



By Sara Trampe

# Staying Put

AN UNCONVENTIONAL WAY TO COVER WATER

The author, Sara Trampe, working for winter walleye and perch.

Photos by Tyler and Sara Trampe

*In a world where you regularly hear how running and gunning on the ice is the secret to success, can you even consistently catch fish if you aren't constantly moving?*

The answer is yes, without a doubt. Staying put doesn't mean instant failure; it doesn't necessarily mean smaller fish or less fish; it just means a different approach.

December of 2020 had been warm, and even in early January, safe ice was still hard to come by in Wisconsin, so Tyler and I headed Westward.

We road tripped to the rolling hills area of Webster, South Dakota, with a few other guys to get on some walleye and perch action while it was still considered "early ice."

We were unfamiliar with the area and were basing our lake choices on reports, maps, and advice from locals. We planned on old-fashioned run and gun tactics searching for spots, but after two days of attempting to film an episode for Sportsman's Journal while constantly moving, with questionable ice for vehicle travel and a group of people with different ideas, we realized it wasn't happening. So, I opted to stay put.

I would stay in one area, get an episode filmed for Sportsman's

Journal's upcoming season (episode to air in December 2021) and alleviate some stress for the whole group. I had one day to get it done.

While grabbing breakfast sandwiches one morning, I chatted with a few local guys at the gas station and asked about any information they had on a hot jumbo perch bite. They pointed me to a lake with no launch that wasn't on the map. Challenge accepted. The whole group agreed to go to the same lake to help bring out my gear, and then they would head off to do their own thing.

## Access and Location

The South Dakota terrain and access are different from here in Wisconsin, where it is mainly paved roads to boat ramps on natural lakes where, usually, there are parking lots at the access and just marked better in general.

In South Dakota, the norm is gravel roads, prairie potholes with limited, rugged access that is not marked, and generally no parking areas. This body of water had no ramp marked on the map, and I forgot to ask about it, so we had to drive the gravel roads surrounding the water, searching for a point of entry. Finally, we found a smaller dirt two-track that ended

The author showcases her end of day giant.



in a barricade and road closed sign with ice on the other side. Step one accomplished – finding and accessing the body of water.

We pulled off the main gravel road and parked off to the side when a friendly farmer came and made sure we were parked far enough away from his driveway because he's been blocked in before. After finding we were sufficiently out of the way for the resident's liking, we unloaded the gear into the side by side, got all bundled up, and headed out.

Due to the ice situation, we checked ice thickness often by drilling holes on the way out and staying in existing tracks. Ice safety is always important, even when you are familiar with a body of water. Do not trust other tracks, or assume because another angler has been there that it's okay and always be aware of ice conditions in general.

When we pulled up to a place I thought would be a good spot to set up, I noticed there wasn't ice past this point on the map. So, I toggled to the satellite picture on my Navionics app – downloaded on my phone for a small fee – where I could see the area had been flooded and actually combined two potholes to create an even larger body of water.

As I switched back and forth, I realized an old road crossed right between the lakes, which was now flooded, meaning a shallow feeding flat. I changed my mind on location and had the guys drop me off with my gear on the old roadbed.

I mentioned it was January, but I got lucky on the weather. In an area known for freezing winter temps and blowing blizzards across the desolate landscape, the weather for the day was supposed to be fairly mild. I had dressed accordingly and was not using my shack; in fact, I didn't have it with me at all. Once I decided on that, I was committed; I would be outside all day.

## Spot and Set up

Step two is finding fish and setting up. It may sound obvious, but if you aren't fishing where the fish are, you can't catch them. This is why so many anglers advocate for the move, move, move technique because you need to find fish. But sometimes, the fish will come to you.

Early ice is considered a prime time to be on the ice for several reasons: the fish haven't been targeted for a few months, they are still fairly active under the ice, putting on food storages for the long winter, and freely moving around on break lines and feeding in shallower water because the oxygen content in the water column is higher than midwinter. Oxygen content in the system plays a large role in fish activity and location.

Knowledge of this information all comes into play when deciding where to start and how to position yourself to set up. I could visually see the two endpoints of the road, so I drilled between them and off of the road line towards the main lake marked on the Navionics.

I knew I wanted to have holes on the deep side and on top of the flat, and possibly on any transition lines. I used our Micro Revolution Pro 5.0 AquaVu to determine bottom content and see if I could find any changes, but the point I was on appeared

An eater-sized walleye helps buoy spirits.



to be one big mud flat; the only contour was the depth change from the old roadbed that dropped off into the deeper basin.

It's legal to have four lines in the water, each, in South Dakota, so I planned one jigging stick and three Finicky Foolers to cover a larger area by myself and to help locate fish.

