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FISHING REPORT

ARCHIVED FISHING REPORTS

March 21, 2016

In spite of a few wet snowflakes over the weekend, I'm so happy to believe that winter has traveled north and we now can look forward to an imminent, glorious Washington spring. Daffodils are blooming, cherry blossoms are ready to pop and dogwoods will soon follow. All these signs of seasonal change correlate with the arrival of various species of fish in Washington's Potomac. The brutal days of January and February will soon be an ugly memory.

Fletcher folks were challenged in late January with a mean and uncommon winter flood of moderate proportions. The dock took a beating and needed a hasty move to prevent damage beyond repair or an unscheduled trip towards the Chesapeake! Thanks to some loyal old river-rats who have been there and done that, the dock came through the flooding in good useable shape and now is ready for the footsteps of anglers.

Fletcher's Cove is scheduled to begin operations on Friday, March 25. Our fleet of 28 classic wooden bay skiffs will be available for fishing rentals as long as Mother Nature and the old Pot-o-mac cooperate; D.C fishing permits and our supply of basic angling supplies will be in stock. Please remember that fishing and river conditions at our location are fickle and change on a daily basis, particularly very early in the season. Poor fishing or bad conditions one day can easily morph into angling nirvana the next -- unpredictability is part of the fishing experience. As an example, the first American shad was caught Friday, March 11 by Mark Binsted just an hour after the first known catch of a hickory by Doug Romaine. This is a puzzling occurrence, as usually at least a week of hickory shad success precedes the arrival of the whites.

As the water warms up from this past weekend's cold snap, other species should fill the river with angling opportunity. I'm hoping for a renewed bounty of white perch in the area adjacent to Fletcher's Cove. In the '90s, a person could easily catch enough of these tastiest of fish for a meal or two with little problem. In recent years, it has not been as easy, as the schools stubbornly seem to remain far downstream. Perch are second-year spawners so their rebound is a good possibility. Striped bass are not in season in terms of keeping a fish for the table, however they are appearing now. If you catch a striper, please, please remember that minimal handling is imperative to allow the fish



"AN IMMOVABLE FEAST"

Old friends add flavor to an annual fish fry
by Bill Heavey
(credit to www.fieldandstream.com
and A Sportsman's Life)



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[Check out Dan's article on Fletcher's Cove in the March 2012 issue of The Buzz](#)
(pages 6-7)

[March 2011 issue of The Buzz](#)
(pages 11-12)

[Rowin' on the River at Fletcher's Cove](#)
article in *KidFriendly DC*
July 2013

[Click here](#) for a great interactive map
of the area around Fletcher's
(opens in new window)

CHAPTER SHAD REPORTS

During the shad run (usually April thru mid-June), our chapter sends out reports of fishing conditions at Fletcher's Cove and elsewhere as we receive information. If you know someone who might want to receive these reports, [email NCC-TU](#) with "SHAD" in the subject line and provide your name and email address. If you received shad reports last year, you don't need to resubscribe.

[Click here](#) for a great interactive map of The Boathouse at Fletcher's Cove Area Fishing and Outdoor Fun (opens in new window)

to survive after release. There will be a "keeper season" later in the spring. Smallmouth, walleyes, snakeheads and big old catfish are also now on the move in search of a meal. So, take your pick of a fine assortment of fishing prospects.

The winter gave me a chance to reflect on a lifetime of watching (and sometimes having the privilege of fishing with) a kaleidoscope of talented and often quirky anglers. Fishing for me was always a social exercise first and foremost. While one may enjoy the solitude of fishing alone, I believe an "angling buddy" (male or female) is a wonderful thing. And my experience in recalling "dynamic fishing duos" I have known, lends credence to the two-are-better-than-one belief.

One duo from my early days at Fletcher's was known to all simply as Dayton and Jones. Dayton was a big, stocky man and Jones was a fellow half his size. They would arrive at the dock way before light and load the boat with masses of equipment to the point where there was precious little space for the two of them. They would motor off, then often set up in a spot known as "The Parlor," with Dayton fishing from the middle seat and Jones angling from the front seat. It did not look comfortable to me, but it was their way and that was that.

Bean and Lloyd Draper were another duo of old-timers, brothers who were as talented a pair of shad anglers as you would ever meet. Usually fishing the old restful "set-line" method, Bean was the quiet one and Lloyd was the talker. They made their own darts with a special mold and hook, which seemed to work better than anything else anglers were throwing. Those darts (some of which I am the proud owner of) are still prized to this day as the brothers have departed for more celestial fishing spots.

