

B O S T O N ' S

South Shore

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COLIN BATES/NOI



Massachusetts' unsung hero for striped bass and bluefish

An angler fishes the South Shore's rocky coastline near Cohasset during the incoming tide when striped bass (above) are concentrated and sight fishing is excellent. Upper right inset: Grave's Light near Cohasset. John A. Halton photos.

WHEN SALTWATER FLY RODDERS consider angling opportunities on the Massachusetts coast, few think of the South Shore. Most anglers consider Cape Cod, Boston Harbor, Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, and the North Shore the state's premier striped bass and bluefish waters. But the South Shore deserves attention from both wade- and boat-fishermen because it offers a great variety of fishing opportunities and terrain: sandy beachfronts, rocky drop-offs, tidal estuaries, coves, and flats.

Where is the South Shore? Many anglers pass it on Route 3 as they head south from Boston to Cape Cod or to the Falmouth and Woods Hole ferries that transport them to Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. It runs from the town of Weymouth south to Scusset Beach. Farther south of Scusset Beach, you'll run into the east end of the Cape Cod Canal, locally known as the Big Ditch. In

all, the stretch from Weymouth to Scusset Beach has about 55 miles of good water.

The South Shore's Season

THE FIRST STRIPERS OF THE SEASON arrive as early as mid-April. They frequent the southern South Shore, from Scusset Beach to about the North and South rivers in Marshfield and Humarock. The fish use the warming beachfronts as corridors and hold over in the flats, rock gardens, guzzles (recesses), estuaries, and rips around Plymouth, Kingston, and Duxbury. Large schools of bass and hickory shad also wind their way into the warmer waters of the North and South river estuaries in the early season.

Fishing in the southern South Shore is good through June, until the water heats up to the high 50s F and the bass move north or seek cooler, deeper water in the ledges and drop-offs. With warmer water, however,

bluefish make their inshore appearance to feed on silversides, sandeels, and menhaden. Blues range from snappers (3 to 6 pounds) to fish that weigh up to 18 pounds. While most fish are in the 7- to 9-pound range, heftier fish in the 16- to 18-pound class are caught occasionally.

The fishing in the northern portion of the South Shore heats up in June and July. This is prime time for fishing the rocky ledge drop-offs around Scituate, Cohasset, and Hingham, and this deeper, colder water provides good fishing all summer long.

In the fall I've found acres of bass crashing silversides and sandeels on the surface, and topwater action with poppers and sliders is as good as it gets. The fishing in Weymouth, Hingham, and Cohasset slows around mid-October, while Humarock, Duxbury, and Plymouth fish well into late October. From White Horse Beach south to the canal, the fishing often continues into mid-November.

The game on the South Shore is to consider the water temperatures and the striper migration before you decide where to fish. You should start fishing at Scusset Beach in late April or early May. As the water warms, move north to Plymouth and Duxbury for most of May and head to Scituate, Weymouth, and Cohasset in June, July, and August. In the fall, reverse the pattern to coincide with the dropping water temperatures and departing fish.

Diverse Terrain

BEACHFRONTS. Depending on the season and the water temperature, fish use the beachfronts as seasonal corridors as early as mid-April and as late as mid-November. Beachfronts are scattered along the entire length of the South Shore and most have easy public access.

For most



The author (above) releases a striper caught in the rocks near Cohasset. Use intermediate lines when fishing the flats near Plymouth (below) and binoculars (right) to spot breaking fish.



beachfronts, such as Duxbury, Plymouth, and Sagamore, where the mean low water depths are between one and three feet, an intermediate line with a one- to two-inch-per-second sink rate will do the job. However, some beachfronts—White Horse, Humarock, and Nantasket, for example—have areas with deeper water (9 to 11 feet) adjacent to the wadeable areas. For this you'll need a sinking, shooting-taper like an Orvis Depth Charge or Teeny line (300 to 400 grains) to get down to the fish hanging on the creases and drop-offs. Use a nautical chart to find other beaches with similar characteristics.

