

TEACH A MAN TO FISH...

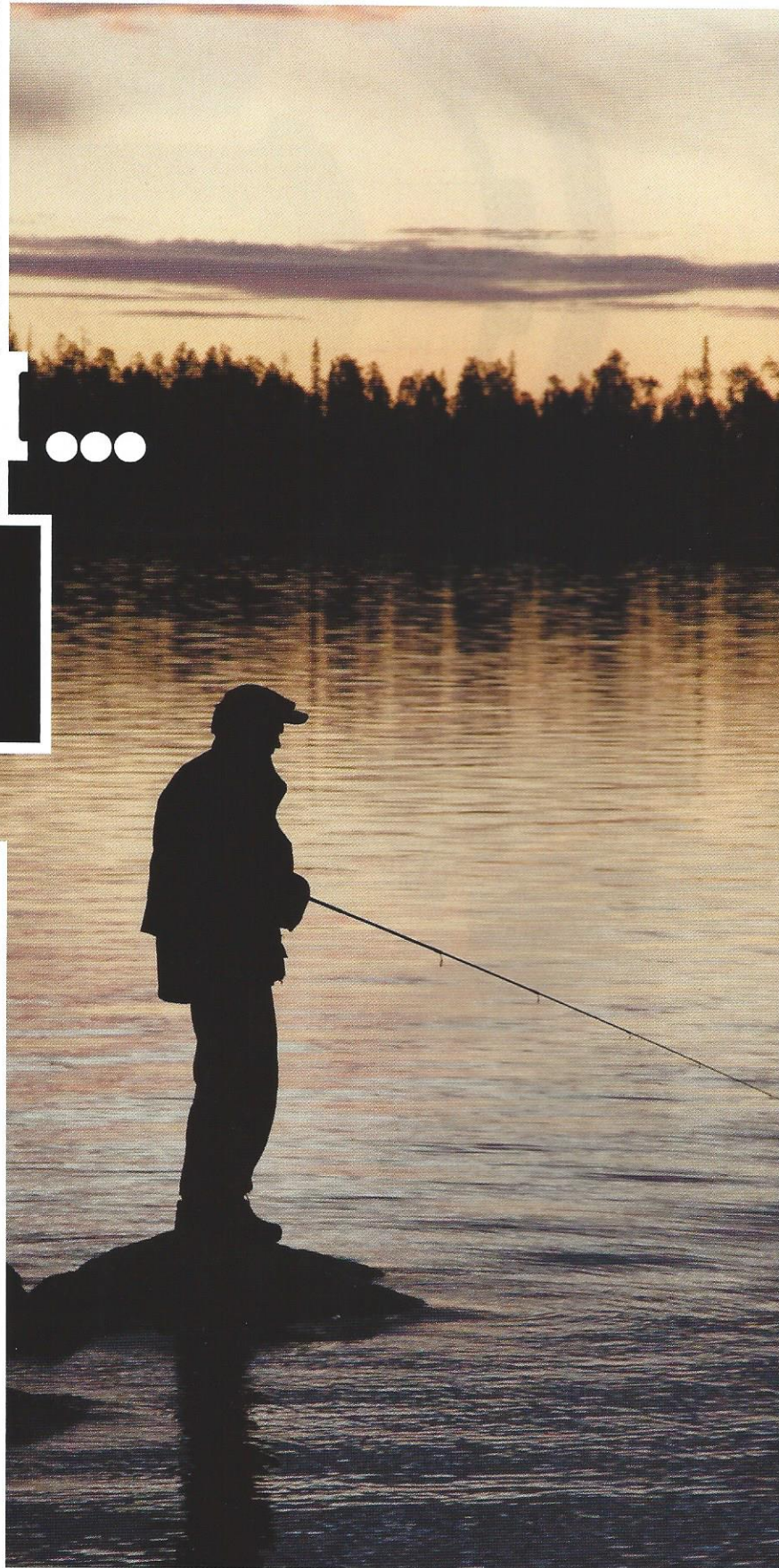
Capitalizing on Earth's Most Abundant Source of Protein

By Gordon Meehl

You know the old saying: Give a man a fish, feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime. Being that water is the life source for all living things, cities tended to spring up around lakes, rivers, and oceans.

And there we may find an aqueous motherlode of protein. Fish are not only the most plentiful source of animal protein on this big blue marble, they are also definitely the easiest to harvest. And you needn't be Bill Dance to do it.

