



Baby Tarpon Lagoon, Chetumal Bay



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We are in the eighth year of publishing our monthly newsletter with updates on great fly fishing venues, trip reports and insights for our traveling fly fishers. We've been to most locations and pride ourselves on our ability to research new destinations. Whatever unbiased information on timing and locations we can provide comes at the same cost to you as booking direct – i.e., NO EXTRA COST.

BELIZE DISCOVERY WEEKS – PART ONE

It is exciting to find that after 25+ years of fishing a certain destination, there are new experiences to be had and new opportunities to explore. We began taking Belize mothership trips in 1986. Last December, we dedicated a week to exploring snook fishing in Belize using a mothership as our base of operations. That resulted in our taking our largest snook ever as well as discovering, after an hour boat ride in the skiff from the places we usually fish, the most amazing snook and baby tarpon mangrove shoreline I've ever seen. Last month, we spent two distinctly different "discovery weeks" in Belize. The first was on the mothership Meca doing an exploratory trip north into Chetumal Bay – the report on that trip is the feature article in this newsletter. For the second week, I was joined by my wife, son, son-in-law, and two oldest grand children (10 and 13) for a family trip on the larger mothership, the Rising Tide.....the report on that trip will follow in the September newsletter.

Ryan Hawks, Mickey Myhre, and myself boarded the mothership Meca in Belize City. The Meca towed two skiffs behind her as we motored into Chetumal Bay. Logistics were to play a large role in this trip and those logistics are covered in the day-by-day report and map that, if you are interested in the details, are available through the linked report at the conclusion of this article. For the sake of space in this newsletter report, we will report the details of what I considered a very interesting day. This day would result in a "boat grand slam," each one of us contributing one of the three fish necessary.



This was our third day and we had just anchored the night before in the Bacalar Chico Marine Preserve in Belize on the edge of the border with Mexico. The highlights of our first two days included many solid shots on the flats at baby tarpon up to 30#.....jumping several and releasing three.....plus having a 20 bonefish day (photos above I to r: Ryan battling and releasing baby tarpon; Mickey casting to cruising "babies"; bonefish).

The day began with dark clouds building from the south. The winds early were light. Ryan and I were fishing with a Mexican guide which allowed us to fish into Mexican waters in the area around Cayo Chelem, just north of the preserve's Belizean ranger station. We had decided to focus on permit as this area was reported to have good numbers of them. We began seeing fish soon after beginning to pole.....had a few good shots but didn't connect. Before long, Ryan had one eat and was hooked up solid – celebrating the hook up in photo at left, below. Photos - Our guide with 8# permit and Ryan releasing it. We had a few shots at a large fish in the 25-30# range.....I'm almost sure he ate, but never felt a tick. He had turned his massive flank to us as he studied the fly

and it was clearly visible from nose to tail. Clouds were building all morning and as they got darker, the fish seemed to disappear. We tried wading and looking for permit or bones on the edge of a flat with no luck before deciding that the storm was almost on us and headed for cover on the Meca (at right).



Mickey (left below with bone) fished the morning in Belizean waters inside the preserve with our captain guiding him. His morning was slow, but his day ended up with a session that he described that evening as “phenomenal.” Mickey described his version of a phenomenal bonefish session in these words: “The morning did not start with much promise; an incoming tropical storm had seemingly vacated the flats, and by late morning, we were fleeing the oncoming thunderhead. It didn’t clear until about 3:30 pm, and though it was grey and still sprinkling, my guide and I thought we’d return and look for bonefish in the nearby marine preserve where we had fished that morning. When we got there, we found ourselves on the leeward side of low wind at low tide, with gently undulating skinny water otherwise glass smooth--and the bonefish, which earlier had been scarce--were everywhere. I could see the fish eat the flies....saw one eat, spit the fly, then hooked and landed him on the second take. I probably saw the take clearly on over half of the dozen or so 3-4 lb fish I landed in the two hours we fished, till the light faded and we had to leave. On at least three occasions, I unhooked a fish and immediately cast to and hooked another----the fishing was that good. I landed bonefish on every small light fly I had in my box, including a small crab which was especially easy to see on the bottom.....phenomenal fishing.”



For a few hours, the wind howled and the rain came down in sheets – a typical afternoon tropical storm. As fast as it began, the storm ended and, as often follows a fast moving tropical storm, the water was like glass. Ryan and I headed north to a small bay that reportedly had a good baby tarpon population. And good it was! This mangrove edged lagoon had several different aspects, most notably at least five cenotes (note: a cenote is a deep hole in the limestone bottom that possibly connects to either the ocean or fresh water river inland). During this session, we fished only a specific mangrove edge (above photos) where we could see fish rolling on the outside of the mangroves. We jumped three and I released the 22 pounder at right, above.

After jumping the three fish, we poled over to the mangrove edge to release a fly that was hung in the branches. While we were on the edge, Ryan and I looked down and were stunned by an amazing site.....there was a narrow cenote right at the edge of the bushes, maybe 8 or 10 feet across. There were an uncountable number of 10 to 30# tarpon in that hole.....we could see their backs clearly as they mulled around, crisscrossing over each other. They were stacked on top of each other for as far down as we could see! An amazing sight.....and one that turned out to be singular as we checked a few times later in the week, but never saw them in that hole again.



We made stops in this lagoon a few more times over the next three days and found fish in several different places (above photos). One time, there were a few small schools of 8 – 12# fish in the shallows on the edges.

Another time, I found a 35-40# fish feeding in the largest cenote. Every few minutes, he would roll on the surface. I had several good shots at him over a 90 minute period, trying all my favorite tarpon flies, but could not connect.

Below, l to r: the three of us motoring fast to catch up with the Meca on our last day; Meca at anchor; Ryan sets the anchor on shore after returning to Belize City; we discuss the map and the next days agenda – Mickey center and Ryan at right pointing to where he wants to fish our last day.



