

# The ANGLING REPORT

*servicing the angler who travels*

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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## DATELINE: ARGENTINA

### **On-Site Report A Firsthand Report on Kooi Noom Lodge**

*Editor Note: We have been looking hard for a report on Kooi Noom Lodge in southern Argentina ever since it opened a couple of years ago. Thankfully, subscribers Patrick Dean and Andrew Badley have stepped up with a good one. Thanks, guys, for sharing what you experienced!*

**“The lake is on a plateau called the ‘plateau of death’ because of the wind.”**

These ominous words wafted to the backseats of the Toyota Hilux as what was advertised as a five-hour ride approached its sixth hour. It had taken us over some of the most sparsely populated land on Earth, about 100 kilometers of it on gravel road. We both had begun to wonder if our journey

would be worth it. We were two white males of a certain age looking for extremely large trout. We had heard of the huge trout in Lake Strobel (a.k.a. Jurassic Lake), but we wanted more variety in our fishing than casting into a lake for a week. Kooi Noom, 60 miles away,



we had been told, offered lake fishing, plus river and creek fishing.

Our journey to Kooi Noom began with a two-hour flight from Minneapolis to Atlanta, followed by a 10-hour overnight flight to Buenos Aires, and then

another three-hour flight to El Calafate, where we spent the night. El Calafate is a small town in southern Patagonia that serves as the staging ground for many travelers. There are several nice restaurants there that serve regional cuisine. A meal for two costs less than a T-shirt. We spent the night at Hotel Kosten Aike, where the accommodations were reasonable and certainly sufficient. Our pickup time was not until two the next afternoon, so we hired a guide to tour the Perito Moreno Glacier. It was well worth the one hour it took to get there.

When we finally arrived at Estancia Rio Capitán, a 44,000-acre ranch where Kooi Noom is based, we were introduced to Luciano and Fabiana, who would take care of us for the week. As we crossed the footbridge over the spring creek to get to the lodge, we noticed several 18- to 20-inch trout in the water. We had been told (and now saw) that these fish would eat almost anything dropped to them, including small yellow flowers from surrounding plants. The fact that these fish were omnivorous and so ready to eat could only bode well for the remainder of the week, we decided. After a quick cocktail and dinner, we turned in for the night, eagerly awaiting what the next day would bring.

Kooi Noom was discovered by Nico and Alex Trochine, twin brothers from Bariloche who have many years of experience fishing in Argentina and Chile. The local waters were stocked with rainbow trout approximately 12 years ago, they say. With few natural predators, exceptionally low fishing pressure, and an abundance of food (mostly scuds, stoneflies, and other arthropods), the fish exploded in size and abundance. The brothers' first challenges were scouting the waters and improving access to the fishery. They opened

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## IN THIS ISSUE

### **Dateline: Cook Islands**

Two More Views on  
Fishing Aitutaki  
Pages 3-6

### **Fanning Island**

Is the Fishing Good Enough  
to Attract Anglers?  
Pages 6-7

### **Colombia**

An Update on That New  
Mataveni River Operation  
Pages 8-9

### **North Carolina**

Kingfisher Society Lodge  
Gets a Rave Review  
Page 10

### **Biloxi Marsh**

Can Big Bull Reds Be  
Caught in the Spring?  
Pages 10-11

### **Subscriber-Written Reports**

An Exciting Trip to Pyramid Lake,  
Tennessee, and GTs in Cosmoledo  
Pages 11-14

# THE ANGLING REPORT

Kooi Noom to the public in late 2013.

Neither Trochine brother was there for our week, but we were treated exceptionally well by Fabiana, who happens to be their sister, as well as by Diego, Guido, and Luciano. The lodge offers very comfortable accommodations for up to six anglers, although we were the only two guests during our week there. Each bedroom contains two twin beds, and each has an attached bathroom. There is a sitting area heated by a small wood-burning stove where drinks and hors d'oeuvres are served. Meals are taken in a nice dining room. Thanks to two windmills and a few solar panels, there is 24-hour electricity without the hum of a generator. Satellite Internet service is also available to let family and friends know you are still alive.

Turning to the food, the cuisine of this area is European-inspired, reflecting the immigration history of the region. It focuses on locally sourced beef and lamb. Our breakfasts consisted of a variety of cereals, yogurts, fruits, farm-fresh eggs made to order, and toast, along with coffee, tea, and orange juice. Lunches were served streamside and were hearty, diverse, and flavorful. Upon returning to the hacienda following a day of fishing, there was typically an hour-long cocktail period with a well-stocked bar. The main courses at dinner were substantial and plentiful.

As for the fishing, there are three kinds of fishable water on the estancia: mountaintop lakes, which are filled by rain and the annual spring thaw; natural spring creeks; and rivers that run out of the lakes that are fed by the spring creeks. Lake fishing is conducted here

mostly from shore or by wading in the shallows. The largest lake on the property is Laguna Quiroga. It offers a chance at huge (greater than 20 pounds) fish, although the chances of catching one are best during the spawn. The smaller lake, Laguna Toro, has an abundance of 24- to 26-inch fish that can be taken on nymph, streamer, or with a hopper-dropper combo.

The marquee water here is the estancia's namesake river (Rio Capitán), which drains Laguna Quiroga. Here, the fishing can best be described as technical and challenging, but there is an abundance of big fish ready to take the fly. Fly selection per se did not really matter very much. What mattered was creating a natural presentation and realistic drift in very demanding conditions. During our visit, water flows were 12 to 18 inches higher than normal, making for at times raging water. The challenge was in having to cast to small pockets of relatively calm water, in winds of 20 to 60 mph, and then controlling the fly's drift sufficiently to give the fish time to see and take it. Although we were fishing well past the spawning period, there were plenty of big fish in the river, and, once they were hooked and made their way into the current, they put up a truly raucous fight.

Here is a brief recap of our fishing action. On day one, we fished Laguna Toro, which required a 30-minute ride to higher elevation on the estancia. Here, we landed several dozen nice fish in the 18- to 24-inch range. They hit black and olive streamers, several types of nymphs, olive and orange scuds, and large stimulators. On the morning

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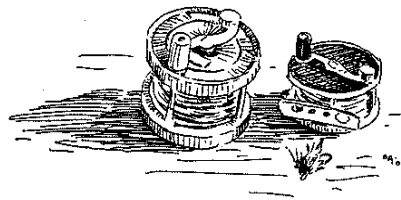
of day two, we focused on the upper portion of Rio Capitán. We started just downstream from the outlet of Laguna Quiroga and landed some very nice fish in the 24- to 26-inch range from deep channels in fast-moving water. The wind was strong, a steady 30 mph with gusts to 40 mph. This day was all about sight fishing for big trout and tossing streamers to them. The biggest producer was the articulated black leach pattern, although we did catch some fish on olive Zonkers and Buggers. After leaving the upper portion of the river, we spent the last 30 to 45 minutes at the home pools, which are on the Rio Capitán about 200 meters from the lodge. These two deep pools hold huge fish.

On day three, we fished the middle portion of the Rio Capitán all day. The morning produced many nice fish reminiscent of trout in the western United States. In the afternoon, we hiked upstream between pocket waters holding large fish. Once again, streamers were most productive. On day four, in the morning, the wind was relatively calm, so we headed to Laguna Quiroga. The journey began with a 45-minute ride on the Polaris Ranger. Once the road ended, we traversed bumpy fields and rocks to get to a bay that held a 25-foot rigid inflatable boat with twin Yamaha 70 hp outboards. A 30-minute ride across to the southwestern shore took us to the inlet of the lake. The favored fishing technique here was a short cast into the current of the inlet river, at which point we let all of our fly line pay out before beginning to strip it back in. Our efforts over two hours produced one 30-inch fish. While the fish in the lake are purported to be huge, this was not our favorite spot at Kooi Noom. After returning the boat to the bay, we spent the afternoon walking downstream along the lower portion of the Rio Capitán to the lodge. We walked approximately four kilometers, stopping where we saw fish in pocket water. Again, the river was high and the fishing was technical.

