



TECH BULLETIN

CALIFORNIA

LAKE HODGES

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA'S "BIG BASS FACTORY"

Compiled from the Diaries and Logs of the Luhr Jensen Fishing Research Team.



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Lake Hodges is truly remarkable for its size. Even in a high water year, this impoundment is not much more than 1000 surface acres. Yet, in a given year, it probably kicks out more bass topping the 8-lb. mark than any other lake in the country! In a good year, Hodges is capable of producing from 200 to 300 lunkers, with many double-digit weight bass.

What is even more amazing is that this reservoir



is only open from March through October, and then only four days a week. Angling pressure can be intense in the early part of the spring when many of the wallhangers are caught. It is not uncommon to have more than a thousand bass anglers on the lake on a given weekend. If possible, try to visit Hodges during one of the two weekdays it is open. Nevertheless, despite the heavy pressure accomplished bassers can routinely tally five-fish daily limits here with the average largemouth weighing 2-1/2 lbs.

As a veteran guide on this lake, I have found a multitude of tactics to be effective on Hodges' bass population. Let's examine some of the more potent strategies to use on this small, yet remarkable reservoir.

FINESSE TECHNIQUES

The largemouth bass found in Hodges are of the

Florida strain. In contrast to the northern variety, Floridas tend to be a much more temperamental species. They are highly selective feeders and are somewhat skittish. Florida bass spook easily with increased outboard noise, a steady barrage of casts and the use of heavy monofilament. Hence, the majority of largemouths recorded here are taken with some sort of "finesse" approach, invariable utilizing a soft plastic bait and fairly fine diameter mono.

SPLIT SHOTTIN'

This is basically a West Coast version of the popular Carolina rig. Using a 4- to 8-lb. test line with either a spinning or baitcasting outfit, tie on a standard plastic worm hook. As a rough rule of thumb, use a size 1 to 2 hook for plastic baits from 2 to 4 inches in length. Switch to a 1/0 or 2/0 for six-inch long worms and a 3/0 to 5/0 for 8- to 12-inch plastic "snakes". Next, crimp on a small lead split shot, 23 to 28 inches above the bait. As you cast out, the split shot will quickly sink to the bottom. The lure trails behind, seductively falling at a much slower rate.

At Hodges, a number of small plastic lures are effective with the split-shottin' technique. Perennial favorites are small, 4-in. long handpoured worms. Popular color combinations are cinnamon brown with blue stripe, brown with green flake (known as "Green Weenie") and pumpkin pepper.

Another effective lure used with the split-shot method is the feather-like Reaper. This 2-in. long soft plastic bait can be dynamite on Hodges' largemouths when they become ultra-finicky. The reaper is made to mimic a wounded, fluttering shad min-

RECOMMENDED CRANKBAITS



TOPWATER BAITS & JIG



now. It is most effective in a "salt and pepper" color which is basically clear plastic with black, glittery flakes added. Also, light-line drop-shottin' is starting to produce more limits when traditional wormin' tactics fail. Stay with lighter 4- to 8-lb. test mono and tiny 2- to 3-in. plastic baits for the drop-shot method.

CRANKIN'

Hodges can be an outstanding lake for the crank-plug angler. Many specimens of trophy proportion are taken on a parade of cranks. In the early spring when the lake first opens, a slow, steady retrieve seems to work best with a scaled-down plug. If the fish are near the bank, try a *Brush Baby*® or *Speed Trap*™. They're great in early spring shallows. A *Klawdad*™ is another great springtime lure because crayfish are major forage at Hodges! Cast them along and across the shallow outside points. Many larger, prespawn female fish will traverse these points moving from deep to shallow terrain as water temperatures increase during the day.

As the season progresses, the largemouths may more aggressively attack crankbaits. With warmer water temperatures, switch to a *Speed Trap* or *Sugar Shad*®. These shallow-running lures are particularly effective with a high-speed retrieve, using either bait-casting or spinning tackle.

In the summer heat, bass move off the shore into 15- to 20-ft. depths. This is the time to use deep-diving crankbaits such as the 1/4- or 1/2-oz. *Hot Lips Express*®. Use primarily shad and crawdad patterns. A variety of colors will work but locals prefer the basic *Tennessee Shad* and *Crawfish* patterns for most conditions. However, particularly in the hotter months, experiment with some of the more opulent shades such as *Clearwater Flash*, *Silver/Black Stripe* and *Metallic Perch*. Often baits in these patterns give off more erratic light refractions, which stimulate the bass to strike.

TWITCHIN'

In late spring through early fall, lake veterans frequently rack up some hefty limits using floating minnow-shaped plugs. Usually lures of this genre excel in the early morning hours. However, there are times when a floating minnow can be effective all through the day if the bass are in a subsurface feeding pattern. The *Floating Power Minnow*™ is a perfect choice for this line of attack. Rig either the 3-1/2" model on 10# test mono using a medium action spinning rod. Do not add an additional snap or snap swivel but tie directly to the lure's split ring.

