



Cranberry Lake

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President's Message – Wytold Lebing

This Sunday the NFA will have its annual Holiday Party and Auction at Haller Lake Community Club, 5:00 PM, December 10. It's always a good time to catch up on fishing friends, swap stories, and plan for next year. The Auction is also NFA's major fund-raising event. The Holiday Party is the last club activity of the year. Meetings will resume in January with presentation of the 2024 Outings Schedule.

My term as president is also ending. Like a lot of things, the club was disrupted by the Covid Pandemic which eliminated in-person meetings and played havoc with the outings schedule. As you would expect membership dropped off, meetings shifted to Zoom, and the number of outings dropped off. So, in a sense 2023 was a recovery year. NFA hosted multiple well attended outings in WA, OR, and BC. The Club hosted a full year's worth of meetings with excellent speakers talking about fishing topics that ranged from the Amazon River in Brazil to Sea-run Cutthroats in South Puget Sound, the Club ran a successful fly-tying class, and we started publishing the Flypaper again. In short NFA began to recover from the Pandemic pause.

So as the NFA looks back at 2023, the year was successful. And we are set up for an even better 2024. I'd be remiss if I failed to mention all the other officers who helped: James Schmidt, Vice President; Nick Sherman, Secretary; Peter Maunsell, Treasurer. In addition, numerous volunteers have stepped up for committee chairs, teaching classes, and leading Club outings. To all of them I say thank you and thank you again for all you've done throughout the year.

I look forward to seeing all of you at the Holiday Party this Sunday at 5.

And finally remember “the fish you cannot catch make you wiser” - Wytold



Membership – Susanne Staats

I hope to see as many members as possible at our December 10th Holiday Party and Auction. This is a good opportunity to get together since we don't have any fishing outings or club meetings in December. Participating in the silent auction and raffle is a great way to help our club carry on the various fishing outings, educational classes, and club meetings planned for 2024.

You'll soon be receiving an email reminding you to renew your yearly NFA membership. Renewals are due on January 1, 2024. Once you receive the email, you can click on the link and remit payment via the website. If you have any questions regarding your membership status, please don't hesitate to contact me via email sstaats02@gmail.com or telephone (206) 794-1553.

Susanne



November Speaker – Ryan Smith

Ryan is the managing owner of Avid Angler and has guided extensively, although less so as his growing family and business occupy his time. He presented so much information on fishing the north Puget Sound beaches and rivers that notetaking could not keep up.

Ryan was excited that the Stillaguamish River opened that very day. The Stilly is arguably the best river for sea run cutthroats. Chum salmon are still protected, thus catch and release only. Use chartreuse and black, egg sucking leech, or purple flies. The chums take the fly on the swing.



Coho need a heavy fly to get down. Ryan likes a heavy dumbbell Clouser (chartreuse) with a floating line, not sink tip. With a heavy fly on a 12-foot leader, the fly will hop when you strip it in.



For sea run cuts, study the beach characteristics. Look for sand, cobble, or large rocks with depth changes. Picnic Point is very good. Meadowdale Beach can be good. Ryan says the SRCs feed on copepods and isopods (little shrimp), so use a scud fly. Muddlers work in the winter. Surface flies that create a wake like a wounded baitfish can be good. At low tide, scope out where there are depressions where the fish would hide. Then go at high tide and fish the outgoing. Move down the beach, not out deeper. The SRCs are likely to be close to shore. Look for currents, seams, and moving water.

Stillwater lakes can be good this time of year. For example, Ballinger is a great lake for holdover stocked trout. Try bloodworms, San Juan worms, wooly bugger, and “blobs”.

This is only a portion of what was presented, but it made us want to dress up warmly and get out there! (Nick Sherman)



Cranberry Lake Outing – October 2023

Preamble: When I was a teenager, my mother taught me how to drive and so when I am driving, if there is a female passenger and she tells me to slow down or turn, I obey even if I don't want to.



