

AND FINALLY...
2000
Viewing

DISCOVERING THE WORLD BELOW

AN

by

Steve

Quinn

EYE ON BASS

A dark form slowly moved toward me, growing in size as the distance between us shrank. I finally made out the massive head and dark line of a largemouth bass. The fish was swimming in an unwavering path toward the Aqua-Vu camera lens, positioned along a 15-foot break under three feet of ice.

As it closed in, I called my young fishing companion to take a look. We gasped as the bass looked as if it would engulf the camera, then veered aside as we got a clear look at its eye and every scale on its lateral line. It was hard to tell just how big the bass was, and it surely left us wondering what the fish was up to.

Underwater cameras do raise questions about fish position and behavior. But they also provide instant feedback on the underwater world and offer clues for finding and catching bass, which can't be gained in any other way.

Minnesotan Jeff Zernov invented the Nature Vision Aqua-Vu system after years of fishing and building fishing-related electronics. The Aqua-Vu is the most portable and self-contained unit on the market, with a monitor enclosed in a viewing case that neatly holds a gel-cell battery, cable, and camera lens. Systems like Humminbird's Fish Eye offer a separate monitor, cable, camera head, and power source. Conduct a little research to determine which system best suits your fishing style. Camera systems cost from about \$489 for the basic Aqua-Vu to around \$1,499 for the color Fish Eye and 100 feet of cable, with options between.



Viewing time of In-Fisherman staff members and friends totals thousands of hours, from Minnesota's weedy natural lakes, to Canadian Shield lakes, to California's crystal-clear rocky impoundments, to the Mississippi River, to Sam Rayburn Reservoir in Texas, and beyond. We offer here a few lessons on what can be learned and how to start the learning curve.

• An underwater camera quickly reveals bass position, which often changes during the course of a day. Bass may be belly to the bottom outside weedbeds; or suspended 3 or 4 feet off bottom; or tucked inside weedbeds either near the canopy or close to the bottom. Astute anglers eventually discern bass position by trial and error, but only after working through many presentation variables. The camera eliminates many variables and points to the likeliest presentations. Scan the underwater world every 4 or 5 hours or when the bite stops. Except in spring, bass usually aren't wary of the camera and won't run from it.

• View inside weedbeds, even thick milfoil and hydrilla, checking areas known to concentrate largemouths. Drop the lens through the canopy and move along 8 or 10 feet. Weeds will hang on the cable, but can be snapped free to progress another 6 or 8 feet before it must be raised to be cleared. The camera shows whether bass are present and how they're positioned. Bass position suggests presentation—whether to bomb the weedbed with 1-ounce jigs or finesse 1/4-ounce Texas rigs for fish suspended high. That pattern likely will hold in similar spots.

• Viewing the position of brushpiles and sunken Christmas trees shows how to fish them most efficiently, as is obvious with shoreline laydowns. When you've seen and noted where the base lies, cast past it and retrieve smoothly through the branches to the tip, effectively checking the cover with minimal hangups. Casting across the tree covers far fewer high-percentage areas, while casting toward the top and retrieving toward the base invites snags.

• After spending time viewing an expansive piece of structure like an extended flat off a point or a river channel, you'll locate key holding areas on the structure—sharp drops, stumps, boulders, or brushpiles. Mark key spots on GPS or by visual landmarks. Next time out, fish the high-percentage spots in just minutes.

• Many key features are indiscernible with even the finest sonar units. Bottom indentations or rises of just a few inches and changes in bottom content attract bass, but are nearly indiscernible on sonar. Also, weeds growing only inches off bottom don't show on sonar. Small patches may hold most of the bass in an area, or conversely, open holes among weeds may attract bass. The only way to isolate those subtle spots is with an underwater camera.

In short, underwater cameras increase your enjoyment and understanding of the underwater world. That alone can't help but make you a better angler. ■

COMPANY CONTACTS: Nature Vision (Aqua-Vu), 218/825-0733; Humminbird (Fish Eye), 334/687-0503.