

Windknots

A monthly publication of the Texas Flyfishers

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Luck Comes in All Forms

by Norbert Burch



Norbert and Mark with a nice pair of bones

Planning a vacation can always be tricky. It can be almost impossible to get everything to come together just right when you make all of your choices three to four months in advance. There always seems to be at least one thing wrong – weather, travel, fishing, or people just don't seem to get along. Recently I was lucky to experience a trip where it all came together. What perfect timing since Janette and I were celebrating our twenty-fifth anniversary that same week.

Good friends, good weather, and good fishing. What more could you ask for? Lighthouse Point Hotel, Freeport, Grand Bahama Island was our destination the week of May 28th. Mark and Cathy Lucas, Jim and Marlene, our neighbors, and Janette and I were the lucky group. Just about all you need is within walking distance of the hotel grounds. Golf, if you swing that stick, which Jim did, is also a short ride from the hotel.

Bonefishing, on the other hand, is a 45 minute drive to the east end of the island. Mark and I fished on Tuesday and Thursday. The weather was perfect, no clouds and ten m.p.h. winds. We booked our fishing with Captain Phil and Mel's Bonefishing Guide Service, (242) 353-3960. I took a gamble on them based on a short fishing report I found on the internet and the fact that they would take us on the days we wanted to fish. Most of the other guide services wanted you to book the week with them as a package. We were very pleased with the guide and the services.

Our guide, Harry, worked hard. He put us on fish all day and was funny. Best of all he spoke English. Both days we caught 12 to 15 bonefish up to seven pounds and had numerous shots at fish over 10 pounds. One of the best tips Harry gave us, which we used many times, was if you hook a bonefish close to the mangroves, don't pressure it and it will head for deeper water. If you pressure the fish it will run straight into the mangroves for cover and cut you off.

The hotel offered several things for the women to do while the men were fishing or playing golf, including many shops, snorkeling, a spa, a very nice exercise gym, a casino, and a great pool and beach just yards away from our rooms. Reasonable dining was available with prices comparable to home and enough variations that we didn't get bored. Night life is lacking if you're looking for some dancing and a little late night fun. We watched the moon rise each night and were in bed by eleven, which made for a relaxing and refreshing trip. I am looking forward to the future with Janette, the love of my life, and our next trip to the Bahamas.

President's Corner

by Jerry "Buggywhip" Loring, president, Texas Flyfishers



Could this year be another 1995 or 1996? Fishing-wise, wet weather has been against the middle Gulf coast and hill country fishing for the last six weeks. Wet weather in this instance is defined as rain, rain and more rain. Every river in the hill country, and along the coast, has had its flow rates go up, then down, then back up again, especially the Guadalupe, Colorado, Brazos, and Llano.

We all know what happens when rivers flow at or near flood stage for week after week. The bays become fresh and muddy. The old salts call the bay water "sweet" at this point. Sweet is a strange word to use because fishing is poor and coastal business suffers. But that attitude fits into the fatalistic happy-go-lucky attitude of shrimpers, oyster dredgers, fishing guides, and marina owners. When it comes to weather, these guys take their lumps and keep on going on. However, not all fishing is ruined. Bait works well because of the smell. Who in fly fishing circles would use bait on a fly rod? Well, that is best discussed in the back of the meeting room. Bad weather, no sun, and cloudy water make fly fishing difficult to enjoy. Clear, salty water with a good tide works best.

1995 was the year of the wind, which started blowing about mid-April and stopped around mid-October. A day with less than fifteen m.p.h. wind was a blessing that summer. Most of it was from the southwest. Because of the direction most Texas bays are laid out on the coast, the water stayed off color for five months. Since only the back lakes held clear water, we really learned our way around them that year.

1996 was the year of low tides. The tides never quite made their usual spring high level and dropped below their normal low in early June. No storms came along to raise the tides so they just sat there all summer about one foot under normal. One foot in Florida or Alaska would be laughed at, but here on the Texas Coast that is 50% of our total tide movement. With the water that low, the back lakes were inaccessible and we learned where to fish inside the bay.

