

Raftin' For Smallmouth

by Andy Lynn

Each year my wife Claudia and I take the Potomac River smallmouth pilgrimage with famed river guide Mark Kovach. I have found no better way to fish the river than to have Kovach rowing his specially built white water raft equipped with swivel bass seats, Claudia casting away in the front and myself peacefully catching everything she missed out of the back. Our plan this year was two-fold — pass over a lot of the first section to concentrate on the lower region and to field test some of the best four-piece fly rods built today. The Lynn Company had just received a shipment of Orvis, Scott PowerPly and Kennedy Fisher Fly rods designed for the traveler fishing Alaska or Canada. We were not traveling that far but I could not think of any better time to try them out!

Now keep in mind this trip requires a hardy soul, good heart and being in good physical shape (especially in the wrist/hand area) to keep pace with Kovach. The previous years Kovach had us fishing the fast paced upper section of the Potomac, above Harper's Ferry, in a machine gun fashion. Kovach would call the casts to this spot or another as the raft went swirling down a set of rapids and you are supposed to not only be holding on but hit that spot, set the hook and bring in the fish as he's telling about another cast here or there. Sometimes I think he has all the spots named and the fish in them must get an extra feeding on Thanksgiving or something.

We did not want to spend as much time in that faster water and consequently knew the total number of fish caught on this trip may not come close to our previous year's catches. Half of the fish caught on Kovach's trips come from the upper section. Eight miles of water starting at 9:30 a.m. and ending at 9:30 p.m. can make a long day, and this day had already worn out my right hand and we were only a third of the way through! I watched Claudia put away her fly rod and knew she, too, was wearing down. I had to remind Kovach and Claudia we were not interested in fishing the upper section and to save our energy for the lower reaches.

Kovach just kept on rowing and we just kept on casting and catching fish. I think this trip is the first time I saw the need for fishing reels with interchangeable handles. Needless to say, I was glad I had one. Kovach was just explaining to us how every trip this year either he or one of his two other guides has caught a walleye, when one hit my plug. I did not know anything about catching walleyes except I knew they had teeth and were hardy fighters. Mine was no exception. A few minutes passed and a nice three pounder was in the net.

The farther down river we floated the larger the lures got and the deeper the water. Claudia was fast casting a small crank bait and I switched to the trusty white buzz-bait to keep the action going. That is the reason for having a good heart on this trip. I have always been amazed at



Claudia Lynn with a nice smallmouth caught fishing with Mark Kovach.

how voracious smallmouth bass are when that bait comes buzzing and sputtering across the water. They simply cannot resist it. The little ones snap at the back of the bait and the big ones, well, they just sort of roll over it the first hit and inhale it the second pass. Kovach really enjoys it when his anglers tie them on. Being practically weedless, it saves him the trouble of rowing that heavy raft back against the current to retrieve a snagged lure.

The trip ends in darkness under the route 287 bridge in Brunswick with three very tired anglers and an excellent day of fishing logged in their memory. I would

suggest taking this trip during the week when there is virtually no one else on the river. Weekends will have swimmers, canoeists, rafters and other anglers crowding the river, making a peaceful trip tough to find. Bring a couple of rods and lures if you wish but Kovach can supply you (for a nominal fee) with the best lures to use for any part of the season. Kovach includes a filling lunch for the heartiest of appetites and usually casting instructions right from his fly casting school if you are having trouble hitting that honey-hole as you drift by! Call Mark Kovach at 301-588-8742 and let him tell you how good his trip is!