

# TRAVELIN': Going in search of bass on Pickwick Lake

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fish for bass with artificials baits. However, nothing looks more scrumptious to a hungry bass than what it normally eats and expects to see every day. Before each trip, Barton throws a cast net to catch live shad.

"Fishing with live bait is a highly effective way to catch both big largemouth and smallmouth," he explained. "I prefer to fish with threadfin shad, but I'll use whatever we can put in the baitwell. We can catch fish with live bait all year long if we can find good shad, but prime time for catching big bass on the Tennessee River with live bait is from October through March."

With the current rolling, Barton hooks live shad onto several lines. We drift down the river, but the guide wants to stay within a few hundred yards of the

dam. When fishing with live shad, Barton typically uses no weight. Occasionally, he attaches a small split-shot to the line to hold the bait near the bottom in swift current. Ideally, the shad should hover just off the bottom and float downstream at the same speed as the water flow.

"Most people think fishing with live bait is 'idiot fishing,' but there's a little bit of art to it," Barton clarifies. "I want the bait to flow along with the current just off the bottom. If I use too much weight, it will stay hung up. If I don't use enough weight, the bait will float above the strike zone."

For the best results, drift baits close to rock piles or other current breaks. Smallmouth and largemouth bass both hide behind such obstructions, facing upstream to grab any temptations washed toward them. Besides smallmouth and

largemouth, anglers could possibly catch spotted bass, flathead, blue or channel catfish, black or white crappie, white bass, hybrid bass, striped bass, maybe sauger and several other species.

With an Alabama license, anglers can fish from Wilson Dam to the Pickwick Dam at Counce, Tenn. Although anglers won't catch smallies, they could catch largemouth bass and other species by drifting live shad down the Alabama, Tombigbee and other Alabama rivers.

## While in Pickwick area

While in northern Alabama, visitors can find food, lodging and other facilities in Florence on the north side of the river or in Sheffield, Muscle Shoals and Tuscumbia on the south side. People can also stay at Joe Wheeler State Park ([www.alapark.com/joe-wheeler-state-park](http://www.alapark.com/joe-wheeler-state-park))

about 25 miles upstream on Wheeler Lake.

For something really adventurous, spend the night in a grain silo converted into a condominium at the Seven Springs Lodge [www.rattlesnakesaloon.net](http://www.rattlesnakesaloon.net) near Tuscumbia. Head down into the canyon to the Rattlesnake Saloon and dine inside an ancient natural rock outcropping. Try the "snake eyes and tails," "rattlesnake eggs" or monster burgers.

Also in Tuscumbia, visit the Alabama Music Hall of Fame ([www.alamhof.org](http://www.alamhof.org)) or the birthplace of Helen Keller ([helenkellerbirthplace.org](http://helenkellerbirthplace.org)). Not far from Tuscumbia, pay homage to hunting dogs at the Key Underwood Coon Dog Memorial Graveyard, more commonly called the Coon Dog Cemetery on Freedom Hills Wildlife Management Area near Cherokee.

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