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JULY 15, 2012

It's a hot but still very active mid-summer down by the river-side at Fletcher's Cove. Here is a "summertime smorgasbord" of people and happenings along the Potomac and C&O Canal. Business has been good with many anglers, boaters, bikers and numerous camp groups. While the torrid temperatures do not really spare our little oasis, the feel of the place seems to have a cooling effect on one's psyche. The lush green and river breezes of the palisades create a sense of being far away from the hard concrete and asphalt of the city. During a hot season like summer, 2012, I think of what a terrible thing it would have been if places like the C&O Canal and Rock Creek Park had been paved over and developed. The green buffers and air conditioning effect these places provide are invaluable to a livable urban environment.

The dastardly derecho of June 29 passed over Fletcher's that night with a sparing hand. Only some already weakened trees and limbs were damaged and in an amazing flip-flop from the usual, we did not even lose power.

The fourth of July was a busy day with many boaters, fishermen and picnickers crowding the park to celebrate our nation's birthday. Our flags were on display and the sounds of the Palisades neighborhood parade could be heard coming down the hill from Macarthur Boulevard. A spirited day all-around.

As for the fishing news, angling at the Cove has settled into the typical summer-time pattern. I call it the relaxed time. The spring runs of fish are a happy memory, the harried angler rushing to get out before day-break, and the jockeying for the best spots along the current lines are now replaced by a lazy row to the shadiest spot of calm green water. Resident fish are still out there, but just like us, their pace of life has slowed. A siesta rather than a big meal sounds good. Surprises still pop up, however. Father-son fishing duo Elliot and Damon Fodge of 16th Street Heights went on an early June outing expecting some bluegills and, if lucky, a decent sized catfish or two. What they ended up with was a 15 pound snakehead caught on a night crawler while using very light tackle. You never know what you might pull up at Fletcher's!

Trolling mania has been replaced by "gar-mania" around The Cove. The very warm water produced by our searing air temperatures has slowed the trolling productivity, while bringing on schools of needlefish and Atlantic long-nosed gar. Groups of these curiously pre-historic looking creatures have been surprising visiting anglers since early June. The needlefish are smaller and nearly translucent. The gar can be up to three feet long with an extended snout full of teeth. Numerous angling parties have ventured out on the river in an attempt to catch and release these summer migrants. The lure of choice is a "rope fly," which basically is a frayed piece of braided rope with no hook at all. The gar will strike at the fly, then get its teeth caught in the rope, so no hook is necessary!

The Binsted brothers, Alex and Derek, have been scoring their usual largemouth and small mouth catches on top-water and soft plastic lures. These fish tend to be in the shady shallows, around structure, and are waiting to prey on minnows, frogs or just about anything edible passing by.

I love to see young people come down to the river, get away from "screen-time" and truly engage the out-of-doors. Ian and Nico are two young District residents who have been coming to Fletcher's for years. Last week they showed up again with parental-unit Nancy Carpenter for a rowboat excursion up the beautiful C&O Canal. As they rowed off, I noticed with admiration how expertly and efficiently these eleven year olds worked the oars to move the boat cleanly and gracefully over the



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[Check out Dan's article on Fletcher's Cove in the March 2012 issue of *The Buzz*](#)
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(pages 11-12)

[Click here](#) for a great interactive map of the area around Fletcher's
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Elliot and Damon Fodge with a whopper snakehead at Fletcher's Cove

water. Fletcher's rowboats are not the easiest boats to row, with non-fixed oars and a lot of weight due to oak reinforced chines, gunwales and marine plywood bottoms. I watched the boat glide up around the bend and was transported back in time to days when I realized I could become one with the boat and master of the oars. I hope Ian and Nico share that same feeling.



Fletcher's old ferry boat crosses the canal in summer, 1977 (photo by Dan Ward)

I'm including in this report a summer photo from 35 years ago. Back in '77 there was no bridge over the canal. The passenger boat "Canal Clipper" used to run excursions all the way from Georgetown to Lock 5 at Brookmont, Maryland. No bridge could obstruct the route, so if you wanted to cross the canal at Fletcher's there was a pulley boat from side to side. The pulley on the boathouse side had a hook and chain attached to it so when the Clipper was coming up the canal, we could run up and detach the rope and throw the whole pulley assembly in the water. The barge would glide over the rope and be on its merry way; we would then just pull up the mechanism and hook it back in place on its pole. Simple, effective and lots of fun for

those who rode in the old wooden scow across the canal.

If any of you readers have old photos of Fletcher's from way back, and you would like to share them, feel free to e-mail them to our site. Please include dates, names (if you wish) and whether it would be O.K. to use them on this site. We love history and stories.

Dan



Matt Murtha and friend with keeper stripers and a walleye on Fletcher's dock. (photo by Alex Binsted)

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