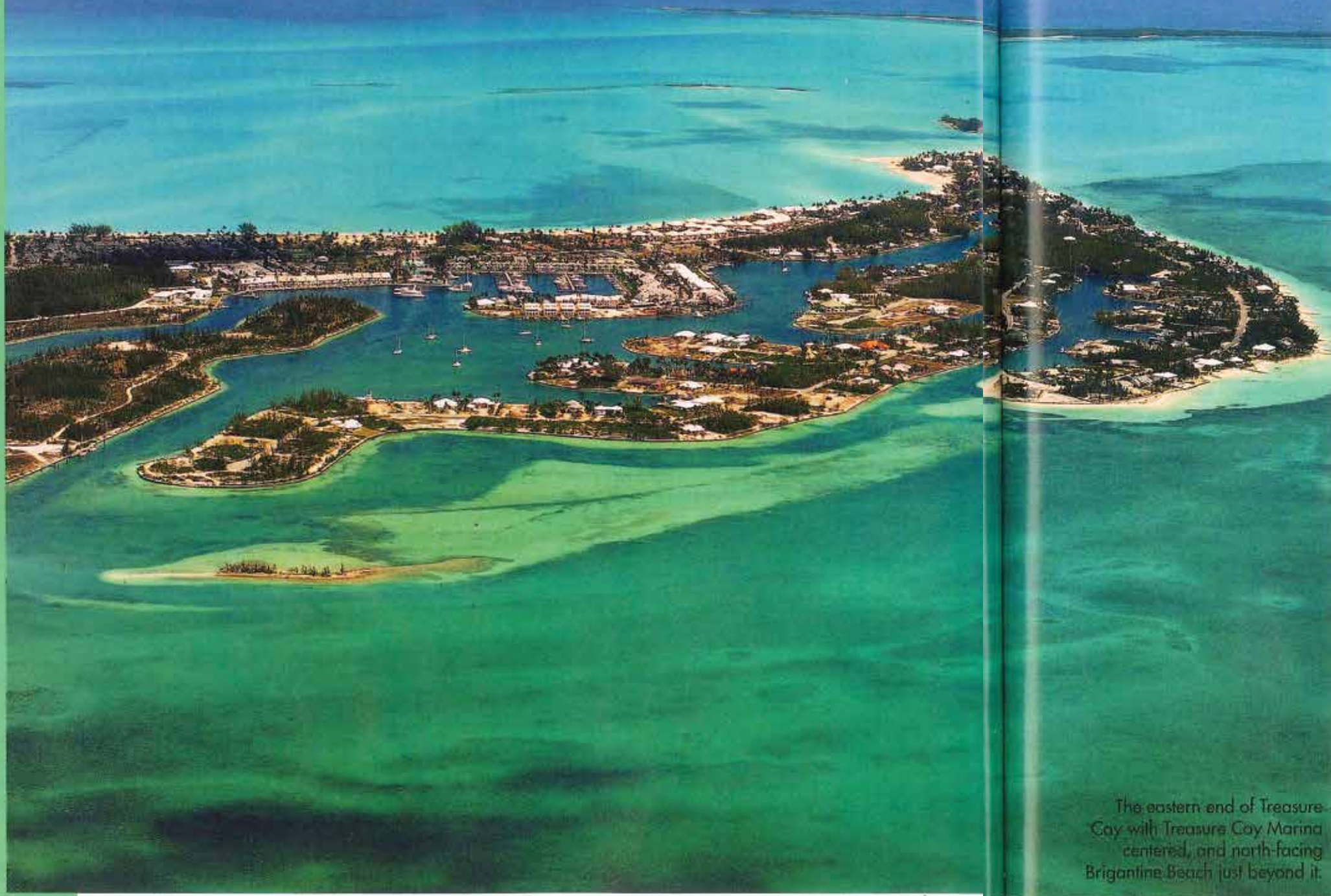


# TREASURE ISLAND

By: Riley Love, MD



The eastern end of Treasure Cay with Treasure Cay Marina centered, and north-facing Brigantine Beach just beyond it.



Bonefish up to 9 pounds were encountered.



The winter of 2015 was a bitter season. Fishermen railed against it, but gales and hoarfrost blustered from the north. Sons and fathers gazed out the windows at the ruthless milieus and longed to be on the water, forced to live on the stuff of their dreams even as their patience withered to suffering. While the logs crackled in the fireplace, a generation older hand would be placed on a young shoulder while the rods and tackle laid idle. Many stories of faraway seas have begun this way. Indeed, some very good ones.

