



MICHIGAN (TAR|NOV.2018):JIM PRYAL

DATELINE: NEW MEXICO

Subscriber Report
Sometimes, Routine Things
Are Anything But



Editor Note: Reader, Jim Aylsworth just filed this report on theanglingreport.

com and it's full of great info on fishing the Rio Grande River system near the borders of New Mexico and southern Colorado. Jim writes:

Because I have done this hundreds, if not thousands, of times before, planning another trout fishing trip was routine. I worked with an outfitter out of Santa Fe, New Mexico, called Land of Enchantment Guides (LOE Guides). My buddy Jack Handey had used them for fishing in southern Colorado and gave them a strong endorsement.

Initially, I had trouble booking the trip. First, the woman who booked Jack and Marta Handey's trip had quit. So Noah Parker, the guy in charge, caught that my email had gone unanswered. He said he needed some time, since I was asking for an exception to one of their

standard trips. (I wanted to book one day less in order to spend Father's Day with my family in Sugar Land, Texas.) After a couple of weeks, it all got sorted out, and the trip was booked and paid for.

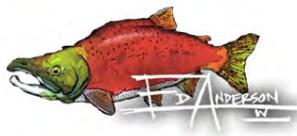
I drove the seventeen hours from Sugar Land to Chama, New Mexico. In order to avoid the whole "routine trip" stuff, I stopped in Santa Fe on the way and spent some time in the old downtown. It has changed a great deal since my last visit forty years ago.

On the drive up US Highway 84 north from Santa Fe I went through the most beautiful red rock canyons and remembered the way Georgia O'Keeffe painted them, as well as her famous New York skyscrapers and her paintings of enlarged flowers. There is an old quote from her: "Nobody sees a flower really; it is so small. We haven't time, and to see them takes time—like to have a friend takes time."

Then it hit me: there is no such thing as a routine fly-fishing trip. When I get to see the beauty of God's nature up close and personal, and then spend time with friends on top of that, it is far from ordinary—it is extraordinary. So my attitude changed, despite the grueling drive. Suddenly I was not tired, I was excited and filled with childlike wonder as I drove around the national forests of northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. I saw countless deer, some antelope and even a coyote crossed the road not too far in front of me on my drive north.

Since I now had all this newfound energy, I decided to keep going past Chama to Pagosa Springs, Colorado. I am sorry to report that at the time of my visit the national forest was closed.

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IN THIS ISSUE

New Mexico
Miles from Ordinary in the
Land of Enchantment
Pages 1-3

Editor's Column
Class 1s
in Session
Page 4

Upper Peninsula
Bowling to a Different King
in the Other Michigan
Pages 3-7

Bahamas
A Bahamian-Owned
Mothership Option
Pages 7-8

Brazil
An Exploratory Trip
to the Curicuriari River
Pages 9-11

Zambia
Trophy Tigerfish
at Matoya Lodge
Pages 11-13

THE ANGLING REPORT

Every dirt road used for access had a gate with a sign saying the forest had been closed due to extreme fire danger. When I reached Pagosa Springs, I found it to be a typical tourist spot, which I define as too many people in too small of an area. I purchased some supplies and drove back toward Chama. I would be staying at a ranch about five and a half miles outside of Chama called the Quinlan Ranch.

That's where I met Marta Handey for the first time, although I knew her already. You see, I had written to her often with updates on my past trips with Jack. He doesn't like electronic communication. He never uses the text message function on his phone, and even his voice mail says don't bother leaving a message because he will not get it. I always made it a point to give her updates while traveling with Jack.

When I arrived at the ranch, Jack was off fishing the Conejos on the public portion of the river, so Marta and I went to look at the three private lakes on the property. We then drove farther up to look at all the elk. The Quinlan Ranch is actually renowned for its 17,000 acres of private elk hunting. They even raise them on the property and release them into a fenced-off area to keep the population up. I must say, it was a very nice setup.

Jack finally got back from a good day of fishing, and we all sat down and ate a fabulous meal cooked by the chef at the ranch. I went to bed early, since I had not slept for about forty hours. My room was in the lodge called the Garcia Cabin. It is a light brown log cabin-style building with a dark red roof and a porch running along the entire front overlooking the valley.

The next morning, I got up at 8 a.m. to a full breakfast with eggs Benedict, my favorite. That's where I met up with the guide Jack always uses, Jesse Lee.

Jesse is super cool. He was born in a teepee—his parents were true hippies. He is a longtime guide with LOE Guides and known for his great instruction.

We put our fishing gear in Jesse's pickup truck and drove to some water on the Conejos River at a private ranch. It was a two-and-half-mile stretch of beautiful fishing water with great pools

and runs, ideal for the fly fisherman.

The Conejos is a tributary of the Rio Grande River and flows down for about 90 miles out of the San Juan Mountains from Conejos Peak (13,179 feet high) to Platoro Reservoir. The landscape here is lovely, with some open meadows and hills and cliffs off in the distance. Due to the severe drought in the area, the river was running low, at about 220 CFS.

This day was perfect, the temperature in the low seventies with a very light wind, and there must have been at least two or three bug hatches going on at one time for the first six hours we were on the water. In other words, fish were eating bugs on the surface all around me. It had been a long time since I had seen so many fish eating bugs on top of the water like this. At first, it was a stonefly hatch mixed with a large mayfly hatch. Jack said mayflies must taste better, since the brown and rainbow trout were choosing them for breakfast. Most of these fish were all over twelve inches. So, I decided to use a large mayfly on top with a small beadhead mayfly nymph as a dropper.

Jack and I were walking the shoreline admiring the wild flowers when suddenly we both saw a huge rainbow trout moving along the shoreline behind a large rock. I told Jack to go for it, but he was changing his fly, so he told me to try while he watched. My first cast was sloppy and too short, but the next cast was perfect. The fly landed about six feet in front of the fish and then drifted with the current right into its feeding lane, but the dry fly got swamped and was riding an inch below the surface. Then, in a flash, the trout darted out and ate the fly, and the fight was on. Typical of such trout, it began with multiple jumps out of the water and the usual headshakes, trying to lose the fly. This is a weird moment for us fly fisherman. We are super excited that we just hooked this very large fish but also nervous that it will suddenly free itself. Jesse and Jack, recognizing this was an unusually large fish for this water, urged me on, "Don't lose it!" As this monster trout ran downstream under a bridge, Jesse pointed out that I only had a 5X tippet, very light



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and easy to break.

Now, having been fly fishing for over fifty years, I must have made over a million casts with countless hours spent on various waters. But at that moment, it seemed like all that experience came down to these ten minutes of a monster trout putting up a great fight. It didn't last as long as I wanted it to, despite my worries about losing such a prized fish. It never does. In the end, we netted and released what turned out to be the largest fish caught on this trip, a beautiful twenty-inch rainbow trout. And I screamed out, "*God, I love this sport!*" That fish is out there, somewhere. A gift for generations to come.

