

An American Adventure Part 2

by Martin James, Wednesday 3rd July, 2002

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In part 1 of my American Adventure I left you having fished Cape Cod for stripers and blue fish.



One of the many stripers caught by the author

What a super venue Cape Cod is for the saltwater fly or spin fisher. In some areas on warm sunny days, you could be forgiven for thinking you were in the Bahamas, especially when you're being poled over the flats in three feet of gin clear water by one of the top guides in the area, Captain Andrew Cumming. Fishing with Andrew I had plenty of hook-ups, landing some, losing others. I was certainly gutted to lose two twenty pound plus stripers on my first two casts. We watched these fish eat the flies so we could see the size of the stripers quite clearly.

I find it tremendously exciting dropping a fly on a fish's nose, then watch the fish eat. As it does so I strip strike the hook home. The first fish was in the twenty pound class, I had it on for several minutes before the hook fell out. The second fish was on for about two minutes, when again the hook fell out. Checking the hook for sharpness I found it a bit blunt, probably caused by hitting a bone on the first fish. After sharpening the hook I never lost another striper but sadly no other twenty pounder wanted to eat. Though I did hook a big bluefish which Andrew and Trevor thought would bite through the line in seconds. I did get a ten minute scrap with this fish, estimated at 15lbs before it got its razor sharp teeth on my leader.

My exciting fishing session ended around 2pm with the wind strengthening from the north east. It had certainly been a great day on the water. Back on the boat dock, I recorded an interview with Andrew and Trevor about the fishing; tackle required, flies and best times to fish etc. (Recording for At The Waters Edge programme on BBC Radio Lancashire and also on the Internet <http://www.bbc.co.uk/lancashire/sport/fishing> - for all you readers who do not reside in the BBC Radio Lancashire transmission area.)



695 A free public launching site with no litter

I suddenly felt hungry, realising I had only eaten a blueberry muffin and had one cup of coffee since six O'clock in the morning. Trevor and I decided we should seek out a restaurant before starting the two hundred and fifty mile trip back to my motel.

The drive back from Cape Cod wasn't in the best of driving conditions. After some fifty miles we were hit by a huge storm with monsoon type rain and forked lightning, though I must say the American drivers were very responsible leaving plenty of distance between vehicles and driving with a lot of care and attention. It's something drivers in the UK should take note of, especially on the motorways where UK drivers insist on getting as close as possible to the car in front even in thick fog.

Arriving back at my motel around midnight, I packed away all the gear and cloths so I was ready for an early start on Saturday morning. My alarm call was for seven am. After a shower and coffee I moved all my bags into reception. After checking out, I had only a few minutes to wait before Trevor and his dad John turned up. After loading the car we then went off to my favourite bakery for coffee and blueberry muffins.



l-r Capt Dixon Merkt and Author Ed Mitchell

The arrangements were for Trevor to drive me south into Connecticut where I was to meet up with author Ed Mitchell, who has written two excellent books, *Fly Rodding The Coast* and *Fly-Fishing the Saltwater Shoreline*, both published by Stackpole. Both books are written about the east coast and the fishing available - especially the stripers, blue fish, bonito and little tunny. Ed's book *Fly Rodding The Coast* covers the tackle required, reading the beaches, saltwater fly casting, flies, reading the man made structure, knots, matching the marine bait fish and beyond. In *Fly Fishing the Saltwater Shoreline*, Ed covers the stripers, bluefish, false albacore, bonito, weakfish and hickory shad. He discusses inshore structures, forage and flies, annual migration, fly fishing the edges, a coastal planner and solving common fly fishing problems. Both books are full of knowledge and make very interesting reading. This man Ed Mitchell writes from many years of experience, Ed makes you feel you're at the waterside with him.



Arriving at the arranged meeting place, Ed was waiting for me. After introductions we loaded my gear into Ed's vehicle, I then said my good byes to Trevor and John before climbing into Ed's motor for the 50 odd mile drive to Wethersfield where Ed lived. Arriving in town, Ed pointed out the oldest building in the area so I decided I had better shoot some pictures both with digital and SLR cameras. Then it was off to Ed's house where I was introduced to Ed's wife Sandy, his son Ed jnr, and Snickers, the yellow lab who gives Ed a good workout each morning when Ed isn't away giving a lecture or fishing.

I was soon sitting down to lunch with a good mug of tea made from Yorkshire Gold tea bags. No, I

Boat dock on Cape Cod



The author interviewing Captain Andrew Cummings



The oldest house in Wethersfield 1780

didn't buy those in the States! Whenever I travel abroad I take a supply of tea bags. After a nice break we headed off to the coast to stay at Sandra's mothers beach house. It was ideal, close to the beach and very peaceful, just a couple of miles from the town of Old Lyme. After unpacking Ed told me the plans for the next couple of days. Tomorrow, Sunday, we would be fishing for stripers and bluefish with Capt Dixon Merkt of Old Saybrook from his 23 foot boat with a centre console which allowed two fly anglers to fish in comfort, one in the bows the other in the stern.

Sunday morning dawned sunny with only a light wind, perfect conditions for going afloat. I cooked breakfast of bacon, eggs with a mug of tea for each of us. Breakfast over, we headed off to the small private harbour close to the I-95 in Old Saybrook where I was introduced to my guide for the day, Capt Dixon Merkt. You couldn't have wished for a better man than Dixon. All the tackle on board was top class and very well maintained. The fly lines had been cleaned, the hook points of the flies were sharp. All was ready to do battle with the blues and stripers. We slipped our mooring and headed down the Connecticut river. As we did so both Ed and Dixon pointed out places of interest, they also told me about some of the great fishing days they had experienced in the past. Tales of big stripers and blues were coming thick and fast, Dixon described some of the days when big blues would hit poppers on every chuck.

