



VARIETY IN BELIZE

The focus of this report, from a trip on the mothership *Rising Tide* in Belize, is variety and the variety comes in several different forms:

- **VARIETY of angling background:** only one of the group had any extensive saltwater experience and two had never fly fished at all previously.
- **VARIETY of angling approach:** both fly and spin gear was utilized by this group of five.
- **VARIETY of fishing environments:** they fished the flats for bonefish, permit and tarpon; the mangrove edges and jungle river for baby tarpon and snook; and the reef for barracuda and whatever else they could find.
- **VARIETY of species:** their “catch list” included what Belize is famous for in its shallow inshore waters – large tarpon, baby tarpon, bonefish, permit, snook, barracuda, jacks, snappers, and a few very strange reef fish.
- **VARIETY of weather:** tropical weather is generally fickle, and on this trip, it ranged from paradise to some heavy downpours.



There were several constants also:

- **Guides:** from Marty who was experiencing the challenges of casting a fly in a saltwater environment for the first time.....“Guides were remarkable. Worked very hard for long hours and were mostly patient with my casting skills (or lack thereof).”
- **Comfort level of the *Rising Tide*:** from Rob - “Very comfortable. Food excellent. Crew very helpful and a lot of fun.”



and Marty Mikelsons.

- **Fun:** This group knew how to have fun. I was in Belize at the same time on the mothership *Meca* and we were in constant communication including getting together one evening for dinner. I’m sure that the fishing gods cooperation had something to do with it, but this group would probably have had fun living together on the beautiful inshore waters of Belize even if the fish would not have cooperated.
- **Photos:** they put together a great collection of photos from which this photo essay is assembled.

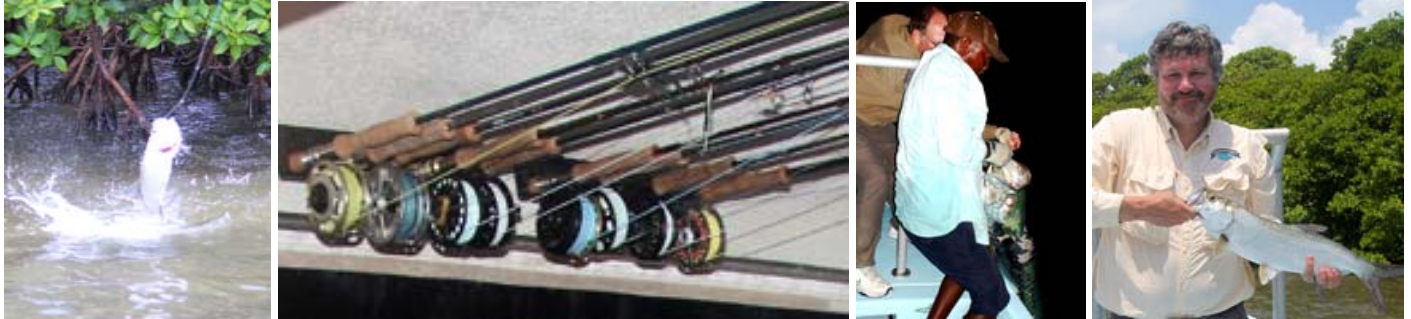
The group from left to right: Ulf Hillgren, Rob Pizzie, John Landis, Mike Cirello,

At right, the 58’ floating lodge for the week, the *Rising Tide*, is at anchor in a sheltered cove. The skiffs used for fishing the shallow flats, mangrove edges, and reef are towed behind the large boat. In this photo, the skiffs are departing after breakfast for the mornings fishing pursuits. They will return in four or five hours, depending on the progress of the fishing, for lunch. All the meals are prepared around the fishing schedule.



The permit may be the top fly rod angling prize in Belize (or anywhere else), but the tarpon (at right, above) is probably the most spectacular of the species pursued in Belize. The group jumped a dozen tarpon ranging from “baby tarpon” on the mangrove edges to their parents and grandparents that ranged to 70 – 80 pounds and up. Five of those fish were hooked on flies and a total of six were released at the boat, half of those six taken with flies and the other half with MirrOlures.

Top, L to R: Baby tarpon from mangrove roots, rods and reels at rest for the night, Marty’s 75+ pound tarpon finally to the boat after dark, John with baby.

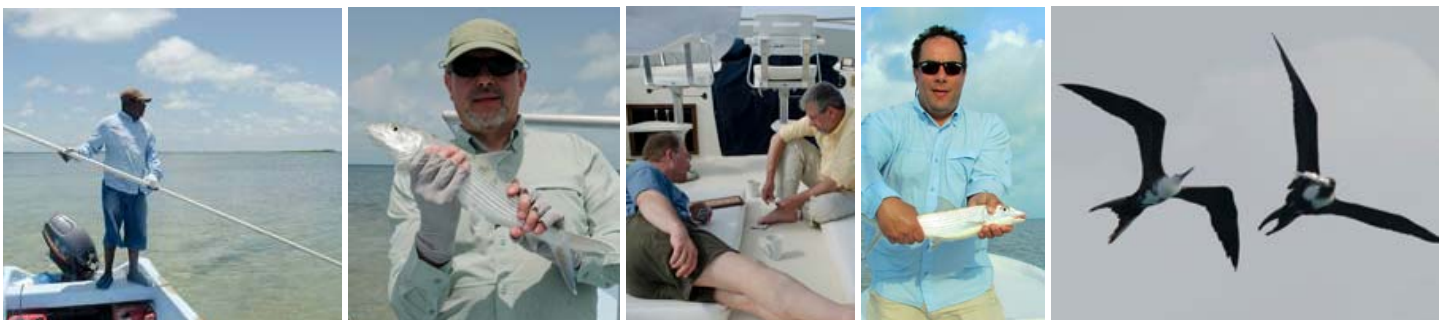


L to R: tarpon from afar, searching tarpon flat, tired big fish near the skiff, baby weighed on the boga.



