

**Late Fall Bass on Lake Keowee**  
- Bill Walker, Tournament Co-Director, Keowee Anglers

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By the time you read this the surface water temperature will be in the mid to low 60s in the vicinity of Mile creek park, and lower in south and north ends of the lake. After that, it's likely to continue dropping through December toward its winter levels: 45°F - 55°F depending on where you are on the lake (not counting the "hot hole" area where the water is generally a bit warmer).

The fall early-morning bite is well underway. As usual, the surface water temperature has cooled first in the south end of the lake. So, as I write, the fall early morning bite in the shallows has started in the south end and is working its way northward. At the Jocassee dam the water temperature is dropping as well, and soon I expect the early morning bite to start up there for the fall season. The last areas to cool will be the middle of the lake, particularly the mile or so just north of the route 130/183 bridge near the "hot hole" where the water warmed from cooling Duke's reactors is released back into the lake.

Each day, where the early morning bite is on, it starts at the crack of dawn, that time when the stars are still visible and only a slight hint of the coming sun shows on the eastern horizon. From then until sunrise, fish the shallows with surface, walk-the-dawg lures (that zigzag along the surface as you jerk them), poppers, or shallow running lures with a rattle. In the south end of the lake, ¼ oz. red-eye shad work well. I find that lures that splash and/or rattle are easier for the fish to find in the darkness at the crack of dawn! As the morning gets brighter, bass strike at a wider variety of lures. And finally, when the sun hits the water, the bass pretty much shut off in the shallows, though they linger a little longer on the shady side of islands and on wind-blown points.

For the first hour or so after the sun hits the water, you may be lucky enough to catch a fish in the deeper water near the shallows where they were feeding at dawn. There you can try dragging a Carolina-rigged plastic worm along the 15-20-foot depth contour on a cloudy or windy day. On a calm sunny morning you may do better dragging your worm around the 25-30-foot depth contour.

Through November the water cooled, and the baitfish worked their way further and further up the creeks, and bass followed. If you happen to see a ball of baitfish on your depth finder, look for bass to be hovering nearby, biding their time, waiting for a moment of their choosing to attack. Trolling a lure through or underneath the ball of baitfish may trigger a strike. Dropping a silver spoon with a little white hair to the bottom under the bait ball and jigging it up off the bottom and letting it flutter back down can also be effective.

If you have electronics on your boat, patience in your head, and time on your hands, here's an effective technique. Search the creek channels after the sun is up. Start out deep in say 80 feet of water and slowly follow a creek channel as it gets shallower and shallower all the way to 30 feet. You're looking for bait balls or suspended schools of fish similar to depth chart 1 below. When you find them, drop a white/silver jigging spoon down to their depth, then jerk it up and let it settle down again. Bass often strike as it falls. If you've lowered your rod to let the lure fall, and your line doesn't sink, a fish is already on it. Set the hook then, or any time you feel weight!

The problem with this technique is that it takes a lot of boring time searching the creek channel without even having a hook in the water. You may search for an hour or two without finding anything. That's what I mean when I say it takes patience and time. But when/if you find what you're looking for you can easily catch 8 or more bass one right after the other. Also, remember the places where you do find them so you can try there again another day or another year and maybe save yourself some searching time!

