



Bonefish Flat, Belize

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PLAYA BLANCA TRIP REPORT

It's tradition at Playa Blanca, after freshening up from a tough day on the tropical flats of Espiritu Santo Bay, to gather beachside for pre-dinner cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, and share stories about what was and what might have been. L to R around the table is Mark Andersen, Arran Andersen, Tim Quattlebaum, yours truly, Sterling Andersen, and Mike Buck. From a salt water flats experience viewpoint, we were a mixed bag. The Andersen family were novices; Tim was on his second trip to Playa B; Mike had traveled from Germany and was on his sixth time fishing the Sian Ka'an Biosphere; and I had fished the waters of the biosphere since the mid 80's.



The Sian Ka'an Biosphere is a protected marine preserve that covers over 100 miles of coastline and 1.3 million acres located in the Mexican Yucatan, beginning just south of the Mayan ruins at Tulum. Most important to a flats fly fisher, the biosphere provides excellent habitat for permit, tarpon, snook, bonefish, jacks, barracuda, and snappers. There are no roads accessing the world class lodge of Playa Blanca – we had congregated in Cancun to take a charter flight to the lodge.

Photos below, l to r: newcomers Sterling and Arran had a great introductory first day to fishing the flats, together releasing over 20 bonefish and using Corona's to celebrate their day. Arran would get his first permit on day two, with a cast to a single cruising permit – an amazing beginning to fishing the flats for the first time! The boys would allow Dad to take the largest baby tarpon.



The guide is critical, especially for inexperienced anglers. Mark commented about the guides: "Each one had decades of experience and could spot fish, seemingly a mile away! They were especially skilled in maneuvering our skiff to give us the best shot at casting to the target."

Photos below, l to r: Tim with a barracuda; Mike shows off a cuda's serious teeth and displays a great snook; our skiffs departing for a day on the bay; Arran may have taken sun-protection to a new level.



Photos below, l to r: Mangrove lagoons produced lots of action with baby tarpon – Sterling with one that literally jumped into the boat and had to be corralled; Arran with a healthy baby; the guide displays one of six that Tim released that day; baby tarpon in the air; Arran fulfilling a Playa Blanca tradition – celebrating your first permit by swallowing a scorpion with a shot of tequila.



Photos below, l to r: “Mexico Night” is part of the week; Mark with a bone and winding his way through a mangrove channel; I want to find that permit again after he grows into that dorsal fin – he was one of three for me bringing me to #87.



Arran on the week: “Espiritu Santo Bay was a magical destination for us first time saltwater fly fishers. Its picturesque flats and bays offer anglers an opportunity to hone their skills catching bonefish, while cruising permit await. And the baby tarpon present in the mangrove lagoons are guaranteed to get your heart pumping with aggressive takes and aerial acrobatics.”

JOIN US AT PLAYA BLANCA? – In the next 15 months, we have three trips planned to Playa Blanca – this Sept 13 – 20; next June 20 – 27 and Sept 12 – 19. Each of those weeks has one or two skiffs/guides still available. If you’d like more info, just hit “reply” and ask.

RISING TIDE, BELIZE: “MOST FUN GROUP EVER!”

The crew of the Rising Tide has seen a lot of fun groups of friends and families over the last 20+ years; however, the crew voted the colorful group of gents in the photo below as “the most fun group ever.” From left to right, John Davisson, John Landis, Al Schrader, Shelly Craft, and Denny Poor - this group of high school friends were here to recapture the fun and excitement from their first Rising Tide trip together in 2013.



Al spoke for the group with his report on the trip: “The time on the Rising Ride was one of the best all-around experiences of my life. A trip with four friends I went to high school with and later attended Kent State University, was made damn near perfect by Captain Dean and crew. I learned more about fishing in one week than in the rest of my life. Great to get out of my element and concentrate on fishing. The cooks made excellent meals. Nice to be tired, not from stress or the emotionally draining practice of law, but from the physical effort of fighting tarpon, barracuda, snook, jacks, snappers, and other tropical fish. Can’t wait to go back.”

Group leader, John Landis, on his first Rising Tide trip years ago, had a very rare experience: after looking for permit for two days, he hooked and released the first two permit he ever cast too! However, the permit gods got even on this trip, providing many “almost” type results. Denny came closest to permit success on the current trip. After getting some fly fishing tips from the Captain, he actually had a permit eat his fly, but then the fish crushed the crab fly and turned the hook flat against the body so no hook-up.

Photos l to r: Baby tarpon provided their usual thrills; John D. with a “baby.” Shelly’s tarpon is a little large for a “baby?” Rising Tide at anchor.



Photos l to r: three pangas were towed to use for fishing. Pictured are the three pangas being towed as they change anchorages at sunset; Al holds a jack – jacks contributed a lot of the action; John has Denny examine a barracuda’s dental work; Shelly was the ‘cud king.



Photos l to r: Weather can change rapidly in the tropics – an afternoon thunderhead builds; John, Denny, and Al waiting for Shelly to get to the breakfast table; Denny gives it one last try as the sun sinks below the horizon.



Photos l to r: Denny celebrates fresh caught fish for dinner. Mealtime was a highlight with fresh fruit, lobster, fresh baked specialties, fresh squeezed juices, and other local delights. Captain Dean (at left) with the Rising Tide crew.



