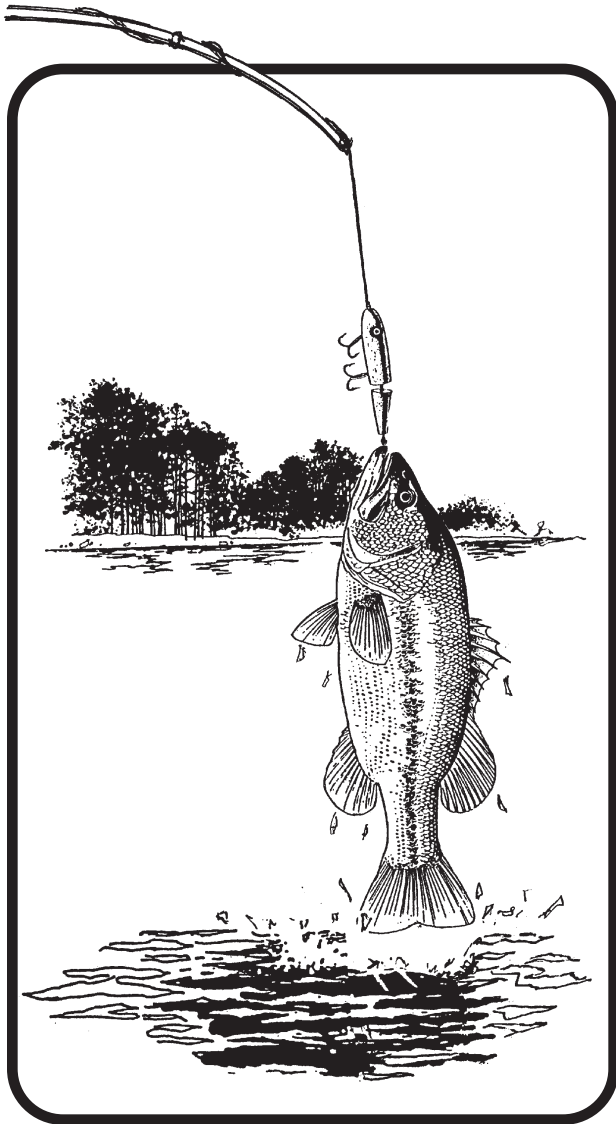


DOODLE SOCKING

by Jim Spencer



Doodlesocking is a highly specialized fishing technique, and it won't work under all conditions. But where it works it works beautifully.

This is an old-timey fishing method, pre-dating modern rods and reels by many years. I know this, because in my early childhood, I knew an ancient riverman who told me of the tubfuls of Kentucky bass he used to catch in the lower White River, doodlesocking back in the '60s. The 1860s. This was several decades before James Heddon got the urge to whittle, so artificial lures were unheard of. The old river rat used a tough piece of tissue cut from the throat of a small gar.

He never told me where he learned to fish this way, but the smart money says it probably originated with the Indians, who fished these waters long before De Soto came paddling through in 1541.

Basically, doodlesocking consists of tying a lure on a short line and dabbling it in and around heavy cover. You can doodlesock with a casting or spinning rod, but it's better to tie a short line to a 10-foot cane or fiberglass pole. This way, you can reach farther and don't run as much risk of spooking the bass. Either way, you'll be fishing close, so stealth and caution are important.

The beauty of doodlesocking is it allows you to cover the water more thoroughly than you can by casting. It also lets you keep your lure in

front of a fish a lot longer than when you're casting. This often spells the difference between a strike and an ignored offering.

As already mentioned, doodlesocking is best practiced around heavy cover, whether there's current or not. Log piles and flooded brush are good places, as is rip-rap along stream or lake banks. Moss beds and lily pads are good. In short, any area of heavy cover is a likely place to try doodlesocking.

It helps if there's some color to the water, because you're fishing so close to the boat. If the water is clear, you're at a disadvantage.

Surface lures are good for doodlesocking, and I once used them exclusively. Smaller surface lures are best, especially noisy ones like propeller plugs and poppers.

Forget the old Hula Popper theory about letting your lure sit on the water until Thursday and then barely twitching it once every other hour. Finesse like that is out of place here. This is rowdy, hurly-burly stuff, and your objective is to make as much noise as you can with your lure.

It's exciting when a largemouth or Kentucky bass gets a bellyful of your plug making bubble trails across his ceiling. The strikes are violent,

to say the least. More often than not, the bass will be mad, and sometimes they'll strike so hard it throws water in your face.

Bass will often miss your lure, but that's no problem. When it happens, quickly drag the lure back over the fish. Sometimes a bass will strike time after time. I once had 14 consecutive strikes from a one-pounder before he found the hooks on strike number 15. Then again, some bass will make one pass at your lure and quit. You just can't tell.

As exciting as surface lures are for doodlesocking, subsurface lures are often better. Jigs and standard spinnerbaits are good choices, and old crankbaits like Bombers and Hellbenders are also good choices. Plastic worms will work, too, but when you use a worm it isn't doodlesocking any more; it's flipping. And it's not as much fun, either.

Whatever your lure, you need a stout line. I prefer 20-pound test, and 25-pound isn't too heavy. About one to three feet is the right length; much more than that is unwieldy.

Doodlesocking is a wonderful technique for the slow-moving flatland streams of south and east Arkansas. Because the current moves you along, it's difficult to cover every likely spot when casting. Stream bass tend to hold tight against shore,

too, and even if you're only 20 feet away, your lure will still be out of the strike zone nine-tenths of every retrieve. With doodlesocking, your lure is in the strike zone all the time, and you can cover every inch of bank.

Because of the back-and-forth thrashing involved, doodlesocking is best practiced when only one person fishes at a time. However, two anglers can doodle-sock out of the same boat as long as they respect each other's fishing zone. Often, the rear-seat angler will catch more, because the second lure coming over will finally make fish mad enough to strike.

Doodlesocking is effective at night, too, and then it can be used in clear water. Fish when there's a bright

moon, so you can see the cover and avoid hang-ups.

On almost any bass fishing trip, there will be times when doodlesocking is the thing to do. You may find a nest of logs stacked so that casting into them is impossible. It may be a hat-sized hole in the middle of a moss bed. It may be when you miss a strike as you lift your lure from the water at the end of a cast.

In these instances, drop some line and thrash the water with whatever lure you're using. Your fishing partner will no doubt think you're crazy at first. But when you hook a hefty bass on a short line, you'll get the last laugh.



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