

T·R·A·V·E·L N·O·T·E·S

April 2005

THE TARPON COAST

RESULTS FROM OUR EXPLORATIONS

If you catch a ten pound bonefish on an 8 wt. rod, it is considered a huge trophy and perhaps the fish of a lifetime. But if you catch a ten pound tarpon on the same 8 wt., it's termed a "baby" tarpon. What's this all about? How can one fish be a trophy and the other a baby? Do you think that ten pounds of leaping, gill-rattling excitement should ever be called a baby... a brat maybe... but not a baby? Maybe we should call these young tarpon something else like immature or perhaps, chronologically challenged. But whatever we call them, baby tarpon are one of the world's great gamefish and as such, have a loyal following. In fact, many anglers prefer to catch baby tarpon over their more mature brethren of 100, 150, even 200 pounds. They like the multiple shots and the non-stop action these juveniles provide. These anglers are content to pursue baby tarpon almost exclusively... and equally eager to explore new areas.

With these tarpon diehards in mind, and fresh from our successes further up the Yucatan Coast at Tarpon Cay, we spent the Fall of 2004 and the early Winter of 2005 exploring south from Tarpon Cay all the way to the Chompton River. What we found simply amazed us; so much so that in February and March, we began sending anglers to what we are now calling "The Tarpon Coast". Here is a report on both our initial explorations and these inaugural client trips in February and March.

This "Tarpon Coast" is an idyllic tarpon habitat consisting of three very distinct, yet adjacent areas. On the outside, extensive, lush flats extend out for miles and can only be crossed using narrow channels. These areas are a maze of undulating shallow bars blanketed with thick turtle grass. Acres of sardines school in these shallows and the tarpon gorge themselves not only on this bounty, but also on the many shrimp and crabs that live hidden in the shag of this undulating turtle grass carpet. Depending on the stage of the tide and water levels, tarpon prowl the edges either way out or more close to shore. Often the bigger tarpon, the 20+ lb. fish, are found on these outside flats. Sight fishing here means rolling, tailing or flashing tarpon – all classic and all good.

The second major tarpon habitat found on this prolific coast is the many bays, creeks, rios and lagos that bring the ocean into the Yucatan's coastal interior. Here, tarpon are found either by sight fishing to rolling

tarpon in the channels, or by blind casting to unseen fish in likely holding spots. Some of these lagos and rios are hidden, their entrances known only to local guides.

The third habitat is the mangrove edge that lies between the turtle grass flats and the interior cuts, lagos and creeks. This edge provides perhaps the finest sight fishing for baby tarpon found anywhere in the world. It is classic and reminiscent of bonefishing in the Bahamas. Find a fish as it weaves in and out of the mangroves, make an accurate cast and you'll most likely jump a tarpon. Tarpon found here eat with gusto and fight like champs, often tail walking across the blond and beige hued

flats. To hook a 10 lb. tarpon in this skinny water is what sight fishing is all about. If this doesn't get your motor running, you might consider going in for a major overhaul!

In this, our first year, we plan to fish from 20-30 miles of this coast. As our explorations continue, we will probably add more areas. We may ultimately trailer to some areas to cut down on running time in the skiffs, but it should be noted, the great fishing starts just 10 minutes north of our base of operations.

To fish this spectacular area involves a short flight from the states to Merida, Mexico. Merida has a brand new airport. Visitors are met with small immigration lines and friendly English speaking customs officials who cycle travelers through the airport hassle-free. Going from Merida to our home base at Campeche takes just under two hours and involves a pleasant drive through the humid forests of the Campeche District.

Upon arrival in Campeche, anglers are often surprised by the unexpected charm of this ancient city. With monuments, statues, forts and one of the largest flags in Mexico flying in the harbor, Campeche is a clean, beautiful city. Locals stroll along the Malecon Boulevard all hours of the day and night. The city sits perched overlooking the Bay of Campeche. Campeche consists of two

major districts: old town and new town. Initially, we have housed anglers in the Plaza Hotel which sits right in the center of old town, within walking distance of many museums, parks, shops and theatres. Again, anglers are often surprised to find this beautiful old four-star hotel in the heart of Campeche. With excellent service, tasty food, a health



club, pool, spa and state-of-the-art business center, this hotel has all the amenities one could conceivably need on a tarpon trip. Guests at the hotel are very rarely American! We have encountered a mix of European, Mexican national and South American tourists. This mix adds to the hotel's charm. Rooms are elegant and luxurious and include marble-tiled bathrooms and floors! Optional junior master suites include a balcony that overlooks the plaza below. As such, we consider this hotel (and destination) quite appropriate for adventuresome couples.

At 7:00 a.m. sharp, anglers are met for breakfast in the hotel's dining room. A choice of fresh fruits, yogurt, cereal, eggs, omelets and of course, juices and coffee prepare you for the day ahead. Then it's off to the pangas to chase Mayan tarpon.

Head guide, "Neko" Pastrana, works with his cousin Cameron. They are both skilled tarpon fishermen who know this coast intimately. Neko and Cameron maneuver their 24-foot pangas with the best of them. These pangas are powered by 65 hp. Johnson engines and are well-outfitted for the fly angler. All of the front compartments are closed to give fly fisherman as much deck space as possible. Pangas may not be as pretty as the new high tech flats boats, but they are far more versatile in rough water conditions and can navigate some truly skinny water with ease.

Lunch is taken when anglers decide to take a break,

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usually around 11:00 in the morning. Lunch consists of sandwiches, wraps, fruits (such as apples and oranges), cookies, chips and snacks (such as nuts and candy). The coolers are well-stocked with water and beverages.

Depending on anglers' wishes and of course, the tides, the fishing day runs to about 3:00 p.m. Generally, anglers are thoroughly sated by this time. It is not uncommon to jump 20 tarpon per boat, per day in these waters. Anglers will very rarely see the same water twice. This coast provides an extensive habitat and new lagoons, creeks and flats are usually fished every day. As a point of reference, we have explored about twenty to thirty miles of this coast and have another thirty or more to go!

