

An Unlikely Catch

By André Lepage

“Sacrebleau, just look at the size of this fish!” I said to no one in particular since I was alone on this late August afternoon. I was definitely ill prepared to catch anything of the size of this huge fish calmly swimming in the clear and calm water of Lake Wampanoag.

This fishing excursion was a ‘spur of the moment’ happening. I had just left a boring birthday party and my creativity level was at an all time low. I thought that catching a few Sunfish would be a fine activity to get me back in the swing of things. I had a few worms leftover over from a trip about three weeks ago. I store them in the fridge but worms have a shelf life, which usually turns out to be about two days before they die. After that, the worms emanate a foul odor not easily forgotten.

My wife, being a patient soul and having smelled dead worms in the past, gently said, “Get the worms out of here before they stink up the house.” I understood her statement to mean that I should go fishing. I always listened to my wife’s gentle requests and I changed clothes in a hurry, picked my fishing gear and the offensive worms, and departed saying, “I’ll be at Camp Collier, and I have my cell phone on.” I don’t know why I said that, we both know that my cell phone doesn’t work at that location.

The ‘Point’ on Camp Collier’s premises always produces good size Sunfish and Perch. I enjoy catching those feisty fishes and I release them unharmed. Another fine enjoyment for me is that the ‘Point’ is in a somewhat remote location, and it is very peaceful and quiet due to the lack of human encroachment. It is shaded by a grove of large Pine trees. The access dirt road is full of muddy potholes and deep ruts. This unimproved road is easy for my old truck but it is very difficult to negotiate for newer, lower vehicles.

The weather was just perfect, warm, bright sunshine sometime hidden by big white puffy clouds. The time of day was also just perfect as the Pine trees shaded my fishing hole. Not even the slightest breeze to hamper sending the smallest of hooks and itsy bitsy piece of worm attached without a sinker, a good thirty to forty feet into the clear water.

I arrived to see the majestic flight of a Blue Heron departing my fishing spot. “Good,” I thought, “nobody’s been here for a while.” I leisurely sat down on a big root high on the bank, the worms on my left, my pipe on the right, a rag on my lap and my trusted ultra light rod in my hands. I was ready to do some serious fishing; I could see many of my quarries in the clear water directly in front of me. After catching and releasing numerous Sunfish, I decided that it was time to take a break and light up the old pipe. I slowly stood up to not spook the remainder of the fishes in the area.

This is when I saw the huge fish, unmistakably a Bass, easily recognizable by the long black horizontal stripe on its side. It was one of the biggest bass I had ever seen. Catching this huge fish would put too heavy a strain on my light equipment and I would take the chance of breaking the two-pound test line installed on my reel. I just stood there for a while admiring the fish calmly swimming among perches and sunfishes. I was secretly hoping that the monster fish would leave, thus decreasing the chances of my catching it.

I purposely tossed my line away from the location I had last seen the big fish. I just had a puny piece of worm on the hook when my line quit moving. It felt I had caught a log or large rock. Then the rock moved, I set the hook from habit and the rock/fish decided that it was not in its best interest to remain in this vicinity. The huge Bass promptly jumped clear out of the water. The fish was so big that it actually made small waves upon his return to his watery home.

I now had a dilemma on my hands plus the fish seemed extremely unhappy about his choice of meal at that particular moment. I did not want to hurt the fish but I had to remove the hook from its mouth. That meant the fish had to come out of the water. I did not have a net with me. I looked for a small clearing near my location where I could safely land the fish without success. The fish was so big that I could not pull it out of the water without major damage to my expensive fishing pole. I carefully left the safety of my root seat and descended to the water's edge while holding on to my fishing rod with the enormous fish doing everything in its power to regain his freedom.

After an eternity or at least it felt this way, I brought the fish close enough to my location to safely pick him up by putting my thumb in its huge mouth, full of sharp teeth, and gently laid him down on the ground above my seat. I saw the hook's location right away and carefully proceeded to manually remove it. This Large Mouth Bass' mouth was so big that I easily inserted my entire closed fist into his wide-open mouth. The removal of the hook operation went rather quickly and without permanent damage to the fish and myself. I then returned the fish to the water. He thanked me for my thoughtfulness by splashing water all over me, but I was very happy to see him swim away in a huff.

Unfortunately, I did not have a camera to record this momentous event. Yes, I have caught bigger Bass in Lake Champlain and the Great lakes but none were caught on such light equipment.

I thought, "This is one for the books!"

After catching such a great fish and releasing it unharmed, I decided to call it a day; beside I was fresh out of bait anyway.

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