Depending on your goals, fishing can be as basic as tossing a line in the water or as sophisticated and graceful as making a hook and feather dance across a stream like a marionette. Just like hunting, fishing can be an exercise in pure sustenance or it can be an obsessive means of feeding your bug-out group. How you view SHTF fishing (as a survival necessity or an extension of a peaceful hobby), where you plan to snag your protein (lake, pond, river, or ocean), and your mobility plan will all determine what gear and techniques you will use to land dinner.



The Source

More so than land-based hunting, fishing is an environmentally specific activity — that is to say, you have to go to your prey. Unless something has gone very wrong, you can't put on camo, sit in a blind and wait for your meat to wander into your kill zone. You have to go to a specific source to actively pursue — and ultimately deceive — your quarry to end up with a full stomach. An effective bug-out plan includes considerations for potential food sources as well as sources for water. As luck would have it, finding a productive fishing hole can take care of both.

Fishing in rivers, ponds, lakes, and the ocean each provide various results (when successful), require different attack strategies, and have widely different capacities. Let's review the various forms of H₂O we'll be sitting on or standing next to while waving around sticks with strings attached to them.

Ponds

Ponds are, by far, the most accessible and arguably the most plentiful source of scaly protein. However, they are the most limited in their yield. Think of ponds as being a home garden. They are small, easy to tend, but limited in what you can produce.

It may seem strange to think about having a strategy for harvesting a pond, but given the closed system of a land-locked pond, it's the best way to ensure a near limitless supply of sustenance. Fish farmers, as well as fish and game wardens, estimate that a fish-friendly pond can produce up to 200 pounds of fish per acre per year. But the reality is that if you take out that much fish at once, you'll end up with a fishless puddle. The best strategy is to eat the big ones and let the small ones grow.



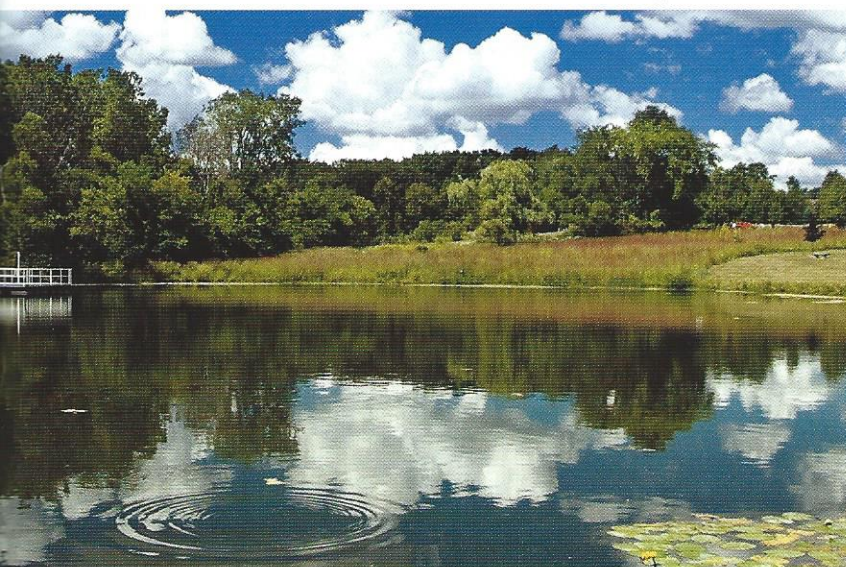
Lakes

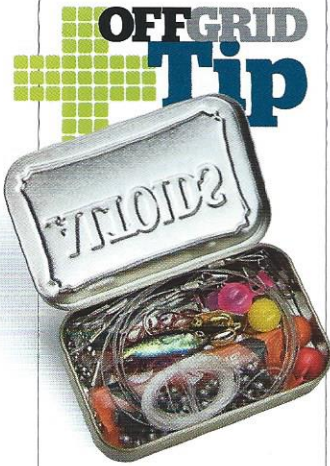
Lakes, except the ones preceded by the word "Great," are essentially big ponds with more imposing waterscapes. Whereas the bottom of a pond is typically bowl shaped, the bottom of a lake can look more like the split top of an English muffin. Lakes also offer a more diverse ecosystem over that of ponds. Ponds typically support just one or two kinds of fish, usually transplants from a larger body of water. In lakes, we find a wider array of fish types. Keep in mind that every freshwater fish (in the United States) is edible to some degree. Some are just bonier than others.

