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FISHING REPORT

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Cinco de Mayo, 2013

"Amazing April," that's what I'm calling the fourth month of the year 2013 at Fletcher's Cove. Just a little over a month ago, in late March, the trees were bare, the ground was brown and dusty from the winter, and the river was cold, with just a hint of the life soon to fill its depths. Anglers were anxious. The annual impatient wait for the Potomac to come alive with fish from downstream waters seemed like an eternity this year.



"Will Shafroth with a beautiful American shad" (photo by Mike Bailey)

Looking back now, over the last five weeks or so... WOW! What a transformation. Lush green now paints the palisades. Daffodil, redbud and dogwood blossoms have colored the river bottom land and Fletcher's tile-red rowboats now bob on a Potomac full of life once again. Many seasons at the cove populate my memory. Rarely has spring provided an April with such a gentle river. Every day, boats have been able to ply the waters in search of white perch, silvery shad and those bullies known locally as "rockfish." Pockets above Chain Bridge were crammed with snakeheads, tempting fascinated fishermen to do all sorts of crazy things to catch them. Never has a fish been so vilified, yet such a magnetic temptation to fishermen as to attempt to

catch it in any way possible (some methods, most definitely NOT legal!)

Now, well into May, the shad, perch and stripers continue to provide consistent angling action. The hickory shad run has sustained itself with barely a dip in daily results. It's been gratifying for me to see so many regular customers return over and over and find success and satisfaction. Expert fly angler David Policansky called me while on the water last week to say he was catching more stripers on his flies than the shad he was after. One really never knows what might be caught while fishing this unique spot along the Potomac, where tides meet free flowing river. As long as the water stays cool, the hope and the opportunity will remain. It is quite likely that the American shad run will be "tail-end heavy" as compared with recent years. This would be due to the late start and the cool waters. Jim Cummins, the shad expert of the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River, reports many green (un-spawned) shad downriver in the last week. Don't put your darts away just yet! And to all you spoiled hickory shad guys and gals out there, if you've never hooked into a fat roe American, your shad frame-of-reference need some tweaking. To each his own, but on my ledger, one big knee shakin' American counts for quite a few of those scrappy hickories. You won't have constant action fishing for whites, but the anticipation is a big part of the reward.

The white perch run has been the weak link in this season's chain of fishing events. A few fish were caught in fits and starts, with days of seeming non-existence during the early part of the run. Recently there's been some good half-cooler hauls of perch lugged up the hill at Fletcher's. Perch are a strangely satisfying fish to catch. I tell people that I would rather catch a twelve-inch perch than a twelve pound striper and some folks think that's crazy. If you're into fishing just for excitement or want flashy action, perch may not be for you. But for the basic urge to angle that



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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)

[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 Fletchers 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 to get them in 2013.

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

some of us have, perch can be the ticket to satisfaction. They are beautiful, delicious and aggressive little fish. Being early life spawners, one does not have to feel guilty about keeping a fair bunch for the dinner table. And, yes, the common, lowly white perch can provide moments of angling angina. I was perch fishing one May Day when The Gipper was in The White House. The river was high and roiled. My boat was parked in an eddy with about twelve feet of water below the transom. I was using shiners with two ounces of lead due to strong current. On my first drop, the sinker never seemed to hit bottom. After a moment of confusion, I realized that fish were swimming sideways with my rig. I started reeling, not even setting the hooks. Up into view came two beautiful jumbo perch, the kind that makes one have a vision... hot, golden-brown breaded fillets in a cast-iron pan. In about an hour of bonanza fishing, my sinker rarely touched the bottom. The five-gallon bucket was nearly full when I sent another two minnows over the side. Feeling guilty about not getting back to work at the boathouse, this was going to be one of my last drops. As had happened over and over, a fish or fish had my bait in seconds and headed sideways. I lifted the bait casting rod and felt an unusually strong pull of weight, almost slipping the rod handle from my grip. Two really big perch, I thought. As the fish came into view, I was amazed to see a silver fish so big for a perch that I thought it must be a hybrid striper, which was occasionally caught at Fletcher's in those days. As I attempted to lift the fish over the transom and into my grip, the weight of the perch caused it to slap on the outside edge of the boat. My heart skipped a beat and as I successfully got the super-jumbo perch over the back seat, it fell right off the hook to the floor. One second earlier and it would have been back with Neptune in the dark depths! Luck plays a role with all anglers and I know I am quite lucky to have caught that fish. It measured fourteen and a quarter inches and weighed two pounds, two ounces. Of all the great perch fishermen who have frequented Fletcher's, no one had measured a bigger one.

There is still a small core of dedicated perch anglers plying the waters out from the cove. The perch run used to attract more people than shad or stripers. It is a different world now. People seek non-stop excitement over bread and butter satisfaction or food for the frying pan. But I know that one day, a lucky fisherman will get a bigger perch than mine and I hope to be big enough to be happy when it happens.

People love legends like Robin Hood or Billy the Kid. Fletcher's has produced some legendary figures amongst "river rats." There was Big Slim, who rowed a boat with eight foot oars and moved it like the breeze over the water. There was a large man called "Gum-Boots," who wore old-style fisherman's rubber knee boots and could wield a large dip net in the strong current at Chain Bridge to pull up shad like they were goldfish.



"The Quillback Kid" (photo by Mike Bailey)

This Spring, Fletcher's has produced a new legendary figure. He is our own Alex Binsted. Alex likes to fish. A LOT. And he takes it very seriously. He makes his own lures and keeps his tackle meticulously organized. Alex has caught many big shad and stripers this spring, but that is not where the legend arises. No... Alex is now know as "The Quillback Kid." Why? Because in a half dozen consecutive trips, Alex managed to catch at least one quillback carp sucker, a rare fish in these parts. I've only seen a couple over the last thirty years. They are beautiful fish, members of the sucker family, though they look like carp. My theory is that the beautiful bucktail jig that Alex makes and used to catch all these fish mimics the quill-like dorsal fin of

the species. In any case, I'm confident that no one will match the record of "The Quillback Kid" and his carp sucking success!

For now, the Potomac runs with a mild current and deep green hue. We've been lucky. Some day soon, Mother Nature will balance things out and brown, roiled waters will sweep by Fletcher's Cove. In the meantime, don't pass up the chance to fish this amazing spring along The Nations River.

Many thanks go out to Brad Gentner, his partner Heather and the many volunteers from Trout Unlimited and Tidal Potomac Flyrodders who worked so hard in making this past weekend's "Family and Youth Casting Call" a resounding success. I saw many excited and smiling kids being helped to a wonderful "reel-life" experience.

Thanks for reading... see you by The Cove.

That's all for now. Remember, more frequent updates on fishing are now available on our [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) tabs as well as the T.U. report and [interactive map](#) connections.

See you at The Cove,



"Chris Wood and sons ready for a fishing adventure" (photo by Mike Bailey)



Paula Smith, a.k.a 'The Dock Lady' with some jumbo perch (photo by Mike Bailey)



Rick Maytorena and his Dad on a happy father-son outing

Dan



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