

# FALLTHER SMALLE SONTHE BAY

By Sara Trampe

TIPS, TRICKS AND TIMING FOR GREEN BAY TROPHIES

Photo by Tyler Trampe.

*The day started early, leaving by 3 A.M. to meet Captain Lynn Niklasch of Your Fishin' Pal Guide Service at a northern Door County boat launch by sunrise.*

My husband and co-host, Tyler, our cameraman, Jeff, from Seeke Creative, and I were fueled up on caffeinated beverages as we drove North with wide eyes, watching for deer in the early morning hours of the November rut.

We planned out talking points and ideas for our Sportsman's Journal TV episode and just enjoyed the anticipation of what the day would bring. The bay of Green Bay is known as a world-class trophy fishery, and we were pumped to have the opportunity to target trophy smallmouth with an experienced guide.

### **First fish**

Just as the sky started to brighten on the horizon, we pulled into the boat launch, greeted Lynn, quickly ran through an introduction for our episode, and hopped in the boat.

Any season can be treacherous for weather conditions on big water, but fall is particularly known for an unpredictable environment. The wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald is a tragic reminder of what November gales can bring; categorically windy and cold with winter right around the corner.

The weatherman called for a beautiful fall day, but I was still one hundred percent prepared for a wintry mix with my Striker prism pants. Tyler didn't chance it either and layered with his eVolve rain bibs, and Lynn, well, he fished in shorts. Everyone has different comfort levels, and to me, being comfortable means longer hours on the water.

After a quick jaunt, we arrived at our first spot, where we baited our hooks, cast out our lines, and started to move. Within minutes Tyler had the first fish hit.

Boat control is a huge factor for a successful day on the water. With long lines out behind the boat, we kept moving, even with a fish on, to prevent line tangles or getting snagged up in the rocks. Plus, this allows other anglers an opportunity to catch fish in the same area.

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Smallmouth are known for their tremendous fighting ability, add on boat movement in deep, cold water, and the fight is fierce. Tyler's fish was no exception. It battled on for what felt

like an eternity until we finally caught a glimpse! First fish; a five-pounder – what a way to start the day!

### **Record potential**

Door County is the easternmost county in Wisconsin, covering almost the entire peninsula that juts out into Lake Michigan. Home to many popular tourist destinations, festivals, and state parks, famous for cherry and apple orchards, wineries, shops, and five-star restaurants in the scenic coastal towns, there is plenty to do there.

On the western side of the peninsula lies the bay of Green Bay, with over 1,600 square miles of prime fishing waters featuring a multitude of species and the potential for world records. So, whether you are fishing shorelines, rivers, rock reefs, or bays, anytime your line goes tight, your heart skips a beat; could this be a giant?

Commonly known as a popular tourism destination in the summer months, due to weather conditions, a fair amount of the restaurants and shops may close for fall, but the fishing is picking up and the chance at a fish of a lifetime hangs in the air.

If you aren't familiar with the system, don't have an adequate boat, or aren't familiar or comfortable in big waves, your best bet is to contact one of the area guides for a truly incredible experience. *Be sure to read the Trampe Talk for a further breakdown on hiring a guide and why Lynn could be your best choice.*

### **Catching the drift**

Between the months of September and November, Lynn opens his schedule to drift live bait over rock flats on break lines for trophy smallmouth bass. When water temperatures drop to 60 degrees, smallmouth begin to move off main lake humps and school up on shoreline feeding flats at a rock to sand transition somewhere between 20 and 40 feet.

If you have fished for any amount of time, you've heard the saying "match the hatch;" well, that saying proves true once again. Drifting suckers keeps the bait in the strike zone while providing them with the size and forage type they are feeding on.

We were using four to five-inch suckers, hooked through the nose with a plain #2 octopus hook, trolling 50+ yards behind the boat, going ½ mile per hour. The speed is critical to keep your bait above the rocks and not hung up in them, but not too fast that you are too far above the bottom with your bait spinning in a loop. The ½ mile an hour speed allows you to stay near the bottom and for the sucker to drift naturally.

Tyler and I used a 10-pound fluorocarbon leader, approximately 10 to 15 feet long, tied with a uni knot to 20-pound suffix 832 braid, a bead to protect the fluorocarbon carbon knot, and a #5 split shot for weight. The fluorocarbon leader is vital for the extremely clear water and to help the line sink.