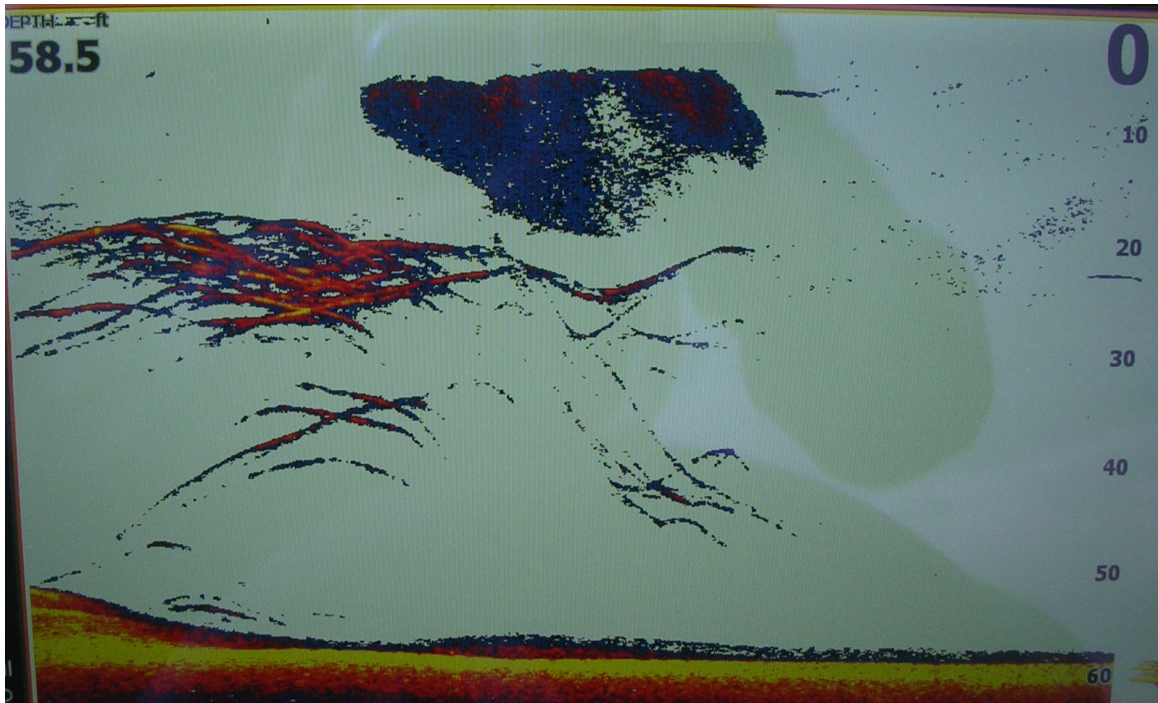
If you're lucky, you'll also see surface feeding frenzies as bass actually attack a school of baitfish. Casting a lure into this surface action can often yield a quick strike and a fish on your line. However, casting into this action is often easier said than done. The bass often start feeding far from your boat, and by the time you get your boat over there, the bass are gone.

You have a better chance of getting your lure into the action if you have a rod on the side prepared and ready with a lure you can cast a long distance. A large heavy, walk-the-dawg surface lure can be cast a long distance with a stiff rod and thin line. Another lure that can be cast a long distance is a solid metal jigging lure. Often jigging spoons are not quite as heavy, but solid metal jigging lures can be small with little wind resistance for their weight. Try casting some lures from your dock and select a few you can cast the longest distance. The longer your casting range, the better chance you have that bass will start a feeding frenzy close enough for you to reach them with your lure.

A word of warning ... if you do go out to try the early morning bite in the Fall, be sure you're prepared for two things: cold and fog. We've already had some cold mornings on Lake Keowee with the temperature in the 30s. Remember the moving boat generates wind-chill as well, so always take one more layer of clothing than you think you need. You can always take off what you don't need and stow it in the boat.

On one occasion, as I was sitting in my boat near a shallow main-lake point fishing in dense fog, I heard two fishing boats approaching me along the shore from opposite directions. I started wondering whether they would each see my running lights in time to avoid hitting me. Each of them cautiously approached my position further from shore than I had positioned my boat to fish. Then I feared they would hit one another. Fortunately, they were each being cautious, and suddenly both motors stopped close together out in the fog where I couldn't see what was happening. I didn't hear any crunch of a boat collision. Through the fog I heard one man shout out loud, presumably to someone in the other boat, "This fog's a real pisser, ain't it!" The motors started up again, and the boats passed and continued slowly on their ways.

Remember, taking care of yourself and your boat is far more important than catching fish. Wear lots of warm clothing this fall and respect the fog. It's important to be around to fish another day!



Depth Chart 1: A large school of bait fish in the top 20 feet in center with bass under them, mostly in 20-30 feet, but some deeper.

Morning sun breaking through Lake Keowee Fall fog – Photo courtesy of Mike McGrey