The trick is to "twitch" the lure slightly below the surface. Occasionally pause to allow it to rise to the top. Then immediately use the rod tip to make rhythmic twitches which cause the minnow to dance below the surface. Try the lure in the *Silver/Black Top/*

Orange Belly but keep a *Gold/Black Belly* handy in case the action slows down with the silver model.

At times the twitchin' technique is sensational once you master the retrieve necessary to make it appear to be a frantic shad minnow. Just be ready for a spectacular surface strike as it floats during the pause phase of the retrieve. As with any topwater bait, always "swing and set" when you feel resistance on the end of your line, *not* when you *see* the splash and commotion.

MORE SURFACE ACTION

During the summer period, a more traditional surface bite can heat up at Hodges. Usually the best action will be in the early morning. This is the time to throw larger lures such as the *Amazon Ripper*™ or *Nip-I-Diddee*®. These prop baits fish best in shallow, calm water. Use either the *Silver Shad* or *Perch* patterns on 10- to 12-lb. test mono. You can either twitch or "pop" the bait after it sits motionless for a moment following the cast. Occasionally stop your retrieve and allow the lure to rest completely still. Or you can kind of "pull" it back toward you using longer sweeps of the rod to generate more flash. This has the illusion of a school of shad crashing the surface. When bass are especially skittish and feeding on small shad minnows, switch to a *P.J. Pop*™. Work it with slower, rhythmic "pops" with the rod tip.

Hawg hunters should consider the larger *Woodchopper*®. This wood lure in the large 3/4-oz. size can be dynamite. Point your rod downward and retrieve with short twitchy pulls to make it "walk" for side to side. Use heavier 12- to 15-lb. test line and a stiffer baitcasting rod. The number one color is *Silver Speckle* but it pays to experiment with *Silver Glitter* or *Silver Foil/Black Shad*.

SPINNERBAITS

In recent years, Hodges has produced sporadically good results for spinnerbait enthusiasts. Don't hesitate to use a larger, magnum-sized model with willow leaf blade and solid white or chartreuse skirt, especially in the spring. Fish blades through the shallow flats wherever rocky rubble and stick-ups can be sighted. In high water years, these lures also are effective when fished parallel to the tule banks. During the summer months, the largemouths at Hodges suspend in 18 to 35 foot depths over submerged structure. This is the perfect situation to vertical spoon these fish. A favorite of lake locals is a 3/4-oz. *Crippled Herring*® in *Nickel/Neon Blue*

Back, Nickel/Neon Green Back or solid *Chrome* finish.

JIGS

Some of the largest bass weighed in each season are taken on the basic jig and pig combo. Lake experts recommend brown, black, purple or blue live rubber jigs in 3/8 to 1/2 ounces. A standard #11 Uncle Josh Pork Frog in either brown, black or purple is matched with the live rubber jig. One of the best well-kept secrets is to use a black jig teamed with a pork frog that is black on one side, blue on the other.

The jig and pig should be fished with 10 to 12-lb. test line and medium heavy baitcasting gear. This bait is most potent in the early spring when the lake's Floridas are foraging on crawdads. Fish the jig and pig around any rocky walls and outcroppings, along tule banks, points, rock piles and outside ledges.

Over the years, in my own guiding experience at Hodges, I have found that bass refer a "slow pull" with jig and pig. Instead of imparting the more conventional "hopping" motion to the bait, slowly "pull" it through the obstructions. This more closely replicates the movement of a slow crawling crawdad.

AREAS TO FISH

Like most small reservoirs in Southern California, Hodges has a number of key spots that have historically produced bass over the years. This V-shaped lake is divided into two basic sections: the eastern Bernardo Arm and the western Del Dios Arm. In the Bernardo Arm, work the points as you motor away from the marina heading east. It starts with "The Narrows" on the south side. This popular bank is characterized by prominent boulders and is a good place to throw crankbaits, pork and worms.

Heading farther into the Bernardo Arm to the north side are the "Bee Hives", so-called because of the numerous hives set up along the shore. This is a muddy flat with scattered broken rock. Try split-shottin', worms, crankbaits and topwater baits here.

In the Del Rios Arm, work the east side, fishing the rocky outcroppings and the massive rock walls leading all the way to the dam. This is the classic wormin', split-shottin', jig and crankbait territory. On the west side, switch to shallow water strategies. Topwaters, spinnerbaits along with shallow-diving crankbaits, plastic worms and jig and pigs can be potent fishing the muddy flats, tule banks and subtle points.

If you want to catch that bass-of-a-lifetime, try Lake Hodges. It's undoubtedly California's premier big bass factory!

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