If you'd like to see a day-by-day report on this trip with an accompanying map showing the areas fished, this link will take you there.....[Chetumal Bay Exploratory Report w.map](#)

JURASSIC LAKE UPDATES



The recently ended season at Strobel Lake in Argentina saw the same sort of results that have earned this lake the nickname of Jurassic Lake. Actually, this year saw an increase in both 15# and 20# rainbows taken with a largest fish of 23# coming from the lake. The biggest 'bow taken in the one and only stream running into or out of the lake (the Barrancoso River) was 21#.

Estancia Laguna Verde has made many improvements in their five years of operation and now have over 40 kms of roads to different parts of Strobel allowing the lodge, using their fleet of ATV's, to fish over 14 kms of shoreline. From late December through March, winds were down from the usual making casting dry flies and mice patterns to these cruising monsters an added attraction. The lodge also has access to 10 kms of the Barrancoso River, including stretches within a few hundred yards of the lake. Twice a

year, these giant rainbows make their spawning run into the Barrancoso, and during those times, this must be the most exciting rainbow stream fishing on the planet.

This is not an easy spot to get to but is one of the world's most unique fisheries. For a unique and contrasting dual Argentina adventure, a visit to Jurassic Lake can combine with the sub-tropical Golden Dorado fisheries in the northern part of the country (or the more traditional Patagonia trout fishing on the eastern side of the Andes). If you'd like more details, ask for our personal photo essay trip report which explains the history of this special watershed.

SOUTH PACIFIC REPORTS

BOUTIQUE FISHERIES

Roger Lynberg (at right with large bonefish; below with trevally) sent me a note after his visit to Aitutaki in the South Pacific. His stay at Aitutaki was "fantastic - people, service and food were exemplary." Relating to the fishery, Roger stated....."I believe Aitutaki should become a 'boutique' destination with a price tag offering the opportunity for 'personal best' for no more than ten fly fisher persons per month because of the smaller areas of decent flats. The fishing was spectacular the first two days, given the small area to fish.....everyone worked hard for an eat thereafter."



Roger describes a situation that is too prevalent in the world of fly fishing

marketing. Someone catches some exciting fish at a “new” location. It gets a lot of publicity and soon the big fly fishing travel marketers are all over it touting it as the “latest great discovery.” Often, what follows is many more fishermen than the resource can handle are being piled into this destination. Soon, the fish get tired of it all and either leave or become so educated, they aren’t fun to fish for anymore. Or, people begin to discover there are serious limitations to the fishery based on timing considerations, numbers, area covered, etc. Roger’s suggestion of establishing ‘boutique’ destinations with reasonable limits on the numbers of fisherman allowed into the area is a good one.....ain’t going to happen though. The marketers can’t make enough money with this approach. I’ve already rushed off to visit, over the last 15 years, several of these “latest great discoveries”.....my attitude has become “wait and see.” Are there really the numbers of fish necessary to sustain it with fishing pressure and, if there are, what is the best way and time to approach fishing that particular watershed? Waiting a few years to let others do the experimenting is the best approach. If it really is good and solid enough to sustain itself with fishing pressure, it will be better with a seasoned, reputable, outfitter to explain how and when to fish it.



AMAZING AUSTRALIA VARIETY

Located 1200 kms north of Perth in northwest Australia is the stunning marine environment of the World Heritage listed Ningaloo Reef and Coral Bay. Covering over 250 kms, this marine wonderland is not new to the world’s marine enthusiasts who covet the richest aqua ecosystems on the planet. What is relatively new is the exciting shallow water fly fishing opportunities available here.



Above, l to r: trophy bonefish, GT, barramundi, permit



The element of this fishery that first grabbed my attention is the mix of species. I don’t know of anywhere that has available in reasonable quantity a mix that includes the fish in the photos above! Additionally, there are large Golden Trevally, cobia, giant herring, queenfish, longtail tuna, milkfish, and a little offshore, sailfish. Almost all these fish are taken in crystal clear shallow water.

For several years, my wife, Marte, and I have tied a tropical destination into our annual New Zealand trip. It didn’t take long to decide that this may be a good candidate for the tropical stop for next year. Being stimulated by my initial impressions, I did the appropriate amount of digging and information gathering. After locating the top fly fishing guide for the area and suitable accommodations in the town of Exmouth, we looked at air. Non-stop flights from Auckland to Perth were available on Air NZ that could tie into our overall air itinerary using the AMEX “2 for 1” business class plan.....bingo! We’re booked for 9 days in Exmouth following our New Zealand stay early next year.

In addition to easily accessed world class snorkeling, our timing should include the nesting season for three of the seven species of sea turtles that migrate here to lay their eggs. This is truly a spectacular marine environment with a unique array of fly fishing targets.

AUGUST MEMORY PHOTO

The 10 pound brown stalked and sight cast to in one of New Zealand’s crystalline streams is one of fly fishing’s great thrills! Mick Malone took this 10.5# brown on the South Island during the late season this year. The stream he was fishing is a unique stretch of water that may have offered-up more ten pound-plus fish in the last three years than any other river in New Zealand. This river is mostly a lowland stream and, in the lower area where it flows across private farm land, is a solid brown trout fishery. However, the upper reaches of this stream have repeatedly produced fish of trophy size.



PHOTO CREDITS: Belize – Mickey Myhre and Ryan Hawks; Boutique Fisheries – Roger Lynberg; Australia – Brian Chambers, Rod Kimberly, Tim Shephard, Andy Vockler, Ian Gough.

Either phone or drop us an e-mail if you have questions or would like more information about any of our destinations.

An enthusiastic traveling fly fisherman,

Don Muelrath

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