The point is that each season has its unique characteristics. Captain Chuck Naiser said the current conditions are the longest period of "sweet water" he has ever seen. In his memory, most fresh water periods last a month or so. This one is going on three months. Go figure. If you fish, adapt, and take what Mother Nature gives.

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Summer Fly Swap Deadline Extended

The deadline for entering the summer fly swap announced in the last issue (see June *Wind Knots*, p. 8) has been extended to the end of July. To make it work, at least six people have to sign up – and up to twelve make a good swap. So far, only two have signed, so there's plenty of room.

The way it works is that each participant ties as many of a particular pattern as there are participants (plus one extra to be given away as a set at the Redfish Rodeo). Then the swapmaster, Chris Summers, collects all the flies, makes them into sets, and sends a complete set back to each participant.

If you'd like to join, the theme is "Redfish Flies, ABC (Anything But Clousers)." Contact Chris Summers at csumers@houston.rr.com.



All Hooked Up

by D. Brent Barnes
1 July 2004

It was a beautiful, humid morning as I walked to the marina in Cabo San Lucas where I was to meet Grant Hartman of Baja Anglers (www.baja-anglers.com). Having slept little the night before, most likely due to a combination of excitement coupled with sleeping in a strange bed, I arrived at the marina even before the shop opened. Sitting on the steps in front of the shop, I surveyed the beginnings of the daily maritime activity and mused about whether the fishing would be worth the cost of the charter due to the cloudless night with a very bright full moon.

Moments later, a gentleman inquired if I might be Brent and introduced himself as Grant. There was instant camaraderie upon discovery that we were both Texans. Grant found his way from Austin to Cabo San Lucas many years ago. Falling in love with both the local beauty and fishing, he has been there ever since.

In the shop, we enjoyed some conversation over a hot cup of coffee. He asked me what I hoped to catch. I naturally told him the big rooster fish of the area but I also wanted a marlin on a fly rod. I still wonder what ever possessed me to blurt that out! Grant explained to me that unfortunately he would not be able to fish with me that day and had arranged one of his best captains and first mates. He has spent over five years training and teaching each of his guides and has a great deal of confidence in their skills and talents.

Admitting that I had never fly fished saltwater before, he graciously gave me some brief pointers and instructions. Having grown up fishing the streams in the mountains of Tennessee and later Utah, Colorado, Arkansas and Alaska, my first saltwater experience in the "marlin capital of the world" was going to be a real treat. I shared some fishing stories of a recent May trip to Alaska while we awaited the arrival of my guide. Soon Roberto and Juan arrived and we started the voyage out of the marina to the open ocean.

Out in the ocean, we trolled for some bonito to use for bait and then set out in search of marlin. Juan put out both a bonito and some teasers and we began trolling. Juan explained to me that once a fish begins to chase the teaser, they slow or stop the boat and begin to retrieve the teaser. My job was simple, put the fly (if you can call the monster I was fishing with a "fly") in front of the hookless teaser and begin to strip it for the marlin to take. Sounds simple, eh?

First of all, I had never cast such a behemoth fly rod before. Between the unfamiliar rod weight, attempting to keep my balance in the pitching boat and the wind gusts, it was a real task to get any distance on the cast. Juan was very patient and told me to just relax, get it out as far as I could and he would bring the fish to it, but I better be ready to strip the line and set the hook.

All of a sudden, Juan yelled "Marleeeeeen"! The boat slowed, and as he brought the teaser closer I began the back cast and worked the fly through the air. It landed on the water and I waited for Juan's teaser to catch up to it. He started yelling, "strip, strip, strip!" as I began to strip the line. Once the marlin spotted it, Juan told me to stop stripping and just twitch it, moving it only a small distance at a time toward the boat. He had no sooner given me the instructions when I saw the dorsal fin behind my fly, and suddenly the bill of the fish emerged out of the water. Next Juan was yelling, "huuk 'eem"! "Got him"! I yelled back.

The fight was on as the marlin shot out of the water like a rocket and danced on the surface like a maritime ballerina. I came to realize very quickly why saltwater anglers often wear gloves. Setting the hook, he took line and literally burned blisters across my fingers as he ripped line through my grasp. All in all, it took about 45 minutes and lots of finesse, but we finally boated an 85-pound striped marlin. We quickly took some pictures and returned him to the water where Juan revived him and watched him return to the depths.