Dinners in Campeche are a cultural and culinary delight. The Yucatan is famous throughout Mexico for its spectacular foods. Anglers can take dinner at the hotel or they can choose our "Tarpon Coast Yucatan Food Tour". For this tour, we have chosen the best restaurants in Campeche. These restaurants offer a good sampling of both local dishes and traditional Mexican favorites; perfect fare for hungry anglers! On an angler's first evening, we start with La Pigua which is a small, locally run restaurant that serves fresh seafood, often

in traditional Yucatan sauces. La Pigua also has the best ceviche on the Yucatan. On another night, anglers can sample delectable offerings from La Parilla (the grill in English). Also locally owned and operated, La Parilla serves everything from grilled meats (chicken, pork, beef) to burritos, fajitas, enchiladas and much more. La Parilla is famous for its delicious spicy red and green chili sauces... and the best guacamole in the Americas. Anglers can also dine at a small cafe in the historic district of Campeche where they will find traditional Yucatan favorites like panuchos, empanadas and tamales. After a succulent carne asada smothered in delicious Mayan salsa or pollo tamales slathered with fresh guacamole, anglers adjourn for the night to their beautiful old hotel to get some rest before they take on the next day's "big brats".

So if you like remote destinations, comfortable, classic accommodations, great regional food and terrific tarpon fishing, you should consider this area for your next adventure. We think this coast offers some of the best opportunities for baby tarpon found anywhere in the world. One other note... given the level of amenities and the opportunities for non-fishing activities such as shopping, night life and Mayan ruin tours, we consider this destination also appropriate for non-angling friends and family.

If you're interested in looking at dates for this spectacular new destination, we have collected all the tide tables for the area. We would be happy to lend a hand and research the best tides available.

So give us a call today! We'll send you a beautiful DVD slide show we just produced and fill you in on all the details concerning this wonderful fishery on the Mayan "Tarpon Coast".

WHAT MAKES A GREAT FISHERMAN?

ACCORDING TO OUR UNOFFICIAL POLL

Most fly fishermen have at one time or another wondered what it takes to be great. Most of us are fascinated by this. We want to know the answer not only so that we can get better, but we also want to know by what criteria success is measured. In other words, what do we do to get better and when will we know when we get there. We know the answer lies in more than just the ability to cast and catch fish, because we all know too many anglers with poor skills that can catch fish. If you ask those that should be able to answer such a query such as guides, shop owners and experienced old salts this question, you might expect to be told the usual stuff. You know, you might expect to hear that such and such an angler is a great caster or that he presents the fly better or that he has superior skills to fight and land a fish. Sometimes these experts do answer with this and just this. They delineate the requisite skills and stop there. But more often than you might imagine, the pondering angler quickly glosses over these essential skills by saying something like "sure you have to be able to cast well, tease the fish to the fly and fight and land a fish", but they often add "yeah, but lots of guys can do that... the great anglers I know have something extra."

When pressed on this point, the conversation gets really interesting. The perfunctory answer quickly gives way to a genuine attempt to describe what qualities separate the truly exceptional angler from the rank and file. We thought you might be interested in the qualities mentioned that separate the merely good from the great.

Some may surprise you and others may not, but we think delving into these other attributes may just help all of us to become better anglers. So here are the results from our unofficial poll:

Without a doubt, the number one quality mentioned is the ability to concentrate. Some anglers seem to be able to do this better than others. Elite anglers are somehow able to shut out everything but the task at hand. They are fully engaged most, if not all of the time. We consistently heard that some of the best fish sighters have only mediocre eyes. We heard stories about the fellow with thick, coke bottle lenses who can spot fish with the best of them. Somehow they see flashes, ripples, rises, nervous water, birds and a myriad of other clues that betray the presence of fish. These elite anglers have an ability to concentrate and block out distractions. As a result, they simply see more fish or fish sign than others do.

The second attribute most often mentioned is the ability to stay the course and work hard over the long haul to find fish. They describe an angler as "He never gives up." or "He has the patience to wait for that second rise" or "He will wait patiently until the time is right." This drive to be successful on the hunt was finely tuned in our ancestors. Those that didn't have it simply didn't last long. Great fish-



ermen have tapped into this reservoir of indomitability and patience. Put simply, good anglers are tenacious.

By far the most interesting quality that guides and other professionals feel is essential to achieving greatness is an unrelenting sense of optimism. In other words, you must have faith. Without it, you might just as well sit in your room. For the elite angler, each new day is filled with hope and the promise of big fish. To these fishermen, yesterday was yesterday, today is today. One old timer put it this way. "What could have been is a wasteful question. Better to ask what is and what will be". Expert anglers are generally positive people who rarely complain about anything, even if there is reason to do so. They don't dwell on what could have been or the errors of others. They see it as a distraction that cripples their powers of concentration and drains their energy. They never complain and they never blame others for their inadequacies. They say people with positive attitudes live longer, but we'll add that they also fish better. And if they do indeed live longer, then it's just practical to be positive... with a longer life, you'll get to fish more and seemingly do a better job at it!

We also often heard that the best fisherman don't compete. These guys genuinely don't care if they are the "top dog". Of course, they want to catch fish. That's the whole point of the exercise, but they somehow understand that to want it *too* much again interferes with their powers of concentration and blurs their focus. They only compete with themselves. These anglers have a certain generosity of character too. They are helpful and encouraging to other anglers and are always willing to share their fishing acumen. Lefty Kreh comes to mind. If ever there was an elite angler who was generous to others, it is Lefty.

The next quality falls under the heading of "relax it's not brain surgery". The best anglers can simply relax, especially under pressure or in the heat of battle. Maybe it's because they are not competing. Maybe they're just too busy concentrating! Intense yes, but also relaxed. They are somehow confident and know that if the fish are there, they will find them. These guys push hard, but they don't push so hard that it becomes a distraction. They let the day unfold. They are determined, but not hyper.