I follow the "keep a winning game plan, change a losing game plan" adage when prospecting for pods of fish on beachfronts: Cover as much water as possible. Sometimes I cover up to a mile of beach in search of a pod of bass. Diving terns or seagulls help locate breaking fish, but simply fishing and moving can do the job. If I find fish in a particular spot one day, I'll start the next day's fishing a mile or so up the same beachfront to find the migrating fish.

Fish on the beaches behave differently during each season. Early in the season, the fish are often deep;

ACCESS AND SERVICES

THE SOUTH SHORE AND MUCH of the Massachusetts coast is lined with private property, so you must be considerate of landowners when accessing the water. The public beaches mentioned here provide parking and easy access. For details on more access spots and public boat rentals, contact one of the fly shops below. Two books, *Public Access to the Waters of Massachusetts* (free from Massachusetts Department of Wildlife, [617] 727-1843) and *Striper Hotspots*, by Frank Daignault (Globe Pequot, 1996), also provide access information.



the rocks. The sinking line will take your fly down to where the fish are feeding on the disoriented bait.

Dead-drifting lobster patterns in June, when the lobsters molt out of their hard shells and develop new ones, often results in big bass. Cast parallel to the structure right where it drops off into the deeper water and allow the fly to sink. When it's deep enough (near bottom), give the fly some subtle twitches. Black-over-tan eel patterns fished at either first or last light also work well in this area.

The best time to fish rocks, ledges, and islands is the later part of the incoming (high) tide and the first part of the dropping tide. Interestingly, Captain Mike Bartlett, who



In the summer, big stripers patrol the cooler, deeper water off the ledges and cliffs near Clarke's Island in Duxbury. You can rent a skiff (left) to explore the North and South estuaries on your own.



The area's guides can take you to the best South Shore spots via boat, or you can explore the shorelines on your own with a rented skiff, kayak, or canoe where the conditions are right.

Guides:

- Capt. Mike Bartlett
boat: 20-foot Hydrasport
(781) 293-6402
- Capt. Charlie Lemieux
boat: 19-foot Carolina Skiff
(508) 747-2602
- Capt. Jon Perette
boat: 22-foot Hydrasport
(781) 749-9855

Fly Shops:

- Henry Weston Outfitters
Pembroke, MA
(617) 826-7411
- Old Salt Outfitters
Hingham, MA
(781) 749-9855
- Bear's Den
Taunton, MA
(508) 880-6226

Skiff Rental:

- Mary's Boat Livery on the
North River
Marshfield, MA
(781) 837-2322

in the fall, they are right on the surface, balling bait as they fatten up for their southern migration.

Rocks, ledges, and islands. If you are a deep-water aficionado, you'll find miles of it on the South Shore. Outside of Cohasset Harbor and south from 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Cliffs, there are rocky drop-offs and ledges you can fish from shore or with a boat. These areas are full of kelp beds that provide cover for bait and bass.

Use Teeny lines or Orvis Depth Charge lines (300 to 400 grains) to sink your fly to the fish. If you fish from a boat, position your drift as tight to the rocks as possible and pitch your fly into the white-water surge where the ocean meets

fishes the rocks in Cohasset, has found a few spots that hold fish at dead low tide. According to Bartlett, there is too much water covering the rocks on any part of the tide except for the low-water marks, and the fish are concentrated at low tide.

If you're fishing from a steep shore, for instance at 4th Cliff at Humarock, you'll need a steeple cast so you don't dull your hook points or fray your tippets on the rocks behind you. You'll also need to let your fly sink. Erratic, syncopated retrieves work best. Retrieve your fly all the way to shore; stripers, particularly large fish, will often take a fly a few feet from your boots.

When you are fishing from a boat or kayak, you can find fish roaming the kelp beds, and they will follow the

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