

# The Killer Catfish of Cape Cod

By Bill Russo

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Far from the tourist havens of Hyannis, Sandwich, Dennis and Yarmouth; deep in the interior of Cape Cod, there are extraordinary beaches that visitors to the 64 mile long island never see. They encircle the waters of a lake several miles distant from the popular oceanfront resorts clinging to the big sandbar - Cape Cod Bay on the one side and Nantucket Sound on the other. The vast tract of more than 900 acres of brackish water, rotting logs, and a billion insects is as far inland as it is possible to go.

Formed in 1938 when The Great Northeast Hurricane knocked down half the trees of the lower cape and gouged out a depression five miles long and one mile wide - it quickly filled with water. In some places it's only as deep as a fisherman's boot while in others it seems bottomless - though it's probably about as deep as the Provincetown Pilgrim Memorial is tall - 252 feet.

Despite the murky water you can see deep enough, to gape at the submerged remains of row after row of trees clipped off near their bases by the force of the hurricane, and left to stand forever in the muck, like lonely corpses staring up at the surface with blind eyes.

There are no roads to get to the lake, which the locals call "Kaycee Pond". Surrounded by thick pines, sharp vines, and dense brush, the only access to the vast, muddy swamp is by trudging through a quarter mile of living tunnel formed of weeds, twisted trees, hedges, and swamp grass.

There are no homes circling the lake, no camps or campsites, and no RVs or vans. The land around "Kaycee Pond" is home to many thousands of creatures, but not a single one of them is human.

At first glance the pond looks serene. The brown water gently laps at the hundreds of exposed tree stumps and rotting logs that almost seem plentiful enough to form a footbridge from one end to the other.

Fat frogs sit unmolested on soggy timber, snapping out their tongues at regular intervals to entrap buzzing flies who themselves got fat from sucking on the decaying matter that washes onto the beaches. Foxes, coyotes, deer, and other animals drink at the edge of the water, but only if they are very, very thirsty. They know by instinct that the calmness of "Kaycee Pond" is merely a Halloween mask that can be whisked off in an instant.

Dense forests border the lake, broken at irregular intervals by six sandy freshwater beaches. A visitor's first impression of their tranquil beauty would quickly fade when he or she noticed a few dozen fifty-pound snapping turtles with shells as big as trash can covers basking in the sun on stumps and fallen trees.

Also lolling on the sun-splashed beaches or on logs floating in the mucky water are dozens of six foot long, gray reptiles, known as Northern Water Snakes. Fierce fighters in the depths, they are non venomous and when meeting humans on a beach they usually flee back to the lake.

A few old-timers who recall a dark time of frightful and bizarre happenings back in the 1900s, say there's something else in the lake that is venomous and is very harmful to humans – though they are reluctant to give details.

They are much more likely to give harsh advice and warnings to young locals or curious tourists who ask about the lake. Their suggestion is... “Stay away from Kaycee Pond if you value your life.”

Anse Peckins over at the A & P Tackle Shop on the Old King's Highway makes his living selling fishing gear, bait, and such to the locals as well as the tourists. An inch or two under five feet tall and nearly as slim as one of his bamboo angling poles, he looks like a skinny elf or perhaps Santa Claus on a starvation diet, with his long white beard that travels down to the third button of his shirt.

Nobody knows Anse's age. For as long as anybody can remember his face was always as gnarled as the bark of a Maple tree. Generations of Cape Codders have considered his rundown bait shop an eyesore as well as an attraction of Route Six-A (The King's Highway).

A few of the elders say that decades ago, Peckins had another store: in a tiny village not far from Kaycee Pond. That was back before the weird happenings and killings drove everybody away.

“I'll tell ya the best fishin' places on the Cape and there's no extra charge,” Anse told two teenagers who wandered into the ramshackle cottage that served both as his store and his home. “While I'm packin' up your seaworms take a gander at the map on the wall. Those areas I've circled in red pencil are the best spots,” Anse affirmed, the sides of his long mustache bouncing up and down like the baton of an orchestra leader while he spoke.

“No sir, not seaworms! I think you misunderstood,” said the taller of the two youths. “We're not going saltwater fishing. We want earthworms. Lake fishing is what we've come to Cape Cod for.”