The Drive to Cranberry Lake. I loaded my pontoon boat and gear the previous night into my truck and so I was already to pick up Susanne at nine the next morning. We loaded her kayak into the truck and took off heading down I-5. I wanted to take the Conway exit and the short cut across the valley, but Susanne wanted to take the Highway 20 exit, so she put Cranberry Lake into Google Maps and I dutifully obeyed. As we neared the turnoff to Deception Pass, Susanne informed me that we had to go through Anacortes to get to Cranberry Lake. Now I knew that she was mistaken, but my training kicked in and I continued and when we got into Anacortes, I again tried to tell her that this was not way to Cranberry Lake. To make a long story short, we drove around Fidalgo Island and the hills above Anacortes for about 45 minutes until we eventually came to Cranberry Lake Park where there was a sign pointing to a bog called Cranberry Lake. Susanne had entered the wrong Cranberry Lake into Google. The picture of Susanne is one from the wrong Cranberry Lake. Now this should not be a surprise to anybody who has read previous reports of our fishing trips together. Under Susanne's guidance we have taken the wrong ferry to Whidbey Island and when driving back from Olympia, she guided us to the highway to the ocean until I finally risked her ire and turned back. And I could go on but that will have to wait until another time over beer.

story short, we drove around Fidalgo Island and the hills above Anacortes for about 45 minutes until we eventually came to Cranberry Lake Park where there was a sign pointing to a bog called Cranberry Lake. Susanne had entered the wrong Cranberry Lake into Google. The picture of Susanne is one from the wrong Cranberry Lake. Now this should not be a surprise to anybody who has read previous reports of our fishing trips together. Under Susanne's guidance we have taken the wrong ferry to Whidbey Island and when driving back from Olympia, she guided us to the highway to the ocean until I finally risked her ire and turned back. And I could go on but that will have to wait until another time over beer.



Cranberry Lake Fishing. We finally arrived at the “correct” Cranberry Lake, changed into waders, unloaded our gear, inflated the kayak and pontoon boat, and prepared to catch some fish. There was only one problem, I had loaded my truck during the dark, and rather than load oars with paddles, I had loaded two sets of oar handles. And Cranberry Lake is not really a good lake to fish from shore. So, Susanne started fishing, I changed out of my waders, loaded my gear back into the truck, and drove around the Deception Pass campground and walked the beach by the ocean. After about two hours Susanne was done fishing so she came to shore, and we loaded her kayak into the truck intending to go to Anacortes for an early dinner.

Dinner. Now Anacortes is well known to me, I had a boat in the marina for 15 years and I knew of a pub in downtown Anacortes with some tasty food and good beer. But it should not come as a surprise to you that when I came to Highway 20 preparing to turn left, Susanne blurted out that I was about to take the wrong turn and that I had to turn right. She said she saw a sign which said downtown Anacortes was east not west. My training kicked in, I followed her direction until we were about halfway to I-5, at which time she realized that the sign must have been incorrect, but rather than turn back, we decided to continue to La Conner where we found a restaurant that looked like it might have good food. In all fairness to Susanne, I eventually also saw a sign which pointed to downtown Anacortes, and it was pointing east rather than west. Go figure!

The restaurant contained a combination of tourists and some locals who had imbibed a little too much alcohol. I was wearing a ski sweater that had some stripes which glowed in the dark and when we passed their table, they decided to remark upon what they perceived to be my gender. I stopped about two feet past their table and looked at them with an incredulous look. One of the lads stood up and I could tell he thought I was ready to fight. I was saved by the bartender who quickly came over and told the lad to sit down and shut up.

We had dinner and drove back to Seattle. I have never understood why, but there is always a backup on I-5 going south which starts at about exit 207 and ends after Marysville. It took us two hours to drive to Susanne’s house and by the time I got home it was 9:30, I was too tired to unload the truck and just went in the house and to bed.



Postamble: When I got up the next morning, I noticed that my glove compartment had been vandalized...I had forgotten to lock the truck when I got home. Also missing was the bag with my waders, boots, raincoat, and wading stick. So, if you see a person soliciting your kindness on the side of the road wearing waders and boots, please give him \$100 and ask for my gear. I will reimburse you.

Oh yeah, forgot to mention...Susanne caught a small trout. And we had a good time. (Brett Schormann)



A Tribute to the NFA Founders – Gary Todd

I wouldn't have been able to have fished HiHium Lake in Canada and Wendego Lodge at Tranquil Lake if it hadn't been for the NFA. With that said, I will tell you a fishing fable.

On one of my many trips to these lakes, I had taken individuals who I taught how to cast the fly. This was my enjoyment to see them catch and release and enjoy the outdoors. On the first trip to Wendego, I was with Al Ford, Jimmy Fukuda, Mike and his son Kyle. Wendego was run by Norm and Flo, who had been the proprietors there for 30+ years. The lodge was actually an old trapper's camp.