For surely the Braemar winds of northern Scotland blew as strong and cold one-and-a-half centuries ago. They lashed rain against the glass panes of the house with a force that would make the mast of a great ship groan aloud.

The map of the imaginary pirate's island, marked with buried treasure lay before them, as fire from the hearth flickered yellow light across it and twelve-year-old Lloyd's excited face. His stepfather had drawn it the day before. Now he must write the story behind the map! It began as a father and son journey.

Turning his long narrow face with its aquiline nose and drooping moustache toward the window, the gray world outside transformed into the sundrenched blue and green waters of the Caribbean, the Spanish Main! Dipping his quill in the inkwell, prose flowed upon the paper like raindrops onto the ocean. With the tale that would unfold, fifteen chapters in as many days, the unknown Robert Louis Stevenson would become remembered as one of the greatest storytellers of all time. He became a lad, Jim Hawkins and his *bildungsroman* began thus:

#### CHAPTER 1: THE OLD SEA-DOG AT THE 'ADMIRAL BENBOW'

"Squire Trelawney, Dr. Livesey and the rest of these gentlemen having asked me to write down the whole

"A HOLY LAND OF ANGLING, SOME OF THE EARLIEST STAGES OF THE EVOLUTION OF MODERN SALTWATER SPORT FISHING WERE PUT INTO MOTION HERE BY IGFA FOUNDERS"

## NEED TO KNOW

### FOOD AND DRINK

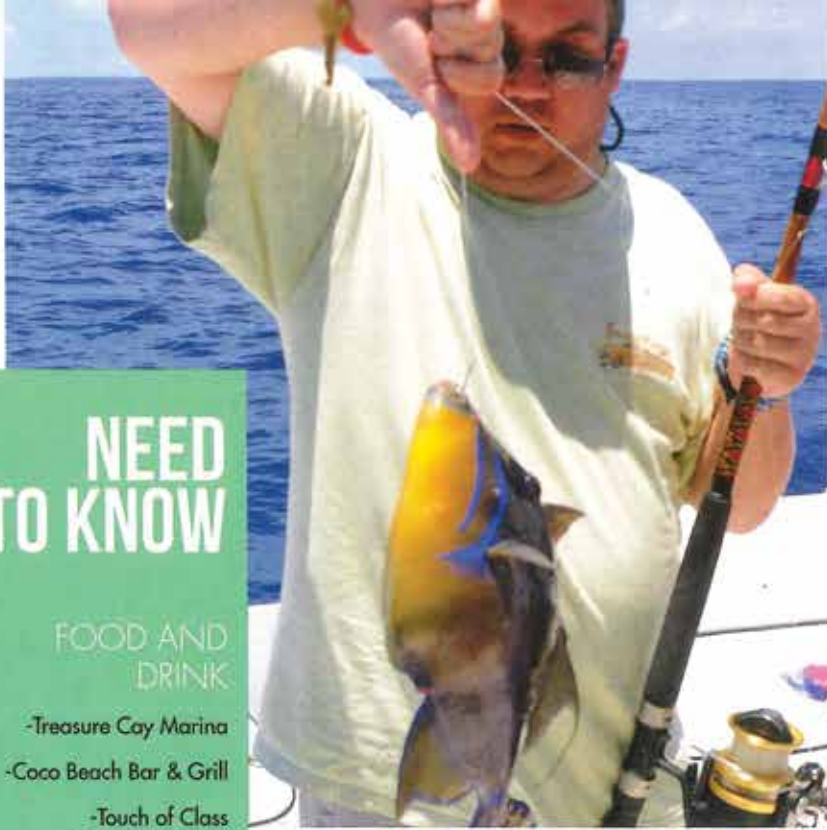
- Treasure Cay Marina
- Coco Beach Bar & Grill
- Touch of Class Restaurant & Bar
- Bahama Beach Club

### BRING YOUR CLUBS

Treasure Cay's Dick Wilson designed 18-hole course stretches almost 7,000 yards with fairways framed in thick island vegetation. Unlimited play packages are available, as well as a driving range.

### TAKE A DIVE

Treasure Cay Resort can set you up with amazing snorkeling trips with charter companies in their marina, or help you book an excursion with their Dive & Adventure partners at Brendal's Dive Center. [brendel.com](http://brendel.com)



Regally appointed, queen triggers were plentiful and delicious.



