

## **Hooked On Recovery**

October 15, 2004

*Seals in the Surf*

Every October my buddy Shortcast and I head to the hallowed fishing grounds of Race Point, Provincetown at the end of Cape Cod to get in on the fall migration of the famed striped bass. I left last Saturday afternoon and returned Wednesday. The fishing was spectacular and the weather even more so.

Seems that with our impeccable timing (I say sarcastically), we chose a few days when a couple of tropical storms merged in the Atlantic and descended upon the Cape. Monday and Tuesday we fished in winds that were topping 50 miles an hour, waves 10 to 15 feet high, stinging horizontal rain along with occasional blasting from the sand. We also had to be extra cautious about making sure the next foamer didn't sweep us off the beach and take us permanently out to sea. I got caught off guard a couple times and struggled to maintain my balance.

Race Point is really a huge sand bar and the water moves quickly past it at all times, now add those high winds and you have some torrents! It was frothy, foamy, wild, wild water... I've never seen it like this. Immediately off the bar and if you weren't careful, you could step off the sand into a river of extremely swift - and dangerous - water about five feet deep. This trough was full of bait fish being pushed in by the wind and tide; feasting on these fish were huge schools of stripers and bluefish and flocks of birds including seagulls, terns and cormorants. Gulls were on the beach, picking up fleeing baitfish and leftovers from the carnage near the beach. If you could cast a lure, any lure, about 20 feet you would have been into fish. I caught so many fish my arms ached, not because of any great skill on my part, but because we were in the right place at the right time.

During the frenzy, we could see seals in the surf. They'd pop their heads up, look at us inquisitively and slip back under the surface. One time, I had a nice-sized blue near the beach, when the water erupted. I could see a black shape in the foam, line screamed from the reel and then it broke. A seal had stolen my fish! This happened to several other guys on the beach as well, one guy lost three. It seems the seals could sense the distress signals coming from the hooked fish and would attack; they were easier to catch. I swear, they were eyeing us out there and waiting to see if our rods were bent and then they'd go looking for the fish.

After awhile, I took a break from fishing (remember my arms were aching), and seals watched. There were huge sea lions and small harbor seals. Both kinds were very comfortable in all that white water and stormy weather, floating on their backs, riding a breaking wave, playing with each other and it seemed to me at times they were smiling at the humans on the beach in all our awkwardness. Seals are serene creatures, at ease in their environment, playful with each other, comfortable in their own skin, in love with life and seem to be extremely grateful for their existence on this planet. I can't wait for the day when my own recovery brings me to a level where I can be as content as those seals in the surf.

*Hooked on Recovery* is a biweekly message from CCAR Executive Director Phillip Valentine, person in recovery since 12/28/87, devoted husband, father of four (expecting number five) and just another surf fisherman. He welcomes all your comments and suggestions on this column, email him at [phillip@ccar.us](mailto:phillip@ccar.us). Or visit the website at [www.ccar.us](http://www.ccar.us) to read previous articles.