach. Where far-north lakes are big, deep, and cold, and particularly where good numbers of lake trout roam the open basin, walleyes may remain in and around the warmer, darker water at river mouths for most of the open-water season. But where northern fly-in lakes are smaller, darker, and warmer, or where lakes lie at more southerly latitudes and warm to swimming temperatures in summer, walleyes spread throughout the lake sometime after spawning. And that's where alternative search tactics come into play.

Therefore, add a few more lures to your flight bag of tricks: notably bottom bouncers, spinners, soft-plastic crawlers, and crankbaits. Both will let you cover water quickly to locate walleyes on shoreline or midlake structures, determine walleye depth preference, and trigger strikes through increased speed. Once you have fish cornered, drop a jig down on their noses if you wish.



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## BOUNCIN' ACROSS CANADA

Bottom bouncers are such snag-resistant devices that they're natural options for drifting or trolling spinner-crawler combos across rock reefs and points—classic Canadian walleye structures. But the weak link has always been the lack of availability of livebait at fly-in destinations. Today, that's no problem. A wide array of soft-plastic substitutes fit the bill.

Scented soft plastics appeal to the walleye's sight, scent, and taste senses, and a thumping, flashing, wobbling blade alerts and draws 'em in for the final attack. With bouncers and spinners, nothing beats a 6-inch soft crawler in a natural color, such as Berkley's Power Crawler. Other companies offer similar 6-inch straight-tailed worms, although Power Crawlers are specifically scent- and taste-impregnated for walleyes and seem to be particularly effective.

Dress 'em on a classic 30-inch spinner snell with a #3 to #4 blade, typically with an orange or chartreuse blade pattern to match the stained water common in many Canadian lakes and river systems.

Add a 1/2-, 1-, or 1½-ounce bouncer to match the depth, typically ranging anywhere from 5 or 6 feet down to 15 or 20. You can get by with your spinning (jigging) rod with 8-pound line, although you're really better off with a 6½-foot medium casting rod spooled with about 10- or 12-pound test. So if you have room in your rod tube, pack another rod; it'll come in handy for crankbaiting, too.

If walleyes aren't stacked at river mouths, proceed out to the first few adjacent middepth structures, like long shoreline points, the ends of islands, saddles between islands or between an island and shore, or shallow midlake reefs projecting up near the surface—somewhere walleyes would logically disperse to if they leave the river mouth for better feeding conditions in summer. Then let your rig out on enough line to barely scratch bottom and begin trolling just fast enough to spin the blade, skipping across rocks without snagging. You'll be amazed by how much territory you can quickly cover.

Wham! First strike. The rod doubles over, and you fight the fish in. It should be a walleye, but it might be a toothy pike. Surprisingly, you manage to land

a large percentage of pike even on mono spinner rigs, because they're often hooked near the lips rather than down in the gullet. Still, expect a few casualties; your 2-hook harnesses eventually become single hooks, and finally, no hooks. Time to retie.

If the threat of bite-offs scares you, Lindy offers Heart-Of-Steel wire

spinner snells under the Little Joe label. Or tie up your own prior to your trip.

I recall one pass around a point on a fly-in where we triple-headered on a walleye, pike, and a lake trout. Who says only bass hit soft plastics?

## CRANKIN' CANADIAN 'EYES

Recent years have witnessed a growing use of crankbaits at Canadian camps, despite the fact that you're generally required to bend the barbs down on all your hooks to facilitate catch and release. No problem. Sacrifice a few treble hooks for the trip and replace them with barbed versions once you get home.

Crankbaits offer the dual versatility of casting and trolling, working anything from small, shallow, specific areas at slow speeds, to trolling deeper stretches at a more rapid pace.

Fact is, almost any crankbaits you pack for pike will catch walleyes, but by and large, they're a tad on the big side, with heavy hooks. So to the fray, add a few 3- to 4½-inch walleye crankbaits you'd likely use back home. These typically fall into the minnow-imitator and shad-bait categories, in both shallow-running and deep-diving versions. Long, thin lures will perhaps best imitate the minnows or ciscoes walleyes are most likely eating, while plastic-bodied deep-diving shad baits offer the most versatility and durability for both casting and trolling. If space is at a premium, opt for the shads. Remember, natural whitish forage patterns are best for clear water and cisco forage, while brighter firetiger or clown patterns make baits more visible in stained water.

