

NEWSLETTER #31B - DECEMBER 2004

If you have access to Microsoft Word, open the attachment above to see the information below in a more "reader friendly" format.

Leland Fly Fishing Travel Newsletter - December '04 (B)

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This is the thirty-second edition of our monthly newsletter with updates on great fly fishing venues and insights for our traveling fly fishers. We want to help you match the right location with your fly fishing goals and objectives and properly prepare you to fully enjoy the experience. We've been to most locations and pride ourselves on our ability to research new sites. One of our services is to compare and contrast different lodges/outfitters. Whatever unbiased information on timing and locations we can provide comes at the same cost to you as booking direct – i.e., no extra cost.

BUSH STREET SHOP DESTINATION DAY, THURSDAY, DEC 16 – LANI WALLER WILL BE IN SHOP PERSONALIZING HIS NEW BOOK

Thursday, Nov 16, has been designated as our monthly Destination Day in the Bush Street Shop. I'll be in the shop from 11:00am through the evening. Famous steelheader and globe hopping fly rodder, Lani Waller, will also be in the shop from 11:00am throughout the afternoon with his new book, River of Dreams. Lani will be personalizing his book for purchasers and answering questions about his world-wide experiences.

The scheduled slide presentations will be 12:30 and 5:00 and feature one of the most productive early season options in the US – the North Platte Lodge. For the last four years, we have been sending clients who want a great early season US trout experience here and the feedback we've received has been very positive. This year, we are holding some space at North Platte for this early season period. Openings still exist for these time frames:

3/17 - 21 (3 days fish)

3/21 - 26 (Easter Special \$200 discount - 4 day fish)

3/28 - 4/1 (3 day fish)

4/1 - 6 (4 day fish)

4/10 - 14 (3 day fish)

Prices - 3 day fish, 1125pp based on double occupancy and shared guide

4 day fish, 1500 - Easter Special week, 1300

Personal slide presentations by appointment can be scheduled on any of our destinations. Let me know if you'd like to make an appointment and what destination you'd like me to be prepared for. Drop in and say "hi" and let's discuss the exciting possibilities of fly fishing travel.

BELIZE REPORT – PRIVATE ISLANDS FOR COUPLES, FAMILY AND CORPORATE EXPERIENCES

Two different private islands, two different experiences, yet a lot in common. That's how I would describe our time on our recent Belize trip at Cayo Espanto and Caye Chapel. What both islands had in common:

- privately owned with no real estate development ambitions
- both upscale with outstanding food, service, etc
- both had bonefishing available wading from the island

- a short hop north via small plane from Belize City
- both reside in spectacular marine environments, inside the second largest barrier reef in the world, which runs the entire length of Belize
- Snorkeling or diving can be arranged from either location; also, sea kayaks and other water sport options available

CAYO ESPANTO

Four acres with only 5 air-conditioned accommodations including two – two bedroom villas, two – one bedroom villas, and one studio unit. Structures constructed so they can be virtually open air and can also be closed down with accordion style walls. Each building is isolated and has it's own private dock. Level of service is outstanding – a “houseman” comes with each rental. The houseman arrives at your beck and call to take drink orders, menu discussion for meals, or for any need you have. He carries a two way radio that communicates directly with the radio he leaves in your beachfront home. Food was fabulous. My wife called Cayo Espanto a “10” on the scale of romantic spots we've been (many of you know what a romantic guy I am!!). Fly fishing guide can be booked from Ambergris Caye to fish the waters in the vicinity by the half day or full day – not Belize's best fishing, but can be good. The masseuse sets up the table on your dock, in your bedroom, wherever you want. Literally, I could grab my fly rod and walk out the back door onto the shallow flat that surrounds the island in pursuit of bonefish.....and find fish most times (guide not necessary). Price: range of \$995 to \$1,650 per night plus tax and gratuities, depending on the size of your villa. Includes everything (not the masseuse or guide), even drinks of your choice. A personal, private, and pampered experience – if you choose, no need to leave your villa for the entire stay – everything will be catered in. (see Erin and Glenn Prichett's report in the Nov newsletter or ask me for a copy).