The nooks and crannies of the lake bottom provide protection for the small fry and a breeding ground for the larger of our finned friends. The subsurface architecture also allows lakes to support a more diverse menu. Because of this, it takes a more specific game plan to bring home dinner. Standing on the shoreline of a lake may only bring in small snack-sized fish. To get dinner-sized fish, you'll need to get your hooks out to deeper water or be able to toss it under some shady cover where the big boys lie.

Moving Water

Most cities have some sort of river, stream, or creek within bug-out distance. Many cities even have a river running through them or somewhere close to downtown. Moving water is the toughest of sources to get dinner from. Often it takes some real experience and skill to be able to read the water — the way it ebbs and flows — to find the right spot to land a lunker or two. This environment usually requires

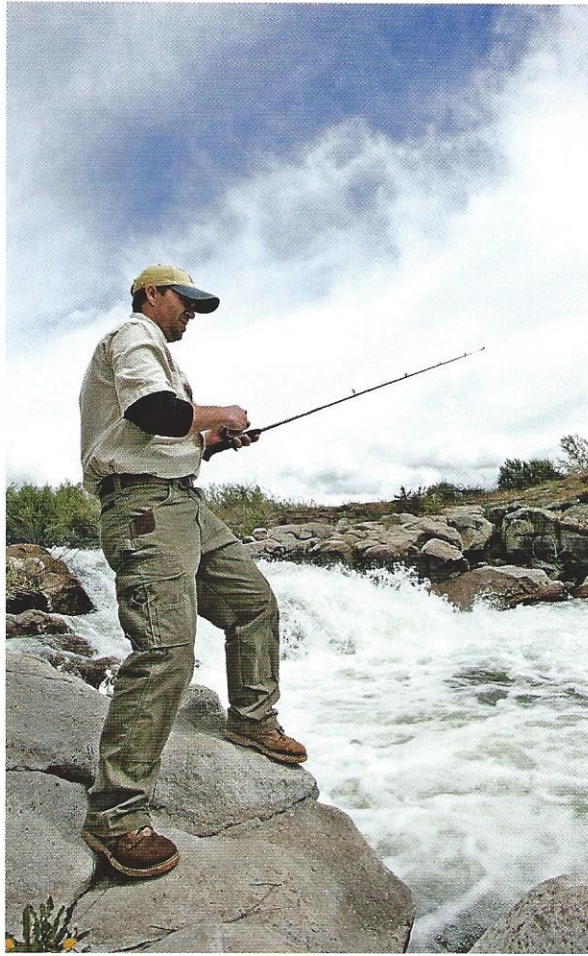




Altoids Fishing Kit

A compact fishing kit can be assembled and packed into in a small container such as an Altoids mint tin. Your "Altoids fishing kit" can be stuffed into your bug-out bag and used when necessary. Some common items that you can include in your kit are listed below.

- > Jig - (1) 2-inch Swirl Tail Grub
- > Jig - (1) Tiny Shad
- > Jig - (1) 1½-inch Tube Jig
- > Spoon - (1) ¼ oz
- > Bait - (8) Salmon Eggs
- > Fly - (1) Size 8
- > Fly - (1) Size 10½
- > Desiccant - (1) Moisture-Absorbing Packet
- > Razor - (1) Folding Razor Knife
- > Hooks - (2) Treble
- > Hooks - (3) #4
- > Hooks - (3) #6
- > Hooks - (3) #8
- > Leaders - (4) Wire Wound Leaders
- > Split Shot - (4) BB
- > Split Shot - (4) 3/0
- > Bobber - (1) ¾-inch
- > Line - (50 ft) 12 lb
- > Line - (25 ft) 30 lb
- > Ready Line - (Line, Bobber, Sinker, Hook)



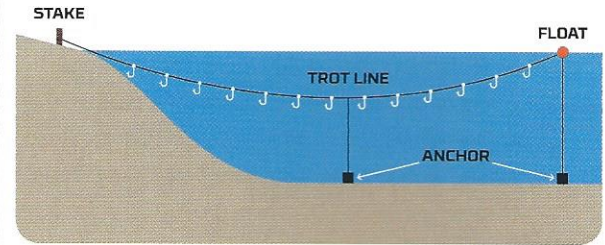
you to immerse yourself in it to set yourself up in a honey hole. In the two previously mentioned collections of water, you can be relatively successful standing on the edge and tossing a line a few dozen yards away; this not the case with more dynamic water features.