Joe Fletcher was (and is) an expert fisherman with or without a partner. But when he would team up with Bill Reese or Paul Jackson, the skill level of experience was off the charts. Bill Reese was a country boy who came to the big city and ended up managing the exclusive Burning Tree Club. But getting his hands dirty was no problem and fishing was just a regular part of living. Paul Jackson was a D.C. fireman who grew up absorbing the old fishing culture of Fletcher's. His son Michael ended up as a valued part of the Boathouse crew for many years.

Then there were Mike Alper and Max Elias. You could say that this duo had a distinctly scientific approach to angling and the results were usually impressive. They could switch seamlessly between species as the conditions dictated or the whim hit them and not miss a beat. Truly, they represented an ocean of fishing knowledge and skill. Sadly, as I mentioned in a previous report, Max passed away last year. Mike continues to fish often and if you were lucky enough to attend the Bethesda Trout Unlimited "shad night" on March 9, you know that Mike is still the 'reel' deal when the phrase "expert angler" is tossed around.



Rupert (age 8) and Lulu Wallace with a bass he caught in Fletcher's Cove on St. Patrick's Day (photo by Peter Wallace)



Spaghetti flood ropes testify to an emergency dock move (photo by Dan Ward)

Billy Collins and Dickie Tehaan come to mind as dear fishing friends who not only displayed amazing skill, but clearly had a cascade of fun teasing and jiving each other while fishing together. White perch were their specialty and if they could not catch any, the perch were simply not biting. Dickie made and still makes the most prized perch jigs, which seem to work when all others fail. People who know this call and beg me



The Draper Brother's magic shad darts
(photo by Dan Ward)

anglers whom I really admire.

Then there was Mike "Animal" Bailey and Jim Range. A wild guy and a good-old boy from Tennessee. Mike's early days at Fletcher's earned him the nickname due to his resemblance to one of the Muppets. Jim, a mover and shaker in Washington's political and conservation circles, loved his bourbon and was as comfortable rubbing elbows with river rats as those on K Street or Capitol Hill. Both were highly skilled anglers individually, but clearly they made each other better and had so much fun in the process. Jim has passed, but getting to know him was a privilege I hold dear.

In recent times, Animal has partnered up with our own staff expert Alex Binsted to demonstrate duo angling skills that amaze and stupefy those of us with less innate talent. Alex, trained in industrial design, creates a new generation of handmade flies and buck tail jigs that seem to be imbued with magical powers to lure fish to the hook.

And yes, yours truly was part of a "dynamic-duo" long ago and far away in a galaxy known as "the old Fletcher's." My dear friend Mark Binsted (Alex's Dad) and I would cross the scary Arizona Avenue train trestle after school with Zeke, Mark's gentle German shepherd picking his way over the open ties as well. We had spent the winter making sure all of our cherished tackle was in good working order, polished-up and ready for the heady days of spring fishing. Hand painting and tying dart blanks from the old Atlas Sports Store at 8th and E Streets downtown, became an art form for two hopeful young anglers. Arriving at Fletcher's, each trip allowed us to slowly be admitted into what seemed to us to be an inner-circle of fascinating characters for whom the river was life itself. With each step of "belonging," we felt pride at the moment and privileged to have a personal relationship with the place and people.

So that's my experience on dynamic fishing duos I have known. With feet still on the ground there, I invite you to Fletcher's so you may discover your own way of partnering with the people and this magical place.

Thanks for reading, see ya down by the river...

Dan

to get them some of Dickie's jigs. Billy was a real jokester who could throw his voice and had a stand-up comedians book of hilarious one-liners tailored just for the boathouse. Dickie still plies the river, but Billy has left me with a heart filled with warm memories and humor.

A male-female duo who still team up to fish with great success is Gordon Leisch and Paula Smith (aka "the dock lady"). I call Gordon the boathouse's own "man for all seasons" as he has worn many hats in his life with fishing and hunting as his recreational passion. Paula worked Fletcher's dock for more than a decade while endearing herself to customers with her unique and memorable personality. They, too, are serious perch hunters, a declining breed of



Two generations of Binsteds working the river
(photo by Dan Ward)