On day five, we fished the spring creek. It is mostly sheltered from the wind by surrounding hills, and long casts are not required. This creek runs

directly in front of the lodge, but we started fishing it much higher up after a 20-minute ride on the Polaris. We fished numerous beautiful riffles and pools as we worked our way upstream. In some areas, nearly every cast resulted in a take, mostly on the nymph of a dry/dropper setup, but a few fish went after dry flies as well. After landing more than 100 rainbows, some in the 16- to 18-inch range, we ascended the hill farther to a plateau where the water flattened out. We caught several fish measuring over 20 inches here in water no more than three feet wide. It was great fun on a 3 wt. rod.

The afternoon produced a unique trout-fishing experience. As on day one, numerous trout were cruising among the vegetation near the outlet of the lake.



That afternoon was the warmest of the week, and a hatch of a cream-colored fly had stimulated the trout to feed at the surface. A few minutes of watching would identify a cruising and feeding trout, and the cast of a 3 wt. in the path of the fish would quite often entice it to take either a scud or the White Wolff. Without a doubt, this is the closest thing to bonefishing in fresh water I've ever seen.

The morning of day six was spent exploring the Rio Chico, another river that borders the estancia. We fished near its confluence with Rio Capitán. We hoped to find some of the big trout from upstream in the Capitán, but this was not the case. The water was muddy, which limited the ability to see fish, and our morning tally was only a few small ones. We spent the afternoon looking for the 20-pound trout that had eluded us thus far. We reasoned that the upper Rio Capitán could provide such a fish, so we embarked on the 45-minute

Polaris ride to that location. Our quest resulted in several fish in the 12- to 15-pound range taking streamers and large nymphs, but a 20-pounder was not to be seen.

Our last evening with Diego and Guido was both celebratory and somber. We looked at photos of the biggest fish of the week, discussed possible enhancements to the property and the experience, and lamented the fact that our 36-hour journey back to the real world would start soon. Indeed, after a quick breakfast Saturday morning, we left the lodge at 6:30 for the six-hour ride to the airport in El Calafate.

So, what is our summary opinion of the trip? If you are interested in catching really big trout on a fly, this is a trip to consider. It is not a trip for the faint of heart, however, as it does require a great deal of travel to get there. Once you are there, the best fishing requires some moderate hiking. If you are up for all that, the fish here are big and hungry, the accommodations are comfortable, the guides and house staff are extremely competent and responsive, and the experiences you'll have will be memorable.

*Postscript:* Patrick Dean and Andrew Badley say their trip was booked for them by Ken Moorish and David Kalinowski at Fly Water Travel ([www.flywatertravel.com](http://www.flywatertravel.com)).

**DATELINE: COOK ISLANDS**

## **On-Site Report Two More Views on Fishing Aitutaki**

Remember that enthusiastic report subscriber Tim Welch filed about Aitutaki in the January 2016 issue? Well, two more subscribers have weighed in about this atoll in the Cook Islands, Alex Waller (who shares Welch's enthusiasm for the place) and Elbert Bivins (who is a bit less bullish about it). The two reports are so long we had to cut a bit from each, but the views of both subscribers should still come through loud and clear. For the record, Aitutaki is a large atoll about

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# THE ANGLING REPORT

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ten hours southwest of Los Angeles in the Cook Islands. It's accessible by New Zealand Airlines, but getting there involves a stop in Rarotonga and then a 45-minute prop flight to the island. The land mass of Aitutaki is quite small, but the entire atoll, including its large, triangular-shaped lagoon, is roughly seven miles by five miles. Lots of general tourists make their way to Aitutaki every year, but not many anglers. Thus, the size and sophistication of the sport-fishing industry is quite limited. With that in mind, here is what Alex Waller has to say about Aitutaki.

**Alex Waller writes:** Aitutaki is a tiny island in the middle of nowhere with white sandy beaches, coconut trees, and water so clear and warm that you can't even imagine it. It's not cold there even in the winter that runs from June through August, and there are fish there that can be caught all year round. And what fish! The bonefish around Aitutaki are up there with the biggest, if not *the* biggest in the world. I may be wrong saying that, and if that's the case, then I'm sorry; please write to me stating where it is better and I will go there and fish! I would say that the average bonefish weighs five to six pounds, with many going bigger than that. These are not the reason most people come here, though. They are bloody hard to see and tricky to put a fly in front of, and they head for the horizon at 3,000 miles per hour in blistering runs topping 150-plus meters! They are stunning to look at up close and something really special to see with your own eyes.

As keen as I was to get among the bonefish around Aitutaki, I had an ulterior motive for the trip: I wanted to go for giant trevally, which are at the top of the food chain, and they know it too. It is brutal, hard work to fish for GTs, and probably the coolest thing I have ever done. And I used to jump out of planes for a living!

There are GTs in the lagoon all year round, I have discovered. You just have to spend the time to look for them. If you are lucky, you may get a shot at three or four in a day, maybe more, but that in no way means you will hook

them, let alone get close to landing even one. There are also lots of blue trevally around that grow big and hunt the reefs in packs and smash anything that doesn't get out of their way. There are also barred and yellowtail trevally that will snatch your fly, plus triggerfish, milkfish, and many more species, such as wahoo, mahi-mahi, and dogtooth tuna. The diversity here is mind boggling. A really beautiful place from top to bottom.

As for places to stay, it really depends on what you want. There are five-star resorts, more reasonably priced places, and basic self-catering-style cabins. You can even stay on your own island if you are stupid rich! I went for a cheap option, staying at Ranginui's Retreat. It had a shower and a toilet, a fridge, and a kitchenette, and it was



clean and tidy. The owner, Steve, picked me up from the airport and sorted me out with a scooter to buzz around the island when I needed to go to town for supplies or a beer.

The island is tiny. The speed limit is 40 kph, and you can still get from one end to the other in 20 minutes or so. There are a few stores dotted around, but don't expect much to choose from. You can buy basic foodstuffs, but you can also easily eat out at night. One place I ate was Koru Cafe at the airport end of the island. It has the best coffee by a long shot, and you can get them to make you a sandwich to go if you want to take some lunch with you for the day. Just up the way is the Boat Shed, a bar/restaurant that offers decent food. It's also a cool place to hang out at the end

of a day of fishing.

As for guides, there is only one name you need to know and that is Bonefish E2's Way (<http://www.e2sway.com/>), run by Itu Davey and his brothers. They guide full-time within the lagoon and also outside the reef. They grew up on Aitutaki and know it better than anyone else. Their talent for seeing fish is almost unbelievable. I can say without a doubt that I wouldn't have hooked a fraction of the fish that I did if I had tried to do this trip on my own.

Speaking of my trip, I had only five days to spend on Aitutaki, so I read every scrap of information I could get my hands on before I went. I suggest you do the same. I arranged to fish all five of my days on the island, either with Itu or one of his brothers. Itu's wife, Kaleena, arranged for me to be picked up outside my cabin at about 8:15 on the first morning by Rua and Junior. I was ready to go well before then and was like a kid waiting for Santa to turn up. They turned up right on time, and we headed off first to a nearby flat to have a crack at some bonefish.

