

Michael's great bonefishing adventure

I THINK HIS NAME was Michael. He was thirty-something. I remember that he was decked out in the latest bonefishing threads, including new flats wading shoes, but what really impressed me were his top-of-the-line Sage and Loomis fly rods, the Billy Pate reels and the hundreds of bonefish flies, all neatly perched, according to pattern and size in labeled boxes, like little planes on an aircraft carrier ready for takeoff.

This guy was easily one of the best equipped fishermen that I've ever seen!

I was at Rupert Leadon's Andros Island Bonefishing Club, Bahamas. The camp just opened up and I was there for a firsthand experience for PanAngling Travel Service. Part of my job, you know.

“We have another single, Michael, booked for a few days, and perhaps you can fish with him?” Rupert asked.

No problem.

Michael seemed like a nice guy. A little tense—probably business nerves, I thought. Perhaps he bought a huge house in a toney Connecticut suburb and had staggering payments. Whatever.

“Have you fished bonefish before?”

“No, actually this is my first time for bonefishing,” Michael replied. “I just learned to fly cast at a school.”

“Well, what type of fishing have you done before?” A logical question, I thought, as we sped to some distant flats.

“Actually, I never fished before. This is my first trip.”

He then recounted how he read about fly fishing, watched several TV fishing programs, and decided that he wanted to get into fly fishing. Especially for bonefish. He was obviously a very successful, young businessman. Michael said that his wife owned a business that took up lots of her time and that she was encouraging him to find a hobby.

I was about to give him my “fishing-ain’t-a-hobby, it’s-a-way-of-life,” speech, but I resisted.

Our guide stopped the engine, allowed our skiff to coast before he quietly picked up the push pole and began to propel us to a flat a few hundred yards away. His head moved slowly back and forth, as he searched for tails or fins, or any type of movement.

“Michael, you fish first. I’ll help you, if you’d like, but I won’t fish until you land your first bonefish,” I insisted, and he seemed to like that.

He loosened up and even smiled when I related some of my bumbling bonefishing experiences. We tied on a “Charlie” and I asked Michael to cast so our guide and I could gauge his casting skill and range. He cast very well. He could drop a fly fairly accurately within a 40-foot range. I was relieved. Often people who go to these casting schools learn the essentials but don’t practice. Then, too, it’s vastly different casting a practice fly on a peaceful school pond than a weighted “Crazy Charlie” under actual fishing conditions (the wind almost always blows on the flats). At first I feared that it might be a long time before I would get a

chance to cast to a bone, since I insisted that Michael must *land* a bonefish before I would pick up a rod, but now I could see that my new fishing companion was a well-coordinated, aggressive, fairly accurate caster. Whoever taught him to fly cast did a very good job.

Our guide pointed to a small pod of bones; maybe there were five or six. He propelled the skiff silently to within casting distance of the bones.

Michael had moved quietly to the casting platform, and after a little pointing he picked up the shadowy movements of the bones. Good eyesight, I noted. He lengthened his line, false casting away from the fish so as not to spook them, and then he dropped the fly to the fish.

A little short.

He quietly lifted the fly and lengthened his cast, but it was not exactly on the target. The bones seemed too busy munching on hors d'oeuvres to worry about our presence. Remember, the camp had just opened so these bones were not very wary.

His next cast was "Lefty Kreh perfect."

"Slow down your retrieve . . . it's interested."

Michael did, and the fish hit the fly. He had it on for an instant, but the bonefish got off. I was excited! Imagine, his very first fishing trip—really his first casts at fish—and he hooks a fine bonefish. He never went through that perch-sunfish-bass-cane pole routine that most of us experienced before we went "big league."

We found another pod, a few hundred yards away. It was a repeat of our previous experience. Again Michael only had the bonefish on for a few seconds. The guide and I were elated, because it was a matter of time before Michael would succeed.

We couldn't find any more bones in the area, but the guide said we would run about 20 minutes and surely we would find more bones there, because of the tide. We did.

