

Slip Bobbers- for Real Men.

Some would say, “Real men don’t use bobbers.” Tell that to my buddy Mike, an air force man, our friend Scott the football star, or my brother Brad, who’s 6’-3” and weighs over 200 Lbs. These guys can jig and power fish with the best of them but when it comes down to getting serious about catching Trophy Walleye, they’re not too proud to put down their Lindy’s and give ‘em the slip. “Slip Bobber” that is!

Four years ago at one of Wilderness North’s outposts, I introduced Mike to the art of slip bobber fishing. At first he seemed a little skeptical about the rig but after landing a 31- inch walleye on it his first day out, Mike became a believer and was hooked for life. In fact, Mike keeps a slip bobber rigged in the boat at all times. Brad and Scott had similar results on that same trip which we’ll get to later.

What the Heck Is a Slip Bobber?

A slip bobber is a lot like the traditional bobber we all fished as kids, except instead of having a clip or spring that permanently secures it to your line, a slip bobber has a hole through its center, or on its side, allowing it to slide freely up and down your line. Slip bobber systems also incorporate a bobber stop. The bobber stop is usually a small piece of plastic or Dacron thread that attaches to your line and with a fair amount of finger pressure the bobber stop can be slid up or down your line. This is what allows you to adjust your bobber for different depths.



How to Rig a Slip Bobber:

There are all kinds of fancy ways to rig slip bobbers today but one of the easiest, and personally my favorite, is as follows: First, I like to use a 6.5 - 7 foot medium action spinning rod and reel. The longer rod will give you more hook-setting leverage when you’re twenty or thirty yards away from your bobber. Spinning equipment is also more manageable and allows your bobber stop to exit and return through your reel bail and rod guides more freely. Next, since we’re dealing with the potential fish of a lifetime, I lean towards 8lb. mono rather than 6lb. During our first season fishing at Wilderness North, we quickly realized that 6lb test just wasn’t tough enough for some of the monster walleye that lurk in their lakes.

Let's move on to the meat and potatoes of the slip bobber system, the components and how to rig them on your line. But first, peel about 5 feet of line beyond your rod guides.

- 1) **The Bobber Stop** – I like to use the Hi-Vis braided Dacron thread kind because it's easy to see and slides through the reel bail and rod guides best. The thread comes tied around a small plastic tube. Slide the tube and thread up your line about 5 feet. Now push the thread off the tube up towards your rod and the tube down off your line. Next, pull the loose threads tight which makes a knot. Don't cut the threads because they're needed to help retighten the knot from time to time.
- 2) **A Small Bead** – Slide this up your line next.
- 3) **The Bobber** – Thill makes a 4" Nite Brite Float. It's a good size for Canada and, because it lights up, you can easily see it at dusk. Slide the Night Brite Float up your line lighted end first.
- 4) **A 1/16oz jig** – Tie the jig to your line. I like to use a jig with a wide hook gap because when I use a minnow there's still plenty of exposed hook to penetrate a walleye's tough jaw. (I also like to tail hook my minnow for more wiggle.)
- 5) **Split Shot** – Once on the water, add enough split shot to submerge about three-quarters of your bobber in the water. This will provide less resistance for the walleye to take your bobber under and they'll be less likely to spit your bait out.

Now Let's Go Fishing!

The key to successfully presenting your slip bobber system is to have your bait set near or above the depth the walleye are at. Most of the time walleye are close to the bottom so that's where I like to start. You can use your graph to guess how deep to set your bobber stop but we've learned of a more accurate way, which is to use a "weighted depth finder." It's a small weight with an alligator clip molded into it. (Ice fishermen use them frequently to set their micro-light ice jigs close to bottom.)

- 1) Clip the weight to your jig and slowly drop it towards bottom till you come to the bobber stop knot.
- 2) Slide your bobber stop knot up or down the line until your bobber rests about a foot under the water.
- 3) Reel in your line and remove the weight.
- 4) Add a fat sassy minnow or a big juicy leech and you're in business.

Note: If the structure you're fishing is shallower or deeper than where you are anchored, you'll want to adjust the depth of your bobber accordingly. If your bobber sits on its side, you have your bobber set too deep. Slide your bobber stop towards your bait until your bobber sits upright.

Sometimes, especially toward late evening, walleye will start to suspend off the bottom so you'll want to adjust your bobber accordingly. Turn your graph on occasionally to see if you mark suspended fish. If you're not getting bites near the bottom, move your bobber stop down your line towards your bait so it suspends about half way up from the bottom. That should do the trick.

Why Are Slip Bobbers So Effective?

