

Go Long For Wahoo

Want a shot at a 100-pound 'hoo? Head for the far reaches of the Bahamas for a long-range fishing experience you won't soon forget.

BY GEORGE POVEROMO

Serious fishermen dream about traveling well beyond the fleet and trolling in an ocean packed with gamefish that have yet to see a lure or bait. And in the far southeastern reaches of the Bahamas, such fantasies are often the norm. • The islands of San Salvador, Cat Island and Rum Cay are way out there, even by Bahamas standards. By air, they're roughly 330, 275 and 325 miles, respectively, from Fort Lauderdale, and even farther by boat. Because of their remoteness and persistent winter and spring breezes, these islands are visited by only a handful of the most devoted fishermen. However, their efforts are usually rewarded with



Billy Gaitor (left) and Trey Rhyne get behind a big Bahamas wahoo from Diana Bank.



The author hoists a big wahoo caught on a Yo-Zuri swimming plug.

shots at some of the world's biggest wahoo, catches of giant dolphin, tuna and superb blue marlin action — all of which peak between November and July.

I've had the good fortune of landing a 143-pound, three-ounce wahoo off San Salvador, and off nearby Cat Island, I've caught blue marlin, dolphin and tuna. This past spring, I returned to Rum Cay for the end of the wahoo run. From there, if the weather held, I planned on running another 65 miles to fish the fabled Diana Bank, an underwater mountain that rises to within 40 feet of the surface from 5,000-plus-foot depths.

BANK ON IT

Diana Bank is about six miles long and a little over three miles wide. It rests about 65 miles from Rum Cay. It is one of just a few major underwater banks in the area and, therefore, draws in migratory fish, such as wahoo, tuna, dolphin and marlin. What's more, because of its remoteness, it's practically a virgin hot spot. The big trick lies in getting there.

I'd heard tales of those who had ventured to Diana Bank: 80-pound-class reels stripped, world-record wahoo eaten by packs of ravenous sharks. Of course there are the victory stories too: 100-plus-pound wahoo,

20 to 30 wahoo tides with fish between 50 and 100 pounds, huge dolphin and marlin. Needless to say, the hype about Diana Bank is almost inescapable and, as I was about to find out, well justified.

MAKING THE RUN

Getting to the far southeastern Bahamas is a major undertaking unto itself. It's difficult to find plane connections that don't eat up a full day or two, and reliable charter boats in the area are scarce. Unless you know someone who takes his boat there for the season, this would be one tough location to reach.

That's where the Over Under Adventures team comes in. Thanks to this first-class sportfishing operation, traveling to and fishing off Cat Island, Rum Cay and Diana Bank has never been easier. Headed by Trey Rhyne, the Over Under operation specializes in the Bahamas. They have a 54-foot Bertram, captained by Pete Fischer, who, incidentally, is a top canyon-fishing authority from southern New Jersey.

Over Under Aviation has private aircraft that will fly your party right to your destination. We arrived at Fort Lauderdale International Airport one hour before our noon departure. Including our brief stopover at Stella Maris to clear customs, we were at Rum Cay by 3:30 p.m.

We checked into our villas at Sumner Point Marina, where the *Over Under* and a few other sportfishing boats were docked. Our plan was to enjoy a relaxing evening at the resort, have breakfast and then board the *Over Under* at 10 a.m. for the 54-mile cruise down to Bird Rock, which is at the tip of Crooked Island. At Bird, we would deploy trolling baits and work our way down beyond the southern end of the island. Then we would anchor up and spend the night off Albert Town on Long Cay, some 21 miles from Diana Bank. Our objective was to be within striking range of Diana Bank for a sunrise assault. Following us down for this adventure was Stan Strickland, a top big-game

KEVIN TIERNEY



The author fights a big 'hoo from the *Over Under*.

fisherman and friend from Savannah, Georgia, who brought his boat *Mojito* to Rum Cay for the season.

THE 'HOO RUN

Trophy-size wahoo migrate through these waters between November and April. These are not your typical 20- to 30-pounders that are found off Florida and throughout most of the western Bahamas, but rather giants that many think make up a totally separate population. It is believed that these big fish migrate in an east-to-west fashion. That is, they'll travel here from well out in the open ocean, and then head back out again at the end of their run through the remote southeastern Bahamas. These fish

never seem to stray too far from schools of tuna and skipjacks, their primary forage. And they comprise some of the largest wahoo in the world, as supported by the IGFA world records set in these waters. In fact, just a couple weeks before our trip, the *Over Under* boated a 148-pound, five-ounce wahoo off Columbus Point near Cat Island. The fish ate a black-and-green Bluewater TB2 lure.

