

Deep Water Bassin, Carolina Style

By Kevin Dahlke



Any bass angler out there knows that if they want to catch bass that they can go and pound the shoreline and put a decent limit together. By hitting wood, rocks and docks along the shoreline this will and does put fish in the boat and at certain times nice ones at that. But what if you would like to upgrade those sizes of fish to larger sized that may be a little more consistent than the bank runners.

Instead of facing the shoreline take a step back and turn around and tell me what you see. There is a vast amount of water out there and it is very intimidating to a number of anglers that their comments will be “where do I start”. Fishing deep water for bass isn’t really that much different if you sit down with a good map and plan out your attack and you will quickly find that it is very similar to what you were doing along the shoreline.

When fishing shoreline you are fishing targets along that shoreline and when you turn to deep water, it is very similar. We don’t just go out there into deep water and start casting at will but will concentrate on features and objects that we will locate with the maps and electronics that we have. Things that are concentrated on in deep water are humps, grass beds, ridges, or anything that is a little different that breaks up the bottom content either structurally or depth wise.

The depth of deep water means different things to every angler and body of water that you fish and this is what we consider deep water. Normally I fish depths from 8 to 12 feet of water and will fish sunken islands down to the 25 foot depths as well. There is a lake that I fish in central New Hampshire that is fished down to 40 feet of water in grassbeds in our search of smallmouth bass but this is a very clear lake as well.

Now that we have the deep water somewhat defined, the approach that we use the most often for fishing this deep water is using the Carolina rig. The Carolina rig allows me to cover vast amounts of water and by doing this it is also exposing my bait to more fish. The Carolina rig is a plastic bait technique that requires a few components to build this up. The components consist of a weight, followed by 2 glass beads, followed by a swivel

tied to the line. Next we tie another piece of fishing line with a 3/0 to 4/0 hook tied to this tag end.



Main fishing line is usually 10-12 pound test with the tag leader of 8 pound test. The 8 pound test allows the bait to move more freely through the water and more natural looking. The length of the tag leader varies from 12-36 inches long and the bottom content dictates this length variety. Shorter leaders are better for working the bait through thicker weeds while longer leaders are great for sparse weeds or no weeds at all. Weight wise down to 20-25 feet of water use a ¼ oz sinker unless it is extremely windy then

maybe a 5/16 oz. For 35 feet and more typically a ½ oz weight is sufficient and this is only needed to be able to get to those depths much more quickly and to keep you more in contact with your bait.

Now that the depths are covered as well as the technique, let's take a look at the approach that works well for us. Typically anglers are afraid to throw the Carolina rig into weeds and that is the first thing that you will need to get away from. After you have fished in the weeds for a while you will understand how to work the rig through the weeds and also learn the differences in the feel between weeds and a fish biting. There may be times that you get hung up and lose some tackle but the fish that you are going to catch will definitely make up for that.

Once we have looked at our maps and found some promising looking areas, sunken islands, ridges, irregular bottom contours as well as different bottom content, weeds are what we are looking for in these areas. Not so much the thickest weeds that are there, but at times that is what we are looking for, but more of the edge and what is going on at the weed edge.

More of an explanation here: weeds only grow so deep and depending on how far the sunlight goes down determines how deep the weeds and edges are. The areas that I am looking for are where the thick weed edges end and from there out into the deeper waters. The tops of the structure areas will have thick weeds that if fished slowly with the Carolina rig you will be able to get through them. But where the heavy edges end, this is our high percentage area.

What we are talking about is that there is always a weed edge or front line and fish use these heavier weeds as ambush areas. But from this front edge out into deeper water the weeds themselves get thinner as the water gets deeper and bigger fish use this zone in their search for food. This is what is called a transition area and baitfish use transition

areas all the time in their movements and feeding. The bigger dominant fish in the area know this as well and are positioned or are cruising this transition area ritually searching for prey. These transition areas will have smaller and sparser weeds here and you will definitely feel this with your bait as you are working it through.

So how do I get setup to fish this type of structure area from the boat? Typically find where the edge of a specific piece of structure is and where that drops off into the deeper surrounding water. Position the boat back more on top of the structure so that the sparse edges are out in front of you and not under you. Anchoring will help immensely if there is wind or also if you find an area that is holding numbers of fish.

With the boat positioned on top of a so called hump, cast your Carolina rig out into the deeper water. Let it fall to the bottom before doing anything else and then your concentration level will need to strengthen. Move the rig only about 6 inches at a time back towards the boat, as the slowness of fishing this is the key to your success. You probably won't feel anything transmitted through your fishing rod at this point, but as you work the bait back towards the boat you will feel that first contact with those outer sparse weeds.

At this point you really need to start focusing on what your line and fishing rod are telling you and this will give you an idea as to how much sparse weeds are there and where the thicker weed edge is starting. Also be ready at all times as in this transition area the fish are cruising and will be picking your bait up at any time. What is happening here is that fish position themselves in these locations as they know that the prey are coming out of the deeper water to find food and cover.

After you have worked through that transition area you will still need to get the bait through the thicker weed edge and top as well. Slowly work your bait through these thicker weeds as well all the way back to the boat because until you get an idea as to how the fish are using these areas, a bite can come at any time. You will definitely start feeling and understanding the differences between weeds and a fish biting and won't be long and the fish are going to be caught as well.

Many anglers are not going to be fishing these depths of waters and if you can get your confidence levels to work to your advantage in these situations, you have opened up a whole new area of fishing possibilities. This is a technique that I have been employing for a number of years and the size of the fish are much more to my liking. One thing though, is your numbers of fish will probably go down and if you like numbers this may not be for you. But if you don't mind not getting the numbers but rather quality is more to your liking, then you definitely want to give this a try.

Once you have the feel for this approach, you will be able to take this into different areas of a particular body of water and search out similar type of structures there as well. Some of these remote deeper areas are very under fished as well as some of these fish may have never seen a bait in their life. The best structures and areas are going to harbor the biggest

fish and after using this for a while, you will understand these areas and will be able to be more consistent in your size of fish caught going forward.

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