

This Month With A Susquehanna River Guide

Lance Dunham

The month of April is always exciting for anglers on the river. It's the first month without that darn ice in the way and the first month of the fish really turning on to feed. And it's also a bit unpredictable weather wise. I had to reschedule a few charters in the beginning of the month due to the weather and we had a few days of rough to almost brutal fishing weather where only the really hard core anglers dared to venture out. But we always caught fish, getting "skunked" was never an option. I'm a true believer that if you are in somewhat safe open water you can always catch some fish somewhere on the river. Talking about "hard core" anglers a couple charters come to mind early this month. Now if I didn't have these certain individuals fishing with me I may have suggested to reschedule their charters. On April 4th two gentlemen, (I'll give them the benefit of the doubt) came fishing with me under some very harsh conditions. I've been fishing with them now for about ten years and we have become good friends and fishing partners. We know what each other can do in the way of fishing and what we can take in the way of harsh conditions. Oh the stories and adventures we've had could fill a book but that's for another time and I don't think my editor would or could print half of it anyway. The air temperature never got above the high 40's with wind gusts up to 50mph, remember that day folks! We had not only muddy water to start with but the river rose 2ft while we were out fishing! The water cooled down to 45 degrees and all of this made for a very challenging day indeed. We ended up with 11 smallmouth bass and 1 walleye all caught and released. The bass were all big old fish from 15" to 18" or 6 to 9 years old. We were very proud of these fish because of the conditions they were caught in and no-one else even tried very long before they gave up and went in without even catching a single fish. I also remember when we were going back to the river access how the wind gusts would start to lift the whole boat into the air like a kite but when I started to feel it lift I would put the bow into the wind, trim the motor down and hit the gas to keep the boat on the water. Oh yeah, good stuff! The other brutal trip I remember was on April 12th. I had one new client but one that I knew could take harsh conditions and knew how to fish because he was a tournament angler and even had a tournament the next day. The day started off with 27 degree air temps and never got above 43 degrees. It was the wind that made it so frigid, there was a constant 20 to 25mph wind ALL DAY LONG! There were white cap waves going up river and it felt like being on a lake with choppy water. I got ice build up on my rod line guides from a combination of the 40 to 43 degree water and the chill factor of the constant heavy winds. But did we catch some really big fish that day as our reward. We caught 34 fish that day. 33 were smallmouth bass and 27 out of the 33 were over 15" to an Angler Award 20 1/2" hog bass that I caught. My client caught a 19" smallmouth and many more very big smallies. He also caught a 34", 20lb carp that took quite a while getting in. The lures used in those two harsh condition days were heavy tubes, stick worms, and hair jigs all weighted enough to stay on the bottom for the most part. You can see photos of these catch and released fish on the photo page of my web site. You can easily tell which ones they are because of the way we were dressed, I'm the one in the heavy Medalist

Silvermax suite, looking like Nanook of the north. We also had some exceptional days like the weekend of the 18th and 19th with sunny warm days and the water got up to 55 degrees. We caught 259 fish for those two days. All smallmouth bass with 11 walleyes, 2 northern pike, and a rainbow trout that no doubt escaped from one of the creeks. On the 21st of the month I did a show again with the guys of Delaware Valley Outdoors, in fact the fishing was so good that we did two shows that day. The Host Bob Murray and producer Mike Haney were great to work with. They gave me the chance to showcase my sponsors in an actual fishing situation. Like I always say, I wouldn't pro-staff for a company that I don't really use their products all the time or believe in it. On the first show I used a JJ's Hair Jig, the shortie "booger" style in their baby bass color. Bob used a Rapal X-Rap Extreme suspending jerk bait. We caught many big 18" and 19" smallmouth Bass during the show. To end that show we actually both caught big trophy smallmouth bass at the same time, no trick photography or editing there. During the next show we did I used an Alluring Baits 3" Trick stick on a lead head jig and Bob used his chartreuse spinner bait that he had good success with. The first fish I caught was yet another 19" smallmouth bass and Bob followed up right away with a big bass on his spinner bait. There was a combination of muddy water areas because of the all day rain the day before pouring in from feeder streams and the semi clear greenish tinted water of the main river. At one point you could see a smallmouth bass strike, circle around and strike Bobs spinner bait three times at the edge of the muddy water before Bob got him on the hook. That was great to watch. The shows have a good deal of instructional footage on reading the river and the lures we used. We even got footage of the hair jig working it's way through the rocks. Good stuff. If you'd like to see those shows free of charge go to their web site at

www.delawarevalleyoutdoors.com

On those days that were so windy, wet, and cold many anglers that ventured out were so uncomfortable that they just couldn't concentrate and function well enough to catch fish on a consistent basis more than an hour or two. It's important to dress for the elements you are faced with. I found some outdoor gear that fits the ticket very well. It is the heavy duty outdoor suit from Medalist and I got to say that it's the best I've found yet in all my years of guiding. Even in a driving rain in a boat going 40mph the rain never seeped into the usual areas around the neck, zipper and cuffs. I was always dry, warm, and comfortable.

The lures that were working this month were the suspending jerk baits such as the Rapala X-Rap. The 3" Stick worms and tubes from Alluring Baits, and my new one, the hair jigs from JJ's Jigs. At my request, JJ's Jigs made up a shortie jig version from their standard line of "Booger" jigs. It's the same 2/0 jig hook but with shorter and less hair on it. It's been working very well in light stained to clear and warmer water. My four favorite colors have been the brown, olive, purple and black in either 1/8oz or 3/16oz weights. They have also come up with a new hair crayfish that's weighted and looks realistic with it's beady little eyes and hair claws. I have tried it and it also works well in the warm clear to light stained water. You can get them at www.jjsjigs.com they have a large amount of hair jigs to choose from.

If you are worried that you might lose your expensive lures in the river and we all do, I have a simple remedy for that and it works most of the time. This works best from a boat in slower water where you can go back with the boat to retrieve the lure. I have a telescoping net that the handle goes out to 6ft and I put a circle bolt through the end of that handle. I opened up the circle part just enough to let a fishing line through. When your lure gets stuck on a rock or wood just hang on to your line, put the line into the circle through the slight opening you made, slide it down and push the lure off the rock or wood. With the one I made, I can go down 8ft to retrieve my lure. You could also use a light weight conduit or PVC pipe to fasten the circle bolt to. I may take you a few minutes to do this but it might save you a few dollars in lures.

A little note of safety here before I go. With the boating/fishing season upon us, make sure you have a first aid kit on board with at least some antiseptic cream and bandages in it. I see anglers getting stuck all the time with hooks. A good practice is to bend the barbs down so they come out of human flesh much easier. Just this month I had one angler get cut on his hand when his buddy set the hook on a fish and the lure came out of the water like a rocket hitting his buddy in the hand. And the more scary instance when the angler in the back cast his lure side armed and hit his buddy in the head so hard that the line broke and the treble hook stuck in his head, Whack! Neither angler was hurt enough to go to the emergency room but it makes you think about what might happen. Another good thing is to wear sunglasses at all times to protect the eyes. Remember, when we're out on the water, I'm no doctor, and I don't even get to play one on TV so don't get hurt! Well that's all I have for this month on the water, be safe and I'll see you on the river.

For further daily reports, photos, and open charter dates, visit my website at

www.ldguideservice.com.

Good Fishing

Lance