The slip bobber rig is extremely versatile because you can adjust it to present your bait to any depth and keep your bait in the strike zone longer. It also produces fewer snags and presents your bait in its most natural state. Slip bobbers also make detecting light bites much easier. However, probably the most important attribute of the bobber is that it allows you to work an area quietly. The evening that Mike caught his 31-inch walleye, two of the three boats in our camp were trolling jigs back and forth over the top of a ten foot saddle. We were catching the typical 17–20 inch walleye but we had a feeling this spot had much more to offer. We decided to stop the motors, quietly lower the anchors, drop our bobbers down and see if any larger walleye would move up the saddle to feed. Sure enough, we landed a couple of nice walleye over 25 inches and at 8:45 PM, as a loon hailed in the distance, Mike's dream-fish came up the saddle to feed. Mike's bobber made a slight twitch then started moving away. The bobber never went under water but Mike knew it was a fish so he waited a couple seconds and then set the hook. That's when he landed his 31-inch fish of a lifetime.

You can bet that the next evening all three of our boats were at that spot but for some reason, none of us anchored and worked the slip bobbers. All three boats just trolled jigs back and forth over the saddle. We were catching some nice 20 - 22 inch fish but no hogs. I think we just assumed that it was only a matter of time before the big girls moved in to scoop up our trolled jigs and we'd be in walleye heaven again. Darkness fell but the big fish bite never came. Later on, back at the cabin, we discussed the day's events and determined that the true trophy walleyes may have been a little skittish from all the motor commotion overhead and never moved up to feed.

The next morning, my brother Brad and his fishing partner Scott, decided to try slip bobbers almost exclusively. At their first spot, the pair hauled in several walleye over 20 inches, including a nice 24 and a dandy 25-incher. (Because they were anchored and quietly presenting bobbers, they were able to work their first spot for a couple hours without spooking the fish.)

After a successful day of bobber fishing, Brad and Scott eventually made their way back to the saddle where Mike had landed his big one a couple evenings earlier. Within two minutes of their arrival, Scott yelled out "bobber down", which now happens to be his favorite battle cry. He landed another 24 inch piece of "Canadian Gold". A few minutes later, Brad's bobber went under and he pulled in a 26-inch Master Angler. By the time the rest of us started to arrive, Brad and Scott were like a couple of giddy school girls who had just been invited to their first dance. Out of respect for them and their spot, my fishing partner, Ted, and I decided to keep our distance and troll jigs off the deep side of the saddle. Next thing we heard was... "bobber down." Ted and I turned to see both Brad and Scott playing big fish. After about five minutes of videotaping, Scott landed a chunky 36-inch northern. Then, after loaning the boys a second landing net, we got to tape Brad netting the biggest walleye of his life. It was a massive 29-1/2 inch monster.

Where do Slip Bobbers Shine?

Again, because slip bobbers can be adjusted to any depth, they work well over the tops of rocks, weeds and wood. We've effectively presented our baits over beaver house wood in late spring, suspended our baits over submerged weed beds in summer and off sharp breaks in the fall. One evening, two years ago, I caught a 28-inch and a 29-inch walleye one hour apart using a slip bobber off the edge of a small rock pile that had historically only produced 15 - 16 inch fish. I strongly believe it was because I quietly anchored away from the spot and the natural presentation of the bobber fooled those two wily trophies into taking the bait.

When To Use Slip Bobbers?

We often use slip bobbers in the morning or evening when the lake has laid down. A quiet presentation is important because it matches the quiet environment and offers the best opportunity for success. Slip bobber fishing also gives us a chance to turn the motors off and just enjoy the piece and solitude of the great Canadian wilderness. Bobbers also come in handy during a cold front or after a thunderstorm when walleye become less active feeders. The natural presentation of live bait sitting in front of a negative walleye's nose is just too hard for it to pass up. Slip bobbers also come in handy when you're fishing Canada with youngsters. You'll spend more time taking fish off their hooks and less time getting them un-snagged or retying their line. But probably one of the most important times to break out the old bobber is when you find a spot and you think big walleyes could be near. For example, if you find a rock, wood, or weed structure that produced good quantities of eating size walleye during midday, try going back in the evening with bobbers, but make sure you quietly anchor twenty or thirty yards from your target.



We've enjoyed fly-in fishing Canada for over twenty years but have especially savored our seven seasons of fishing with Wilderness North where we've managed to catch and release 40 Master Angler walleyes, twenty-five of which were caught on slip bobbers. On top of that, out of those 40 Master Anglers, 15 were 28-31 inches and 11 out of those true trophies were caught on slip bobbers. So whether you're a real man, a real woman or just looking to try something different in Canada this season, we promise not to laugh when we see ya given 'em the "slip"-especially if you catch your personal best, a Master Angler, or set a new lake record.

So have fun, stay safe, have a great Canadian adventure this season and please don't forget to continue to support catch and release.



This document has been brought to you by the fly-in fishing experts
at Wilderness North – Canada's premiere destination for
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