

A Navy Base in Stuart?

Jim Griffiths, Nautical Mile

From advertising inquires, to visitors asking about local attractions, our office gets a lot of phone calls. One memorable ring was this June from David Blackwell at DOA Lures that I'll never forget because it led to me fishing the world famous jetties in Stuart. This is a pair of man-made rock piles at the mouth of the Atlantic Ocean well known for big Snook, and something that I've wanted to do ever since I watch a TV show with Mark Sosin who filmed underwater while fishing.

DOA Fishing Lures, founded in 1989, has an annual Writer's Festival in Jensen Beach. The founder and owner of DOA Lures does this yearly as a form of thanks for promotion and support throughout the year. Except for me, this was quite an "A-List" invitation. I enjoyed the company of famous writers like Bob Stearns and Vic Dunaway, just to name a couple. 62 writers from all over the country were invited and DOA hired 22 local fishing guides to get us all out on the water for 2 days of local fishing.

The resort we stayed at was "River Palm Cottages" in Jensen Beach. This resort has cottages in a "U" shape with a pool in the middle and was right on the Indian River. We had our own private beach, pier, bar, pool.... you name it! When I checked-in and got my room key, there was a canvas shoulder bag (everyone got one) with "DOA" printed on it laying on my bed. This bag had dozens of lures that DOA makes plus some new unreleased prototype products. The bags also included other various items such as a bottle of SmartShield Sunblock, several popular fishing publications, 3-4 hats, an embroidered event shirt, etc. My favorite bag item was a mini flashlight made by Streamlight that was thinner than a pencil and less than an inch long, yet can light up a whole room for more than 10 hours.

Day 1 was a meet-n-greet day that ended with a Captain's meeting and dinner on the bay. The next morning at 5, we met on the dock to pick up our catered lunches and board the boats for a day of fishing. I was with Captain Duber (Doober) Winters and fishing with us was Bob Stearns, "Editor at Large" for Saltwater Sportsman. Capt. Duber is a full time guide and runs a 22' Pathfinder in the Stuart area. He asked what we wanted to do and my answer was to catch one Snook at the Jetties, and the rest of the day was up to him and Mr. Stearns.

As the sun made its way up, we headed 6 miles south down the Indian River to the famous Stuart Jetty. There are actually 2 jetties, one north and one south, about 100 yards apart. Capt. Duber idled the boat to get us within about 100' of the south jetty (a 100' long rock pile) and turned on the trolling motor to work the edges. As we eased up to the jetty, I asked Capt. Duber if there was a Navy Base nearby because I just saw a few Los Angeles Class Nuclear Submarines go by. He wasn't quite sure what I meant, but soon answered that they were not subs, they were Snook!

I was casting a DOA plastic jerk bait, pearl with a firetail, my "go-to" bait. My third cast stuck on a rock, or at least I thought. That rock was very unique, unlike any rock I ever got stuck on. It smoked 15-20 yards of 10# braided line off of my reel before I even realized that it was a fish. This fish spit the hook, but soon after that, I was hooked up again. This time I could hear dogs barking on the beach from the high-pitch sound coming from my reel. I stood helplessly on deck next to the engine, heavily worried about my drag washers burning up when Bob tapped me on the shoulder and said "It's a bit like standing on a tall building with a 10# rod, tying your line to a safe and kicking it off".

Boy was he right, but the fish had no trees to tangle in like we do around here, so it's mostly a matter of gaining on the fish before his jaw grinds through the leader. On its first turn, I muscled it towards me, got him facing us and coming in fast. A couple more minutes of fight and Capt. Duber had a grip on his jaw. Hearing Duber say "I've got him" was perfect! There I was, fishing the Stuart jetty with a Snook pushing 20 pounds beside the boat waiting for us to take her picture.

"It's a bit like standing on a tall building with 10# test, tying your line to a safe & kicking it off"

Bob Stearns

It was a nice catch but considered an average fish for that area. She was under 20 pounds, but it was a personal thrill to catch it there at the jetty, and especially on 10# tackle. Catching Snook over 30 pounds in the Stuart area is not an everyday occurrence, but it happens often. They also have 4 different species in their waters, the "Common Snook" is the most caught and the largest. The "Fat Snook" seldom reaches 24" long and has a squared body with much smaller scales. The "Tarpon Snook" also has a squared body but larger scales and a mouth turned up like a Tarpon. The "Swordspine Snook" is rare and the smallest species. According to FWC, the current Florida Record for a Common Snook as of 2007 is 44 pounds and was caught in Ft. Myers by Robert D. Cosmo in April, 1984.

Except for the local hospitals, the city of Stuart maintains a 4-story height restriction on construction, they're well known nationally as a Sailfish Capitol (one was caught while I was there in June 4 miles from shore) and Redfish are rarely caught in that part of Florida. There are very few tournaments, yet the locals often have friendly competitions to see who can catch all 4 species of snook in one day. The area is also known statewide for having monster Trout. One of the guides I had dinner with caught a 12 pound Seatrout a few days prior.

