

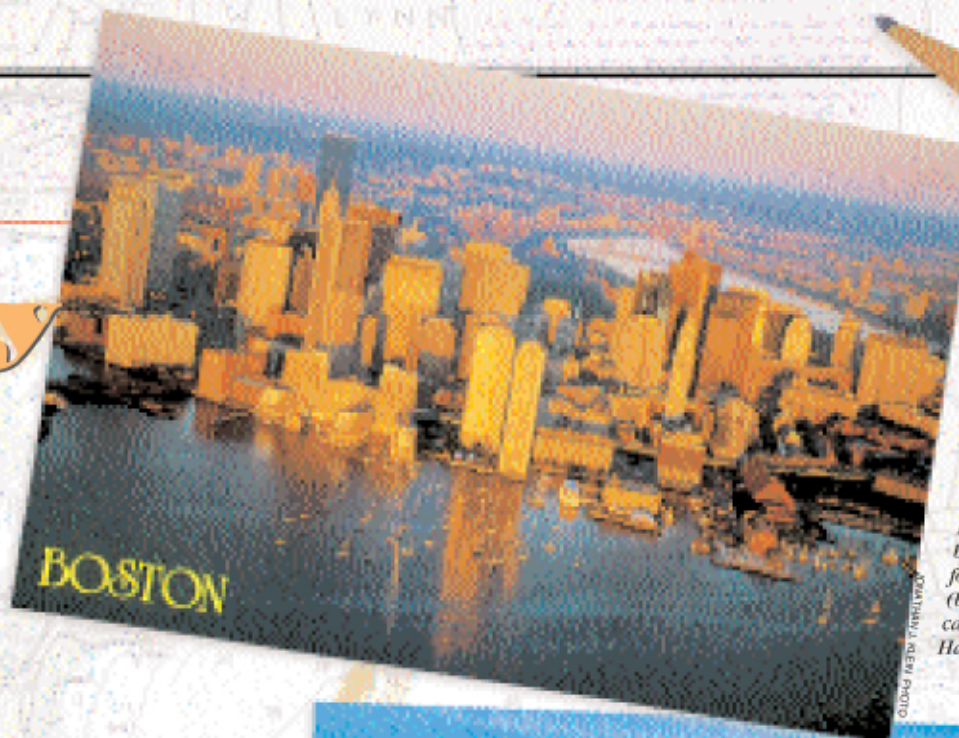
STRIPER

country

TOM KEER



The rocky Massachusetts shoreline and its combination of beachfronts, rips, rivers, flats, and channels, provides large bass with plenty of structure and food. The author (left) casts to the rocks in search of striped bass.



Boston's harbor (left) is clean once again thanks to groups like Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, and the baitfish, striped bass, and bluefish are back in force. Captain Barry Clemson (below, right) and other guides can fish the hot spots in Boston Harbor and on the North Shore.



Massachusetts' Boston Harbor and North Shore - New England's finest full-season saltwater fishery

THE NEARLY 40 MILES of Massachusetts coastline ranging from Boston to Newburyport is without doubt one of New England's finest full-season saltwater fisheries. What makes this scenic stretch so impressive is its diverse terrain, suitable for striped bass, bluefish, and many species of baitfish. There is a greater diversity of coastal terrain on the North Shore than all the other New England states combined.

On this stretch, from late April, when the first school striped bass arrive, until mid-October, when the last phases of migrating bass depart, there is a style of fishing well suited to both the expert and the rookie—from shore or boat, on your own or with a guide.

There are three basic coastal substrates from Boston north: hard, soft, and a combination of the two. Hard bottom consists of structure such as ledges, rocks, and islands. Soft terrain includes beachfronts and sand- or muddy-bottom waters in the estuaries.

Boston Harbor and the North Shore

LET'S START AT BOSTON HARBOR, which has some of the

best striper fishing in the Northeast. The harbor is divided into two subsections, the inner and outer.

The inner harbor has great structure combinations for striped bass: inshore islands (35 of which make up the Harbor Islands National Park) and small beachfronts, flats, rips (fast current over structure), channels, rivers, and ledges. The outer harbor has deeper water, rips, and ledges.

While the water clarity in the harbor is far from clear, it's much cleaner than you might think. Several environmental groups (Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, for example) have invested nearly two decades of work improving the water quality with nearly \$4 billion in state and federal aid. The baitfish are back in force, and anglers have caught from 40- to 50-pound stripers in the inner harbor.

You don't need your own boat to fish the harbor, because Boston Harbor Cruises, (617) 227-4320, runs hourly charters (\$8 a trip) to Peddocks, George's, Lovell's, and Thompson's islands. Call for schedules and camping information. Call the Park, (617) 727-7676, for information on camping on the islands.