CAYE CHAPEL

Over two-hundred acres that includes a championship 18 hole golf course – probably the only golf course within hundreds of miles in any direction. Nine spectacular air-conditioned beachfront, Florida style, two and three bedroom villas. Alternatively, eight smaller casitas, which are similar to a large motel room. Most meals are taken in the central clubhouse, but can be catered. Transportation supplied by golf cart. Caye Chapel is only a 20 minute boat ride via flats skiff from some of my favorite fishing areas in Belize and guiding can be arranged. Also, many of the lakes on the golf course have been stocked with snook (can't verify how many fish available). Unlimited golf is \$50 per day. Villas rent for \$1,000 per night for four persons with 5 night minimum. Casitas are \$300 per night per couple, three night minimum. Meal package per person is \$75 per day and includes villa snacks, sodas, and bottled water. The barrier reef is directly off the beach and can be viewed from the veranda's at the villas. Conference rooms available for corporate functions.

ADDITIONAL INFO: I will have my slides from our trip with me when I'm in the shop Thursday or personal presentations can be arranged.

ABOUT BELIZE: Small country located just south of the Mexican Yucatan – population of 250,000. Only English speaking country in Central America. A two hour flight from Houston or Dallas. We board an American or Continental flight at 6:30am in San Francisco, connect through Houston or Dallas, and arrive the same day in Belize City by mid-afternoon.

WHY I SPEND SO MUCH TIME FLY FISHING BELIZE?

More specifically, this is about why I keep returning to the Belize mothership trip with either Captain Martin McCord or Charles Westby. I have fished several different areas in Belize from lodges where I don't plan on returning so this “why I do this” article needs to be qualified. Why have we spent so much time annually since 1986 fishing with McCord and Westby from their Belize motherships? There must be some reasons to keep us going back. Here's our reasons:

- Personal experience shared only with whoever you brought with you and your crew, who are very experienced at respecting your privacy. This is not a party boat type affair – the Seaduction only takes two people and the Meca can handle a maximum party of three or four.

- Long days on the water with great guides who love to fish – usually start at 6:00am and quit at or after dark, with a short break after lunch. No “8 hour clock watchers” for guides.
- No long boat runs – you’re literally living where you fish and you can move your “home.”
- Accommodations are clean, comfortable, air conditioned and, with rare exception, “bug free.”
- Food is “good to great” – all fresh and prepared on board by the cook who has basically all day to prepare the meals.
- Control – schedule for meals, fishing, sleeping, etc is whatever you want it to be with some general guidelines if you want to max out the fishing time. Areas you fish and species you pursue are a joint decision with you and your captain/guide.
- Logistics – for international travel, about as easy as it gets. Board a plane in SF at 630 am, make one connection in Houston or Dallas and land in Belize City about 3:00pm that afternoon. The captain meets you as you clear customs and 20 minutes later you’re on the boat.
- Bonefish are a “filler,” not the main menu. It’s nice to have bonefish available if the primary species aren’t cooperating; but, for experienced salt water guys, they are a secondary species on this trip. Ten and twenty bonefish days can be had, however, hardly anyone spends the time necessary fishing for them to add up the numbers. For newcomers to salt water fly fishing, the shallow bonefish flats make spotting fish as easy as it gets.
- Finest permit fishing in the world and maybe the best year-round tarpon fishery. Each day on our recent December trip we saw 60 – 100 pound tarpon. These are resident fish, not the migratory variety which only show up during one or two months a year.
- Variety of fish and fishing environments – on more than half of the days of our recent trip, I did all of the following in the SAME DAY: cast to tailing bonefish, cast to big rolling tarpon, cast to permit on shallow flats, fished mangrove edges for snook and baby tarpon, sight fished baby tarpon and some of the big boys.
- Didn’t use my comb or wrist watch for the entire trip (with my remaining hair, a comb is not a big factor).
- As casual as it can be - no one to impress and who cares what you wear? It’s entirely up to you how casual you want to be.
- Until the fifth day of our recent trip, I did not see another fisherman!!!! One that day, a guide made the 90 minute boat run from Ambergris Cay to fish the area we were in and they were within sight for about 5 minutes.
- It’s a cool adventure living for a week on the sheltered waters inside the second largest barrier reef in the world with McCord and Westby.
- Value – there’s not a better value in the world of saltwater fly fishing. The Meca charters for \$8,800 for a group of four and the Seaduction \$5,800 for two. Those prices are virtually all-inclusive except for personal beverages and tips.

