

## Deep Ledges & Drop-Offs: Warm-Weather Hotspots

**C**hannels, ledges and drop-offs produce good numbers of crappie, with summer and winter being the best two seasons for deep water. Fishing channel drop-offs for crappie is nothing new. Veteran crappie fishermen can tell lots of stories about bumping bottom with big sinkers to find the drops. Today's maps and locators make this job easier for anglers.

### Where To Fish

A drop-off is a quick downward drop in the lake bottom often associated with a channel. The drop-off may be a somewhat gradual



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drop or a 90-degree, straight-down turn. Most drops are in between but with a clearly defined fall.

A ledge is the portion on top of the drop-off. Similar to a building ledge, it's a relatively flat spot on top of and next to the

drop. Crappie often hold on this key spot.

A deep ledge offers everything to crappie. It's a reference during travel. The deep side of a ledge provides protection from predators and a comfort zone during extreme temperatures. The cover usually present on the break-over portion of a ledge gives protection, an ambush point for

feeding and a location reference when suspending.

### Finding Crappie

A contour map and locator are your key tools for quickly finding a drop. First, look at the map and mark some obvious spots. Contour lines spaced closely together represent a quick drop.

If no map is available, you can still motor from one side of the lake to the other. Have a buoy ready to throw when you find a drop. Once you find one, you can ease along the ledge looking for cover and fish.

A good ledge may hold large numbers of fish for long periods of time. Unlike finding a roaming school and catching big numbers for a

short time, a prime ledge will produce day after day, year after year.

### Catching Fish

Specific spots are key to finding and catching fish. Bends, cuts, irregular features and cover are prime examples of target areas. Spot-fishing these areas will quickly reveal active fish if they are present.

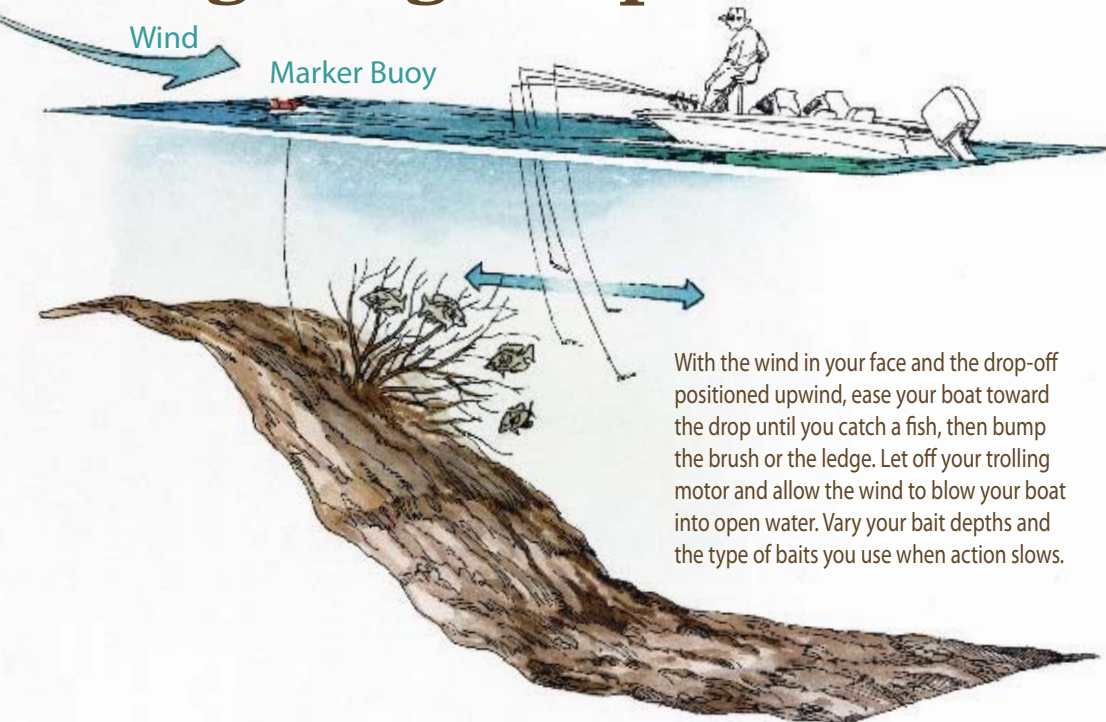
Summer offers a variety of techniques to catch fish along a drop. Casting, drifting and fast-trolling can be good choices. However, when going deep, vertical presentations are usually the best.

Slow vertical trolling with two to four poles per angler is a good method for locating cover, maintaining contact with the bottom and finding active fish. Once a spot is found, the boat can be stopped on the structure.

While pre-fishing for a tournament in Alabama, Barry Bunch revealed a trick that always seems to work. He found cover on the side of a drop-off and then slow-trolled into the wind and directly into the drop-off. He eased his boat into the drop until he caught a fish or bumped the cover and drop-off. Bunch would let off the trolling motor and allow the boat to drift away. He repeated the process over and over.

Another option is vertical jigging with one pole. A single jigging pole that's 8 to 10 feet long gives you the ad-

## Targeting Drop-Offs



With the wind in your face and the drop-off positioned upwind, ease your boat toward the drop until you catch a fish, then bump the brush or the ledge. Let off your trolling motor and allow the wind to blow your boat into open water. Vary your bait depths and the type of baits you use when action slows.

vantage of concentrating on one bait. You can feel contact with the bottom, cover and bites. You can also watch your line for light bites.

One-pole jiggling puts you in complete control of your bait. The bait's position, action and depth are determined by you.

Be sure to experiment with different presentations to learn which one the crappie like best. If you are in doubt as to what you should do, remember to try no action, moving the jig very slowly and keeping it bumping the cover.