Lynn prefers to use monofilament line for this technique because, one; you don't have to tie on a leader, and two; the presentation is light. Because we are fishing in current, to get



the bait down to the bottom, floating line (braid) can keep the bait higher, while mono sinks or suspends.

The four to five-inch suckers are the prime size because three-inch suckers tend to die easily, and anything greater than six-inch suckers, with only one hook through the nose, decreases your chance of hook-ups.

We were all using Kraemer Custom Rods between six feet eight inches to seven feet in length, medium power with a sensitive tip. Lynn prefers shorter rods due to convenience when traveling but told me he now uses slightly longer Kraemer Custom Rods because of the advantages the extra inches provide to the angler.

Between the three of us, we all used a little bit different technique for feel and hook setting, but Lynn suggested keeping the bail open and holding the line with your thumb for feel; once you feel the tug, you are able to give more line letting the fish take the bait for a few seconds, close your bail and, as your rod loads up, set the hook. After a few fish, it will become a reactionary movement from feel alone, and a sweeping hook set usually means a fish tugging on your line.

Both Tyler and Lynn hooked up in the first spot with nice fish while I went empty-handed. After moving a few hundred yards up the shoreline, I felt the first tug on my line, but the fish dropped the sucker before my hookset. I hadn't fed the fish enough line before attempting my hookset, and I missed it.

The key is getting the timing right because if you set the hook too soon, before the fish has the hook, you'll pull the bait out of their mouth. But, if you let them take it too long after closing your bail before setting the hook, they feel the tension from the moving boat and drop the sucker.

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But fortunately for me, this smallie wasn't giving up on her meal quite yet. She came back as I was reeling in to check my sucker and the hit felt like a freight train, and with the boat moving opposite the current, the fish felt enormous!

The rod doubled over, and I couldn't even reel from the pressure, but soon found my rhythm and began to fight the fish -- and a fight it was. These smallies are acrobats, powerful fighters, and never give up. My first big November Green Bay smallie was in the net!

## Fatten up

Fall is a great time to trophy fish because fish are feeding to add fat for winter. Generally, this means larger fish are more active than they would be during the summer months.

Another popular saying among anglers when talking about fall patterns is “fall feedbags.” A common misconception about this saying is that the fish are consuming any bait you put in front of them, like in spring.

Dropping water temperatures require less energy for movement, meaning their metabolism is decreasing, requiring them to eat less often. But the fish are hungrily adding on those fat storages, looking for a bigger meal that takes less expendable energy, which is why we used four to five-inch suckers instead of smaller profile fatheads. Tyler likes to say, “the fish are getting more bang for their buck” on a fall meal, going for fewer, larger meals.

While the main goal of the day was trophy smallmouth, nature’s beauty in the area was hard to miss. Door County boasts breathtaking limestone cliffs that overlook the shorelines, and the splendor doesn’t stop there. The crystal-clear water near Egg Harbor and northward is unreal. Add on the bonus that Lynn suggests the best time for fall smallies is when the fall leaf colors are peaking, and the scenery is a sight to behold.

Fishing in 30 feet of water, we were able to clearly see the bottom and make out fish swimming beneath us. We could see the pods of fish scoot out of the path of the boat and knew some would return to investigate the bait (or because that’s the transition line they preferred to be on) and feed on our suckers. It’s a combination of sight fishing and lindy rigging.

We fished all day from sun up to sundown, and as the sun dipped lower in the sky, the slight wind we had died off completely. We ended the day with a double, Tyler brought in a beautiful smallmouth, and while Lynn was netting the fish, his rod doubled over; I grabbed it and caught a smaller three-pounder on Lynn’s rod.

Between the three of us, we caught about 20 smallmouth, a few of which were over five pounds! Unfortunately, I lost a few fish before I got the timing down right, and I’ll never know if one of those was my six-plus pounder. It just means I need another fall day of smallmouth fishing on the bay in the future.