A blue parrotfish, as beautiful as the Bahamian sunrise.



particulars about Treasure Island, from the beginning to the end, keeping nothing back but the bearings of the island, and only because there is still treasure not yet lifted, I take up my pen in the year of grace 17\_\_, and go back to the time when my father kept the 'Admiral Benbow' Inn and the brown old seaman, with the sabre cut, first took up his lodging under our roof. I remember as it were yesterday..."

Page one. *Treasure Island*, by Robert Louis Stevenson.

The book was serialized in *Young Folk*, a magazine, rather like this one, between 1881 and 1882, then published as a book in 1883. The original title was "The Sea Cook," and that character, Long John Silver, has lived on in countless literary reincarnations and many films including Starz Network's current serial, *Black Sails*. Stevenson's story begins anew with Captain Flint, Silver and the rest of the crew prequered in the Bahamas.

"I'm a hard man not to like." John Silver.

*BLACK SAILS*. Starz. 2015.

A historical fishing mecca, the Bahamas begin with Bimini just 50 miles off Florida's coast. A holy land of angling, some of the earliest stages of the evolution of modern saltwater sport fishing were put into motion here by IGFA founders S. Kip Farrington Jr. and Michael Lerner in the 1930s. These legends were to our sport largely what Robert Louis Stevenson was to 19th century literature. Ernest Hemingway came over on his *Pilar* for three straight summers beginning in 1935. He was to sport fishing largely like... well, Ernest Hemingway was to 20th century literature. But the prevalence of fishing machines from Florida made the prospect of anchoring our annual father-son international tournament here too much like fishing at home.

There are a great number of fishing destinations in the Bahamas including small lodges and luxury resorts. In the most distant Bahamas, such as San Salvador, reliable air service becomes a dicey game and full-service marinas become scarce, only a little better than when Columbus made landfall in the "Indies" here on October 12th, 1492. Because so many Americans bring their own boats over from Florida, there are an absence of destinations that can handle a *Moveable Feast* such as ours with dozens of anglers alighting at one time needing charter captains and boats.

In the end as fate would decree, there was only one resort that could be our match: Treasure Cay. Ominous portent of the first magnitude.

The Bahamians pronounce Cay, from the Spanish word *cayos* [low lying islands] as "Key," like our Floridians. These gems had not been missed by the *Tainos*, who originated in South America and came to the Bahamas by canoe from Cuba. These became the *Lucayans*, the first people encountered by Columbus and depicted as quite physically beautiful in his journal. They were enslaved by the Spanish who transported them to Hispaniola in the 1500's as laborers. Nearly half the population died in the first year when their naive immune systems met with smallpox brought by the Europeans. The rest lasted little longer.



## A BETTER WAY

When planning travel by the dozens, small local airlines will frequently raise their prices outrageously after the first few budget seats are sold. Other options are available and a custom flight becomes really cost effective. You don't have to charter the whole plane unless you wish. It adds the experience of traveling like gentlemen instead of being herded like cattle. Brandi Patton of Meregrass, Inc. was sublime in making this easy and even made arrangements to fly us directly into Treasure Cay instead of Marsh Harbor. From an iced cooler waiting in the lobby to the silky smooth landing, the flight was perfect. Their Saab was retrofitted down from 50 seats to 32 and had legroom for an NBA team between the leather chairs.

Check out their website at [www.meregrass.com](http://www.meregrass.com).

These islands were virtually uninhabited until the tide of the American Revolution changed in 1776 and the colonies gained independence from England. Hundreds of disgruntled American loyalists to the English crown emigrated from New York to the Abacos bringing their slaves and account for the native population which resides there today. They disembarked about where Treasure Cay Resort is located today.

Dropping smoothly from the clouds like a bird in the big Saab turboprop, the islands below were covered with dark green Abacos pine, giving them a tone like notes played in the low register on a viola. Our spirit was sparked like Stevenson's with the sight of blue, green, almost limitless flats, drop offs and channels... and not a boat or human form anywhere. For fishermen, these were treasure islands.

Fueled in equal measures of portent and blind, thoughtless abandon, our 13th annual tournament torqued gear down into the "Topsy Seagull," Treasure Cay's marina tavern like a flaming arrow whistling through an open door. Tournament rules, or lack thereof, were quickly dispensed, the competition to begin at first light. This was the biggest mob to hit this harbor since the Loyalists and each man meant to fish well, libate well, but karaoke poorly.

"Fifteen men on the Dead Man's Chest Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum! Drink and the devil have done for the

rest! Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!"

*Treasure Island*. Robert Louis Stevenson.