We hooked up four more times that day but were never able to get my elusive rooster fish. All in all, not a bad day for a pure novice fishing during the full moon phase. What am I going to do about the rooster fish? Suppose I will just have to talk my wife into taking another vacation in Cabo San Lucas. Wonder if I can convince her to engage in such drudgery?



The Bahia Grande Restoration Project

by Ralph G. Adams, Jr.

There is some exciting news on the conservation front here in Texas. And true to Texas, it's happening big – in this case, over 6,000 acres big.

The plan is to re-flood the southern portion of the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge. The area is located between Brownsville and Port Isabel. This portion of LANWR is known as Bahia Grande and comprises over 10,000 acres. Park managers believe this is the largest marsh recovery project ever undertaken in the U.S. and probably the world.

Historically, the Bahia Grande was a tidally influenced marsh. In the 1930s, the Army Corps of Engineers placed the dredge spoils from the Brownsville Ship Channel across the various inlets that fed the Bahia. Constraining the tidal flow into the marsh collapsed the vibrant chains of marine life that thrived in the Bahia and brought an end to the huge duck, shellfish, and finfish populations that lived there.

In the years since, the area has flooded sporadically during tropical storms and unusually heavy rainfalls. The collected water always evaporates quickly and the alluvial clays and light soils have been a constant irritant to the residents and commercial interests of the area. If you have ever made the pilgrimage to the twin cities at the southern end of the Laguna Madre via Hwy 100, then you have probably witnessed the dust storms which result from a dry Bahia Grande. The windblown dust from the defunct estuary has been a decades-old hazard to people and machinery both.

Plans are well underway to restore the Bahia Grande. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is completing the requisite archeological survey to locate and preserve any findings of cultural or historical significance. Indeed, researchers have found artifacts from pre-Columbian peoples. Other process requirements include an environmental impact assessment which should be completed shortly. It's interesting to note that these very impact assessments required to re-flood the Bahia were instituted due to oversights and negative impacts from earlier projects such as the Brownsville Ship Channel.

Much of the Bahia lies below mean sea level and the flooding will occur through a series of four channels. The exact channel plans and lengths are still being decided, but the ideal configuration would move the greatest volume of water. It calls for two channels to connect the ship channel to the Bahia. These channels will provide the main flow of salt water and allow lunar and wind-driven tides to sweep in and resuscitate the marsh. Two interior channels would connect the main body of the Bahia Grande to the smaller lakes near Hwy 100 which are known as the Laguna Larga and the Little Laguna Madre.

The project is moving through the approval process. This means it is moving slowly. The earliest date for groundbreaking depends not only on man-made approvals but also on Mother Nature. Managers are optimistic that this could all come together so that construction could begin as early as the Fall of 2004.

This is one of those rare conservation projects that draws strong support from competing interests. A Bahia Grande restored to its former greatness benefits everyone including sport anglers, commercial fishing interests, and residents of the area. It will be a unique opportunity for scientists to study and better understand the ecology of marshes and how they can be brought back to life.

Once accomplished, the fishing should be amazing. One need only glance at a map of the area to imagine the Bahia's saltwater lakes filled with redfish, trout, flounder, and everything that goes with them. It would appear to offer access by kayak or shallow draft boat. And to put it in perspective, this area is larger than nearby South Bay.

The project is well underway, but refuge managers stress that they welcome your help. They need everything from people willing to shovel dirt to those willing to dig through their wallets and write a check. John Wallace, manager of the LANWR, is confident that when the project is completed it will return the area to its natural state with abundant sea grasses and black mangroves surrounding the lakes.

For more information, call park headquarters at 956-748-3607.

(Editor's note: Ralph has recently become the Texas Flyfishers' conservation chairman.)

OUTINGS SCHEDULE

Our outings schedule is a continuing work-in-progress. Here are the trips we have currently scheduled for the rest of the year. More may be added. Some may be dropped. There will probably be some rescheduling. Use the list for general planning purposes.