On another trip to Wendego, Al, Jimmy, Willy Morrison and I shared one of the cabins for a four day stay. On one of the days, there were 3 teenagers casting from the dock. One of the teens was a young girl who was having a hard time casting, so I went down to help her. While I was helping her, her father was in question about me to Willy. Willy told him about me and said it was OK with him. So, on the morning that we were leaving, I watched her again trying to cast. I went down and explained to her what she was having troubles with. I asked her if I could take the rod. I casted out and with a slow retrieve I hooked the take. I then gave her the rod and she landed and released the fish. Hopefully this young teenager is still casting the fly. To this day, I still love watching individuals cast the fly.



Bonefishing – Nick Sherman

I am proof that one does not need to be an expert fly fisherman to enjoy pursuing the elusive bonefish. Bonefish are not for a beginner, as one does need to make a reasonable cast in 20 mph winds. The few number of casting attempts in a day will not spark joy in someone who wants continuous casting. But mastering a cast up to 35 foot will open the world of Bahamian flats fishing.



A bonefish caught and released on a Bahamian flat.

Bonefish are found around the world, but they are king in Caribbean islands, particularly in the un-touristy backwaters of the Bahamas. Traveling to the Bahamas certainly poses a logistical issue for someone in Washington. I go



because my college classmate, Neale, married my younger sister Lucy (his greatest catch ever). Neale got me started on fly fishing (a far more dubious endeavor). Living in Florida, the Bahamas are in his backyard. While it takes the longest flight in the continental US to join him, it is a double treat to see Lucy. But the ultimate reason is that getting out on the gorgeous Bahamian flats is an addiction.

Bonefish come in from the ocean to feed on sand crabs, shrimp, and other crustaceans burrowed in the shallow sand flats and around mangroves which are flooded with higher tides. Bonefish can be in schools of a hundred or a thousand, but most schools I see are four to eight fish. The singles and doubles are usually bigger and a more satisfying target, both for the challenge and the result. Bonefish feed in the shallow (skinny water) for protection where the sharks and barracudas cannot match their swiftness. Either that, or fisherman go to the flats because that is the only way to catch a bonefish on a fly.

Neale discovered bonefish in the mid-90s and sucked me in back in 2002. We went to South Andros Island, the largest and least populated of the Bahamian isles and cays. Our guide was the late Felix Smith, considered one of the originators of fly fishing on South Andros. In his thick Bahamian accent, Felix said something like this, so we would begin to understand our target: "Everybody eat de bonfish. The shawk eat de bonfish. The 'cuda eat de bonfish. The osprey eat de bonfish. But de bonfish got two things goin' for him. He fast. And he hawd to see. He feed in de skinny water where no 'cuda or shawk can keep up. He turn de color of the bottom like a ghost. He hide under mangrove branches until de tide push him out. But the bonfish, he always moving. He never sit still like a 'cuda or a jack. And dat how we see him. If a ghost not moving, it de bottom. But if a ghost move, dat might be a bonfish."



Beautiful water on a flat with bonefish coming out of the mangroves, though difficult to spot on a windy day.

Fishing for bonefish is very much like upland bird hunting, but more sporting since the “catch and release” shotgun has yet to be invented. In this analogy, the Bahamian guide is the English setter, spotting the bonefish invisible to most Americans. Two anglers, fly rods at the ready, wade a flat on either side of the guide. Schools of bonefish are like a covey of quail; easier to spot because they might make a slight disturbance on the surface, referred to as nervous water. Schools often circle around to give you another shot. Singles and doubles are like a pheasant – big and spooky, usually last seen streaking away at 50 mph after a bad cast.



Our guides are indispensable. They know hundreds of square miles of cays, flats, creeks, and mangroves which fish completely differently depending on the tides and winds. They read the weather and go where there will be more sun, a huge asset in spotting fish. The guide motors the flat-bottomed skiff across spine-pounding stretches of the open ocean or weaves through shallow bars and reefs to reach a likely spot.