“I got earthworms,” Anse replied, “but there ain't much freshwater fishin' around here. Now you take your salt water. You can stand on the jetty of any one of the beaches and get yourself some blues, flounder, bass, and even a couple sand sharks. I can almost guarantee that you'll catch a mess of fish before noon and have 'em all cleaned and grilled up by early afternoon.”

“We want seaworms,” the taller youth persisted. “We found an old book that tells about a strange lake near here and that's where we want to fish.”

“We are going to fish there!” insisted his buddy. “We know all about that lake and we're going to see it for ourselves.”

“What was the name of the book you guys read?” Anse asked, though he was sure he knew the answer.

“Jimmy Catfish,” the teenagers replied in unison.

“That old book!” Anse protested. “I didn't know there were any copies of it still around. That was mostly just a story. It wasn't real - just an exaggeration. There was no amphibious boy named Jimmy Catfish and there are no killers left in the lake.”

“If it was just a story then you shouldn’t have any problem selling us the earthworms and telling us how to get there,” countered the taller young man.

Anse looked hard at the teenager, who said his name was Rico. He was a strong young man, about an inch over six feet with a weight of near 200 pounds. His dark brown hair was buzz cut in military style. He looked like he could handle his share of trouble and then some.

His companion was shorter, about five-nine with black hair buzzed into a flat-top that gave definition to a face that reminded Peckins of a strong man from the 1900s named ‘Charles Atlas’. Angelo, as he identified himself, had a physique that would probably make bodybuilders want to take lessons from him. Anse thought that the pair could manage many dangerous situations – but not what they’d find at Kaycee Pond. Before the ‘blood-bath’ it was known as Codfresh Lake. It got its name after fishermen began pulling Codfish out of the pond, although the lake was fresh water and Cod can only exist in salt water.

“It’s dangerous that’s all fellas. That lake is tricky. It’s ankle deep in some spots but just a few feet away it might be 80 feet to the bottom. It’s true that people died there. Sometimes there’s a swift current. Folks could easily step from the shallows into the channel and drown.”

“That’s not the way we heard it Mr Peckins. There’s a cryptozoology museum up in Maine that will pay us big money if we can find those killer catfish in Kaycee Pond and bring them some bodies stuffed and mounted.” said Rico.

“Well, I’ll sell you the worms but you’ll have to find the lake yourself. I’ll not be responsible for what might happen,” Anse said firmly. “I hope you don’t find what you’re looking for because if you do, it’s far more likely that it will catch you instead of the other way around!”

Undaunted Rico and Angelo set off on their adventure, armed with backpacks, some food, a first aid kit, bait, and their fishing rods. They rented bicycles at a shop on Great Western Road by the side of the bike trail built when the old railroad tracks were torn up between Hyannis and Provincetown.

They couldn’t persuade Anse Peckins to give them exact directions but he did reveal that although there were no roads to the lake, the route of the bike trail passes within a half mile of it. Given the fact that Kaycee Pond is the largest fresh water body in all of Cape Cod, the boys figured they’d find it by hiking an hour or two at most. It turned out that it only took about 45 minutes to get to an opening in the dense forest that looked like a tunnel.



The Arboreal Arch – a Living Tunnel leading to the water:

Photo copyright by Bill Russo, From “The Ghosts of Cape Cod”

With the smell of decaying swamp matter reaching their noses, Angelo and Rico knew they were close. Running through the Arboreal Arch as fast as they could, they reached a sandy beach in less than a minute.

“Look Rico it’s there, just like the book said – the fallen log that stretches into the water like a pier,” said Angelo, his excitement mounting.

“That’s the log that that Jimmy Catfish sat on just before all the trouble started,” Rico replied. Sun-bleached and worn smooth from time and usage by the catfish boy, the log ran from the beach in a sixty foot arc to the water where its tip dove beneath the surface. “He stretched out on that log one day back in the 1960s and summoned the monsters from the lake and they killed everything in sight.”

“That’s the story that the book tells,” Angelo stated, “but it does seem unbelievable that there could be 300 pound catfish in a Cape Cod pond.”

“That’s not the amazing part. The weight thing is easily explained,” Rico replied. “There’s plenty of food for them here and no competition for it, so they just keep growing as long as they live. What makes these catfish so extraordinary, is those razor sharp teeth that they supposedly have.”

“That’s something we’ll have to see to believe,” responded his partner. “I’ve been wondering Rico, if there are giant catfish in this lake, how are we going to catch them with the tiny little worms we got from the bait store?”



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