

Last Fishing Trip Of '91 Was Memorable One

BY JAMIE MILLIKEN

As the temperature plunged into the 20s last week along the South Brunswick Islands, the realization of winter hit me like a freight train. Gone are the warm afternoons of after-work fishing. Gone are the days when I knew that if I could make Shallotte Inlet sea buoy by 8:20 p.m. I could see well enough to find the markers and slip back through this inlet that wears so many different faces.

I also remembered that there are countless sport fishermen all over the state who probably feel the same emotions as the dreary days of winter drag by. It is for you guys that I was inspired to write this story about my last trip to the "blue water."

Thanksgiving day afternoon found me and Rube McMullen sitting on his back porch at Ocean Isle preparing for our last trip to the stream for 1991. Anticipation was at an all-time high as we heard from several sources that there was an eddy off the stream that had pushed to within 40 miles off the coast.

We had also heard reports of yellowfin tuna being caught off Georgetown. Tunas are a great gamefish and they have incredible strength. Visions of doing battle with these guys had us really pumped up. As I left Rube's that afternoon to go to take on another load of turkey at Larry Holden's, I couldn't wait for our 5:30 a.m. departure. I still never sleep well the night before a big fishing trip. It's kind of like a child at Christmas—just too excited!

As dawn broke we were already about 15 miles out. Rube commented as we watched a breathtaking sunrise that this was one of the things that he loved most about fishing, and in his words, "It is always a religious experience." I felt the same way.

At the 35-mile mark I noticed that the water temperature had risen to 68 degrees—prime water temperature for king mackerel. But kings were not on target this day. At the 40-mile mark I noticed a vessel that appeared to be dead in the water.

It looked to have a makeshift sail but obviously it was not under sail. We decided we had better investigate. As we moved closer toward this strange vessel we began to see literally hundreds of fins cutting the water around the stern and one man standing there observing them. My immediate thoughts were that we were just in time to offer assistance to someone who was surely in grave danger. This surely turned out not to be the case.

This man was totally surrounded by porpoises and they were crowded in against his vessel like cattle around a feeding trough! We eased up, not knowing whether this guy could speak English or not and asked if everything was okay? He spoke with a very heavy Caribbean-type accent and assured us that he was okay but thanked us for stopping to check on him. We commented on all the porpoises and he seemed to act as if this was normal for him to have this entourage with him.

We all waved goodbye to this truly free spirit and I felt very lucky to have encountered such a person. We nicknamed him the "Jolly Mon" after a character that Jimmy Buffet created in song as well as in a children's book.

Not long after that we were in the stream. Although our destination was a place called the "Steeple," we decided to stop and fish a very well-defined weed line that was huge. This proved to be a good move. As I ran the "Mako Mac" from the tuna tower and Rube and the rest of the crew prepared skirted ballyhoo, I could see all kinds of bait fish working in and out of the weed line. In a matter of minutes a nice medium-sized dolphin exploded on a bait. This dolphin did everything that you expect from them—breathtaking beautiful leaps and line-turning runs. It was great to be back in the "blue water" again.

Our next strike was the one that we all had dreamed about. Yellowfin tuna hookup! Aaron, a 15-year-old from Atlanta, Ga., had the honor of wrestling this prize catch with a Penn 980 mag. reel mounted on a live bait rod. Boy, did he have fun. And it was all high-fives when that bad boy hit the deck. The rest of the day was filled with more dolphin and even an occasional king mackerel.

When 3 p.m. rolled around Rube gave the order to reel-um-in and headed for home. We all settled in for our 70-mile trip back not knowing that our course would carry us past the "Jolly Mon" and, perhaps not thinking that we would ever see him again—but we did. There he was, slowly moving south so we stopped again. This time we offered him fresh dolphin for his evening meal. He gladly accepted and he told us that he had been at sea for 30 days. His last port of call was Boston, Massachusetts, and he was heading for Florida. He thanked us again for stopping and for the dinner and we all said our goodbyes and pretty soon he faded from sight.

The sun began to set as we were about seven miles out and, here again, it was a beautiful red sunset. Sure enough, another "religious experience."

I toyed for days whether to write this story. I decided to write it for all of you who have salt water pumping through your veins and perhaps a little of the free spirit that we saw in the "Jolly Mon."