Depending on the anglers' preference, the guide will either lead a wading expedition or pole the shallow draft flats boat while standing on an elevated platform. Poling is hard work, requiring balance and endurance. But a good guide can search for fish from this high vantage point which lets him see much better through the glare or the ripples. The angler stands on a low platform at the bow with the fly in his left hand and fifty feet of fly line coiled up ready to cast at a moment's notice. The second angler sits in the middle, patiently or impatiently waiting his turn on the bow (this waiting is definitely the downside to bonefishing from the boat). Both anglers should have their hearing aids cranked up and covered with a buff to eliminate wind noise. He who does not hear the guide will catch few fish and will incur the wrath of his partner waiting his turn to fish. The man in the middle can help by translating Bahamian instructions into American English and shouting them into the deaf fisherman's ear. Believe me.



Poling the flats while spotting fish from the higher vantage point.

The guide will spot a bonefish, maybe 150 feet away, but more often 50 feet (and in difficult conditions, often only 20 feet). Incidentally, if you don't practice short casts, you will certainly kick yourself over botched opportunities. If there is time, the guide will turn the boat, so the cast is between 9 o'clock and 1 o'clock. In the optimum case, the angler sees the fish and knows where to cast. If angler says he cannot see the fish, the guide might say 35 feet at 11 o'clock. Bonefish always move, so you must get the cast there with as few false casts as possible. With the line in the air, the guide will tell you how to adjust the angle and distance as the



fish alters course. If the guide says, “drop it”, you drop it immediately. Taking another false cast means the fish will no longer be there and, in my case, I’ll try to goose it which usually makes the cast “crash and burn”.

The most important casting skill landing the fly land softly, but with the leader completely extended. Here is why: The fly must land in front of moving fish so as not to spook it on impact. The fly must sink to the bottom in 6 to 20 inches of water within two or three seconds before the bonefish swims up on it. The rod, line, leader, and fly must all be in a line pointed where the fish will be in a few seconds. You can then strip the taut line in a series of tugs to make the fly hop on the bottom like a fleeing sand crab. If all has worked, the bonefish will put its nose down to swallow the prey. When you see the nose go down, you get excited, although more often you see nothing - the guide sees it and says, “long strip, fish on!” That long strip sets the hook. For whatever reason, if you raise the rod to do a “trout set”, it will always pull the fly out of the fish’s mouth and you will be chastised severely in the Bahamian dialect, which fortunately you don’t understand.

This all gets around to making a cast with little slack – that way you know where the fly is relative to the fish and your first strips will move the fly rather than merely pull-out slack. If the fish swims over the fly before it moves, the bonefish will not eat it. If the fish does eat, it will immediately spit out the immobile fly. Once the fish has swum over and is going away from the fly, it will never eat. As one guide said, “In the last thousand years, no shrimp has ever jumped toward a bonefish, only away.” How do you make a cast that lays the fly out properly? Practice all possible casts – backhand casts when the wind is off your right shoulder, high steeple casts or sidearm casts to 12 o’clock so as not to hook the guide. Similar to a golf short game, the ability to quickly make a short cast in adverse wind without slack is often more useful than a 50-foot cast.

Back to catching a bonefish. If a fish has sucked up the fly, you continue to strip - the fish will be moving toward you and you must set the hook before he spits it out. When you feel resistance, continue to strip, but with a light grip so that when the bonefish turns and bolts, you don’t hold on too tight and break him off. No fish swims faster than a hooked bonefish. You keep the rod tip up to keep some



tension on the streaking fly line while frantically checking to make sure the coils of fly line are not around your leg, shirt button, hemostat, or most often, the butt of your rod (all this has happened to me). The most dramatic was when somehow the fly line tied two half hitched around my right hand (I managed to clear that under high tension without losing my rod to a charging bonefish). Once the fish is “on the reel”, the hard part is over.

It is always enjoyable to see a bonefish run to the open water. However, they aren’t dumb and frequently slash straight for the safety of mangrove roots. You must have your drag set tight and palm the reel if necessary to try to hold and turn the fish toward open flat. You also must look out for sharks and barracudas, which cannot catch a free bonefish, but will slice a hooked one in half with one bite. The best escape technique is to loosen the drag and let the bonefish swim freely to outpace the predator. With barbless hooks, this might also accomplish a long-distance release to save the bonefish.