And it turned out the weatherman was correct; some might say Lynn ended up a little underdressed in shorts, and I was a little over-dressed in my prism pants, but overall, November 4th, 2020 was the perfect fall Wisconsin day. ■

*Sara Trampe is an avid outdoor enthusiast and co-host of Sportsman’s Journal television series. She has always loved outdoor life, but when she met her husband, Tyler, she really developed a passion for fishing and hunting. Together they have been all over the Midwest and NW Ontario, targeting various species, honing their skills, and dedicating their life to the outdoors. Their adventures are chronicled on Sportsman’s Journal – which airs Saturday mornings on Fox Sports North at 11:30.*



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*“Every single rod is hand built by me in Wisconsin.”*  
- Erik Kraemer

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*A collaboration of Tyler and Sara Trampe's knowledge, experiences, opinions, and insight on various topics in the fishing industry. Tyler and Sara host Sportsman's Journal, a syndicated fishing show on Bally Sports North and Pursuit Channel. Here we provide an in-depth breakdown of something from the corresponding article to better educate you on a specific topic.*

## When hiring a guide makes the most sense

*In this edition, we learn from Captain Lynn Niklasch why hiring an educated guide on big water could make a lot of sense.*

### Experience pays

We are typically do-it-yourself anglers, utilizing our own equipment, knowledge, and time to learn new bodies of water or narrow down specifics on familiar lakes. But when it comes to the Great Lakes, we generally fish with Lynn.

Captain Lynn Niklasch of *Your Fishin' Pal Guide Service* is an experienced boater and angler with over 20 years of experience on the waters of Wisconsin and beyond. Lynn knows the seasonal patterns, fish behaviors, and weather conditions on the bay of Green Bay. He is a multi-species guide specializing in walleye, smallmouth, and musky, breaking out the boat for the spring walleye run and going all the way into November.

Green Bay is a large body of water with many spots that hold fish and many spots that don't, and simply put, an experienced guide will put you on fish faster. Plus, knowing how the weather onshore will make the lake react is not only important for catching fish but for safety. For example, 10 mile an hour winds out of the west on the Oconto side might seem relatively calm, but that same wind on the Sturgeon Bay side can produce three to four-foot rollers.

While fishing for walleye on a breezy day this past spring, Lynn predicted what conditions would be like where we wanted to go versus where we were, all from experience fishing in those conditions on a regular basis.

Also, we generally have a limited amount of time when targeting trophies on the bay, and by using Lynn's knowledge and experience, we get the most out of our time on the water.

Learning a piece of water takes years; from different seasons to different weather patterns, it

takes many, many hours to know what conditions for the day will produce fish at any given structure using a variety of techniques. The difference between an okay day on the water, an unsuccessful day, and a terrific day can all be just slight variations on location and techniques.

### Plan your trip

When I asked Lynn, "Why trophy smallies in the fall?" he chuckled and stated he could target smallmouth throughout the open water season, but September to November is when drifting live bait works.

When water temperatures are above 60 degrees, smallmouth relate more to main lake humps and rock piles feeding on crayfish and gobies, so different techniques are needed. Plus, the higher water temperatures tend to kill the suckers faster, making them a less favorable option.

When water temperatures drop below 60 degrees, the suckers last longer, and the fish are schooling up more on the shoreline breaks. Peak time tends to be around Columbus Day, corresponding with peak colors, when the smallmouth are schooling up and eagerly chasing down suckers.

And an experienced guide will know what the times are for action-oriented fishing and what time frames are hot for trophies to make the most out of the trip you are looking for.

We fished with Lynn for the spring walleye run this past spring, and we requested trying for big fish versus many fish. Lynn knows big fish spots and when it's best to hit them.

In addition to guiding, Lynn also fishes professional tournaments. In 2015, along with finishing first in three other tournaments, he earned the title of Wisconsin Team of the Year and National Champion in the AIM Weekend Series. Additionally, he qualified for the AIM National Championship, which took place in June of 2016.

Lynn will talk with you about your goal for the day and do his best to put you on the fish you want while having a great time! Lynn is also excellent at explaining why fish are using spots and why he chooses the baits or presentations to catch fish. He will teach you how to become a better angler on Green Bay if you want to learn.

Give Lynn a call to discuss what you want your day to look like, and he can *guide* you to the best time frame to make that happen. He runs a 22-foot DVX Vexus with a 400 horsepower Mercury, all decked out to put fish in the net and provide safety and comfort while fishing the big water. You can reach Lynn at 262-370-6771 or [fishinpal.com](http://fishinpal.com).



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