From Boston Harbor north to Rockport, the coastline

is rocky. Although it is open ocean, a few tidal rivers deposit sand, creating small beachfronts, but it consists of coarse rock, rather than fine sand granules. Mostly though, you'll find sharp cliff drop-offs, rock piles, inshore islands, and ledges that create an uneven structure—places for fish to hold. Current and tidal surges against the structure help stripers trap bait, and the adjoining deep water provides good protection. The main idea is to fish moving water, which forces bait from hiding places; an equal number of fish are caught on both flood and ebb tides during the day or at night.

When fishing from a boat, cast right into the white-water surge where bait is washed up and bass wait. This is best done with a sinking, shooting-taper line (Teeny T-350 or Orvis Depth Charge 350-grain), because these lines can get your fly into the strike zone, that two- or three-foot-deep area where the fish are feeding just below the surf line. When fishing from shore, fish your fly right to the rocks.

From Ipswich to Newburyport, the coast changes into a softer-bottom estuary system consisting of several major



Jack Gartside (right) releases a striped bass caught in one of the North Shore's many productive estuaries. The beachfronts (below, right) and flats allow for easy wading and often hold bluefish (below, left) in late May and June.

cles can gain seasonal access to eight miles of beach through the Parker River Wildlife Refuge gate on Plum Island. A Federal Duck Stamp allows daily access to these beaches, or a \$5 per diem fee can be paid upon entrance. At the southern tip of Plum Island, you can fish Emerson Rocks and Sandy Point's rock gardens and rips.

Spots to Fish

BOSTON HARBOR IS AN increasingly popular destination for many anglers. Fishing can be great along the piers off Atlantic Avenue, the Charles River locks in Charlestown, the Coast Guard station near the Fleet Center (the new Boston Garden), Wollaston Beach in Quincy, the Neponset River, and the wonderful beachfront flats by Revere Beach in Revere. Noted area angler

ivers and dozens of minor ones. The rivers worth noting include the Annisquam, Essex, Rowley, Parker, and Merrimack. They run many miles inland from the sea, forming an intricate web of marshlands where thriving baitfish populations provide food for stripers.

Over the years, these tidal rivers have channeled sand into miles of beachfronts, the two most popular being Crane's Beach, formed by the Ipswich River, and Plum Island, formed by the Merrimack. You can fish these areas in daylight during the early season, but as water temperatures and beach-goers increase in July and August, night fishing is more productive.

You can access Crane's through the Trustees of the Reservation beach facility just off Route 1A in Ipswich. Overnight parking permits (available from Ipswich Town Hall) are necessary; the gate is locked after sunset.

The North Shore really has it all when it comes to terrain. There are urban mussel beds in Chelsea and Revere where anglers catch legal (28-inch) fish while commercial airplanes come and go overhead. There are Revere beachfronts, and Nahant and Marblehead's craggy cliff drop-offs. Farther up the coastline, the ledges and inshore islands around Salem, Beverly, and Manchester hold fish in deeper, cooler waters.

The historical fishing towns of Gloucester and Rockport have similar drop-offs interspersed with the beginnings of long, wide, gently sloping beachfronts. Ipswich, Newbury, and Newburyport are tidal zones with long winding estuaries running upstream many miles from their open-ocean endings. These estuary systems remind me of Florida's Backcountry, a fishable labyrinth of main rivers and minor shoot-offs. There are rips and flats scattered at the ends of these beaches, and 4x4 vehi-



and fly tier Jack Gartside has written about taking the water shuttle to several of the Boston Harbor islands, camping out, and fishing around the clock. (See Jack's book titles at the end of this article.)

The Merrimack River is perhaps the North Shore's biggest draw. With its headwaters in New Hampshire, the river winds southeast and meets the ocean in Newburyport, Massachusetts. The popular Joppa Flats at the mouth of the Merrimack are easily accessible on foot. Parking is on a first-come, first-served basis for about 20 cars on Water Street in Newburyport. If the area is full,