It may be fairly said that, north of Venezuela, better billfish fisheries can be found than on the Atlantic side of the Americas. However, the diversity of marine environments in the Abacos and the multiple fisheries they support gives the angler a chance to cash in on variety. For this competition, each team of anglers would fish one day on the flats, one day offshore, and one in on the reefs.

First morning on the flats, rust and worse at sunrise were placated somewhat by the sight of a well-stocked cooler. There are over 400 square miles of flats to fish in the Abacos, some are world famous, such as the Marls. The ability to fish on both sides of the island helps take care of weather that would otherwise

BAHAMEN! Junkanoo on the beach - tres cool.





## TREASURE CAY

Treasure Cay Resort is less than 200 miles off the coast. It features a hotel, condos and homes for sale or rent. There is a full-service marina for boating, fishing and scuba diving. There is also tennis and a golf course. The beach here is the kind you dream about during the cold winter months at home.

The staff were wonderful and more than lived up to their promise of hospitality. Manager Avis Miller orchestrated our three-day tournament and was a whirling dervish of service. She oversaw our breakfast plated in the mornings at the open-air Coco's Beach Bar and Grille, as well as our fresh catch served at the beautiful Spinnaker's Restaurant each night.

keep you on the dock and seasonal movement of the bonefish. Our groups trailered boats across the narrow island to the west side each day. There were scores of tiny cays and channels. In a full day, there was not another person fishing nor a boat as far as the eye could see. No cabins, no condos. The peace of the natural setting and quiet, but for the wind and water, was marvelous and worth the trip in itself. The only humanity you encounter out here will be that which you bring along with you.

The first school of bones was two fish and I caught the second one. The next was two hundred and I spooked the lot with a cast that had the guide reaching for his ulcer pills. Depending on which area of flats are targeted in the Abacos, the fish vary in size, sometimes rivaling the big ones in the Florida Keys. These were moderate specimens but many running over five pounds. I hoped they'd be ramped a notch lower on the bonefish schizo-affective meter since the bays weren't getting a beating from props all day. Still bones are bones... silver torpedo amphetamine junkies with a manic twitch.

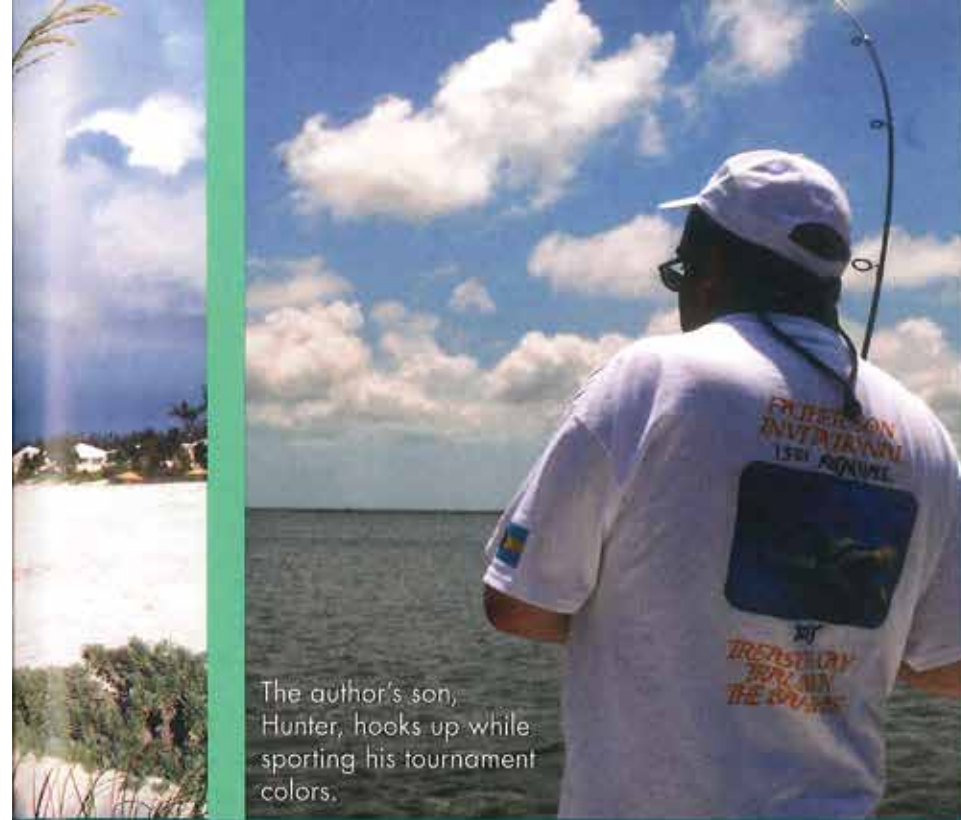
We fished with Ron Sawyer, a fly fishing expert with 33 years of experience at stalking bones. His father had been the first professional bonefish guide in the Abacos.