To a person, experienced anglers all felt that the best fishermen are in reality, excellent hunters. These anglers think like hunters whether it be in a boat, bank side or wading a flat. They are quiet. They move slowly. They plan their attack whether it be to move upwind on a bonefish flat or to hide in the shade of a big ol' cottonwood tree when casting to a trophy brown trout. They take the time to make a plan and execute it successfully and above all, quietly. I once had a guide tell me that so and so was a great caster, but not a very good fisherman. He said he just made too much noise whether it was wading the flats or shutting the lid on the boat's cooler.

So there you have it. It is interesting to note that not one of the qualities so often mentioned above involve technical skills. Perhaps the necessity of having technical expertise is a foregone conclusion, but perhaps the acquisition of technical skills only puts you at the threshold of true greatness. Whichever the case, we hope you found this food for thought... it certainly provided something for us to chew on here at Angling Destinations.

KUDOS ON ALASKA TENT CAMP

We were pleased to receive the following from Jim and Jeni Wincek and thank them for taking the time to file this report. We thought that anglers contemplating a trip to Alaska might find their comments interesting:

Dear Angling Destinations,

I received your Christmas card and it jolted me into shame for not writing to you sooner. I hope you will remember that I'm the guy you sent up to the Kanektok. It was a fantastic trip! Unbelievable, really. The river was beautiful, and full of big wild fish, especially big wild rainbows. Sure, we caught lots of silver salmon, but that got old after a couple of days. (I think I could teach a monkey to catch salmon on that river.) But the rainbow fishing was out of this world. Everyday, we caught multiples of 26 inches plus - and that is not a "fish story". IT'S TRUE! When we targeted 'bows, we used mouse patterns almost exclusively. We couldn't use egg patterns because the char & dollie varden were too aggressive. We caught a few dandies on flesh flies too, but that was mostly incidental. Using that swimming mouse presentation took a little practice, but once I figured it out, I was addicted.

The guides were absolutely delightful too! My wife was the only lady in camp, but these guys were true professionals and gentlemen, and they made her feel comfortable. They also spent a lot of time with her for instruction in both casting and presentation. She had a great time, which means I had a great time.

Speaking of the camp, it was quite comfortable. It was hard to believe that we were in such total isolated wilderness. It rained every day we were there, but we were always dry and toasty in the tents. The food was awesome as well: prime rib, lasagna, steaks on the grill, heaping mounds of eggs and fresh fruit for breakfast. I was shocked by the quality of the food and accommodations for a so-called "tent camp". We didn't "rough it" at all.

So, I'd like to express our heartfelt thanks to you guys for suggesting the trip and especially for helping us to prepare. Next time we have an idea for a fishing trip, my first call will be to you guys.

Thanks again!... Jim & Jeni Wincek

If you're contemplating a trip this summer, here's a short primer on Alaska... Generally, king (Chinook), red (sockeye) and dog (chum) salmon are in the rivers from late June through the end of July. Pink (humpy) salmon show up on even numbered years only. Silver (coho) salmon begin their migration in August and continue to enter fresh water well into September. The fish that follow the salmon and the natural chum line of roe and decomposing salmon flesh are dolly varden, grayling, Arctic char and rainbow. These fish are caught throughout the season, June through September. The best times for trophy rainbows are June before the salmon run and in September, after the last of the silvers have entered freshwater. If variety is your desire, August is your month because then the greatest numbers of salmon and freshwater species are available.

There are basically four types of experiences available in Alaska:

1) **Full Fly-Out Lodges...** These lodges offer top notch accommodations, five-star dining and excellent equipment and guides. Fly-out lodges provide one of the finest angling experiences available anywhere in the world.

2) **Fixed Lodges...** Fixed lodges use jet boats to ferry anglers from the lodge to a "hot spot" each day. These lodges are located on very reliable rivers. Fly-outs may be optional.

3) **Fixed Camps...** These camps offer great fishing, excellent meals and comfortable, if a bit more rustic, lodging all at a much more affordable price.

4) **Float Trips...** Anglers camp as they move down the river. There are two anglers to each raft with a guide/boatman. Although float trips require more effort, they provide unlimited fishing time and a deeper involvement with the wilderness.

So if Alaska is in your future, give us a call and we'll get you to the right place at the right time!

DOGS, DRAG AND CABIN FEVER

During a long Wyoming winter, thoughts turn to the tropics way before a bad case of cabin fever goes from "unspecified restiveness" to "terminal psychosis". Case in point: Our office mate Todd Sabine's report helped explain his recent eccentric behavior and at least partially reassured us that his mind has not totally turned to tapioca. In Todd's own words, here's how he said it all started:

I picked up an Abel Super 12 belonging to my good friend, Jeff Stine. After fiddling with the drag for a moment, I handed the big reel to Jeff and asked,

"How tight do you run your drag for a giant tarpon?"

He pulled on the line, cranked on the drag knob and handed it back to me.

"This is about right." was all Jeff had to say.

I grabbed the reel firmly in my left hand and yanked on the line.

"Jeff... the line won't come off the spool."

"Exactly!"

"You are kidding me... RIGHT?"

"No... that's how I set the drag for a big tarpon."

"Impossible! There is no way! You'll pop your class tippet every time!"

"Todd... I swear that's about right!"

"You're going to have to prove it to me."

"And exactly how do you suggest I do that, last time I looked we don't have that many tarpon in Wyoming?"

"Call your dog, grab a tennis ball and a 12 wt. and meet me outside... 'cuz I have an idea."



If you're a long way from big fish, and by that we mean really big fish like tarpon, trevally or sailfish, here's a great way to learn how to do everything needed from the moment a big fish takes your fly and begins his first run to the point where the line comes tight and engages the drag. This is the chaotic few seconds where big fish are often lost. Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to learn these skills without catching quite a few big fish. So if you have to fish often to learn these skills and if this is the point where you often lose these big boys negating the opportunity to learn the skill, then obviously this sets up a classic catch-22. Here's a solution and it doesn't even involve fishing! Here's what you'll need:

1) A fishing rod rigged with a reel, preferably with a good drag system (more on this later).

2) A friend, preferably one with a strong arm and a sense of humor.

3) A dog... specifically a retrieving dog... preferably a big, enthusiastic one that thinks his life mission is to retrieve tennis balls and/or saliva-sogged sticks.