The Finicky Fooler is an ingenious tool that allows anglers to cover more water and still fight the fish with a rod and reel combo. Depending on what species you are targeting, they have varying degrees of resistance to adjust to larger or smaller baits. You set the rod and reel into the Finicky Fooler, drop the bait down to your desired depth, and use the Fooler to suspend your bait with an open spool. When the fish hits, the flag is triggered, the spool stays open, and the fish does not feel tension. When you are ready, you pick up the rod, close the bail and fight the fish. ([www.finickyfooler.com](http://www.finickyfooler.com) has some great tutorials, you can purchase products or use the store locator option to find a dealer near you.)

My game plan was that if one of my Fooler's consistently has more action than another, I will move the ones not getting hit.

I used the traditional Finicky Fooler tip-ups with a Kraemer Custom Rod medium action 36-inch Scrapper and a 1/8 or 1/4-ounce Northland Fishing Tackle eyeball spoon tipped with a dorsal-hooked live minnow.

I was hoping for consistency throughout the day on both walleye and perch and more action during the feeding window near dusk. I chose the eyeball spoon because it's heavy enough to control the minnow and stay in a tighter area, yet give flash to attract fish from further distances. Plus, it's life-like looking large prey fish eyeball tends not to spook fish when they are close. It also has a great hooking percentage. I used my Humminbird Helix ice unit to mark depth and placement for the spoons on the Foolers.

Once I had multiple holes drilled - did I mention I drilled a lot of holes? Having investigated bottom content and depths, I decided exactly where to place my Foolers and where to jig.

I had to place the Foolers close enough for my camera to pick up my mic and, of course, within running distance when the flag pops. And since I didn't know how much action to expect, I set up two within 10 yards of my jigging hole and one only just a bit further out into the basin.

## Fooling Fish

Step three is to actually catch some fish. It didn't take long for my first flag to pop, but the first few times were wind trips with no fish. I adjusted the tension on my Fooler, and the next time a flag flew, I found weight on the end of my line. Fish on!

The first fish was a small walleye, but I was so proud of myself for locating and landing a fish that my confidence grew. The next several flags were also smaller walleye, but with each flag, my smile got a bit wider; I didn't even care that I was supposed to be targeting perch.

After a few flags and a little bit brighter skies, the action slowed, and I was able to give my jigging rod some attention.

I chose a Northland Fishing Tackle tungsten punch jig, size 3/32-ounce, tipped with a Freedom Baitz two-inch white Bonita minnow. The Bonita minnow is a two-inch split tail minnow imitation soft plastic designed specifically for panfish.

Most jumbos are loners, roaming through the mudflats and sticking to the bottom, searching out hatching insect larvae or easy prey. How I work my rod on the Bonita minnow can make it look like a feeding minnow or a dying one, which becomes an irresistible easy meal for hungry predators. After landing a few smaller walleye, I almost gave up on my perch agenda and figured I was in for a walleye show, but after

marking a fish and thinking I had another small walleye on, I was shockingly surprised when I saw the perch head shoot up through the hole. It's always nice when the plan comes full circle, and I could now say I accomplished catching what I sought out to do.

I felt a wind shift, and a small front rolled into the area, and as soon as the cloud cover hit, more flag flying action ensued. I landed a few nice 17-inch eater-size walleye along with a handful of jumbo perch that I could add to our group's fish fry, feeling even more proud of myself for bringing home food along with an episode. Oh, what a hero I would be!

I had enough fish for my episode and utilized both the Foolers with live bait and an artificial for jigging for a great combination of techniques. With the wind picking up and the temperature dropping, I probably would have been done, but my guys weren't back yet, so I could sit and wait or keep fishing. I kept fishing.

As the sun was setting, I was marking fish but didn't have anything committing to my jigging rod when the flag behind me popped. As I knelt down next to the Fooler, I saw line coming off the spool, and I knew right away that there was a fish on the other end.

When I picked up the rod and clicked in the bail, I could immediately feel the weight difference in what I had been catching. I knew there were northern in the lake, and I had been easily tricked before thinking I had on a big walleye only to find a mediocre northern, but my heart was pumping nonetheless.

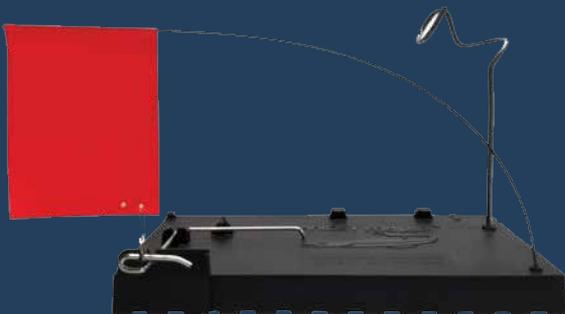
The fish went on multiple runs, and I could feel some powerful headshakes. I couldn't catch a glimpse due to the dark low light conditions and snow on top of the ice until the large undeniable head of a huge walleye hit the hole. You know the fish is huge when her gills flare in the eight-inch hole, and she barely fits. I grabbed the fish's face and hauled her out of the water in disbelief. What a giant!

