

Mayhem in Menemsha: Fishing Martha's Vineyard in The Spring

By Alberto Knie

As I was tying one of my favorite striped bass flies, my phone rang. It was my friend Mike Laptew the infamous underwater videographer and sharpie fisherman.



Anyone who enjoys striped bass and doesn't know of his work, ought to visit a tackle store and buy one of Mike's many exciting videotapes. There's Striper Magic and Strippers in Paradise, both filled with the most beautiful footage of thousands of stripers in their undisturbed habitat. The only other place you will see that many bass will be in your dreams!

Anyway, Mike was calling to invite me to fish with his buddies on a Martha's Vineyard getaway. Knowing that he shot many of his videos at some of the places we would fish, I didn't take much time to accept his invitation.

Since I opted to drive my truck, I packed a large assortment of equipment that would make any bait-and-tackle shop go completely gaga. I packed my fly outfits, light tackle and heavy surf sticks, medium to heavy conventional gear, ultralight spinning stuff, and for good measure, I also packed about 300 lures plus a fly-tying cabinet. As I slowly drove out of my garage, one very concerned neighbor ran out of his house and asked where I was moving to. Gee, whatever gave him that impression?

My Cape Cod ferry reservation was for the 9 p.m. boat, and I left work in New York City at 4 p.m., forgetting something called "weekend rush hour". I felt foolish, but with some creative driving, I arrived just before the ferry's doors slammed and the props started to turn.



In no time, I arrived at the Gayhead beach house and quietly I unpacked until 2 a.m. I was really exhausted, but before I could shut my eyes, somebody's alarm clock rang at 3 a.m. From that moment on, I knew this was going to be another interesting trip.

A slew of yawning zombies trekked out from the dark rooms incoherently mumbling something about fish. Among them were Jim Donofrio, executive director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance; John Haberek of Hab's Custom Plugs and his son, John Jr.; Doug Jowett, master fly guide and writer; David Sandlin, owner of an Alaskan resort, and Dave Pateuk, an avid fisherman.



Together we visited the herring grounds where Capt. Buddy Vanderhoop nets the day's candy - herring - for many charter boats. Conveniently behind the netting ground over a hill there were several local fishermen liveling candy bait for hungry stripers.

As the day progressed, we made our way to the marina on Menemsha Harbor and met Capt. Jennifer Clarke who treated Mike, Jim and me to some of the best striped bass fishing I've encountered in a long time.



Her new vessel is an awesome 28'9" Intrepid named FUTULEUFU (pronounced: Foo-too-loo-foo). Don't let the name fool you, this boat is one hot tamale!

I was also very impressed by Capt. Jennifer. She's sharp and really knows her stuff. Born to a fishing family, she lived in Virginia most of her younger years, fishing rivers and streams. She also traveled frequently to Miami where she learned how to fish the flats of Florida. She also regularly visited Montana and practiced her finesse by fly-fishing for those finicky native trout. Now she's stationed on the Vineyard with her hubby. However, she credits her striped-bass expertise to Vineyard fishing guru, Capt. Buddy Vanderhoop.



We fished in about 55 feet of water about a mile from the historic Gay Head Lighthouse. The day was perfect in every way: clear blue skies with just a slight 5 knots of southerly breeze and most important, we were fishing the peak of the moving tide. Every time we drifted the spot, the recorder would scream an amazing 20-foot wall of linesiders averaging 25 pounds and better. Needless to say, every drift we ended up with multiple hookups until our arms gave up. This is what I called stupid fishing at its best! Let me tell you, every drift Jennifer made was meticulously calculated.

Our method was simple; each of us used a Gamakatsu circle hook with a Palomar knot to a 40-pound-test leader, 3 feet long, a sliding egg sinker and a whole, fresh herring. We tried diamond jigging, bucktailing and plugging, too, and everything worked!

As the tide started to give, thank God those fish moved away. Otherwise our arms would have fallen off.



Trust me, it takes a lot for me to be impressed, but on that day she did just that! If you want my recommendation, this one is a no brainer. Just ask for Futuleufu Charters, and I know you will not be disappointed.

We had an outstanding day and the group ended with a celebration. Our wonderful chef, Jim Donofrio, cooked up a storm and for good measure, we also bought fresh tuna for sushi appetizer, prepared by yours truly. Our special guest was our wonderful skipper, Capt. Jennifer. The infamous Capt. Buddy Vanderhoop also joined in the celebration. We shared some good laughter and puffed away on fresh imported cigars.

Over the next few days we were blessed with great weather and memorable fishing. We caught and released countless bass, and I also had the opportunity to fly fish a blitz of chopper blues. Unfortunately, I lost a few flies to those choppers, but that's what I deserve for forgetting the wire leaders.

I fished with John Haberek and tested some of his most beautiful hand-made custom plugs. It was also a pleasure to meet young John Jr. He is very special and definitely will be a sharpie in his own right. Already, he has the knack of finding the first fish.



Much to my surprise, he was also quick to learn the principles of fly tying. We brained-stormed a few fly creations during our breaks, and my best fly-caught striper on the trip took one of John Jr.'s creations.

Let me explain what happened: Mike Laptew had explored the beach with his underwater camera and captured a school of stripers within our vicinity. He pinpointed their whereabouts and I revisited it the next morning.

I had decided to fly fish only. I had my 10-weight Loomis and Charlton 1.2 reel with 11-weight floating line. The fly of choice - John Jr.'s Crazy Creation. The morning tide was just perfect at first light.

My heart started to pound with excitement as I watched a huge school of bass in skinny water, fishing no more than 30 feet from the wash. The scenery was spectacular and there was no one around. I truly had a blitz all to myself.

I don't think I have to tell you the rest. By the time the sun was bright and the tide was low, I tallied seven bass and the largest was a respectable 36-1/2 inches long. My new friend John Jr. helped me choose the right color combination on that fly. The poor little fly did not stand a chance; it is now retired.

As always, all trips must come to an end. It was a long, tiring, silent ride back. I was content and thinking aloud about the rich experience, the breathtaking scenery, the great times and, most important, the many new friends I made during the trip. We came from all walks of life and great distances to share our one profound passion.