Now here's the fun part: Attach your line to the dog's collar (not the choke), set your drag and strip off 40-50 feet of line so it lies on the ground. Have your friend throw the ball or stick. Give the retriever the command to "FETCH IT UP" and hold on. Make sure you put on a fairly light leader and tippet because if you initially screw up (like most anglers do for the first time on fish), you'll just come unattached to Bruiser (and the beauty of this is it's not your fish of a lifetime!).

The best way to clear line is to make a circle with the thumb and forefinger of your line hand and hold your arm out perpendicular to the rod at the point of the reel. Don't watch the dog. Watch the line until it is on the reel. Then you are home free! Hopefully, you have engineered this situation so that the dog is about ready to make his way back with tennis ball in mouth just as your line gets on the reel... unless you actually want to try and land 85 lbs. or so of dogfish. But that's a whole other story!

This is also a great way to learn where to set your drag. You'd be surprised how much drag a tarpon or a sailfish or even a golden retriever can power off a reel. This exercise let's you know the proper place to set your drag and how much drag you can hold. So good luck! Just don't let the neighbors watch, they'll think your tray table has finally dropped from its upright and fully locked position. In case you're wondering, we haven't totally gone to the dogs here at AD. We promise this will be our last article on what you can do with dogs at least for awhile... probably until next winter! To that end, we tried this with cats, but it was a little too much like ice fishing for our tastes.

The Yucatan Peninsula

For the saltwater angler, the Yucatan Peninsula offers some of the best opportunities for shallow water angling found anywhere in the world. The Yucatan Peninsula straddles the two countries of Mexico and Belize. From the lush turtle grass bars of the Gulf of Mexico, to the beautiful white sand flats of the Caribbean coast, the Yucatan has it all. In this issue, we'll explore what we think are the best choices available on the peninsula from Ascension Bay south to the Belize border. In our next issue, we'll look at the opportunities that exist north and ultimately west of Cancun.

Like the pudgy thumb on a hobbit's hand, the Yucatan Peninsula juts north for over 200 miles into the fish-rich waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The Yucatan offers the traveling angler a tropical sportfishing paradise. Many anglers make a yearly pilgrimage to the Yucatan. They come for the warm Caribbean ambiance, the friendly people and of course, the extraordinary and diverse angling opportunities. On the Caribbean side of the Yucatan, the Grand Slam species: permit, tarpon and bonefish take center stage while on the Gulf side, it's snook and tarpon that are the major players.

Let's start our tour south of the gateway city of Cancun at legendary Ascension Bay. The waters of Ascension Bay offer the light tackle angler one of the most diverse selections of gamefish found anywhere in the world. Here, it is possible to cast to bonefish, permit, tarpon, snook, jacks, barracuda, cubera and mutton snapper all on the same trip.

For the Grand Slam angler, it has been said that Ascension Bay has the world's largest population of permit. It is not extraordinary to cast to 25-50 permit in a single day. In addition, Ascension Bay bonefish come across the flats in droves. Sometimes it seems that

an acre of water begins to quiver, rise up and move *en masse*. The beginning saltwater angler will do well fishing among the schools of bones which run 2-5 lbs. More experienced fishermen can try for some of the bay's larger singles which run up to 6-7 lbs. The final Grand Slam player is the tarpon. They are the largest, strongest, and most acrobatic of all the flats fish. Ascension Bay is primarily known for its small to mid-sized fish (20-60 lbs.). And while there are plenty of tarpon to cast to in order to complete a Grand Slam, you should not consider Ascension Bay primarily a tarpon destination. A majority of these fish are natives which remain in the area throughout the year. Migratory fish begin to show up in the beginning of April and from then on, numbers will increase significantly through July.

At the north end of Ascension Bay lies **Pesca Maya Fishing Lodge**. Established in 1996, Pesca Maya has quickly become one of the Yucatan's most popular fishing destinations. The lodge is located 90 miles south of Cancun in the 1.3 million acre Sian Ka'an (Mayan for "where the sky is born") Biosphere Reserve. Situated on a long, narrow barrier island just north of Punta Allen, the lodge is virtually surrounded by water. To the east lies the blue Caribbean and just a few hundred

yards off shore, the Palancar Barrier Reef stretches from southern Belize to north of Cancun. To the west lies a vast laguna system... an area of shallow flats cut by pale azure channels and dotted with small mangrove cays. Ten miles to the north of Pesca Maya is the famed "boca" which cuts through the barrier island and provides the only access to the inner lagunas. Four miles to the south lies legendary Ascension Bay. Both the interior lagunas and the more oceanic Ascension Bay boast some of the Caribbean's most productive fishing areas.

complete with private bathrooms and hot and cold running water. These cottages are cross-ventilated and efficiently cooled by the consistent ocean breezes. Facing a beautiful, white sand beach with turquoise waters beyond, these cottages provide a classic ocean vista... and a great place to savor an evening libation before enjoying a delicious meal featuring fresh local seafood and other regional favorites.

Pesca Maya combines extraordinary angling, comfortable accommodations, personalized service and good food... all at a price that's very reasonable. As such it receives our vote.

At the southern end of Ascension Bay, **Casa Blanca Lodge** sits at Punta Pajaros where the reef that divides the sea from the bay begins to bend inshore. Casa Blanca's white buildings are clustered amid majestic palms that rise from a beautiful white sand beach. The rooms are large, comfortable and well-appointed with tile floors, mahogany shutters and very spacious baths. Casa Blanca runs a very efficient and successful fishing operation that has

garnered an excellent reputation over the years. For adventuresome anglers, Casa Blanca lodge has a new kayak fishing program that allows intrepid anglers to explore numerous mangrove-lined lagoons and other previously unexplored areas that are inaccessible to conventional flats boats and pangas. Give us a call if you're interested in more information on this program.