Jack and I caught a nice trout about every twenty minutes; it was that productive. There was even a drake hatch on top of all the other food available for these hungry trout. Then, at 2:30 p.m., it suddenly turned off. No more flies, no more surface activity, and no more fish. So, it was time for a stream-side lunch, albeit a little late. I often ask my fellow fly-fishing buddies when the topic of lunch comes up, "Would you rather eat a sandwich or catch fish?" Stupid question, right?

Back at the lodge at about 7 p.m. I call my wife to tell her how much fun I am having. Just then, a deer runs by me while I'm walking on the road behind the lodge talking to her. Now comes the thought, "*God, I love the outdoors.*"

After dinner, Jack, Marta, and I kicked backed several glasses of fine single malt scotch as we looked out at the beautiful forest stretching before us. They had brought up their old dog, Ruby, too, who sat contentedly at our feet.

The next morning, we went to what was new water for me, the Navajo River. It only has two very small stretches of public water, so we went to another private ranch to fish some of the prettiest water and mountains I have seen. On the way there, we saw a fox carrying a cub in its mouth cross the road in front of us. *God, I love wildlife!*

Upon arrival, it dawned on us that we now had eight miles of access to this small river to ourselves. Actually, I would call it a stream at only 65 CFS. The Navajo River is a tributary of the San Juan River. It runs 54 miles south of the San Juan Wilderness area past Chromo, Colorado; dips into New

Mexico just north of Dulce; then goes back into Colorado, where it joins the San Juan River.

Smaller water usually equals smaller fish. This is not always true, but it was in this case. However, smaller fish are often easier to catch, so there is an upside.

On the third day of my trip, we changed guides. We joined Aaron Dunkin, from LOE Guides, on some more public portions of the Conejos. On the way in, at the bottom of the trail, we came upon the most beautiful hole I have seen on the Conejos. It had a nice run into a very deep pool of water. So deep, as Aaron mentioned, that the local kids swim in it. In two and half hours, Jack and I caught over twenty trout. It was that good.

In the end, I drove Jack and Marta home to their casa in Santa Fe and spent the night there. I got up at, oh, dark-thirty and began the fifteen-hour-drive back home. It sounds crazy to drive so far, but not when you consider the purpose: to get together with good friends to enjoy the great outdoors as only fly anglers can. That's what makes trips like these anything but routine.

DATELINE: MICHIGAN

Combat Fishing in the 48 Rubbing Elbows with the Yoopers by Seth Fields



My first experience in Michigan's Upper Peninsula was also the first time I had

ever heard of it.

"You mean there are two Michigans?"

"Yea, but this one is mostly woods and there are hardly any people." My wife replied.

The Great Lakes and their tributaries were nowhere on my radar before I met my wife and we began taking yearly trips to her family's cabin in the UP. Fast-forward several years, and it's now one of my favorite places on the planet. It is not a place of frills or lavish things, but rather a wild and forgotten corner of the country where the people are salt-of-the-earth, the sporting opportunities are endless, and the landscape just begs to be explored.

That being said, the UP is a relative black hole when it comes to information on fishing and hunting. The locals have it good, and they're not about to go blasting out information on any forums or blogs. There is an overall mantra of

"keep it secret, keep it safe" that seems to reign supreme among locals, or Yoopers, as they are called. Though, like any fraternity or secretive club, once you're in, you're in. What I mean by that is if you go asking around for brook trout hot spots, you're going to come up empty handed, but bump into a guy on a brookie stream and he's likely to talk shop. That's just the way it is.

Over the years, I have managed to find some decent trout streams, grouse coverts, and other lands to explore, but the one thing that has evaded me up to this point are the salmon and lake-run trout. First, it's a tough thing to time. We plan our UP excursion months in advance, and the timing never seems to work out. The time to target lake-run fish is usually between late September and mid- to late October, but it changes year to year. This year, I finally timed it right, but—since I had already struck

The Great Teacher

“Damn. My arm is burning!”

“The kings will do that to yah.” Jim says, in that unmistakable matter-of-fact, Midwesterner way.

I mean, it REALLY burns. It’s not my bicep. It’s lower than that.

...

I think it’s the . . . brachialis, maybe?

Or, is it the brachioradialis? There was also the flexor carpi . . . something.

I can’t quite remember.

It’s been a long time since I took Anatomy in Art 111, and if there were a pop-quiz today, I’d get a good scolding from Professor Beyer.

Al Beyer was, to most of his students, a stubborn old Yankee with as much people skills as he had hair. He was ornery and unyielding, but to those who took art seriously—and had thick skin—he was well-liked. His rough and grumpy exterior was the result of a childhood in the Bronx and a youth spent in the ring, boxing. How a guy like that ended up teaching art in a small university down in South Carolina sure beats me.

Yankee or not, he truly was a great teacher, and he ran his class like a well-oiled machine—much to the dismay of non-art students who thought art classes would be an easy way to add a couple of credits and boost their GPA. You could say that he had a knack for weeding out the “this-should-be-easy” folks.

Once, a student who was angry about a grade he received spent a whole period concocting a detailed caricature of Al with emphasis on his shiny, oversize noggin. When Al finally caught on that this student wasn’t paying attention and walked over to see what the young man had drawn, everyone just knew he was going to snap. Rather than snap, however, he tore the drawing from the student’s

notepad, looked it over, placed it on the digital projector, put it up on the big screen, and spent ten minutes critiquing the composition and anatomy and pointing out the finer points of drawing. The kid was shattered. Like a true pugilist, Al could deflect any blow thrown his way, and you could bet the counterpunch would be a swift one.

There was no subject Al was more of a stickler for than anatomy—it was even rumored that his Anatomy in Art class was more difficult than any equivalent in the medical curriculum. Despite the warnings, I ended up taking the class anyway. It was difficult, but I managed to squeak by. And, like most things that go unused over time, it’s now buried in some cerebral storage unit labeled “Things I Have Forgotten.”

No. No. I’m pretty sure it IS the brachioradialis, because I can feel it from my forearm to my bicep, and Al always said, “You know it’s the brachioradialis because it radiates from the forearm, up.”

Yep, that has to be it!

GREAT. Does it really matter? Whatever it is, it hurts, and I NEED to land this fish!

“He’s a nice one!” says Jim. “Don’t worry he’ll wear out before too long.”

At this point, the adrenaline of the hook set and the aerial assaults that followed have all but faded away, and my arm is really starting to burn now. Much like Things Forgotten, muscles that go unused, won’t do you much good when you need them either.

“Try and keep him out of those logs.”

Oh no you don’t . . . you . . . big . . .