LEGENDARY NZ GUIDE GOES SALTY



25 years ago, during the first week of our first ever trip to New Zealand in 2000, we fished with a guide reputed to be a legend among the great Kiwi trout guides, Dennis Ward (holding brown trout in photo). Indeed, Dennis, now retired, is a legend and also, through all these years, a good friend.

In a recent email exchange, he informed me he had become a big fan of salt water flats fishing and was curious about my permit experiences. In addition to fishing some of the coastal waters in NZ, he has been pursuing shallow water flats fishing in Australia and the South Pacific.

Below, l to r, is Dennis with some victories from the salt – Giant Trevally, Queenfish, Bluefin Trevally



PERMIT - THREE HOURS OF CRUEL AND UNUSUAL PUNISHMENT

This saga begins on the shallow flat pictured below, with the glare from the setting sun playing a role. Water on this flat gets very shallow (inches deep) on the outgoing tide. Our floating lodge, the Rising Tide, was anchored a few hundred yards away as we wrapped up a day of pursuing permit on the flats of Belize. I was joined on the trip by Art Hinckley, my permit mentor and the man responsible for me creating a personal quest to release 100 permit by time I turned 85 years old. The “good news” part of this day is that Art would take a tailing fish of 11# (photo - left) - his 135th permit released.



Part of the process of me releasing 84 permit to date is encountering huge portions of frustration, rejection, and disappointment; on the flip side, there have been exciting, thrilling, and memorable angling experiences forever etched into my memory cells. However, in all the years of pursuing permit, there has never

been so much disappointment and frustration crammed into one, short three-hour period.

It's a beautiful evening if you're not staring directly into the glare of that setting sun in the photo. We had spotted a smallish tailing permit about 150 feet away. As we poled as quickly as possible toward that tail, he began moving left, toward the glare. As we approached casting distance, he was moving slowly, occasionally stopping to eat, a few feet to the right of the glare. As I cast, he moved directly into the glare and stopped there, tailing. Although the sun was threatening to fry our retinas, we could see the motion of the rings from his movement. Hoping the fly was in the right place, I stripped it slowly. Bingo – he eats and fish on. He left a wake as he rocketed across that shallow flat and into my backing. I'm beginning to celebrate #85 as we get him near our panga.....then into the net....a very large (for Belize) bonefish in the five pound range. Nice fish, but damn!!!



The next morning, we're on the water at 6:00am and off to check out a white sand patch in the midst of a large area of dark bottomed turtle grass, about 80 yards from an old rusted out barge. A few days earlier, we had found a school of very large permit on that sandy patch and hooked a large fish of approx 20# that found his way into that rusty barge and broke me off. This morning, we again found a school of permit on that patch and they were in a spawning mode, daisy chaining....cast to the edge of the chain and one fish moved out and ate the fly, but didn't hook up. The chain broke up with fish sort of milling around.....recast quickly. Hook up! Again, I'm assuming #85 will be in the net, and, yes, the fish is in the net – a very large Mutton Snapper. Nice fish, but damn!!!

Next, we returned to the shallow flat from the night before, one of my favorite all time permit flats. Soon after we begin poling, we spotted a pod of small permit tailing and eating aggressively. Perfect! Cast is there, one eats, but not hooked....keep stripping and another eat. Fish on.....streaking off....yeah, this should be #85! You gotta be kidding me....another large bonefish! Years ago, we used to occasionally find bones on this flat, but not recently and never in any significant numbers. And to top it off, the bonefish wasn't even hooked – he had the crab fly wedged sideways in his throat.....the hook had been turned flat against the body of the crab pattern when the initial permit had eaten and that fly wasn't going to hook anything. All of us who have spent many hours fishing the flats, have experienced casting to a pursued fish and had an unseen, small snapper, or jack interfere and eat the fly. But to have that happen on essentially three consecutive casts, in the situations that occurred here, seemed as if the fishing gods were dealing me some cruel and unusual punishment.

Disappointed, headed back to breakfast on the Rising Tide. I would finish this trip still at 84 permit released.

WHAT WE DO AT FLY FISHING ADVENTURES

This is a link with a description of who we are and what we do.....also, it lists the destinations around the world where we can provide reliable information and help you prepare for your trip: [Fly Fishing Adventures - About What We Do](#)

JUNE MEMORY PHOTOS



Henry and John Gans are a globe-trotting father-son fly fishing team who have been fishing together since Henry was a young boy. The Amazon produces an amazing and varied array of sport fish. The most often pursued is the Peacock Bass, held by John Gans in the middle photo above. Flanking John's peacock are a pair of Arapaimas, one of the largest freshwater fish on the planet. This air breathing Amazon monster is a seldom

taken trophy. John (left) and Henry (right) combined for one of the most unique ever fly rod combo's with a pair of Arapaimas....truly the stuff of memories.

Photo credits: Banner photo – John Landis; Playa Blanca – Arran Andersen, Sterling Andersen, Mark Andersen, Tim Quattlebaum, and Mike Buck; Rising Tide – John Landis, John Davisson, Al Schrader, Shelly Craft, and Denny Poor; NZ Guide – Dennis Ward; Permit – Art Hinckley;

An enthusiastic traveling fly fisherman,

Don Muelrath

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