We spent the morning slowly walking the flats, Rua spotting the fish way before me, and me trying to put the fly in the right place at the right time. My first bonefish was not big by Aitutaki standards (three pounds), but it still ripped off a good 100 meters of backing on its first run and bent my 8 wt. through to the butt. Wicked power. I soon got it under control, however, and was looking at my first bonefish. Quick picture and then on its way. Good times.

I blew a few more chances at fish before the wind came up and we had to look for sheltered water. By the time we had lunch, it was too windy to drift or walk the flats, so we concentrated on fishing what they call the milk, that is, an area of water that has been stirred up by bonefish feeding on the bottom. You position the boat upwind of the milky water, let out the majority of your fast sink-tip line and drift downwind through it, feeling for the faint tapping that is a bonefish having a go at your fly. This was not exactly fly fishing, but it was effective and it saved the day. On

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# THE ANGLING REPORT

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the last drift of the day, I hooked and landed a fish that was pushing seven to eight pounds.

Back at the boat ramp, I met Itu for the first time, and he drove me back to my cabin, stopping off at a couple of shops so I could grab some food on the way. The next day was all about GTs. It started with Itu, Shaka, and me heading over to the reef at low tide to cruise around looking for fish. We didn't have to wait long before I got my first shot. One cast in the right spot, and he nailed it like he had been waiting all morning for it! Within seconds, I was down to my backing and the fish was tangled in coral bombies and on its way back into the reef. I took the pressure off the fish to stop it running as Shaka dove in and started untangling my line from the coral. In the excitement that followed, I managed to snap the top section of my 12 wt., at which point I jumped out of the boat, chased my fish into the reef and then back out again. I got back in the boat at that point to keep up with it. I eventually got the upper hand in some clear water about waist deep.

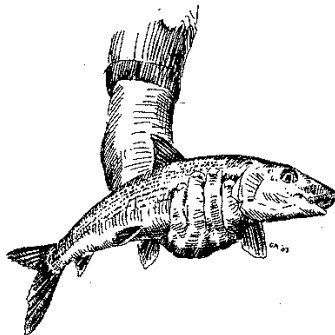
The fish turned out to be a real trophy. It was big. I mean 30-plus kilograms, and every inch a gangster! Catching it was the coolest fishing experience of my life. After a few photos, we watched it slowly swim off. The memory of that fish is etched in my mind forever.

I spent a lot of time over the rest of the week looking for GTs. We spent hours slowly and quietly walking through the reefs, sometimes spotting big black shapes cruising the bombies. I had a handful of other fish on that day, but all of them destroyed me in the coral with their brute strength, speed, and power. When the tide wasn't right or the GT fishing was just not happening, we would switch to searching the flats for bonefish. As the week went on, the weather just got better and better, and by the last day, it was flat calm and hot. Picture-perfect all day. I ended my trip with several new species under my belt, some awesome experiences, and a new understanding of what fly fishing can be.

The fishing here isn't easy, but the potential for something epic to happen is always just a good cast away. I already have plans in motion for a return trip. I can't thank Itu, Kaleena, Rua, Tia, Shaka, and Junior enough for how well they looked after me while I was with them.

□

**Elbert Bivens writes:** After reading Tim Welch's excellent article on Aitutaki in the January 2016 *Angling Report*, I thought I should go have a look, and these are my observations. I didn't fly 8,000 miles in order to fish on my own; I went there committed to fishing with guides from the outset. There are accessible flats around the main island, but the acknowledged better areas are on the south end of the lagoon and only accessible by guide



and boat.

The guides on Aitutaki are highly skilled and very reasonably priced, about \$300 a day US or less. One of the guides I used was Butch Leone, an Oregon transplant who has lived, guided, and fished there for many years. He is strictly a sight-fishing fly guy. He has a good temperament for the job, good fish eyes, and he knows where to go. The other guide I used was Itu (E2) Davey of Bonefish E2's Way. Itu, along with his brothers and cousins, offers more varied possibilities. They fish the flats, as well as deeper and often milky water. They also help anglers cast poppers at the coral for trevally, plus they troll and even fish offshore. I did some of all that.

Itu has a custom-built 30-foot

open fisherman powered by twin 150 Yamahas that takes well to the sea. His charge for big-game fishing is the same as for lagoon fishing, about \$300 US a day. The day I fished offshore with him we caught yellowfin tuna and had some action on wahoo, though we didn't actually boat any of the latter. His big-game gear was very good, so I would not bother to take my own gear again.

My main purpose in going to Aitutaki was to catch bonefish. It is not easy. Butch Leone says it is more like permit fishing than bone fishing, and I agree. I would not say the bones here are any spookier than elsewhere, but they have a common trait: they are not very interested in flies. Why is this so? I asked and got several similar explanations, mostly relating to the fact that they are well fed. A marine biologist told me that abundant food was the cause. Another factor, I was told, is that there are no sharks in the lagoon. That allows the bonefish to feed at will. Whatever the cause, the sight fishing was exciting but mostly unproductive. Even the small trevally, which will usually chase anything, just thumbed their noses at me.

A complicating factor here is the water depth. Unlike many areas where bonefish frequent water as shallow as ankle- to knee-deep, many lagoon areas in Aitutaki are three to five feet deep, and the water is crystal clear. The several moments it takes for the typical bonefish fly to get to the bottom here gives a target fish several moments to move from the spot where he was spotted. Sink-tip lines and heavy flies are much in order, and who would have thought that would be so? We had most of our success blind casting into milk, or cloudy water caused by feeding bonefish schools. These were not small fish, however, the way milk fish tend to be elsewhere.

Heavy gear is needed here for bonefish. I'm talking about 20-pound tippets on the flats and 30-pound tippets in the deeps. As for rods, think 10 and 12 wt. Even equipped thusly, I lost several large fish, which I just couldn't turn, to the coral. There are not a lot of coral heads here, but they tend to be ev-

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# THE ANGLING REPORT

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erywhere. You are almost always near a few, and the big bones seem to know how to use them to their advantage. You have to be prepared here to horse your fish in if you can. My biggest bonefish was just over nine pounds, and he was all I could handle on my 12 wt.

I asked Itu Davey at one point when the best fishing times are on Aitutaki. He said the months of November and February were best, and around the period of a new moon. Butch Leone said he caught fish with about the same degree of difficulty all year long and in any moon phase. Both guides did note that certain conditions can lower the water temperature a few degrees, and that very definitely puts the fish off. Our weather was great, and

the moderate temperature and low humidity made things very comfortable. Butch allowed that not everyone was so lucky.

I stayed at a place called Popoara Resort close to the airport. It featured snug, air-conditioned bungalows in a beautiful setting facing the reef. The cost was about \$50 US per night. There are numerous similar choices on the lagoon side or facing the sea. Allen Mills built Popoara Resort and has operated it for about ten years. He is a delightful, accommodating host. He rents small cars and scooters, which are the principal means of transport about the island, but I had no desire to go that route, preferring to pay the Popoara staff a few dollars for the occasional rides I needed. The Boat Shed restau-

rant, on site, has a lengthy and varied menu. Only steps away is Coru Café, which is open every morning at seven o'clock. The food in both places is a lot more interesting than you would imagine on a humble island.

The locals speak very good English and were easy and agreeable. Everyone knows everyone else, and most are related—just one big family. Prices here are quoted in New Zealand dollars, which were worth about 66 cents while I was there. Visa cards are widely accepted. Only the fishing guides require cash. In that regard, there are a couple of ATMs on the island. Aitutaki is certainly spouse friendly, albeit a bit low key. It is deservedly described by many as the world's most beautiful island. Enjoy!

