

**BRADFORD
CHARLES
BARKER**

BLACK BASS

Charles Bradford

Black Bass

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Charles Barker Bradford

Black Bass / Where to catch them in quantity within an hour's ride from New York

Let me live harmlessly, and near the brink
Of Trent or Avon have a dwelling-place:
Where I may see my fly or cork down sink,
With eager bite of pike, or bass, or dace,
And on the world and my Creator think:
While some men strive ill-gotten goods t'embrace:
And others spend their time in base excess
Of wine, or worse, in war or wantonness.
Let them that will, these pastimes still pursue,
And on such pleasing fancies feed their fill,
So I the fields and meadows green may view,
And daily by fresh rivers walk at will.

– *Ancient Angler.*

There is probably no more welcome news for one fond of black bass fishing than a description and general details of where good sport may be had; and when the individual is a unit in the population of a large city and suddenly learns that this is obtainable within an easy distance, the information is worth its weight in gold, in his estimation, if in no one else's. The main object of this paper on black bass fishing is to supply that knowledge to a large contingent, and also to give a few hints to those, who, fond of fishing, may still be open to a few practical hints. There are possibly many fishermen like myself, who, while not unfamiliar with salt-water sport with rod and line, still know and fully appreciate the pleasure of fishing for the fresh-water black bass.

Salt-water fishing is grand sport, but there are many denizens of a city who have been reared in the districts of fresh-water streams, lakes and ponds, who have not had the opportunities of cultivating salt-water sport, and who even when surrounded with every facility for its pursuit, would still be elated at finding some well-stocked stream near at hand. Anglers, as a rule, are unable to go far a-field in search of fresh-water fishing, and for six years past it was a continual thorn in my flesh, mortifying me considerably, that no information could be obtained of any good fishing that did not necessitate an absence of several days.

Last season, entirely by accident, I ran upon a magnificent place within nineteen miles of New York City. It is a beautiful spot, easily reached without much expense or trouble and within an hour's ride by rail. In all my search, this is the one spot I care to recommend to my readers. Take the cars from Jersey City to Rahway, N. J., and upon arriving there walk to a small village called Milton, half a mile west of Rahway; pass through this, continue half a mile further west, and you will reach Milton Lake. An hour and a half's time covers the distance. I generally take the one-thirty p. m. train, and return in the evening; but trains run almost every hour to and from Rahway.

Milton Lake is a body of water about a mile square, with two outlets, one falling over a picturesque stone dam twenty feet high into a stream about ten feet wide; and the other outlet, a small stream flowing through a mill-gate to the Milton Mills. In each of these streams there are plenty of bass, but in the lake proper and in the little brook that flows into the upper end of the lake, they are in abundance. I pass the lake itself and follow the little stream for about half a mile until I come to White's Farm. This I have found to be the finest fishing ground. The stream is about eighteen feet

wide at the narrowest part and from fifty to sixty at its widest. It rises miles upon miles back in the country somewhere, and runs rippling and chattering over the shallows, surging silently over the pools until it empties into the lake. I have never fished higher than White's Farm, being well satisfied with the sport obtained there, but the resident farmers tell me that there is even finer fishing up stream.

Like the average fisherman, I am more or less superstitious, and having always had good luck at my favorite place (the edge of a fine piece of wood, which, by the way, contain a few woodcock), I do not care to seek further, and, perhaps, fare worse.

Here, where the stream branches off from a wide pond-like section, and slowly flows past two dozen or so fine willows on either bank, I have made a rude seat in one of the trees, and using a coat for a cushion, have spent many pleasant hours; not always fishing, but on hot summer afternoons, shaded from the sun, just letting my line run out in the water, careless about either rise or catch, in quiet repose, looking at the beautiful natural landscape around me, fairly enchanted with its rural splendor. Then I feel that for a short space, at least, I have thrown off the burden of a busy life, and can quietly absorb all that Dame Nature thus generously affords. I see the silvery sky-reflecting stream winding its peaceful way through the rich pasturage, under the rustic bridge, past the line of undulating willows, that, moving with the faintest breath of air, seem ever bending down to kiss its ripples; past the green banks and orchards, on through clover patches, and sedge-lined promontories, flashing like burnished metal at the rifts, black as night in the pools, dappled and flecked by the mirrored clouds, kissed into "cat's paws" by the faint breeze; on it goes until its farther course is lost in the shadow of the olive-green woods that tower in massive darkness against the soft amber-colored clouds and pale blue sky. The watchful kingfisher, perched on the other side of the stream, eyes me askance but has no great fear at my presence, the splash of a disturbed turtle or the heavier fall of a diving frog calling for his more earnest attention. Bass are leaping in every direction; far up on the hillside sounds the bell of a cow; nearer still calls "Bob White;" robins are piping; the wrens are chirping; a hungry crow dismally cawks, and all these sounds mingle with the music of the millions of trilling nameless tiny insects concealed in the deep grasses below me and in the fluttering leaves over-head.

What greater pleasure can a busy man wish for than to now and again "leave life and the world behind" for a few hours and amid surroundings like these smoke and chat with a congenial friend, in pleasant shade, until the sun sinks towards the West, and the work of fishing begins.

One can fish equally well from bank or boat. The stream sides are grass-bound and flower-decked to the very water edge, affording dry and safe footing, with here and there a fence to lean against, or hang your impedimenta upon. A little to the left of the farmhouse is the orchard, succeeded by a wood of nut and oak trees, which slope to the banks of the lake, and under whose shade bass may be caught at any hour of the day, be the sun ever so hot. The water here is deep and cool, and I use it as a swimming ground. It is also a fine place to cool drinks in. A bottle of Piper Heidsieck or a bottle or two of beer slung into the depths of the pool with a stout cord, can be drawn up an hour later cool as a snow stream in the mountains. A little distance above a rustic bridge spans the stream, under and on either side of which, just in the shadow line, a dozen or more fine bass, weighing up to four pounds each, may be seen at any time. As one crosses the bridge they raise their weather-eye and look up, but do not move, whilst hundreds of young bass, an inch or two in length, shoot from the innumerable crevices like so many fresh-water shiners. The very foundation of the bridge seems to be alive with them. There are also a number of giant sun-fish here which seldom refuse a bait. At daybreak on fine mornings, when camping there for a day or two, I have caught in less than an hour half a dozen two-pound bass, not counting other fish and small bass which I tossed back. I used one of Chubb's ordinary silk trolling lines and one of Abbey's spoons, which, by the way, to my fancy spin more freely and better than any others I have used. This I worked sometimes from a small bark canoe and sometimes from a wooden one, which I keep at the farm, and use to paddle up and down the stream between the willows and the bridge, or upon the lake itself.

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