

THE ART OF JUGGING

By Jerry Smyly

Jugging is a simple and effective method of catching catfish, and can be as easy or as complicated as you want to make it. I grew up in Myrtlewood and spent many a summer night floating the Tombigbee River chasing cats. It was not uncommon to be on the water from dusk 'til dawn. Whether trying to catch a mess for supper or 300 pounds for market, jugging is one of my favorite methods for catching whisker fish.

We would often throw out 50 to 100 jugs and float with them all night "working" them, checking bait and picking up fish periodically through out the night. It really was work! Cleaning a cooler full of cats the next morning after a long night of no sleep was quite a chore also. However, one doesn't have to make it work, and throwing out a few jugs and floating along can be a very relaxing way to spend an evening.

Tackle

As I mentioned jugging is very simple and can be done with minimal tackle. Of course you need a boat to fish them, but the equipment needed to do it is very inexpensive when compared to other techniques. A "jug" is just that, a jug or plastic bottle with a length of line and a baited hook on the end.

Here lately many people have begun using foam pool noodles rather than jugs. I prefer jugs rather

than noodles but that's what I grew up using. We always used quart jugs made of thicker, white plastic. These always seemed to work best for us. You may find you prefer other types, and some people prefer gallon jugs to quarts.

If you're going to be fishing at



night, make sure the jugs are a bright color so they can be easily seen with a light. The same goes for noodles. Once you find the jugs or noodles you want to use, gather up the desired number and get them ready to rig.

You will need some nylon twine, a candle, hooks, a felt-tipped pen or marker, duct or electrical tape and reflective stickers or tape. Nylon twine will be used for your lines or "drops" on your jugs.

Line size varies, but makes sure it's heavy enough to handle the fish you're after. The same goes for hooks. Use heavy line and bigger hooks if you're after trophy cats. The candle will be used to burn the line rather than cutting it with a knife and allowing it to fray. Your drops should be cut to fit the water depth you're fishing. I prefer one to six feet, any deeper and you'll just be snagging bottom.

Tie the hooks to the line with a good sturdy knot and then secure it to the neck of the jug or around the noodle. We use the tape to wrap around the jugs and hook the hooks underneath when they're not fishing. Use the marker to write your initials, and cut the reflective tape or stickers to put on them so they'll be easier to see at a distance when the light hits them.

Bait

Catfish aren't picky, so they're menu is very large. Earthworms, Catalpa worms, cut bait, chicken livers and gizzards, even hot dog weenies soaked in fish attractant will work. That being said, I prefer good, fresh, natural cut bait, something that will stay on the hook for a while and appeal to bigger cats. Shad, skipjack herring, mullet, and carp are top of the list. Sometimes these baits are hard to come by, If so, I'll settle for chicken gizzards. They're tougher and stay on the hook better than livers. It will add to their attractiveness if

you leave them in the sun for a few hours to get a good stink. If you have a weak stomach someone else may need to cut bait.

Technique

Jugging isn't hard to figure out, but a little strategy is involved. For example, will you be fishing a pond, slough, or main river? Each body of water will fish differently and therefore need to be approached differently. Generally sloughs, ponds, and backwaters will have little, if any, current so you will have to rely on the wind or manpower to scatter them in the most productive areas. If in a river, usually current will carry jugs down stream at a good enough rate to cover water. You always want to make sure your bait is in productive waters. Deep holes, rocky banks and channel swings, all hold cats. When fishing the river we would often pick up a number of our jugs out of our main fleet and bring them back upstream. The idea was to try and cover that productive water again and pick up any fish we may have missed during the first float through.

Another consideration is when to fish jugs. Most cats, particularly the big ones, are most active during night or periods of low light. Fishing jugs at night is a common tradition, but fish can be caught during the daylight hours also. In fact it will be much safer to introduce a youngster to the sport during daytime. Early morning and late evening work well, as does a heavy overcast day. Also anytime the river has a rise and is a little muddy, the cats will be on the move, and can be caught during daylight hours.

If anyone were to ask me the best time to go jugging I would simply

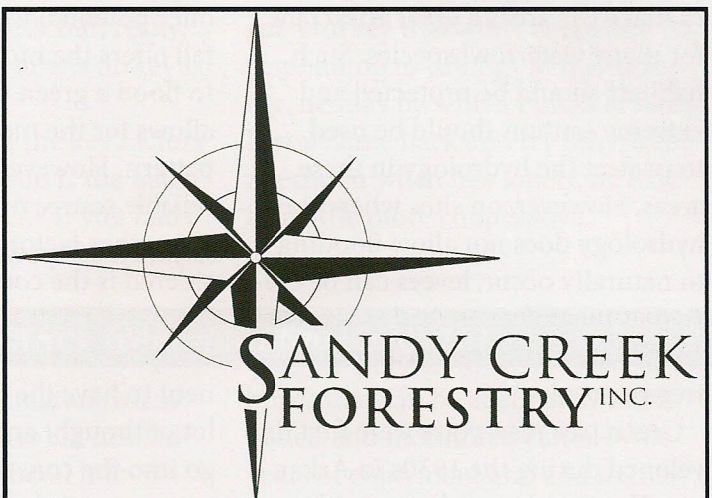
say it is anytime you can get out there. That's the same with any hunting or fishing. However, if I had to choose the perfect night for jugging, it would involve a dim moon, slight rise on the river, and a willow or may fly hatch. Some of our best hauls came on these nights.

Jugging is a great Southern tradition. You can catch a mess for the grease or load the boat. Whether you throw out 10 or 100, it can be a fun way to spend some time outdoors. If you go, keep safety in mind! This is especially important if going at night. Don't overload the boat. Have adequate lighting and make sure to wear proper fitting personal floatation devices (PFD). Also, if jugging on the river, be aware of channel markers and any navigational hazards. Oh, and I can't leave out the jug-eating tugboats that frequently traverse the river. The barges require a lot of room and some will do the best they can to dodge your gear, but it's ultimately your responsibility to move yourself and jugs out of harm's way.

If you take kids, remember to make it a fun experience. Wait a while before you make them walk the trunk of a

submerged tree, fighting moccasins and snapping turtles to get a jug. Dad took pride in leaving no jugs behind. If you found one of ours, it wasn't left on purpose. That's for sure! That should be the case with everyone. There's enough litter in our waterways without leaving jugs and noodles everywhere. If you're out there and see someone else's gear left behind and you know they're not coming back for it, pick it up. Oddly enough, some of the jugs we "rescued" from banks and fallen trees were some of our best catching jugs. They were more experienced I suppose. If you go, try to get all your jugs up and leave it better than you found it. Good luck and good fishing.

- Jerry Smyly is a wildlife biologist with Sandy Creek Forestry in Demopolis.



Specializing in all aspects of
timberland and wildlife management.

Pat Smith – Registered Forester
Amanda Smith – Landscape Designer
Jerry Smyly – Wildlife Biologist
Chris Brooks – Forestry Technician
Willie Harden – Wildlife Technician

205-609-1234
107 E Washington St – Demopolis, AL 36732
sandycreekforestry.com