

The ANGLING REPORT

serving the angler who travels



MEXICO - PACIFIC COAST (TAR|JUL.2018):JOHN LORENZ

DATELINE: BELIZE

Subscriber Report Chasing Permit with Captain Dean



**Belize City,
Belize**

Editor Note: They say there is a natural cycle in fly fishing. An angler begins his

career looking for numbers. Later, he or she graduates to time spent looking for quality over quantity. It has also been said that the last stage of the cycle is when one no longer cares about fish and just appreciates “being out there.” Permit fishing, and those who choose to pursue it earnestly, are in a category all their own. They live in a place between the cycles. They are in perpetual limbo, haunted by thoughts of tailing fish and rejected flies. Don Muelrath is one of these anglers, and, as you will see, his affliction is both affable and completely terminal.

Tail . . . 150 feet at 2 o’clock,” murmured Captain Dean. Then, a little louder, “There’s three tails. . . Do you see them?” Just then, a cormorant flew out of a nearby mangrove cluster, flying about four feet above the water, directly over the fish, which immediately

exploded and rushed off the flat. Yes, now even I could see them.

This report was compiled primarily for those who may wonder what a dedicated permit trip is about. For those readers who are “regulars” to permit fishing, there will be nothing new here, just the results of our week. I spent seven days chasing permit with Captain Dean and the crew of the *Rising Tide* of Belize, and, hopefully, you will smile a time or two as I share my experiences there. If you’ve ever hunted with a fly rod or rifle in hand, you will relate to the stalking aspect, which makes permit fishing so special; indeed, this is fly fishing’s most challenging, frustrating, and exciting experience.

I have divided this report into two parts. First, for those who have enough interest to want the details, I give the day-by-day report, explaining our activities and a brief description of where we fished and what situations we encountered, and secondly, there is a summary of the raw numbers for the trip. After my first day, I began carrying a small piece of paper and pen and, a few times each day, with the help of my guide, would update the numbers. Enjoy.

Day-by-Day Report

Terry and Gary Butts were going to be joining us on this trip, but when we arrived in Belize City, a message was waiting for us—a last minute medical situation would not allow them to fly, so Marte and I boarded the *Rising Tide* for a “trip for two.” I began the trip with a total of 45 career permit released and was hoping to get to 50 by week’s end.

Day 1: Anchored the *Rising Tide* our first night in anticipation of the day to come. 6:00 a.m.—perfect conditions,

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IN THIS ISSUE

Belize

Permit Fishing,
by the Numbers
Pages 1-4

Spain

An Unexpected Fishery
in Northern Spain
Pages 4-6

Mexico

Jumping Baby Tarpon
in the Off Season
Pages 6-7

Honduras

Permit and Bonefish
from Guanaja Island
Pages 7-9

On the Radar

Bills & Thrills on
the Pacific Coast
Pages 9-10

Feedback Request

An Important Update
on *The Angling Report*
Page 10

THE ANGLING REPORT

blue skies, winds 6–10 mph, mostly from E and SE. We somehow managed to not see one tailing fish!? I did manage a cast to three schools of a dozen-plus fish. We had several follows and finally got one small permit on Captain Dean's "Hinckley Crab"—a brown-and-tan creation with a single green stripe down it.

Six times we saw singles, pairs, and pods. All told, I had around seven good shots and saw about 50 fish total. We fished 11 different flats and found fish on six of them. We took our one fish for the day and anchored up for the second night.

Day 2: During the night, the wind shifted to the NW and blew a tropical storm right to us—lightning, thunder, and rain galore. Woke to gray skies and very light winds, still from the NW.

The short story is we fished tailing fish from 6:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. At 9:00 p.m. fell asleep, totally exhausted and a smile on my face from the combination of events during the day. The short story on results for the day was that we saw well over 120 fish total—at least 60 of which were tailing. We saw at least a dozen schools with eight or more fish, plus some pairs and a few large singles. We fished eight flats and found fish on six of them. All in all, we had 10+ good shots, with one eat without a hook set and one small permit released. We saw a school of large tarpon rolling in the channel right next to the permit flat. In another time, we would have quickly become tarpon fishermen.

The long story is the day began at 6:00 a.m. on the flats, and the tide was full—just beginning to go out. The first two schools of tailing fish spooked before the fly hit the water. Plus, the water was slick, like glass. With the rising sun behind us, the line in the air spooked them. Later, on a different side of the flat, we stalked a school of large tailing fish for a few hundred yards but never got a cast to them before they swam off the flat. We

had a few good shots at singles, with one eat, minus the hook set. I blew a cast to a school of tails—10+ fish. I cast across their backs. We poled the flat out front for a few hundred yards, but didn't see a fish, so we moved south to the next flat and found three more schools of large fish. We had two follows on the Meyer Shrimp but no eats.

The tide began to get low, so we tried the deeper flats out front again and didn't see a fish. We only saw a school of small fish and could not get a look. Later that day, Marte was going snorkeling with Noel at the reef, so I went along and waded the flat inside the reef while they snorkeled. I managed to spook one fish, and headed back to the boat for lunch.