“There you go! Now, maintain steady pressure and try to keep him in this pool. Just don’t horse ’im!”

One thing is for sure, if this fish

doesn’t wear out soon, we might be wading our way out of this river in the dark.

Did I pack my headlamp? I remember seeing it in the car.

FOCUS! You don’t want to lose anothe . . .

Fhwuuupp!

Suddenly, my indicator exits the water below and shoots up over my head in a rocket-fueled flight path leading from the fish to the heavens.

Another king salmon swims away free.

I fight the urge to snap Jim’s rod, hurl a few choice words and gestures into the cosmos, reel in my line, and head for the bank.

It’s just been that kind of day. Fish after fish hooked and fought, all with the same result. My only comfort lies in knowing that these fish were designed to best a flyrodder. Jagged rows of tippet-shredding teeth; bulky, muscular bodies built to test gear; and a hard-nosed temperament that would give Professor Beyer a run for his money.

I’ll end this day on a loss, but in the end, when the nerves have settled and my thoughts run clear again, I will realize for the first time how much fun it was and that I learned a lot that day. It was, if you will, a crash course on fighting and landing big fish in skinny water.

King Salmon 101.

This morning, when I first saw them stacked up in the river and saw their tales thrashing around and protruding from the water, I thought to myself, “This should be easy.”

Well, it’s been nearly 12 years since I drew that portrait of Al, and although these fish were not the first to teach me a lesson, they taught me one of the hardest:

Being a good fisherman means being a good student, and only an idiot mocks the teacher. —Seth Fields

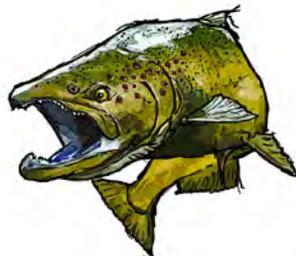
THE ANGLING REPORT

out on where to go in the past—this year I turned to a guide to help me get on the fish. A guide also happens to be the quickest way to break through the secretive barrier surrounding this place and learn the lay of the land.

I had been in contact with Jim Pryal of Into the Wild Fly Fishing (<http://www.intothewildflyfishing.com/>) for at least two years before the timing was finally right to set dates and fish together. Jim operates out of Escanaba, which is the ideal city for someone looking for a home base in the UP, as it is centrally located and you can reach many different regions and waters within an hour or two. Escanaba is also big enough to support more lodging options for travelers. With a population of around 12,000, it is a fairly large city by UP standards—another reason I love the UP.

Jim is a hardcore fly fisher and fishes the UP year-round, so he knows when the fish hit the rivers and when the runs fluctuate between different species. The usual order of things goes something like this: Pink and king salmon hit the rivers first, steelhead follow them up

trying to devour all the eggs they can, and last come the runs of gargantuan brown trout. While the salmon and steelhead are impressive, if you spend a few minutes on Jim's YouTube page (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wcpwy-4FyA0>), it will likely be the brown trout that make your jaw drop most. Think White River, Arkansas, only these browns are heftier



and in full spawning regalia. However, I was in the UP for one fish and one fish only: the kings; but, more on that later.

Many of the tributaries on Lake Michigan's coastline experience similar runs of fish, but most of them are long, undammed rivers, and that makes finding fish and holding water quite difficult. Trust me, I've tried for years. It is best

to approach fall lake-run fish in a place where they congregate or are blocked from further passage, like a dam or steep gradient. There are various rivers known to support healthy numbers of fish, but there are none quite like the Manistique River. A few people had told me that the Manistique was, by any means, an awkward place to catch fish, but it's not the kind of place one can really describe. Any description will sell it short, so it is best to experience it for yourself.

The portion of the river that anglers target lake-run fish on is very industrial, which makes it a bit jarring and unusual. This portion stretches only a half-mile or so, and all along that section, the river is lined with a concrete retaining wall that varies in height from six to nearly 20 feet tall. At the head of this run is a small spillway that blocks the fish from passing, and it is also the main reason that this area is so productive. At the tail end of this stretch, you can see the smoke stacks and facilities of Manistique's industrial district, including an old paper mill and water treatment facilities. Like I said, it's a bit jarring. I must admit,

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though, that it grew on me. Doesn't sound like your kind of place? Hear me out.

This is not some pristine destination with wondrous landscapes like you might find in Alaska or other places where you might target these species. This is a full-blown spectacle, and one should approach the fishing here from a desire to experience something distinctive and stirring. It is a local phenomenon, and these annual runs bring anglers from all over. Though it varies, depending on what day and time you go to the river, you will not be alone. You also never know who will turn up. I actually bumped into a friend from Wisconsin I had no clue would be there. He and his friends were making a week of the event and had come equipped with a few folding chairs, good whiskey, cigars, and a few bird dogs that they hunted with on some days. From top to bottom the river was scattered with anglers throwing fly rods, center-pins, spin rods, and everything in between. Welcome to combat fishing in the lower 48!

Still not sold? I'll let the details do

the talking. . . .

I met Jim in the early morning and we started our one-hour drive from Escanaba to Manistique. It is worth noting that these runs coincide with the seasonal fall colors, and I am willing to place a wager that there is not a place in the whole lower 48 that has better fall foliage than that of the UP. One can't help but marvel at the kaleidoscope of wonderment that covers every square inch of the local landscape. Even longer drives are a joy during this time of year.