We left the jetty and spent the rest of the day fishing and sightseeing. Capt. Duber showed me the home of the Miami Dolphins owner, (which I at first thought was a plane hangar with nice windows) and we did catch a few more nice Snook that day. We returned to River Palm around 2, swam in the pool and everyone told tales of their day under the tiki hut on our beach. (east coast guys lie about fish as much as we do) Our July deadline for the Nautical Mile was creeping up on me, so I headed back to Bokeelia while the others enjoyed another day on the water in beautiful Stuart Florida. This was the second time I had the privilege of meeting Capt. Mark Nichols, founder of DOA Lures. About a month prior I attended their annual Kayak Fishing Tournament to meet the staff and take pictures. The first time I met Capt. Mark, he was barefoot doing a public speech..... I knew we'd get along just fine.

About a week after the Writer's Festival, I contacted DOA and invited myself to fish with Capt. Mark. He mumbled something about twisting his arm and we agreed on going the next morning. I left Bokeelia at 3am and we hit the water in Stuart at sunrise. It was 1 day after the June moon so we didn't have any great expectations as far as fishing, but I mostly wanted to spend some time with Capt. Nichols on the water and learn about Stuart and the history of his company. His character reminds me a lot of the late Dean-O Hicks, a man well respected and involved in his marine community.

We launched Mark's classic 1981 17' Dolphin at one of the many public facilities and started our day. With only 200' to open water, we both complained about how most people that were not already at work got to sit in traffic as we fished on a weekday morning. Capt. Mark asked if I had any questions about DOA products. I did have one, it was about a particular lure he makes called a "TerrorEyz".



Sunrise at the Jetty

I had tried this jig-type plastic lure several times without success and I wanted him to show me how it was designed to work. He idled to a channel marker to see what the tide was doing, then looked over at me with an inviting look in his eyes, smiled and said "You're in luck". Mark tied a small rootbeer colored TerrorEyz on my rod and we proceeded to the Roosevelt Bridge. (The Roosevelt Bridge in Stuart is to Snook what Bert's Bar is to our charter captains)

Traditionally, lures that are known fish catchers usually have a certain technique that makes them the most productive, the DOA TerrorEyz

is no different. The one I was using

was fairly small. I was really hoping to catch something bigger, but who was I to question the founder of DOA? After checking the current again, Capt. Mark pointed at

a spot near the Roosevelt Bridge, instructed me to cast and let my lure drop to the bottom (about 25') give it 2 hard twitches, let it fall for 2 seconds and repeat that till the lure works its way back to the boat. After the first twitch, my rod doubled over and there I was stuck on another rock that ripped 20 yards of line out within 2-3 seconds. Mark laughed

"Jim, those are not submarines, they're Snook!"

Capt. Duber



Capt. Mark at the Roosevelt Bridge

A special thank you to Capt. Mark Nichols and the staff at DOA Lures



and said that it must have been a catfish, "They get pretty big around here". That comment really freaked me out because I caught a giant SailCat on my second cast. Mark then pointed towards another area under the bridge for me to cast at. I twitched my TerrorEyz as I was told, and there I was with 10# test line tied to another safe falling from a tall building. Capt. Mark, with hundreds of big Snook under his belt, knew exactly how to maneuver the boat so the fish would run out into deep water instead of cutting me off under the bridge (with age comes wisdom). A few minutes later, there I was with another trophy Snook from the waters of Stuart Florida. Capt. Mark posed for a quick picture and back under the bridge he went. (I'd tell you how we knew that it was male, but it would probably embarrass Mark).

Like all DOA products, the TerrorEyz was designed to be fished a specific way, and when fished properly it can catch most local species of fish. We even caught Sheepshead on it that day. Each lure at DOA is repeatedly tested and a proven before it goes into production. The TerrorEyz is for deeper water with strong currents, and has also been recently tested under our Sanibel Causeway with great success.

I learned how to use several old and new DOA products, got another good picture and the rest of the day was spent touring the inlets and talking about local history and the fishing community. We did spot some Tarpon that just moved in, and I witnessed a 30+ pound Jack Cravelle corner and eat a full-size mullet. We eventually got chased in by a storm, but it was a productive and memorable trip.

The fishing guides I talked with knew Pine Island Sound better than me, they come here on days off for a different fishing environment. If you're interested in fishing a different area, contact Capt. Duber (Doober) and book yourself a trip in Stuart. (772) 631-1023
www.greenwatercharters.com

River Palm can be contacted at:
www.riverpalmcottages.com (800) 305-0511

A special thanks to Capt. Mark Nichols, River Palm Cottages and the staff at DOA for their hospitality and a June to remember.

Jim Griffiths
Nautical Mile



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