Ten miles south of Casa Blanca, a small peninsula separates Ascension Bay from lesser know Espiritu Santo Bay. Here, **Playa Blanca Lodge** is the perfect spot for couples and families who want isolation, a classical tropical setting and lots of activities. Guests are encouraged to kayak through mangrove lagoons, visit the island's Mayan ruin, snorkel the spectacular offshore reefs, bike along the expansive white sand beach and of course, flats fish for permit, bonefish, and tarpon. The knowledgeable staff (exceptionally well versed in the local flora and fauna) includes a private chef that features fresh seafood and a variety of regional specialties.

The cottage interiors are whitewashed and beautifully decorated in bright Caribbean accents. Each cottage is different and all have ceiling fans, a large bath and a private veranda that faces an untouched, white sand beach lined with coconut palms. A bar offers indoor and outdoor



Beginning saltwater anglers find Pesca Maya one of the best places in the world to take their first bonefish on a fly, while many seasoned anglers agree that this is perhaps THE best location to take permit on a fly. In addition, because of good seasonal migrations of snook and tarpon, there have been more Grand Slams and Super Grand Slams (tarpon, bonefish, permit and snook all in the same day) caught here than most anywhere else in the world.

Pesca Maya has recruited both the best of the old Pesca Maya Lodge guides and the best Punta Allen guides. All are professional native guides with years of experience. These guides know Ascension Bay and Boca Paila Lagoon intimately. Pesca Maya uses both a head guide and a young apprentice. Both guides spot fish well. This approach helps when wading as each angler has a guide with him or her to help spot fish. When in the boat, one guide poles while the other assists the angler on deck. Both guides are constantly probing the flats searching for fish so anglers have two experienced pairs of eyes behind them. The apprentice guide can also reposition the boat so you don't have to walk all the way back to the boat after wading a long flat.

At Pesca Maya, eight thatched-roof cottages come

NEWS & NOTES...

service, as well as covered seating on top of the building. This is a perfect spot to sip a tropical drink and watch the sun set as the waves roll in.

For the fisherman, Playa Blanca uses the same guides as Casa Blanca and mostly fishes the area south of Ascension Bay. They are equipped with 16' Dolphin skiffs and work hard to insure that fishermen sacrifice nothing in the way of angling opportunities. While you are fishing, non-angling companions can enjoy the many activities available making for a great guilt-free vacation for you. All this makes Playa Blanca the perfect romantic getaway... with great fishing included!

If you continue south, near Mexico's border with Belize, a small spit of land separates Chetumal Bay from the blue waters of the Caribbean. At Xcalak, a man-made channel accesses this lesser known, but very productive, estuarine system. Because Chetumal Bay is too far south to be reached easily in a day from Ascension Bay, this area has been somewhat ignored by the Mexican angling establishment. And while the Belizeans know full well the area's potential, it is illegal for them to cross the border into Mexico. As a result of this happy coincidence of political and geographical isolation, the Chetumal Bay fishery has remained lightly pressured.

The **Costa de Cocos Lodge** is strategically located on the peninsula between Chetumal Bay and the open Atlantic making it a perfect base for fishing these prime waters. Built on a beautiful beach two kilometers north of the small village of Xcalak (Ishkalak), Costa de Cocos is located on the doorstep to a fishing paradise.

The local waters have excellent populations of bonefish found on the numerous hard and soft bottomed flats. It is important to note that the area's bonefish generally run larger than the fish you will find both north and south of Costa de Cocos. Various theories abound on the reasons for this, but this anomaly delights the seasoned angler accustomed to the smaller fish found at Ascension Bay.

For the experienced angler seeking the most elusive of flat's inhabitants, permit are found in the bay and at the lagoon mouths. These fish sometimes school in numbers of five to twenty. The larger permit feed both in the turtle grass flats along the ocean front on an incoming tide and in Chetumal Bay, often in the morning. We suggest the months of May, June, and July for fishermen specifically targeting the bigger permit. Smaller school permit are present throughout the season.

At Costa de Cocos, anglers are housed in cabanas constructed of native stone and hardwoods. These spacious rooms have two double beds and a private bath with hot shower... perfect for two fishermen. Gourmet dinners are served family-style and include a full range of seafood, local fare, and more traditional foods.

If you take a break from fishing, snorkeling is excellent right off the dock and diving can be arranged through the on-site dive shop. This area is well known for its varied and plentiful marine life and sea kayaks are available for exploring the nearby lagoons and rivers. At your request, we can arrange ruins exploration through Rancho Encantado at Laguna Bacalar. This overnight excursion offers the best of the best in exploring ruins on the Yucatan Peninsula.

In our quest to step off the edge and explore the unknown, sometimes we miss what is right under our nose. As such, the Yucatan is just a short flight from the states, but seems so very far away. It is home to tailing bonefish, turquoise shoals loaded with permit and secluded miles of mangrove shorelines patrolled by tarpon and snook. Our advice: don't ignore the obvious! If you haven't fished the Yucatan yet, give yourself a treat and give us a call today.

As the fishery in Alaska began to develop some 40 years ago, many outfitters jockeyed for position in an attempt to secure the best rivers, develop the best lodges and, of course, attract the most anglers. It's axiomatic in the fishing world that wherever there is great fishing, there will be a struggle among outfitters. We think this is a good thing although with all the claims and counter claims, it can be a bit confusing to the angler intent on selecting the best spot. But we still strongly believe that with these options comes better choices and stronger programs - a good thing for all of us.

Never has this been more apparent than in the developing frontier of Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula. Many of you already know that major changes are underway concerning outfitters in Kamchatka. This winter, this political jockeying hit full stride. One of the peninsula's best and most knowledgeable outfitters, **The Best of Kamchatka's**, Will Blair, found himself the subject of a tremendous amount of largely responsible for subsequent development of their most remarkable rivers, we are certain that they are two of the fisheries in the world!

Without going into details, Will's former partner asked Will to join forces once again and after going out on their own, generated some negative press in their competitive market. Will and his Russian partner have the experience to offer the best trips (and not everyone



air here: Will and his Russian partner wants to work with Will and only Will. Forget the political struggles and power grabs going on, the bottom line for the avid angler is that Will offers great trips. If you're interested in fishing one of the world's last true frontiers, then Will Blair's The Best of Kamchatka is a fine choice! Give us a call to discuss this excellent program further.

