

NEED SOME SALTWATER THERAPY? ESCAPE TO MEXICO PG.44

BIG GAME FISHING

THE EDGE

big game

FISHING JOURNAL

May/June 2019

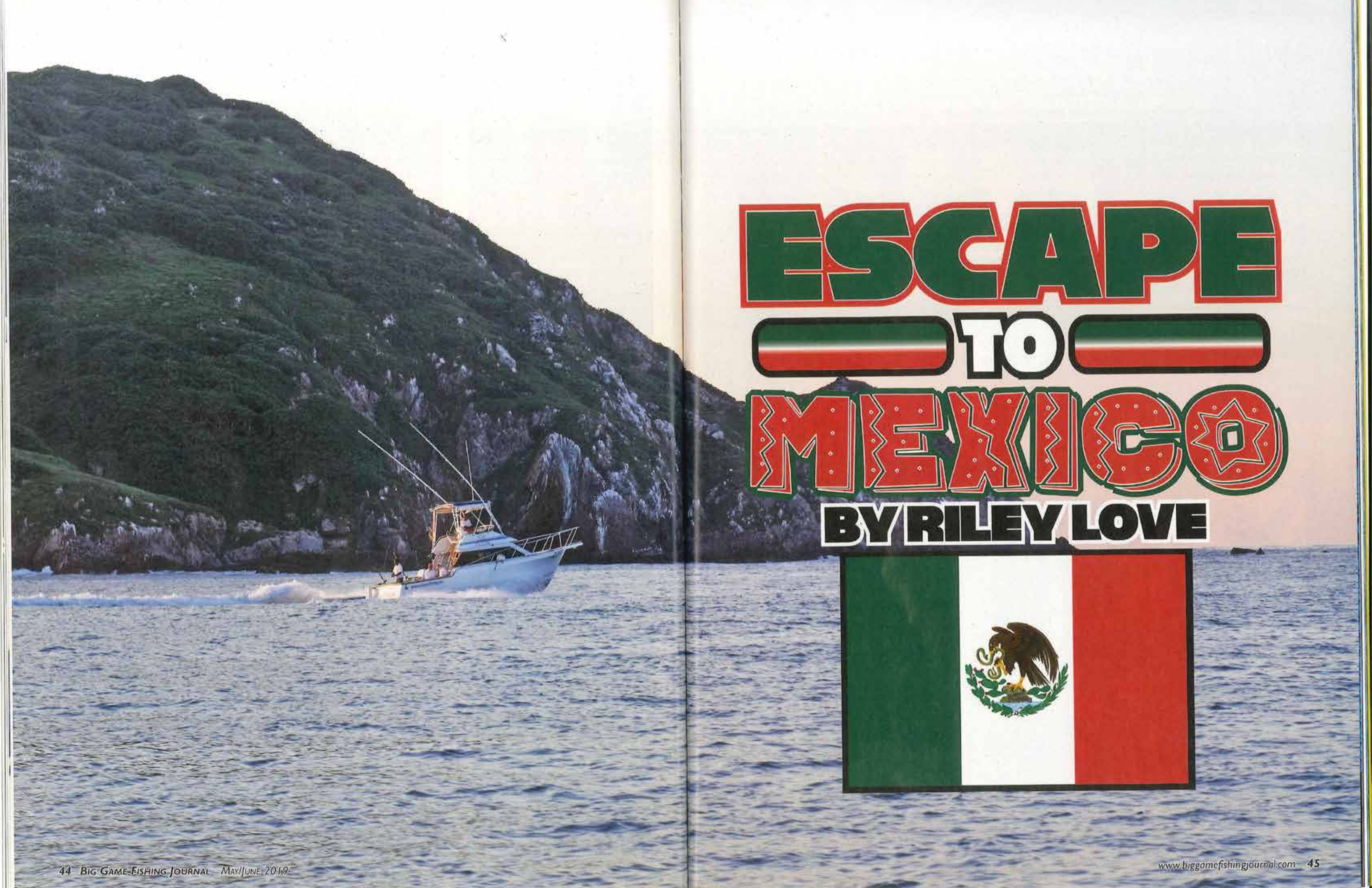
INSHORE SHARKS
FUN CLOSE TO HOME

TOURNAMENT SUCCESS?
IT'S IN THE DETAILS

TACKLING TARPON
IN FLORIDA

COAST GUARD
COPTER RESCUES





ESCAPE TO MEXICO BY RILEY LOVE



Business had been good since moving into these new offices. So good, in fact, it was ... dictatorial. I sat there alone. It was getting late with work still piled on the desktop. My usual long-range fishing trips to Central and South America had been pushed back and back. Where had they gone? Modern clocks don't tick but an unmistakable Edgar Allen Poe macabre was lent to the fun of electronic hum in the room.