For fly rodders, sightfishing for bonefish and permit on the flats is a priority. Taking their first bonefish on a fly was a thrill for some of the group. Many good shots at tailing permit were found on the flats just inside the barrier reef – as is the “norm” for permit, most were unrewarded. However, Mike achieved the “Holy Grail” of fly fishing by taking his first permit on a fly.....and he did it before he caught his first bonefish and with the first permit he had ever seen!

Below, L to R: Poling a bonefish flat, Rob with bone, Marty and Rob “relax” while motoring with a game of cribbage on the flying bridge, Mike with first bonefish, frigate birds fight over a fish



Above, L to R: three skiffs in tow while moving the big boat, cutting the salt with a limeade and rum before dinner, dinner and wine await, chef Velda doing her magic in the kitchen, queen bed in master stateroom.

Below, L to R: Mike with permit on near the reef, permit fins and tails above the surface raise the pulse rate, Mike with first permit, permit release.



The Belize barrier reef is the second largest in the world (next to Australia's) and is home to coral gardens and a great variety of tropical species. Trolling near the reef can produce barracuda and some unique reef species. The stunning lionfish below was taken off the reef and Ulf released a 3 foot houndfish. The Jack Creville are a hard hitting and aggressive sport fish. Over 20 jacks and 'cуда were captured, mostly on spinning equipment although both will take a fast moving fly.

Below, L to R: Belize barrier reef, lionfish, Rob with 'cуда, Ulf with Jack



Below, L to R: Mike with nice Jack, John with 'cуда, Velda's lobster with garlic butter sauce, Marty and Ulf with Jack double, John and Marty examine the "fly of the day" on the rear deck of the Rising Tide.



The weather turned ugly the last two days so the Rising Tide was moved closer to the mainland, near Belize City where their departure airport was located. The fishing focus turned to baby tarpon and snook, a challenging predatory stalker, on the edge of the mangroves and a jungle river. Nine snook were taken (4 on flies by Rob), most were in the 6 to 8 pound range with a large fish of 12#. This area also has bonefish and tarpon flats that can fish well, with the right weather patterns, and is home to some productive jungle river mouths.

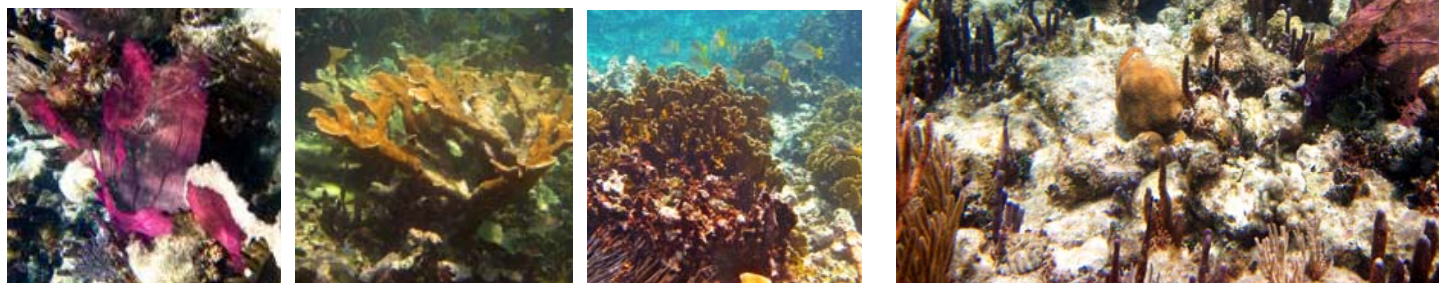
From this locale, it is just a 15 minute drive to the international airport and the flight back to the USA. Miami, Dallas, and Houston are the most often used US connection points, although there are direct flights from other airports as well.



L to R: casting to the mangrove edges, John with snook, Ulf in downpour, snook to skiff, Mike with good snook



What is there to do on a mothership trip? Obviously, fishing is the main reason people are there.....it's eat, fish, sleep, fish, drink, fish, relax, fish. Some anglers like to mix in some snorkeling or scuba diving. Also, you can visit some of the small islands near the reef. Marty, Ulf, and Rob did some snorkeling and Marty did an excellent job of underwater photography in capturing the essence of the coral gardens on the Belize reef (right and below).



Below, L to R: My fishing partner, Frank Jackson, and I anchored the *Meca* for two nights in the same mangrove cove with the *Rising Tide*. We all got together (Frank in green shirt) for dinner on the *Rising Tide*. The crew – guides Edwin and Noel, Velda, and Captain Dean;



Comments from the group leader, John: "I have been fishing with members of this group for 25 years. In the past, all of our fishing trips were to lakes in Ontario, Canada. The Belize trip was our first trip together in saltwater and our first trip where we stayed on the boat. We enjoyed the boat experience and the variety of fishing venues and fish in this pristine marine environment. Even though 2 of our members had no fly fishing experience, the guides were great instructors to all and we all improved our skills."

PHOTO CREDITS: Ulf Hillgren, Rob Pizzie, John Landis, Mike Cirello, and Marty Mikelsons.

An enthusiastic traveling fly fisherman,
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