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FISHING REPORT

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Report from Fletcher's Cove - November 22, 2010

The oars and paddles are gathering dust, the bicycle wheels have stilled. The boats are in their various stages of repair and repainting. While the river reflects the final palette of a beautiful fall, all that is left of the 2010 season at Fletcher's Cove are the memories. It's that melancholy time of year when we look back with satisfaction and gratitude for a job well done while looking forward with newborn hope and happy anticipation.

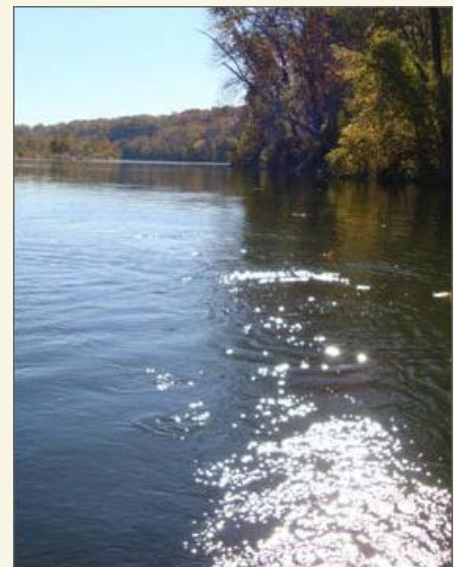
On the last day of the year that the boats were in the water I took a little row across the river to an old favorite fishing spot called "The Parlor." That same day the weathered and well-used boats would be yanked from the cove to be scrubbed and prepped for painting. Ray Fletcher and I have spent so much time in close personal contact with these wooden boats that they are like a part of us. To row them is a trinity... the oarsman, the boat and the water. Done properly, patiently and gracefully, moving the boat over the water is a bit primal, even spiritual. It was a peaceful row... a hundred strokes across to what is known as Lowell Rock. The leaves were ablaze, the water like glass and above on the palisade, an Osprey circled in a hunt for breakfast. In my youth I spent many a chilly dawn anchored in The Parlor waiting for a fishing reel to scream with the run of a rockfish that had found my cut herring. Now, I don't get over to that spot very often, so I was moved to be there for a few quiet moments of reflection. I hope many of you can also find a place of peace. It can do wonders for your state of mind.

2010 had its challenges. Mountains of snow and moderate flooding to start off the year, then summer heat so intense one would think we resided on Mercury rather than Earth. And even though the economy remains fragile, many people sensed that Fletcher's is a close-by, value-rich recreational resource. Kayaking was ever more popular and truly can be called the water sport of the decade.

In the angling arena, the perch and shad fishing were great in the spring, but the striper season was cut short by the rising water temperatures and the lack of herring in the Potomac. I thought this would be the "summer of snakeheads" at Fletcher's, but it was not to be. After many were caught early-on, they vanished to still waters down stream. As expected, the big blue catfish, which are reaching behemoth proportions of late, were the fish of the season in 2010. Look back to previous reports for some of the monsters.

At the boathouse, we love visitors from an earlier era. It reminds us of how enduring this place is and how it has touched so many in highly personal ways. As Ray Fletcher and I painted boats one day a couple of weeks back, up walked a lovely woman who had been poking around the place for a bit. Her face had that uniquely human and indescribable look of seeing something soothing to her soul and familiar to her mind's eye. Her name was Chris. As tears welled up in her eyes, she told us about her dad, Joseph Tisinger, who taught her to fish at Fletcher's back in the early 1960's. Joseph as a boy, fished at Fletcher's in the 1930's and knew all the river-rat regulars. As Chris spoke of her happy days at the boathouse, I could see the little girl in the tile-red boat learning to unhook the silvery perch she and Dad were catching and then dropping into a bucket. White perch, as she recalled, were the most delicious of fish. She spoke of beautiful memories and how the perch used to "run like crazy here."

A visit like this is precious. It reminds me that truly, the weight of our lives is in simple things and personal connections. Thank you, Chris, for your visit and the memories.



The view looking downstream from The Parlor



A blaze of fall color surrounds the tackle shack and bike shed

It is also time to say thank you to those who made "Fletcher's 2010" possible: To our hard working employees and corporate support personnel. To the staff of the C&O Canal National Historic Park, in which we are located. To the ever vigilant but friendly officers of the U.S. Park Police. To our suppliers of everything from paint for the boats, to ice-cream for the little ones, to worms for the fish. And last, but not least, to our customers. I hope our smiles have let you all know what you mean to us! We look forward to seeing you again in March 2011.

Dan



A happy young angler, Merrick Edgerton of Reston, with a prized catch (photos by Dan Ward)

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