Twenty years ago, our fish ran deep into the backing, making one long run, one medium run, and one short run before submitting. We used 10-pound tippet and loose drags then. Far too often we broke off. Clearly fish were exhausted and easy prey to barracudas when released. Each trip, we went to heavier tippet and tighter drag. This year we fished with 20-pound line and drag set tight to punish your rod arm, so only really big fish went significantly into the backing. I kept everyone out of the mangroves and each released fish was able to swim away fairly quickly. With barbless hooks and less than stellar reeling, I had several fish slack up and get off, but I also could grab the fly with a hemostat and release a fish without a net and without lifting it out of the water. Usually you can release the bonefish, grab it, and hold it safely underwater until it fully revives.



Releasing a bone without touching it.

Wading a flat might be agonizing if the walking is tough, but usually it is more satisfying if you are encountering fish. Both anglers can fish. You are in a position to contribute by spotting your own fish in this shallow water without the guides help. The casting is free of concern over hooking your guide on the poling platform or your fellow angler (the back of your shirt is still fair game). A good flat has a few inches deep of water with level firm sand – you can focus on looking for fish and you can walk forever warmed by the sun and cooled by the water. An uneven bottom is treacherous as you step from 10 inches of water into a 30" deep hole. Sticky oozy bottoms grab your boots like glue; usually you quit to go somewhere else. This last trip I encountered an uneven bottom with a thin layer of marl that so slippery that anything more than a six-inch step could cause a pratfall slide onto your back. Bonefish always move, so you don't have to walk to



them – often you walk just enough to have the cloud of mud behind you and your fly line trailing back so you don't step on it.

While walking, you constantly assess how you would cast with a howling wind if a fish were to appear at any spot in a 360-degree radius. This is when you wish that you had practiced a backhand cast or crosswind casts that blow your fly in a (hopefully) predictable curve. If it is sunny, you look for shadows (even a ghost fish casts a shadow on a sand bottom). Oncoming fish look like big black dots, when they turn, they might disappear as long thin phantoms. If there are clouds, you are reduced to looking for nervous water or a ripple that is at an oblique angle to the other ripples. If you see a wake, you pray it is a large bone and not a barracuda. The Holy Grail is spotting a tailing fish (with his head down feeding and tail out of the water) or a dorsal fin sticking out of the water. Even Americans can see tailing fish. If conditions are really tough, you drift off dreaming about the girl you didn't ask out in high school or what will be served at dinner tonight.

Flypaper



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This is a released bonefish, but you can see why an angler gets excited when he sees fin or a tail above the water.

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What about equipment? You need flats boots preferably, but any shoe or boot will do if it can survive sharp coral and stays on your feet if you run into a mucky bottom. My old Simms flats boots are 20 years old now and considered a collector's item. The rest of your outfit is to protect you from sun and flies. Quick dry fishing pants and calf high socks will keep doctor flies at bay. Long sleeve fishing shirt, brimmed hat, a buff, and fishing gloves. With good, polarized sunglasses, everything but one's nose is covered from the sun. Surprisingly, you are seldom hot and even less seldom cold. You pack a raincoat for ocean spray during the ocean boat ride or the occasional tropical downpour. If you need them, for heavens sakes, wear your hearing aids!

The rod is typically a 9-foot eight weight. I have an Orvis rod whose 25-year warranty will soon expire, but this last trip I used my Echo rod that I bought from the lodge in 2003 for \$90 (Echo was unknown to me back then, but I had broken my Orvis rod). I used my Pflueger Trion stainless steel reel because it has a good drag even though I wish the arbor was bigger since you need to be able to take in a lot of line quickly. I didn't use my 21-year-old Orvis Battenkill Large Arbor V reel because the drag is too tough to get tight with arthritic fingers. Reading between the lines, none of these are expensive. One does need a good fly line (mine are Rio Tropical Series Bonefish 80 feet and Scientific Anglers Mastery bonefish 100 feet). Leaders are fluorocarbon for strength and good sinking. I just keep tying good condition 20-pound tippet on to an old butt section. Many guides want 16- or 14-pound tippet, but not lately. My guide thought my 11-foot leader was too long for my casting ability, so I cut it down to 9 foot and retied when it reached 7-1/2 foot.

