



Larry Johnston

Back To School

Fish tales hook eager anglers

You have seen the nature programs. A gentle stream cuts through ragged mountains. A fly fisherman gracefully whips his rod overhead in search of hidden trout. Such is the dream of many Americans. Even a recent episode of "Boston Legal" featured fly-fishing as a part of the plot.

I was hooked. I would try a fly-fishing class. I met my chief angler when he gave a presentation at the Lagoon House in Palm Bay.

Capt. Gary Giles apparently has been fishing since he was in diapers. He has the face of an outdoorsman. His cheeks are red. Sunglasses have left a white raccoon shadow around his eyes.

He speaks with an infectious enthusiasm for fishing. "There are monsters waiting out there for you," he began.

Most of us didn't need to hear anymore. We were ready to stand up and march out the door.

Fly-fishing is the gentle art of going to the right location and quietly placing an appealing bait within inches of a hungry fish.

Capt. Gary is a master of finding the right location. He has hundreds of haunts. Many of them do not even require using a boat. He projected aerial photographs on a screen and led us from main roadways to dead-end streets. From there he showed us paths and clearings to his secret locations.

He suggested a few items to bring along. Having plenty of drinking water was an obvious one.

The fire ant spray was not. When our kindly captain stakes out where he wants to stand and fish, he takes no prisoners and the local residents must retreat for a time. He claimed some of the ants in the woods are so big you could roast them on a spit.

Capt. Gary also brings a bicycle. This is not your common fishing tool. However, unless you want to spend the day hiking, it is the fastest transportation to remote locations. I wondered if I should mount little rod holders on my Fearless Flyer.

Once established as to location, Capt. Gary could not resist a few fish stories. What am I saying? He is a continuous fish story. He claims 1,000 tarpon in 15 years of fishing. He once caught so many tarpon in one day he had to stop because his arm was tired from reeling. The audience's eyes grew big. I tried to detect whether our captain's nose was growing, too.

Next he demonstrated some lures and baits. He ties many of his own. They were beautiful. He dangled them in front of us. They appeared appetizing and we wanted to try one. They say you can tell the difference between a fisherman and a fish: If you hold a lure in front of it and it drools, it is a fisherman.

Capt. Gary left the audience's appetite whetted and they loved it. If you want to learn the sport from a true professional, contact Gary at 258-0041.

Next week, I will share my fly-fishing experience under Gary's watchful eye. I will challenge the proposition that the definition of fishing is: "A jerk at one end of a line waiting for a jerk at the other."

Perhaps I should rephrase that. Johnston is a retired juvenile court judge. E-mail LarryJohnstonFL@aol.com

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Fly-fishing's not exactly a luxury cruise

Last week, we learned about my classroom introduction to fly-fishing under the careful tutelage of Capt. Gary Giles, a professional fishing instructor.

Today, we find out how I did actually holding a rod.

"Class starts at 6, sharp," my instructor said.

"Tonight?" I asked hopefully.

"No, tomorrow morning," came the reply.

What is it about early mornings and fishermen? It still is dark at 6 a.m. How are the fish supposed to see a bait if I can't even see my hands?

Not one to waste sleep, I set my alarm for 5:50 a.m. I placed my clothes, a bagel and flashlight by my bed, firefighter style. I put my toothbrush in my car.

Capt. Gary and an advanced student, Jerry Davis, were waiting in the boat for me. An electric motor whizzed us away from the dock, and my companions began casting frantically in all direc-



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tions. Fishermen are like blindfolded kids in a candy store. They know the candy is out there but don't know where. I decided to stay out of the way until the stars disappeared.

This was not a luxury cruise. My idea of a fishing charter involves coffee and some fruit and danish on a dinette table. The best I could hope for on this excursion was to nibble on bait. Does shrimp make good sushi?

Swish, swish, splat. The rods sailed overhead and then the bait landed on the surface of the water. I sat in a mist of spray.

I learned we were looking for the tarpon to come to the surface to feed. The bait, known as the

"fly," is carefully tossed close to the fish's mouth. The degree of closeness separates the amateurs from the professionals.

The sky began to turn gray, and I could see. I looked around and saw about 5,000 small bait fish on top of the water. What are the odds a tarpon would find the one meal with the hook in it?

The answer is good. A hit! Jerry reeled and chattered. Fishermen sure are perky when the fish are biting. I silently hoped we would have snagged a Starbuck's first.

They landed their quarry. Capt. Gary teaches the catch-and-release philosophy, so my two anglers said a gallant farewell to their adversary.

By the time they caught three fish, I had the courage to try. The rod seemed about 30 feet long in my hands. We dodged my lure as I awkwardly whipped it around. There was no telling where the dangerous hooks would land next. Gary demonstrated how to

hold my hands and let the tip of the rod go from the 10 o'clock to 1 o'clock position while swinging the bait overhead.

My first cast landed at my feet. My second cast never left the tip of the rod because the line was tangled around my hands and backlashed around the reel. Gary has seen these errors a hundred times. He has a cure for every one.

Finally, I was placing the lure at a respectable distance away. My aim still needed help. This sport is like golf in its addictive quest to get slightly better each day.

With each cast, I saw a mouth slowly coming up after my lure but never quite reaching it in time. I kept trying.

Finally, Gary said, "Larry, you might want to cast off in another direction before you hook that turtle." Oops. ■

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