The West Side of **Andros Island** aboard the mothership the **Outpost** continues to impress us and the anglers who were lucky enough to experience it this year. The Outpost is exactly that... an outpost in a remote corner of the angling world and a perfect antidote to a busy work life. Simply put, we think the Outpost is the best bonefishing trip this side of the Seychelles... period. There are just not that many areas left in the Bahamas that have zero fishing pressure. The 2005 Spring schedule is full and we strongly suggest that if you want to do this trip, you call us for a Fall 2005 date as we will be fishing limited weeks and the schedule is already filling up.

Montana's Patrick Straub also has access to great unfished waters on remote stretches of some private ranch lands near Helena. His company, **Straub Outfitters**, has made a study of getting off the beaten path and finding great streams that hold wild Montana trout. If you love dry fly fishing without the crowds, Straub Outfitters ought to be on your list of summer hot spots. Call us for details, as some things are just too good to publish!

While were on Montana, we can also arrange fishing adventures to some of the West's most legendary rivers including the **Gallatin, Yellowstone and Madison Rivers**, as well as numerous spring and private ranch creeks. We can arrange accommodations from traditional lodges to private cabins. These options are perfect for families and small groups looking for a unique "out-of-the-box" experience.

If you are looking for a great combination of incomparable luxury and unspoiled wilderness, **The Resort at Paws Up** offers a unique experience. From deluxe horsepack trips in the Bob Marshall Wilderness to combination pack trip/float trips on the South Fork of the Flathead River to The Saddle Club and The Spa at the resort's home base, this remarkable destination has something for everyone in your family. Please call us for a brochure and CD.

Los Roques' best operation, **Sightcast**, has made an interesting hiring. Shane Kohlbeck, who has fished the flats of Los Roques extensively, became part of the Sight Cast team this year. Shane is a FFF Certified Casting Instructor. Shane will be tying and developing new flies, translating for clients and guides, teaching the guides more English and offering complimentary casting instruction. For those of you who have never fished Los Roques, this is an outstanding fishery and Shane Kohlbeck's presence at the lodge can only help to improve an already superb experience.

And finally, we will be heading to the Yucatan's **Tarpon Coast** this May to host Jon Cave, world traveler, photographer and writer extraordinaire. He will be writing an exclusive article for **Fly Fishing in Saltwater Magazine** on our latest, and perhaps greatest, baby tarpon hotspot. Based on the numerous phone calls we received, many of you read the article we did with Jon on Great Inagua Island in the Bahamas a few months ago, so make sure to look for the magazine sometime after this summer. 5

THE PERFECT DAY... BAHAMAS

I could tell you that a day like this is common in the Bahamas. But it would not be true. A day like this is a rare gift. These tropical islands own a hot sun, making wind a constant companion for the bonefisherman. Learn to live with it or quit... it's your choice. But this morning had dawned calm and it was still dead calm. There was not even the slightest exhalation coming off the big island of Andros. These are the kind of days you dream about... a few wispy clouds, a few small thunderheads way off on the horizon and a sea as slick and quiet as a marble slab in a morgue. If you could only bottle these days and take a sip once a week, a desk stacked high inside a slushy sidewalk just wouldn't seem so bad.

As I stood still staring at the simmering sea, I realized there was no horizon. In its place was just the dusty blending of flat, grey sea and dull blue sky. If you stared only at the mangroves' reflection in the water, it looked like a world gone upside down. The image was perfect with no rippled flaws. There were just mangrove leaves, gnarled roots and scattered white clouds with bellied anvils pointed down like pots. Heat had slowly oozed into the day and now drops of sweat rolled down my back.

I took a step forward advancing from a soft patch of marl and white sand to a hard rocky shelf. Startled crabs, with claws drawn like six guns, stood their ground itching for a fight. I scanned the pale yellow flat. Dragonflies hung in the air and one lazily tried to land on my rod tip. Cicadas thrummed their "rake and scrape" in the background. An osprey changed direction to push overhead, briefly canting its head down to stare at me. Was it just curiosity or a tip of the hat from one fellow angler to another?

All was perfect... the stuff of dreams. This was our second morning exactly like this. But as still and calm as it was, anticipation hung in the air like the drive to a high school tryst. I was all dressed up and ready to go... I just needed my date to show up. I scanned the shoreline looking for the last element to complete this perfect picture. I knew this wasn't the best weather

for bonefishing... a small wind scuff always helped to increase your odds. Wind hides you from the fish, while calm waters opens you up to the close scrutiny of a shallow water predator with a set of eyes perfected over countless millennia. But I wished for no wind. For me, the most thrilling moment in bonefishing occurs when you see a tail breach the surface on a calm day. When conditions are like this, often you can see a tail glinting way across a flat... seemingly a mile away. On days like this, the splash from a six-inch needlefish can stop your heart.

The tide was dropping now, draining water from the mangroves. Two small creeks riffled the placid surface where sun-warmed water drained back into the bay from the island's interior. It looked like wind scuff, but was only a gentle current. Calm prevailed, yet I felt agitated as anticipation reigned. I needed a fish to complete this perfect picture... one fish, one shot, one tail, one hookup. It may have seemed a shame to destroy all this remarkable calm, but winter was on its way up north and a man has to do what a man has to do.

As I stood waiting, I drew my backpack strap off my shoulder and felt inside the pack for the camera that I knew was hidden under my raincoat. I took special care to place the camera's sling around my neck before slinging the pack back on my back. I took a few photos, taking time to look at the digital image to see if the photo conveyed accurately the beauty of the day. It did.

Just then it happened. I saw a tail pop up and slowly ease its way around a mangrove shoot. This fish was obviously enjoying the day as much as I was. To a neurotic fish doomed to a life of incessant scanning for sharks and barracudas, perhaps a day like today evened the odds. The water was clear and there were no lapping waves or surface scuff. With no background static, bonefish senses, tuned by eons of predation, would work just fine on such a day. Maybe for this day only, all the bonefish in this bay could just relax and act recklessly. At least as recklessly as a

bonefish can act given their serious need for a Prozac cocktail chased with a Valium shooter. Eventually, I lowered my camera and shifted my rod to my right hand. But for some reason I paused. What came next tempted the fish gods. Stupid I know, but maybe this calm day had made me as relaxed and reckless as my tailing companion.

