

NEWSLETTER #4 - JUNE 2002

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This, the fourth of our monthly newsletters with updates on great fly fishing venues and insight for Our traveling fly fishers, has a focus on Western fly fishing destinations. We want to help you in your research for your next fly fishing destination – we've been most places and pride ourselves in the ability to research new locations. For the same cost as booking direct we get you unbiased information on timing and locations.

REPORT - WYOMING LODGE ON NO. PLATTE: Tony Brookfield and a friend fished this lodge in early April. This is a quality early (April) or late (Oct/Nov) season option for those looking for a non-summer Rockies' trout fix. Part of Tony's report states: "Peter and I had a great time on our North Platte trip.....we were joined by a group of seasoned fishermen who fish all over the world – they claimed that the North Platte is the best place for big trout (they have been back a half dozen times and will be returning in May)." Tony's full report is pasted in at the bottom of this newsletter.

THE RIGHT TOUCH FOR BEGINNING FLY FISHERS – MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN: This is the best time of year for those interested in learning to fly fish to make their plans because there are so many good options. The appeal of fly fishing has stimulated many to begin learning the sport. There are many ways to get started including some of the local programs conducted by the Leland shops. Maybe the most exciting way to get started is to reserve space at a renowned fly fishing lodge. This gives you a chance to learn while on the water with an experienced guide/teacher in a beautiful environment. Skills are developed and practiced for a concentrated period of time (3/4 days to a week) allowing you enough time to really establish a foundation upon which to build your fly fishing hobby.

In addition to the excellent teaching staff members in the shops, all the lodges/guides we work with are experts at training newcomers to the sport. From the outstanding approach for new lady fly fishers at Three Rivers Ranch to the North Platte or the Canadian wilderness with Moose Lake Lodge, there are many options to satisfy whatever your specific interests/family objectives may be. One of fly fishing's greatest rewards is the great places your fly rod can take you. This list includes the most beautiful and pristine environs our world has to offer. Over a period of several years, a newcomer to fly fishing could develop the skills that take them from catching/releasing their first 10 inch trout to, while using a fly less than three inches long, stalking and taking a 100 pound tarpon on the salt water flats of Belize. In between those two destinations could be stops at many places in our spectacular Rocky Mountains to Alaska, New Zealand, the Bahamas', the Andes of South America, etc. etc.

THREE NIGHT TETON AREA EXPERIENCE FOR CORPORATE GROUPS AND FAMILIES WITH LIMITED TIME AVAILABLE: When looking for quick and invigorating three night fly fishing and outdoor experience for newcomers and veterans alike in a first class Western Rockies' environment, it's hard to beat this one. The trip centers on an overnight float trip through the canyon of the South Fork of the Snake River in eastern Idaho. The canyon section has limited access, wonderful scenery and a productive fishery including native cutthroats, rainbows, and browns. The outfitters we work with hold many of the limited permits giving them access to guide fisherman through the canyon. They have a permanent tent camp set up in the canyon where comfortable accommodations and tasty meals are served. Couple the outdoor experience with upscale lodging and meals for the first and third night either in the Jackson Hole area or on the South Fork itself and it's the perfect answer for a limited time adventure.

BRITISH COLUMBIA WILDERNESS LODGE HAS COMBINATION OF TROUT, SALMON AND STEELHEAD: John Blackwell's Orvis endorsed Moose Lake Lodge and Dean River Lodge offer an attractive array of fishing venues and species. These are comfortable, isolated fly-in lodges. There is great fishing to be found at both locations within

walking distance or via guided horseback ride at Moose Lake Lodge. However, it's the helicopter or float plane fly out options that open up the varied possibilities. They can put you on with streams and coastal rivers where you can pursue a 100+ trout day on dry flies, silver and king salmon, or the famous Dean River steelhead all within the same week. Space is very limited, especially on the Dean River (one of our weeks on the Dean have been sold out for almost a year). Please plan ahead to book this experience. Now is the right time to begin thinking about the summer of '03.

THE TETON RIVER CANYON STRETCH – A PERSONAL FAVORITE: For a fly fishing venue to qualify on my list of favorites, it must have stunning scenery, productive fishing, and a feeling of separation from the rest of the world (i.e., the ability to enjoy the wonders without sharing it with numbers of others). One such place in the lower 48 is the float trip through the canyon stretch of the Teton River in eastern Idaho. The Teton is a river with many personalities, but it's greatest charms are found in the canyon section. Part of the charm is it's limited access – there are very few outfitters who have both the permits and the access through private property needed to fish this stretch. I have floated this section at least eight times during my stays at Three Rivers Ranch and have encountered only a few other fisherman during those drifts. It has also delivered the largest native fine spotted cutthroat I've ever caught (about 6 pounds) and it was taken on the surface – it's a primarily dry fly fishery. For a view of some of the dramatic rock formations that make the canyon special, see the photo essay my wife and I published in the ---- edition of Gray's Sporting Journal.

