



1.15.26

It's been a while since I've had a fishing trip worth reporting. I've fished a handful of times since my last report, and I've caught a few fish. I caught some drum in the neighborhood canals. I caught lots of perch on dead shrimp at the jetties. I even caught a couple of whiting from the beach. I decided to change things up a bit and finally had a really good trip worth reporting!

I started the day by buying a pint of live shrimp from Clem's for \$10.50. Next stop was the Fish Pass jetties. For those of you who are not familiar with the Fish Pass, it's a pair of beach-front jetties that are completely inside Mustang Island State Park. You can hit the south side by going through the main entrance of the park, paying a day use fee, and driving north on the beach for about a half a mile. Or, for free you can approach from the north and drive south about 2 miles of beach to hit the jetty. Today I fished on the free side. The tide was low so getting to the jetty was a breeze.



Sign at the entrance to the state park

When I arrived, the water was blue/green next to the jetty. There was a brisk northeast wind and a small building swell breaking against the rocks. I stopped about a third of the way out at the last spot where you could stay dry and still fish the edge of the rocks.

I set up with a 1oz weight and a 1 ough hook. I dropped a live shrimp in the little gut right on the edge of the rocks. It didn't take long till I felt a strong tap and my line tightened. I made a big hook set and at first, I thought I was hung on the rocks. Then my rod bent and line started peeling off my reel. The fish made several runs before I started to gain line. I got the fish close and saw it was a huge sheepshead!

I wasn't sure if I could land the fish because of all the rocks. I was rigged with 20lb mono and no leader. I took my time and eventually got the fish close enough to grab the line right above the hook. I lifted the fish out of the water and dropped it directly into a 5-gallon bucket I'd brought. Once unhooked, the fish taped out at 20"! I was certain that I was about to go on an epic sheepshead run and catch a quick limit of convicts. Alas, I never saw another sheepshead the entire day.

I took a quick picture of my fish and got another shrimp out to the same spot. I got bit quickly but didn't hook up. Another shrimp out and another quick hit and I was hooked up again. This one felt like reeling in an old shoe. It wasn't fighting much at all. When I got it close I saw it was a flounder! I played it carefully and swung it up on the rocks. I wasn't sure if it was legal size but a quick measure was exactly 15". When I put it in the bucket the sheepshead went ape shit, knocked the bucket over, and both fish were now flapping around on the rocks! I somehow managed to get them both back in the bucket, but not before losing my measuring tape in between the rocks. Worried about losing my fish, I carried them back to my truck and put them in a cooler on ice.



I got back to fishing the same spot in the same way. Over the next 45 minutes or so the action was steady. I caught and released another flounder that was close but I wasn't sure. I decided to look for my tape and sure enough spotted it and rescued it from the rocks! The flatfish was short and released. I got a couple puppy black drum, also released. Finally I got a drum that made the cut. At one point I caught rat reds on back-to-back casts!



Rat Red



Undersized Flounder released

As I got closer to the end of my live bait I felt something alarming swimming around in my bucket of shrimp. Scared of what might be lurking inside, I drained all the bait into my 5 gallon bucket to see what I was dealing with. There was a jumbo shrimp and 2

live mantis shrimp (sea lice) mixed in with the other shrimp. I got the sea monsters out and put my live shrimp back in some new water. I'm terrified of mantis shrimp!



Sea Monsters mixed in with my bait!

The action on desirable fish slowed considerably. I started catching huge piggy perch almost every cast close to the rocks. I made a couple of casts farther out into the surf and got a big bite that took drag and broke me off! I re-rigged and cast out towards the same spot. I got another big bite but this time it stayed pinned. After a brief fight I landed another keeper drum. It was significantly bigger than the one I'd already boxed so I knew it was good.

By now I was almost out of live shrimp, so I took the 2 drum back to the ice chest in the truck and grabbed my backup bag of dead shrimp. Back out on the rocks the only thing I caught with dead shrimp was more piggies. They were some of the biggest ones I'd ever seen! I considered keeping a few but decided not to. Every time I landed one I thought "I should keep that one" before tossing it back.



By this time I could see that the tide was really filling in on the beach. Worried that the drive out might be challenging, I decided to call it a day. Driving out I had to skirt a couple waves that were pushing up the beach towards the dry sand at the base of the dunes. My little Ford Maverick was up to the task though, and I made it back to the pavement with no trouble.

My take-home lesson from today is that to catch really good fish you need live bait. And check the tides before driving the beach. I'll probably be hitting Fish Pass again soon. I'll wait for a window with calmer waves and clear water before ponying up \$10 bucks for live shrimp and making the run down the beach!



Nice box of fish using live shrimp at the Fish Pass jetties