

CATFISH: Among tools for anglers is good sonar unit

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something that makes it feel secure and lets the river feed him.”

Drifting a river allows an angler to cover considerable tracts of water. A moving bait will more likely pass close to the whiskers of a big, hungry fish that one just sitting on the bottom. When fishing a big river, drift backward with the current, but face the trolling motor upstream to hold the boat straight. When done correctly, the boat slowly drifts downstream at slightly less than the natural current speed so the lines remain nearly vertical.

Some anglers do a little scouting before they begin a drift. They use electronics to find holes, humps, sunken logs, and other bottom contours or objects. Often, a river bottom resembles an



Photo by John N. Felsher

Joey Pounders caught this catfish on the Tombigbee River system.

old washboard with humps and valleys carved by the rolling currents. Giant catfish habitually drop into these depressions to let the current wash over them. Typically, the most active catfish lurk just below the upstream rim of a hole look-

ing for something tempting to eat.

“A good sonar unit can give an angler 30 years’ worth of experience in five seconds,” said Phil King, a national champion catfish angler. “I look for drop-offs, holes and changes in depth. It doesn’t have to be more than a foot in depth change to hold a big fish. I like to fish right along the drop-off edge where the current rides over the top, creating a little boil. Sometimes, little mounds on the bottom hold pieces of debris on the front end, making the spot that much better.”

After scanning an area with electronics, plan a drift through the best area. When heading upstream to start the drift, don’t run directly over the prime fishing area. Crank the outboard and circle wide of the best spots to

avoid spooking the fish.

At the starting point, drop the line with the sinker on the bottom and the bait suspended slightly above the weight. Once the sinker impacts the bottom, raise the rod slowly to keep the line tight. Set the trolling motor speed and angle so the boat goes backward slightly slower than the current speed. Walk the bait downstream with it hanging about two feet off the bottom. Periodically check the line to make sure the bait stays in the strike zone.

Many anglers fish several rods in holders, each tipped with a different bait to see what big catfish want to eat that day. Smaller channel cats eat almost anything including liver, nightcrawlers, shrimp, chicken or commercial baits, but giant catfish prefer bigger, fishy meals.

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