After lunch, the tide was coming in as Noel and I fished ahead. No fish on the south end. Motoring along, we found an island where the winds died completely and the water was totally slick—you could see a minnow move water! We found five schools. We spooked the first two due to the slick water; stalked two other schools, one for over 15 minutes without getting close enough for a cast; and got a small permit from the other school. All of these fish were tailing aggressively and not moving: perfect. We decided to move and check out two other flats, but there were no fish.

Later, dark clouds blocked the setting sun on the horizon, so we started to head back. Along the way, we chased a school pushing water but couldn't get a shot. After 6:00 p.m. and getting dark, I found one last school tailing. I managed to get some long casts in, but no eats. If we had caught one, it would have been the latest permit ever taken from the *Rising Tide*.

Day 3: During the night, winds switched direction again, coming from the west. There was a big electrical storm with heavy rains on the mainland, but we managed to have only light rain. At 5:30



THE ANGLING REPORT

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A Publication of MCC Magazines, LLC
a division of Morris Communications Company,
LLC 735 Broad St., Augusta, GA 30901

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Contributions in the form of manuscripts or photographs will be gladly considered for publication. A self-addressed, stamped envelope of the proper size must accompany each submission. Please write for editorial guidelines if submitting for the first time, and enclose a SASE; this is very important. We cannot guarantee against damage or loss of materials submitted, but we take great care in handling all submissions.

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THE ANGLING REPORT

a.m., we woke to 15 mph winds from the west and dark clouds all around. No rain, but strong, cool, west winds had blown the tide out, even though it was supposed to be still incoming. The flats were shallow and dirty. We tried the lee side of a few cays, but no tails. Took a nap. By 12:30 p.m., the skies were blue and the wind had died down to around 8–10 mph. The tide was very low.

The short story is that we saw well over 100 fish (35+ of which were tailing); fished five flats and found fish on four; Got one small permit (no. 48 for me); both no. 47 and no. 48 were taken in sight of the anchored *Rising Tide*, and we had 10+ good shots at different fish.

The long story is that we spent 90 minutes before lunch on the deeper side of an island. There we saw two schools of small fish and two singles, and we spooked a very large fish with the panga. We managed one really good shot at a half dozen tailing fish. Later, while chasing a school of tailing fish, we didn't see the other six fish in the school that weren't tailing and spooked the entire school. After lunch, we started at Dean's Flat, which is deeper water. The tide was beginning to come in, and we saw four singles and one school—no tails.

Later, we went to another area and spent 20 minutes stalking one single fish. Finally, we got a decent shot and he followed but then spooked at the last second. Then, we spent 20 more minutes with a school of tailing fish. After five decent casts, I finally got an eat and a small permit (no. 48). At the north end of flat, we stalked three large schools (one of 30+ fish) with only occasional tails showing. From that herd, we managed four good shots. Fish were all over my fly, but I couldn't get an eat. We got shots to tailing fish again after 6:00 p.m. for the second night in a row.

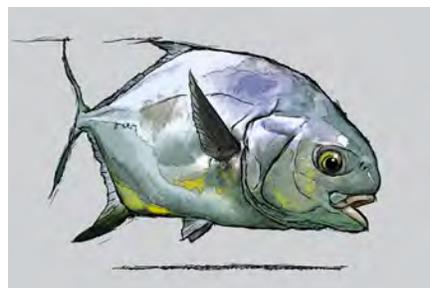
A few seconds can make the difference between casting at the back of a fleeing permit or having a solid shot at getting an eat. Spotting fish as early as possible is critical to success in this game. While my experience often allows me to spot fish, for me and my aging eyes, a guide is essential to getting the fullest enjoyment in this game, since he will

usually be able to see the fish long before I do.

Day 4: Winds were light from the NW and moved to NE and even ENE during the day. We mostly had blue skies with some patchy clouds.

The short story is we saw over 50 fish (20+ tailing); fished a total of 12 flats and found fish on eight of them; had eight good shots; and had two fish eat the fly, take it into their throat between their powerful crushers, and bend the hook. In both cases, I never felt the fish eat—they must have been swimming toward me and inhaled the fly with momentum. They can inhale and expel a fly faster than we can imagine.

A highlight of the day was on the windward side of the shallow flat, where we began the day (deeper water). We had an exciting 45-minute stalk of a school of eight fish (all around 15 pounds), a pair and a single that were easily 20 pounds, and one tailing single that was 25+ pounds. We got some shots but not a solid one at any of them; it just never lined up



right for a good shot.

The long story is that in the morning we fished five flats and saw fish on three of them. On the first flat, we saw two pods—where I blew a cast to the first pod, which had been a perfect setup. On the second pod, I had an eat where the fish turned the hook. I saw one other single.

On the next flat, we saw a school of about 10 decent fish. From this school I had another eat, and it turned the hook again! That's two turned hooks in less than 90 minutes—frustrated doesn't even begin to describe it! Later, I saw a pair of singles and another pod but had no luck. We took another late breakfast at 10:00 a.m., and afterward the tide started falling fast. We fished four flats after lunch and saw fish on three of them. I had one great shot at

three large tailers, but, once again, none of us saw the six fish between the tailers and the boat, so we spooked the entire school. I also had a follow on the Meyers Shrimp from two deepwater fish that were mudding, but couldn't get them to commit. In a short session after lunch, we found one pod of small tailing fish and had a few good shots, but no eats.

