

## Winter Evening Report

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Allan Sefton – 02/03/17

### Bonefish with Allan Sefton

Globetrotting Allan Sefton spoke to us about his encounters with bonefish. I did not realise that tropical seas were so clear because they lacked nutrients. Tropical islands are frequently based on volcanic peak which favours the upwelling of enriched cool water from the deeps and transfers algae and zooplankton around the coast line. Polyps – soft worm-like creatures - accumulate around the islands and form a symbiotic relationship with the algae. The polyps grow a hard shell, often cylindrical in shape, which en masse serves to form the coral reef which not only protects the land mass but provides a haven in-shore for fish and other aquatic life: these are the flats. In contrast the seas outside of the reef plunge to depths of thousands of metres. Here live the larger species of fish such as barracuda and trevally which occasionally raid the flats in search of food. The coral islands are mainly found in the tropics in shallow water. Other species of coral exist in deep water in cold water such as in the North Atlantic, off the coast of Scotland. Allan compared the tropical coral deposits with oasis's in a desert.

Bonefish are the major game species within the reef. They were first sought after by anglers some 70-80 years ago, but they are a primitive species and have been on the planet for millions of years. Allan compared the shape of bonefish with the barbel: both are bottom feeders but there the resemblance ended. They are perfectly suited to living in shallow water. It is not unknown for them to feed vertically with their tails out of the water! They have mirror-like scales which renders them

almost invisible even to birds never mind anglers! I have heard it said that anglers should look for moving shadows but I do not have any personal experience of this. They are easily spooked and capable of swimming at very high speeds especially when hooked! Allan's advice was to adopt the "induced take" technique by casting at least 10 feet ahead of the fish and hope that it (they) continue on the anticipated path and sees the lure when it is given a short tug.

Allan started off talking about the Caribbean. The Bahamas were described as the playground for the Yanks. The lodges are luxurious and packages are available through agencies such as Frontiers and Roxtons. Fishing is from skiffs as wading is not possible as the shore line is composed of soft soil. Chris McLeod has just returned from an adventurous trip. He managed to fall from a jetty and his mate was bitten by a shark! On the other hand a skiff and guide was remarkably cheap.

Belize is a great venue to the extent that he has sworn us all to secrecy! A recent advantage is that it is now accessible via a direct flight from the UK. The aim is to achieve a grand slam by catching Permit, Tarpon and Bonefish in the same day!

Cuba is renowned for big fish and a wide range of fishing venues apart from the flats. Cayo Largo was one the earliest lodges but it is in fact an island off Cuba requiring an hour's flight to access. Allan did not rate this venue very highly mostly because of the poor guides. The other factor about Cuba is that it has

just thrown its doors open to citizens of the USA and is unlikely to retain any sense of tranquillity for much longer.

A discussion of salt water fly fishing in the Caribbean would be incomplete without mention of Venezuela, Los Roques in particular which is about 100 miles from the mainland. In fact, several Invicta members are familiar with the venue so there is no shortage of knowledge. Top bit of advice is not to leave the airport at Caracas as the surrounding area is known as the murder capital of the world! The development of fishing on the island is recent. In 1995 Allan said he was the only angler on the island whereas in 2010, there were 10-15 operators flying anglers in every day. Not for nothing is it known as "Paradise under pressure".

According to Allan, the best fishing in the World is to be had in the Seychelles. However it is exclusive and expensive or should that be the other way around? We are talking about \$10k for a week and that does not include getting there! The best area is on the Alfonso atoll which comprises 3 separate islands: access requires a flight from the main airport on Mahé. I read somewhere that fishing from the beach is prohibited. The worst thing about the Seychelles is that it is full of Russians – said Allan! I can feel a phone tap coming on.

Mauritius is a relatively new venue but although more renowned for big game species, is actually the home of Bonefish of up to 15lbs. Allan said that the most prolific area is a 26 hour journey by sea from the mainland. (Take your Kwells!). This, in effect, adds an extra 2 days to your holiday. Worth reading the fly fishing forum for a few different viewpoints.

Zooming over to the Pacific we have Costa Rica. Again, this is really a game fishing venue with the possibility of catching a 100 lb Sailfish on a fly. You are not exactly casting to the fish. A

teaser is trolled behind the boat. When a fish shows interest, it is retrieved and the angler casts out the fly. Exciting stuff! Fish are tagged and released. Allan thought that the venue was overcrowded but I suppose it depends when and where you go.

There is no doubting Allan's favourite venue and that is Christmas Island now known as Kiribati. It is some journey, located as it is 1200 miles south of Hawaii, close to the equator. There is a constant breeze of 20 mph. The island is populated by about 8000 natives, located in 4 villages, who initially migrated there to work in coconut plantations. Copra remains an important export along with tropical fish destined for aquariums. There is just one flight a week either from Hawaii or Fiji which limits the number of tourists. Make sure that your luggage travels with you or your trip of a lifetime will be doomed! The Bonefish are not especially big but they are plentiful and the cost is very reasonable compared with most other venues. 30 fish in a session is not unusual.

The Bonefish reside in one of the largest lagoons in any atoll on Earth. The fishing franchise has been in operation for about 40 years. There are three companies offering packages of which Allan considers The Villages to be the best. Nevertheless, conditions are a little primitive which Allan considers an advantage as it keeps the Americans away! Allan visits in October, thus avoiding the pressure from visitors from Australia and America.

Tackle for Bonefish was typical of that seen on any reservoir in England. He used one of his own Lennox #7 coloured pale blue in order to blend in with the tropical surroundings. The line must be to a "tropical" specification or it will be too soft to cast properly. The leader would be 12 ft in length terminating at 10 pounds breaking strain. Allan had a box full of Clouser minnows, a fly which

is tied so that it swims point uppermost. The trick is to see the fish!



Allan's fly box

Polarizers are essential and the angler should try to avoid staring into the water. The sun is savage and it is essential that the angler is attired as far as possible with UV resistant clothing. Factor 50 sun cream was recommended. Fishing commences at 4am as the fish follow the incoming tide: anglers may walk for several hours or more during the day which some may find exhausting. Comfortable footwear was desirable along with gravel guards.

Allan said that there was more to life than catching Bonefish! Allan mentioned Milkfish which can grow to 50 lbs. However, they were described as "uncatchable" rather like mullet once were, as they feed on weed.



Milkfish

The Surgeonfish is another species found off the reef but much smaller than the

Milkfish. They possess very sharp teeth and are unlikely to be landed unless a wire trace is used.

Giant Trevally are known as the "Attack Dogs of the Lagoon". They are exceptionally powerful and the angler requires beefed up tackle to stand any chance of landing the fish which on Kiribati may weigh in at 100 pounds. A second rod should be made ready in case a GT should appear.



Giant Trevally

Another species is the Triggerfish which although on the small size, is an aggressive fighter. Nice gnashers! They are difficult to land as they head for holes in the coral. Most of these species are equipped with features which enable them to survive in a hostile environment: beware then of teeth, spikes and reinforced fins which can inflict considerable damage to the unwary angler! Each angler has a designated guide for the week so that any of these species may be targeted.

Allan has stayed at The Villages - Not really a hotel in the usual sense. Basic, clean and entirely acceptable. Rave reviews can be found on Trip Advisor. Nial Logan is the Aussie agent ([nial@learntoflyfish.net](mailto:nial@learntoflyfish.net)).

<http://learntoflyfish.net/cxi/> provides a comprehensive review of the facilities. Places are limited as you will see from the availability page and, by now, might well be fully booked for 2017.

See you there!

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