

PERMIT TRIP REPORT WITH CAPTAIN DEAN AND THE RISING TIDE

“Tail – 150 feet at 2 o’clock,” murmured Captain Dean, Then, a little louder, “there’s three tails....do you see them?” Just then, a cormorant flew out of a nearby mangrove cluster, flying about four feet above the water, directly over the fish, which immediately exploded and rushed off the flat. Yes, now even I could see them.

This report was compiled primarily for those who may wonder what a dedicated permit trip is about. For those readers who are “regulars” to permit fishing with Captain Dean and his crew, there will be nothing new here.....just the results of our week. Hopefully, you will smile a time or two sharing my experiences. If you’ve ever hunted with a fly rod or rifle in hand, you will relate to the stalking aspect which makes permit fishing so special; indeed, this is fly fishing’s most challenging, frustrating, and exciting experience.

This report is done in two parts: first, below is the summary of the raw numbers for the trip. Then, below the summary, if you have enough interest to want the details, is the day by day report explaining the daily activities that comprise the summary and a brief description of where we fished and different situations encountered. After my first day, I began carrying a small piece of paper and pen and, a few times each day, with the help of my guide, would update the numbers.

Definition of terms used:

POD - 3 to 5 fish together

SCHOOL – 6+ fish, usually 8 – 15 fish

HERD – school of 15+ fish

SMALL FISH – apprx 6 pounds or under.....only weigh them if 7+ pounds.

SHOT – cast to a permit with a reasonable opportunity for an eat....not throwing at the back of a fleeing fish. Multiple casts to the same fish/school counts as only one SHOT.

PUSH – permit moving on a flat and swimming close enough to the surface, they “push” water in front of them.

PERMIT FLAT – usually 1 to 2½ feet deep, sometimes 3 to 4 feet deep, with deep water in close proximity. Often, there is a ridge that is out of the water on low tides, with water tapering off each side to deep water.

DRIVE BY FLAT – a flat you don’t want to take the time to pole, but sometimes holds tailing fish so you motor by at idle speed to check for fish.

General Trip Summary

- total number of permit seen – 404+
- number of tailing fish encountered – 133+
- number of “shots” taken – 46+; only counting as “one shot” multiple casts to the same fish or school
- number of flats poled – 66; not counting “drive by flats.” Depending on the tides, most flats are 1 to 2.5 feet deep with some 3 – 4 feet, depending on the tides.
- number of flats where at least one permit was seen – 39
- weather – generally good except for two days
- highlight – to have this experience without seeing another angler the entire week
- this is “guide driven” fishing – I have fished with these guides for over 20 years and they know these flats in detail; they know what flats may hold fish on different tidal situations and which to avoid in certain conditions and their ability to spot fish, tails, and “pushes” is amazing and is critical to your overall success.

DAILY DIARY - PERMIT TRIP WITH CAPTAIN DEAN AND THE RISING TIDE

Terry and Gary Butts were going to be joining us on this trip, but when we arrived in Belize City a message was waiting for us - a last minute medical situation would not allow them

to fly so Marte and I boarded the Rising Tide for a “trip for two.” We anchored our first night at Robinson. I began the trip with a total of 45 career permit released and was hoping to get to 50 by week’s end.

Day 1: Anchored the Rising Tide our first night at Robinson. 6:00am Perfect conditions, blue skies, winds 6-10 mph, mostly from E and SE. Did not see one tailing fish!!??? Cast to three schools of a dozen+ fish. Several follows and got one small permit on Captain Dean’s “Hinckley Crab” – brown, tan, and one green strip. Six times saw singles, pairs, and pods. All told, 7 good shots and saw about 50 fish total. Fished 11 different flats and found fish on 6 of them. We began the day fishing at Robinson and worked our way to Bluefield where we took our one fish and anchored for the second night.

Day 2: during the night, the wind shifted to the NW and blew a tropical storm to us.....lighting, thunder, and rain. Woke to gray skies and very light winds, still from the NW. The short story on results for the day was:

- saw well over 120 fish total.....at least 60 tailing fish.
- At least a dozen schools with 8 or more fish.....plus some pairs and a few large singles.
- Fished 8 flats and found fish on 6
- Had 10+ good shots, counting multiple casts to the same fish as one shot.
- Had one eat w/out a set and released one small permit.
- A school of large tarpon rolling in the Bluefield channel, right next to the permit flat.....in another time, we’d have become tarpon fishermen.