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## • Briefly Noted •

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### Things to Do . . . Places to Go . . . New Developments

■ In case you are wondering, those anglers trying to test-fish **Fanning Island**, an atoll northwest of Christmas Island, finally made it there. Here is the latest from Tim Welch, the *Angling Report* subscriber who helped push this exploratory project forward:

“Readers following the effort to open sportfishing around Fanning Island will be pleased to hear that a group of five fishermen, led by filmmaker Brian Jills of Motive Fishing ([www.motivfishing.com](http://www.motivfishing.com)), visited the atoll for eight days recently, returning to Christmas Island in early June. Jills declined to be interviewed directly about this trip, but he was debriefed thoroughly by others who are working on this project, including Chuck Corbett, an American Kiribati resident who carries the title of chairman of Tabuaeran Villages on Fanning Island. Here is the gist of what the returning group members had to say about their experience on Fanning.

“Foremost was the comment that the fishing was every bit as good as in Christmas Lagoon on Christmas Island, with a slightly different variety of large reef fish, including wrasses, along with the expected trevally and bonefish. Was

the fishing good enough to attract a flow of anglers to Fanning? Here are some more facts. What do you think?

“Fanning is an isolated and pristine atoll 165 miles northeast of Christmas Island that rarely has been visited by fly fishermen. An area of about 12 square miles in the northeast section of the la-



goon is considered wilderness and is almost untouched by private or commercial interests aside from the occasional copra harvesters who camp in the area. Copra is the dried meat, or dried kernel, of the coconut used to produce coconut oil. Irapa Pass is located here, one of three passes that flush the lagoon.

Reaching it in the heavy Taiwanese aluminum skiffs used by locals requires dragging and pushing the cumbersome boats in skinny water over sand and rough coral passages. Tidal differences at this latitude range from six inches at neap and up to 18 inches in the spring tides, so there is little relief to this task. Even after boats are dragged to the shoreline, there is a hike of an hour and a half to the pass itself, where the best fishing is found. All of these hurdles are the reasons that local netting of fish in the wilderness is limited or next to nonexistent. This water is at the heart of the potential sportfishing business on Fanning Island.

“The bad news is that netting of fish in the rest of the lagoon is a major issue. It clearly has a serious impact on the fishery, reducing the area's sportfishing potential. To date, locals have had no ‘commercial’ reason to stop netting of bonefish and other edible species. However, there is clear awareness of the no-netting effort on Christmas and its economic benefits. At this writing, that is motivating the Fanning Council to put appropriate regulations in place.

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# THE ANGLING REPORT

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“Jills and his team spent five days camping in the Irapa area, and three additional days as guests at La Belle Etoile, a comfortable and convenient accommodation that is limited to eight guests at a time. The facility is owned by Bruno Delala, a French expat living on Fanning. Jill’s group flew from Christmas Island in Air Kiribati’s Hardin Y-12 turbo, which they say they will never risk flying in again. The MotivFishing team is known for serious hotdog adventures, so their statement should be taken with some seriousness.

“So, what are the next steps for Fanning, and what are prospects for interested fishermen? Surprisingly, there is some overall good news. First, Pegasus Lodges and Resorts ([www.pegasuslodges.com](http://www.pegasuslodges.com)), an established owner/operator of South Pacific surfing destinations, is proceeding with the development of Fanning, starting with the arrival of their King Air (to replace the Y-12) on July 19. Until Pegasus builds its cottages, guests will stay with Bruno in his limited but comfortable accommodations. Guides who know the lagoon well will be available to assist anglers. Schedules and prices will be established by Pegasus at a later time. Surfers and anglers will mingle at Bruno’s, but that should prove to be an interesting and even enriching aspect of the trip.

“In truth, all of these plans are still far from certain, but the emergence of Pegasus as a player on Fanning adds substance to what has only been talk up until now. For sure, future trips will be far less uncertain and nowhere near as risky as the recent trip by Jills and his group, not to mention my own visit to Fanning eight years ago. A scientific study of the fishery is planned for as early as this year, with Sustainable Travel International ([www.sustainable-travel.org](http://www.sustainable-travel.org)) in the queue to prepare a full analysis of the economic and ecological issues associated with the project. As all of this unfolds, it’s clear that early travelers will need to be flexible, physically capable, and adventurous. This is not yet a trip for casual anglers.”

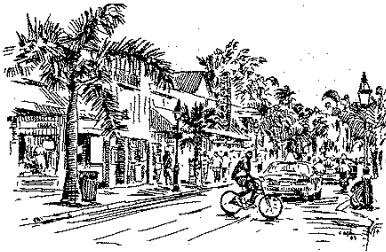
*Postscript:* The best sources of ad-

ditional information at this point are: Chuck Corbett ([chairman@tabuaeran-villages.com](mailto:chairman@tabuaeran-villages.com). Tel. 775-997-5120); and Tim Welch ([twelch@wa-net.com](mailto:twelch@wa-net.com). Tel. 360-263-8488). For sure, if you arrange a trip to Fanning, do let the rest of us know how it goes.

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■ The Obama administration just notched another victory in its move to open **Cuba** to US tourism. Seems a bank in Florida, Stonegate Bank ([www.stonegatebank.com](http://www.stonegatebank.com)), has issued a credit card that works in Cuba. At least it sort of works there. . . .

At this writing the Mastercard credit cards will be accepted only by state-run businesses in Cuba and a relative handful of private businesses that have obtained point-of-sale devices from the government. They cannot be used



to withdraw cash. On the positive side of the ledger, using the card will allow American tourists to buy products and services in US dollars without paying the 10 percent markup they would have to pay if they used cash or changed their dollars into pesos. The cards will thus provide American tourists the cheapest way to spend money in Cuba.

Importantly, one of the credit cards Stonegate has issued for use in Cuba comes with no annual fee and no minimum spending limit either. Other versions of the card do have spending limits and annual fees. As this was written, a few special commemorative credit cards were still available featuring a design on it by Cuban artist Michel Mirabal. One thousand of the cards were commissioned, but they were going fast when we called Stonegate last month.

Critics of these cards are sure to point out that they will strengthen state-

owned and state-sanctioned businesses and do nothing for private business except dry up financial support. Of course, the same kind of thing can be said of the People-to-People itineraries that all American tourists have to buy into to legalize their trips. The Cuban government demanded, and has been given, the right to veto any items on a People-to-People itinerary, virtually ensuring that no US tourist will be allowed to see things or meet people that are off limits. Also, all revenue from state-controlled tourist activity (which means almost all tourist activity) is funneled through the military.

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■ J. W. Smith and his wife, Dawn, are not well known by many subscribers to this publication, despite the fact that J. W. at one point was co-owner of a well-respected Alaska fly fishing lodge that is now known as Painter Creek Lodge (see item on Painter Creek in the June issue) and a remote fishing-camp operation called Alaska Wilderness Safaris. Today, J. W. books a lot of traditional anglers into peacock bass fishing camps in the Amazon, and he also works with a ton of birdshooters in Uruguay and Argentina. That’s not to say he hasn’t stayed involved in fly fishing, because he has been actively creating a peacock bass fly fishing program in Brazil of late and generally poking around in promising trout waters in South America. He recently created a website devoted to these latter activities ([www.southamerican-flyfishing.com](http://www.southamerican-flyfishing.com)) that complements his website devoted to wingshooting and traditional angling for peacock bass ([www.rodgunresources.com](http://www.rodgunresources.com)). I say all this to bolster the credibility of this report I just got from J. W. about some huge brook trout in **Argentina**. If you book one of these trips, do file a report. I’ve seen some photos from this area that are amazing!