### Summer Tips

The crappie's aggressiveness varies in summer. For this reason, jigs are a good choice. Preferred colors include red/chartreuse and white/chartreuse. However, any color with chartreuse will probably make for an attractive crappie bait.

Minnnows are great during summer because they provide their own natural action and allow anglers to worry more about the placement of the bait instead of being so careful with line movements and quick hooksets. They also offer flash and scent.

Be sure to have the net ready. When a big slab or one of the many other species comes up from deep water during summer, you had better be prepared for a fight and have a landing net.

It's also a good idea to wear protective clothes and sunscreen, and drink plenty of fluids.

During the summertime, try to fish in the very early hours of the day and watch out for pleasure boaters and jet skis, which not only can be irritating but also dangerous.

# Rigs For Slow-Trolling Drop-Offs

Typical slow-trolling rigs include:

1. A double-hook minnow rig on 6- or 8-pound test line with a  $\frac{3}{8}$ ,  $\frac{1}{2}$  or  $\frac{3}{4}$ -ounce sinker and a No. 1 or 2 hook.
2. Your favorite crappie jig on 6- or 8-pound test line with a split shot.



### Factors

**Wind** — Summer winds are typically less than those in spring. On most days, you'll have little or no wind, so boat control will not be a problem.

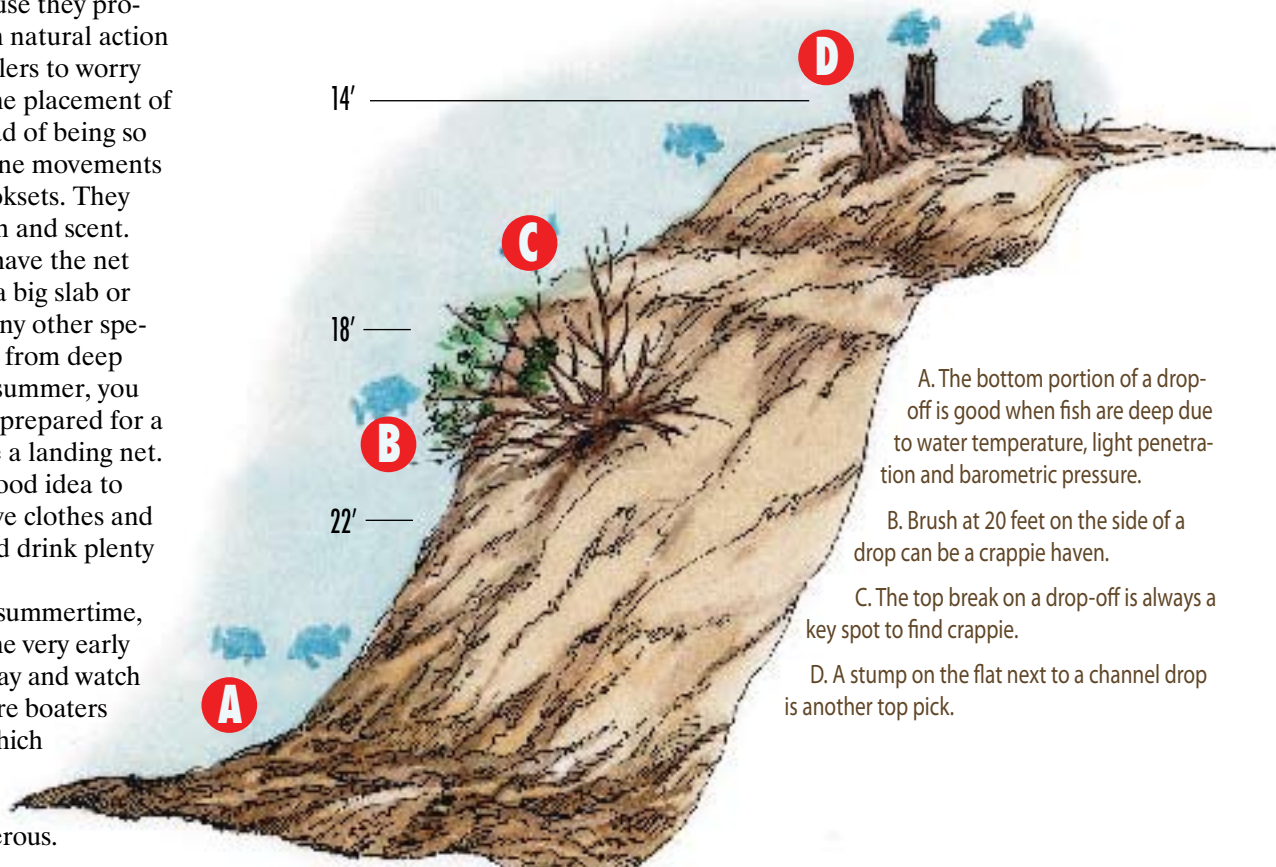
**Sun** — The penetration of light will definitely change the depth of the fish and their feeding mood. Be aware of any quick shutdowns by the crappie. You may simply

increase or decrease your depth to start catching again. If you're using jigs, be ready to change colors with changing light situations.

**Boat Traffic** — This can be a big problem in summer. Night-fishing for crappie is one alternative. Another option is to fish very early until late morning before the party folks come out.

**Rain** — During summer, rain is not a bad thing. It can help keep you cool and may even help you catch more fish.

## Drop-Off Hotspots



A. The bottom portion of a drop-off is good when fish are deep due to water temperature, light penetration and barometric pressure.

B. Brush at 20 feet on the side of a drop can be a crappie haven.

C. The top break on a drop-off is always a key spot to find crappie.

D. A stump on the flat next to a channel drop is another top pick.