There are huge varieties of flies to use. I let the guide choose, but almost always it will be a Gotcha in the Bahamas. I tied 2, 4, and 6 size hooks in different colors with bead eyes or small tungsten eyes. All the ones I tied with heavy eyes are still unused. We don't lose too many flies anymore since we religiously cut out any poor casting ("wind") knots, the overwhelming cause of breakoffs. Plus, I've gotten better at casting between rather into mangroves. Remember to check your leader frequently for barnacle nicks or wind knots – it reduces heartbreak. This April 15th, we tried a different lodge and island – Crooked and Acklins Trophy lodge on Crooked Island. This remote pair of islands is the farthest east and south



that we had been to. Guantanamo, Cuba is just to the south and Turks and Caicos to the east southeast. The challenge is getting there. After visiting my sister in Orlando, we flew to Nassau and spent the night to get the twice weekly flight to Crooked and Acklins. It is nerve wracking thinking of missing any connection. The lodge is on a beautiful cove with delightful swimming until Neale pointed out the bull sharks cruising. As with most Bahamian places, the seafood was excellent. The fishing was affected by strong west winds that pushed the water level up higher than usual, providing excellent foraging in the mangroves for the bonefish, but few catchable fish on the flats. Day 1 was slow with few opportunities, but I did get one nice sized fish that ran well into the backing. Day 2 was strictly poling from the boat. Rocky is an excellent fisherman and I enjoyed that we fished efficiently, catching the few fish when they appeared. We boated ten bones, with a five pounder for me and an eight pounder for Rocky. It was fun to see him fight that fish that he kept clear of the mangroves by a mere twelve inches and to see how pleased an experienced angler can still be with a great catch (see picture). Day 3 was a huge disappointment – I like fishing with Neale and we saw no fish. Day 4 was worse. Rich got one nice one with one cast and salvaged it by wading into the mangroves, but that was it except for a dinker I sheepishly reeled in. Then we came home to find the other boats had seen a lot. That eats at you! Day 5 was blown out by weather before we made a single cast. I was vocally angry when the guide turned in for day, but when the squall hit later, I count my blessings that we were not on the water in a flats boat.

Flypaper



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Rocky was quite pleased with this bone!

So, I was down to my last day on what was pretty much a bust of a trip. I went alone with Elvis due to a cancelation. After four days of not wading a flat, we walked out on a firm, very shallow area with good sun and excellent visibility. We started picking up single bonefish. After one clear refusal, Elvis wanted something with orange. I had tied two spawning shrimp flies that were so terribly improvised with the wrong materials that I had been going to just salvage the hook for another day. Neale called it the ugliest fly he had ever seen. But the bones loved it! I hooked a couple before the fly line wrapped around the butt of the rod and the fish broke off. So, I tied on the other mistake and proceeded to have the best

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day of sighting, casting, hooking, and landing sizable fish that I've ever had. I've caught greater numbers and a few bigger fish, but never had an efficient day like this. After nine bones and a rising tide that pushed us off the flat, we changed gears and went for triggerfish, the "poor man's permit". I landed one triggerfish, which is like pulling in a very stubborn oil drum. While beautiful in the water, the color fades from a triggerfish and they are quite homely out of the water.



Triggerfish – the poor man's permit.

My joy was tempered by the rest of the group having a slow day and hungry for more. We had hardly returned to the states when Neale and Rich cooked up the idea to return to South Andros, but in the fall for the first time. After telling Kathy that Crooked and Acklins was probably my last bonefish trip ever, I was back in the Bahamas less than seven months later.



Rich worked out to go to Pleasant Bay Lodge after usually going to Andros South Lodge. Pleasant Bay was less expensive and had a great recommendation from his fishing buddy. I was pleased to see that it was owned by Timothy Smith, Felix's son (Felix was our first guide ever). Being owned and managed by locals with no offshore absentee owners not only brought the cost down but delivered my favorite aspect of the trip. It was like attending a family reunion. Felix's other son Lonnix was our first guide. Arlene, Timothy's wife, was the matriarch and Charlene, her beautiful spitting image daughter managed the finances. Poogie, the star cook, was related to a guide we had used in past years. Tara in the kitchen was the granddaughter and Natasha was her cousin. Coral was the daughter of guide we had used in past years. We had met an Endalyn years before when she married the Andros South manager at the time - our guide Cue was her older brother. I believe the guides appreciated that we were interested in their lives and had a feel for their small community.



Lonnix Smith. We fished with his father Felix 25 years ago.



