

December in the Everglades is HOT with a Lot!!!

November brought the predict changes to Everglades City and Chokoloskee Island. The recent cold fronts cooled down the waters a bit, bringing with it our winter season. Noticeable was the arrival of the cobias, brown marlin, as we affectionately know them around here. The place is also over run with Spanish mackerel ... nice fish 23" – 26". The biggest she-snook have moved offshore to the near shore structure and the speckled trout have moved in force. The redfish population thins out a bit and the big tarpon all but disappear leaving their smaller sized youngsters around to play with us.



Most of the big snook are gone, but there are still plenty of these line-sided acrobats here ... especially in the deep backcountry. On a recent kayak trip we release 113 snook and four tarpon, the next trip 74 and two days later 66. (Notice that I am not mentioning the day between ... It still is fishing!) They were a blast.

I had the pleasure of fishing with Bill and Karen Elder of Arkansas for several days. Karen brought her 80 plus year old father, Austin, an ex-WWII fighter pilot who flew the “hump” in Burma ... some very dangerous flying at 20,000 feet in freezing cold over mountainous peaks escorting bombers. I have been a flight instructor since 1979, but it has to be “severe clear” before I tackle the sky this days ... things have changes.

Bill and Karen fly fished, while Austin spin fished their four fishing days. The first day, Bill and Karen were taken through the mangrove tunnels to the back lakes for their introduction to the glades on fly. They manage a pile of small snook on the long wands, but Karen jumped her first tarpon on fly ... I think it changed her life. Austin, came back from his trip, telling stories of “a lot of fish, I do not know what they were, but there were a lot of fish”.



After a day off, Karen and Bill, along with two other couples ventured into the back creeks for some more snook fishing, Austin was with another one our guides slinging lead at redfish. We had about 70 snook that day, but I was thoroughly embarrassed being “snook-handled” twice with snook that way too large of for my tackle. The highlight, however, was Karen (again).

She put on a quite a (movie quality) demonstration. I was around the corner in my kayak actually watching another guide struggling to catch fish. He was hanging live pilchards watching the popping cork float. He had just eased by us as Patty made three casts and caught three snook from her kayak. The faces were long on his boat that day.

I heard Karen start hooting and hollering with excitement. I paddled by the flats boat, to get where I can see what happening and stood up in the kayak to watch. She was anchored up on a pocket of snook that were absolutely thrashing her popping fly. Every cast they would strike, breaching the surface two and three times each cast ... but missing!!! Each smash of the fly brought a yell from Karen. I was laughing so hard I almost fell down in the kayak!

She pulled out numerous fish, but most simply missed. I was so amazed I had her check to see if the fly still had a hook! The bite never stopped, her arm pooped out and she left the spot with fish still smacking her fly. My side hurt from laughing and the poor live bait guide was just left dumb-founded. I never seem to have a video camera when I need it...it was something special to watch how much fun she was having.

The next day, a weak front passed and the whole area got lock jaw ... just like some one turned out the lights ... lots of tripping over our lower lips that day ... from everyone who fished.

The following day, we all fished together on the Blue Bird *Daze*... Bill, Karen and Austin. It was great to have them all together. I am sure by now you have figured out the star of the show... yep, Karen ... Cobia, mackerel, jacks, ladyfish, gag grouper, goliath grouper and even a few shots at tarpon. Bill and Austin were not far behind, but once well in the macks, Bill brought out the fly rod. Fishing without a wire leader, he purged his fly box pretty well, but had a good time doing it.

The fishing in December is good. You can expect lots of speckled trout, mackerels and blue fish on the flats...many 100 fish days. Sight fishing in the shallow, clear back country water for snook and redfish is some of the best fishing you will find. The near shore structure can be full of action ... There are still plenty of large snook and tarpon around early in the month, but by the end, the water cools enough that they move offshore ... so we follow.

We have some pretty cool things coming up in January and February this year. We have added two very cool kayak fishing trips. Basically, both are shore launch and we paddle into various mangrove lakes through the tunnels and canopies that connect them. Fishing is limited to snook and tarpon, but we are fishing waters that do get fished very often. The best part is the that we are drift down current the entire trip arriving at the mouth of a river ... The Yak Attack, kayak transport boat will be waiting for us when we arrive.

February 9, 10 and 11 we are doing a camping with the kayaks and flats on the Cape Sable beaches. There will be three days of fishing, two in the yaks and one in flat boats. We will be shuttling back into the Jurassic Park area the NMZ north of Lake Ingraham for snook and redfish, while the flats boat will head up to tarpon fish. Last February, we did a shakedown trip at this time...the fishing was nuts. Obviously, there is limited space on this trip.

February 24th is our Third Annual Everglades Kayak Fishing Paddle-In. Launching from Chokoloskee, we drift with the tides to a sand beach at the mouth of Chokoloskee Pass. Vickie will be serving her famous conch chowder again, but there will also be plenty of bratwurst, drinks and pastries. Once the tide turns around and begins to rise, we launch from the beach and drift/paddle back towards Chokoloskee with the tide. For those that wish to stick around, we will be having a fish fry at a local waterside restaurant. This is a fun, social event that last year had 70+ kayakers of all ages participating. The paddle-in is free, but we do ask for a donation for the Smallwood's Store Museum. Come join us ... you will have a blast and meet some new friends. Rental kayaks will be available.

Tight Lines!

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