Day 5: At 6:00 a.m. we had perfect conditions: strong incoming tide, light winds from the east, and mostly blue sky with patchy clouds. The plan was to take "breakfast sandwiches" and fish our favorite flats, and then work our way back. Dean said he didn't like to fish that area usually because it has gotten crowded with other guides fishing there, but he would give it a try. If we encountered a lot of skiffs, we'd turn around and come back. We got lucky and saw no other anglers.

The short story is we fished nine flats and seven held permit. We saw 12 tailing fish out of a total of 28 fish and managed to get five good shots and one eat, but no hookups.

The long story is that in the first area, we saw one tail only. We found four other fish, but couldn't get any shots at them. We had one good push, and I had a good cast leading them, but it turned out to be a school of bones. Later, we saw two large singles but didn't set up for a cast.

At the next spot, we saw singles, pairs, one pod, and one school (8–10 fish). I had some really good shots, but they just would not eat, except one that got away.

Day 6: At 6:00 a.m., conditions were great again—east wind about 11 mph, and mostly clear sky. The tide was coming in. We decided to fish all the same flats that had provided the big numbers for day 2. In the beginning, we only saw a few fish moving—no tails. The only place we found tails and had shots was on the south end, near a creek mouth. Very strange.

The short story is we fished 14 flats and only saw fish on five of them. We saw a total of 26 fish (only four tails), managed to get four good shots, and got one nine-pound permit (no. 49) while casting to the front of a single fish pushing. He streaked off 100 yards of backing before we got the motor started and chased. He was 150 yards into backing by the time I began

retrieving line. The way he fought, we thought he was larger! The highlight was when I got two good shots at a tailing 20+ pound fish rooting hard on the bottom. I should have got him!

No need for a long story. It's hard to believe these were same flats as on day 2, especially with better overall conditions this day. Permit fishing just leaves you wondering so many times!

Day 7: On the water by 6:00 a.m. and conditions were good—same as the day before—but the tide came in a little later, and the winds were lighter (5 mph). We had a mid-afternoon flight, so we planned on getting five to six solid hours on the water before departing.

The short story is that this day was similar to day 6. We fished our favorite flats and found relatively few fish, even with ideal conditions. We fished seven flats, three of which held fish; saw about 30 fish (two large schools and two tailing singles); and I got two shots. But this would be the first day of this trip without an eat.

The long of it goes something like this: The day started fast. On the first flat, we spooked a school as we approached the flat. Soon after, we saw a fish tailing about 200 feet away. He tailed twice more as we approached and then disappeared. Then, we found a large tailing fish that kept disappearing and reappearing, moving left and right, feeding aggressively. We approached slowly, and after about 15 minutes were within distance. The cast looked good. The fish turned on the fly. At this point, I was all set for a big finale with no. 50, but he suddenly exploded and rushed off the flat. Guess he saw something he didn't like. After about three hours, heavy, dark clouds appeared in bunches on the horizon. We began dodging thunderheads as they moved toward the mainland. We were getting wet and weren't seeing any fish, so we headed in to finish packing and set off for the airport.

At week's end, I had fished some of the world's finest permit flats, and Marte had snorkeled in several spectacular coral reef environments. In all that time, I did not see another angler, and Marte only encountered one other snorkeler. It

was almost like our own private, 30-mile stretch of the Belize barrier reef and the cays and flats inside it!

Thirty-one years ago, we arrived in Belize for our first Belize mothership trip. ("We" is our son, Scott, and me.) Back then, we carried four spinning rods set up to fish for the variety of species we expected to encounter, and we brought an 8-weight fly rod to fish for bonefish. We didn't have the fly rod skills to fish for the other species with a fly, only bonefish—if we could find them close enough. We learned to saltwater fly-fish over the next 10 years, primarily in Belize, and, eventually, we would carry five fly rods rigged for the different species and situations available in Belize. After evaluating all my saltwater experiences, last August I came to the conclusion that the great majority of my most exciting saltwater stalking experiences with a fly rod in hand were in fishing for permit.

During our past 70 or so Belize trips, we spent most of our time fishing for a variety of species available in Belize (tarpon, snook, bonefish, etc.). We would usually spend a few days moving our mothership to the best permit flats to fish for permit. Adding in a few permit taken in Ascension Bay and 10 Pacific permit from the Ningaloo Reef over our past three trips there, I had released 45 total permit before this trip. I'm 74 years young and decided I needed a new and worthy fly-fishing goal to liven up my saltwater pursuits. That decision was to set a goal of releasing over 100 permit before my 84th birthday.

I no longer carry all those fly rods on my Belize trips—just a 10-weight rod with the "Hinckley Crab" tied on. I have now officially joined the growing crowd of dedicated permit addicts. Blame this in part on the inspiration of Art Hinckley, a superior angler who has released over 120 permit, mostly in Belize, fishing with the same guides used for this report!

General Trip Summary

- Total number of permit seen—404+
- Number of tailing fish encountered—133+
- Number of "shots" taken—46+ (counting as only "one shot" multiple casts to the same fish or school)
- Number of flats poled—66, not

counting "drive-by flats," most flats being 1–2.5 feet deep, with some 3–4 feet, depending on the tides.

