

# Fishing

By Paul Quinnett



A few years back I was on a leisurely business trip to Daytona Beach, Florida. Rather than fly between cities, I rented a car and drove from Daytona to Marietta, Georgia. I headed north hugging the coast, laying over in St. Augustine for a night, then turned inland to follow the blue highways toward Atlanta. I did not intend to go fishing en route to St. Augustine, but then my patience failed.

I don't know about you, but the stability of my sometimes precarious mental balance is greatly endangered – not by the big things like the terrorist alert rising to extreme – but by, say, being stopped dead in traffic and peering ahead to miles upon miles of cars stalled before me on an interstate. Such sights tip me over. So, stalled behind roughly 5,000 other fools, I inched forward until I reached an off ramp and made good my escape.

God has always been kind to me. Not two blocks from the interstate stood a little coastal village and, side by side, a tavern and a fishing pier. Tap beer, public fishing, rods to rent, bait \$1, and all you need is love. Would that all life's decisions were such slam dunks.

I fished for a couple of hours while the traffic thinned out,

*What better place than historic Charleston to renew old blood ties, and while you're at it, to catch a fish you've always wanted to catch.*



ART CARTER

*Beautiful in hand, bruisers to fight, redfish have triggered a flourishing sportfishery in the coastal waters around Charleston.*

though I didn't hook anything. But a fish I've always wanted to catch was running, and other anglers were hauling them up with some regularity. Drum. Reds. Spot-tails. An inshore bruiser and hot item on the Eastern seaboard, they go by several names. I watched as one small Asian woman hooked what must have been a 15-pounder, and it was not altogether clear who was going to win the pulling contest. I vowed then to come back and catch one.

Fast forward, oh, say, five years.

A group we call The Cousins (about ten strong) tries to meet up every year and renew old blood ties and bonds. Someone takes the lead and picks a spot most of us have not visited.

We fly or drive in, then spend a week visiting, catching up, sharing good times and fishing. Last year found us all at Edisto Island, South Carolina. For me, it was time to go get one of those redfish.

On this trip, the three fishers were Cousin Steve, my older brother John and me. We all handle a fly rod

reasonably well and figured that, with a proper guide we could set some hooks in these fish. After a few phone calls for some help and direction, Legare Leland offered to host us for an outing on Charleston Bay. Up well before dawn, we struck out from Edisto and drove north, winding beneath the thick arms of huge live oaks that line the narrow roads in these parts of the Deep South.

To quote from Pat Conroy's novel, *The Great Santini*, as the Meecham family heads into the coastal flats to a new home, "Stands of palmetto and live oaks met the car as the road ribboned out straight in its last sprint to the barrier islands. But the most

all around us. Feeding. The guide's job is to put you on fish, not catch them for you.

I've always held that Steve has some rare neurological disorder that severely slows his striking reflexes. For Steve, in the time between hit and hook-set, a person with only one hand could knit a sweater. My diagnosis is too many Martinis. His brain seems fine, but his reaction time is a bit tragic. After about the fourth missed strike, I inquired if he would like instruction.

"Nope, I'll figure these guys out in a minute."

"I'm over 60 and minutes count, pal," I said.

John observed, "When they pull, try pulling back . . . this week."

"But Steve didn't, and another red dropped the fly and scooted away. Finally, I said, "Time!" — or something so I could show him how it was done.

I made a few fair casts, but was

foiled on every attempt. I never felt a hit, but may have had one. I did manage, however, to spook several pods and singles until, looking up and down the green swath of sawgrass, it was clear I had routed all the fish in that section of Charleston Bay to parts above the Mason-Dixon line.


I tried to study Legare's eyes through his wrap-around sunglasses.

Nothing. He looked fine and brave and strong and confident, but I guessed he was thinking, "Who are these old farts, anyway?"

As the tide dropped, Legare suggested we move to the passes where the fish would be back-peddling toward deeper water while trying to ambush smaller fish. We wound through streams and channels and set up on likely spots, and gave it what we had, but for the fly and rod, hope died.

"I never stand on pride or tradition when fish can be caught," said John. "Pass me one

of those spinning rods." If there was a fly fishing purist in the boat, it was hard to find him, and in five minutes we were all spin-casting. In five more minutes we'd landed the first red. Fishing picked up, the morning wound down, and we ended with lunch and a lovely boat ride back to the dock.

As I recall with perfect clarity and because I would never dream to lie about such things, and because I have out-fished John and Steve on just about every occasion over the past fifty years, I hereby reaffirm in print, as I declared then, that I did, in fact, catch the biggest red of the day. This memory is punctuated and made all the more poignant by my recall of a sharp pain in my lower back as some old fool poked me with a push-pole. 

## If You Want To Go

To book an in-shore fishing trip in the Charleston area, contact Legare Leland at Head Shaker Charters, 843-810-0495.