Equipment and Technique

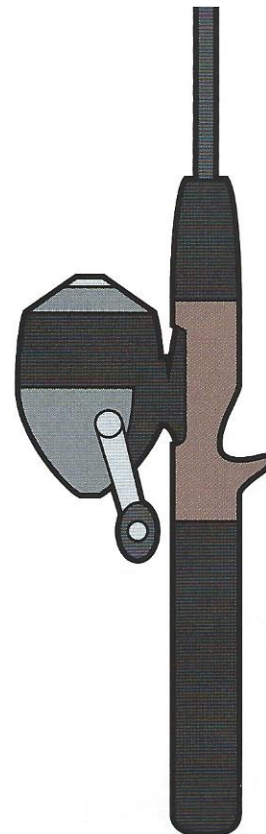
There's a wide range of equipment, strategies, and techniques, so let's explore just a few of the more common ones. You needn't have *Old Man and the Sea*-type tenacity to bring home dinner, but you also can't expect to lazily sit in a shady spot, dangle a line, and get enough to keep your troops well fed. Remember we're fishing as a means of survival, not as a means to escape from the daily grind.

You don't need a quiver of rods or a different reel for every water type — in fact you want to avoid that since we're buggin' out and trying to minimize excess gear. In fact, unless you've got some experience fishing, it's best to stick to a basic setup. For fishing a pond, all you need are hooks, a line, and possibly a piece of cork. See the sidebar for the contents of a basic survival fishing kit that is easily packable.

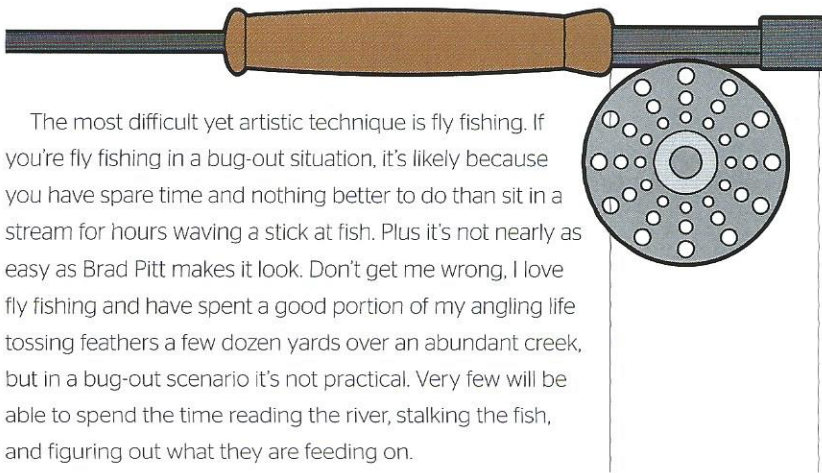
With this, you can toss one baited line in the water at a time and sit and wait. But since time is likely of the essence, you'll want to swing the odds in your favor without increasing your workload. You will want to set up a trotline — a line stretching from one point to another (the top line) with several baited lines branching off at regular intervals. (Strands of 550 paracord are perfect to build a trotline.) These lines are a force multiplier, allowing you to have numerous points of attack and increased potential of coming home with a bucket full of protein.



So what equipment should you have? If your bug-out plan doesn't specifically include fishing, but you want to be prepared if the opportunity presents itself, then an Altoids box with some basic items will fit nicely in your bag and is sufficient for the occasional waterborne meal. When stocking your survival fishing tin, remember small hooks can catch small fish and big fish, but big hooks can only catch big fish.



If you're a little more skilled angler or have a life-sustaining body of water close by, you'll want a spin casting setup. Many of the spin casting rods break down and fit nicely in a backpack. Spin casting is ideally suited for sending out lures or baited hooks more than a few yards away from your position. The technique of using a spin casting setup is to cast a line and slowly reel it back, or to cast a line and wait. These techniques are best suited for still-water fishing, such as in lakes and ponds. Using a spin cast rig in rivers or creeks can be done, but usually the heavy lures or bait required will tumble along the bottom, ultimately failing to trick a fish into biting.



The most difficult yet artistic technique is fly fishing. If you're fly fishing in a bug-out situation, it's likely because you have spare time and nothing better to do than sit in a stream for hours waving a stick at fish. Plus it's not nearly as easy as Brad Pitt makes it look. Don't get me wrong, I love fly fishing and have spent a good portion of my angling life tossing feathers a few dozen yards over an abundant creek, but in a bug-out scenario it's not practical. Very few will be able to spend the time reading the river, stalking the fish, and figuring out what they are feeding on.