The food at Pleasant Bay was over-the-top delicious. Meat is expensive to bring into Andros Island, so we ate what the locals caught. First, we had lobster tail (which they dive for and call crawfish). Conch fritters and conch bisque. Grouper steaks and grouper skewers. Peas and rice (what Bahamians call black or red beans). I had grits (which is unavailable north of the Mason Dixon line) with sausage and perfect hash browns every breakfast. When the fishing is poor, you want a drink. When the fishing is great, you want a drink. The Kalik “beer of the islands” and local rum came with the package.

We fished the day after a huge windstorm and rain had swept the islands. The sun was not out fully, and it sits lower in the sky in November than in April. Lonnix only poled and we caught a few out of schools while having a nice day on the water. Day two, Neale and I walked the flats with Lonnix. Since Neale can spot fish on his own, I got a “private guide” at my shoulder. What was memorable were the big fish that we had good shots at but failed to catch due to casting not being up to snuff. I took four upwind casts at a large bone so big that his back was out of the water, maybe fifty feet away. Each cast landed five feet short of target. The bone was moseying away as fast as we could wade, so I needed to place the fly to the side and somewhat ahead of him, but I never got it never got there. I landed a couple of bones, but the big ones that I missed were the most fun (in an excruciating way).



Lonnix spotting, Neale with a bonefish on.

Day 3 was with Cue (for Cuebell or Quebell). Cue is 55 years old, one of 15 children, never smoked, never drank, and can still free dive 60 feet down for crawfish or to spear grouper. He can also pole a boat all day in the wind. I was with Randy, relatively new to bonefish. We didn't catch big ones or singles, but we were very effective at hooking a bone out of a school, relinquishing the bow to the other angler, deploying the fly line, and hooking another with little good fishing time frittered away. On the other hand, I hardly saw any of the fish. Cue saw them and guided our fly to them.

Day 4 with Cue guiding was totally different. Rich and I left the boat and chased schools and singles across a wide flat where they would circle back to us rather than buggering off. We both landed sizable fish. The biggest fish for me ran three



times and was 20 feet away where we got a good view of the size before the hook pulled out. I slacked up on another and the barbless hook did a long-distance release. But plenty stayed on in a good fishing frenzy. The highlight was when I actually spotted a big bone myself over by the shoreline. I made a 30-foot backhand cast crosswind that blew wide. I picked up the cast and laid it down properly. There is little more fun than seeing a bone turn 90 degrees, charge your fly, and put his head down. I set the hook, the fish exploded and disappeared. My line was empty, broken at the wind knot in 20-pound tippet that had landed several fish. I had tested that unfortunate knot by pulling as hard as possible without breaking it, but a large bone lying on the bottom with his back out of the water can turn on a taut line and snap it off. Always, always, always cut out a wind knot! I could have retied a blood knot in two minutes. And the frenzy was over. We fished the rest of the day with no hook-ups, but it was already a great success.

Day 5, final day was with Sparkles. The names are amazing and apparently, he liked jewelry. He was another incredible personality. Sixty years old and able to pole all day. He guided back in the 80s when drug runners controlled the west side of the island. He had been foraging for land crabs on foot when he broke through a branch covered hole and landed on a broken limb that punctured his abdomen. It is only because he is thin and strong that he was able to climb out with his intestines hanging out and walk several miles back to his car where he passed out. Having made a phone call, his relative rescued him. The local hospital was incapable of helping. Western Air wouldn't board him for a flight to Nassau because it was sold out, but his friend saw him half dead and gave Sparkles his seat. He spent 16 days in the Nassau hospital. That was in August, and he was guiding again in October. Neale is a doctor and said it is a miracle he lived. Anyway, Sparkles knows how to find fish and keep us sheltered from the worst of the wind. I was thrilled that I caught three nice fish with about seven casts, including two that I spotted myself. But Sparkles pointed out the easiest fish all day – a nice sized one downwind from the boat passing predictably right to left. I started to cast and wrapped the leader irrevocably around my rod. Bonefish always move and don't wait around during screw-ups. It keeps you very humble. In summary, this was a rewarding trip. Great people, fun fishing partners, skilled guides, excellent food, relatively sunny visibility, and wind that you could cope

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with half the time. Memorable catches and memorable misses. That makes a good bonefish trip!



Spectacular scenery abounds. This is the southwest corner with nothing between here and Cuba.

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For questions or comments contact [Nicholas Sherman](#).