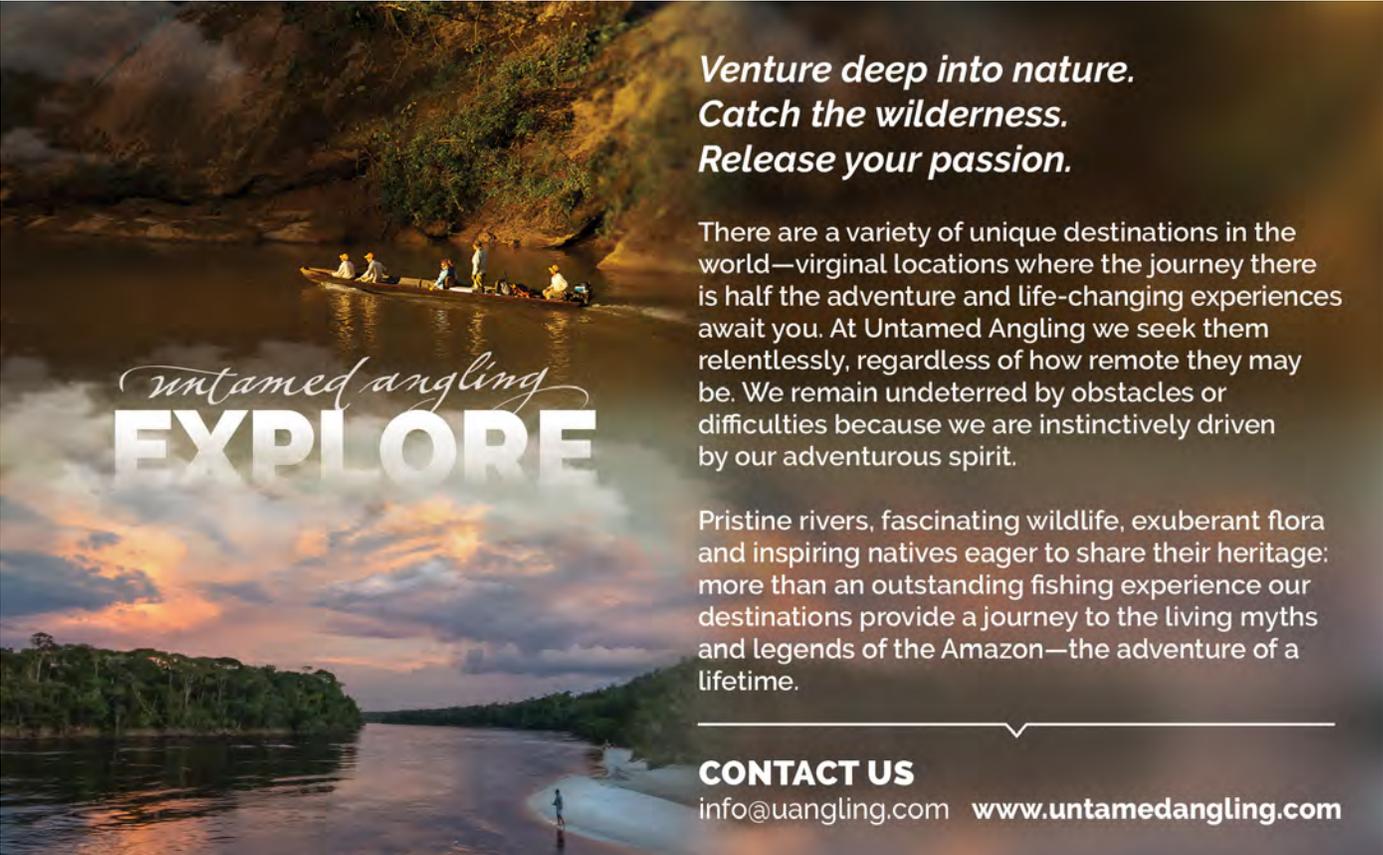
Upon our arrival, we parked no more than 60 feet from the river and walked down the bank at first light to find that some anglers were already in the thick of it. We found an opening and waded out into the tannic waters to a hole that Jim knew as a good holding spot for fish. This is another reason to hire a guide. Most of the waters in the UP have lots of tannins from the endless forested swamps and wetlands dotting the landscape. These darker waters can make wading and spotting holes a bit difficult at times, but Jim knew exactly what was and wasn't a fishable hole, while I could hardly tell

any difference. We saw many people who thought they were fishing a hole only to watch another angler walk through it knee-deep a few minutes later.

We weren't in the water more than a minute before we saw them—tails thrashing as they vied and jockeyed for better positioning in the various holes and runs in front of us. It was exciting to see king salmon so close and actively spawning. Don't be surprised if a 25-pound fish plows into your legs from time to time. Like I said, it's exciting.

The waters were a little high and more stained than usual when we fished, which meant that we didn't have to be quite as stealthy as normal conditions would dictate. So, we walked right up to the holes and started dredging with a dual-nymph rig—mostly eggs—underneath a large indicator and with enough split shot to get them into the target zone.

Persistence and repetition is key with this type of fishing. Prepare to cast, mend, drift, mend, and repeat—a lot! Jim can supply 10-foot rods that make mending and getting drag-free drifts a lot easier. For those who want to bring their



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own gear, I would recommend bringing a 10-foot rod with a lot of butt to it, in anywhere from a 7-weight upwards to a 9-weight. I will bring an 8-weight next year. Also, a reel with a good, smooth drag is absolutely necessary.

It may be the first drift, it may be the 50th, but eventually the indicator will take an awkward dip, and then all hell breaks loose!

Upon hook set, the fish would mostly react in one of two ways—take to the sky with acrobatics akin to a tarpon, or take off up- or downstream in a blistering run. Option one means everyone looks your way as the sound of this behemoth fish hitting the water echoes up and down the river. Option two, though not as visually appealing, means you have to let the anglers either up- or downstream know you're coming. *Fish on!*

Anglers will happily move out of your way as you begin your chase, and then they will go right back at it once you pass. The madness never stops!

Oh, and when I say "chase," I mean it. They go upstream, you go upstream. They go downstream . . . well, if they go downstream you'd better get moving, and quick. You'll be into your backing in a matter of seconds if you don't. Anglers who aren't so confident in their wading abilities may choose to fight them in place, but it will be a hard-won fight. Going upstream or downstream with them helps a lot, and you won't have to regain so much ground in the end. It may be 100 yards or more, upstream or down, before the fish even begins to slow down.

Once you've got one solidly

hooked, you have to try your best not to put too much strain on the tippet, while simultaneously putting enough torque on the fish to begin slowly wearing it down. Easier said than done, especially considering that they can run 20 yards in any direction in the blink of an eye.

I had my first king hooked within ten minutes of my first cast. I set, she tail slapped, dove down, and the rest is history. She shattered my feeble attempts at dominance within the five-second mark. I got to feel what it's like to hook a fish that big in such skinny water, and though it was over quickly, I felt like I had gotten the jitters out of my system and I was finally ready to tangle with the king. Fast-forward twenty minutes and I've just set the hook on another fish, but this time it doesn't dive or jump; it just runs upstream as if there were no current holding it back at all. Within ten seconds the fish was 50 yards and two anglers upstream. I felt the head shake and watched the line go limp. Like I said, easier said than done.

No two fights were the same with these king salmon on the line. Some would go on blistering runs, and some would dig deep and make me earn every inch. At one point, I had one hooked that took to the air five different times; each jump more desperate and acrobatic than the last. These battles took place all throughout the day and varied from short, hard skirmishes, to 20-minute drag-out fights that tore at my muscles and my focus.

All in all, Jim and I fished various holes and stretches of the river over an eight-hour period, and though I hooked

into over 20 fish, in the end I didn't manage to land a single king salmon. I was able to net one, but it was actually foul-hooked in the end.

It is not, however, impossible to land these fish. It just requires focus, a good hook set, unwavering optimism, and maybe even a little bit of luck. I know firsthand that it is possible, because I told Jim to fish with me after a while, and he managed to land a gorgeous, chrome-bright coho; a large male pink salmon; and a very large hen king salmon. True skill and honed technique is what one needs to land fish of this caliber in such skinny water. It is a skill that I plan to acquire over the years to come.

