



The First Striped Bass

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Catching my first striped bass was a long process, probably one that started way back in my childhood when I saw my first pictures of the mythical beast. They were huge compared to the trout that I had chased in my youth and seemingly impossible to catch. I saw the pictures, but settled for trout instead.

Even as an adult, I felt that striped bass were out of reach, so I continued to chase trout from the shoreline. It wasn't until I moved to Castaic, the home of the world renowned bass lake by the same name, that I even started to think about bass, but at that time, it was the largemouth bass that called to me. I didn't know what I was doing, so I read books and checked out internet pages for fishing tips. It took me over a month of fishing a couple of times a week before I landed my first largemouth. Over the next several months, I landed a lot of largemouth bass and actually started to figure out patterns for catching them, but as I continued to research online, I kept running into photos of the giant striped bass that lived in Castaic Lake.

My first attempts at catching stripers came from the shoreline, throwing large metal spoons, but I had no luck. I saw stripers being caught by the Mexican and Asian fisherman that were fishing nearby, and even attempted to ask what they were using, but the language gap kept me ignorant and fishless. I would try to look at what they had on their hooks as they cast out, and finally figured out that they were using some sort of cut bait. After more research on the internet, I decided that the best way to catch one of these monsters, was to throw anchovies at them.

Right around this time, my father gave me his little aluminum boat with a five horsepower motor, and now that I had access to the deeper parts of the lake, I decided that it was time to get out there and make a serious attempt at a striper. On one of the coldest days of the year, I loaded up my little boat and headed out. As soon as I pulled away from the dock, I started to regret my decision ... it was freezing! Still I moved out

to the middle, figuring that if I suffered a little for this fish, it would be that much more memorable. I tried everything for the next couple of hours, but either it was too cold, or I was too clueless for anything to happen. As a last ditch effort, I moved by boat closer to shore where I had seen fish caught before. By now, the clouds overhead were threatening to open up and the wind made my eyes water so hard that it was getting tough to see out of them. I took a whole frozen anchovy, stuck it on the end of the hook, and threw it over my shoulder toward the back of the boat. Since I had a two pole fishing license, I tied a spoon on to another pole and jiggled it off of the front of the boat. I tried this for another fifteen minutes, until my hands were so cold I could barely hold the pole. I decided to call it a day, feeling the stripe of another fishing skunk. I pulled up the pole and packed it away, then turned back to grab my second pole. It was bent deeply toward the water. I stared at it for a second, not understanding what was happening. Trout never bent poles like that, so I decided that it must be stuck on the bottom. I grabbed the pole and started reeling. The line was coming in, ruling out that it was stuck on the bottom, and finally the fish turned letting me know I had something. He wasn't a fighter, probably because he had been on the line for some time before I noticed it. As I pulled it in, I looked hard into the water to verify that it was in fact a striper. When he finally rolled to the surface, there could be no mistaking his stripes. The initial fear of losing the fish was eased as I slid the net under it and pulled it into the boat. My hands were frozen to the point that I could hardly open them, but as I turned the boat back toward the boat ramp, I was feeling plenty warm inside.

I would find out later that striped bass are a good fighting fish even though that first one didn't show it. It didn't matter much to me at the time though. I had landed my first striped bass, and that fish won't soon be forgotten.

