

May 2003

Inshore Fishing Report

Well, it's May and GOFC 'territorial' waters are heating up! Of course, the big news is Daniel Basta's 8.19# trout, an incredible catch for a nice young man. Of particular interest to me it that he caught the fish on a rod I'd given him! Congratulations, Daniel!

As the water warms, it's probably not likely that the big 'lunker' trout are as available as they were in the early spring, but trout fishing has been and will continue to be the inshore species-of-choice. I fished Steinhatchee towards the end of April and did very well using DOA clear Shrimp tipped with FishBites under Cajun Thunder corks. Seems that the fish were in 3 to 5 feet of water. I like the DOA/FishBites combination, as it seems to attract pinfish, which attract trout. Also, the pinfish don't eat all those costly live shrimp! Don't expect a lonely day on the water while you're trout fishing. On a typical Saturday afternoon at any of the GOFC ports, expect to find lots of competition for your bait in the way of lots of other boats on the water. If you can manage it, a weekday-fishing trip will be less busy and will probably find some fish that haven't been floated over by a boat in the last 20 minutes!

Trout reports are good from other places as well. The 'brown' water near the Suwannee River mouth has been diffusing and fishing near bars and cuts have produced nice catches. Suwannee Marina reports that there have been lots of 6# trout caught, with very few small trout showing up. The deep flats at Cedar Key, Waccasassa, Yankeetown and Crystal River are producing good limits, but seem to be more dependent of angler's finding clearer water. Strong southerly winds the first week or so of May churned up the water at Cedar Key, but those boats with the ability to get out to 5 or 6 feet, in areas south of Snake Key have done well.

May and June are also prime times for redfish. Every year (since the net ban) the fish just seem to be getting more and more plentiful and larger. Great catches in creek mouths on rising tides are to be had all along the coast. Areas near the mouths of Bumblebee, Johnson and Sanders Creeks near Suwannee are really producing nice catches of reds. Also, the bars south of the mouth of the Waccasassa are great, but remember to take it easy—that's some BAD bottom up there. If you're going to run fast, just be sure your Vessel Assist membership is paid up!

As to techniques for redfish, some prefer live shrimp, pinfish or cut mullet under corks. My only problem with that sort of fishing is that you don't cover lots of ground, and there's lots of sitting around in the hot sun involved. I use 1/4oz DOA Terror-Eyz (green if the water is clear, brown if it's dark) jigs and bounce them slowly off the oyster bars. Another tested redfish 'killer' is the holographic Gag's Grabber Schoolie Popper—if you can find them, or just a simple gold Johnson spoon. I really enjoy casting and 'prospecting' for redfish. Remember that reds feed best while the tide is rising on a bar, not while it's falling.

While you're out looking for those trout and reds, be prepared to catch some other species. You'll start seeing nice keeper flounder around the sandy ends of oyster bars (again on the rising tide) and lots of 'fun' fish like ladyfish and big yellowtail jacks. I kept a mainly freshwater fly fisherman entertained the other day with a nice school of blue runners—lots of action for him, but just bait for most of us!

As to unusual catches, Ed Ellett was surprised in late April while trout fishing north of Steinhatchee when a nice tarpon took a leaderless 2/0 hook he'd baited with cut mullet and drifted behind the boat. After battling the fish for about an hour and a half and having his 23' Mako dragged about 2 miles, Ed lost the battle, but had a great story to tell!

Finally, a note about fishing courtesy. I'm always amazed at the folks who just run through an obvious fishing area without any regard to their fellow fishermen's efforts. If you see someone fishing, drifting or anchored, DON'T blast on past. Cut your speed to 'minimum wake speed' or run well clear of them. In particular, if you see someone up on a poling platform and another person fishing, be courteous—he's trying to be quiet—so should you! Also, don't pull up in front of another boat's drift and begin fishing...take your turn at the end of the line. Just THINK!

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