

## "A Bridge Too Far"

By Richard Seale

No, this is not a WWII story about Arnhem, The Netherlands.

We have a tendency to forget that fishing adventures can occur without ever crossing bridges to the sea, like the Atlantic Beach Causeway!

In the "dog days" of July and August, far up the estuaries, rock fish (striped bass), speckled trout and flounder are spawning, growing and feeding on the myriads of small menhaden that ripple across the surface of waters like Lower Dowry Creek, Pantego Creek, Pungo Creek, Bath Creek and many more creeks that empty into the Pungo, Pamlico and Neuse Rivers. Fishing these creeks usually requires a boat, although there are places where shore fishing is possible and productive.

But on a few nights in these hot and humid months, something really special happens. The rock fish and trout school up and come to the surface to feed. The result is a fantastic fishing experience. Even better, you can try for these feeding schools of fish with floating "top water" lures, even with fly rods with floating lines and flies.

The fish are very aggressive. As you "walk the dog" with your lure twitching left and right along the surface, you are never sure when a strike will happen. But when it does, there is no doubt about it. Usually there is rush of water, a splash, a strong "hit" and a powerful fight. The rock fish often go airborne making twisting leaps a foot or two into the air. This is a spectacular sight and a true adrenaline rush for anyone.

Often the bait fish seek protection among old pilings from long-gone sawmills and ice houses that are hazards to boats, motors and lures! It takes some skill, and more than a little luck, to make casts into these locations. Getting the lure "hung" on a piling is not an uncommon event, and a trolling motor is very handy. When a fish strikes, keeping the fish from depositing your lure on a piling, and thus freeing itself from the hook, is no easy task as well.

I have been fortunate to have had several such fishing events over our years fishing near Belhaven, North Carolina. Another happened this summer in early August. My son had

some business in little Washington, N.C., and managed to slip over to our creek cottage on the "right" evening. Roger hooked 10 fish in his first 10 casts and ended up catching more than 50 rock fish and trout. The rock were 15 to 26 inches, really great fighters, and the trout 14 to 22 inches. The Belhaven waters are in a rock fish management area where no rock can be in someone's possession from April to October, so the rock went free. However, 10 trout were kept.

Now imagine yourself getting into a little boat with a small motor and trolling motor. You motor up to an area of mostly submerged pilings and drop an anchor in the six or seven foot deep water so that the boat floats downwind towards the piling. You look for a spot where there are some "casting lanes" between the rows of piling. You tie off the anchor line, and you are ready to fish at about 6:30 p.m. The sun is sinking behind the tall pines that grow to the creek's edge. The heat of the day is fading quickly. This is a very different image than big boats, big motors and long rides that are common to coastal fishing. Here, the sound of a bobwhite quail can be heard, and as evening falls, the song of a whip-o-will comes clear and strong across the water. Only one other boat ventures into the creek this evening, and soon the chorus of crickets masks its motor sounds.

Braided line in the 20 pound class is a good line to use with a 24 to 30 inch 20 pound mono or fluorocarbon leader. This is relatively heavy tackle, but it is not the strength you need; it is the resistance to abrasion caused by dragging fish past the piling. You tie a gold sided, dark-backed floating lure on (Yosuri Crystal Minnow or another shad-type floating lure) and check the drag to be sure it is set at about six to eight pounds. Then you make a cast into the pilings. You pause to let the splash circles dissipate before you start the retrieve. Now you twitch the rod tip and reel in line so the lure zigs and zags in an action known as "walking the dog."

Not many feet of retrieve happen before an explosion of water obliterates

any sight of the lure. A rock fish catapults itself out of the water, twisting and turning. You point the rod at the fish and jerk back to be sure the hook is set. The fish splashes back down into the water and makes a run for pilings to the left. Your heart sinks as the run of the fish puts a piling between the fish and you. Carefully, you work the rod and line to coax the fish back to the middle of the lane of open water. Not only do you want to land the fish, but having the fish deposit your lure several feet underwater on a piling represents about \$6 in lost money! Getting two sets of treble hooks around a piling is not an easy task. The rock jumps again, but is tiring. The clear run of water gives you the chance to crank the fish quickly and hard. It comes to the surface and is dragged past the piling. A few more cranks and you have the fish out into waters devoid of pilings. Now you can slow down the retrieve and enjoy fighting the fish. In a few minutes, the fish comes to the boat, rolls on its side and you net it. It measures 23 inches, but being a rock, you carefully remove the hooks with a needle nose pliers and return the fish to the water. The fish is a little in shock and remains there, cradled in your hand. It gives you time to admire its greenish back colors and white sides with clear stripes. Its gills are pumping, and it regains its bearings and darts off into the dark waters. You check the leader for abrasions from the barnacles on the piling, but all is OK. So you are able to make another cast. As the lure hits the water next to a piling, another fish hits immediately!

You remind yourself that you are glad that you did not cross that "other bridge" to go fishing on the ocean coast! That would have been a bridge too far for sure! As the moon starts to sparkle on the creek, you smile at the having landed 43 fish, most of which you released. As you start for the dock, you remind yourself that life is awfully good. The four trout you kept will be dinner for two or three meals. It is pretty dark now, but in just three minutes you can see the dock light shining on the still waters of the creek, small creeks. Small boats, big times.

## At the Library

"Get Puzzled!" Bogue Banks Public Library has a collection of beautiful and challenging jigsaw puzzles for you to enjoy in-house. According to experts, solving puzzles is like brain calisthenics for older minds and brain food for younger minds. Come check out our selection.



**Activities for Children:** Preschool Storytime is held each Thursday at 10 a.m. September 3 will be "Read A Book Day." September 10 will be "Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear." September 17 is "Left-overs." September 24 is "Fall Fun." Preschool Storytime is for ages 3-5 years old, and all programs are with Ms. Brita.

**Featured Artwork:** The Art Gallery of the Bogue Banks Library will host the 2009 North Carolina Seafood Festival Photography Exhibition. More than 80 stunning color and black and white photographs depicting the fishing industry of our coast will be on display. Also, the original painting of the winning poster design will be on display from August 28 to September 30. The showcase will feature a collection of beautiful and practical stoneware by Newport potter, Birkett Howarth. His work has a distinctive coastal flair, decorated with shrimp, crabs and other oceanic delicacies. A public reception is planned for Friday, September 11 from 3-4 p.m. in the Art Gallery.

The library's regular hours are Monday through Saturday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and the phone number is 247-4660.