At the end of the day, the sense of failure I carried with me dissipated as we drove down the coast of Lake Michigan, and soon I began to feel a boost of confidence as I thought about 20 of the hardest fights I have ever had on a fly rod; a peculiar, but memorable river; and the creeping desire to do it all again next year. Maybe next year I'll even wait another week into the run when the steelhead start to show up more abundantly.

The cost of a full day of fishing with Into the Wild Fly Fishing runs \$275, plus \$75 per additional angler, per day. I recommend putting a couple of days on the books to insure a good chance at learning the techniques and really getting on the fish. Jim also guides for smallmouth, trout, and musky. Find more info at <http://www.intothewildflyfishing.com/> or call (906)280-4983.

Briefly Noted

Things to Do . . . Places to Go . . . New Developments

■ *Editor Emeritus Don Causey filed the following report on a new development in the Bahamas.*

Subscribers who have followed the uproar over those new flats fishing regulations in the **Bahamas** know that one of the least controversial matters has been a ban on non-Bahamian motherships. A lot of anglers loved these offshore operations,

to be sure, because they provided easy access to otherwise hard-to-reach areas such as the western coast of Andros Island and the Berry Islands northwest of Nassau. Also, many of these motherships used American guides and modern skiffs, and they provided top-of-the line luxuries. What's wrong with that picture is the unfairness of those offshore operations.

Like pirate radio stations, they took from the Bahamas and (some of them) gave absolutely nothing in return, not even guide jobs.

I know these operations have had their supporters, and I am not going to get into a quarrel about the right way forward here. Perhaps, in a perfect world, there would be a way for operators to

arrange to pay the government a special fee to enjoy and cash in on Bahamian resources. But that has not happened, and the new law of the land is: No Non-Bahamian Motherships Allowed. If you are approached with an offer to fish on a non-Bahamian mothership, keep that in mind.

What occasions this discussion of motherships is the surprising emergence of a completely legal mothership. Yes, it's Bahamian-owned, genuinely so, and not just registered in the Bahamas and operated for foreign interests by Bahamians. The operator of the mothership is Charles Bethel, who owns and operates the ultra-exclusive Flamingo Cay Lodge on the west coast of Andros. The facility is located on a vast tract of private land surrounded by the largest national park in the Bahamas. The Bethel family was given this land by the British, long before the island nation gained its independence. Bethel supplies the lodge and transports clients there in his own Otter seaplane based in New Providence.

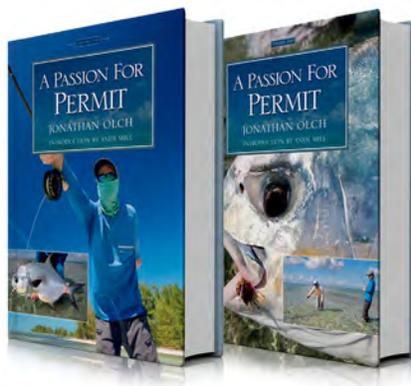
If you haven't ever heard of Flamingo Cay Lodge, don't feel left out. Most anglers haven't heard about it, because Bethel does not use agents and he doesn't do a lot of reaching out for clients. He does not have to, as he says he has somewhere between 200 and 280 regular clients who just keep coming back, occasionally with guests who are then also put on the list of people welcome to come back later on their own. Needless to say, protected by its remote location, the fishing around Flamingo Cay for bonefish and resident tarpon up to 100 pounds is off the charts.

Bethel says he plans to use his new mothership to provide interested clients a 3/3 trip—three days at the lodge and three days on the mothership, which he plans to anchor north of the lodge near Williams Island, an angling hotspot so remote it gets zero pressure from anyone without a boat capable of anchoring overnight or longer. In the future, Bethel says he plans to anchor the ship at various other places in the Bahamas and perhaps even use it somewhat the way it was used in Europe a while back. More on that in a moment.

I had a chance to tour the mothership

last month when Bethel brought it over to Fort Lauderdale for servicing. My first reaction, on seeing it, was to exclaim, "You've bought a ship, Charles! Not a boat!" Indeed, the craft is 165 feet long, has five staterooms and enough room on the back deck to land a helicopter—which is one of the things Bethel plans to do. He has, in fact, bought a chopper to transfer anglers to and from his lodge to the boat. That will leave the Otter Seaplane free to bring in supplies once it has been used to ferry clients to the lodge from New Providence. Given the remoteness of Flamingo Cay Lodge and the area he plans to anchor the ship, Bethel's plans are nothing short of amazing. A plane? A ship? A helicopter? Skiffs? Wow!

The history of the boat Bethel has bought is worth noting. Originally



commissioned by an oil company to service and supply offshore oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico, it was later bought by a Frenchman who made some changes to the craft and used it to chase blue marlin all over the world. Called *The French Look*, it was a famous sporting craft in Europe among aristocrats who could afford the very best.

Anyone planning to arrange a booking with Flamingo Cay Lodge this fall and winter should be aware that the cost of the new 3/3 trips will be around \$2,000 a day. And that, mind you, will not buy you the right to land a tarpon or lift a bonefish out of the water. To his credit, Bethel is an outlier when it comes to handling caught fish. He is determined, he says, to minimize injury to the fish his clients catch. To that end, he has told all of his guides they will be fired if they allow a client to take a bonefish out of the water.

No exceptions. No excuses. As for tarpon, the standing orders are three jumps and you break the leader. Again, no exceptions. No excuses. Of course, all hooks must be barbless.

When I asked Charles if any clients have pushed back against these rules he said they had but to no avail. "It's only new clients who push back," Bethel said. "My long-term clients know the rules and understand the reason I have imposed them. The resource I have access to is very special, and I feel a strong obligation to protect it." Bethel says he is convinced all anglers are eventually going to have to move in the direction he has taken. He thinks his catch survival rate is close to 100 percent.

You can get more information on Flamingo Cay Lodge by going to Bethel's website (<http://www.flamingocay.com/lodge.html>). Be aware, at this writing, there is no information there on the new mothership. Bethel says he hopes to get information uploaded soon. If you give the ship a try, or just fish the lodge, do file a report and let the rest of us know how things went. Write: doncausey@msn.com.