I know you take 'em when you can get 'em. Bonefish tails are rare. Reach back, make a cast, get the hookup. This was a happy fish, ready to eat. Instead, I placed my rod back in my left hand and raised the camera. I would get a picture of a tailing fish.

"Yea, that's the ticket. I'll take a photo, then I'll catch him." I told myself.

Obviously the hot sun and lack of breeze had frizzled my brain. I was tempting fate and I knew it. I would deserve nothing more than double goose eggs and I'd probably change the weather in the process.

But I took one photo, then two, searching through the viewfinder for the elusive tail. I checked after each exposure and saw

nothing. Maybe these bonefish really are ghosts or maybe this fish was an apparition created by a brain heated to the point of hallucinations by too many hours on the flat. But I foolishly continued trying to photograph a tail. At one point, I spotted another fish as it tailed in from my left. I ignored him and eventually, as he gazed up at me with that big black eye, he finned slowly away. Geez, was I tempting fate! I was a fool festooned in khaki and basted in sunscreen just waiting to go from the stove to the frying pan.

My fish continued to happily tail until he rushed ahead throwing a big boil into the surface of the glassy water.

"Spooked him!" I thought. "See, you should have taken the shot."

But, just as I prepared to move on, I saw him tail once again. Then, in the reflection of a big dark mangrove bush, I could see his entire pale green form. He had a crab crossways in his mouth. Tan claws stuck out each side of his mouth. This was a big crab. You'd need major ordnance to deliver a fly this big. You'd need a 14 wt. rod and enough rug yarn to carpet a small office wrapped on at least a 4/0 hook to deliver a fly the size of this crab.

Then he crunched. I could hear the crab's exoskeleton crack as the big bonefish reached the sweet meat inside. On this still morning, it sounded like my son at Long John

Silver's. After just a few loud cracks, it was over. No chewing, just crunching once, twice, then I presume, swallowing. I figured that much crabmeat would fill him up and he would soon adjourn to deeper waters for cigars and brandy. But no, I guess you must make hay while the sun shines if you are a bonefish. In no time, he was off and tailing again, headed for the mouth of the first small creek.

OK, no more photos! It was time to catch this fish before he filled up on crab cakes and shrimp cocktails. I raised my rod just as his tail disappeared into the roiled waters at the creek's mouth.

"Oh man, now you've really done it." I lamented.

I squinted and I stared. Nothing. Eventually, I had to accept the reality that he had followed the current into the bay, leaving me with only a few silly photos and perhaps a nice memory. But luck was smiling on me today and three feet beyond the riffle, a tail popped up again. I quickly cast. My fly landed with a plop to the side and slightly behind my fish, about at his pectoral fin.

Before I could say, "they don't eat from that end", he pounced like a cat and pinned my fly to the bottom. I could see the pink bead at the hook eye just above his right gill. He finned backward drawing the fly towards his mouth until he took it all – the bead, the rabbit fur and the hook – in one big vacuuming rush of water.

I stripped and he was on.

It has been said that a fisherman lives for that nanosecond before the hookup. The rest is just work – good work – but still work. I generally agree, but on this day the nanosecond lasted for quite a few minutes... and it will last for quite a few more if I somehow managed to get a photo of this fish tailing. Time will tell.

I could tell you that the wind came up and this perfect day was soon over... but it wouldn't be true. I could tell you that by tempting the fish gods, the rest of the day was slow... but it wouldn't be true. And I could tell you that the next day dawned clear and calm just like today... but it wouldn't be true.



Full Moons 2005

April 24

May 23

June 22

July 21

August 19

September 18

October 17

November 16

December 15

January 14

◆ BAHAMAS UPDATE ◆

As we reported in our winter newsletter, Grand Bahama Island was slammed last Fall by one of the strongest hurricane seasons in recent memory. Two hurricanes hit especially hard on the east end of the island at McLeans Town and continued to wreak havoc as they barged towards Florida strafing the island's northern flats as they passed. After a winter of rebuilding and cleanup, we are pleased to report that Iram Lewis and his family are almost done repairing their **Water Cay Bonefish Club**, located on beautiful Water Cay. This small lodge may have been the bull's eye for the hurricanes, but Water Cay is also ground zero for some of the best bonefishing available in the northern Bahamas. To refresh your memory, Water Cay is quiet and removed from the big city hub-bub, yet still very easy to reach from Freeport. This lodge has comfortable accommodations, experienced guides like Sidney Thomas and Ishmael Pinder, as well as some great bonefishing practically out the front door. If you have been looking for an affordable, quality destination that is easy to get to from the States, this is it!

While we're on Grand Bahama Island, let us remind you that this island offers a superb compromise for you and your non-angling friend or spouse. Great food, casinos and nightlife are not often found within a stone's throw of superb bonefishing. So if you were thinking of a quick trip before summer, we would strongly suggest the two bonefishing operations in Lucayan Village those being **Pelican Bay Bonefishing** and **Grand Bahama Bonefishing LTD**. And if you can sneak away from town for a couple days, Water Cay offers a great option too! How does the ad go... great bonefishing and having your wife smile at you when you get back... priceless!

What can we say... it seems that the cat is out of the bag concerning **Clinton Scavella and Crooked Island**! Clinton Scavella has been very busy this winter and he has now emerged as one of the best, and most entertaining, guides in the Bahamas. Clinton works out of Landrail Point, a blink-and-you'll-miss-it kind of town on the northwest corner of Crooked Island. Here you'll find Clinton in his Silver King bonefish skiff as he lets a few lucky folks in on Crooked's best kept secrets.

We also have some positive news to report coming out of **Crooked Island's Pittstown Point**. Seems management has made some much needed changes and client satisfaction is way up. Pittstown Point is a great choice, especially for couples, and we are delighted to once again give this destination our endorsement. So come on! Come fish with Elton "Shakey" McKinney and his excellent cadre of guides and enjoy one of the prettiest spots in the Bahamas.

