

On Wisconsin Outdoors

With the Dick Ellis Experts

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Double Down

March-ing on with whitefish, walleyes

By Dick Ellis



Pete Krueger of Boulder Junction shows another bonus walleye taken on a tip-up while jigging for whitefish on Trout Lake March 1. (Ellis)

A better day was looming on the horizon of Trout Lake. An unbroken veil of blue skies and sunshine was about to chase the overcast ceiling and biting winds that had made targeting whitefish and walleyes on the 3000 acre Vilas County water less than pleasant since the early hours. March 1st had come in like a lion, but it had skedaddled like a little kitty by noon, leaving Pete Krueger of Boulder Junction, John Parshall of Irma, and me to work our jigs in the warm sunshine, not really caring if the fish bothered us or not.

Well, maybe not. But they did bother us. Soon, Krueger would land the largest whitefish of the season and walleyes would take the minnows and trip the flags set over the rock hump in the distance. If there is a bonus clause built into the design of the tip-up, it is to send grown men running like boys again, forgetting aching knees and hips that they may have been complaining about just minutes before as part of the 5-gallon bucket bull session.

I had come to South Trout Lake with veteran whitefish anglers Krueger and Parshall for my own introduction to a schooling fish that has seen resurgence as a favorite angler target on the great lakes and on a few inland waters. My hosts routinely fish both north and south Trout through ice and on open water for walleyes, musky, whitefish and lake trout, a combined water of 4000 acres with a maximum depth about 115 feet.

Although whitefish was our primary target, we would “double down” by also targeting walleyes with that season dwindling down to just a few precious days. In fact, we would double way down, holding vigil over augured holes and jigging for whitefish in 80 feet of water. In the near distance the tip-ups with minnows were set on a rock hump rising to 35 feet.

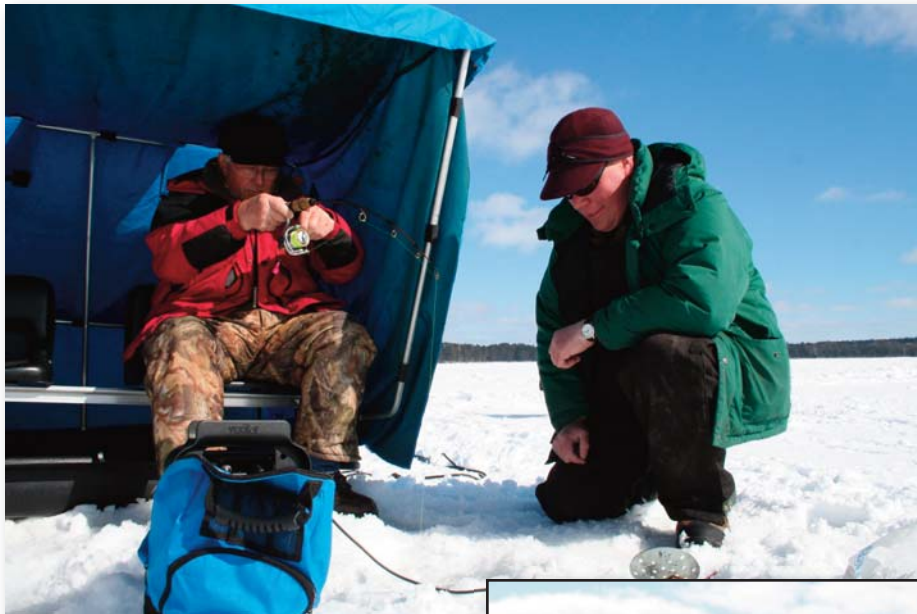
When I arrived at the landing late morning, Krueger and Parshall’s vehicles a mile out on Trout gave evidence of the only anglers on the water with the exception of an ATV several hundred yards to

the south. Vilas County Guide Duane Horstman, usually a reliable bet for fish in the bag, would stop by to say hello as he exited Trout with a lone whitefish ready for cleaning. For the rest of the day, Trout Lake would remain a vast hardwater dessert with no inhabitants but our own group.

“Whitefish are open year round,” said Krueger. The limit is 10 fish per day.



John Parshall of Irma gladly gives up his plastic ice shanty to jig for whitefish in the warm sunshine on Trout Lake while Pete Krueger takes the shanty and works 80 feet of water in the foreground. (Ellis)



John Parshall of Irma runs to lend a hand as Pete Krueger of Boulder Junction wrestles a 19 inch whitefish to the surface of Trout Lake March 1. (Ellis)

Years ago you could fish for lake trout beginning in January and catch whitefish as a bonus. Now the Lake trout season opens in May and closes September 30 to protect them during spawn.”

According to Krueger, whitefish spawn in fall at the end of October or early November, migrating to shallower, mud spawning grounds with lake trout. Lakers spawn first, and the whitefish feed on the eggs. Whitefish then spawn and the lake trout reciprocate.

“There’s a big population of whitefish on Trout Lake, but the numbers do fluctuate from year to year depending on the success of the spawn,” said Krueger, who began targeting the fish for sport and table fare about 10 years ago. “A lot of whitefish will also spawn right near the boat landing. If you’re lucky trout will freeze by Christmas and you can start to get out here.”

The game plan March 1st was fairly simple. Tip-ups with minnows were set on the rock hump rising to 35 feet. The Trout Lake walleye limit is two fish per day with a 15 inch minimum. Parshall had fast action on walleyes weeks before while fishing for whitefish despite setting up at high noon in bright sunshine, and the trend continued. 10 days before our trip, Krueger’s and Parshall’s catch from 15 tripped flags had included a 27 inch wall-

flats near structure, seeking red worms or mayfly larvae. Vexilar screens told the story of approaching whitefish or perhaps an occasional laker. But none would take the bait at first.

Soon though, a flag blowing in the distance sent us running to the tip-up. Line slanting under the ice told us this wasn’t another false alarm like several flags before it. A short tussle later with Krueger, and an 18-inch walleye was ready for the frying pan. Very soon, a whitefish also agreed to pose for a photo on the end of Krueger’s hook. In fact, at 19-inches it was this team’s largest whitefish of the season.

“This is a little different strain of



Pete Krueger of Boulder Junction and John Parshall of Irma pause from jigging to pose with two Trout Lake whitefish and a bonus walleye taken on a tip-up. (Ellis)

eye. The week before, Krueger had set up at 11:30 a.m. and had two 18 inch walleyes iced by just after noon.

While we waited for tripped flags, Parshall worked in 80 feet of water for whitefish in the open sunshine while Krueger and I took the comfort of Parshall’s two-seat plastic shanty. Krueger showed me how it was done while I worked the camera and took notes.

The gear of choice included 30 inch medium jigging rods, regular walleye reels with six pound monofilament line and no leader. A variety of spoons tipped with wax worms were sent down to work the bottom, including Swedish pimples, buck-shot spoons, little Cleos, Jig-a-whoppers, and do-jiggers. Whitefish often work mud

whitefish than they catch in the Great Lakes,” Krueger said. “In Green Bay they can be up to 25 inches and I’ve heard of whitefish to 27 inches in the Washburn, Bayfield area of Lake Superior. Here, a real good whitefish is 20 inches and nice fish are over 17 inches. Two weeks ago we caught seven fish in two hours and the month of March should be real good. Whitefish are excellent eating just about any way you make them and on six-pound test in deep water, they’ll give you a real good fight.” *Wo*

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