

# Bottom fishing gone mad at Cape Eleuthera

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*Courtesy of "George Poveromo's World of Saltwater Fishing"* A most welcoming sight, especially after a 252-mile boat ride (one way) from Miami! I'm an offshore troller at heart, so having just released a blue marlin and iced down several big dolphin off Cape Eleuthera, you could understand my reluctance over going bottom fishing the next day. Yet friend Harry Vernon and I stuck with our original plan, and began gearing up for the reefs. As it turned out, it was a wise decision.

Harry and I had traveled over 250 miles from Miami to Cape Eleuthera's Powell Pointe Marina aboard my Mako 284 MARC VI last June, to sample both the offshore and reef fishing.

Our first two days offshore were very successful, and now we hoped to find a prime section of reef which held snapper and grouper. We had heard about a spot called Tommy Pointe, less than 10 miles to the west of the marina. Tommy Pointe is a spot where the shallow bank protrudes out into deep Exuma Sound. The depths at the top of this reef rise very close to the surface, whereas the drop off plummets to over 1,000 feet.

## Valley of the snapper

We loaded the MARC VI with 15 blocks of Captain Mark's Pure Sardine Chum, silversides, squid and Spanish sardines. We then left the marina and pointed her bow to the west.

We reached Tommy Pointe in virtually no time, but then spent about 30 minutes reviewing the structure. We finally felt good about a piece of bottom between 50 and 60 feet of water, showing on my Lowrance 111 unit as hard, ragged reefs and fish. We lowered the anchor, let out some scope, then tightly snubbed the rode, once over our spot.

I immediately slipped a frozen block of chum into a mesh bag and hung it over the side, where the melting sardine particles and scent began flowing out and down over the reefs. I then made my way to the bow to ready some bottom fishing tackle, only to hear Harry laugh and call me back to the cockpit. I walked back to see what was so funny, and he pointed to the chum bag, which now had numerous yellowtail around it — some of which were eating right from the mesh netting!

These weren't your typical half-pound or 1-pound snapper, but rather 2- and 3-pounders! The schools of yellowtail kept growing, growing and growing, until the proverbial "yellow brick road" formed for as far as you could see. Catching these fish was going to be easy, perhaps too easy.

Harry and I grabbed our yellowtail outfits: Penn AF 3000 and 4000 Series spinning reels, filled with 20-pound test braided line. The spinners were matched with the new Penn Torque Jigging Rods rated for 30- to 50-pound test lines. These new graphite composite rods appear like ultra light sticks, but they've plenty of backbone to muscle up large fish. We rigged the outfits with 20- and 30-pound test fluorocarbon leaders and either a 2/0 in-line circle hook, or a 1-1/16-ounce Capt. Harry's Yellowtail jig. We tipped the circle hook and jigs with a silverside, hung the baits by the chum bag, and bailed snapper at will.

## **Shooting fish in a barrel**

This was too easy! To make it more challenging, we cut off the hooks and jigs and replaced them with a 4-inch long, 1-3/8-ounce, Yo-Zuri Live Bait Minnow Jig. This slender, elongated lure — made out of a durable, semi-flexible plastic - has an erratic wobbling action when jigged through the water column. It appears much like an injured minnow.

Harry pitched out his Yo-Zuri first, far back into the chum slick. Within seconds, and certainly before the lure reached bottom, he hooked up.

I thought it was a cero mackerel, and so did Harry. But instead he pulled in a surprising 4-pound yellowtail!

He fired the Yo-Zuri jig out there again, and immediately hooked another big yellowtail. It wasn't long before I got into the action, bailing big yellowtails myself. We were clearly onto something with these jigs.

As it turned out, the jigs weeded out the "small" fish, as only the bigger yellowtails ate them. We discovered two key things: First, the hot color was the pearl/chartreuse, which appears more as a bright yellow - a color yellowtail find irresistible; Second, the yellowtails ate the jig mostly during the free-fall stage, and usually right after the cast.

If you didn't get a strike, a moderate and steady retrieve generated bites. After discovering this hot yellowtail lure, I've used it at other Bahamas destinations, with similar results. Yo-Zuri also makes 1-3/4, 2-3/4, and 3-3/8 versions of the jig, so you can gear them to the size of the fish in the chum slick.

The waters behind the MARC VI were a virtual fish bowl. There were thousands of yellowtail, hundreds of cero mackerel and even countless angel fish in our slick!

If we wanted to catch a yellowtail, we'd cast out the Yo-Zuri jig into the chum slick and let it sink, or reel it in steadily. If we wanted to score a cero mackerel, we'd make a long cast to the outskirts of the chum slick, and reel in the jig as quickly as possible.

## **Tuna time**

After wearing out our arms each of the two days we bottom fished, we pulled anchor late each afternoon and searched the offshore waters for birds and tuna. I dialed in my radar, spotted birds on the screen and raced toward them.

Sure enough, they were over tuna. We trolled baits and lures around the birds. We hooked one decent size yellowfin, which, unfortunately, was eaten by a shark. Other than that one strike, trolling and even chunking couldn't rally the tuna. Our next step was to cast out the Yo-Zuri jigs!

Most of the yellowfin tuna were small, but they readily ate the Yo-Zuri jigs. They gave a great fight on the relatively light spin tackle, and we kept a couple of the heavier fish for sushi.

## **Time passages**

Our week flew by, it seemed. We were off the water early on our final day, packing for the crossing home the next morning. The wind was still and the sea even calmer, so we opted to load the boat as quickly as we could and leave that afternoon.

We rushed quite a bit, but had the boat loaded and ready to go at noon. At 12:15 p.m., we took off and ran the MARC VI between 45- and 48-miles per hour. We took about an hour to top off the fuel tank in Nassau, and sped off again, pulling into North Miami Beach's Haulover Inlet at around 7:15 p.m. that evening. Talk about flying low!

Cape Eleuthera's Powell Point Marina is without a doubt a premier fishing destination that sees very little pressure. As we proved with my MARC VI, a mid-size boat can make it here in one day.