



### CHETUMAL BAY EXPLORATORY TRIP

Mid July – Ryan Hawks, Mickey Myhre, and I boarded the Meca mothership towing two skiffs out of Belize City for the purpose of exploring the fishery in Chetumal Bay. Generally, we wanted to fish the best waters near Ambergris Cay, the Chetumal waters in southern Mexico, and the northern-most Belize waters. Not even our captain had ever fished much of the water we wanted to reach. This would be a learning experience beginning with the species available in each area and including the political issues, such as how and what was necessary to cross the border and fish in Mexican waters.

Did we accomplish everything we set out to? No, we barely scratched the potential of some areas and we ran out of time and never got to other sections we wanted to fish. However, we did cover a lot of water, and given the weather conditions we had, it was a very productive trip.

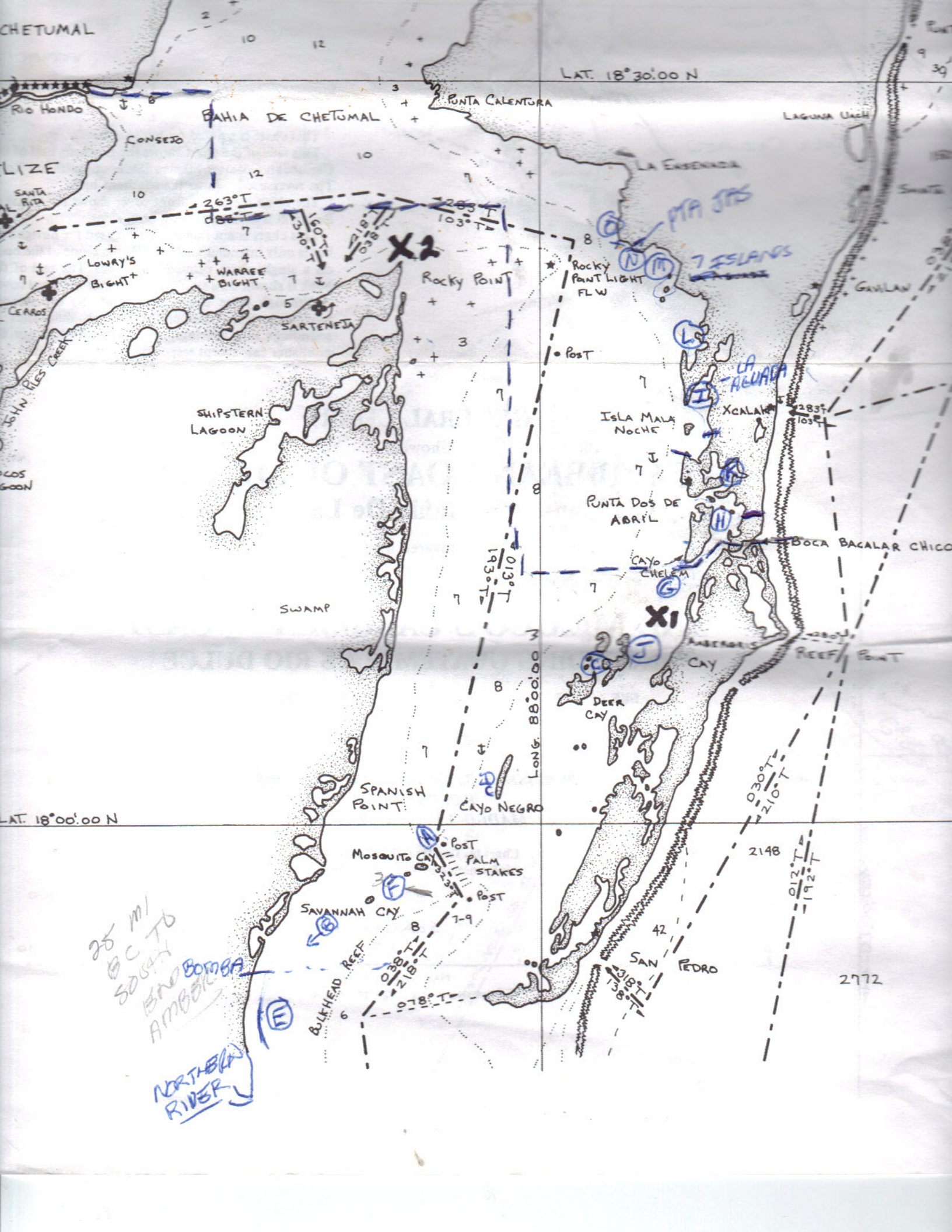
A complete session by session report of our results and locations visited/fished follows. The basic conclusions, in brief format, were:

1. bonefishing: many good options for quality sight fishing for bones on clear flats (white sand or marl).....some good wading flats. Singles, pairs, and some large schools were found. Average size was good and seemed to increase the further north into the bay we fished – areas L, M, N, O. Good opportunities for newcomers to salt water fly fishing as well as veterans looking for good target casting and sightfishing.
2. baby tarpon: maybe the highlight of the trip were the baby tarpon. We found areas with good numbers of 10 – 30# fish on the flats as well as the more traditional mangrove lagoons. Released at least one tarpon each day, all over 20#, except for one 10# on last day.
3. permit: The lagoons and flats around Cayo Chelem held a good population of permit including some large fish in the 20 – 30# range. This area is a solid permit fishery, although limited in size. We fished this spot with Mexican guides and, because they are not allowed to fish in Belize waters, did not get a chance to fish the adjoining waters across the border with Belize. This area of Belize is a marine preserve – more below.
4. large tarpon: sparse.....a few sighted in the 40 – 60# range, but that was it. We know there are some areas around southern Ambergris that hold the large fish, but we didn't fish them, preferring on this trip to focus on the smaller tarpon.
5. miscellaneous species: some good cuda areas.....no snook that we found. We were told that snook are found in mangrove lagoons on the mainland shoreline. Our December exploratory experiences in the Northern River Lagoon seem to verify the possibility that these lagoons on the western side of the bay will hold numbers of baby tarpon and snook.
6. Given weather conditions, we had very solid results. All of us fished hard.
7. There are two places that definitely need further exploration. Both of the spots marked X1 and X2 on the map are located entirely in Belize. The X1 area, the 60 square kms of the Bacalar Chico Marine Reserve, has fascinating possibilities. We found great bonefishing here and have been told there are also permit and baby tarpon. The area marked X2 has often attracted us, but was far enough off our chosen path, we just couldn't get there this trip. X2 is far from any fishing lodge or outfitter and has numerous lagoons and flats.

#### DAY BY DAY

(capital letters refer to areas marked on the map)

Map: the map enclosed in the attached PDF has letters marking the places described in the detailed report below. The border with Mexico is marked with dashes (- - -) and steps down the center of the bay connecting Rio Hondo on the west side and Boca Bacalar Chico on the east side.



CHETUMAL

LAT. 18° 30' 00 N

LIZE

BAHIA DE CHETUMAL

PUNTA CALENTURA

LAGUNA UACH

CONSEJO

LA ESSENCIA

263° T

263° T

PTA JTS

7 ISLANDS

LOWRY'S BIGHT

WARREE BIGHT

X2

Rocky Point

Rocky Point LIGHT FLW

Post

SHIPSTERN LAGOON

SARTENEJ

Isla Mala Noche

LA AGUADA

XCALAK

283° T

103° T

PUNTA DOS DE ABRIL

BOCA BACALAR CHICO

CAYO CHELEM

X1

AMBERG'S CAY

DEER CAY

REEF POINT

SWAMP

SPANISH POINT

CAYO NEGRO

Post PALM STAKES

Mosquito Cay

SAVANNAH CAY

030° T

210° T

2148

012° T

192° T

25 MI BC TO SOUTHWEST BEND AMBOL

BOMBA

NORTHERN RIVER

BULKHEAD REEF

SAN PEDRO

2772



Definition of sessions when fishing from a mothership in Belize: 1<sup>st</sup> session – 6:00am until breakfast. 2<sup>nd</sup> session – between breakfast and lunch. 3<sup>rd</sup> session – late afternoon and evening.

7/10 arrive into Belize City and motor 5 hours north to near Cayo Negro (Blackadore) for our first anchorage – A. Severe tropical depression in the area.

7/11 weather still bad.....afternoon began to break up.

1<sup>st</sup> session: fished B, south of Savannah Cay. Saw 7 tarpon, mostly 20# range, one around 40#. 3 good shots and jumped/landed one of 20#.

2<sup>nd</sup> session: C.....6 bones, most sight casted....1 large cuda hooked. Moved the Meca to D.

3<sup>rd</sup> session: C (SE point of Cayo Negro)....fished large school of bones....released 14.

7/12 light clouds, winds light.....our best weather day.