Details: the day began at 6:00am on the flat on the NW of Bluefield and the tide was full, just beginning to go out. The first two schools of tailing fish spooked before the fly hit the water.....water was slick, like glass, rising sun behind us, and the line in the air spooked them. On the flat on the SW part of Bluefield, we stalked a school of large tailing fish for a few hundred yards, but never got a cast to them before they swam off the flat. Had a few good shots at singles with one eat, no set. Blew a cast to a school of tails – 10+ fish.....overcast across their backs. Poled the flat out front for a few hundred yards, didn’t see a fish. Moved to the flat at southern Alligator. Found three more schools of large fish.....had two follows on the Meyer Shrimp, but no eats. After 10:00 when we stopped for a quick breakfast. Tide getting low – tried the deeper flats out front again and didn’t see a fish. Looked at the barge.....only a school of small fish and could not get a look. Marte was going snorkeling at the reef with Noel so I went along and waded the flat inside the reef while they snorkeled – spooked one fish. Back in for lunch. After lunch, moving the RT to Sand Fly. Tide coming in as Noel and I fished ahead. No fish on south ends of Gator and Colson. As we ran south, winds died completely and water was totally slick.....could see a minnow move water! At the White Sand Flat, found five schools; spooked the first two due to the slick water. Stalked two other schools, one for over 15 minutes, without getting close enough for a cast. Got a small permit from the other school – all tailing aggressively and not moving. Moved and checked out two other flats – no fish. Setting sun blocked by dark clouds on the horizon when we returned to the WSF. Chased a school pushing water, but no shot. After 6:00 and getting dark – found one last school tailing. Got some long casts, but no eats.....if we would have caught one, would have been the latest permit ever taken from the RT. Fished tailing fish from 6:00am til 6:00pm. At 9:00pm fell asleep, totally exhausted and a smile on my face from the combination of events during the day.

Day 3: Durng the night, winds switched direction, coming from the west – big electrical storm on the mainland with heavy rains.....we only had light rain. 5:30am Woke to 15mph winds from the west and dark clouds all around. No rain, but strong, cool, west winds had blown the tide out even though it was supposed to be still incoming. Flats shallow and dirty. Tried the lee side of a few cays, but no tails. Took a nap. 12:30 – skies are blue and winds from north – 8/10mph. Tide very low. Short story:

- saw well over 100 fish – 35+ tailing.
- Fished 5 flats and found fish on 4.
- Got one small permit - #48 for me. Both #47 and #48 in sight of the anchored Rising Tide.
- Had 10+ good shots at different fish.

Details: Spent 90 min b/4 lunch on deeper side of WSL. Saw two schools of small fish, two singles, and spooked a very large fish with the panga. One really good shot at a half doz tailing fish.....didn't see the other six fish in the school who weren't tailing and spooked the school. After lunch, started at Dean's Flat....deeper water....tide beginning to come in. Saw four singles and one school....no tails. Got two good shots and had two follow. Went to WSF.....spent 20 min stalking one single fish and finally got a decent shot and he followed and then spooked... Spent 20 more min with a school of tailing fish....after 5 decent casts, I finally got an eat and a small permit (#48). At north end of flat, stalked three large schools (one of 30+ fish) – only occasional tails showed. Got 4 good shots – fish all over my fly but couldn't get an eat. Got shots to tailing fish again after 6:00pm for second night in a row. Winds moved to NE.

(A FEW SECONDS can make the difference between casting at the back of a fleeing permit or having a solid shot at getting an eat. Spotting fish as early as possible is critical to success in this game. While my experience allows me to often spot a fish, for me and my aging eyes, my guide is essential to me enjoying this experience due to his ability to usually see the fish long before me.)

Day 4: Winds were light from the NW and moved to NE and even ENE during the day. Mostly blue sky with some patchy clouds. Short story:

- saw over 50 fish – 20+ tailing
- fished 12 flats and found fish on 8 of them
- 8 good shots
- had two fish eat the fly, take it into their throat where they have powerful crushers, and turn the hook. In both cases, I never felt the fish eat. They must have been swimming in my direction and inhaled the fly with momentum coming toward me. They can inhale and expel a fly faster than we can imagine.
- highlight – on the windward side of the shallow flat we began the day (deeper water) had an exciting 45 min stalk of a school of 8 fish (all 15+#), a pair and a single that went 20#, and one tailing single that was 25+. We got some shots, but not a solid shot at any of them....just didn't line up right for a good shot.

Details: fished 5 flats....saw fish on 3 of them. First flat, two pods....blew a cast to the first pod that was a perfect set up.....second pod, had an eat that the fish turned the hook. One other single. WSF – school of about 10 decent fish....had an eat and turned the hook. That was two turned hooks in less than 90 minutes – frustrated! Saw a pair of singles and another pod. Another late breakfast at 10:00. After breakfast, tide falling fast. Fished 4 flats and saw fish on three. One great shot at 3 large tailers, but we couldn't see the 6 fish between the tailers and me and spooked the entire school. Had a follow on the Meyers Shrimp from two deep water fish that were mudding. Short session after lunch – one pod of small tailing fish and a few good shots, but no eats.

(At weeks end, we would have fished some of the world's finest permit flats and Marte would have snorkeled in several spectacular coral reef environments. I would not see another angler and Marte only encountered one other snorkeler.....almost like our own private 30 mile stretch of the Belize barrier reef and the cays and flats inside it!)

