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WILLY WARRIOR



BO SILVA'S 16-POUND, 5-OUNCE PERSONAL BEST FROM LAKE GUERRERO.

"Fuego!"

And thus was Vicente Guerrero's life—though not his legacy—ended by firing squad in 1831. Guerrero, hero of Mexico's war for independence with Spain, abolished slavery in 1829 as the country's second president. But known for his hot-blooded personality, he was deposed by coupe after only nine months in office. In 1971, the General Vicente Guerrero Dam was completed, subsequently flooding the town of Padilla. Ironically, inundated beneath Lake Guerrero is the location of the 1824 firing squad demise of Agustin de Iturbide, the constitutionally proclaimed "Emperor of Mexico."

LAKE GUERRERO

As I contemplate this, the lake seems especially tranquil in the early morning light, still too pale to see colors. Idling out, extraordinary osprey with the wingspan of eagles demonstrated their prowess for topwater fishing. I kept glancing over my shoulder for firing squads.

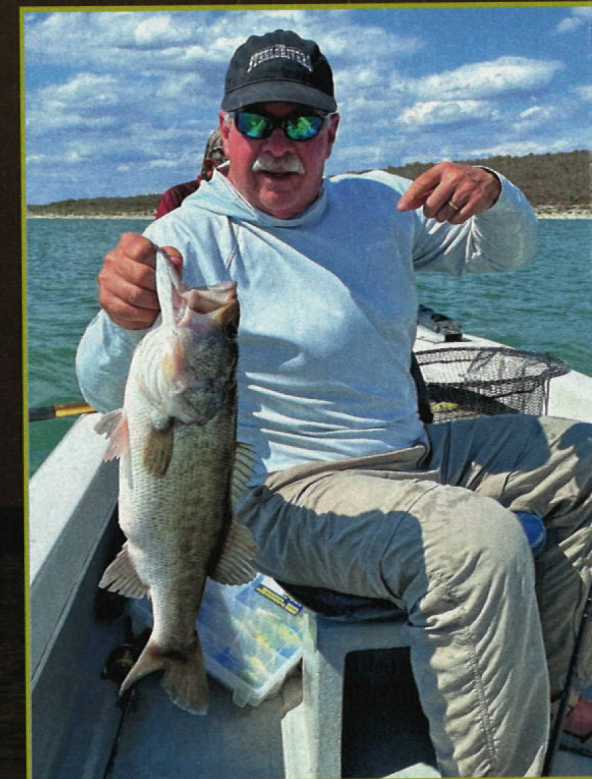
Guerrero is a big lake (100,000 acres at full pool), even at the current capacity which is down to about half of its original pool when it was filled completely in 1982. For perspective, Lake El Salto is 27,000 acres and opened in 1990 and Lake Huites is 30,000 acres and was completed in 1997. Like so many lakes in this arid land, Guerrero was developed for agricultural purposes and water supply for the city of Victoria to the west. There is a score of similar projects underway in the country with already nearly a dozen lakes in Mexico, having been seeded with Florida-strain black bass, which are now famous. Guerrero may be the godfather of what is certainly the best bass fishing country in the world.

GUERRERO ECOLOGY

During the height of summer, water temperatures in the central U.S. often easily reach 80 degrees Fahrenheit or more. But Guerrero, being only a stone's throw north of the Tropic of Cancer, had reached this temperature prior to our mid-April excursion in early spring. As a result, the first waves of spawning occur in

December here, so even the rearguard had finished up their agendas by our arrival.

The lake level was down over 30 feet from the prior winter. Surveying other Mexican bass lakes demonstrated that all are down this time of year. Interestingly, this lake fishes about the same across the range of water levels. The images tell the story. Even if the level increased by double digits, there would still be strata of rocky ledges, boulders, and trees marking previous islands to attract and hold fish—just as there are now. The eye of the fisherman is like no other. Hawg heaven is revealed.



IN A STILL COVE A BIG FISH DETONATED UNDER A CRUISING MINNOW. "LOBINA," SMILED GUIDE BAUDELIO "BO" SILVA. "SPANISH FOR BASS."

LOBINA

In a still cove a big fish detonated under a cruising minnow. "Lobina," smiled guide Baudelio "Bo" Silva. "Spanish for bass. Some people here mistakenly call them *robalo*, your name for snook with the line on its side." Having guided on this lake for 40 years, Bo was a substitute for electronics, easily able to predict the exact depth under our boat at every location we tried. In our other boat was Francisco Martinez.

It's simply great to fish in this enchanted country. Many anglers agree that the Florida-strain bass are moodier and less aggressive than their Northern-strain brethren. Careful thought to presentation is required for success. But a new challenge loomed. The weather forecast had changed dramatically, and a "Game of Thrones"-grade cold

front was blowing down fast from the north.

DIA UNO: LA PAUTA

The first day brought a temperature of 103 degrees and we hit many different environments. We put the squarebills through their paces in shallow timber, sunk Texas rigs down to the base of trees, then crankbaits and spinnerbaits off ledges, all in search of a pattern. It's no mystery that these Mexican bass like big lizards and craw critters. But by the next morning, the temperature had dropped to 60 and the wind, roaring down the long axis of the lake, blew us off the water in the afternoon.

