

## STRIPERMAN (from page 10)

Two days later I spied their tin boat coming up the river, so I eased up into the moored boats and grabbed an empty mooring. I was confident they had not seen me. They then put on a show that would rival any skit by Abbott and Costello: Who's on reef! What's on rod!

You see, the part of the reef that runs east to west is made up of boulders. Some of them come close to the surface, so if you manage to troll over or between the rocks without running aground, anything you're trolling will surely hang up. You would then need to go back to retrieve the lure; even in those days crocodiles were expensive. Well, the wardens banged around in this area until they lost enough tackle to open a store. It's a wonder I could see them - I was laughing so hard I had tears in my eyes when they finally got frustrated and drove away. To my knowledge, they never showed up again.

On another good day of catching bass at that "Magic Marker Number 25," I noted that the striped bass were spitting up eight-inch Atlantic salmon smolts. That was different! The last fish to go in the box was a twenty-pounder, which had a wound on its back. After unloading the box, I found a fish tag, and judging by the shape of the wound, I figured it was from that last, injured bass.

Like a good citizen, I called the number on the tag and reported the circumstances in which it was found. Two weeks later, I received a call from a salmon biologist who was absolutely bewildered by the fact that a twenty-pound bass got tagged with a salmon tag. That's when I put two and two together - he did not know about the bass spitting up the salmon. When I told him, he was amazed that the stripers were eating them; he appeared to be very upset, and almost maternally protective of his salmon. He probably knew, but I couldn't resist, so I clued him in anyhow: the bass were following the alewives and blueback herring upriver; when they meet those "tasty" shiny salmon coming downriver at the same time, well, you can't blame the bass for making a snack of them. In the following years, the biologists built huge wire floating cages to transport the salmon down the river in order to keep them safe from the marauding bass.

Allow me a quick word about the Atlantic Salmon Restoration project. In 1987, while chatting with a customer in my tackle shop, Rivers End, he told me he was some big wig working on the salmon project. I asked when he thought there

would be a viable sport fishery, and he said there never would be, because the areas they spawned had been lost. Of course, my response was, "Why are we wasting so much money trying to restore them?" He said, "Don't worry, the money is coming from the federal government." I was flabbergasted, asking him, "Where do you think the government got the wasted millions and millions of dollars?" I suggested they could have been spending it on actual ways to improve Connecticut fishing, to which he had no answer.

Anyway, marker number 25 was a huge producer for me over the years, but specific trips are a blur in my memory except for a select few. On some trips, live bait was hard to find, early on I figured out how to be effective at jig trolling using short,

light wire with bucktails. It was a Fourth of July weekend, and if you haven't seen boat traffic on the Connecticut River during a busy holiday, it's a sight to behold. In the lower river there's a procession of vessels consisting of anything that floats, from canoes to fifty-foot yachts, creating a flotilla

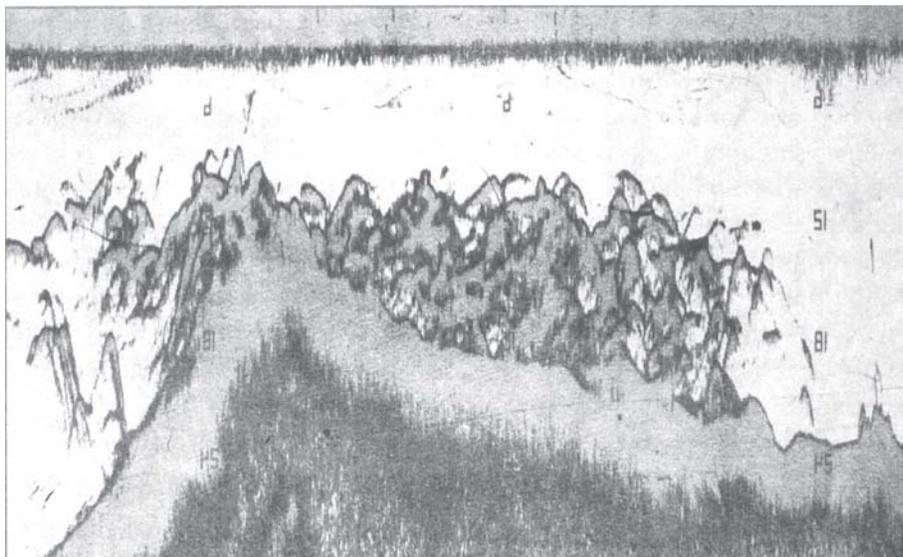


Chart paper showing stripers feeding on salmon smolts at Marker #25

that would make the Spanish Armada look like small bathtub toys. Trying to land a twenty-pound bass and keep it a secret next to the channel would be almost impossible with so many prying eyes. Normally, fishing on a weekend in the river would not happen, especially on a holiday, but my friend Tom Boyles could only fish on weekends and he really wanted to go. The fish were there, so off we went, against my better judgement.

We caught over 400 pounds, and I don't believe a single soul was aware of even one. We would set in and let out 125 feet of wire, keeping the rod low, and we'd troll over the fish. Once hooked up, we put the tips of the rods in the water and reeled them in, all while sitting down. The only time we stood up was to gaff the fish on the side of the boat facing the bank. The idea was to hold the fish on the gaff, look around to see if someone was watching, and then, when the coast was clear, hoist the fish up with the console and our bodies shielding the fish. We then pushed the fish forward with our foot and sneaked it into the fish box. This system worked so well that several boaters who recognized me stopped to say hello and chat, yet were never the wiser. You wouldn't think this would be much fun, but we had a ball! (to page 33)