

Valley Angler

August Means Bass Fishing

by Bill Thompson

There is no question, when it comes to fishing; I am a dyed in the wool trout man. I would guess that most anglers, in our neck of the woods, share my passion for Brook Trout, although Rainbow and Brown Trout are OK too; in a pinch. Many dedicated trout fishermen will shun all other species of fish in favor of their favorite query. If it doesn't sport an adipose fin it is not worthy.

On the other hand when my favorite trout streams begin to warm up and the fishing slows down, I can be persuaded to cast to a bass or two. In truth, bass are not really all that bad a game fish. If you are a Bass man you should know that when I say this my tongue is firmly planted in my cheek. Bass can be quit sporty and provide a spirited fight especially on a fly rod. Bass can also be just as selective as any trout and just as challenging. In the spring and early summer I am always to focused on trout to give bass much thought, however, when August rolls around I am ready to head for my favorite bass pond.

Probably a lot of bass anglers would not think of me as a "real bass man". I don't have a high powered bass boat and I much prefer to use a fly rod rather than spin or bait casting gear. Up until recently bass tournaments had banned the use of fly rods. Last year a few of the fly rod companies came out with special rods designed for use in professional bass tournaments. Tournament rules prohibit the use of rods longer than seven foot eleven inches so these rods are made to comply with the regulations. Most come designed for eight weight lines in order to cast heavier wind resistant flies. I am not really sure why fly rods were banned before now. I always thought it might be because spin and bait casting manufactures have always been the major sponsors of tournaments. It is kind of odd when you think of it as fishermen were using fly gear to catch bass long before spin reels were ever invented.

When it comes to choosing a rod, I fish the same fly rods that I fish for trout with. My nine foot five weight works just fine for most outings. On days when the wind is blowing a little stronger or I am going to use some larger poppers I will take along a seven weight rod.

Like I said I don't own a hopped up bass boat. I must admit that bass boats look pretty cool. Bass boats have a lot in common with NASCAR stock cars. This would probably explain why tournament bass fishermen dress in brightly colored jumpsuits covered in patches advertising lure companies. I find this amusing, but fly fishermen dressed in rubber pants can be just as funny.

For the most part I stick to small ponds and avoid large lakes where a lot of horse power may come in handy. Because of this I am rarely bothered by over powered boats, jet skies or for that matter many other anglers. Most of the time I fish from a Hobie Float Cat. The cat is a small one man pontoon boat powered by a set oars. The fisherman sets high and out of the water and is able to row the craft forward much like a drift boat. The Hobie Cat's pontoons are made of polyethylene and are darn near indestructible. There is a small platform on the back that will accommodate a cooler or if you don't feel like rowing a small electric motor can be attached. The fact is, should you have a mind to, you could outfit this little craft with just about anything that you might find on a fancy bass boat. As for myself I find the rod holder and cup holder to be the most indispensable options. My boat is named the Pequod, from the novel Moby Dick, and Janet's cat is called the Rachel from the same book.

As for flies I try to keep that simple as well. A handful of small poppers and maybe a leech pattern are all that I carry. I can get the whole lot in one small box in my shirt pocket. I love to tie big fancy deer hair bugs, but I rarely take any with me.

As for tactics, my strategy pales in comparison to those of hard core bass men. I occasionally watch a bass tournament on television and I am always amazed at the lengths these guys will go to. For the most part I work the shoreline especially where there are weed beds and lily pads. I toss the bug into clearings between the pads and let it set. It is kind of a mind game I play with the bass. OK, I know that sounds a little weird. The trick is to let the popper set still for as long as you can stand it. I imagine the bass setting under the fly trying to decide whether or not to eat it. At some point the bass will give in and attack the fly or you will pick it up and the process begins all over again. The trick is to stay focused while waiting for the strike. Often as not your mind will wander off and you will miss the take.

If this tactic fails to take fish I will resort to working the fly. Poppers are meant to “pop” or “gurgle” when retrieved. Cast to a likely spot and let the popper set at least until the rings dissipate and then give it a quick “pop”. After the first “pop” let it set still again for a few moments and then give it another “pop”. Repeat this process a few times and if you don't draw a strike start the process all over again. Sometime bass anglers refer to this as “walking the dog”.

My favorite time of day to fish for bass is late evening's right up until after dark. Bass, like most predators, prefer the darkness. It is especially fun to fish after dark. I enjoy setting back in my little boat listening to the sounds of the night. The occasional bull frog, maybe a whippoorwill somewhere off in the woods can lull you to sleep, but the big slurp of a big bass inhaling its supper jolt you awake. It can be a little spooky to cast at night and a big strike can scare the heck out of you. The world is a different place after dark.

My advice for an enjoyable summer evening is to go down to your local fly shop and pick up a few poppers and go bass fishing.

See you on the River.