- Number of flats where at least one permit was seen—39
- Weather—generally good except for two days
- Highlight—to have this experience without seeing another angler the entire week
- I have fished with these guides for over 20 years and they know these flats in detail; they know what flats may hold fish on different tidal situations and which to avoid in certain conditions, and their ability to spot fish, tails, and "pushes" is amazing and is critical to your overall success.

Postscript: For more information on the Rising Tide operation, go to <http://flyfishbelize.com/general-info-prices>.

DATELINE: SPAIN

Subscriber Report

Fly Fishing the Pyrenees



Editor Note: Longtime subscriber David Sandlin knows trout. David has made a name for himself as owner of some of Alaska's finest lodges; including Alaska Sportsman's Lodge. You can imagine it would take a real outstanding experience to impress a figure like David, and his recent trip with his wife to fish the Spanish Pyrenees Mountains for trout did just that. Here is what he had to say about their experience.

My wife, Cathy, and I bid on this trip, donated to the Bonefish and Tarpon Trust by Salvelinus Fly Fishing Adventures and Frontiers

THE ANGLING REPORT

Travel, while we were attending the BTT Symposium in Ft. Lauderdale last November. I had never fished the Pyrenees, and Cathy had never visited Spain, so combining a week of fly fishing with an equal time touring seemed like a good idea, and it was.

The only available time for us was May, so we booked May 9. Salvelinus operates two lodges, one in the eastern foothills in the village of Arén and the other higher up in Santa Cilia. May is too early for the high country, but perfect in Arén.

We flew Atlanta to Barcelona, arriving early morning on May 10, and we spent the day touring the city. Of course, no visit would be complete without seeing Antonio Gaudi's Sagrada Familia, an architectural marvel. We then went to his home and also toured some other building designs. The view from the highest hill and the trips to the aquarium and the city market in the old historical area for tapas and beer made for a long but fascinating day.

After a restful night's sleep, Salvelinus picked us up and we drove three hours into the foothills of the eastern Pyrenees to the medieval town of Arén. Here we met Ivan Tarin, owner/operator of Salvelinus, and his partner, Juan Antonio Allema, owner of the hotel/lodge and the local bar and restaurant that served as our home for the next seven days. The Arén Lodge has been in Juan Antonio's family for over 300 years. Recently, the lodge was renovated with the added facilities of spa, sauna, massage room, wader area, fly shop, and a library/meeting room.

With Ivan, we walked around the charming village. It dates back to the 13th century and is well preserved in its original architecture of stone and tile. We traversed streets that looked just as they must have looked hundreds of years ago.

A magnificent dinner with fine wine and the company of fellow anglers from Jackson Hole made the welcome complete. We were shown pictures of some nice trout they had caught, including a monster 30-inch brown. I had no idea there were fish of that size in Spain. I'm getting excited.

On the first day, we fished with the guide Alberto. He holds a full-time job as a lawyer, but his true love is on the river. (I must interject here that Salvelinus furnishes Orvis waders, Sage rods, and a full assortment of hand-tied flies. We only needed to bring personal gear and a good wading jacket.) Alberto patiently worked the river with Cathy and me, but that first day we only caught a couple of smallish 12-inch browns.

The fishing is technically demanding; we worked both nymphs and streamers according to what the water called for. The hook is set at the very hint of a take. The river was clear and fast with medium-sized rocks and gravel. Wading was sometimes challenging, but safe with the sturdy shoulder of our guide available. The river itself is a tailwater, but the fish seemed to be evenly



dispersed throughout the 20 or so miles we fished.

On the second day, I fished again with Alberto. Cathy hung back to visit the village and rejuvenate with a massage. Alberto and I worked hard and produced a couple of 23-inch browns, nothing really big, but late in the afternoon we looked down from a bridge into a large pool with several 30-inch-type browns and rainbows. Once again, I'm excited.

The third day, Ivan took us out, along with his apprentice guide, Terrence. The morning was unproductive. However, we had a grand lunch at a small village restaurant. The owner, Emile, served fantastic paella. This is one of Ivan's favorite places. Emile opens at five in the morning for coffee and breakfast and closes after lunch.

After a short drive, we arrived on a new section of the river. Immediately we could see several very large trout, probably rainbows, but could not get

them to take. Then, about 6:30 p.m., we entered a split in the river. A huge brown took the streamer and the fight was on. Browns don't usually jump, but this one gave a good accounting, and I thought it was well hooked. He won!

A few minutes later, another hard strike, and the battle resumed. I won! He was somewhat shy of 30 inches and weighed eight pounds, according to the net/scale. Now I'm fired up for tomorrow.

Ivan and I had lengthy discussions about trout feeding habits and our collective experiences around the world. Our conclusion was to fish first light. In the water by 6:00 a.m. This can be somewhat taxing, since the usual dinner hour in Spain is after 9:00 p.m., usually ending around midnight. An early dinner around 8:30 would precede our next outing.

Weather was iffy for our fourth day, so we took the day to tour through the mountains, looking at streams that would be fished later in the season. As we rose higher in the mountains, it began snowing. A group of cross-country skiers passing in front of the car gave us a hint that we were too early.

The next morning, Ivan and I were on the river a little after six o'clock. The water was boiling with rising trout. Using a dropper rig, I hooked a nice brown, weighed him in at about eight-plus pounds, and then released him. After that, the fish disappeared. We worked up and down the river for the rest of the morning, but an early thunderstorm curtailed our day.