Day 5: 6:00am perfect conditions – strong incoming tide, light winds from the east, and mostly blue sky with patchy clouds. The plan was to take “breakfast sandwiches” and fish

our favorite flats near Sand Fly then work our way south to Blue Ground Range. Dean said he doesn't like to fish that far south usually because it has gotten crowded with the Placencia guides now fishing that far north.....he would give it a try, but if we encountered a lot of skiffs, we'd turn around and oome back. We would get lucky and saw no other anglers. Short story:

- fished 9 flats and 7 held permit
- saw 12 tailing fish and a total of 28 fish
- 5 good shots and one eat, but no hookup

Details: In the Sandfly area, saw one tail only. 4 other fish, but no shots. One push and had a good cast leading them.....turned out to be a school of bones. Saw two large singles, but didn't set up for a cast. Beginning at Coco Plum, saw singles, pairs, one pod, and one school (8 – 10 fish). Some really good shots, but they just would not eat, except one. Moved Rising Tide back to Bluefield in late afternoon.

Day 6: 6:00am – conditions great....east wind about 11mph. Mostly clear sky. Tide coming in. Fished all the same flats that provided the big numbers for day 2....some favorites – 2 west side flats at Bluefield, south ends of Alligator and Colson. Only saw a few fish moving – no tails. The only place we found tails and had shots were south end of Mid Long Cay and the creek mouth backside of Colson. Very strange.....Short Story:

- 14 flats fished for day and only saw fish on five of them
- Total of 26 fish seen – only 4 tails
- 4 good shots and got one 9# casting to front of a single fish pushing - #49. Hot 9# fish – streaked off 100 yards of backing before we got the motor started and chased....was 150 yards into backing by time began retrieving line.....thought he was larger!
- Best experience – 2 good shots at a tailing 20+# fish rooting the bottom hard. Should have got him!?

Details: hard to believe these were same flats as Day 2, especially with better overall conditions today. Permit fishing.....just leaves you wondering so many times! Late afternoon, moved the boat back to Robinson.

Day 7: 6:00am – conditions good – same as Day 6, but tide coming in a little later and the winds lighter – 5mph. We had a mid afternoon flight so we planned on getting 5 to 6 solid hours on the water before departing. Short story:

- was similar to Day 6 – fished our favorite flats in Robinson area and would find relatively few fish, even with ideal conditions.
- Fished 7 flats and 3 held fish.
- Saw about 30 fish (two large schools) and 2 tailing singles.
- 2 shots and the first day this trip without a fish eat.

Details: started fast.....first flat, we spooked a school of about 15 fish as we approached the flat. Soon after, saw a fish tailing about 200 feet away. He tailed twice more as we approached and then disappeared. We found a large tailing fish....saw him first at 150 feet. He'd disappear and reappear, moving left and right, feeding aggressively. We approached slowly and, after about 15 minutes, were within distance. The cast looked good.....the fish turned on the fly....all set for a big finale with #50, but he suddenly exploded and rushed off the flat.....guess he saw something he didn't like. After about 3 hours, heavy dark clouds appeared in bunches on the horizon. We began dodging thunder heads as they moved toward the mainland, getting wet a few times.....weren't seeing any fish.....headed in to finish packing and off to the airport.

MY PAST EXPERIENCE WITH FLY RODS AND BELIZE (if you have interest): Thirty-one years ago, we arrived in Belize for our first Belize Mothership trip. ("WE" is our son, Scott,

and I, often accompanied by daughter Holli and wife Marte) We carried four spinning rods set up to fish for the variety of species we expected to encounter.....and we brought an 8 weight fly rod to fish for bonefish. We didn't have the fly rod skills to fish for the other species with a fly.....only bonefish, if we could find them close enough to reach with our meager casting skill. We learned to saltwater fly fish over the next 10 years, primarily in Belize, and, eventually, we would carry five fly rods rigged for the different species and situations available in Belize. After evaluating all my saltwater experiences, last August I came to the conclusion that the great majority of the most exciting saltwater stalking experiences I had encountered with a fly rod in hand were found fishing for permit. During our past 70+ Belize trips, most of our time was spent fishing for the variety of species available in Belize (tarpon, snook, bonefish, etc). We would usually spend a few days of our Belize trips moving our mothership south, where the best permit flats on the globe begin, and fish for permit. Adding in a few permit taken in Ascension Bay and 10 Pacific Permit from the Ningaloo Reef over our past three trips there, I had released 45 total permit before the trip referenced in this report. I'm 74 years young and decided I needed a new and worthy fly fishing goal to liven up my salt water fly fishing pursuits. That decision was to set a goal of releasing over 100 permit before my 84th birthday. I no longer carry all those fly rods on my Belize trips – just a 10 weight rod with the “Hinckley Crab” tied on. I have now officially joined the growing crowd of dedicated permit addicts (blame this in part to the inspiration of Art Hinckley, a superior angler who has released over 120 permit, mostly in Belize, fishing with the same guides used for this report)!