I truly couldn't believe what I was seeing. I couldn't keep a thought in my head other than "wow" and get the fish back quickly. I snapped a picture and grabbed a quick measurement of the 28-inch brute, and breathed a huge sigh of relief as I watched the tail of the giant flip goodbye and knew my episode was complete.

## Patience Payoff

I started out the day in quiet deliberation, trying to convince myself I could accomplish filming a solo episode. I found reprieve on the first flag, followed by disappointment with a wind trip. I felt more relaxed after the first small walleye and celebrated a quiet victory when I started pulling up jumbo perch. But when that master angler walleye came through the hole, I was able to silence that small voice in my head that kept saying, "you need to keep moving."

Putting in the time to plan out your spot, have the correct tools to help you, and a little bit of patience - or no choice because your ride isn't there - can be an effective way to catch fish on the ice.



**The Finicky Fooler set up is a simple way for anglers to fish multiple rod and reel combos.**



The Finicky Fooler's are super easy to use, convenient to pack and travel with, and an effective way to cover water without repositioning and put fish topside. And they proved their versatility on mixed action and big fish.

As the storm fully moved in, I was almost packed up when I heard the rumble of the motor and saw the headlights of my ride — step four, celebrate the victory and brag about my 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.*

**South Dakota can offer great jumbo perch fishing through the ice.**



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.

In this month's Trampe Talk we touch on new and exciting ice gear coming out - order early because it's going to go fast! I know this isn't a more in-depth look at something from the article, but I couldn't help myself. The timing is right to get the news out for the brand new on-ice products so that you can have it in time for the start of the season - or at least, that's why I convinced myself to introduce some of the new gear!

## New from Northland

If you follow us at all, you know we love Northland Fishing Tackle products. We've used their stuff for years and have had a lot of success putting fish topside because of it. But this year, Northland has outdone themselves. The new baits are hot, and Tyler and I literally had so much action and success we couldn't believe it.

The favorite for both of us is the Buck-Shot Coffin Spoon. A combination of the Buck-Shot Rattle and Macho Minnow Spoons, it has an internal rattle and loud kicker-tail fin to call the fish in. A flat design creates tumbling action and a light reflection flash the fish could not say no. These new spoons come in four sizes and multiple color options for a variety of species. We caught bluegill, perch, crappie, walleye, and northern on these - consistently.



**The Northland Buck Shot Coffin Spoon and Bro Bug spoon.**

We were successful jigging these spoons with or without a minnow head during midwinter and late ice and will 100 percent be putting them to the test on early ice this season!

Want something a little more subtle? The Bro Bug spoon has a slender profile that falls quickly and quietly, resembling falling larva. It's designed with large eyes so that you can see it on your

locator, and the fish feeding upward can visibly see the silhouette. It also has a tapered body to create a larger gap for better hooksets. Thanks in part to these design traits, this spoon gave me my biggest crappie of the season at 15 inches. The Bro Bug comes in three sizes and 12 different colors.

Northland also added four new colors to their existing lineup of dominating baits, with which you are sure to put fish topside on the ice. "Your next fishing story starts here." [Northlandtackle.com](http://Northlandtackle.com)

### WELL SUITED

Now let's talk ice suits. Again, a company that Tyler and I have been using for years due to quality, Striker Brands



**Sportsman's Journal hosts Tyler and Sara Trampe (middle and right) staying warm in Striker ice suits. (photo credit: Rob Utendorfer)**

continues to be on the leading edge of high-quality ice suits for both men and women.

For the guys, Striker has designed the most advanced cold-weather fishing suit out today, the Apex Suit. According to Tyler, it's in a class by itself, one of the lightest suits he's ever worn. Light enough for running and gunning but filled with advanced technology to sustain even the coldest days. Immediately, Tyler noticed the increased mobility due to less bulk. You can find all the technical details on their website [strikerbrands.com](http://strikerbrands.com). Add new colors for the Climate, Predator, and Trekker suits, and you are sure to find what you are searching for.

Ladies, we finally have options! New suits are coming out from several companies, and I was able to try out the Stella Suit on the ice a few times. And oh, what a suit it is. I'm used to layering to stay warm, and I quickly learned I didn't need to. The Stella suit is equipped with Primaloft Silver insulation in combination with heat mapping technology in both the jacket and the bibs to keep anyone warm on the ice, even me. Yet, this suit is lightweight enough for drilling, hole hopping, and chasing flags comfortably.

These suits are designed for women anglers, by women anglers - I even had some input, which is exciting! I personally like the high-waisted design with the form-fitting side panels for bending, kneeling, and sitting on the ice, and, most importantly, the warmth stays in while cold stays out. Plus, I'm a big fan of the three color options: Frost, Veil Stryk, or Burgundy. Now I just have to decide which color to get! Go early, go late, go prepared. [Strikerbrands.com](http://Strikerbrands.com)