Michael was casting better and better. He was a quick learner. He stripped the fly just right, and he nicked a few more bonefish. Michael delivered a nice cast to a fine fish, possibly eight pounds, but the bone, although aggressive at first, changed its mind at the last second when he saw the skiff and us. Although I love to fish, I was now enjoying this. It

was a challenge of sorts, helping Michael, who never fished before, hook a bonefish.

“Can we go back to the lodge?”

“Huh?”

“*Can we go back to the lodge?*” Michael repeated.

“Look, if you have to go the washroom, I’m sure our guide can find a suitable place . . .” I was trying to be delicate. “We’ll lose a lot of time going back and forth . . .” I pleaded.

“**No, I want to go back to the lodge!**” He gave no further explanation. Maybe in his business and back home he didn’t offer explanations.

So we went back. After all, he was a *paying* guest.

The guide and I waited in the skiff at the camp’s dock. We tried to figure out what the problem was.

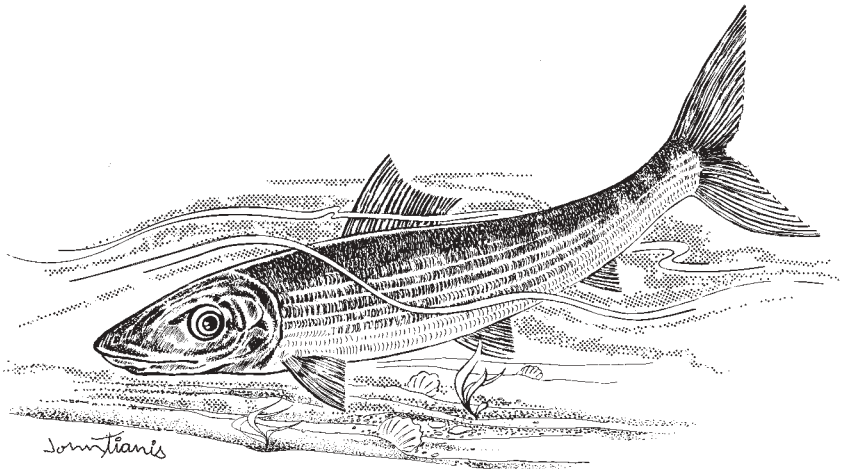
“Maybe he’s sick?” the guide offered.

“Maybe.”

After about a half hour, Rupert came down to the dock.

“You guys can go fishing on your own.” He offered no explanation, and we didn’t ask.

In a selfish way, I was pleased. Great bonefishing waters. Great guide.



New skiff. Conditions seemed close to perfect. I would have all the chances. Take advantage of the day. Seize the opportunity!

I had a ball. Lots of bonefish landed. Lots of big ones sighted. A couple of giants hooked but lost. Ahhh, what a glorious day. By the time we headed back to camp, I had classified this day as one of my best bonefishing experiences in years. I was bopping around on the return, scatting some jazz riffs, off-key, I'm sure. Hey, it was a great day. Express yourself. The guide was happy, too.

Rupert met us at dock.

"How's Michael?" I asked.

"He's no longer here. He asked me to call for a charter plane and he went back home," Rupert answered. "He said there was nothing wrong . . . you guys were helpful. . . but he found out that he doesn't like fishing. He said he'd rather be home working on some projects, so he left. I told him I couldn't make a refund, but he said he didn't expect one. He didn't care."

I was stunned. Here's a guy who was starting at the top, fly fishing for bones, and surely would have succeeded if he gave it just a little more time.

I wondered about his top-of-the-line Sage and Loomis fly rods, the Billy Pate reels and the hundreds of bonefish flies, all neatly perched, according to pattern and size in labeled boxes, like little planes on an aircraft carrier ready for takeoff.

His perfectly designed, matching equipment just didn't have a chance to do its stuff. Maybe he will give fishing another chance.

Or maybe they will occupy a dark, seldom-opened musty closet.

Next to that drum set or golf bag.

Or perhaps someone will really luck out at a garage sale.

PS: The fishing was even better the next few days!