It was back to Arén, an excellent massage and cocktail hour with Juan Antonio. He makes a most excellent gin and tonic with Spanish gin, a unique tonic, and exotic aromatics. One could get accustomed to these. Cathy and I maybe should have had one less. Dinner was a full seven courses, all of which were unforgettable. We tried for an early to bed but 11 p.m. saw us just leaving the restaurant.

The last morning of fishing, Ivan and I were on the river before six. The big fish were there, but for the first few minutes, no takes. Then, high-sticking a nymph, a monster rainbow hit with a

vengeance. This fish was well north of 30 inches and made several spectacular leaps all around me for 360 degrees. The hook set was solid, but this big hog just straightened the hook. What a show! These are the moments that make one come back. We caught other fish, but this one is burned in my memory.

The last night we had a special meal in the cellar to celebrate our adventure. Just as the folks from Jackson Hole had done with us a week earlier, we shared our experience with a new couple from

England. They were fired up to begin their fishing adventure in the Pyrenees.

Cathy and I went on for the next week touring our way through great wineries with Sara Espuelas as our guide. She heads the touring part of Salvelinus. We visited ancient towns, vineyards and wineries across La Rioja, ate mind-blowing food, and finally arrived in San Sebastian on the Atlantic Coast, but this is a story for another time.

In summary, I would do this trip again in a heartbeat. The accommodations

and food were superb, the hospitality unsurpassed.

Most of all, for the angler, it's exciting. I had no idea we would encounter both rainbows and browns in excess of 30 inches and fat. The mere thought of trout that size has led me to all corners of the world. I will come back here.

For more info about Salvelinus Fly Fishing Adventures go to <http://www.salvelinus.com/>, call +34 696 164810, or email Ivan Tarin at info@salvelinus.com.

• OUTFITTER CRITIQUES •

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

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■ *Editor Note: Bob Dhalberg has supplied us with a report on a recent trip of his to Mexico to fish for juvenile tarpon on the Yucatan Peninsula. He was able to sample the fishing in two areas and had this to say about his experience:*

"We became interested in fishing for baby tarpon, after briefly fishing for them in Jardines de la Reina, Cuba, some while ago. The idea behind this trip was to explore the fishery on the Yucatan Peninsula. The main area we sought to fish is 60 miles of continuous mangroves. This fishery is accessible from two distinct locations: from the north via Isla Arena and from the south via Campeche, a historic colonial city.

"We booked this trip with Yellow Dog Flyfishing Adventures. Yellow Dog was very professional; in fact, their pretrip information package was the best I have seen among numerous booking agents over the years.

"For our trip, Yellow Dog chose a single outfitter to host us and fish both the Isla Arena and Campeche locations; that outfitter was Campeche Tarpon. We were slated to fish for three days in Isla Arena and three days in Campeche.

"Our guide for all six days, Daniel, worked hard to get us to fish,

accommodated our casting abilities, spotted fish well, and was enthusiastic when a fish was in casting range. His English was a little better than my ten-word Spanish vocabulary, so there was a bit of a communication issue, but it did not effect the fishing very much.

"We confirmed what we had read in advance of the trip, that the fishing is optimal in the early morning, around high tide for both locations. You are fishing in and among mangroves almost exclusively.

"Of the two locations, Isla Arena offers a more approachable fishery. You can be fishing in 10 minutes or less. There, we also saw bigger fish, 10 to 20 pounds, and more of them. However, the better fishing comes at the cost of staying in a remote Mexican village with intermittent and slow-speed internet and very little in the way of amenities and other things to do. The only interesting local attraction for an English speaker is Wotoch Aayin, the nearby crocodile farm and restaurant, where some of the staff do speak English.

"In contrast, if you choose Campeche City as your base of operations, you do have excellent restaurants and historical sites for afternoon activities. Also, English is generally not a problem. The downside is that the morning fishing can start as

early as five o'clock. If you start that early, you will be eating one of the two packed sandwiches for breakfast, since the hotel restaurants don't open until six. We were lucky because Alejandro worked with our hotel to open up the restaurant for breakfast 15 minutes early, but this same deal cannot be guaranteed for all visitors.

"Also, if you choose to stay at Campeche, you will be riding in a boat in the dark, without running lights, for 45 to 60 minutes each morning. Another upside to fishing from Campeche is that, since fishing is usually from six in the morning to two in the afternoon, you have more time to do more as a tourist in the afternoons.

"Unfortunately, we did experience some non-fishing-related service lapses at Isla Arena. First, there was a big mix-up on the Campeche Tarpon agent's responsibilities regarding our transfer from Isla Arena to Campeche. We were sent by way of an uncomfortable 60-mile flats-boat ride in stormy weather, when our written itinerary specified a land transfer.

"Secondly, we ended up staying at the Tuunben Kin traveler's hotel, not the Ecoturismo Carey (the common name of Isla Del Sabalo Lodge), which was the

THE ANGLING REPORT

facility we were expecting. The Tuunben Kin rooms were comfortable and clean, and the staff was very friendly, although the three meals per day we received were fit only for a Spartan. If we were to stay another three nights, we would have likely gone to the Crocodile Restaurant (Wotoch Aayin) up the road for dinner. We learned later that there are other Isla Arena fishing outfitter choices.

