

# THE COMPLETE NON-BOATER

As they are carrying their tackle to their partner's boat in the morning, most non-boaters have at least once heard the comment, "What did you bring, everything?" I know I have, and I feel like I have a good system to carry everything I need for the day. I have all my tackle, food, drink, and accessories in one soft side bag. I don't want to talk about the tackle aspect of being a non-boater. That is an article in-and-of-itself. Let's just say that you should only bring as much as you need to feel confident on the water.

Most waters in New York offer both smallmouth and largemouth, so usually a good variety of tackle is in order. Additionally, you can never be too sure of your partner's style of fishing. If your partner tells you he wants to fish for smallies at the pre-tournament meeting and you don't ask the right questions, you could be burning spinnerbaits or dragging tubes the whole next day. And, if after two or three hours, a call is made to bail on the original plan, carrying a variety of baits and rods will give you the ability to be versatile on the water.

That being said, there are some additional items that can be invaluable that non-boaters should carry with them. This is a list of things that I have with me. Some I use every time out, others are very situational:

**Cull Tags:** I generally carry six cull tags with me. I find it makes culling easier to have every fish on a tag when they are in the boat. They are easier to handle and identify in the livewell. I have three numbered floats, two that are colored and a rope. The different styles can be used to differentiate approximate size of fish. I can't always remember exactly what color or number my smallest two fish are, but if the "rats" are on the numbered floats, I can quickly find them in the livewell. On each tag, however, I replaced the plastic device most manufacturers have with a reliable metal clip.

**Livewell Chemicals:** Sticking with the livewell theme, not all boaters carry chemicals for the livewell. I don't use chemicals religiously. However, if I have a fish that doesn't look very healthy, at least I can do something that might help that bass recover. I have heard stories of chemicals doing wonders for fish from enough Federation anglers to convince me to carry it with me during tournaments. Of course, I would recommend asking your boater if it is okay to use before going ahead and dumping chemicals in his livewell.

**Balance Beam:** In my opinion the balance beam is the best way to cull fish that are close in size, but not all boaters carry one. Scales are fine to use, but they can have significant variance and are reliant on batteries. I've also had issues with getting scales to operate correctly when you are trying to hurry to get your bait back in the water. That is not something you want to be dealing with during a tournament. Balance beams take most of the guess work out of culling.

**Scale:** After I just got done bashing the electronic scale for culling, it does have its place in the tournament arsenal. It is very important to know if you are on the right size fish to do well in a given event. Most of the time anglers can identify the approximate size of the fish they are on. But on waters where there are a lot of little fish being caught, like Lake George, it can be challenging to know if the bigger fish you are catching are a pound and a half or two pounds. Over the course of a limit this can mean you are misestimating by two and a half pounds. Taking the time to put one fish on the scale could make you aware that a technique or location change may be needed.

**Tools:** These are kind of no-brainer items that you would have anytime you are fishing. I always like to have a pair of needle-nose pliers and something to cut braided line with me. Additionally, I will carry a pair of diagonal cutters in case I need to cut a hook for whatever reason.

**Food and Drink:** I will also stuff my pretzels, Peanut M&M's and Gatorade in my tackle bag. This is usually enough to carry me through the day, but obviously others may need something more substantial.

**Maps/Handheld GPS:** If you want to take a boater to one of your spots, you should be able to point it out on your own map or have a waypoint on a GPS. First of all, this will give the boater confidence that you have an idea of where the area is, and that will convert into some trust that the spot is worth spending some time on. At the Oneida Tournament this past season, I did not follow this advice and directed my boater toward the area where there was a hump in which I had some fish in practice. Well, as we got closer, I noticed none of the waypoints on my handheld seemed to be in the area that this hump was located. Then I figured out that I had marked it on my boat's GPS and hadn't transferred the data. We didn't go too far out of our way, but don't put yourself in that situation if you can help it.

**Syringe and Needle:** When fishing in deep water, "fizzing" can reduce the stress on fish in the livewell. Not all boaters will have the proper equipment, so you can be responsible for fish care as well. Before next tournament season there will be a feature on Deep Water Fish Care, so details on fizzing will be available then, but having them on hand is a one-time addition that will make a big difference in fish care. **FL**