

Fly Fishing The BAhAMAs RePoRT BooTs on The gRound AT ABACO lodge



The artful cast
Photo by Barry and Cathy Beck

BOOTS ON THE GROUND AT ABACO LODGE

A Staff Report

In September of this year, Terry Gibson, reporting on Conservation wrote an article about a cooperative research project that included volunteer anglers joining Aaron Adams (Bonefish & Tarpon Trust) and local Bahamian guides on a **Bonefish Roundup**. It was a tag, measure and release project that actually went down in the fall of 2010. Headquarters for the Roundup was Abaco Lodge.

FINDING ABACO

After receiving a lot of inquiries about what was the fishery like surrounding the world famous Marls, and what could be expected of Abaco Lodge, we decided on boots on the ground, and we're glad we did.

CIRCUITOUSLY GETTING THERE

On recent expeditions to Panama, Mexico, Florida Keys to sus-out the best of

Typical Abaco bone just minutes from the lodge - Photo by Barry and Cathy Beck



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the best fly fishing venues, we never gave much thought about the weather . . . simply assuming it always rains when we go to the tropics with a fly rod. After torrential rains in Panama causing mudslides, a hurricane evacuation in Mexico, and a trip to the Keys only to be met by the first named storm of the season (three years in a row), we noticed that our fishing buddies no longer wanted to travel with us.

Well, we're happy to report that our luck changed in The Bahamas. We were greeted at Abaco Lodge with abundant sunshine, calm breezes and willing bonefish and we were thoroughly impressed with the entire operation. In 20 years of looking on Abaco, we finally found what we have been searching for—a quality lodge with great skiffs, skilled guides and easy access to the world famous flats of the Marls.

THE LODGE

Sitting on a point with an incredible bay view, Abaco Lodge has been thoroughly renovated and remodeled from the ground up. It's part of the stellar



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THE ISLAND

The Abacos consist of their own 120-mile-long island chain, basically a mini-Bahamas complete with its own Out Islands. Great Abaco Island and Little Abaco serve as the "mainland," with a string of barrier islands separating them from the Atlantic. With its own calm sea surrounded by charming islands, each worth a visit, the Abacos are known as one of the world's top fishing, boating and sailing destinations. Not that those who prefer to sleep in a bed that doesn't rock should look elsewhere. With quaint colonial towns, two golf courses, miles and miles of stellar beaches, unbelievable flats and blue-water angling, diving and snorkeling, and a wonderful selection of hotels, resorts, restaurants and bars, the Abacos are the most complete vacation destination in the Bahamas' Out Islands. There is a hugely expansive area of flats called "the Marls" which has some of most prolific bonefishing still available in the Atlantic and Caribbean. From our perspective, Abaco Lodge could not be better located.

-- Staff

A starter collection - Pat Ford photo



Barry and Cathy Beck photo



Abaco Lodge at rest - Barry and Cathy Beck photo



Barred Gotcha
A favorite

Cathy Beck laying out some line
Photo by Barry and Cathy Beck



Bring this selection and you're good to go
Photo by Pat Ford

family of Nervous Waters Lodges—they own and operate three fishing properties in the Bahamas and five in South America. The lodge has eight air-conditioned rooms right on the water with private en suite facilities.

WHAT EVERY ANGLER WANTS

One of the unique features of this lodge is that they only take eight anglers; therefore, the guests enjoy single-occupancy accommodations at no extra charge. As much as we all enjoy fishing with friends, everyone likes to have his or her own space in the evenings. Having said this, the rooms are very appropriate for couples with nice furnishing and spacious bathrooms. See a typical room at the end of this story.

CUISINE

The property also has a plunge pool, a fire pit for evening bonfires, and the main lodge has a wonderful deck, comfortable furniture for lounging, and a full bar open to the guests. With international chefs, you'll find the cuisine quality a real pleasant surprise! The meals are beyond any "Foodies" expectations - fantastic.

THE FISHING

The lodge owns four state-of-the-art Hell's Bay skiffs - probably the finest fishing machines one could hope to be transported to and from, and fishing platforms to fish off of. Fast, quiet and with very little draw, it's easy to understand why these skiffs have the fine reputation they deserve.