Dixon went on to say "In October we have the Albacore, or 'albis' as they are known, which is also known as the little tunny, often called the false albacore, one of the fastest fish in the ocean. At the mention of these fish. Captain Merkt got all excited, it seemed as if his face was aglow just like a little tunny lights up as it hits a school of bait fish. Dixon said "Martin you must come across in late September early October and fish for the False Albacore". I replied "Tonight I will blank out October in my diary". My plans are to join Dixon later in the year to hunt those false albacore. If you want to join me, you're more than welcome.

Our first drift was over an area of shallow rocky water just downstream of the I-95 bridge. My first cast, shooting with an eight weight outfit and Teeny 250 found me hooked into a nice bass around the five pound mark. I could see it twisting and turning in the clear shallow water as it fought for its freedom. The well balanced tackle soon had the fish beaten. Leaning over the gunwale I slipped out the barbless hook then watched the fish swim off strongly. I was quickly back in action; two strips, then another fish was hooked. As I fought this fish to the side I looked towards the stern, Ed was also in action. If the fishing continued like this then by lunchtime our arms would be tired and aching.

At the end of the first drift Dixon motored back upstream for another drift. It was the same story, more hits, some missed, others hooked and released. The sun was shining brightly, everything looked good. Depending on the speed of the ebbing or flooded tide you sometimes only get in a couple of casts before starting another drift. As the tide slackened we moved further down river into Long Island Sound so we could fish more of the ebb tide. Through the clear water I could see we

were over rocky ground and occasionally a bluefish would swirl on the surface. Ed spotted this action, he quickly changed over to a popper, the bluefish didn't disappoint as it savaged the popper, putting a bend in Ed's rod. The rocky flats and rocky shoreline areas are often the spots where you might find a big bluefish, but make sure you have a wire tippet. These fish have a mouthful of razor sharp teeth. These teeth are not just pointed like those of the teeth of a pike, they have two cutting edges which will slice through a bait fish or your finger.

I was most impressed with the behaviour of other boaters, anglers and sailors. Not once did another boat cut across our drift, though Ed did say they get a few cowboys in the summer who want lots of speed, lots of noise and lots of beer. When I asked about jet skis he told me the problem wasn't quite so bad these days. The cowboys of the ocean cannot hire a jet ski unless they have the correct paperwork. This means they cannot just turn up and hire one of these noisy machines. Last year one jet skier lost his life as he tried to go at a fast rate of knots between two boats, one being towed by the other. He was decapitated by the towing chain. If you go afloat with Dixon or any of the other registered guides in the United States you're in safe hands as the guides are tested by the United States coast guard. All Captains have to follow strict rules, including carrying safety equipment which includes fire extinguishers etc.

If you're planning a trip across to Connecticut or Massachusetts for two or three weeks of serious fishing, my advice is take three rods. A nine foot nine weight for most of your fishing, a ten weight in case you get the chance of hooking up with some big stripers, bluefish and false albacore, and an eight weight for the smaller bass and bluefish. If you plan to take just one rod, make it a nine or ten weight. On this trip I found my Thomas and Thomas SC models with line weights of eight, nine and ten perfect for all my fishing. Though I did have a ten weight Horizon in case I was faced with some tough windy conditions. I had several reels carrying floating, intermediate and Teeny 300 line. I was also trying out a Rio VersiTip line, which I have found to be most useful.

If you only have one rod and reel I would advise you purchase a Rio VersiTip with its four shooting heads. This will then allow you to fish various depths of water. Rio now make a VersiTip for the tropics which I have just purchased for my fishing in the Persian Gulf Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Oman this coming winter. I feel this line will help me catch a lot more fish from the shoreline. When shore fishing I only carry one rod so these new lines will enable me to fish various depths of water and no doubt catch more fish.

When it comes to fly selection the best advice I can offer is to ask the local anglers and guides, you will find the American angler very helpful and informative. I always carry a selection of Lefty Kreh Deceivers and Bob Clousers Minnows in various colour combinations in hook sizes from 1/0's through to 3/0's. Popovics Surf Candy is another pattern to have in your fly box along with some poppers. All my hooks are barbless. Bob Popovics, in his new book 'Pop Flies' published by Stackpole books, advises long tapered leaders for presenting smaller flies with floating and intermediate line, but when fishing large heavy flies and fast sinking lines then use a shorter heavier leader. When I was out with Dixon he gave me a squid pattern to use, saying "Stripers love eating squid in this area" I believe we were fishing off Barlett Reef at the time in very rough water. In fact it became so rough we had to head back to the docks so I never got the chance to find out.

I will be going across to fish with Capt Dixon Merkt again in either late September or early October. I will also be doing some shore fishing during the trip. If you want to join me you're more than welcome. E-mail me, martin@flyfishing.plus.com

Should you be across in the Connecticut area and you want a days fishing then you can get Dixon by E-mail dmm1042@aol.com or call him on

860-434-2301

If calling from the UK, prefix the number with 001

I recommend the following books Fly Rodding The Coast and Fly Fishing The Saltwater Shoreline, both books by Ed Mitchell and Pop Flies by Popovics and Jaworowski, all three books published by Stackpole. Thomas and Thomas rods are available from Sportsfish. E-mail sportsfish@sportsfish.co.uk or telephone 01544-327111