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■ In case you haven't heard, an important new two-volume book on permit has been released by Wild River Press. A veritable tour de force (it's 1,120 pages long and contains a thousand color photographs!), the impressive work is called *A Passion for Permit*. The author is Jonathon Olch. If you are hooked on hooking permit, this is the book for you. We sent a copy of the book a while back to subscriber Glenn Zinkus, and he gives here his first impressions after a quick first read. We welcome your feedback on the work. See below for ordering details. Glen Zinkus writes:

"Permit do not come easy. Permit can be skittish; finicky; and, at times, downright exasperating. But they are gorgeous, and a caught permit is a massive reward for stalking and tricking this fish into eating the fly. The process of learning about permit—what they eat and how to catch and land them—comes with experience, and this experience does not come cheap, because it typically involves a guide and travel. Therefore, getting

a jump on the process or reinforcing earlier experiences with some expert guidance and information on permit is a great advantage. This set of books is hands-down the best, most complete, most lavish volumes ever published on fly fishing for permit. It's a bit of a tongue twister, but you might call it the perfect permit primer.

"Let's start off with this: like all Wild River Press editions, this is a visually stunning set of books, well illustrated with photos and drawings throughout. It's a true pleasure to sit down and just wander through these pages. And the expansive scope of these volumes expounds on every aspect of the game of permit fly fishing, including the fish itself; its habitat and diet; the environmental conditions, such as tides, wind, and weather; fishing equipment; techniques; preparation; strategy and tactics; destinations; and more. Throughout the two volumes, there are also fascinating detailed interviews with permit luminaries.

"The text is not only informative and relevant to fly anglers but also interesting in itself. If pressed, I'd have to say that one of my favorite chapters is "The Art of Being a Permit Angler," a more philosophical, preparation-related chapter. There's no doubt that bringing your "A" game to the permit flats is absolutely necessary, and a key part of that is preparedness. For this reviewer, getting into the right frame of mind for catching permit is part of the fun, and this chapter discusses the critical planning aspect of the game. The chapter's mantra sums it up nicely: "Think like a permit; be the permit."

"I'm also a fly fanatic, and I am always drawn to thoughts and advice focused on flies. Thus, "Choosing the Right Fly" is another of my go-to chapters. This chapter is complete with notes on fly design, materials, and fly tying approaches, together with patterns and, again, striking photos of permit flies.

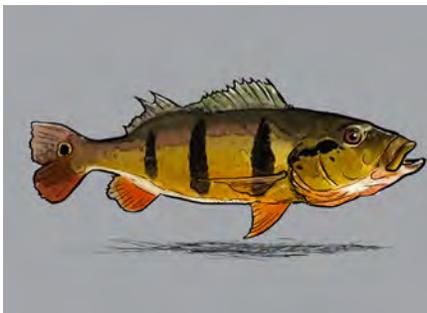
"It's hard to find anything to complain about with this work—although, with two volumes totaling over 1,100 pages, I don't recommend packing it on your next trip to the flats. But then,

neither does Olch.

"This book set, a labor of love, is by and for devotees, but it appeals beyond the bona fide permit aficionado. It is invaluable for collectors of fine books, saltwater flats addicts, armchair anglers, and all itinerant anglers, such as the readers of this newsletter. *A Passion for Permit* is available from Wild River Press at \$150, a bargain for such a wealth of insight. Here is the address to order a copy: <https://www.wildriverpress.com/product/a-passion-for-permit-volumes-1-and-2/>. Enjoy!"

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■ Talk about an outstanding peacock fishing trip! Note what longtime subscriber William Douglas has to say about his recent exploratory trip to **Brazil's Curicuriari River**, a tributary



of the Rio Negro that flows through the reserve set aside for the Tucano Indians. His trip was handled for him by Acute Angling.

"I was among the second of three groups of anglers who fished the Curicuriari River earlier this year," Bill writes. "We went in on September 26 on what was described to us as an exploratory trip. The attraction was the potential to catch big fish, predicated upon an initial 2012 visit by Acute Angling's owner, Paul Reiss, and his exploratory trip and multi-species operations manager, Wellington Melo. In one day of angling, we were told, they landed three 20-plus-pound peacocks of the *temensis* variety.

"At any rate, our floatplane touched down in front of a tent camp after a three-and-a-half-hour flight from Manaus, and we swapped places with an ecstatic outgoing group of anglers. During their week, they had landed no fewer than 12

20-pound fish, including a 26-pounder that Art Weston said he planned to submit for the world record in terms of length. Our week's largest, it turned out, was a 24-pounder. Personally, I did not manage to catch a 20-pound fish, but my Brazilian boat-mate, André de Botton, landed a 22½-pounder the first hour of our first afternoon of fishing. The group after us managed to catch three more of the big boys, giving this year's anglers an average of nearly one 20-pound fish apiece. To my knowledge, this is unprecedented. All three groups landed similar numbers of 15s to 20s.

"There are several caveats I need to add to this glowing report. For one thing, the angling on this river was slow. This is indeed not a big-number fishery. Also, other than butterfly peacocks, this is for the most part a *temensis* fishery only. The river and its two tributaries are tannin-rich, and there was not a lot of current flow during our week. The water is mostly quite deep, which meant you had to fish well below the surface, and you had to be down to have much of a chance. While fly fishing the first two days, I did manage to boat a few small butterflies and a couple of bicuda, even hooking up a couple of times on a floating line. We caught almost all of our fish in the main river or the first few feet of enticing lagoons. Unlike other peacock fisheries, at least during our stay, there was nil action within the lagoons themselves. A mystery!

"I was the only fly fisherman in camp and so I had to share a boat with a bait caster/spin-fisherman, and that was not an ideal situation. Traditional-gear anglers prefer to have nearly twice as much distance from shoreline cover as fly anglers do. Also, traditional-gear anglers do not require clear space behind the boat for a back cast. The tackle mismatch was so frustrating for both of us that I acceded to the camp's offer to lend me a baitcasting outfit. Paul Reiss accompanied me for a generous tutorial, too, and by that day's end I could actually hit the river with most of my casts. In short, I became a gear guy on this trip and now have other arrows in my angling quiver. Not all bad.

Acute Angling told me they plan to

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test-fish this river throughout the rest of this dry season and into the spring season to gain better understanding of the fishery. In the meantime, they have plans to run another series of exploratory trips next season, four this time for eight anglers each. Depending on the results of their test-fishing visits and the results of next year's four groups of anglers, they will decide whether to make this destination one of their permanent offerings. The company currently has three others. As for me, I have signed on as the eighth angler for the first week of next year's exploratory.

"During the three weeks of exploratory angling this year, I should note, the water levels dropped no less than 12 feet! That meant fishing conditions changed almost daily. In all, there are 160 miles of potential fishing

on the main river and also two fishable tributaries of currently undetermined length. While I did not land a 20-pound fish, I had two possible ones on, including the largest peacock that I have ever fought. I connected with him after an awesome surface take of a woodchopper lure.

