

Revenge of the Lost Pole by J.R. Warnet

A few months ago I headed down to Island Beach State Park in search of “jaws”. The water temperatures were very warm and an abundance of bunker schools had been spotted close to the shoreline. Reports of big sharks had come in from my local source, so I aimed my sights and loaded up the truck.

It was the end of the August fishing scene and several of my close friends had hooked into big “brownies,” as they are called. Despite reports of dreaded dogfish and cow-nosed rays, I decided to take a chance and head out before the summer was officially over.

I know my expectations were a bit high looking for a monster shark in the surf, but I know larger sharks head north to the Garden State all the time. For years, reports of large white sharks and hammerheads that winter off the coast had intrigued me. A lot of local anglers often forget about shark fishing from Island Beach because of the hit-or-miss fishing style. So I made it my mission to catch a shark from the surf and to do so without wire leaders or chum.

A trip to a local tackle shop which prided itself on “the freshest bunker in town” was my first stop. The next stop was to the tackle shop a little farther down the road; the first shop didn’t live up to its motto for this trip. And that’s the key to catching big sharks: fresh bait. Rumors of sharks eating anything in front of their noses have some truth to them, but sharks have one of the most acute senses of smell on the planet. Using sour bait is almost like throwing a grenade in the water before fishing. After airing down my truck and turning on the Magellan Triton, I was off to a little hole about one mile before the North Jetty.

I was using a basic three-pole setup for this trip. I set my longest rod out first to ensure that I got a “deep bait” way past the waves. I set this pole out first because it was the farthest down the shoreline, so at least if the other two poles got hit, they wouldn’t tangle. After I sand-spike my rods into the ground, I sat back and let the glow sticks do the talking. A few bounces here and there are common in the park, especially if you have skates and rays in the area. Most of the time they are so large and bulky that they tap bait and don’t even know they’re hooked.



Our author J.R Warnet displays his catch.

Most of my skate catches are hooked in the wings more often than not.

On this trip I was using freshly chunked bunker and hoping to catch a large thresher or even a big brown shark. A report from earlier in the week suggested that a massive thresher shark was in the area, so my hopes were up. I scanned the dark horizon at least once every minute to look for any action. Despite nice conditions, the poles were untouched for about an hour. I re-baited twice in that hour and not even a crab hit my lines. After checking on the weather from my Blackberry, I looked up and saw only two of the three glow sticks on the horizon.

Jumping up and dashing to the sand spike, I found an empty spike lying down, facing the waves. Now I know I really had jammed them all into the sand pretty far, but this pole was nowhere to be found. I scanned the shoreline farther down the coast and even waded into to the surf but found no sign of my rod. Losing a rod is always the last thing you want to remember from a trip, but with a new reel and fresh line on it, I was not a happy camper. In fact, this was the long-line rod, so I had no hopes of finding this pole ever again. As I walked back to my truck with a losing stride, I passed my second rod, which slowly fell forward and onto the sand.

I bent down to pull up the tip before I lost this one as well, and it nearly ripped off my hands. I hit a

solid wall when I reeled back; it almost felt like I was trying to pull down the Taj Mahal with a piece of yarn. Whatever it was, it was big but didn’t put up a normal fight, more like a slow, steady pull, which almost always indicates a cow-nosed ray on the end of the hook. So I hit the drag down a little bit and began to wrench back, hoping upon hope that I could at least catch a fish after losing a rod. After five minutes I was fighting a losing battle and being pulled farther down the shore. I can still remember looking back every few seconds and seeing my Coleman Lantern getting dimmer and dimmer as I walked this monster down the sand. It almost felt like I had foul-hooked it, but I pulled until I saw the leader. It wasn’t a shark or even a skate, but the same rod I had just lost!

I don’t remember how I felt when I first saw the pole, but I do remember holding the second pole between my legs as I knelt down to pick up the long rod. It was torture to hear the sound of the gears shredding as I reeled back. The reel vibrated in my hands as sand and salt water rubbed against metal. The line was still solid though, so I knew if the gears held fast, I would have a chance to land this beast. Two minutes passed after I regained my lost rod and I was starting to see the leader now, although I still had about six or seven feet of fluorocarbon in the water. My penlight was on and I placed it in my mouth as I worked the fish onto the sand. It’s brown and white body glistened as I grabbed it from a crashing wave.

It turned out to be a 5-foot brown shark with a circle hook lodged properly in the corner of its jaw. Boy, it was a solid fight towards the end, and just feeling the muscles tighten inside the shark as I held it amazed me. It was like holding a semi-soft torpedo as it wiggled violently in my hands.

A single photo and a carefully removed hook are the last images I keep from this trip. I never really thought about the last moment before I put it back in the water. Releasing such a strong, powerful fish made me feel great to be a fisherman. The fact that I got my pole back makes it an even better memory! In case you’re wondering, the reel was shot from the sand working its way into the gears. The rod still has its place in my cooler rack, packed with another fresh reel and line as I wait for another trip.



Nautical Trivia by Ginny Hauff



1. Did you know that it took the *Mayflower* 67 days to reach America?
2. Did you know that the *USS Maine* was sunk in the harbor in Havana, Cuba in 1898? This enraged the United States and prompted the battle cry for war of “Remember the Maine”.
3. Did you know that *The Britannic* was a younger sister ship of the *Titanic*? During WWI this luxury liner was converted to a hospital ship.
4. Did you know that the Panama Canal opened in 1914? It shortened a 9,000-mile sea journey to only 50 miles. The two major bodies of water it connects are the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea.
5. Did you know that during WWII the French ocean liner *The Normandie* caught fire and sank at New York’s pier 88 while being converted to a troop transport ship?
6. Did you know that a German U-boat sank the *SS Lusitania*, which was owned by the Cunard Line in the year 1915?
7. Did you know that the Suez Canal opened in 1869 giving ships a short cut to the Orient from Europe?
8. Did you know that the name of the first American nuclear submarine to be lost at sea was the *USS Thresher*?