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FISHING REPORT

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June 2, 2014

It's been a roller coaster ride in many ways at Fletcher's Cove during the month of May. There were fishing highs and lows, weather ups and downs, river surges and slow-downs, busy days and days of near solitude along the Potomac.

The month started with a high water level that quickly dropped and produced a ten day period of premier shad and striped bass fishing between the 5th and 14th. I hope you partook of that golden angling opportunity; it was glorious. However, just as anticipation peaked for an extended shad run and the opening of striped bass season on the 16th, torrential rains fell across the entire watershed. Bummer! Instead of sending out boats carrying hopeful fishermen, we were rushing to save our fleet and dock from the angry, rising river. In all my many years at Fletcher's, I've never seen the river rise any faster than it did on the evening of May 15th. In 15 minutes just before dusk, as I raced to place more heavy ropes to our first dock



A snakehead and the lure that fried him
(photo by Dan Ward)

section, the water level rose nearly a foot. Trust me, that's a lot for the main stem of the river. The water level of the Potomac at Washington goes up noticeably faster now than it did in my youth -- that is because of all the impervious surfaces that go along with upstream development and population growth. Build a parking lot, a housing complex, a shopping center or business park and what do you get? You get water rushing quickly into the creeks and streams that feed the Potomac rather than soaking slowly into the water table. And ironically, with less water feeding into the aquifer, the river drops more quickly to extra low levels during dry periods as there is less water to feed the springs that sustain the smallest of upper tributaries.

On May 18th, the river reached the highest level since a pre-opening flood in 2010. Most of our dock and boats were safely tucked into the upper cove and what could not be moved was roped tightly to trees above the water level. Many thanks go to Dick Tehaan (once again) and Alex Binsted of our staff for tireless hours of work during this event. Dealing with a flood at Fletcher's requires experience and equal measures of brawn, finesse and timing. Alex and Dick provided just what was needed.

The end result of a flood at Fletcher's is lots of mud and debris where you don't want it. As the water receded during the week of the 18th, it looked bleak for car access to the parking lot at Fletcher's anytime soon. It appeared to me that only heavy equipment could get things cleared away. Then to my surprise, metaphorically speaking, in marched the Calvary. I've seen many volunteer clean-



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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 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)



The Marriott Crew gets down and dirty
(Photo and Fish by Dan Ward)

again useable and my jaw was on the counter in disbelief at the results. A sincere thanks to Michael Nardolilli, President, and Becky Curtis, Director of Programs and Partnerships, of the C&O Canal Trust for organizing the clean up. As a sometimes cynical old river-rat who has traveled and watched the C&O Canal all my life, I came away from my conversation with Mr. Nardolilli with lifted spirits about the future of the big ditch. If you'd like to know more about the Trust and its good work, the website is www.canaltrust.org.



Before the clean-up
(photo by Dan Ward)



Rob C. with one of the biggest crappies
ever caught at Fletcher's
(photo by Dan Ward)



George Frenett, 95 years young, looks out on his river
(photo by Dan Ward)

It has been my pleasure to meet many amazing people at Fletcher's. From "regular folks" to Presidents (three), I've seen 'em all. The place is a real "mixing bowl" of humanity. One person who stands out from the crowd is George Frenett. George is our oldest customer and has been an inspiration to all of us. George was born in 1919. He attended Fordham University in New York City, played in the Sugar Bowl of 1941 and The 1942 Orange Bowl during the "leather helmet days." George was on his way to a possible pro football career until war interrupted; he spent five years in the Army Air Corps from 1942 to 1947. George was awarded a Ph.D. from the University of Maryland and served as a school administrator in Arlington County for 30 years,

including years at Stratford Junior High, the first school to be integrated in Arlington in 1959. George has been fishing at Fletcher's since at least 1953, and until last year did not miss a season. He was an expert at shad and striper fishing, made his own lures and, like all great anglers, fished for the love of it rather than mere results. When once I asked him his secret to longevity, he told me that spending a day fishing did not count toward your chronological ageing. (He also attributed his vitality to garlic and a dose of homemade wine from a bota bag he carried).

We had many conversations on the dock when George would return from fishing and I would help him carry his gear to the car. His strength was amazing, as he would carry a heavy motor and all his gear to the boat

before daylight and head out onto the water. George would fish until he was pretty well exhausted and only then would I find it necessary to lend him a hand. I feel privileged to have shared time with this wise man and more than a few times became tearful when George would talk of caring for his bedridden wife. His dedication to her exceeded even his love of angling, but the escape onto the water was what kept him going.



Over 300 years of river experience. Left to right: Mike Alper, Dan Ward, George Frenett and Gordon Leisch. (photo by Jim Meyer)

A heartfelt thank you to Jim Meyer, George's Godson, for bringing him down to Fletcher's for a visit on May 13th. While George and I stood on the dock looking out on the river, I felt his larger than life presence spreading out over the water one more time. The smile on his face said it all.



Ray Fletcher returns home for a snakehead fry (photo by Dan Ward)

With the coming of summer and its attendant heat, fishing at Fletcher's Cove will morph into a different sport. Shad will disappear, stripers will be of the schoolie class, and the resident small and largemouth bass, as well as lots of big blue catfish, will be the fish platter du jour. Snakeheads have recently been the object of much attention and whether or not they will stay around for the summer remains to be seen. We had an impromptu snakehead fry on the 20th, thanks to Alex and friends catching a good supply of the curious fish by several methods. Ray Fletcher returned to the riverside for the event and it was good to see him at his namesake establishment. Senior brother Joe also returned many days this spring to catch white perch and shad with expert skill from a life on the river. I really like seeing them; they are my brothers in spirit.

Thanks for reading. See you by the river and the old C&O!

Dan

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