

Bone & Tarpon Fishing In The BVI

By Nan Clendenin

RECENTLY I discovered that some of the most prestigious bone/tarpon-fishing in the Caribbean is done in the British Virgin Islands. I love to fish and enjoy learning more about different elements of the sport. However I did not realize, as I began my conversation with Ian Batchelor owner/operator of Caribbean Fly-Fishing Outfitters, that sport fishing done in flats is one of the fastest growing sports in the western world with some two million people a year taking up the sport.

Batchelor, and his instructor/guide Graham Shepherd, work with the BVI Fisheries and Conservation

BVI. They state that: "The BVI, one of the world's most popular destinations for cruising sailors, is also host to many flats teeming with bonefish, tarpon and permit." On Tortola they fished with Batchelor on one of his three custom-built poling flat boats from which the fishing is done as wading can damage reefs. *After You*, his 28' Bertram mothership, offers transport from either land or yacht and supplies food for outings - freshly baked bread, sandwich meats and cheeses, fruit and sodas, with an open bar. All of the needed gear is also supplied along with arrangements for accommodations, transfers and other water activities such as diving, snorkeling, etc.

of fly-fishing by just doing it - since the age of 7. He has fished from the Northwest Territory to Peru but ranks the BVI as absolutely the best place. He loves the sun and feels that BVI flats are, as yet, an untouched territory. Shepherd is also a paramedic who, quite fortunately, has not had to use his skills while instructing or guiding.

The outfitters work on a catch and release program. None of their boats have anti-fouling paint so they never pollute the reefs or waters where they fish. I asked Shepherd about the differences between fresh water and salt water fly-fishing. Enthusiastically he replied that: "When you are fishing in fresh water you are fishing in areas that look like they might hold fish whereas in flats fishing you are casting to specific fish - target shooting. It is so shallow that you can actually see the fish tailing. The BVI is a great area because our winds ideally run between 5 - 10 knots which is perfect for fly-fishing. We also have the added advantage of not having to wear a lot of clothing."

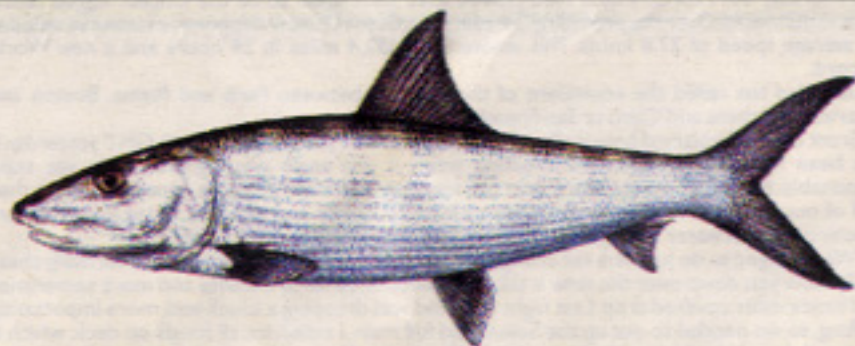
Batchelor adds: "We normally leave in the early morning and fish until about 4. We then motor back to our destination be it land or a yacht. Most of our outings depend on the tide. The best time for fishing is on the rising or falling tide - only once a day in our latitude. We take two people per flat boat so if we have a single fisherperson we try to match them with someone else. No bait is used because all fly fishing is artificial. The hook is made out of silk, feather, synthetic hair etc. to get the color and shape. At night we sometimes fish for tarpon on a full moon. The search here is equally as important as the skills. Once the proper flats are found we then fish that



Ian Batchelor's 28ft. Bertram *After You*

location, picked for its wind direction, etc. We can be reached on channel 16, caribbeanflyfishing@surfbvi.com, www.caribflyfishing.com or by calling 284-494-4794."

Wanting to take up the sport I asked if there was anything I could do to prepare. Noting my age and knowing my inclinations, Shepherd smiled and told me to build up my muscles by taking a wine bottle in my fishing hand and moving my body as if I were actually casting - 10 am to 2pm movements - this gives you the rhythm. Although learning to cast usually only takes a couple of hours, it takes months, even years, to learn a true technique. Having watched Brad Pitt, in *The River Runs Through It*, at least ten times I got the gist of what he was saying. The book, written by Norman Maclean a fly fisherman from Montana, told the story of a man and his passion. The movie introduced millions, of now devoted advocates, to the sport. Reading the literature he gave me, I went to bed that night sated - dreaming of azure waters brimming with fish just waiting to nip at my perfect cast.



Albula vulpes

Department in making fishing a viable industry within the BVI. They are helping the industry to grow by training employees as guides. Already the hotel industry on Tortola has prospered with enthusiasts who travel the world in search of primo flats for fishing.

Clay Hall and Katie Oliver, writers for *Fly Fishing in Salt Waters*, tell of the merits of fishing on flats in the

Batchelor has been fly fishing for 25 years. He started in his home territory on the BowBow River, Alberta, Canada, and has now fished throughout Europe - Scotland, Ireland, Germany, France and Yugoslavia, Canada and the USA. His favorite locale is Canada for trout fishing with the BVI for salt water fly fishing. Shepherd also grew up in Calvary and was first taken fishing by his father. However, he learned the art