Much of the northern New England seacoast features granite shores and shallow ledges. While this type of topography is typically associated with Maine and Cape Ann, Massachusetts, it also exists in some isolated southern locales such as Boston Harbor, Newport and Fishers Island.

In all cases, a turbulent zone of “whitewater” is created where ocean swells meet the rocks, and that’s the key to locating striped bass—even during the hot summer months when the bays and rivers are devoid of fish. After all, ocean waters are cooler, and stripers are built for this environment. With their broad, powerful tails, they can effortlessly patrol the area below the ceiling of frothy water churned by the wave action, looking for injured and confused prey.

WHERE TO CAST

As in any type of fishing, there are certain spots along the rocks that tend to produce better than others. For example, pockets, troughs and fissures along the rock face concentrate current flow. When a wave meets the rock, water rushes deep into these places, sweeping baitfish along with the flow. As the wave recedes, the out-rushing water sweeps the disoriented prey to where the bass are waiting in ambush.

In this game, timing and accuracy are everything. The trick is to cast your lure, fly or bait next to the rocks—or even onto the rocks—as the water rushes out, so that it will be swept into the ambush zone.

Another type of shoreline feature to fish is any place water is channeled between 2 rocks. A deep hole often lies on either side of these narrow passages, and this is where you’ll find the bass. Again, it’s important to let the lure or fly be swept into the hole and allowed to tumble in the wash like a real baitfish, because that’s where the fish will be waiting.

If using a fly or light soft-plastic bait, try to let the lure tumble around in the whitewater without imparting any extra action, save for an occasional twitch. Just remember to keep tension on the line so you can feel a strike.

SAFE BOAT HANDLING

You need to know how to handle a boat in this type of environment, especially if a large swell is running, as it can be dangerous. Always have one person at the helm and keep the engine running. The helmsman should keep one eye on the rocks and the other looking for approaching swells, then be ready to hit the throttle should he need to motor out of harm’s way.

Ideally, you want to keep the boat as far from the rocks as possible while remaining within casting distance. This will ultimately depend on conditions and the angler’s casting ability, but a minimum of 50’ is a good start.

If winds are light and the swell gentle, an electric trolling motor can be a huge help in working stretch of shoreline or submerged ledge.

CASTING & SPINNING GEAR

A medium (15-25 pound test) spinning or casting outfit is ideal for this type of fishing. For casting soft-plastics and other light lures, many pros prefer a 7’ rod with a light tip. Reels should hold a at least 200 yards of 30-pound braided line and have a substantial drag for keeping a big fish from diving into the rocks.

Leaders are generally 3’ of 30- to 40-pound fluorocarbon, connected to a double section of main line via a Bristol knot, Triple Surgeon’s knot, Slim Beauty knot, or Albright knot. Whichever knot you use, it should pass easily through the rod guides for casting or for landing a fish.