FIRST TRY RESULTS IN A TARPON, PERMIT AND BONEFISH GRAND SLAM: All Grand Slams are unique and treasured as a highlight of a salt water flats fishing career, but the one that's reported in this newsletter is EXTRA SPECIAL. Why? First, it was caught by a newcomer to salt water fly fishing - someone who had never before caught a permit or tarpon. Second, it was special to me because my wife and I happened to be at the lodge with this young man and his "child-bride" when he caught it and we got to share the excitement almost first hand. Third, because of the way it happened. Pasted in at the bottom of this newsletter is a report from Jim Arce on his EXTRA Special day. It's a good read and thanks to Jim for putting it together.

BAHAMA'S REPORT: DELUX ANDROS WEST SIDE BONEFISH LODGE: While on our recent trip to Andros Island in the Bahamas', Josh Frazier (Leland's owner) and I took the extended boat trip necessary to preview the ONLY lodge on the west side of Andros Island, Flamingo Cay. It's location on the West Side gives it access to fabulous flats that can't be practically reached from the East Side of Andros (there are no roads in the area and access is only by float plane). But it's location is just the beginning – the lodge itself has a wealth of character reflecting the Bethell family ownership which began in the 1920's. For many years the lodge was held just for personal family friends and was also host to the Duke of Windsor and other celebrities, primarily for waterfowl shooting. Today, hunting is still an attraction, but it's the fishing that is of primary interest to us. The operation is run by Charles Bethell III and is a strong candidate to make our list of hosted trips for '03.

A THREE PERMIT WEEK – AND THEY WERE THE FIRST THREE: Three permit in one week doesn't happen often – they are just toooo tough no matter how much experience the fisherman possesses. However, for Dr. Warren Parker fishing with Martin McCord aboard the Meca in April, there was nothing to it. Warren actually hooked four permit during his week in Belize and released three to 16.5 pounds. Most exciting was that these were the first three permit he's caught. He wasn't a complete novice – he's from Florida and had fished for permit before in southern Belize. All four ate a #2 Merkin fly. For details on this salt water adventure, check www.flyfishbelize.com

A LOOK AT TENTATIVE PLANS FOR OUR HOSTED TRIP PROGRAM FOR 2003: We are in the process of putting together our hosted trip program for 2003. This is like a venture down a fly fishing fantasy road as we look at all the possibilities for exciting fly fishing travel and try to assemble a group of outfitters and lodges that will offer a varied list of quality experiences for our clients and our shop staff. Of course, we will keep on our list some of the trips that have been successful such as New Zealand, Ladies Week at Three Rivers, the Minipi River Brookies, Belize mothership trips, Dean River/Moose Lake Lodge, Deschutes River and Smith River Float trips, etc. Some of the ideas we are considering adding are Mongolia for giant Taiman, an exclusive Bahama bonefish lodge, Boca Paila Lodge near Ascension Bay, a pristine tropical island experience in French Polynesia (near Tahiti) for bonefish and other saltwater species, Kamcatka (eastern Russia) for rainbows, steelhead, char and salmon, Tierra del Fuego, and a few others.

If you'd like to cast a vote for any of the trips listed or suggest something that isn't listed, please let me hear from you. Details will be finalized in the next few weeks.

2002 TRIP AVAILABILITY:

Belize mothership trip in Oct still has some space available

Smith River hosted trip is full, but a few opening are still available for other weeks

Deschutes June trip is full, but other trout weeks have openings

Deschutes September steelhead trip is open

2002 Minipi River has two openings remaining
2003 Minipi River July trip is full, but we will have another week on the Minipi
Dean River – both weeks for '02 full, but reservations are being taken for '03
Ladies Week at Three Rivers Ranch – July week is full, a few openings still for September.
Spots still available for September Alaska rainbow trout and Christmas Island Oct 27.
New Zealand for Feb '03 has openings

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COMPLETE NORTH PLATTE REPORT:

Peter and I had a great time on the North Platte (besides the hand cramps at the end of the trip). We had been concerned that the weather may not be great in early April in Wyoming, however, we had 60 to 70 degrees every day. Catching less than 20 fish each per day was considered a bad day (but who’s counting), and we caught nothing smaller than 15 inches - Mostly rainbows and a few cutbows. The guides were patient, superb oarsmen and skilled fish-finders - The lodge was comfortable, the food excellent and the hosts were friendly..

We were joined by a group of seasoned fishermen, who fish all over the world - They claim that the North Platte is the best place anywhere for lots of big Trout (they have been back a half dozen times and will be returning this May).

I’ll be back!

Tony Brookfield

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.