Nearby on **Acklins Island**, the Williamson Family operates the **Grey's Point Bonefish Inn** and are cut out of the same cloth as Clinton Scavella. This strategically located lodge continues to offer some of the best out-the-front-door fishing available anywhere in the Bahamas. Combined with a comfortable family style ambiance, this lodge has a very loyal following, which comes as no surprise to us! A new wrinkle is that top guide, Elvis Collie, is now available on a limited basis for those who can plan ahead. We reported in the last issue that Elvis was working exclusively with **Acklins Island Lodge**. Not so says Elvis! He has struck out on his own. He is happy to work for either Grey's or AIL. It just depends on his schedule and how far in advance you plan your trip. We're delighted with this news, so plan ahead and spend a few days fishing with Elvis!

We've had a few intrepid anglers come back all fired up after spending some time recently on the quiet little island of **Mayaguana**... a jewel located in the southern Bahamas. As we all know, unfished places are getting harder and harder to find and sometimes it just takes a leap of faith to find the best opportunities. So although there are no guides available on Mayaguana, the island's fishing can be superb for anglers who can see fish well, like to wade and don't mind going it alone. In addition, this trip offers some great bonefishing at a terrific price.

Our explorations on the west side of **Andros Island** aboard the **Outpost** introduced us to guide **Percy Darville** from the **Berry Islands**. An excellent guide, Percy has some areas completely dialed-in over in the Berrys. Absolutely drop dead gorgeous white sand flats await folks willing to step outside the box

of the known bread 'n butter bonefish lodges and try something new. Percy has some comfy, beach side A/C lodging and he can customize a great bonefish itinerary for you. Percy works with his best friend and our other **Outpost** guide, Stanford Johnson, so parties of four are an option. Our recommendation is to think of this area later in the season, namely May through September, when the guides are not aboard the **Outpost**.

Ezzard Cartwright down on **Great Inagua Island** has been busy this spring showing visiting anglers the island's promise. Larger than average bonefish prowl the island's flats and the always elusive permit show up in good numbers as the tide stage turns toward the flood. Ezzard knows the best spots and in addition, is THE man if you want to venture into the island's unusual interior lagoon. Lake Windsor, or as the locals call it, "the pond", is home to the Bahamas' best tarpon fishery. On a sunny day, Lake Windsor provides a great option for 15 to 80 pound silver kings. A little known secret is that the fall fishing on Inagua is fantastic especially for bonefish! The flats have been rested all summer, the weather is stable and having the Bahama's third largest island all to yourself isn't too bad either!

The excellent crew and guides aboard the **mother-ship Outpost** are continuing to explore and learn the treasured secrets of **Andros' West Side**. Having spent quite a bit of time aboard the **Outpost** and having delighted in learning this remote and untapped fishery, we feel compelled to let you know how incredible (and comfortable) having this deserted stretch of coastline all to yourself can be. If you have fished at various lodges and have some bonefishing experience, consider chartering the **Outpost** for your next adventure. We have not had a single client that has come back with any complaints about the fishery or the service offered by the yacht and its crew. Sure we've had a few trips that had bad weather, but in terms of the quality of the experience, the **Outpost** has simply been the best! But please be advised, the Fall of '05 and Spring '06 are already being booked by this year's anglers eager to return, so get on board, so to speak, and experience the best the Bahamas has to offer!

Scott's Dog Bone Series Fly #2... The Bonedoggle

| | |
|------------|--------------------------------------|
| Hook: | Tiemco 8115 or Mustad 34007 Size 4-8 |
| Thread: | Mono |
| Antennae: | Silli Legs Tan |
| Mouth: | Tan Sheep Fleece |
| Body: | Pink Beads |
| Eyes: | Gold Bead Chain |
| Underbody: | Tan Rabbit Strip |

Tying Instructions:

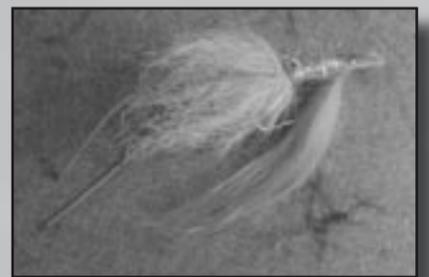
This fly was originally tied with the undercoat from a Golden Retriever named Oliver. Oliver's fur may still be the best material from which to tie this fly, but we've substituted rabbit fur for three reasons: 1.) We fear having to explain to Oliver's family why we are filling a few too many orders requesting "just a small ziplock" filled with Oliver's fleece. 2.) The fly works just as well even if it lacks a bit of canine pizzazz. 3.) Oliver doesn't run from us whenever the fly tying vice comes out.

To tie the fly, slide four beads onto the hook shank (on a size 6 hook). Tie a small bundle of sheep fleece off the bend of the hook. Then tie two silli-legs for antennae and stack another appropriate amount of sheep fleece on top of the antennae to finish the mouth. Then tie in the bead chain eyes on top of the bend of the hook. Tie a hank of bunny fur in at the eye in the traditional Crazy Charlie beard style. It should cover the hook.

You can also use a bunny strip to create a more dense beard. Tie off the bunny strip at the eye and appropriately thread it on the hook point and bring up flush with the beads. The strip can be super-glued to the bottom of the beads.

The glass beads impart weight to the fly, but with the fleece and rabbit, the fly still lands quietly. You can slide 4, 3, 2 or even 1 bead on the hook shank depending on the weight you want the fly to be. If you want to use the pattern for tailing or skinny water bones, you can eliminate the bead chain eyes to even further reduce the fly's weight. If you use fewer than the 4 beads, either dub or palmer a body with rabbit fur or make the mouth longer or a combination of both depending on the number of beads used.

This pattern uses pink glass beads from Enterprise Art at 800-366-2218. Ask for bead # 25199 6/0 pink color # 13.





Bonefish from the Bahamas...

Photos: © JeffStine.com

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