J. W. Smith writes: “On an exploratory trip this past February in Argentina’s Patagonia region we landed five brook trout that weighed between eight and 10 pounds, and we saw trout we believe could exceed the current IGFA all-tackle world record of 14 pounds 8

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# THE ANGLING REPORT

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ounces.

“Benjamin Beale of El Encuentro Fly Fishing has secured exclusive access to four interconnected brook trout lakes in the mountains near the Argentina/Chile border. We believe that these four lakes could hold a new world record brook trout. Three of the four lakes are unexplored, as is the previously inaccessible outlet river that drains the lake system and flows through the pristine mountains into Chile.

“In addition to trophy brook trout fishing, Beale has also secured exclusive access to a prime rainbow spawning area on the upper Rio Corcovado. Giant rainbow trout migrate out of Lago Vintter to spawn in the upper section of the outlet river, the Rio Corcovado. These adult trout gorge on scuds (miniature freshwater shrimp in the lakes) and reach enormous size, measuring up to 30-plus inches in length. Some will exceed 12 pounds.

“El Encuentro Fly Fishing provides a unique opportunity to catch trophy rainbow and the largest brook trout we have ever seen in the same general area. Prime time is November through mid-December. Our exclusive, remote Safari Base Camp on the Rio Corcovado is limited to six anglers. The seven-night/six-day fishing trip is priced at \$5,295 per angler and can be combined with a stay at El Encuentro Lodge on the premier Rio Futaleufú for brown and rainbow trout. To reserve your dates, call 800-584-1180. E-mail: dsmith@rodgunresources.com.

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■ We continue to get feedback on Alex Zapata’s peacock bass fishing operation in **Colombia**. The latest subscriber to weigh in is Donovan Pieterse, who fished the Mataveni River with Alex this past spring. The Mataveni is a somewhat famous big-fish river that produced a number of IGFA record fish before it was closed some 30 years ago due to the worsening security situation in Colombia. With security improving and a workable relationship with the local Indians in place, this trip is beyond the exploratory phase, Pieterse says. He goes on to write:

“There were four fishermen in our group this past April, along with The Fly Shop host, Eric Ersch, and Alex Zapata. This trip is clearly ready for guests with previous experience in salt or jungle locations. To be sure, the outfitting here cannot be compared to what’s available in Brazil, where live-aboards are common. A live-aboard would be almost impossible to arrange on the Mataveni because of the narrowness and the shallowness of the river and the many sharp turns it takes as it winds its way through the jungle. At this point, tent camping is the only real option available. But not to worry. The camp we had was simple but comfortable. The Indian guides’ large metal canoes are fine. Almost 30 feet in length and equipped with well-maintained outboards, they easily allowed two anglers



to fish at once on what turned out to be a surprisingly stable platform.

“The Indians own the boats, I was told, and they rotate guides from the village, all of whom know every part of the area from their years of tropical fish netting. Of course, unless you understand Spanish, your questions will have to wait until you get back to camp. Be prepared to use hand signals to slow your guide’s paddling or to instruct him how to position the boat for a particular cast you want. The guides I was assigned clearly weren’t familiar with fly fishing. At this point, count on needing to spot most of your own fish, tie your own knots, cast from any angle, and know how to do everything else except remove hooks from your fish. The guides can see surface disturbances such as bait fish and peacock bass fry,

but they don’t use polarized sunglasses or stand up in the boat like traditional fly fishing guides. All considered, this is not yet a trip for a beginner. It is an adventure, and it needs to be treated as such.

“The trip begins in Bogota with an early morning flight to Puerto Inírida on Satena Airlines. The hotel and flight were both included in the package, as well as a night in Puerto Inírida on the way out. A boat ride on the Orinoco River takes you to the mouth of the Mataveni, where we met the dugout canoes for a two-hour ride to the camp.

“There are two types of peacock bass in the Mataveni, butterfly and temensis. The butterflies averaged about four pounds and were the strongest fighters for their weight. Having a four-pound fish bend a 9 wt. to the butt is dumbfounding. Some days we caught 30 of these smaller peacocks per person, with the largest being eight pounds. The larger temensis is the one you see in pictures most often. The largest we caught weighed 20 pounds. Between four guests, we caught 16 that weighed more than 10 pounds. We caught most of our fish blind casting at structure. One thing to note is the heat, and its impact on fly lines. Most of us brought Rio Tropical Outbound lines. They proved to be designed for cooler temps, so we dealt with continuing knots after they wilted in the heat. Two guests showed up with Scientific Angler tropical lines and the difference was amazing. They held up without knotting, and they flew through the guides.

“The flies that worked were big-profile flies. Chartreuse and white did very well. The streamer that caught the highest number of temensis was a pike fly with a rattle. Poppers didn’t work very well, but the few fish we did catch on them were worth the extra work. Pole Dancer was the winner on the surface.

“At the end of the trip we got a tour of the village to see the difference sportfishing is making to the community of 72. They had recently dug a well and will soon have drinking water available to them without making a long hike to



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# THE ANGLING REPORT

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the river. The village has a school that appeared to be well appointed. At this point, Alex has done the hard work of negotiating with the tribe to open up the river and arrange transportation, river guides, food, hotels, and marketing. As was noted in a previous article, a well-regarded Colombia angler and guide, Armando Giraldo, will be running the Mataveni operation in the future so Alex can explore new water. We met Armando in Bogota for dinner, and all agree he is the right man for the job.

“This trip currently costs \$4,615 (which includes a week of Global Rescue coverage) and can be booked exclusively through The Fly Shop ([www.theflyshop.com](http://www.theflyshop.com)). This is far less expensive than the lodge and mother ship options in Brazil. No visa is needed to enter Colombia, but you will need a Yellow Fever Certificate. All considered, experienced and self-sufficient fly fishers will enjoy this trip.”

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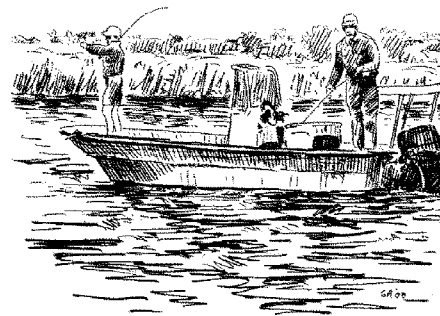
■ Here at *The Angling Report*, we are not quite sure how to write about the **Zika virus**. For sure, we don’t want to scare everyone into staying home, but, at the same time, we don’t want to minimize the risk this outbreak poses either. Personally, I have to admit, I am not sure I would go to the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro if I were given a free ticket. The prospect of getting caught up in crowds of people surging back and forth in a third-world urban environment fraught with mosquitos gives me the willies. As for watching athletes swim in dirty water, I’d rather watch paint dry. Or go bonefishing somewhere.

In that latter connection, as a person well past my reproducing years, I can’t really think of a place I wouldn’t go bonefishing (or fishing for anything else) because of the Zika virus. To be sure, I would be more than usually careful to avoid mosquitos during the early morning and evening hours, and I would use repellent, about which I will have more to say in a moment. There is one other rule I would follow as regards the Zika virus: I would not think of letting my daughter of childbearing age (if I

had one) or her husband, for that matter, come along with me.

That’s not to say there aren’t disturbing undercurrents to this outbreak, as witness the talk of a rising incidence of an immune system disorder called Guillain-Barré syndrome in areas with a high number of Zika virus infections. The report Global Rescue has just issued on Zika covers all of this. You can read it at the following address: <http://globalrescue.hs-sites.com/the-leader-in-field-rescue-0>.