POTENTIAL DOWNSIDES

Weather – like most “world class” fisheries, weather can be a factor. It’s the tropics and it’s always changing. We were lucky on our recent trip to avoid any cold fronts which can affect Dec, Jan, Feb, and sometimes March trips. We had two days with very light winds, one day of heavy overcast and occasional rain (still was 80+ degrees), and three days of moderate to heavy winds.

Sight fishing – the overall experience of sight fishing to trophy fish is not a numbers game. An angler must be into the excitement of the hunt to appreciate this type of fly fishing.

Challenging casting – for our first several trips, we traveled to Belize with a bonefish fly rod and several spinning rods because we didn’t have the fly casting skills to deal with all the different situations which present themselves on this trip. Eventually, we developed the skills necessary to throw away the spinning rods.

Don’t like living on a boat for a week? Obviously, this could be a factor, although many people each year learn for the first time that this is a very private and comfortable overall experience.

Getting space – due to the large percentage of repeat clients, getting space on the Meca or Seaduction is difficult. Currently, there is one week open in each Feb, July, and Aug. Fall is still wide open.

Leland hosted trip August 9 – 16 still has space. Bush Street shop manager, Keith Westra, will once again be leading a group of six on a trip chartering both boats.

VIDEO AND DVD AVAILABLE:

We have a free video or DVD available on the Belize mothership trip. Let me know if you'd like a copy.

FANTASY STUFF - ADD THIS TO YOUR SALT WATER "MUST EXPERIENCE" LIST

It was a beautiful tropical evening and the sun was just getting ready to disappear below the horizon on the third day of our recent Belize trip. We were poling along a glassy, sheltered mangrove edge and I was casting my fly as close as possible to the branches (and far too often, into the mangroves). Snook had been the primary focus of this trip as it occurred during their spawning period and the numbers of fish in many mangrove areas were stronger than any other time of the year. On this particular cast, the fly dropped right on the edge and as I gave it a strip, a large snook darted out and grabbed it. I struck the fish hard, stunning him momentarily and, capitalizing on the momentum of his aggressive charge, pulled him away from the tangled root system which could have ended the battle quickly. My experienced guide immediately began moving the skiff away from the shoreline. This all happened in a heart beat and the fish was momentarily disoriented and began swimming into open water, away from the security of the mangroves. For a few minutes, we were safe as the fish appeared to wonder aimlessly. The guide was the first to note a change of demeanor and yelled, "get ready, he's going home." Go'in home he was and in a hurry – the fish had turned, and realizing he needed to find the security of the mangroves, had started a full out charge for the roots. Quickly, I took up the slack line and put a few wraps around my gloved hand. Experience had taught me that the moment of truth was coming – if he gained the sanctuary of the mangrove roots, he was free. I braced myself as the line tightened and my 9 wt rod bent to the pressure. The next few minutes were as intense as it gets. He had regained the brink and was only a yard from freedom. He repeatedly lunged for that yard, sometimes taking to the air with powerful head shakes, sending sunset enhanced spray in all directions. I held tight with all the strength I could muster, not giving an inch and hoping my five-foot, 40 pound leader section would hold and the rod didn't shatter. If you have fly fished for stripers, this struggle compares to trying to hold a fresh, powerful 10 pound striper in one place when he had other designs – both fish have a similar "bulldog" mentality. After what seemed like ten minutes, but was probably only two or three, he relented and allowed me to drag him from the edge. A few more weakened charges were all he had left before we put him on the scale, took the requisite photos, revived him, and watched him disappear under the overhanging branches. A shade under ten pounds was the weight and fifty pounds of thrills!! This was a special fish for more reasons than one – he completed my grand slam for the day adding some treasured memories to my salt water fly fishing collection. This was the second largest snook we took for the week – a 12 pounder was taken on the open flats and didn't supply the drama of the "mangrove mauler."

The sensation of stalking a medium to large permit or watching a tarpon cartwheel across the surface is well known, but a good-sized snook on the edge of the roots provides a seldom recognized experience that is very special.

LELAND-FRONTIERS AGENT AGREEMENT

In addition to the many great destinations that we represent, Leland Fly Fishing Adventures also has an agreement with Frontiers to represent all their properties (many of which we already book independently). If you are considering any of the destinations that Frontiers offers, please give us a call as it's virtually the same process as booking through Frontiers, and we need the "bonus points." And, we may have some personal experiences that can add to your knowledge and preparations.

Either phone or drop us an e-mail if you have questions or would like more information about any of our destinations.

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