Sunday morning after breakfast, we got our assignments. Fernando was to be our guide for the week. He was a pleasant and enthusiastic young Mayan, who had spent little time outside the Yucatan. He barely spoke English and I barely spoke Spanish, but we enjoyed each other's company and communicated well during the week.

To my disappointment, that day Pat and I were to fish the mangrove lagoons for bonefish. There might be the occasional tarpon, but there would be no permit. Fernando guided us out to the flats through a maze of tunnels cut in the mangroves. The boat barely fit through some of the passages. Occasionally, we climbed out of the boat and pushed it while we clambered over the mangrove roots. We would then speed over a lagoon to the next narrow passageway.

There were numerous schools of bonefish on the shallow flats. We caught dozens, all on a pink crazy charlie. They averaged 2 to 3 pounds and fought well. The birds were even more numerous than the bonefish. We saw all varieties of waterfowl including herons, ducks and egrets. The most beautiful by far was the roseate spoonbill. Several flew close overhead, seemingly to check us out. They were bright shrimp pink with a bill shaped like a very large serving spoon. It was a wonderful day, but I wanted to fish for permit.

On Monday morning, February 28th, we headed to Espiritu Santo Bay. We took the truck south to the boat, embarked, and sped to the bay. The flats boat skipped over the waves and sprayed us with salt water. We urged Fernando to go faster; he pushed it to full throttle. We huddled under our rain slickers and giggled—we were finally going to chase permit!

Fernando slowed the boat as we reached the southern shore of the bay. He brought us close then cut the throttle. We looked over my flies and selected one: a size 4 Velcro body crab pattern with rubber legs and grizzly saddle hackle claws. I tied it on my 10 weight rod and sharpened the hook while he readied the boat. He climbed on the poling platform and I climbed on the casting platform. We were ready.

We poled along a flat that seemed to go on forever. The water was a clear aquamarine with light dancing off the surface; it was mesmerizing. I stood poised on the bow of the boat with the fly line coiled at my feet. My arm was cocked ready to cast at a moments notice. Our eyes searched the water in all directions. We saw sunken logs, rocks and the occasional barracuda and ray, but no permit.

Then, there they were. Two black scimitars waving gently above the water: a pair of tailing permit at three o'clock. I tensed as we poled into casting range. I had been fly-fishing for over three decades, but had never felt such excitement. Now, they were within 70 feet. The water, the air, my body, everything felt electric.

They were gone faster than they appeared. Spooked by the approaching boat they shot out of sight quicker than my eyes could follow. I breathed for the first time in an eternity. I got saw two more pair of permit that day. Once, I was even able to get off a cast before they spooked. They ignored the fly completely.

We got home at sunset, drained. Fernando looked at my flies again. He liked the Velcro crab, but said the grizzly saddle hackles were too dark. That night after dinner I tied a few new crabs: a Velcro body trimmed in an oval, lead eyes tied with chartreuse thread, white rubber legs with silver flecks, white saddle hackle claws, and a pearl flashabou mouth. I named it the "Monday Crab".

Tuesday morning was Leap Year Day—February 29th. We headed back down to Espiritu Santo Bay. I tied on and sharpened a Monday Crab as we headed south. We reached the flats, and Fernando began poling the shore. I stood on the bow and peered expectantly through the water.

Fernando saw them first: a trio of permit at 100 feet and closing fast. We waited until they were at 65 feet and then I cast about 5 feet in front of them. The crab fluttered to the bottom and the permit paused. Strip slowly Fernando said, and keep stripping. On the second strip the fly just stopped, the permit stopped and my heart stopped. I stripped one more time to set the hook, then came up with the rod tip.

The permit peeled off line as I let him run. In a heartbeat he was well into my backing. I kept the rod high and my hand away from the reel until he finally tired. I began to reel, bringing him in slowly. I had recovered half the line when he set off on another hard run. This time he took me to where I could see the bottom of the spool before he stopped. I reeled as fast as I could, barely recovering the line before he ran again.

After four long runs, the permit changed its tactics. He began to circle the boat at a distance, turning sideways against the pressure of the line. It seemed like stalemate for a while, but gradually I was able to bring him closer. After more than twenty minutes, I finally got him to the boat. Fernando tailed him, and lifted him aboard. He was about 18 pounds.

I think it was his eyes that were the most magical. They were large, gentle and alive; somehow he seemed more aware than any fish I had caught before. He had a subtle beauty that was majestic: a silver and pale blue body, with subdued yellow tones and dark blue fins. And his lips looked like they had been drawn by Disney himself, round and whimsical. He was the most beautiful fish I had ever caught.

Pat took some pictures, I kissed him on the nose, and we set him free. Fernando poled us to shore and we had lunch under some pine trees. I was still tingling with the excitement of catching my first permit.

