



RISAA Members'

# Fishing Stories



## Beer and Sandwich = New *Secret Spot!*

by Alan Stewart

Although I live in Rhode Island and New York City I have been fishing Marathon in the Florida Keys for 8 years and always enjoy the variety of species and action that the area offers. The last trip was a memorable one.

The day started slow as we decided to start by fishing for yellowtail snapper on the edge of the reef in 70 feet of water. It was one of those days where the wind and current were fighting each other and the fish just weren't biting.

We decided to move over to fish the "barge" which is a very common wreck off of Marathon in 189 feet of water. I've had some luck there in the past, but after a few passes we realized that it was probably pretty fished out and perhaps not our day.

We decided to do one last very long drift. Let's call it a "beer drinking/lunch" drift where you start on the wreck and just relax and drift way past it. No sense in pulling the rods up 189 feet when there were sandwiches to eat and beers to drink.

We drifted about 3/4 of a mile off of the wreck, and I glanced over at the fishfinder and noticed an amazing piece of structure with fish on it. I was really excited as new wrecks/structure in that area are really hard to find. I checked my GPS and all of my logbooks and had nothing in that area.

We anticipated that our rods would bend over as we passed the area, but nothing happened. I made another pass over the structure and, again, no fish. I was perplexed. We were using big pinfish as bait and the mutton snapper, grouper, Amberjacks, etc can not resist them.

On the next pass I decided to drop down a shrimp on a small circle hook. Right when it hit the bottom the shrimp was attacked and FISH ON!

I had no idea what I had hooked into. It didn't seem particularly big, but wasn't a tiny grunt either. We all had our theories, but when the fish came up to the boat we were all surprised to see a very large Vermillion Snapper.

Now I have caught these in the Gulf of Mexico in deep waters off of Texas, but have never seen them in the Keys. I also know they are very tasty.

My two buddies and I drifted over our new "secret" spot again and again, and had a triple hookup of nice Vermillions on every drift. It was a blast in 170 feet using light tackle. On our fourth drift I decided to add some cut fresh pinfish and ballyhoo

to the shrimp and make a nice tasty cocktail in hopes of getting a huge vermilion.

Right when the bait hit the bottom I almost got the rod pulled out of my hand and proceeded to fight (using 10 pound test braided line on my small Penn Silverado reel) what was the hardest pulling fish I have ever felt. The fish didn't run down into the wreck, but sideways, then up, then back down, then to the side again etc.

Fortunately we weren't anchored and the small diameter of braided line allowed me to load up 300 yards of line on that reel because I needed both of those items working in my favor.

After a fight that seemed like hours (I could get into detail about how many times I wanted to give up and thought I would never see this fish) I finally saw color and started screaming for the gaff.

I was worried about the line cutting off on the boat and sudden movements breaking the line, so I cautiously brought the fish up, but every time she got close to the boat she would make another run. My buddy tells me "just get it close -we have a long gaff" so I horsed the fish up a bit and then witnessed one of the most hilarious gaff jobs of all time. My buddy is leaning WAY over the boat to deep gaff the fish and begins slipping towards the water.

My other buddy runs over, grabs his legs so he doesn't fall in and as the fish is gaffed my other buddy pulls him in with the fish on the gaff. Mission accomplished. It was a 47 pound Greater Amberjack on light tackle using a weird cocktail of cut pinfish, ballyhoo and shrimp.

All told we caught our limit of Vermillion Snapper, that huge AJ and a black grouper off of the spot we found while relaxing and having lunch. I only got to eat about half of that sandwich before the excitement set in, but I'll trade a sandwich for a new spot and big fish anytime.

That was the last day of our trip so I am looking forward to checking it out on my next trip to Paradise.

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