To volunteer as a trip leader, contact Fresh Water Outings Chairman Clarke Thornton or Salt Water Outings Chairman Scott Fossum. Their telephone numbers and email addresses are on the Executive Committee listing elsewhere in this issue. Fresh water trips are designated [F], salt water [S] in the listings below.



Clarke Thornton - fresh

July 31. "Port O'Connor One Fly" tournament. Port O'Connor, Texas. Redfish, speckled trout, etc. [S]. Scott Fossum, leader (contact info on Executive Committee list, p. 11). Rotating crystal trophy up for grabs. Most inches of fish caught on the first fly you tie on wins. Boat or kayak needed. Captains with space and fishermen needing rides should contact Scott.



Scott Fossum - salt

August 14. "Redfish Rodeo." Catch and release event headquartered at Rockport Beach Park Pavilion, Rockport, Texas [S]. Fishing from first light to 4:00 p.m., sign-in by 6:30 p.m., dinner and festivities at 7:00 p.m. See notice on our Web site for more details.

August 7 (revised date). San Marcos River float trip with Kevin Hutchinson, San Marcos, Texas. Bass and panfish [F].

September 11. Double Lake, Cold Spring, Texas. Bass and panfish [F].

September 25-26. "Padre Island Surf Fest." Four-wheel down Padre Island and fish the surf with Capt. Billy Sandifer and outing leaders Tom Lyons and Scott Fossum [S]. Optional camping on beach. See the article in last month's *Wind Knots* for important details.

October 2-3 (revised date). South Padre Island, Texas [S]. Rick Rawls, leader (contact info on Executive Committee list, p. 7).

October 10. Damon Live Oaks Lake, Damon, Texas. Bass and panfish [F].

November 7. Guadalupe River, Sattler, Texas. Trout [F].

November ?? Shamrock Bay, Port Aransas, TX [S].



Speakers for Upcoming Club Meetings

July: **Mark Marmon** will speak about his adventures chasing and landing some of the biggest fish inside the Houston city limits. Mark is a state record holder for fly-caught mullet and is an accomplished chaser of clean water fish in the hill country.

August: **Joey Lin** will present a program on the huge trout and Dorado fisheries in Argentina. Joey worked at the Austin Angler for nine years, has guided in the hill country for a number of years, and now guides part of every year in Argentina. He has a great website for previewing his work at www.faroutfishingtrips.com.

September: No speaker scheduled yet.

October: **Ron Begnaud** guides out of Lake Charles, Louisiana, on Lake Calcasieu and the Sabine River area. He is a redfisher by trade and avocation and he also has a great website, www.Redchaser.com

Return to the Hill Country

by S.B. (Bud) Turner

I marked my calendar for June 12 -13 as soon as I learned it was the date for the club's annual trip to the Llano River outside Junction. It had been a great outing the year before and I had been looking forward to returning from the minute I got back to Houston. My friend John, an attorney in Fort Worth, had gone last year and was anxious to get back also. When I e-mailed him that the trip was cancelled he called me immediately. He had already dropped a small fortune on sending his girlfriend to a spa for the weekend so he could get out of the house. We decided that since we both had open dates on our calendars for the first time in a year, it was time to get back to the hill country where we had enjoyed fishing for over twenty years.

I had decided that maybe we would try a different part of the river so I booked a cabin just outside the city of Llano itself. I made arrangements with the local canoe rental vendor and everything was set. That's when the rain started. We were scheduled to arrive Friday afternoon and hoped to get in a couple of hours fishing before dark. On that Wednesday the river was at fifteen feet above normal and was starting to go down but there was more rain in the forecast. The camp vendor thought if we changed our plans from Friday through Sunday to Saturday through Monday we would be all right. John had a client meeting that Monday he could not get out of. I decided we needed an alternate plan since these dates seemed carved in stone.

I called South Llano Canoe Rentals where the club had rented canoes last year. Mrs. Thomas was great as I pestered her several times about river conditions. Junction and the up-river area had not received any significant rain and the river had not come up at all. As the crow flies this was less than seventy miles from the town of Llano where the same river had still not crested. I told South Llano Canoe Rental to hold us one for Saturday and they said they would have several. It appeared a lot of people had assumed all of the hill country rivers were at flood stage.

