



## **Time Flies on Geneva Lake**

**by Steve Sarley**

**Sunday, August 24, 2008**

Captain Walt Koch sent me an e-mail with a tip on boat gas savings a while back. We exchanged greetings and I told him to call me if he ever had a few hours available. Walt runs the Red Rock Guide Service, concentrating primarily on Geneva Lake.

After canceling a couple of dates at the last minute, I wondered whether Koch had doubts about my reliability. When I showed up almost an hour late for our evening outing, I was sure of it. If he was sore at me, I couldn't tell. Koch is a mild-mannered and pleasant man. The amiable captain proved to be someone with whom I always would enjoy sharing a boat.

Koch grew up in downstate Illinois. He has lived in Chicago and its suburbs. He finally landed in Lindenhurst 25 years ago. He has been married to his wife, Lana, for 37 years. They have two grown sons and a pair of granddaughters.

Koch retired from his position as a chemist at Abbott Labs a few years ago, and he decided to expand his guiding business. He first started guiding as a youth on his dad's upland game and waterfowl hunt club in southern Illinois. He began guiding on Geneva on a part-time basis in 1993.

We set out in his Lund Pro-V 2025, powered by a 225-horsepower Evinrude. The rig was a 2003 model but looked brand new. Koch uses top-flight equipment and keeps it all exceptionally neat and orderly. That is a habit I truly admire. I had one thing I had told Koch that was etched in stone: I had to be off the water by 8 p.m. sharp, no exceptions.

We were in search of northern pike. Koch had honed in on them in recent days, with a 16-pike catch on a four-hour excursion being his best effort this year so far.

We would be targeting these toothy fish in deep water using Shimano reels spooled with 14-pound Berkley Fireline tipped with 17-pound Vanish fluorocarbon. A 3/4-ounce egg sinker would get the bait down quickly. We would try live perch and bluegills and also some live suckers. The technique is to drop your bait to the bottom and then bring it in two cranks so the weight was up a foot or two, allowing the bait to swim freely.

Koch told me to let the fish run for one minute if I felt a strike, which probably would be faint. Then I was to reel in until I felt weight and then set the hook. I had a hard strike while raising my bait. It came halfway in and then spit the bait. There weren't any teeth marks on the perch, so it was probably a smallmouth.

We fished for a while. Koch's sonar showed plenty of fish but they obviously were not hungry. We were a half-hour closer to my 8 p.m. deadline.

We moved to a steep breakline off a well-defined weedline. Again, we couldn't tempt a pike to hit our baits. We again moved to a different pike spot and worked our live bait rigs, attentively awaiting a subtle tap. Nothing doing, the pike simply weren't hungry today.

We moved to the south side of Black Point as my watch showed 7 p.m. I had an hour, absolutely no more time than that. I was dead set on leaving at 8 p.m.

Now we would be after smallies. We used Fenwick Techna AV rods with high-end Shimano reels. We were rigged with 6-pound Berkley Trilene and an eighth-ounce egg sinker. Tiny No. 8 hooks would be threaded with whole crawlers or leeches. Koch conditions his crawlers in ice water for a few minutes to toughen them up and make them expand. We would cast out and then sweep the rod tip back and then reel in any slack. Koch said the sweep technique gave better feel than simply reeling in.

The crawlers were tempting, but to the wrong species of fish. We began pulling in rock bass after rock bass with a few bluegills or two mixed in. I love Geneva rockies and gills, but we wanted smallies and the clock now said it was 7:30 p.m. I knew that if we could pop one smallie, more would come in short order. That's the way it is with Geneva smallmouth bass.

After a few more chunky rockies, Koch switched to a G. Loomis/Shimano combo with a drop shot rig on the end. He was spooled with Power Pro hi-vis yellow line tipped with 8-pound Vanish. The plastic bait of choice was a Berkley Power bait

4-inch worm in a watermelon color. It was 7:45 p.m. Only 15 more minutes and I needed to be gone. Koch patiently tossed out his line a few times and finally was in an encounter with a beautiful, fat and feisty Geneva Lake smallie. We both looked at our watches. It was only a few clicks before my witching hour of 8 p.m.

Koch grinned at me and asked, "Are you ready to head in?"

"Oh, well," I responded. "Why live my life on deadlines? What's another hour or two?"

I switched to a drop-shot rig and our smallie fishing began in earnest.

- To contact Koch, call **847-710-5453** or visit Red Rock Guiding Service online at: **[redrockguidingservice.com](http://redrockguidingservice.com)**
  
- Northwest Herald outdoors columnist Steve Sarley's radio show, "The Outdoors Experience," airs live from 8-9 a.m. Saturdays on AM-560. Sarley also runs a Web site for outdoors enthusiasts, [OExperience.com](http://OExperience.com). He can be reached by e-mail at [sarfishing@yahoo.com](mailto:sarfishing@yahoo.com).

