



(This two-part report comes from Mickey Myhre and friend, Craig Trask, who recently sampled fly fishing the salt water flats for the first time. Along with Dave Simington and Jeff Cordill, they chartered the Meca in Belize as their “floating lodge” to access the shallow water flats protected by the world’s second largest barrier reef. Even though neither had any experience prior to the trip, both Mickey and Craig were determined to enjoy success at sight casting a fly to bonefish, tarpon, snook, and permit,. Both took casting lessons and practiced the skill before departing for Belize. As a backup, they also brought along spinning equipment just in case the fly casting frustration level became unmanageable.)



[Part 1 – Casting The Flats, The Learning Curve, by Mickey Myhre](#)

[Part 2 – First Tarpon Experiences, by Craig Trask](#)

Part 1

It’s been difficult writing about our recent Belize trip, in part because the experience was so special and enriching that I don’t want to call hordes of ingrates in to what I view as an experience so special it almost ought to be earned. But as I, we, came in completely green it is perhaps overly selfish of me to want to reserve that experience.

As you know, none of our group had any credible experience with fly casting prior to this trip. I had been excited about the possibilities of fly fishing by Winston Moore some years ago. I had desire but essentially no experience casting prior to this trip. At your insistence, and that of others, I got some instruction casting here in Boise, and practiced in my back yard prior to the trip, but in retrospect, while those experiences were helpful, I showed up in Belize knowing really almost nothing.



The first two days Craig and I fished with Captain Dean who later described our initial casting as "beating the water with a mop." It was, in retrospect, a good thing that Craig brought conventional gear on which we caught our first fish, for me a 16 pound Jack Crevalle on 10 pound spin gear - exciting but not why I came to Belize. I wanted to learn to sight cast a fly on the saltwater flats, in some large part out of my immense admiration for Winston Moore.

The first two days were trying, but Dean, our guide, patiently reinforced what we were doing right without making us feel bad about what we did badly. Somewhere in that second day I realized that casting was art, that I'm good at art, and that if I just felt the line and made it do something beautiful it would all be alright.

That day we encountered a large school of permit and, following that idea, I cast to them. The first cast landed close enough to the school that three of them came out from the school to chase the fly but didn't take it. I continued casting to them in that spirit for what felt like ten or fifteen minutes, afterwards to find out that it had been over an hour--and that I'd been casting 75 feet, per Dean, "like a

pro", dropping the fly wherever he suggested. No takes. But the thrill invigorates me now and I think it will forever.



First Bone



Jack Crevalle



Barracuda



Carol the cook

Truth be told, we started out awful, thought we were good by day two, but we improved immensely each day. By trip's end, it was fairly routine to drop flies into ten inch slots in the mangroves for snook, forty feet off.

Did we catch boatloads of fish? Nothing that'd qualify for fish porn movies, but we caught bonefish pretty easily when we could see them, each caught tarpon on a fly and other fish, but the quality of the trip has, in my book, nothing at least now to do with the fish count - to me, it was beautiful casts on those lovely silent flats which made this one of the most richly rewarding experiences of my entire life.

And to those like me, who may be afraid of undertaking this trek for fear of the difficulty, knowing their personal and/or technical weaknesses, I'd tell them that saltwater flats fishing is difficult, but not that difficult, and the rewards far exceed the price paid in learning and getting there, at least for me.

Since returning home, I've been traveling and in my fourth hotel in four days but all I think about, dream about, concentrate on, are a few images of beautiful casts in beautiful spots in Belize..... the trip became magical, dreamlike, wonderful for me. I'm so glad we went I can't begin to tell you.

Part 2

What an unbelievable adventure we had on the Meca. I'll never forget the excitement of our very first time leaving the mothership in the skiff. Just 15 minutes out, as we rounded the corner at St. George's Caye, having no clue as to what's next or where we're going, and never even having cast a fly on water, Dean, our guide, pointed at an empty sea like Captain Ahab, saying only one word...."Tarpon". The setting was spectacular, with calm, flat, water so clear it looked like the boat is floating on air, two feet above the sea floor. At first we didn't see the fish. I was looking several hundred yards out on the horizon. Then suddenly, only 50-75 feet from the boat, a 50 pound tarpon gracefully rolled on the surface. All the lessons I had taken in the park and weeks of practice on grass didn't help this situation at all. I was so excited.....I never got the fly in the water. Within five seconds of being "on deck," I had stripped line wrapped up in flip flops, the fly was snagged on my shirt sleeve, and I was waving the rod around like I was signaling a rescue ship. It took ten minutes to get me untied. The tarpon was gone and I was relieved of my post.



It only took about 10 minutes for the next tarpon to be sighted. My partner Mickey, in a fog of adrenaline and all tied up in fly line, didn't do much better, and ended up coining a phrase that stuck with us for the whole trip..."operational issues". About this time the guide yelled, "for God's sake man, throw out the Mirro-Lure with the spinning rod." I did. In a millisecond the tarpon slammed the lure and leaped in the air. He was out of the water more than he was in. After about 15 minutes I had him to the boat, but he shot under the keel and jumped on the opposite side of the boat cutting the line and was gone. That was our first hour ever fishing the salt water flats. I'm not sure a fly line ever touched the water.

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Big Bone



Casting At Dark



Mangroves – the roots



Barracuda

No amount of practice can prepare a first-time flats fisherman for the moment he sees his first rolling tarpon. It's a LONG WAY from the "dip-and-strip" method of trout fishing. I am happy to say, after a couple days our casting lessons and practice did pay off. By day three we had caught some bonefish, and were casting with good accuracy and far fewer "operational issues". The next time we cast to tarpon was in the mangroves and the outcome was different. I made a 75' cast into the direction the tarpon was swimming. I never saw him hit the fly, but what a blast it was. At the boat, the guide pulled a scale and put it in a box with the fly as a souvenir (tarpon with Craig above left).

Mickey, with the guide quietly pushing the boat with his pole in pursuit of a fish, finally got in position for a long cast to a tarpon. After several casts fell short of the quickly moving fish, it suddenly turned around and was swimming toward us. Mickey made a perfect double-haul, with one false cast, and dropped the Orange Grizzly right on his nose. The tarpon took the fly and exploded. It was a work of art (and Mickey was hard to live with that night). Within an hour that day, we had both caught our first tarpon on the fly.

All four of us on the trip are hooked. Sight fishing for tarpon is more like stalking a mule deer than fishing. I can't imagine ever going back to blindly fishing in salt water again.



Photo credits: Mickey Myhre, Craig Trask, Dave Simington and Jeff Cordill