I managed to get out of the office early Friday and was making good time down I-10, and I decided to detour through Kerrville on a sight-seeing tour, which I convinced myself was necessary to inspect the water levels. I took 39 out of Kerrville heading to Hunt. The Guadalupe was out of its banks and all of the low water crossing warnings were out. I was less than fifty miles from Junction at this point and was wondering if I had made the drive for nothing. As I got to the headwaters of the Guadalupe the water levels appeared normal, the camps were full, and it was starting to look up. Running parallel to the river for the last few miles into Junction is always beautiful and as I drove near the stretch we were to fish the next day I could see that the water levels were perfect for fishing.

Saturday morning, John and I met Curtis and his wife at their home on the river at 7:00 a.m. They were waiting on us with canoe loaded and we were in the water by 7:15. Our plan had been to paddle to the first shoal where we would set up our rods and tie on flies. We decided on small poppers and chartreuse Clousers. I threw my first cast in an unlikely spot only to test my bait and line while John was getting his equipment ready. I was caught totally by surprise by a small bass that struck hard and fought valiantly against the five-weight rod. John decided he'd better hurry up after that and he caught a respectable red-ear sunfish on his first cast. We fished that first spot for over an hour and probably landed twenty fish between us before getting back in the canoe and heading down stream. This year I had a hand held "mapping" GPS so I always knew how far we were from the take-out point and we could gauge how much time we had to fish. The map showed every detail of the river as well as the roads. It will accompany me on every trip from here on.

We fished hard all day and caught fish at every stop. The top producer of bass was a chartreuse Cypert minnow in size 6. As was our experience last year, the bass were small, with the best one of 40 or more maybe pushing the 10-inch mark. All of them were aggressive and hit the flies hard and fought well. One of us always had a popper at the ready for when we found a shady spot against the bank. This worked all day on sunfish, some of which more than covered my hand. We fished hard and arrived back at the Thomas's house around 6 p.m. We figured between the two of us we had landed more than 100 fish.

On Sunday morning I left Junction going north for a tour of the north west side of the hill country. I visited the historic Ft. Mason followed by Colorado Bend State Park before swinging through Lampasas and heading back to Houston. Even though the total drive over three days was more than 700 miles I am ready to go again.

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WIND KNOTS CLASSIFIED

Space permitting, we'll run "Wanted" and "For Sale" ads for members of Texas Flyfishers. On a case-by-case basis, we may also run ads from non-members if the goods or services sought or offered would be of interest to our members. Send your ad by e-mail to corey.rich@aya.yale.edu or regular mail to Corey Rich, 1900 N. Memorial Way, Houston, TX 77007. You may include a photograph of items to be sold if you like.

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FIVE FAVORITE FLIES

by Mike "Mud Flat" Eberhard

My five favorite flies for fishing my home waters of Port O'Connor are copies or modifications of others' favorite flies.

1. Scott Sommerlatte's gold spoon: Bent #2 or #4 hook, red thread, gold with red eye.
2. Sally Moffett's foxy Clouser: #4 hook, chartreuse and white arctic fox hair.
3. Borski shrimp: #4 or #6, green and tan, or green and chartreuse.
4. Dorsey's Kwan: #4 or #6, tan, brown, chartreuse and even black.
5. Andy's sand shrimp: #4 or #6, tan, or tan and brown.



Photo by Fred Carr



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Texas Flyfishers Membership Application

Please check one: ☐ New Application ☐ Renewal

To join Texas Flyfishers or renew your membership, please complete this form and mail it with your check to the address below, or bring it with you to one of our monthly meetings. All memberships expire June 30th of each year, and renewals are due July 1st. Please pro-rate your payment for the number of months between now and the end of June, inclusive, if you are joining for the first time. Our monthly meetings are at the Holiday Inn on the Katy Freeway between Antoine and Silber on the last Tuesday of every month (except December), beginning at 7:00 p.m.

Dues are for (check one): ☐ Individual at \$24 a year ☐ Family at \$32 a year ☐ Student at \$16 a year

Name: _____

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