All I can tell you is I have read the above report and a lot more, too, and I am going fishing this summer anyway. That is a personal decision and not a prescription for anyone else to follow, including the subscriber who sent me a recent *Consumer Reports* article that focuses on the best repellents to use



against Zika-infected mosquitos. That same subscriber said he was so spooked by Zika he had backed away from plans to go fishing all over the Caribbean and Latin America. He may be right, and I may be wrong. Different strokes as they say.

As for the *Consumer Reports* article, it appears in the current July 2016 issue. I won’t attempt to summarize it, but for the record, here are the three repellents that *CR* rated as the best to use against Zika: Sawyer Picaridin (20%), Ben’s Deet Tick & Insect Wilderness Formula, and Repel Lemon Eucalyptus (30%). “Once applied, [these repellents] were able to ward off *Aedes* and *Culex* mosquitoes, plus ticks, for at least 7 hours,” *Consumer Reports* says.

I will let all of you find out how

to buy those repellents. Personally, I am going to use the same old repellent I always use. It comes in olive drab, uninteresting-looking plastic bottles labeled “100% DEET.” You can find it at any Army Navy Store.

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■ We live in such a safe world these days, statistically speaking, at least in the United States, that it is easy to forget that things can (and do) go wrong. As a consequence, we just don’t pay enough attention to safety. We are indebted to subscriber Bruce Pfund for that important reminder. His note, which follows, made me remember a safety briefing that a guide in central Florida provided me before a day of redfishing. What was odd about the briefing (you know, a brief rundown on where the life jackets and fire extinguisher are, that kind of thing) was the fact that it is the only safety briefing I can ever remember getting from a sportfishing guide in some 30 years of fishing! There is something wrong with this picture, no?

Bruce Pfund writes: “In the past I have shared some observations on the lack of basic safety gear in many guide boats. Well, here are some more observations on what I experienced on a trip in April to an island and with a highly recommended guide that will both remain nameless. We crossed an expanse of flat-calm water on my first outing with this guide and ran through a cut in the barrier reef on our way to a distant flat. Immediately, on reaching open water, we hit short-frequency, four- to six-foot seas with breaking whitecaps. The boat and motor were fine, and the guide ran this gauntlet with great skill. As we shot through that cut, however, I looked over at my companion and saw that we shared the same concerns: the boat had no radio, no life jackets, no flares, no fire extinguisher. We had nothing in the way of safety equipment except two tired seat cushions for the four people aboard. Worse still, the kill switch lanyard was draped in the bilge, unconnected in any way to the guide.

“Later that day, I ran the boat for a while so the guide could throw a cast

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# THE ANGLING REPORT

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net for pilchards. That's when I learned that the steering friction setting was absolute zero. When you let go of the tiller, prop torque pulled the steering hard over immediately. That's how people get ejected from small boats!

"Was my concern about no radio on the boat unwarranted? After all, there were cell towers visible even at the most remote ends of the island. On the other hand, later that day and on the subsequent five days, it became apparent that the guide's tiny cell phone, with no waterproof case, often had a

dead battery by mid-afternoon. As for life jackets, it was true that the guide's boat had three built-in flotation compartments. It would probably float if it swamped or flipped. Still, the potential was there for a long, lonesome warm-water drift.

Needless to say, after the first day, I brought my armored cell phone on board, along with a waterproof GPS.

"Personally, I like to bring an inflatable PFD (personal flotation device) along with me on fishing trips, but doing that can be complicated because of

the compressed gas inflator cylinder. TSA, local airport, and airline restrictions vary widely on the transport of inflators. There's a lot of Internet info on this subject that fellow subscribers may want to look into. Recently, I was able to get my PFD down to Acklins Island in the Bahamas and back to the US with no problem. I regret not bringing it on the trip I am describing here. That's a mistake I will not make again."

*Postscript:* Anyone want to weigh in on this subject? Write: [mike@anglingreport.com](mailto:mike@anglingreport.com).

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## • OUTFITTER CRITIQUES •

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### The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

*This section of The Angling Report is based entirely on subscriber-written Fishing Trip Report Forms. Our policy on these forms is to publish excerpts in the newsletter of Angler Network Forms as received without censorship. Agents, guides, lodge operators, and/or outfitters who disagree with anything said about them in this section are free to submit a rebuttal. As a subscriber, you can help extend the reach of this program by filing a Fishing Trip Report Form yourself. You should find one inside this issue of your newsletter. Alternately, you can file a report online by going to our website, [www.anglingreport.com](http://www.anglingreport.com), and clicking on "File a Report." For details about how to do custom searches for Angler Network Reports on our website, see page 2 of this issue.*

■ Here's a report that will make some subscribers' eyes mist up with memories. It's about a bream fishing trip, and it was sent to us recently by subscriber John Schneider: "Recently, my wife and I joined another couple for a few days of fishing for bluegill bream at the Kingfisher Society Lodge ([www.kingfishersociety.com](http://www.kingfishersociety.com)) on Richmond Mill Lake near Laurel Hill, **North Carolina**. Seldom does a destination provide an experience greater than advertised, but in this case, the Kingfisher Society came through with flying colors. The lodging, meals, staff, boats, guides, and fishing were absolutely first class. As for the fish in this lake, they are in a class by themselves. My wife and I opted to fly fish only, whereas our friends used crickets with floats. Yes, they out-caught us in number and in size, actually bringing to the boat a three-pound bluegill. Our best on popping bugs was 2.2 pounds. It was hard to keep the bass off our lines, but for anyone with a Bucket List wish of a huge trophy bluegill, this is the place. We arranged our trip so it would coincide with the full moon in

May, hoping we would find the giant bluegills on their beds. As it turned out, cool misty days had run them off their beds and we wound up prospecting for them along the shoreline with small chartreuse poppers, which we tossed with 6 and 7 wt. fly rods. The setting here is lovely, with gum and



cypress trees lining the banks. There are no aquatic vegetation issues here at all. The lake, we were told, has huge bass and crappie as well, but for us the main draw were the giant bluegills. They also have copper nose and red ear perch here. Kingfisher Society Lodge is not cheap, but its

bluegill heaven is worth every penny they charge." □

■ Subscriber George J. Grochala has nothing but good things to say about his recent redfish trip to **Biloxi Marsh** south of New Orleans. He writes: "I have had the good fortune to fish Biloxi Marsh many times over the last 20 years, and with many excellent guides. On my latest trip I fished with guide Greg Moon ([www.flyfishinginlouisiana.com](http://www.flyfishinginlouisiana.com)) during four days of tough conditions May 5-8. My partner, Gene Shropshire, and I cast to dozens of large redfish and black drum and landed reds up to 30 pounds. Who says big bull reds can only be caught in the fall!

"Going into this trip, we knew conditions this spring were going to be less than ideal. Southern Louisiana and the surrounding states had record-breaking winter and spring rainfalls this year, accompanied by weeks of clouds and high wind. These conditions resulted in very high muddy water for an extended period. Additionally, we learned upon arrival that the marsh was loaded with bait

# THE ANGLING REPORT

of all kinds, which most fish prefer over any fly. Luckily, the sun shone brightly our entire trip and the wind diminished from 10 to 20 mph to almost nothing. This at least allowed us to begin seeing fish well. And see fish we did! More about that in a moment.