“We know that outfitters don’t have control over the weather and when the fish bite. But outfitters do have control of the services they offer and upholding prearranged itineraries. To Yellow Dog’s and Campeche Tarpon’s credit, they accepted full responsibility for the service lapses that we experienced on Isla Arena. In the end, both came together to make things right with us. We are impressed that both companies stand behind their offerings, and we will be returning customers. I have no hesitation in recommending both companies, and I plan to use them again. I also learned to do better due diligence when booking a fishing trip to a place I have not been to before. All the more reason to read *The Angling Report!*”

“Lastly, we encountered less-than-favorable weather conditions, but this can be chalked up to bad luck. On our second day, a major cold front moved into the Isla Arena area. High winds kept us off the water that day and affected the fishing for the next two days. Productivity finally returned on the fifth day. Even though the weather was not favorable, I managed to land three tarpon in five days fishing (one day lost to the cold front), and I jumped six tarpon on top of that.

“We used 10-weight rods and lines, with a specific tapered leader structure that worked well. The leader was as follows: 6 feet of 30-pound mono + 5 feet of 20-pound + 2 inches of shock tippet (40-pound). We used a medley of Puglisi flies for our trip. We used the “Peanut Butter” fly in chartreuse and red/black, and the Puglisi “Bunny Tail” in brown/white and black/purple.

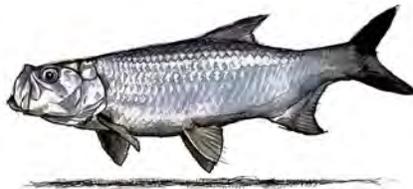
“We chose to take the trip in April to avoid any chance of a hurricane ruining our stay, and to take advantage of Campeche Tarpon’s promotional pre-

prime season discount. Prime baby tarpon season runs May through September. Next time, I would definitely consider September, as long as it was coupled with travel insurance. In season, we’d expect the tarpon to be more abundant.

“I would still recommend this trip, as it is reasonably priced and easy to get to from the United States. Cost of the trip (excluding airfare): \$2,635.00.”

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■ *Editor Note: Subscriber, Bill Wichers has been supplying this newsletter with quality reports for quite some time. We don’t often hear much from Honduras, but Bill and his wife just returned from a trip where they fished Guanaja—a tiny island just 70 kilometers off the north coast of Honduras—for bonefish and permit. Here is a detailed account of his experience there:*



“My wife, Donna, and I fished around the island of Guanaja in the Honduran Bay Islands April 22–27, 2018. We booked directly with Fly Fish Guanaja, the only fly-fishing operation in the waters around this island. They offer seven-night, six-day fishing packages, Saturday to Saturday, and the lodge can accommodate up to eight anglers.

“We flew United Airlines from Missoula, Montana, to Denver, then Houston, where we spent the night. The next morning we took United to the Honduran island of Roatán, where a facilitator met us at the airport with our tickets and checked our bags for the 20-minute flight on a 12-seater plane to Guanaja. The lodge manager, Kendall, met us at the Guanaja airport for the 20-minute boat ride to the tiny island of Jones Key, where the lodge is located. The roundtrip flight from Roatán to Guanaja is included in the total price for this package, \$4,200/person, with a shared room and guide. Also included was the boat ride to the Guanaja airport, assistance with tickets, and help with baggage.

“The lodge is small and comfortable and relatively new. There is no air conditioning in the lodge or the rooms, but the brisk breeze made A/C unnecessary every night except one. That night, things were a little warm for sleeping, as the daily high temperatures were in the mid-80s and at night hardly cooled down at all. Two very comfortable queen beds with quality mattresses were in each room. We were not bothered by mosquitoes or other bugs at the lodge. We did see a horsefly or two most days while we were fishing, but insect pests were rare on this trip. The lodge is supplied fresh water from a two-mile-long PVC pipeline along the ocean bottom from a spring on the main island, so there was plenty of hot water for showers. Likewise, an electric line also runs underwater to the lodge from Guanaja to provide electricity. A backup generator is in place for those times when power is temporarily interrupted (which happened once during the week we were there).

“The lodge also provided some thoughtful amenities, such as a hot/cold bottled water dispenser outside the door to our room. We brought our own water bottles to take along fishing each day, which we refilled from the dispenser. The guides washed our rods and reels after each fishing day at the dock and stored the rods there each night. (They have a night watchman who stays in the building at the dock.) Free laundry service is also available. They also have two friendly dogs and a couple of rescued parrots that live around the lodge.

“The food at the lodge was very good—local seafood (shrimp, lobster, conch) and chicken dominated the dinner menu (served at six o’clock) with excellent appetizers available before dinner. The fried shrimp were particularly outstanding. Beer and wine, as well as a basic hard liquor selection, were available and included in the fishing package. Breakfast was served at seven and included eggs, meat, toast, fresh fruit, cereal, and other items—lots of choices. Large and good sandwiches were the featured lunch item most days.

“On two days, we had lunch at the Crazy Fish Restaurant in the village

THE ANGLING REPORT

of Mangrove Bight (which was paid for by the lodge), part of lodge owner Steve Brown's commitment to involving the local residents and community as much as possible in his operation. He directly employs about 20 locals as guides and kitchen and lodge staff, providing some of the better-paying jobs available on Guanaja. The guides and kitchen staff speak very good English. The Bay Islands were originally settled by English speakers, and it is still the primary language spoken on these islands, even though Spanish is the official language of Honduras.