"Ron, what do you do when you catch a day off?"

"Go sight fishing for bonefish out here." He had a typical native accent, which could be compared to what? New England, South African? Australian? It was irresistible.

"Can you give me some expert advice?" "Eat more conch... make love longer." With that it was time to hit the cooler. "Milk! I've been poisoned."

Long John Silver. [Movie] 1954. It was offshore fishing on day two for our



The author's son, Hunter, hooks up while sporting his tournament colors.



Big bull sharks are common in Bahamian waters.

with a whipping offshore wind that whispered, "I dare ya to try me." So we did.

"Thems that dies'll be the lucky ones." Long John Silver.

Treasure Island. [Movie] 1990.

The versatility of these cays would again work in our favor. With the extreme amount of flats geography and ability to work the lee side of some islands, we could still aggressively get after reef genera on a day that would have left some sailors on their mooring. The flats offered protected fishing, as well for bonefish as silver as Spanish pieces of eight.

Some, long on guts but seemingly sparse on neurons, headed far offshore fortifying themselves against the elements with the contents of their coolers alone. In the end, Kismet smiled on their abandon as they at last hit a treasure trove of big dorado, cashing in like they were golden doubloons, and swabbing the deck of points to win the tournament. The Abacos offer a nearly inexhaustible waterscape of fishing opportunities. There is still much treasure not yet lifted. I remember as it were yesterday...

"Arrrh!" Long John Silver.

Treasure Island. [Movie] 1990.

It should be duly noted that Florida fishermen above and beyond most, are accustomed to fishing in sharky water. But this is SHARKY WATER. Many a good rod bend ended with a more extreme bowing as we were visited by the "man in the grey suit." If one wanted to target this species, you would stay busier than a bi-denominational meeting of Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses at Doors Unlimited. These sharks are as tough as the Green Bay and Chicago fans you watched removing their shirts at the snowy NFL games on television back in January... and a lot more intelligent. **G**

team. There is readily available underwater structure close in so that fishing for dorado, tuna, and sailfish can begin shortly after leaving the dock in 200 to 300 feet of water. Swinging in closer will get your ballyhoo, shipped in from the States like yourself, eaten by big barracuda.

It is not far to very deep water, as the blue falls away into the Great Abaco Canyon. Just to the north is the uninhabited Walkers Cay, the "Top of the Bahamas," and legendary fishing grounds. Trolling takes you along Great Guana Cay with the "Vegas Strip" of multi-million dollar celebrity homes built just in from the reef here. But it is most notorious for Nipper's bar where a pig roasts every Sunday afternoon and the ladies sometime forget the top half of their bikinis.

This is big fish water. Renowned for big tuna and wahoo, the Bahamian blue marlin record was set here in 2011 at 1,119 pounds. The Bahamas Billfish Championship was going on at the same time we were there. They claim this is the oldest billfish tourney in the world finishing its 42nd year. Eventually, I'll catch up to them.

We had pegged all the numbers right. We were at the pinnacle for our game on the calendar, we were spot on with the moon phase, and water temperature was nails. But

the fish were vacationing harder than we were. The action was the same for the BBC boys. This is called fishing.

We were angling with Captain Mark Carroll, a true Bahamian with a family tree dating back to the loyalists; he has the same lilting accent. With a wiry red ponytail and beard, he resembles an emcee at a Colorado Cannabis Grower's Convention. Not many guys can fade a leather cowboy hat in the tropics like Mark. We made an extra run out to "Tabletop," an underwater plateau in 3,000 feet, but couldn't pull anything out from under some floating debris. Our tide had run slack, physically and metaphorically. This was more than Mark could stand.

"Ar, fortune rides the shoulders of them what schemes."

Long John Silver. [Movie] 1954.

Many have a passion for a certain style of fishing, whether it's steelhead on the fly or tarpon on the flats. Mark Carroll likes sending down some meat and bringing up fish from the bottom. There is nothing more infectious than some real passion for sport and bottom fishing is his game. We headed in to bend some rods.

It was late in the day but we had a cooler of fish when we hit the dock. It was only a few steps to the restaurant kitchen's door.

The last day of the tournament rolled in

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