

Tidal Delaware Largemouth

by *Vic Attardo*



Many years ago when I first began fishing the tidal Delaware River around Philadelphia, the tallest point in the skyline was the hat on Billy Penn's head at City Hall. During this time, due to the intricacies of tidal fishing, there were few days with scores of strikes.

Since my early wanderings on the Delaware, Penn's hat has been surmounted by many taller buildings and my angling success has improved because I have come to understand what tide water bassin' is all about.

Fishing the tidal Delaware is a matter of timing. Success depends on staying with the current—a current that is moving in and out, that is pushing and pulling food from hidden corners, vast weed flats and indented and concave shorelines.

Tidal Delaware fishing is about searching every nook and cranny in an intricate landscape of industrial structures and debris as well as casting in lush backwaters.

The Delaware's largemouth bass are in tune with the tides and mastering a tide chart is the key to success. A day with a high tide in downtown Philadelphia between 10 a.m. and noon is one that presents a lot of opportunities. I can work from below the Philadelphia airport to north of the Tacony-Palmyra Bridge, staying with the start and the best part of the flow for many hours. Between the main shorelines of the Delaware, there are many unusual places to fish. River newcomers are amazed by the beauty of the city as they face west and the depth of the wild lands when they turn east.

Something you may not have encountered anywhere else in your fishing experience is the buildings at the ends of docks. At some sites there will be a couple of end-structures and long, old rows of wooden pillars. Bass love these foundations and pillars. When the tide turns and starts moving past these structures, bass will sit on the upcurrent side. Once the tide rips, the fish gang-up on the down-current side, using the pillars and foundations edges as buffers. Cast ahead of these formations. Let your bait move with the current. Two offerings that often work well are the crankbait and the jig-worm.

When working dock pilings, toss a medium diver crankbait upstream and let it bump against the wood as you bring it along the current. Bass suspended against the pillars will take this offering. If bass are hanging closer to the bottom, a 5- or 6-inch straight-tail worm or sinkbait affixed to a light jig head are good offerings.

The Delaware River is rife with sunken debris, everything from old barges to industrial scarp. Sunken barges are

a great place to fish in the river's bays. Metal is the most common material encountered, but there's plenty of thick wood. Both will tear lines and lures, so these are not places to use expensive offerings. I ply these spots with unweighted sinkworms and finesse worms affixed to light jig heads.

To my knowledge, there is no river map that diagrams the location of the barges or other underwater structure, which means you have to go about finding them yourself. At low water, idle carefully through the industrial back bays and marinas. Look for objects near the surface. Do this when water clarity is good. Be careful, many fiberglass boats have been scuffed by rebar and mangled sheeting.

Up and down the river, ocean vessels are docked off the main channel where they obtain fuel through pipes of 4- to 5-feet in diameter. The pipe lines are supported by a bridge of pillars. These pillars work as current breaks for bass. Work these spots with crankbaits, spinnerbaits and jig-worms.

You'll find a few marinas located between the main river banks. Depending on the height of the tide, any long dock can produce bass, but the outer third and outer edge of these wooden structures are best.

If there is a weedline nearby, the ability of all of these structures to hold bass is greater. One of my favorite spots is beside the runways of the Philadelphia International Airport while another is located on the Jersey side at Riverton.

But what is between the main shores of the Delaware is just part of the picture. Head into the creek channels, crossing sandbars and gushing outflows, and you will find more fishing opportunities. You'll be fishing against entangled lines of pickerel weed and arrowheads mixed with cattails, willows and whatever other vegetation can thicken a marshy shore.

You will need your tackle box to fish these areas. In clearer water, I like an old fashioned rubber-skirted jig and twin-forked trailer and also long Texas-rigged ribbon tail worms. I throw these against the tall weeds and bounce them along with the current. When the water is cloudy with tidal rush, a rattling crankbait is a good offering. The surface weeds are worked with plastic frogs.

Other than these vegetation lines, I find small pits and land points produce results. Many work best with young, incoming tides. While others become hot with a stronger flow. A fallen shoreline tree or overhanging branch will give bass cover.

When you put it all together, the tidal Delaware River is like nothing else in Pennsylvania. ☐