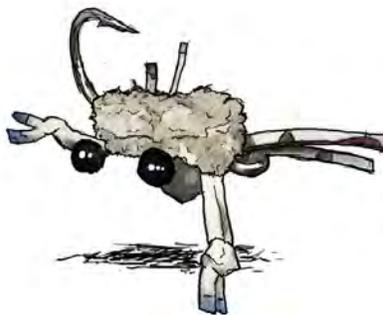
"The south and east sides of Guanaja have a small barrier reef with inside flats interconnected with 8–10 small islands (including Jones Key), while the north side of Guanaja has some white sand beaches dropping into deeper water, as well as some deeper flats near the northeast point of the island. We did a lot of wading for bonefish on the flats associated with the reef, while the rest of the fishing was from the boat poled by the guide. All of the flats had thick turtle grass, making weed guards on flies essential. The trip information from Fly Fish Guanaja strongly recommended weed guards on all bonefish and permit flies. Naturally, I didn't follow that recommendation, so most of our flies did not have weed guards, but that was quickly remedied by one of the staff adding them to about 20 of my flies. The weed guards made a big difference—heed their advice.

"We generally left the dock around 7:30 each morning and returned 3–4 p.m. Each day was sunny and windy (except our last day, which was cloudy and calm). We fished with three different guides (Cassidy, Darren, and Edwin) during the week. All were very experienced, capable, and good company. Two of the boats we fished out of were pangas (but with decent-sized casting decks and good rod holders), the other was a flats boat. Fishing was slower than I expected, for several reasons, but was still good. One reason was the nearly full moon we had that week; another was that we had primarily low or dropping tides during most of our fishing days. It was also very windy

almost every day along the reef, making long and accurate casts difficult. For the most part, the north side of Guanaja was the lee side, and casting was much easier there.

"Also, the Guanaja bonefish have a reputation of being more difficult to catch than those at many other locations, maybe because they are larger on average than most caught in this part of the world. The smallest bonefish we caught was about two and a half pounds, the largest almost eight. Of the eight bonefish landed, most were between three and five pounds. We didn't see any large schools of small bonefish like you typically see in many places in Mexico and Belize.

"Almost all of our time was spent fishing for bonefish and permit, although we did cast to tarpon several times, and



Donna landed one that went about 25 pounds. She also caught a four- to five-pound permit. I landed one permit on a small worm fly that literally was about five inches long—a really cute miniature permit that was the smallest I've ever seen. I also had two larger permit eat crab flies, the first I missed with a trout set, the second I hooked with a strip set, but it broke off the fly. The two days we spent a lot of time looking for permit provided us with 8–10 decent shots each day. Unfortunately (but typical of permit), most of those fish looked at but didn't eat the flies. Some were on the north side of the island on grass flats and sand beaches, the rest were on grass flats associated with the reef or along the south shore of the main island. We saw some large permit in the 20- to 30-pound category, but most were smaller, under 12 pounds. Fly Fish Guanaja began primarily as a bonefish

destination, but in recent years it has shifted a lot of emphasis toward permit.

"Wading the flats associated with the reef was the most productive bonefishing for us. We also caught bonefish on the north side of Guanaja, fishing off the boat. Donna caught the biggest bonefish of the trip in the mouth of a creek on the north side as it moved out on a dropping tide. I also caught a large boxfish (my first) and we both caught small snappers, needlefish, and barracudas.

For permit, we used mostly tan or olive crab flies (Bauer crab, Kung Fu crab, etc.) and spawning shrimp patterns. Tan-colored shrimp flies without a lot of flash were used most of the time for bonefish, generally in small sizes (8 or even 10). I experimented with a two-fly rig with some success the last three days. A small tan shrimp followed by a wine-colored worm worked well for bonefish until I lost the worm (the only one I had). I actually hooked a bonefish and permit at the same time on a spawning shrimp and small, tan floating crab. The permit broke off, but I landed the four-pound bonefish on the shrimp.

"We also brought our snorkeling equipment and spent an hour swimming around Michael's Rock on the north shore of Guanaja one day. The snorkeling was excellent, with lots of diversity in fish and coral species, as good as most places we've snorkeled on the barrier reef in Belize.

"Another thing to mention is Fly Fish Guanaja's trip to the Faraway Keys, a group of uninhabited islands and sand flats 160 miles (1.5-hour helicopter flight) east of Guanaja. This program provides four days of fishing on these flats for up to five anglers, combined with two days of fishing around Guanaja—the day before the helicopter ride from the lodge and then the day after it returns. The four anglers who did the Faraway trip the week we were at the lodge reported lots of nice bonefish and many shots at permit. They landed three permit and some bonefish at Faraway. The accommodations (yurts with cots) and food were good. The total cost of this trip is \$9,500, for a shared room and guide.