“Guide Greg Moon is hardly a newcomer to the scene. At age 46, Greg has been a full-time guide on the Marsh for about 10 years, and he previously worked at NOLA’s best fly shop, the Uptown Angler (now closed, unfortunately). Greg therefore knows the water, the tackle, and the techniques needed to catch quality fish in all conditions. More importantly, he is passionate about fly fishing for reds. His gear is top notch. It includes an 18-foot Maverick skiff with a 75 hp motor and a casting platform that is perfect for fishing skinny water. As for fly rods, he uses fast 9 wt. Scotts. Now, back to the extraordinary fish we caught

“Despite the tough conditions we faced, Greg put us on dozens of quality redfish and black drum daily. The reds we saw and caught ran from nine to 30 pounds, and the drum were even larger. The high water and abundant bait did pose a problem, however. Rather than following a normal spring pattern of foraging along the marsh banks, pushing water, or busting schools of bait, the reds and drum were mostly laid up on the bottom. Some of them would occasionally float to the surface and descend again in a maddening phantom-like pattern. At other times, fish would literally stand on their heads, nose straight down, “tailing” while feeding, though the high water did not show much tail! Seeing fish was clearly the biggest challenge we faced. Fortunately, within hours of the first day, Greg clued us in to what we should watch for. He also helped us fine-tune our casting to these unique conditions. What was called for were short casts of 15 to 30 feet, which are not easy with a nine-foot rod and 15 feet of leader and shooting head already out. The trick was maintaining line control and achieving velocity quickly, often without the ability to haul. The technique Greg demonstrated to us

involved letting a moderate amount of line play out behind you on the water, then using that water tension to load your rod. Some of our casts were like smacking the fish on the head with the fly. They weren’t pretty, but they were productive. As for presentation in these tough conditions, Greg taught us that the fish have a dinner-plate window of feed that has to be honored. Failure to put the fly within that tight window accurately and quickly resulted in a refusal. As for stripping, Greg taught us that the fly must be moving the millisecond it hits the water, with an immediate strip into the dinner-plate window of feed, followed by a short pause to let the fly sink a bit, followed by a long slow strip. If that did not elicit a take, then you had



to haul up and do it over again quickly. Don’t waste time retrieving the full cast, he intoned, as finicky fish either hit during that first strip into their window of feed, or not at all.

“With these techniques in mind, we were able to land some great fish, including one of nine pounds, one of 14 pounds, one of 24 pounds, and one of 30 pounds. We also caught a 30-pound gar. Gene Shropshire, my partner, also hooked but lost a black drum estimated to weigh at least 30 pounds. As with every trip, when it was over, I contemplated what I had learned and how to improve for the next adventure. Here’s what I took home from this early spring experience:

“First, book Greg Moon if you are serious about fly fishing for big reds in

the Biloxi Marsh. I swear Greg was a redfish in a former life. He is the “Redfish Whisperer” of the Biloxi Marsh! I have never met a guide who is more knowledgeable and articulate about where reds can be found and how they react in changing conditions. Moreover, his ability to spot fish and put you in an excellent casting position is uncanny, whether the fish are cruising or laid-up along the marsh edges or out in the open lakes/bays over oyster beds. Further, Greg, a former philosophy major, is a great teacher and conversationalist. There is never a dull moment in the boat with him. To top it off, he is as reasonable and courteous as the day is long.

“Second, book as many days as your calendar and wallet permit, as bad weather and high water can improve dramatically within a few days. If you book only a day or so, you may completely miss a good weather window.

“Third, practice your short-casting (under 30 feet) before arrival, as that may be the most important distance you will need to artfully address. Also, focus on accuracy, with no more than a 16-inch dinner-plate target, and on line control that allows you to begin stripping the millisecond the line hits the water.

“Greg’s fee is \$600 per day for two anglers, with drinks provided. If you plan to stay in NOLA, here are some personal recommendations. For music, check out any place on Frenchmen’s Street (especially Maison, D.B.A., and the Spotted Cat) and Buffa’s Back Room on Esplanade at Burgundy. As for affordable restaurants, I recommend Eat New Orleans at Dauphine and Du Maine Streets in the French Quarter and Buffa’s Back Room (the red beans and rice with sausage is to die for!). As for recommended higher-end restaurants, my favorites are Emeril’s NOLA on St. Louis Street in the French Quarter; Herbsaint on St. Charles in the Central Business District; and Cochon and Annunciation in the Warehouse District off Tchoupitoulas Street. As they say in NOLA, ‘Let the good times roll!’”

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■ *Editor Note: We would be impressed*

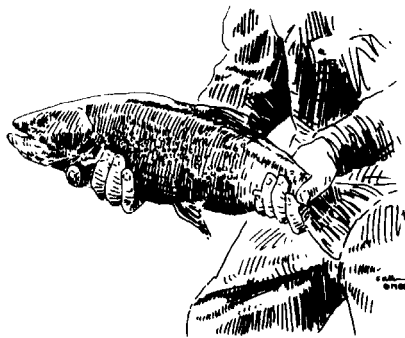
# THE ANGLING REPORT

*if any current subscribers remembered the string of reports that we published in 1988 and 1989 on the famous native Lahontan cutthroats that are located in Pyramid Lake, Nevada. Seems anglers fish these cold waters by wading out to ladders erected in waist-deep water. Reports of 10- to 20-pound fish were not uncommon at one point. Fast-forward 27 years to the following two reports by anglers Judith Brown and Nancy Morrow on their April 2016 trip to Pyramid Lake. Clearly, this fishery is holding up well.*

**Judith Brown writes:** Pyramid Lake is a saline lake in the stark Nevada desert, on the Paiute Indian Reservation, about 30 miles north of Reno. There is a pyramid-shaped tufa rock formation on the east side of the lake (hence the name, Pyramid Lake). Once extinct in Pyramid Lake, Lahontan cutthroat were reintroduced in the 1970s when the Paiute Tribe opened a small fish hatchery in Sutcliffe, Nevada, stocking Pyramid Lake first with strains of Lahontan cutthroat from nearby lakes and, later, from a different cutthroat strain found in a small stream near Pilot Peak, Nevada. Under the stewardship of the Paiute Tribe and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Pyramid Lake has become a sportfishing trophy-trout destination, where anglers can now catch both Lahontan and Pilot Peak cutthroats.

“When Rachel Andras of Andras Outfitters ([www.andrasoutfitters.com](http://www.andrasoutfitters.com)) decided to host a women’s fly fishing trip to Pyramid Lake with local guide Rob Anderson (<http://pyramidlakefly-fishing.com/guideservice>), ten enthusiastic women anglers from California and Oregon immediately jumped on board. I was among that group. In the months leading up to the trip, Rachel periodically sent us information about all things Pyramid Lake: rods and reels, stripping baskets, clothing, Paiute tribal fishing permits, and information on fishing techniques. I began practicing casting with a 24-foot sink-tip shooting head line, a totally new experience for me. By the time April 14 arrived, I couldn’t wait for our adventure.

“The next morning at five o’clock, we caravanned from the hotel to South Nets, one of the many fishing access points at Pyramid Lake. It was dark, it was cold (in the 30s), it was partly cloudy, and it was very windy. Within minutes of getting on a ladder, however, the first member of our group hooked a fish. Once acclimated to our ladders, all of us were hooking fish, many over eight pounds—no giant fish, but what we arguably lacked in size we definitely made up for in sheer numbers. Although we could not see the fish strike due to the turbidity of the water (except for the occasional fish that took the fly right at the ladder), we could definitely feel the tug. At one point, seven of us had fish on at one time; one of us hooked six fish in six minutes. Rob graciously served



coffee and muffins at mid-morning and soup and sandwiches for lunch, cooked on a stove mounted on the back of his truck. All delicious, but, if truth be told, we couldn’t wait to finish eating and get back on our ladders. Rob estimated that we caught and released about 300 fish that day. I don’t know if that’s so, but I certainly lost count early in the day.