"This is not a trip for beginners. If you want to fly-fish I would suggest partnering up with another fly fisherman. Acute Angling is very accommodating and will work with you on that. Cost this coming year will be \$7,950 ex-Manaus. Specific dates and accommodations on the river are yet to be determined. We stayed in a comfortable tent camp on our trip and had great cuisine. Next year's arrangement may be the same or there is a possibility that a live-aboard vessel will be brought in. For more information,

contact Garry Reiss at 866-832-2987. The company's web address is: www.acuteangling.com."

Postscript: As this report was being edited, another report of big peacock bass being taken crossed our desk. The fish were being taken by anglers on the Uneixi River fishing with Luis Brown's River Plate Anglers. Eight anglers fishing the week of October 6 to 13 took 438 fish, it seems, 123 of them weighing more than 10 pounds. The largest taken for the week weighed 24 pounds. The group took five over 20 pounds in a single day! We have all that from JW Smith, River Plate's agent. He can be reached at 800-211-4753. The figures on subsequent weeks were coming in even stronger, JW said on October 18. He promised to send us a summary of the season as soon it closes. Stay tuned.

• OUTFITTER CRITIQUES •

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

This section of The Angling Report is based entirely on subscriber-written Fishing Trip Report Forms. Our policy on these forms is to publish excerpts in the newsletter of Angler Network Forms as received, without censorship. Agents, guides, lodge operators, and/or outfitters who disagree with any comments in this section are free to submit a rebuttal. As a subscriber, you can help extend the reach of this program by filing a Fishing Trip Report Form yourself. You will find one online at www.anglingreport.com, and clicking on File a Trip Report.

■ *Editor Note: Subscriber Michael Cembalest is quickly becoming a regular and trusted reporter for destination and adventure opportunities to remote, bucket-list locations. If you recall, Michael gave us a quality report on Pegasus Lodge's Fanning Island outfit in the April 2018 issue, and he recently provided us with this nice report from Northwest Zambia, where he spent five days chasing trophy tigerfish. Be sure to check out his photos from the trip as well. Thanks Michael.*

I have always wanted to catch a tigerfish, which to me looks like a combination of a striped bass and a dinosaur. The tigerfish is actually a relative of the golden dorado, dating back to the Jurassic period, when South America and Africa were physically connected. One look at the tigerfish's orange tail and you can see the similarity to the dorado.

My wife and I planned the trip around our 25th anniversary. After doing research on tigerfish fisheries, I discovered that some locations on the middle Zambezi were not as reliable. I'm defining "middle Zambezi" as the area from Sesheke to Lake Kariba where the Zambezi flows almost due eastward. Yes, middle Zambezi fishing lodge websites show beautiful specimens caught (as all websites do), and I met people who have done well there. However, I also found testimonials about crowded conditions, netting by local communities, days passing with no bites, and maximum sizes of three-pound tigerfish. These opinions were corroborated by guests on our trip as well. Middle Zambezi locations are often preferred by travelers since they offer land-based safari options alongside fishing, and they can be accessed by land rover from Livingstone in a couple

of hours. But my wife and I planned a safari in Botswana, and wanted a good shot at trophy tigerfish. A friend who operates a farm in Zambia told me that the best place for trophy tigerfish is the Barotse Floodplain in Northwest Zambia, and that the ideal time was August through October, when water levels are falling from summer highs. So that's where we went in August 2018.

There are two established tigerfishing operations on the upper Zambezi. We chose the Matoya Lodge, which is near the town of Lukulu. To get there, we flew from Johannesburg to Livingstone, and then from Livingstone to Lukulu on a prop plane that the lodge arranged for guests. The whole trip took around five hours, including a stop in Livingstone for customs and fuel. I liked just about everything about the Matoya Lodge. While my standards may have been lowered by my 2017

THE ANGLING REPORT

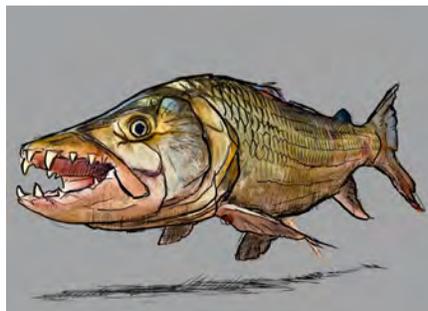
trip to “Bruno’s Animal and Microbe Farm” on Fanning Island in Kiribati (which I wrote about in *The Angling Report* last summer), the other anglers liked Matoya as well. The cabins are well appointed with very comfortable furniture and air conditioning; the service was great; the guides were well trained and enthusiastic; the food was very good; and the location was beautiful, perched on a hill overlooking a curve in the Zambezi River. While there are no safari options in this part of Zambia, we did hear hippos at night and saw some crocodiles. We fished for four and a half days before making the return trip back home via South Africa.

To be clear, even though we were in a remote corner of Zambia, there was still plenty of pressure on the tigerfish. Between six boats at the Matoya Lodge, six boats at the competitor lodge, a couple of local boats, and a boat from the *Animal Planet* TV show, there were few times when we didn’t see another group fishing nearby. I also got the sense that the tigerfish had become accustomed to (and a bit wary of) lures and flies. That said, there were several miles of river to work with, and by the end of the trip, all nine fishermen on our trip had landed a trophy tigerfish. It wasn’t easy, and there were some very slow periods (particularly during the middle of the day), but the Barotse Floodplain delivered as advertised: trophy tigerfish in a beautiful corner of Zambia.

There are four primary methods of catching tigerfish in the floodplains: trolling with lures; casting metal spoons and other artificial lures; fly fishing; and live bait. Our group was composed of four dedicated fly fisherman, with the rest using a mix of the other options. On the first day, we tried trolling, but the lures need to be set back quite far behind the boat; our Rapalas kept picking up weeds and other debris, resulting in extended periods of resetting the lures. We gave up on that approach, and switched to casting spoons and lures toward the shoreline. We had some initial success, landing a three-pound and a five-pound fish

and getting a few other bites. Tigerfish are impressive leapers, and you’ve got one shot to set the hook properly. Any loss of tension on the line once you’ve hooked it, and you will probably lose the fish, because like dorado and tarpon, tigerfish are very adept at shaking loose from flies and lures.

At the end of the first day, we compared notes with the other groups. The fly fisherman were using 8- and 9-weight rods with intermediate or sinking line, and using red/black Whistlers and red/black Clousers. Some fly fishermen landed quite a few fish of between three and four pounds, and reported plenty of bites in multiple locations, while others had less action. The best fly spots were the eddies just after a run. Flies don’t always attract as much attention as lures that vibrate in the water, so it’s important to get the



fly close to the action. Depth was very important: most of the strikes came from flies that were left to sink close to the bottom. The fly had to be pulled through the eddy behind the run, which required casting into the run above the eddy and drifting the fly along the bank while gaining depth. Once the line indicates that the fly is about to enter the eddy, the retrieve should start. Almost always, the fly got hit within the first couple of strips while still in the eddy. On fly, the strike-to-landing ratio was somewhere between one and two out of every ten fish.