Any inlet, shallow rock point, or reef top is an obvious candidate for walleyes, and in the more southerly lakes in Ontario and Quebec, smallmouth bass. Where the water's stained or dingy, or in lowlight conditions, cast and retrieve cranks with a steady, predictable motion, banging the occasional rock and scraping bottom from time to time. If the water's clear and the sun bright, the finesse of neutral-buoyancy minnows like Husky Jerks comes into play. Cast, twitch, twitch, pause . . . linger . . . bam! Size 10 or 12 Husky Jerks are excellent for walleyes, while the larger 14s are deadly effective for pike.



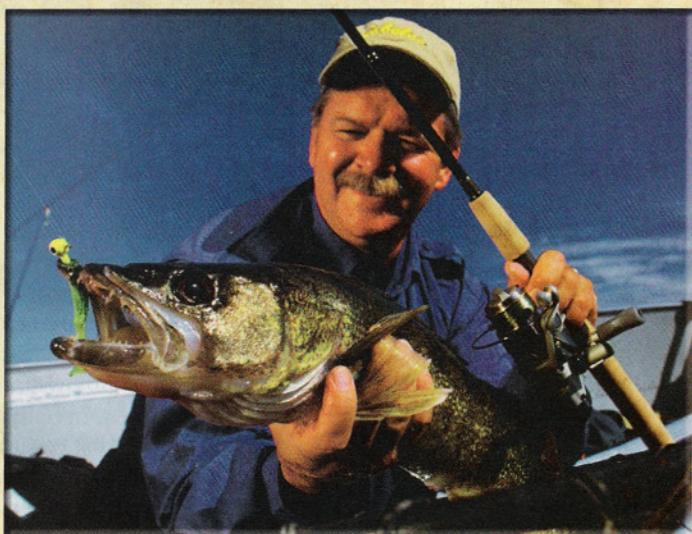
The largely untapped element comes into play when trolling deep-diving crankbaits along the perimeters of points, large shallow humps, and even rock walls plummeting to deep water along shore. Anglers (and guides) are just catching on to their potential and ease of use; simply run the lure and line out behind the boat, rev up the engine to achieve a modest

lure wobble, and scoot along for mixed catches of walleyes and pike down to 20 or 25 feet deep. Consider adding a light-wire leader where pike are plentiful—which is generally just about everywhere Canadian walleyes swim—since even hammer handles will eventually nip off your crankbaits, and you can't run down to the nearest store to replace them.

I must admit that, when I go on a far-north Canadian fly-in trip, the allure of walleyes is mostly generated by the thought of fast, easy fishing and 100-fish days, rather than investing precious time in trying new approaches. So I, like most folks, tend to keep things straightforward and simple. If I want to play with weird experimental stuff, I usually do it on pike, which has paid off in recent years; which also suggests that similar experimenting might work on walleyes, too.

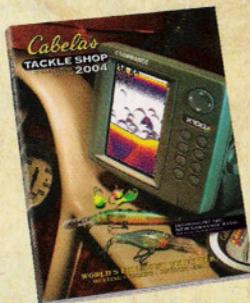
In the clear lake trout lakes of southern Canada, a growing number of anglers are catching big walleyes in the evenings by trolling crankbaits over open water, near the surface. These aren't 2-pound bug-eaters, but 8s to 10s to even 12s—big brutes that have switched to suspended cisco forage. This isn't true of all lakes, but enough to suggest that longline trolling cranks over open water for suspended fish might pay off big, providing you can tear yourself away from the easy jig bite at the river mouth, waterfall, or rapids. Tossing a pair of planer boards into the duffel bag isn't unreasonable, either. It might draw a few strange looks from your camp operator, whose general response is, "You don't need that kind of stuff to catch fish here." But it's worth a shot.

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Walleye and Pike Catalog

### PACKIN' PLASTIC— HARD AND SOFT

Other options? Bladebaits and jigging spoons will obviously add to your vertical jigging options and are deadly on Canadian walleyes. But they seriously add to the weight of your gear. And at times, heavy pike spoons and spinnerbaits, or even small grayling spinners, will produce their share of walleyes—although none are considered go-to baits for 'eyes.

Plastic cranks, by comparison, add comparatively little weight to your fly-in luggage, although they are slightly bulky. Note your camp operator's recommendations, however. They always seem to enforce a weight restriction, but never one on bulk! Just think how many soft-plastic worms and grubs, crankbaits, marshmallows, and pillows you can bring on your next trip! Plus a modest number of jigheads and lead sinkers, of course, to get your lures down to the walleyes. ■

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