WAHOO CENTRAL

The weather was surprisingly calm for our jaunt down to Crooked Island. On the way, we boated a few dolphin that ended up on our dinner plates. Later that evening, Rhyne and mate Billy Gaitor worked off dinner by



catching yellowtail, big margates and mutton snapper behind the boat.

The sea was still flat when we awoke the next morning, and we were trolling on Diana Bank by 7:30 a.m. Fischer settled into a trolling speed just under ten knots and focused on the east side of the Bank between 100 and 400 feet of water. Once Fischer uncovered schools of speedos and skipjack tuna, we knew things would break loose.

The first strike came on a flat line. In typical wahoo fashion, 80-pound line zipped off the reel. I picked up the rod and was fast to the first wahoo of the trip. A short time later, we boated a 52-pounder. It wasn't long after the baits went back out that we had a doubleheader. We pulled the hooks on one, but did manage to land

The Long-Range Connection

Over Under Adventures specializes in long-range big-game fishing excursions to Cat Island and Rum Cay in the southeastern Bahamas. They also do specialty runs to Diana Bank, weather permitting. The *Over Under* is a 54-foot Bertram loaded with

quality tackle and captained by Pete Fischer. Over Under Aviation provides private air transportation directly to these remote destinations. They fish the Bahamas between November and July.

In addition to their off-shore program, Over Under

Adventures also has a 32-foot Mirage for light tackle, near-shore and bottom fishing and a 17-foot Hewes skiff for bonefishing on Cat Island. Trips start at \$2,500 per person. For more information, call (305) 852-8015 or visit www.overunderadventures.com. — G.P.

a 60-pounder. Shortly after that, the big Yo-Zuri Bonita plug, swimming deep off the flat line with the aid of a trolling sinker, got clobbered. The big fish kept taking line. Unfortunately, the hooks pulled on what may have been the biggest wahoo of the trip.

Wahoo are notorious for turning on at the change of tide, and we were at the right place on the bank at the right time. We trolled a variety of lures, including Bluewater Eagle and TB2 lures rigged on 480-pound-test, 49-strand cable leaders and a big Yo-Zuri Bonita lure rigged on a 270-pound-test cable leader. The flat-line lures, including the big Yo-Zuri plug, were each fished in conjunction with a 32-ounce trolling sinker.

We primarily trolled with Penn International 70VS two-speed reels and matching Penn stand-up rods, save for a pair of Penn two-speed 50VSWs. Heavy tackle is necessary insurance when the really big fish eat, and helps you land these wahoo faster. Although we didn't have a shark encounter on this trip, many times it's a race to see who ends up with the wahoo — you or the sharks.

Our hot morning bite continued, and we missed a couple fish and boated a couple more. At one point, we had five rods go down simultaneously, with two fish hooked solidly. I thought my hook had pulled, only to discover it had broken off in jaws of the fish. Rhyme remained tight to his fish. Looking at the amount of line leaving the reel, he had a big wahoo. After a few very impressive runs, we boated the 77-pounder.

At day's end, both boats were once again anchored off Long Cay. We snorkeled around the *Over Under* to cool down, cleaned up and later enjoyed a fresh wahoo dinner prepared by Fischer. We would spend one more night on location, fish Diana Bank for a few hours in the morning, then cruise back to Rum.

The wind had come up the next morning, spiking seas to four feet. We were on the bank for the tide change, but bait was noticeably scarce, except for occasional pods of flying fish. We



Captain Pete Fischer and Billy Gaitor with a pair of Diana Bank wahoo.

had one strike, and released a wahoo around 20 pounds—a runt in this part of the world. A blue marlin that we guessed to weigh 250 pounds provided some excitement by crashing one of the teasers, but it failed to eat the bait. We picked up the lines a couple hours after the tide changed and headed back for Rum Cay.

A FISH FOR ALL SEASONS

Prime time for big wahoo is between November and April. Dolphin begin showing in numbers around March or April, with the yellowfin appearing in March. A blue marlin is possible

at any time, although the chances of catching one increase dramatically in April and May.

Although fabled Diana Bank didn't yield the spectacular numbers of wahoo it is known for during our visit, we were there at the end of their run. Still, we did enjoy a great bite and boated many fish weighing more than 50 pounds each in one morning.

You'll be hearing more from Rum Cay and Diana Bank in the near future, as anglers now have an easier way to get there. This is an amazing Bahamas adventure, especially for anglers who love catching big wahoo. ~

GEORGE POVEROMO