1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> session: left at 5:00 and brought breakfast with us. B again our starting point – had 5 shots early, 3 tarpon jumped, 2 landed – 15 and 25#. Moved to channel (E) which parallels the mainland, about 8 feet deep and bordered on shallow end by white sand strip, located between Bomba (where the cable to Ambergris goes into the water) and the Northern River Lagoon. Can only fish this area (west coast of bay) when winds are down. Holds larger tarpon. Saw a few in the 60# range but no good shots. Moved back to B. No fish on dead low tide, but as soon as tide began moving, fish showed. Lots of shots at 15-30# fish. Skinny water, blue skies, and light winds = jumpy fish. Lots of follows but no eats! Moved to F.....shallow flat between cays....lots of nervous small tarpon and bones. Got two bones. Saw school of large bones – 6 – 8# class. This area is an interesting one holding large numbers of baby tarpon and gets attention from San Pedro guides.....nervous fish....seems to fish best early in the morning.

3<sup>rd</sup> session: moved Meca to new anchorage at G, west of the Belize Ranger Station in the Bacalar Chico Marine Reserve – 2.5 hours motoring.

7/13 day began perfect with light winds and sun. Before noon, heavy front blew in with winds and rain. Late afternoon, after storm passed, water turned glassy everywhere.

1<sup>st</sup> session: two fished with one of our Mexican guides for permit (H). Had 6 good permit shots, released one of 8# on Ryan's crab tie. Had a large fish (25# range) work fly, think he ate, but no set. One of us fished south into the preserve (J).....saw few fish and got 1 bone. Note: cost \$5US a day to fish in the preserve.....must get license at ranger station.

2<sup>nd</sup> session: waited out storm for 2.5 hours on the Meca.

3<sup>rd</sup> session: two of us with Mexican guide went 20 minutes north to I for baby tarpon. Fished a mangrove bush with a deep cenote at the edge. Many fish rolling – 10 – 30#. Jumped 3 (20, 22, and 30#) and landed the 22#. Cenote was full of 20#+ fish....strange looking down into it and seeing all those backs moving, stacked on top of each other. Didn't see this phenomenon again later in week. Mickey went south again into the preserve to J, back side of Deer Cay. Had a great bonefishing segment...fish on clear bottom, takes visible, lots of tailers, one fish around 5# - released a dozen in two hours. Mickey described it as a "phenomenal bonefish session". Asked to describe further what he meant, he submitted this description of what constitutes such a session with bonefish: "The morning did not start with much promise; an incoming tropical storm had seemingly vacated the flats, and by 10:30 am we were fleeing the oncoming thunderhead 4-5 miles away. It didn't clear until about 3:30 pm, and though it was grey and still sprinkling, my guide Eddie and I thought we'd try our hand at bonefish at the nearby marine reserve. When we got there at 4, 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 added four feet of tippet to my leader, choose unweighted flies and could see them sink to the bottom. 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 may never encounter such bonefishing again--I landed bonefish on every small light fly I had in my box, including a small raghead crab which was especially easy to see on the bottom.....phenomenal fishing."

7/14 weather started bad and got worse. Had to be off water for 3 hours mid-day with heavy winds and rain. Fished with two Mexican guides for the remainder of the trip.

1<sup>st</sup> session: two went looking for permit and bones (H). Winds forced them to sheltered flats (K) with lots of wading opportunities. Got 7 bones, 5 while wading. One went to I for baby tarpon. Jumped 2 and released a weighed 23# fish.

2<sup>nd</sup> session: sat out most with the storm.

3<sup>rd</sup> session: all back to I to look for baby t.....fish rolling on mangrove edge and some smaller ones in shallows on edges of lagoon. Only got one jumped.

7/15 began gray with light rain. Afternoon saw limited blue sky, but overcast. Winds medium.

1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> session: left early and took lunches with us and went north. Fished I, L, M, N and O. Mickey got a 23# pound tarpon at I on the way north. Got 7 bones and 2 cuda (L, M, N, O), most with short 20' casts. Lots of bones broke off on the lava patches up north. Saw one 60# tarpon. Many bones in 4-6# range. Back late....no 3<sup>rd</sup> session.

7/16 partly cloudy and winds light to medium.

1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> sessions: left early and took lunch with us. Two went to H for permit. 15 permit sightings (some schools), 7 good shots. Waded....got 1 permit shot and released 11 bones. One went to I.....baby tarpon schools of 8 – 10# fish working the edges of the lagoon. Some bones. Got one 10# fish. Larger tarpon (35-40#) in largest cenote hole feeding – worked him for 90 min, but couldn't get an eat. Fished rollers in mangrove hole for 2 hrs – but no eats. Moved to H for two hours....2 good permit shots. 3:00 – all met at Ranger Station to go south the catch up with Meca which had begun motoring south.

7/17 departures from Belize City

**PHOTO CREDITS:** most of the photos were taken by John Landis and Jon Stettler.

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

Fly Fishing Adventures

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