CAPTAIN JAMIE'S OFFSHORE FISHING REPORT

This Week's Tide Table

		DECEMBER		HIGH		LOW	
Day	Date	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
Thursday	12	11:37	11:58	5:19	6:01		
Friday	13	-----	12:19	6:09	6:49		
Saturday	14	12:51	1:09	7:05	7:37		
Sunday	15	1:44	2:05	8:07	8:33		
Monday	16	2:46	3:05	9:11	9:29		
Tuesday	17	3:45	4:03	10:15	10:24		
Wednesday	18	4:43	5:04	11:13	11:20		

ADJUSTMENTS
 SHALLOTTE INLET—add 17 min. high tide, add 32 min. low tide.
 LOCKWOOD FOLLY—subtract 22 min. high tide, subtract 8 min. low tide.
 BALD HEAD ISLAND—subtract 10 min. high tide, subtract 7 min. low tide.
 SOUTHPORT—add 7 min. high tide, add 15 min. low tide.
 LITTLE RIVER—add 7 min. high tide, add 7 min. low tide.

Coastal Panel Meeting Today

The Coastal Resources Commission (CRC) meets today (Thursday) and Friday, Dec. 12 and 13 at the Best Western Armada in Nags Head.

Coastal residents may comment during a public hearing today at 4 p.m. on proposed setback criteria for large structures. Under the proposal, any structure larger than 5,000 square feet would have to meet the large structure setback.

The change would simplify the current policy which considers use, size and number of units, said spokesperson Jeannette Johnson of the N.C. Department of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources.

The CRC will also consider a plan to gather information on a 6,000-acre site in Pender County that has been nominated as an area of environmental concern (AEC).

The commission will make its appointments to the Coastal Resources Advisory Council (CRAC), after having reviewed applications from the 20 coastal counties and numerous participating coastal towns for the past few months. The CRAC is an advisory board of citizens, government officials and businesses that make recommendations to the CRC.

Ms. Johnson added that staff will present an assessment of the state's coastal program and identify areas that still need improvement. They will also give a final report on maritime forest protection.

The CRC, as part of the Division of Coastal Management (DCM), has applied for federal grant money to purchase maritime forest land on Bald Head Island (See related story in this issue.).

The CRC is a state agency responsible for adopting rules and policies for development in the coastal area. The DCM administers CRC rules and policies and is an agency of the N.C. Department of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources.

Forest On Bald Head Could Be Preserved

A federal grant that could help North Carolina purchase undeveloped land on Bald Head Island has just been increased by the U.S. Senate.

The National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grants Program, which had previously aided states only 50 percent of the total price of a proposed piece of wetlands, will now pay for 75 percent. The state would still be responsible for funding the other 25 percent.

The amendment passed in the Senate in late November with the help of Sen. Terry Sanford, D-N.C.

Bald Head Island has maritime forest totaling around 450 acres, and the N.C. Division of Coastal Management is interested in seeing that as much as possible be protected from future development. If the state purchases a piece of land, it can't be touched by developers without permission.

North Carolina's application, filed by the state DCM in Raleigh, is "rated number one in the southeast," said Richard Shaw, the Division's assistant director for policy and planning, and he thinks that's encouraging news.

The officials who run the Wetlands Conservation Grant program should announce a decision "by the first of January," he said in a telephone interview Friday.

The application, according to Roger Schecter, director of the N.C. Coastal Resources Commission, was sent in more than two months ago. At the time news first broke on Nov. 27 about the grant increase, he said the federal agency had not released

any information relating to award decisions.

Shaw is not sure just how much of the forest can be purchased, but "we will buy as much as the grant money will buy," if the word comes that the application has been approved.

"What hasn't been made clear," Shaw said of rumors about the grant, "is that we were always eligible for the grant; we just would have had to put up more of it ourselves. Now, they're (the federal government) paying more."

He also said that if approval does come through for this particular project, that the Division won't stop applying for grant money.

"This is only the first year the grant has been around, and it is an annual thing, so we'll, of course, apply in future years," said Shaw.

The proposed 200-acre tract that the state is thinking of buying would cost around \$5.3 million, which means that the federal grant will pay for \$4 million, and the state would have to come up with the other \$1.3 million.

Another part of the amendment to the grant allows the state to use funds from the Natural Heritage Trust Fund, which consists of income from vanity license plate sales, to help out with part of the \$1.3 million that would be left for the state to pay.

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