The whole idea of bugging out is to move quickly to your bug-out spot. Getting food along the way needs to be quick and easy. Fishing can fit the bill and be the best renewable source of protein you could have. Unlike livestock or a garden, you don't have to feed or cultivate anything to fill your belly — nature does that for you. Fishing can be the ideal strategy for long-term sustenance when everything is off-grid, but it's not an easy one. So before the SHTF, head out to your local body of water, toss some lines in the water, and see what happens. Remember, practice makes perfect, or at least easier.

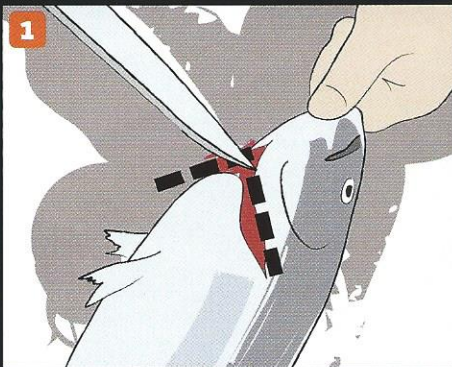
Fish... the other white meat. ☘



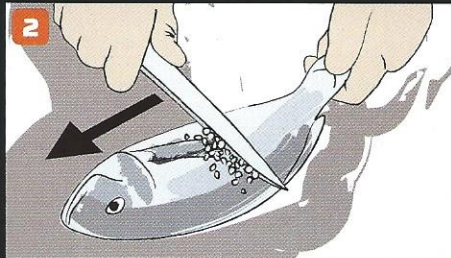
Fileting A Fish

Illustrations by ALT

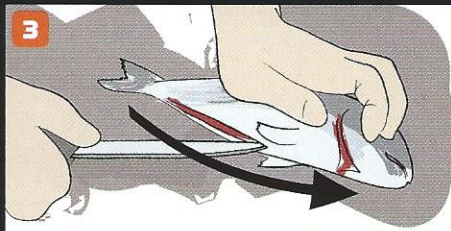
As soon as you land a fish, it should be killed, gutted, cleaned, and eaten as quickly as possible. Fish can go bad very quickly — the skin turns slimy and is the perfect breeding ground for flies and bacteria.



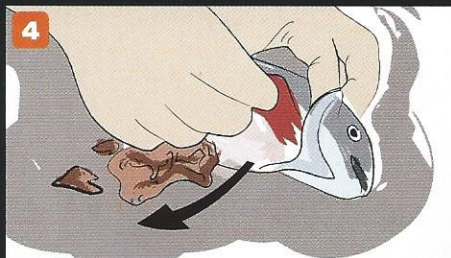
1 Cut the fish's throat and bleed it out. Wipe away the slime.



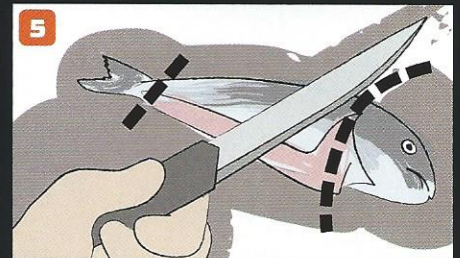
2 Most fish don't need to be skinned, but if you have time it's best to remove the scales since they can be a choking hazard. Hold the fish by the tail and scrape off the scales with a knife, holding the blade and moving it away from you toward the head.



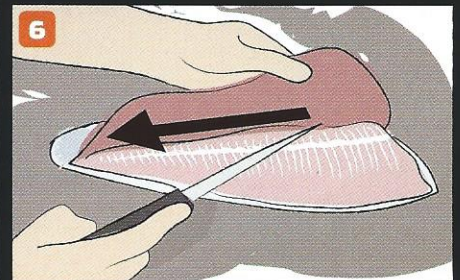
3 Grab a sharp, thin blade. With the tail toward you and the blade facing up, insert the knife into the anal gland (yup, the anus) and slit the fish open along the belly to the throat (with the blade up you avoid puncturing the internal organs).



4 Remove the guts. If the fish is female, keep the roe (eggs) — it's good eating! Wash thoroughly inside.



5 Cut off the head and tail (the head makes for good soup). Slide the knife under the ribs to separate them from the body. Work from tail to head, away from your body and hands. Fish oils make the knife slippery and dangerous.



6 Separate the backbone and ribs from the flesh and use some tweezers or pliers to remove any loose ribs.



7 Fry or cook over an open flame and enjoy nature's bounty. Don't walk away — fish cooks very quickly.