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Year 7, September 2004

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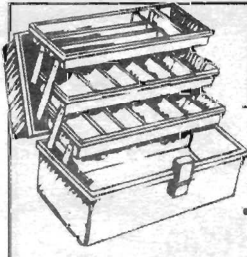


By Tim Sherman

One of my favorite summer fishing activities is to take a float trip on the Potomac River in quest for smallmouth bass. It's a leisurely, fun filled outing that only requires you to show up. I've never been disappointed adrift with the Mark Kovach Fishing Service. On previous trips my cousin Brian and I have enjoyed productive days with guide John Hayes. This year we fished with Mark himself, while John guided another twosome that day. Mark explained that summer patterns got started a bit late this year, and with river levels fluctuating from rains, water clarity and height have played a bigger part than air and water temperatures.

I've experienced many different fishing trips as a writer and angler. I've been offshore for big game in sportfishing yachts, fished the bay on vessels from center consoles to fully rigged charter boats, and I have been 85 miles per hour on a bass boat to pursue largemouth bass. All these fishing trips are great, but the leisurely pace of a laid back float trip on a scenic river such as the Potomac has a way of reaching the inner essence of an angler.

We met with conditions more suited for summer patterns. While the river was moderately low, we fished on a gray drab day that could have put smallies in a tight lipped mood. I've always used water clarity as a barometer of what lure to use. I would have started out with a neutral color like green pumpkin, but Brian began the day with a red shad (black/red bottom) YUM tube. He was getting strikes and landing bass soon after we passed through one of the openings within dilapidated Dam 3. I was able to manage a



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"LARGEST TACKLE"

Fortunes for Potomac Smallies

couple smallies myself on a plain shad Houdini Shad soft jerkbait. However, Brian stuck with the red/black scheme casting a crawfish shaped crankbait. The tube and cranking crawfish worked well for him right up until lunch.

As we finished a shore-bound lunch, the clouds broke away into a beautiful summer afternoon. As the clouds disappeared, so too did the bite on anything in a black and red color pattern. We had just a few strikes after lunch before rushing through the fast water at White Horse Rapids. I made a quick adjustment in color by switching to a smoke/red flake Yum tube, which the bass responded to immediately. After my second bass in about five minutes, Brian also switched to that color and began to catch fish once more.

Surface activity seemed to pick up in the afternoon. We'd watched bass leap out of the water for damsel flies. Mark suggested that we try surface plugs. Being that I pride myself as a topwater lure fanatic, I couldn't resist the guide's advice. They weren't as productive as tubes, but I did manage to catch a small bronzeback on a buzzbait. I'd cast a popper and prop bait throughout the rest of the day when smallies would show themselves, but the tube was the benchmark lure of the day.

Meanwhile aboard John Hayes' raft, his two anglers were busy with a few different lures. These fishermen also caught their share

of bass on tubes. They also landed numerous smallies on 4-inch Zoom Flukes and crankbaits in assorted colors.

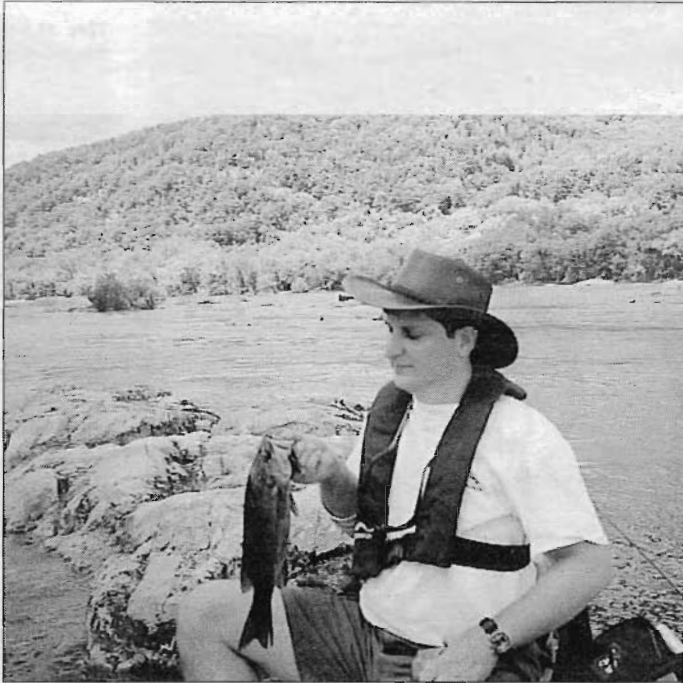
We had the sun for about three hours before the clouds rolled in

to the take out location at the ramp in Brunswick, Maryland.

This was one of the most enjoyable float trips I have been on. I learned a lot along the 8-mile stretch of the Potomac. Mark showed me the techniques for using a soft jerkbait and a topwater prop bait. Even though we were fishing in summer, these two dominate hot weather lures only played a small part in the day's fishing. Most of our smallmouth bass were caught on tubes, lures that transcend the seasons for catching smallies. Subconsciously I resisted changing lures when bass stopped biting the tube. Many times anglers fall victim to casting a different lure when fish stop biting, yours truly included.

The tube bite was so dominate during the day that giving up on it would have been detrimental. Mark would have beaten us over our heads with an oar if we stopped casting it. By simply changing the hue, we were able to keep the bite going.

The Potomac River had yielded for us an "anything goes" trip. With the advice and instruction of Mark Kovach, we managed to catch over 40 bronzebacks between the two of us. We are knowledgeable on reading flowing water, but Mark pointed out casts that only his experience on the river could call. If there is one lesson I can take away from this trip, it's that change can be a good thing. The changing weather conditions made for a wondrous day. Switching from predominate summer patterns to hopping tubes along the rocky river bottom saved our day from the first bass. Swapping colors of the tube paid heavy dividends on the number of smallies we caught. Learning a new technique along the way is an added bonus. The theme for this day truly loaned itself to the old adage, 'The more things change, the more they stay the same!'



Brian Johnston found that tubes are one of the best baits for smallmouth bass no matter what the season. Photo by Tim Sherman

over us. First they appeared upriver from where we had fished, then downstream in the distance. When the first layer of thin clouds rolled in on us, bass stopped biting the smoke colored tube. From the day's weather patterns, I again changed the color of my tube. This time I slipped a pumpkin/green flake tube over the 1/4-ounce jig head. Brian recognized that the clouds had dictated a change and went back to the red shad tube. And again the bite was on.

Soon thereafter a cloud base -- one that would have made Noah nervous -- rolled overhead. The breeze picked up into a light wind, but we never got rained on. While the clouds did lack rain, they seemed to put the damper on the fishing. Fortunately we were close

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