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Report from Fletcher's Cove, May 26, 2009

The three days of Memorial Day weekend were busy, busy hours at Fletcher's Cove. While the skies threatened rain much of the time, that did not stop the many anglers, boaters, and bikers who celebrated the "unofficial start of summer." Our playful time on this solemn holiday is thanks in large part, to those many men and women who have made the supreme sacrifice in defense of freedom. May our gratitude never be forgotten.

A mid-Atlantic deluge this morning has muddied the river yet again in this yo-yo fishing season of 2009. Conditions along the Potomac change rapidly, so never take for granted what you expect to find. One day's fruitless fishing can morph into a bonanza the next. Case in point... Mike Alper, an 'old-timer' whose faith in angling's promise spouts like a fountain of youth. On Friday, he caught 29 American shad, many good-sized ones, with time tested techniques most anglers never develop. Why? Because they don't have the faith to believe, the patience to keep trying, and the willingness to "fail while learning a lesson." Two days later, he was back at it, keeping the faith, exercising his knowledge. That day, he, (and fellow shad devotee Mark Binsted), had slimmer pickings. catching some good fish, but finding that this school (as happens this late in the run), had done its business, and was headed back to the sea. Unlike many fishermen though, that won't discourage or stop him. To faithful anglers, the quality is in the quest.

George Malusky and Kent Halstead had an eventful fishing excursion on April 30th. During that one trip, they caught six different species of fish: shad, herring, striped bass, catfish, perch and crappie. I asked George "what about a mermaid?" and he said "next trip." Well, the next trip came on May 2nd, and while no mermaids were caught, Kent boated this little-old catfish of 42" and lots of pounds. (Photo, by George), (fish was released.)

After a high water event like we experienced at Fletcher's early this month, it is to be expected to see some unusual fish caught around the Cove. Sure enough, on Monday, May 11th, Presley Hyman of Falls Church drove up with a (beautiful?) snakehead he caught just upstream of Fletcher's. After fumbling around with my low-tech cell phone, along came Joel Contreras who was kind enough to use his blackberry for this photo.

Another uncommon fish we see from time to time is the rock bass, also known as a "goggle-eye" or "red-eye." These are beautiful and aggressive little critters which get washed down from rocky streams in the upper watershed. The fish pictured here, caught and photographed by yours-truly, was let to swim again.

Striped bass season continues on in D.C. through the summer. Quite a few legal size fish have been caught. Most stripers this time of year are in the 15 to 25 inch range, while the biggies have departed for the lower river and bay. On April 1st, while the water was cold and many had yet to dust off their fishing equipment, John Hancock caught one of those "biggies" right out from the cove. John was using herring on a circle hook and the fish was released. Photo by his fishing partner and wife, Mary Lee Hancock. Together, they also caught about 40 hickory shad that day.

When the river flow and weather allows, Fletcher's is now also renting canoes and kayaks for recreational paddling on both the river and canal. (Fishing from rowboats only, please.) D.C. fishing permits, bait and tackle are yours to purchase at the store.



Kent Halstead with a 42 inch catfish



As Washington becomes that sub-tropical steam bath natives know so well, please consider a day trip to Fletcher's and embrace the mugginess. You will find rewards unknown to air-conditioning addicts. And we have an ice cream or cold soda to chill you off!

Thanks for reading this, we'll see you at The Cove.
Dan



Rock bass caught by Dan Ward



Striped bass caught by John Hancock on April 1st



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