I looked in the lodge’s trophy book and compiled statistics on how the 465 trophy tigerfish had been caught at the Matoya Lodge since September 2016, with trophy defined as a fish of 10 pounds or more: 372 on live bait, 67 on artificial lures (Rapalas, copper

Effzett lures, etc.) and 26 on fly. So, on the second day, we switched to live bait to improve our chances. The lodge was well stocked with live bait, which needs to be free-spooled at a considerable distance from the boat to get a strike. The Zambezi is a fast-moving river; we found that the fish congregated in small groups around structure where they can ambush prey. We caught a very nice seven-pounder and a nine-pounder, both of which leaped in the air multiple times before we brought them to the boat for some great pictures. Other times, the bait was shredded before we had a chance to set the hook. Most of the bites occurred from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m., and after 4 p.m. The middle of the day was generally very slow, although there were some five- to 10-pound sharptooth catfish around throughout the day.

The third and fourth days were very slow for us, although other boats had more action. On the third day, all six boats went on a coordinated journey for an hour to a bream location. However, it was a very slow day: one boat caught five bream of three to four pounds each, the rest only caught one each, and we did not get any. It felt like there were too many boats fishing for bream in one confined location, and in retrospect, it was not worth spending the day away from the tigerfish spots.

By the end of the fourth day, we had landed a total of six fish: a three-, five-, six-, and nine-pounder, plus two seven-pounders. On the last day, perhaps because the water warmed up by one or two degrees, the fishing lit up. My wife and I landed five fish on that last day: a seven- and eight-pounder, plus trophies of 10, 16, and 17 pounds, all on live bait; you can see pictures and videos here: <https://instagram.com/p/BmbaIrTHhpo/>. The other boats reported better action that last day as well, including a father/son team that had not caught a single tigerfish during the entire trip, and then landed an 11- and a 14-pounder. A 10-pounder was landed on a fire tiger Rapala, and a 10- and a 15-pounder were landed on red/black and red/orange Clouser flies. The biggest fish of the trip, a 19-pounder,

was landed on live bait.

Over the entire four and a half days, one boat had consistent action each day on flies and lures and landed over 20 tigerfish (including three trophies), while for others, conditions were much slower (five tigerfish or less landed). Even so, by the end of the trip, everyone had landed at least one trophy tigerfish, which confirmed what we had heard about the Barotse Floodplain fishery.

A few minor notes: if you are a spin fisherman, the lodge can prearrange purchase of lures, wire leaders and other terminal tackle in advance, or you can buy on-site. The cost of terminal tackle and live bait adds up, so be prepared to bring plenty of cash to settle accounts at the end of the trip. In terms of weather, August was perfect (high 80s during the day, mid-60s at night) but water levels were still a little high. If I were

to return, I would shoot for September or early October instead. One thing I would change: dinner at 8:30 p.m. is too late, and most guests were exhausted by the time we ate, having spent the day in the African sun. They should move dinner 30 to 45 minutes earlier. Other than that, it was as impressive a fishing operation as any I have been to, particularly considering the remoteness of the location.

• Best of the Best •

*Our readers are some of the most well-traveled, and knowledge fishermen and women on the planet. From distant island lodges to backcountry beats long forgotten by the world, you have fished it, and then some. Here, in the **Best of the Best** section, we publish your responses to questions about some of the memorable experiences that have stood out to you in your travels. Subscribers have their chance to answer these questions and more for our monthly segment. If you would like to contribute to this month's set of questionnaire or the upcoming issue, email seth.fields@morris.com and also be on the lookout for new feedback requests sent to your subscription email.*

Tell us a brief story about "One That Got Away!"

As a young boy, I was fishing out of a 13-foot aluminum boat with my dad and grandfather. We didn't fly-fish back then; we were jigging worms one evening for walleye off an island in the French River, Ontario. The walleye weren't there, but we were reeling up lots of perch from 90 feet. I got bored and lay back into the boat's bow, looking skyward. My grandfather started to reel something in and said, "Son-boy I got another perch," but he later said his line started balling up onto the surface. Something was coming up and coming up quickly! Then I remember a splash sound and seeing my grandfather go white in the face, slack jawed.

My father exclaimed something like "Jesus!" and then both of them stared motionless into the water. Well something awesome just occurred, so I pulled myself up from the bow and barked, "What happened?"

My Dad, still dumbfounded, almost in a trance said, "That fish was almost as long as our oar. It just rolled on the surface and broke off like it didn't even know it was hooked."

For years we thought the fish might have been an unusually large muskie, because there were rumors of

such a fish nearby. Upon reflection, based on the size of the fish and where it was hooked, my guess now is that somehow my grandpa Luby hooked into a rare surviving sturgeon of the French River. It was an awesomely large fish that got away, and my grandfather summed up the experience by later saying, "Son-boy, if that fish had stayed on my line, I would have cut it off!"—*Eric Wolfe*

•••••

I've been blessed to have fished enough to have more than a few lost fish, the most "haunting" of which is the following with Capt. Eric Wallace, my tarpon guide of several years.

We were fishing the backcountry near Cudjoe Key after a couple of typically tough tarpon days. Three fish were laid up and I promptly threw at the tail of one, thinking it was facing the other way. I recast and a nice fish immediately ate the fly. After several jumps, it was off to the races across the flat. We were recovering line and the stars seemed aligned when the handle of the Tibor Pacific came off in my hand! I turned to explain this to Eric and he thought I was kidding. We grabbed the stripping bucket and proceeded to hand line the fish. Remarkably, we managed to "coax" the fish

within yards of the boat at one point. Eventually the fish surged and I snugged it and he broke off with one final jump to add insult to injury.

The joys of tarpon fishing never end.—*Shawn Taylor*

•••••

What's the one fish that haunts you in your sleep?

It's not just one thing that haunts me. It's a thousand. When I started bone fishing 25 years ago (I'm now 74), I compiled a journal whose heading was "100 Ways to Lose a Bonefish". I think I'm up to 89. If I'm lucky enough maybe I'll get to 100.

Here's a small sample: I rush the cast, and the fly doesn't turn over. Step on the line, pop. First run and the line goes around the reel handle, pop. Cast to the bone you see 40 feet away, only to spook the school I'm standing in the middle of. Great fight and then the bone is gone, so I bring back the line only to find the dreaded cork-screw at the end of the tippet; should've used a blood knot. Drag too loose so the first run creates a mess of backing, pop. Perfect cast to tailing bone, fly eaten by a snapper. I think you get the point.

That being said, the years of fishing in all those tropical beautiful spots has made my life much more complete. Can't wait to lose my next trophy. —*Robert Merrill*