"Steve is committed to this area,

annually hosting groups of up to ten students from Colorado (Steve's home state) each week in June for a combination education and work trip under the Fish for Change program. The students typically work in the mornings (to date they've planted more than 500,000 mangrove shoots in areas denuded by Hurricane Mitch in 1998) and learn to flats-fish,

try some snorkeling, interact with locals, and so on in the afternoons. He has also been active in raising money for a local hospital, with one of his clients donating \$200,000 to this project. Another guest provides scholarships to the children of guides to attend private school on the island.

"In summary, this was a very nice

trip and a reasonable value for the price. There were good opportunities for nice-sized bonefish and ample chances to cast to permit. The entire operation was very well run and we would return given the chance."

Postscript: For more info about this operation, go to <http://www.flyfishguanaja.com/>.

• On the Radar •

Angling Report subscribers are always looking for new opportunities and waters to explore. In this section, we will provide you with details for new and expanded operations that are popping up on the international and domestic radar.

"To my mind, the greatest reward and luxury of travel is to be able to experience everyday things as if for the first time, to be in a position in which almost nothing is so familiar it is taken for granted." —Bill Bryson

What do you look for in a fishing trip? The formula for success varies widely from angler to angler, but there are some common denominators. First, there's the fish. The tug is definitely the drug, but the ends need to justify the means to some degree. Nobody flies to Patagonia to fish for perch. Regarding travel, how many connections, deafening prop-plane rides, and hours on spine-numbing country "roads" are you willing to endure? For lodging, thatched huts, luxury villas, and pitched tents are all acceptable shelters if the fishing is up to snuff. Does the day close with inconceivably delicious Malbec and cordero al palo or a soggy PB&J? Or is freshly harvested seafood on the menu? Friendly staff? Double occupancy? The list goes on. Though there is no "perfect trip," if you do your homework and you know what you're looking for, you can get pretty darn close.

Looking for your next big adventure? If your personal formula for success includes large fish; rustic, yet comfortable lodging; great Mexican food; and all for an incredible price, then we have a new place for you to consider. The Bahia La Tortuga Fishing Lodge sits quietly on the beachfront of the small fishing village of Puerto Vincente Guerrero, Mexico. Here, the Sierra Madre del Sur Mountains dip into the Pacific Ocean to form what some claim is one of the best billfishing destinations in the world.

The Mexican Riviera is home to sailfish, marlin, roosterfish, tuna, and a host of other fish, all accessible with both flies and conventional tackle. I recently spoke with owner John Lorenz about the lodge and what anglers can expect to encounter at Bahia La Tortuga.

The southern Pacific coast of Mexico has been slated as a premier billfish destination, and you're right in the thick of it. What techniques do you use to catch them, and what can anglers expect from the experience?

We are blessed to have this area of the Big Coast to ourselves. We haven't experienced the heavy fishing pressure that areas to the north and south have for years. When you fish with us, you're normally the only boat in sight. When you find fish, you don't have to worry about other boats seeing you hooked up and cashing in on your success. With little pressure, our fish are easier to target. This allows us to listen to each angler's needs and focus on landing fish with the methods they prefer. We can slow troll 30- to 50-pound outfits for billfish, bait and switch with spinning rods, or tease up fish with hookless teasers for our fly fisherman.

I understand there are several species other than billfish that will be of interest to flyrodders. What other species are available in the region, and in what seasons?

Fishermen here have plenty to keep them busy year-round. October thru April is prime time for Pacific sailfish. This time of year, most clients target sailfish that are usually no more than a fifteen-minute boat ride away. We normally see 5-10 sailfish a

day this time of year, and it's an excellent time to tease them up to flies. We also have many other species to keep you in your backing. Here, the mahi-mahi, or dorado as the locals call them, are beautiful and also some of the best-tasting fish. They are very prolific this time of year. Coming to our hookless teasers, they are eager to charge a fly and are an accomplishment any way you land them.

May through September, we still have billfish but we see the return of the king of the beach, the roosterfish. He prowls the beach with his combs flared in search of baitfish. Once you've caught one, you'll understand all the fuss. They are magnificent and have power like you've never seen. Most battles last 30 minutes or more, even on 50-pound braid. Roosterfish here can go up to 80 pounds but most fish are 25 to 50 pounds and it's not uncommon to land five to eight fish a day. We also have many other species to round out your holiday. Little tunny, Sierra mackerel, ladyfish and houndfish are just a few other species available.

Can you talk a bit about your location, and what's the best way to get there?

We are located on the Costa Grande or the "Big Coast." The lodge is about one hour south of Zihuatanejo. Most major airlines fly here, and the airport code is ZIH. Once you arrive, a representative will transport guests to the lodge.

We've heard a bit about great Mexican food at Bahia La Tortuga. What else can guests expect while staying at your lodge?

Bahia La Tortuga Fishing Lodge is a

THE ANGLING REPORT

simple lodge. To me, it feels like camping when I was a kid. Long days in the sun followed by starlit nights around a fire on the beach that allows you to relive each day. It's a great place to spend time with family and friends.

This is a really special place. It's like stepping back in time. It rekindles our passion, our spirit. It takes you back to your first memories of fishing. Back to that first fish when it was new and every minute was consumed about how to be better and catch more fish. There's a magic about this village, the mountains, and its people. When you arrive, you dread leaving. When you do leave, you dream of returning.

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For more on Bahia La Tortuga, go to

<https://www.escapeixtapa.com>, call (956) 455-6931, or email them at escape@escapeixtapa.com.

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