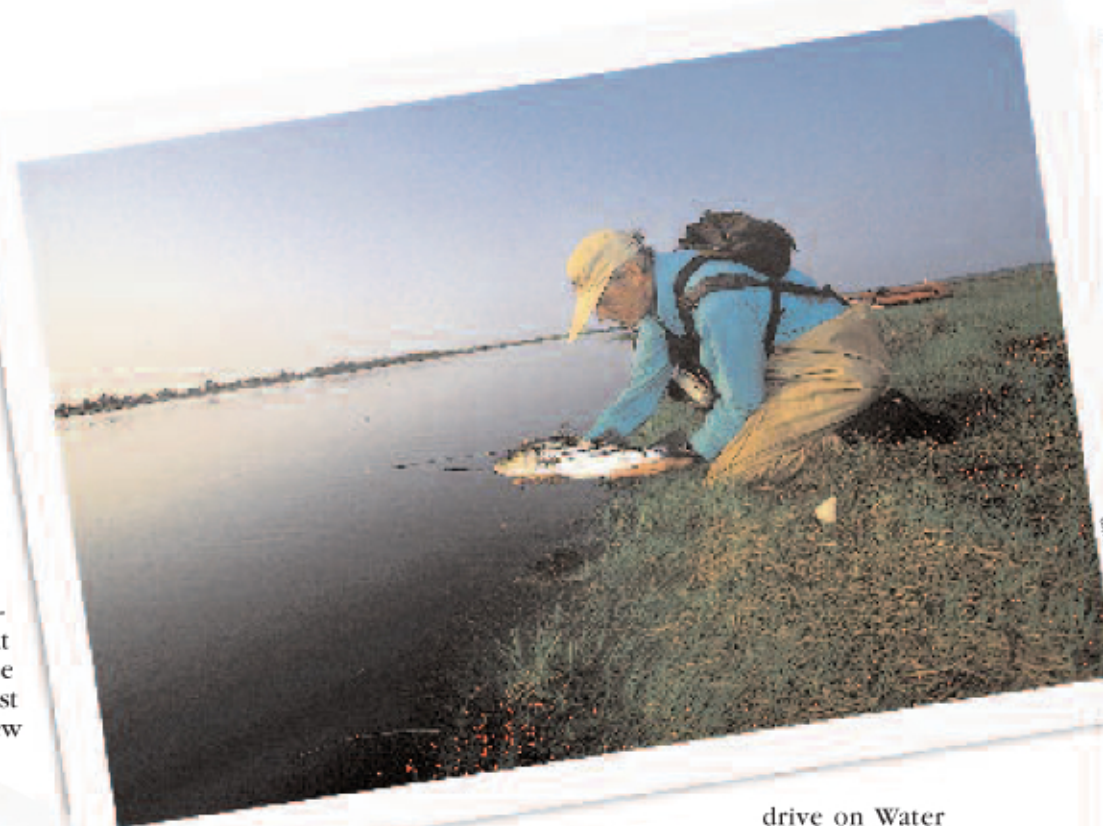
drive on Water Street out to Plum Island and continue north along the beach. There is ample parking in the lot at the end; daytime parking requires a fee, nighttime does not.

Though the river is several hundred yards wide there, the channel on the northeast side of the river is of most interest to fly fishers. On a dropping tide, you can wade out a long way and fish back toward shore as the tide returns.

As the tide comes in, bass and blues enter the flat to chase bait. There are several mussel beds within the flats, each of which features deeper surrounding guzzles (shallow recesses in the ocean bottom that offer slightly slower currents and holding areas for bait-fish). Strong current exchanges muddy the water, and bright chartreuse Clouser Minnows or Lefty's Deceivers work best. Poppers and big bait imitations are excellent choices from late May through June, when the menhaden, mackerel, and herring arrive. Sliders (Pip Winslow's Afternoon Delight) fished with a floating line and an erratic retrieve prompt some of the best top-water activity of the season.

The mouth of the Merrimack on Plum Island is also popular among fly fishers. There, Orvis Depth Charge

Continued on page 88



WINSLOW'S AFTERNOON DELIGHT

HOOK: Mustad 34011, #3/0 or equivalent.
THREAD: White Monocord, 3/0.
BODY: Edgewater Slider Cone glued on with quick-drying cement.
TAIL: Five or six extra-long saddles and a few strands of Krystal Flash tied over a chenille tag for a splayed effect. Tie it in white, black, or a combination of blue and yellow saddles.

CLOUSER DEEP MINNOW

HOOK: Mustad 3406B, #1 to 1/0.
THREAD: 6/0.
EYES: Dumbell eyes.
UNDERBELLY: Bucktail.
OVERWING: Bucktail with Krystal Flash or Flashabou.
NOTE: This fly is designed to ride hook point up. It is effective tied in many color combinations.

EPOXY SAND EEL

HOOK: Mustad 7766, #1 or #2, or equivalent.
THREAD: Clear Danville's fine mono.
BODY: Fine mylar tinsel for sparse patterns; mylar braid for bigger patterns.
WING: Chartreuse bucktail over white bucktail and pearl or lime Krystal Flash.
EYES: Small stick-on eyes.
EPOXY: Five-minute epoxy.