

This Month With A Susquehanna River Guide Lance Dunham

For a couple of weeks in January I've had my boat and trailer up to the good folks at Snake Creek Marine just outside Montrose, Pa. for some well needed annual maintenance. You see I put more hours on my boat in a single year than the average fisherman does in seven years, so I need their expert service to keep me on the water. Odds are I'll need another boat in just a few years. That along with high river water has kept me from fishing this month.

A good old client/friend asked me the other day what do you do your article on in the winter when you can't put your boat on the river. Well, I just reach back in my bag of memories I've accumulated over the many years and pull one out. This one comes to mind about how I helped a client get his wife to buy him a new bass boat. It wasn't on purpose mind you, but sometimes things just happen on the river.

It all started many years ago when my client and his wife came to fish with me in the summer. This was long before you ever saw a jet boat on the river. I drove us to a remote spot and unloaded the boat. Since there was no one around the area and it wasn't a public access, I pulled the trailer just up on dry land a few feet and parked it. We went fishing and was having a great time catching fish when I looked up the river and a big thunder storm was on the way down. It came on so quick that we went to the nearest island for shelter. By the time we hit the shore line there was static electricity coming off the graphite rods and the hair on the back of your neck was standing. Basically, what this was telling me that we were in a prime situation to get hit by lightning. Thankfully we never got hit, but we were on that island for most of an hour. Now the Chemung river meets the Susquehanna at the New York boarder. Up the Chemung, there is a dam that they will let water out for flood control during a wet season without warning. This was a wet season and most likely they let water out the day before in anticipation of the storm and it was just reaching us now. The river came up a couple of foot quickly and was pure mud. We got back in the boat and went back to the truck and found that the water was so deep it was just starting to go into the truck cab. I was able to drive the boat right on the trailer without moving the truck! I had the clients stay in the boat while I got us out of there. Needless to say the guys wife was terrified. I didn't know it, but that was "Strike One" in the wife's eye. Oh well.

The next year the same client came with another man. We were floating between towns in a different boat with no way of going back. Again I see a storm coming down the river and this time we made it to an island in plenty of time. It started raining really hard with lots of lightning and terrible high winds. There were two foot waves going up river! Then instead of the rain coming down, it was coming straight across at us! We hunkered down in the lowest part of the island and hung on. The rain turned to hail and the wind turned to a roar. You could hear a constant

booming sound behind us. It was all over in about a half hour and what we thought was a really bad lightning storm turned out to be a rare tornado! That booming sound behind us on the mainland we found out later was the sound of some pretty big trees being snapped off like toothpicks. I guess we were pretty lucky that we were not in it's path. The thought of us being so close to a tornado never entered my mind because it never has happened before, nor since for that matter. When we got down to our take out point some people came running over to us and told us of the tornado that came through and asked how we ever survived it in a boat. Well then, this was all really exciting to find out we were next to a tornado without getting even a scrape, but when my client told his wife about it, that was "Strike Two" in her eyes. What can I say, it just wasn't my fault! The next day I had a charter and we went down river in the Mehoopany area. We saw a tornado path a hundred yards wide where it came off the mountain and destroyed every thing in it's path, just like a huge lawnmower cutting a swath out of tall grass, and where it crossed the river and took out several vacation homes on the other side. That's when it really hit me just how lucky we were the previous day.

That winter the same client called me to book another trip. We joked over the phone about what the odds were of ever going through just one of those trips let alone two years in a row. He said his wife was coming again with him one more time so we should make it a short trip and really uneventful. "No problem" I said, I'll get out the lake boat and we'll just go for a few hours close to the access. "What could happen?" The lake boat was a 17ft deep V boat with really high sides and a good sized motor to get us back to the access quick if a storm came up like the last two years. I rarely ever used it because it had to go in deep water only.

The day of the charter came and we went fishing on a nice sunny day without a cloud in the sky. This time I thought, it's going to be perfect. When all of the sudden I hear this humming sound like tractor trailer tires going down the highway. Being within hearing distance of Rt.6 I didn't pay much attention to it, but it didn't stop. Now I'm checking the motor of the bilge pump and then the livewell aerator but both of those were turned off and the humming sound was getting louder. Just then my clients wife lets out a scream you could have heard in the next county! I look up river and we were about 5 seconds from being hit with the biggest swarm of bees I've ever seen. It was about eight foot high and it seemed to be 20foot wide. I yelled for everybody to get on the floor. I touched the electric starter and we were just starting to move when they hit us. My first instinct was to outrun them because I knew the boat could go about 30MPH. There were hundreds of bees hitting the high sides of the boat and me at the same time. Then I realized that move was just plain stupid and I wasn't going to outrun anything with wings. I headed to the opposite side thinking we could get in shallow enough to jump in the water to avoid being stung to death without swimming. All this time, which was probably less than two minutes total, the poor woman was screaming on the bottom of the boat and the

bees were hitting me and the boat side which sounded and felt like someone was throwing gravel at us. Then all the sudden nothing! I look back and the swarm kept going down river. There were hundreds of honey bees in the water and in my boat either dead or stunned. The three of us never got even one sting out of the whole ordeal! Just then, a police helicopter came around the corner about 30ft high off the water. They must have pushed that swarm right into us. Yeah, well, it didn't matter much, it was too late for any explanations to the wife and it was definitely "Strike Three" for me alright. I shook the clients hand and said it just wasn't meant to be for us to fish together. The client called me about a month later to thank me for everything. Thank me! For what! The client said that when he told his wife that he was booking again next year with me she took him boat shopping the very next weekend! The only conditions were that he must get a boat too big for the river,(poor guy), and that he could never fish again with me since he now has a new boat of his own. He has kept in touch with me over the years. We laugh about the past and wonder, it just couldn't happen four times in a row! Could it? Someday we'll see. Maybe when he needs a new boat.

Well that's my report for this month. Boat safely and I'll see you on the river.

Good Fishing

Lance.

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