The Abaco Lodge guides are knowledgeable, friendly and willing. We were fishing within minutes of leaving the dock and found school after school of willing bonefish. In the calmest days a 7- or 8-weight will do just fine for the small bones, but if you get into bigger bones (or other opportunities show), use larger flies and the wind picks up, you might be glad you brought at least an 9-weight, and many never leave home without a 10-weight. That said, the bonefish are not huge at Abaco, but there are lots of solid 4-pound specimens that will get your attention and produce a lot of memory imprints.

NOTE: Abaco Lodge continues to participate in the bonefish tagging program in conjunction with Bonefish & Tarpon Trust (see September's issue for the full story).

In addition to convenient access to the Marls, the lodge will often trailer one of the skiffs to a different part of the island to fish some of the ocean-side flats where anglers can find bigger bones and some species diversity - here's where a 9-weight pays off.

YOU ARE HERE

The Marls are approximately 300 square miles of pure wilderness found along the western shore of Great Abaco Island: 30 miles to the north and south, and about 10 miles off the west coast of Abaco Island. It's vast, little fished and the bones are not Islamorada spooky. The Marls and South Andros Island are the most productive bonefish fisheries in the Bahamian island chain.

Fly fishing the “Marls” involves hundreds of square miles of mangroves, creeks, cuts flats, endless cays, bights and sounds that all contain astounding numbers of crustaceans - crabs, conchs and other edibles to treat a hungry bone. Just cruising the Marls is a delightful experience.

The entire area is only navigable by shallow draft flats and skiffs, and knowledgeable guides make good things happen.

NOTE: If you walk the Marl’s flats, you’ll need to be marathon fit and have good stay-tight flats shoes because you’ll sink into the marl anywhere from inches to feet.

The unique geography of the Marls has spared it from gross development and remains one of the best bonefishing destinations in the Bahamas. Never turn down an opportunity to fish it.

TAN AND PINK GOTCHAS

A 12-foot leader tapered to 15- or 12-pound fluorocarbon tippet works very well, but always defer to the Lodge’s top guides before doing battle. They might have a preference that can make your day, especially since you don’t know where they’re taking you that morning and you’re probably not at all familiar with each day’s targeted fishery.

We’ve found the flies developed over the years just for bones are the best bets. Gotchas rule. Everything seems to eat it, so all you have to do is vary the sizes. The bigger bonefish like larger helpings of food and you should have some gotchas with both lead and bead-chain eyes because you can be fishing in anywhere from 6-inches to 3-feet of water. For the most part, tan and pink are the best colors. Also, we never leave home without an adult assortment of shrimps and crabs. However, never lose sight of the fact that presentation trumps everything.

GETTING THERE

Getting to Abaco Lodge is a breeze! There are daily commercial flights from Miami, Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach right into Marsh Harbour, Abaco’s largest town. Guests are met and the lodge property is a mere 10 minutes away. You can fly on Continental from West Palm, which has a convenient afternoon flight that gets you to your room in plenty of time to get unpacked and “tackled up” before cocktails. On departure, the return flight allows for a half day of fishing in the morning, a shower and nice lunch before heading home.

-- Staff

CONCLUSION

With just a few seasons under its belt, Abaco Lodge is already considered one of the premier lodge options in the Atlantic and Caribbean. We plan to return yet again this season (October through early July).

Even though we’re headquartered in South Florida, we’ve found making lodge arrangement in the Bahamas through our old friends Frontiers International. It saves so much time, avoids any hassles and there’s no premium for enjoying being waited on. We’ve also found that we seem to get extra attention when at any Frontiers property.

Contact Joe Linscott at Frontiers—he’ll give you the latest Abaco news, the up-to-date availability at the lodge and handle all of your travel arrangements.

For arrangements to visit Abaco Lodge and get the inside scoop, go to: www.frontierstravel.com / 1-800-245-1950 / info@frontierstravel.com

Your own room at no extra cost, pure comfort and privacy.
Photo by Barry and Cathy Beck