After lunch, we headed across the bay to the north. We were going to the lagoon of a large river to seek tarpon. I had never fished for tarpon before and was excited to give it a try. I tied on a leader with an 80 pound shock tippet as we crossed the bay, and put on a tarpon fly—a Black Death, that I had tied for just this occasion. I kept sharpening it nervously until we reached the river.

We entered the mouth of the river and went up a deep channel. After a quarter of a mile the bottom came up quickly. We crossed a shallow bar and headed towards the center of the lagoon. The prop cut a swath through the shallow grass and churned up the muddy bottom leaving a dark trail behind us. Fernando cut the motor and began poling.

The water was murky from recent rains and there was a slight chop on the water. I saw nothing but Fernando soon sighted tarpon. They were moving quickly through the water. I made casts to several pods with no takes. A few fish followed but refused the fly.

I changed patterns to one I had created in my living room--a modified Cockroach with two pairs of ginger grizzly saddle hackle wings layered over orange squirrel tail. We tested it by the boat and it had great movement in the water. Fernando saw another pod of tarpon approaching and I cast in front of them. I let the fly sit for a moment then began making short and quick strips.

A powerful jolt shocked my arm. I pulled the rod to one side and tugged the line hard three times to set the hook. The tarpon exploded from the water throwing its body into the air with reckless abandon. The fish flung itself into the air repeatedly, gills flaring and tail flailing with summersaults and leaps that would do a gymnast proud. Then one long run and it was over.

We boated the 35 pound tarpon. It looked positively prehistoric. The large scales seemed like armor and the huge mouth felt like cement. Pat took a picture and we put it back in the water, no kiss for this fish.

It was only two p.m., we had landed a permit and tarpon, and we were just a bonefish away from a grand slam. What an incredibly lucky day! I stowed the 10 weight, rigged up my 8 weight, and tied on a pink crazy charlie. We headed to the bonefish flats, at the far north end of the bay.

We went back across the lagoon towards the river mouth, the prop again chewing up the bottom. We had almost reached the bar at the entrance to the deep channel when the motor conked out. Fernando pulled hard on the starter rope several times. Nothing. He checked the gas, looked at me and shrugged his shoulders. Plenty, he said. Again, he tried to start the motor. Again, nothing.

Pat and I just sat there while Fernando set to work. He pulled out a kit with tools and spare parts and took off the cover. He tested the fuel lines, nothing. He checked all the connections, nothing. He replaced the spark plugs, nothing. We sat there while the afternoon slowly passed, dreams of a grand slam fading as the shadows lengthened.

We sat while schools of needlefish and milkfish swam by. I asked Fernando if bonefish came through here, but he said no, it was not a good time or place for bonefish. We waited as patiently as possible. I caught the occasional small needlefish to keep amused.

Hours later he found the problem. As best I understood it had to do with the waterpump being clogged with mud. He took it off, flushed it out, and reassembled the motor. It started on the first pull. We raced out the channel, into the bay and headed north. It was nearing sunset, we had to get to the bonefish flats, and we had a long way to go. Fernando ran the motor flat out.

We arrived at the flats at the golden hour. The sun was beginning to set, and the glare on the surface made it impossible to see into the water at any distance. We kept circling the flats, but only saw fish when we were right on top of them. We spooked several bonefish and a small permit, but could not get off a cast.

The sun was below the horizon when we turned back towards the west. There against the sky we saw the tails of several bonefish flashing in the fading sunlight. Fernando quietly poled the boat closer. We ground to a stop on a sand bar, too far away to cast. The fish hesitated, but resumed feeding.

I slipped quietly over the side of the boat and wading cautiously towards the tailing fish. At 60 feet, I made the cast and dropped the fly softly to one side of the school. I let it sit for an eternity, then began stripping the fly in slowly. A bonefish hit right away. After several runs, I tailed the two pound bonefish. The grand slam was ours.

We laughed, shook hands and hugged. Pat took several pictures of the two of us with the fish. I kissed the bonefish gently on the nose and returned her gently to the water. I don't know who was more excited, Fernando or I.

I helped Fernando push the boat off the sand bar then climbed in. He started the motor, turned the boat around and we headed home. It was almost dark when we saw the lights of the boats coming towards us. We were hours late and the other guides were starting to search for us. In our excitement, we had forgotten to use our radio to notify them.

They followed us to the beach where we moored the boats and waded ashore. The rest of our group was waiting for us. They all gathered round while Fernando and I told the story of our amazing success. Then we piled in the trucks and headed home. We celebrated joyously well into the night.

Before our trip, someone had told me that to catch a permit, you not only had to do everything right, the stars had to be lined up, too. That Leap Year day, when I caught my first permit and my first tarpon and landed a bonefish at sunset, the stars and all the planets were with us. And, as luck would have it, we had Fernando, who was not only a fine guide, but fortunately, a great mechanic.

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