

Hooked On Recovery

August 22, 2008

Tube and Worm

Finally, the big bluefish was worn out, but I was still extremely wary of its jaw and the sharp teeth. With my left hand, I carefully grabbed the flesh under and between the gills and the fish quieted. Pliers took care of the hook. I twisted my body hard and got him in the rear well in my new kayak. He thumped a few times and then remained still. Phew! But for a bluefish to taste better on the grill, I had to bleed it. The deed done and the fish blood draining out the back scupper holes, I wondered if this was a good idea considering the dramatic rise in shark sightings off Cape Cod. I pulled my feet out of the water.

Kayak fishing is booming right now, many of the trucks on the beach now sport kayaks. Several years ago I was one of the first. This year I bought a new boat, now I have two. My new one is a Prowler 13 Angler designed with fishing in mind; 2 built-in rod holders, a well in the back, a couple nice compartments and yes, even a couple drink holders (for water and soda, not beer). So what do you do with a new kayak? Test it of course. So much to the delight of Sandy and the kids, I paddled out into little Hatches Harbor and with creaky joints and surprising lack of balance I attempted to stand on it. Of course, I fell off several times but more importantly, I was able to climb back on. Next thing I knew, the kids had the other kayak in the water and were standing on it easily, then paddling it while standing and all the while being much more graceful and nimble than their dad.

So feeling fairly secure, I paddled out amongst the charter boats working the drop off and fished and fished and fished. This year, I caught most of the fish trolling, a method where you let a lure out behind you and use the boat to drag the lure through the water. With the new Prowler I had the rod holders and found this better than holding the rod with my feet like I did on the other kayak. I caught fish on all kinds of lures with a Rapala Sliver and Yozuri two of my favorites. Trolling had always been one of my favorite ways of kayak fishing – a tried and true method if you will. This vacation I caught fish using a couple new methods for me.

One day, I saw a guy standing on his diving platform on the back of his boat. I thought he was stuck on the bottom the way he was thumping his rod, but closer inspection revealed he was actually jigging. I watched for several minutes and he hooked up a few times boating a couple blues and a short bass. As I drifted a little closer, he finally acknowledged my presence. I told him “I was just going to school”. He relaxed a little and said that last year he discovered that he could catch fish using this jigging technique, but that I probably couldn’t do it from my boat. My first thought was “Don’t tell me what I CAN’T do”. I didn’t say that, but just paddled a few yards away and tied on a jig, a 3 ounce red River Fox with a white curly tail and let it go to the bottom. I mimicked his technique and after a few drops and retrieves, a smallish bass followed it to the top. Ah, some interest from down below. Next drop, a few quick retrieves and a strike: fish on. Soon, I lipped a 25 inch bass and thought to myself, “Wow, that was pretty cool”. Now, if I had an electronic depthfinder, some different style jigs, I could really be on to something here.

So jigging proved productive, would the tube and worm? One guy I talked to on the beach swore by this method and convinced me to try it. I already had some tubes in my gear, so I rigged one up. I was told that orange was the hot color. A tube lure is exactly what it sounds

like, a piece of surgical tubing with a line through it with a swivel on one end and a hook at the other. You can “sweeten” the hook with a sand worm (thus tube and worm) or improvise with a sand eel or some other bait. Believe me, this thing should not catch fish, it looks stupid. Yet, the charter boats use radiator hoses with a hook on the end with great success and call them tubes, so who am I to argue with success. Imagine dragging a radiator hose behind a boat to catch fish.

The key to getting this to work is to get the tube near the bottom. A lot of kayakers use leadcore line, fishing line with lead in the center, to get the thing to sink. Leadcore line can be difficult to work with, so I tried weight, a nice 4 ounce dradle. With curiosity but not a lot of hope, I let the contraption out behind me. I’m trolling along, enjoying the water, maneuvering around the lobster pots when “bam!” my rod doubles over and line starts screaming from the reel. I grabbed the rod, swung my feet to sit side-saddle and battled the fish for several minutes. Finally, I lipped a 34 inch striped bass (a keeper is 28 inches plus) and heaved him into the well. Cool! Very cool! So now I’m a convert. There’s nothing like success to turn a skeptic into a believer.

Trying these new fishing techniques reinforced the idea that there are many pathways to recovery. Some ways have been around for years – they are reliable, traditional, classic and still highly effective. Others may seem outrageous, silly, and unconventional yet they have their results as well. In fishing, one key is to match the technique with the conditions and more importantly, to match the lure to what the fish are feeding on. It’s one of the reasons I find fishing fascinating.

Near the end of our Cape Cod stay, on a glorious afternoon, I was slowly and peacefully trolling an orange tube behind my Prowler and the words of my sponsor came to mind. He has told me for 20 years to *remain teachable*. The thought came with a smile.



Hooked on Recovery is a biweekly message from CCAR Executive Director Phillip Valentine, person in recovery since 12/28/87, devoted husband, a father of five and one other guy fishing from the beach. These thoughts, views and opinions reflect on his personal recovery and are not meant in any way to speak for the entire recovery community. He welcomes all your comments and suggestions on this column, email him at phillip@ccar.us. Visit the website at www.ccar.us to read the entire series.