

Robeson County Fish Tales

AS TOLD BY JUNE MCINTYRE



Hello Folks:
Not much fishing news this week. It has been a most too cool. I was supposed to go last Wednesday p. m., but instead I set by the fire and rested and warmed. Cutlar Moore came along with a big tale about a big trout he caught in Florida, but as I have said before, Florida is out of my territory. However, Cutlar said he weighed eleven pounds. Some trout, I'll say.
I have lots of inquiries about where and when to go fishing and all sorts of things. I had a man come to me the other day and say he wanted me to settle an argument for him. I told him I would if I could and he said some fellow was trying to convince him that the rock fish, striped bass and channel bass and puppy drum was all the same species of fish. But he was all wet. The book says Rockfish and striped bass are the same and channel bass and puppy drum are the same. So I got him straightened out all right.
I spoke last week about my trip to Lake Waccamaw but I don't believe I have ever told you about the never to be forgotten trip to Lake Waccamaw. It happened a few years ago, the spring after there was so many big bears killed down around the Lake. Jack Pait, Big Joe Nicholas and myself went on a camping trip in the Lake. We went down on a Friday p. m., pitched camp away down in the edge of the Lake some three or four miles from anywhere. We fished a little while that p. m. and we caught enough fish for supper, or that is, I did. If I remember right, Jack and Joe didn't catch so many but anyway, he had a plenty of fish to eat. Now, to get down to the sad part of this trip and this ain't no fish story.
T. M. Burney and Earl Bryant told us before we left for us to take the boat and come up to the

Shad Run Heralds Spring On Cape Fear

By E. Carl Sing (State News Bureau)

ELIZABETHTOWN—When the winter's been more than a man can bear, and it's a long time yet to poke salad time; when his spirit's down and his innards weary—it's shad time on the Cape Fear River. From mid-February to middle May, shy spawning shad ease up the ships' channel 50 miles from the Atlantic Ocean to Lock Number One, 20 miles below this half-est inland river waterway. If the water is muddy-clear they swim deep—if it's muddy-plumb they addles out of sight just under the surgid surface.

In either case the only way to get them is with a shad net, 50 to 100 ft., 5 1/2 inch mesh gill net, a contraption developed over the years to take advantage of a spawned shad's habit of reversing its course on striking an obstacle (thus entangling fins) and to set up the most enjoyable fishing yet devised by man. For a March catch of maybe seven 3-pound shad, including (if they are roes) seven pounds of shad-roe, a properly staffed shad fishing expedition takes three hours of floating down the river, 15 minutes of power-boating back up again.

Of course, in March and April, when the big run is on, pulling maybe 30 or 40 fish out of the net can get to be work. But with a guide like Tobe Gill (63 year old Negro who "never did do nothin' but fish, and won't so long's cat-fish sells at 35 cents a pound"), Cape Fear shad fishing out of Elizabethtown is a day-long idyll of floating the river and lazing in the hammock on the shad shack porch waiting the call to shad-and-roe that forgets the sad winter and makes any kind of spring hopeful. Shad fishing is strictly a stag affair on the middle Cape Fear; shad-and-roe eating, on the other hand and in warm April weather, is often a community event. Like-wise, riverside eating is strictly man's privilege, whether it's direct ly on the banks or in the tiny shad shack on the bluff above.

For a March party when the river is low and muddy-clear and the shad a-lazying up waiting for the right moon two boats with two men each are enough to add to the half-dozen likely already on the river. Good companions, besides Tobe, should be good fishermen first, like Manley George, theater owner, and Morris Wood-

house, farmer when shad isn't running; and good talkers, like say Norman McCulloch, newspaper publisher. Strictly for the eating, a county sheriff, a municipal judge, an oil jobber or two, and a soft-drink bottler help immensely. A big-enough boat can be toled down the steep steps at the lock site; Ruby Squires, keeper of the lock, generally can round up one of the slender, pointed, Square-cut-at-both ends Cape Fear canoes — Tricky for amateurs but easily handled in the currents. The difference between an outing and an outrageously hard job of work will be the outboard motor brought along or rented (if possible as Tobe says: "Gasoline is much less wearing than muscledene.")

At high water there's a boat pier in February a sandy beach. One man can handle boat and net, two sensible men will balance much better and get the net overside in a neat line, bouyed at each end by cypress goat stakes and in the middle by ten shad squares rigged as (diamond) foats. Downstream, your "shad drift" cast is just that, with the net spread out beside the boat, one fisherman manning a guide oar or pole, the other holding the net lone tight.

Nine times out of ten, a di'mint will show a strike by standing up on edge; eight times out of nine in February it will be a snag, or trash. There's no need of trying to persuade yourself it's trash — you'll look at that net every time throughout its length. In late March and most of April, and depending on your "fish-eddy nose" (Tobe says), you'll likely have to pull into the bank to unload shad from the net—and you'll cus the day you went shad fishing before you've got ten shad fins disentangled from the linen mesh.

Just as surely you'll make only one drift cast in your whole life if you left the outboard motor at home. Downstream for a mile around the second bend is one hour of piscatorial seventh heaven, shad or no shad. Upstream again for another cast is four minutes by hard-duty motor—by paddle it is two-and-a-half hours of excruciating muscle-torture which doesn't really hurt until you stop rowing; by pole it's a bent back for the rest of a natural life, whatever age attempts it.

But even so, and even if only one shad comes to your \$13 net, one drift cast on the river is worthwhile in the life of any fisherman, and one shad feast by the

river will convert the most indifferent. A lot of people who have eaten shad might not thing so, remembering the million bones to be encountered to get to the sweet meat. But a few people like Tobe can fillet a shad to get them out, and there's even a metter way.

Take along a half-pound sow-belly (fatback, not bacon or "striped side meat"), some salt, and a hinged wire grill. When a shad hits, pull in to the bank and dress the sleek 4-pounder on a straight slit. Rub in salt (pepper if you have it); then line both sides of the spread shad with thin but substantial strips and clamp the whole in the hinged grill. Hang the grill no a bush while you decide whether to grill the roe (if it wasn't a buck or a hickory shad) and build a roaring fire in a roasting pit (scoop out the ground, or lay a couple of green logs parallel). When the fire is a good bed of coals, the grill strung over it on a bent bush, and aromatic smoke curls up over the shad from dripping, spluttering fat pork grease, the miracle happens—twenty minutes close to the coals will bring out a spring-has-come flavor in the shad meat and loosen most of the

bones thirty minutes (you'll never make it) will make every bone fall clean.

Tobe said it would, and proved it. But he didn't try to explain the mystery of the sowlbilly smoke. "Eat, man," said Tobe. "Ain't no room for words in a man's mouth in shad-eating time."

The "ditty bag" used by Navy personnel has been in use since the first days of sailing.

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