

## Sod Bank Bassin'

By DJ Muller

The arrival of spring is welcomed by the stir crazed surfcaster. The cold winds of winter don't bite so hard, the layers of clothing and jackets start peeling off. Green vegetation begins to sprout up all over the place and it is finally time to get your equipment in line for some of the great spring bass fishing along the sod banks and beaches of the Raritan Bay.

Usually by the time April rolls around I am raring and ready to catch some bass. Actually by that time, I am ready to catch anything that swims. I have all my rods and reels ready to roll; after all, I have had all winter to ready them. I make sure all my line is fresh. I have enough rigs tied up to carry me through the spring run. I go through my bait-fishing bucket and make sure everything that I need is in there; sinkers, clam knife, pliers, extra rigs and hooks, my digital scale, a tape measure, head lamp, and elastic thread. I then dig out my home-made sod-bank buggy, one I made a couple years back for humping all my fishing rods, spikes, bait, chair, and what ever other good stuff that I could fit into it, down to where the fishing is good. I then load all the stuff into the back of the truck and head off to the bait store for some fresh clams on my way to the honey hole. It is spring and it has been too long since I actually felt the weight of a bass on the line. I have dreamed about it all winter but it just isn't the same, of course.

Shallow waters always heat up the fastest in the spring. Bass, like any animal, gravitate to warmth. At this time of year the bass are also moving into the warm shallow creeks and rivers to spawn. This is what makes the back bays good spring locations for catching bass. The more I fish the shores of the Raritan Bay, the more good places I find to fish. If you want a little tip on a spot that is hotter than all the rest, I would like to inform you that there isn't one. Any of the bay beaches are capable of producing bass in the spring. From Morgan Creek all the way out to the backside of the Hook, you can find productive water. It may depend on the time of the season and the water temperatures, but by mid-April, take your pick. Last year for example, there would be a good number of bass caught one day in Union beach, and the next day it was hot in Keansburg. The bass cruise the muddy flats in search of forage, when they find it they indulge, when there is no forage, they move on. It is not too much more complicated than that.

### **The Set-Up.**

When fishing the sod-banks I have found a nine foot rod teamed up with a reel equal to the Penn 5500SS, to be the perfect combo for what I am doing. Most of the bass that you catch will be 15 pounds and under, but every once in a while a heavyweight will come for dinner. It is not unusual for a 20-30 pound bass to be caught from the area. Remember the pre and post spawn bass swim these shallows. I like to spike my rod as opposed to holding it for long periods of time. I use a custom made hi-low rig, and I bait it with fresh clam. Not frozen, not salted, fresh. I just hook the clam on and cast it out and wait for the action to begin.

**A Bay Tip.** When it comes time to fish clams, as a rule I don't usually tie my clam on. A fresh clam usually stays on the hook while casting if put on correctly. However when fishing the bay I have had trouble with the clam staying on the hook while in the water. I have yet to figure out why, perhaps it is small predators, maybe flounder or crabs, or maybe strong current, but it is has become advantageous to tie the clam on with some

elastic thread. Plastic thread is available in just about any tackle shop. Put the clam on like you normally would and then wrap it with the thread about 10-15 times. Keep the thread and the clam up around the shaft of the hook. The barbs on the shaft of the baitholder hooks help the elastic keep the clams up on the shaft as opposed to sliding down to the bend. Remember, you want to keep the hook concealed as much as possible. When you begin to experience the inability of your bait to stay on the hook, be prepared by having some thread ready to wrap up Mr. Clam.

**Tides.** The bay is big, and the bay is wide. The bay is also shallow. The sod banks of the bay sit high. Higher than the sand and mud that sits down below the top of the banks. Any one that has fished the banks knows what I mean by a drop off, or step down. The drop off varies of course but once you step down off the bank the bottom gradually descends. At low tide you can walk below the sod banks, and you can wade out quite a distance before getting to deep, fishable water. Fishing on the top of the banks at high water gives you 3-4 feet of water right in front of you. This is why you want to fish the banks at high tide. High tide offers you plenty of water to accommodate the desired bass activity. Many a cow bass cruise just off the drop off at high water, this gives you, the shore based angler, a considerable shot at a trophy.

**Make Haste.** The time to begin is now! Don't wait till June to start fishing for bass. Find a spot that you feel comfortable with on one of the bay beaches or banks and go put in your time and see what you can come up with. You usually get some good action throughout April and early May. Time on the water is what will get you both fish and fishing experience. Not sitting home reading about how others do or have done it. In closing, while fishing the Bayshore areas, please, please, clean up after yourself. I see way too much "fisherman's refuse" left behind. In many cases these areas are not publicly maintained areas, and future repercussions could be suffered if fishermen continue to leave their junk and not take responsibility for their garbage. I would not want to lose one of these great bay access points because of carelessness.

#### PICTURE CAPTIONS:

(017) The Mullerized custom buggy cart for hauling your equipment to the fishing hole of your choice. It can be a long walk.

(019) Anna B. stands watch for a knockdown along the sod banks.

(024) Anna B. hoists a bass from the waters on the Raritan Bay.

(PB Striper)The picture says it all. Night time and clams, produces most of the bass along the sod banks.

(034) Many find comfort along the banks of the Bay waiting for old pajama's to pay a visit.

(037) The banks at high tide give you enough water to sustain bass activity. These girls found out the tides move quickly along the sod banks.

(042) Muller unhooks a typical spring, sod bank, bass.