The windows to the outside world here are smaller, a decidedly dismal metaphor. Outdoors, shaded areas were still white from the previous week's unreasonable, unseasonable snowfall. When I was a boy, my daddy told me that money didn't grow on trees. Well, leaves weren't growing on trees now. I watched them fall, not swirling in the air

like a Robert Frost poem, but wet and cold, plummeting down like lumps of uranium. I knew what that meant. Trying to rake those things would be like trying to rake up tent stakes.

A lightning bolt of recollection occurred: an image of the open fridge at home. Nothing there but my wife's organic health drinks. That cut it. There was no way to take a week or two off, but what about a couple of days, a long weekend to someplace that was accessible? It would be a commando-style trip: in and out quickly. It was time to assemble a posse of like-minded fellows, "enlightened" as myself. My hand was drawn to the cellphone by the invisible magnetism of fishing. But a pause: there was a photo of my son on the screen. He'd lost his long battle with cancer last year. We had

fished together over a hemisphere of the planet ... it took a while to bring up the phone interface.

MAZATLÁN, MEXICO

It's not as attractive a bluewater target as Guatemala, Panama, etc., but this destination provided the opportunity for a combo trip that would light up the limbic system of any angler with a pulse. The dry season had just begun and the stars aligned for a salt water-fresh water surgical strike weekend.

Mazatlán lies at the opening of the Sea of Cortez. It has a historical pedigree, beginning as a fishing village of indigenous people. This was a collection of huts until the early 20th century when the infusion of a modern banking system sparked its growth, becoming the largest port of the Mexican Pacific coast.

Marlin in Mazatlan, on the west coast of Mexico, is a great way to spend a weekend when you need a quick getaway.



During the golden age of Hollywood, it became a popular fishing destination for many famous movie stars. Sixty years and over a hundred destination fishing trips ago, my brother and I first experienced catching Pacific sailfish nearby. There are beautiful hotels and all the wining, dining and nightlife a traveler could ask for.

Mazatlán means "place of deer" in the Nahuatl language, which we gringos would call Aztec. This is still spoken by roughly 1.7 million people, mainly in central Mexico. Six of us stags exploded through the 757's silver portal into the place like we'd been shot from the neck of a champagne bottle. To borrow a line from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "the game was afoot." We were going to cram all we could into the next three days.

ESCUALO TIME

We spent two days fishing freshwater for bass on Lake Picachos at Billy Chapman Jr.'s Anglers Inn. I would recommend it to anyone. It was hard coming off the lake with the torrid topwater action happening. Billy had offered us another day. But the deep blue sea was just there over the horizon and it called to us like Herman Melville's Ahab. Our storming Normandy game plan took us back for first light to the Mazatlán marina. I'd gotten a tip that of the local outfits, Escualo Sportfishing had the newest and best-maintained boats. The Spanish word escualo means shark in English.

At sunrise, we had three 34-foot cruisers ready at the dock. They had stocked our lunches and beverages. There were experienced captains and mates aboard each. They were clean,

well-organized with a big box of baits at the ready. I would also note that compared to fishing in South Florida, this excursion was a real bargain. It was a fraction of the cost for boats and gear that were about as good.

I may not have been born a romantic, but I became one about going out on the blue as a child by reading Sir Walter Scott, Robert Louis Stevenson and Joseph Conrad for hours on end. Motoring out past the three islands - Isla de Pajaros, Isla de Venados, Isla de Lobos, the isles of Birds, Deer and Wolves - the romance returned like it does every time. Somewhere inside I tell myself it's just fishing, just fishing, just fishing ... The hell it is. I think my son had felt the same way.

The captains here used a five-line set up with flat line pulling big



Make no mistake: there is something special about the allure of leading a big blue marlin. The author and his group would have preferred to let her go, but the fight was too much. They honored her the best they could.



heads with skirts; then sewn-on ballyhoo or mullet on the outriggers about three troughs back from the flats. Last, a mop-up line from the flybridge further back. J-hooks in all. They did not use circle hooks here routinely. They will break up a day fishing inshore for dinner fish on the reef on the way in, but we were set for a day of trolling.

We could have brought out the water skis, the sea was so tranquil. It was a slow morning, but I was so glad to be there. The sun was golden, and the beer was cold. It was the first time out on the deep for my partner du jour, Greg LaNeave. I was keen for him to hook into a good one, but we had to settle for stories and jokes for a few hours as we watched frigate birds hunting. I decided to try a Mexican joke on the captain and mate whose En-

glish was as spotty as my Español.