This was a shallow low-pressure system of 999-1011

hectopascals. Anglers would predict bass to move into more depth in response. Biologists believe that fish species such as bass with prominent flotation bladders sense the change in pressure, as "discomfort" in the bladder wall; they move to greater depth seeking pressure to equilibrate and relieve this.

Pressure and temperature changes, cloudy skies ... Bassmaster Classic and Elite champion Mike Iaconelli aptly conjured the metaphor of Rubik's cube when trying to explain the behavior of bass. About the time you get all the colored squares aligned on one side you turn it over and realize everything else is out of whack.

DIA DOS: FRENTE FRÍO

The next morning was cold and windy. No cooperation on topwater and only one taker on a Clouser with the flyrod ... for the fun of trying it. We hit fish keying on the sides of deeper creeks where they could move in and out of cover and into more depth. Soft plastics, particularly finesse worms on shakyheads and Zoom Speed Craws on Texas rigs, brought a lot of fish into the boats. In Mexico, the champ's got to be magnum Zoom lizards, then critters



IDLING OUT, EXTRAORDINARY OSPREY WITH THE WINGSPAN OF EAGLES DEMONSTRATED THEIR PROWESS FOR TOPWATER FISHING. I KEPT GLANCING OVER MY SHOULDER FOR FIRING SQUADS.

in watermelon red and tilapia magic all day long.

DIA TRES: REDENCIÓN

The last day rolled around and the bets rolled forward. The sky cleared; the sun sparkled. ...

From the start it was go deeper—rocky points where diving cranks could do business. "I catch my biggest bass on this lake on crankbaits," Bo confided. "My best is 16-5; lake record is 18-4." Citrus colors have done well in Mexican lakes and an Azuma Z Boss 24 finally took me to big-fish nirvana with an 8 1/2-pound beauty. Late in the day we hit steep, rocky drops near the dam. A Berkeley Dredger fooled a 10 1/2 *lobina* that confirmed the importance of frequently checking your drag.

I was in the lead and counting my money. The sun shone brighter; the sky was bluer ... when suddenly my fishing partner Lynn Narramore's rod bent U-shaped like a chiropractor's nightmare. A 12-pounder on a Strike King 8XD would be the big fish of the trip. My wallet got lighter.

Adjourning to the bar, I was soon cheery again. I love Mexico and can't wait to return. And what has local history taught us



LAGO VISTA SURVIVED THROUGH NORRIS' FORCE OF WILL AND FINANCIAL SPINE, AND BOTH DESERVE THE NAME GUERRERO.

about interfacing with firing squads? That it would be better to go fishing that day.

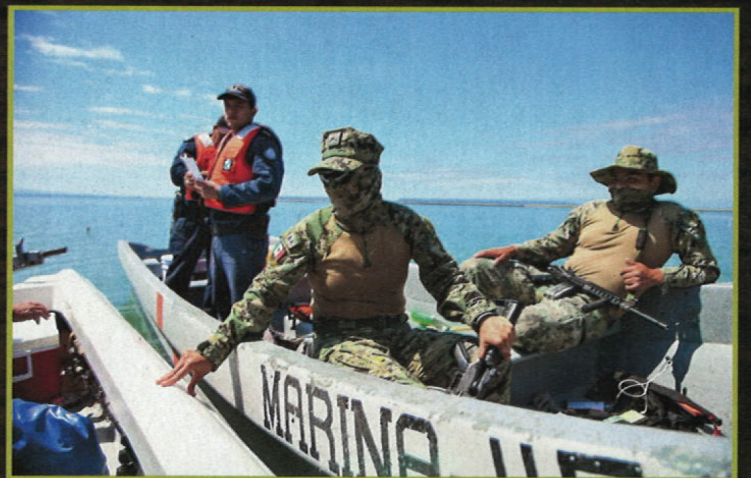
FORTRESS ON A HILL

Shafts of sunlight illuminated a squadron of huge turbine generators on a distant mesa, bestowing an angelic mystique. A desert wind slowly rotated their 120-foot blades. Despite the modernity, it's still the old country. Purple Sierra Madres rise upon the horizon, nurturing the soul. Agave and prickly pear bloom across the wild, arid, rugged domain of rattlers, lions, and wolves. Cormac McCarthy stoic; Zane Grey romantic.

This stage demands colorful characters, and you won't be disappointed. Dickie Norris came to fish in the 1980s and witnessed the evolution of the modern sport. In 2003 he bought the Lago Vista lodge.

Deserted hulks, like skeletons of dead beasts, loom near the lakeshore. These old fishing lodges did not withstand the storms of economic downtrends and pandemics blowing across the industry's map. Lago Vista survived through Norris' force of will and financial spine, and both deserve the name *guerrero*.

This trip stands apart in terms of both expense and ease of travel. You are driven down from the border by van, circumventing travel through Mexico City and the extra flights to Las Mochis or Mazatlán for other lakes which are quite expensive. The food is great, and drinks are on the house. If you want to catch 50 bass daily and score a true trophy, this one is a real bargain. **BAM**



MARINES PATROL THE LAKE AND TIGHTLY ENFORCE RESTRICTIONS ON THE TILAPIA FARMERS.