“Pyramid Lake is definitely worth checking out. The area is hauntingly beautiful, especially at sunrise. Fishing from a stepladder is unique, too, and is wildly fun when the fishing is hot. Ideally, spend two (or three) days when you go to maximize your chances in case bad weather rolls in. If you have not had an opportunity to fish with Rachel Andras or Rob Anderson, give them a call. You will not be disappointed.”

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■ **Nancy Morrow writes:** “When I first received a notice about fly-fishing Pyramid Lake with Rachel Andras, I quickly responded with an enthusiastic YES! The next day, I began to wonder just what I had agreed to do? Pyramid Lake? Fishing from a ladder? Seriously? But I love adventure and getting off the beaten path of fishing. I soon became very interested in knowing just what Lahontan cutthroat trout fishing on Pyramid Lake is all about.

“April 14 arrived, so Rachel and I headed from Southern Oregon to Northern Nevada. Arriving at the Nugget Hotel and Casino in Sparks, we quickly found our 10 women companions. We checked into our rooms and had a quick meeting about the logistics in the morning. Our guide, Rob Anderson, would meet us in the lobby at 5:00 AM, we were told, and we would follow him to the lake to be in the water before six. The weather was expected to be cold and windy.

“At the lake the next morning, we proceeded to dress in many layers of clothing. Rob gave us a quick lowdown on the flies, line setup, and casting techniques needed for these conditions. He then instructed us to follow him out to the water, staying close to him as he dragged our ladders out, pushing them deep into the sand so we would not get pushed off by the rogue waves coming in.

“I had a strike on my first cast, then another and another, before I finally set the hook on my first Lahontan cutthroat trout. I forgot about my numb fingers and yelled to Rob ‘Fish on!’ He came running over to release it. Then three other women started catching fish. After a few minutes, I had another one and then another. Rob looked at Rachel and said ‘It will take two hours to get all the women out on the ladders if they keep catching them like this’.

“We continued catching many, many fish throughout the day. It was almost too many to keep my interest. At the end of the day, there was a last frenzy of strikes that saw seven out of 10 women with a fish on at the same

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time. We finally decided to leave the lake around 3:00 PM after things quieted down. The count for the 10 of us was over 300 fish in that one day alone. We were on a high!

“After returning to the hotel, we had a lovely dinner with those who wanted to join in. Some were too exhausted for that. Then it was off to bed to rest up for a repeat of this extraordinary day of fishing! The next morning at five o’clock, we headed out again for what we thought would be another awesome record-breaking day of fishing. When we reached the lake, however, it was 42 degrees and very calm, with clear skies. The ladders were already positioned in the water, ready for us to start casting. Rob recommended using a floating line in these conditions, so most of us changed, while some continued with the previous day’s setup just to test Rob’s theory. An hour later, none of had a strike. I did not catch a single fish the rest of the day. But I was happy to have had such great success on the first day. The plunge in our success rate certainly drove home how dramatically conditions here can change from one day to the next. We all came away aware of the great fishing here and the work that is going on to restore the Lahontan cut-throat species.”

□

■ Subscriber Scott Moore has good things to say about a recent float trip on the Watauga River in **Tennessee**. He writes: “I recently returned from an early May trip to fish the Watauga River, floating a nine-mile stretch with guide John Stunkard. I caught mostly brown trout in the 12- to 16-inch inch range, though I did hook one fish over 20 inches that threw the hook on a very acrobatic tarpon-like jump. I also moved numerous other significant fish that were not brought to net. During the trip, the weather changed rapidly, with the morning featuring overcast skies and light rain. During this time, I saw the most activity on streamers. Later in the day, the sun came out strongly, which seemed to put the fish off the feed. As evening approached, clouds moved back in and the sulfur activity increased.

John is a young guide, but he has a great deal of knowledge of the South Holston and Watauga Rivers. We chose to fish the Watauga because I like to fish for brown trout with streamers, and it also gave me the best chance to hook some larger fish. Indeed, I fished streamers for a good portion of the day using a 250-grain sinking line with 15-pound 1X Seaguar tippet. Toward evening, I fished dry flies, sulfurs, with a nine-foot 5 wt. with 5x tippet. The streamers I used were articulated. Early in the day, black patterns produced well, while lighter flies produced better later in the day. A highlight of the trip occurred while floating the trophy section of the river. I cast a large articulated streamer toward the bank, where it was crushed by a large brown trout that immediately



catapulted out of the water and threw the hook. The second highlight was selectively fishing a light sulfur spinner in the evening, taking several midsize fish on sulfur dries. John Stunkard, was superb. He provided a very nice lunch and was good at positioning the boat to make my casts easier and more effective. I highly recommend this area and John Stunkard to anyone interested in fishing in the southeast. There are walk-and-wade opportunities here, but both rivers are large and much more easily fished from drift boats. If you plan to fish the South Holston River, be sure you check the TVA generation schedules. The river rises from 200 cfs to 1,200 cfs when generation is occurring. *Postscript:* Scott gives the cost of his guided outing as \$400. He says he booked it through the South Holston

River Fly Shop (<http://southholstonriverflyshop.com>).

□

■ Subscriber Mills Schenck has very good things to say about the world-class giant trevally (GT) fishing he enjoyed on his trip to Cosmoledo Atoll in **Seychelles** this past March. He writes: “We focused on giant trevally on this trip, averaging 10 to 15 per boat per day (three anglers to the boat). Most of these were caught while sight fishing on the flats. We also encountered large numbers of other species, such as bluefin, triggers, bonefish, plus milkfish, though the latter were rarely feeding in a way where they could be targeted. We saw a few permit, too, but not many.

“We did about 70 percent of our fishing wading the flats or walking beaches, with some fishing done from the boat and off shore when the tides were either not very low or high. We used 12 wt. fly rods for the GTs and 8 to 10 wt. rods for the other species. The weather was exceptional, with only one morning of rain, wind, and adverse conditions. We didn’t experience any problems on the trip itself, but we did have some inconsistent communication about our travel plans before we left. This caused some minor apprehension, but everything was handled well once we arrived. The trip was outstanding overall, especially as regards the quality of the guide team. They were all very knowledgeable, hardworking, and fun to fish with. We were very impressed with the number of GTs on the flats. In retrospect, I regret not spending more time targeting other species (triggers, bonefish), which were great fun when we did fish for them.

“Among the fun moments on this trip was the chance to watch five sailfish follow a spinning rod teaser to the boat while fishing off shore. We could have hooked one had it not been for some ‘user errors.’ Another interesting event was having a large GT literally chase my boots on the flats. I was too surprised to get my fly in the water! We had multiple double and triple hookups of GTs on the flats, and there were several one- to two-hour sessions where we

# THE ANGLING REPORT

didn't go more than five minutes without having a GT that we could target in sight.

"Cosmoledo is an expensive destination, but if you want to catch GTs on the flats in great numbers and experi-

ence an incredibly beautiful and remote place to fish, it is not to be missed. The Alphonse team does a truly exceptional job with outfitting the trip: the boat is comfortable, the food is great, and, despite our best efforts, we did not run out

of cold beer."

*Postscript:* Mills Schenck gives the cost of his trip as \$17,000, excluding airfare. He says he booked it through Alphonse Fishing Company (<http://www.alphonse-island.com/en>).

## Back of the Book

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