"How many Mexicans does it take to screw in a light bulb?"

Blank faces waited for the punchline.

"Juan."

Stone-cold seconds dragged by. Finally, a detonation of laughter. Whew!

I was standing next to the right flat line when the reel screamed like I'd goosed it with an ice pick. The rod flew into my hands.

There was an explosion of white spray behind the boat where a blue marlin tore thousands of gallons of surface into water molecules. I put my back into the hook set.

The line went slack, and the sea calmed as if the fish never was. Chances like this don't grow on trees either. The motor droned as we trolled along, humming a re-

minder of what might have been.

We were well into the afternoon. Long had I wondered at the minds of the gods of fishing. Now we had to believe they would deal no more cards to our hand. I have been watching billfish dance behind the transoms of boats for over a half-century, never ever losing the thrill each time. I glanced over at Greg, patient and ready. I was just thinking about how these childish gods would sometimes in the throes of their covetousness, smile on the novice. I felt their hand when, just from behind my head there was the subtle yet distinct "click" of the line pulling from the right outrigger.

"Blue marlin!"

There was the expected mayhem of motor roaring and line clearing while the reel screamed in mezzo soprano. We had Greg

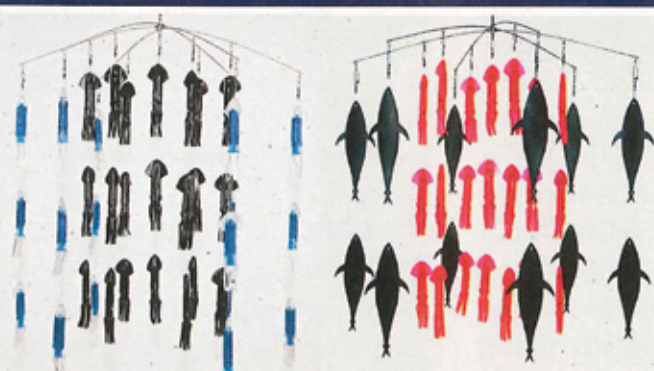


MAZATLAN.



The author's friend with his 10-foot blue marlin, a first-time catch for the friend and a lifetime memory. It was hung with a sailfish at the dock. Top: A historical photo of Mazatlan.

Squidnation Dredges - fished worldwide everyday because fish worldwide eat squid everyday.



Available at Most Tackle Shops - Retailers Please Inquire

SQUIDNATION.com

410 873 3282
410 726 3582

email: Squidnation@gmail.com

SWITLIK
SURVIVAL PRODUCTS



QUALITY WHEN YOU NEED IT

CALL: 609-587-3300

VISIT: go.switlik.com/BGF



in the chair with the rod bending like a chiropractor's nightmare. The sun became brighter and the ocean bluer.

There is nothing better than someone getting to experience the beauty and majesty of a blue marlin for the first time, and Greg was drinking it in. After the initial cameo, the fish stayed down below for nearly an hour, confirming that she had taken the hook deeply. This set the stage for a lengthy struggle and she was past her threshold of exhaustion when she appeared at last behind the boat.

Animals like ourselves with lungs can increase their breathing rate to meet increased demand for oxygen in our muscles, and to eliminate the additional carbon dioxide they make during prolonged exertion. Fish can't exchange these gasses across their

gills any faster despite the increased need. The changes in metabolism causes the blood to become too acidic for the heart to beat normally and it goes into a lethal fibrillation. Her silver belly was already turning brown when she languished behind the boat.

She made her entrance onto the deck through the transom door with a mighty heave. Greg got to be up close and personal with his catch. She measured 10 feet long. One fish like this makes for a great day.

Back on soil, the same misfortune had occurred on one of the other boats with a sailfish which had expired before it could be released. They hung from ropes for the cameras to click and we all wished they were still out swimming. Struck by the bushido of the moment, Greg

fell on his sword ... er, I mean credit card, and the wonderful marlin was sent off to the taxidermist, her beauty to be admired for a generation. Standing behind Greg as he penned the deal, we all agreed that his wife was going to be thrilled when it arrived at their home.

CONSIDER YOUR ESCAPE

So, amigo mio, how do you like the winter weather staring back at you through the office window? May you enjoy the fruits of your labors. But if you are a fisherman in heart you can dream of no other. Want to destination fish but short on time? You can go lean and mean for a three-day foray to Mexico. There's time for sleeping in the grave.

What's it going to be? Desk work and raking leaves, or black bass, blue marlin and margaritas on a tray? 🐟