

Float trip flames fishing passions

Several years ago I met a real character, a Potomac River angler who seemed to excel in whatever he did. I had signed up for his spring fly fishing school, a refresher course for me as I hadn't wet a fly in many a year. The school was held in Harpers Ferry, W.Va., at the confluence of the Shenandoah and the Potomac — and this was water I loved and had fished for several years.

My fishing, though, was all spin fishing. I just wanted to get back into chasing those bronzebacks with a fly rod and Mark Kovach's fly fishing school was my logical solution.

But it was when I learned about his Potomac River Float-Fishing Trips that my curiosity was really aroused. So last fall, I finally made my trip with Kovach, a spectacular 12-hour day spent rafting down what is possibly the most beautiful portion of the Potomac — from a mile or two above its confluence with the Shenandoah on down to Brunswick.

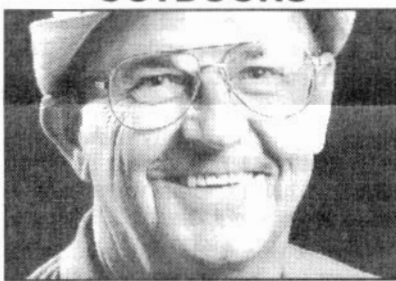
Kovach's boats are not those light-duty rubber crafts that you commonly see on the river. They are custom-designed professionally crafted white water rafts and they can easily handle the best that the river has to offer when it's not in flood.

The day I rafted with Kovach, we pushed our 14½-foot inflatable into the Potomac River just above Dam No. 3 and had hooked feisty little smallmouths before we were 20-feet from shore. On our entire trip, we didn't kill a fish, releasing everything we caught and I'd estimate our biggest bass was about 17 inches long. Most Potomac River smallmouths run on the small side, with 9 to 12 inches dominating.

And while I admittedly was on a fly rod kick, I left my light wand at home and took an ultralight spinning rod loaded with 4-pound line. The reason I deserted my fly rod was that I knew we'd be three in the boat and I'm not that skillful a fly caster.

Kovach, though, had brought along

OUTDOORS



By TOM GOODSPEED

several of his beautiful fly rods and I did try them out for a while. I didn't stick with them too much, though, as they were too expensive for my blood and I feared I might break one.

Kovach has a crew of river guides that work for him and all these guides are expert river watermen. They will hold the boat against a boulder while you work a half-dozen adjacent holes — and they use a lot of muscle power in doing so.

These rafts are not gasoline powered! A unique aluminum tubing structure supports oarlocks and his long, oversize oars handle the river beautifully.

The total drift runs about eight miles, passing down through the Needles just above Harpers Ferry, and continuing down through the Whitehorse water past the waterfront villages of Weverton and Knoxville.

When we finally arrive at the bridge in Brunswick, the truck is there for carrying us, our gear and the boat as well as back to where our cars were parked.

Kovach is beginning his fly fishing instructions this month and reservations are filling fast for his river float trips. If you are interested, give Mark Kovach a call at (301) 588-8742. Either venture, the fly fishing school or the river float trip will be something you will long remember.

GOODSPEED'S TIPS

Any day now, the dogwoods will be in bloom and you'll be sorry you didn't get your boat in the water earlier. I find that there are so many little things to be done on my boats each year that I jump into the task long before most Marylanders do. By mid-March, I'm usually ready to go fishing.

I winterize my two outboards myself and once I've put in some new plugs, they invariably start on the second turn of the key or pull of the cord.

My gas tanks are both in good shape, too. The big tank was filled and treated with conditioner prior to winter storage, and the little six gallon tanks were used weekly over most of the winter months so water in them is no problem.

I do check my fuel lines carefully, though, as this is where most of my problems start. I always replace the "O" rings in the connections at each end of the hoses, and I check to be sure the hose clamps are sound and tight.

The little 15 horsepower outboard that I use all winter always gets the most attention. I don't always flush it out with fresh water after using it in the salt so I like to give it a good run in fresh water each spring to wash out any collected salts. I lubricate it, of course, and always drain and refill the lower unit.

On my big outboard, the steering system always merits special attention and I pump a lot of light grease into the cable that connects the steering to the motor.