

1ST GRAND SLAM - JIM ARCE

LEAP YEAR GRAND SLAM

by Jim Arce

In January, 2000, Pat and I were planning a trip to celebrate our First Anniversary on February 20th. She was dreaming of sandy beaches, warm breezes and exotic cultures. I was dreaming of catching a permit.

I learned of permit in 1996 when I went to Christmas Island for my first bonefishing trip. Before the trip I read several books on fishing the flats. As I studied the intricacies of catching bonefish, I read of an even more elusive prey, the permit. I was captivated, and dreamed of a time that I would pursue them.

Pat and I found a destination that had everything we were both looking for, especially permit. It was Playa Blanca, a small resort in the Yucatan just north of Espiritu Santo Bay. We flew to Cancun via Miami and spent the night.

The next morning we boarded a small 4 seat Cessna at the Cancun airport. We flew south for about 1 hour and landed in another world. On a small limestone airstrip carved out of the mangroves, heavily armed federalis checked us carefully to make sure we were not drug runners. Having passed inspection, we piled into a small boat and motored across a lagoon to Casa Blanca, the mother lodge to Playa Blanca.

The staff greeted us with refreshing drinks that we enjoyed on the beach while they loaded our gear onto the truck. The barrier reef was right in front of us. The beach was pure white, the water was crystal turquoise, and palm trees swayed in the breeze. The intensity of city life began to melt away. Shortly, we climbed aboard the truck and sat on wooden benches.

The drive south took us farther and farther from civilization. The narrow road led through thick brush, with mangrove lagoons on our right and palm covered beaches on our left. Wildlife scattered as we drove along slowly. Birds flew from the brush and iguanas scampered from the warm soil where they had been basking in the tropical sun. We passed few dwellings.

After 40 minutes we came to a clearing on our right where an ancient Mayan temple rose mystically from the mangroves. An enclave of cabanas built of stucco and dark wood with thatched roofs sat on the beach to our left. We had arrived at our destination, Playa Blanca. It was Saturday, February 26.

That night after dinner, I readied my gear. I assembled an 8 weight rod for bonefish, and a 10 weight rod for permit and tarpon. I cleaned the lines and straightened the leaders. I checked over the flies that I had tied so carefully in our living room in San Francisco for weeks while dreaming of this very night. Tomorrow I would fish for permit. I was ready.

TRIP REPORT

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