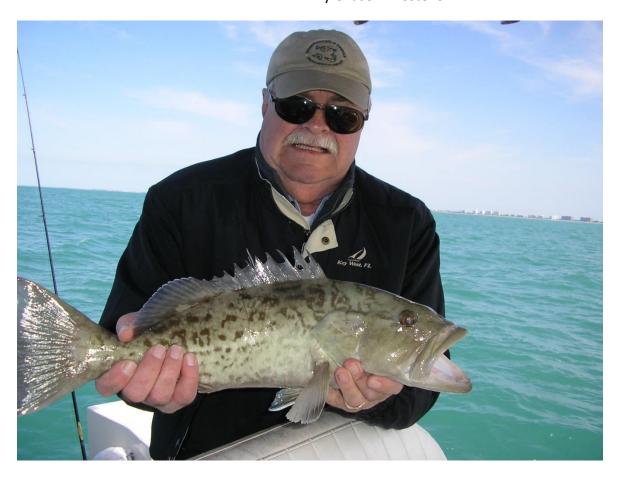
"OCEAN SPOONPLUGGING"

By Chase Klinesteker



Grouper

On February 21, 2012 while on vacation in Sarasota Florida, Bob Dykhouse and I took a chartered fishing trip out in the Gulf with Captain Jack Ryan. We left from CBs' Marina on Siesta Key and traveled 7 miles to get out to the Gulf of Mexico. "Captain Jack" is no ordinary charterboat captain. He has been a Spoonplugger for many years, a past member of "Spoonpluggers of America", and is devoted to Buck Perrys' guidelines for fishing success, mentioning them in many of his fishing seminars. Much of his outstanding reputation has been gathered from trolling 500s' and 400s' in shallow Sarasota Bay and catching many gamefish species with them. He knows the bay structure very well. This time, however, I requested we go fishing in the Gulf. Although we only fished 2 structures on this 6 hour charter, he has hundreds of them on his GPS. I asked him how he got that many, and he explained that in the past, he and his son went scuba diving in the Gulf out of Sarasota every weekend for about 15 years to map and pinpoint every one. Wow, if that isn't the dedication of a real Spoonplugger, nothing is!

The **day started** with a fairly good breeze blowing off the land, sunny skies, and a 20 degrees temperature drop from the day before (to 51 degrees), a classic cold front situation. The first spot we stopped at was a **breakline and bottom change structure in 31 feet of water, about 2½ miles out**. If the wave height

increased as we fished, we planned to return to Sarasota Bay and fish the shallows. Captain Jacks' boat is a 25 foot Mako, fiberglass, open, center console rig with a 250 horse Yamaha. It is fast and seaworthy, but the open Gulf can be treacherous, so we played it cautiously. After pinpointing the structure, we anchored and fished live bait (3-5 inch shrimp) under the boat with medium weight spinning outfits, circle hooks, and 1/4 to ½ ounce slip sinkers. It is the law that circle hooks be used on live bait when fishing the Gulf. (Before some of you Spoonpluggers begin wondering, just re-read Buck Perrys' material on live bait and cold fronts in the "Green Book"!) The line used was 15 pound braid and a section of 25 pound mono leader. This allowed for exciting action, but could have been heftier for some of the fish we hooked but never saw. The action was pretty well continuous, and, as the wind and waves subsided, Captain Jack recommended that we go another 5 ½ miles out to a second spot. This structure was in 42 feet of water and consisted of man-made reef balls and dumped remains of old culverts. He uses a floating marker to pinpoint the structure, then goes upwind and drops anchor, releasing enough rope to accurately position the boat over the reef for fishing. I remember being taught to do this for a casting position by Terry O'Malley several years ago. Within seconds we were again getting bites and landing fish! In the vast expanse of the Gulf, this would not be possible without a GPS, Captain Jacks' Spoonplugging knowledge, and his extensive structure research.

As for the results, we landed around 60 fish, with 4 or 5 times as many "bites" as fish landed. The most incredible part was that we landed 14 species of saltwater fish that morning, a real educational experience! They included Spanish Mackeral, King Mackeral, Key West Grunt, Southern Flounder, Sheepshead, Lizzardfish, Spottail Pinfish, Red Grouper, Gag Grouper, Sting Ray, Porgy, Puffer, Sand Perch, and Triggerfish. The largest fish landed was a sting ray about 3 feet long, although we all lost large fish that we could not bring up. The stingray was released masterfully by Captain Jack using a wire hook remover designed for circlehooks without even touching the fish (you don't want to tail-land these guys!). We kept mostly **sheepshead and flounder for some filets** and returned the rest to the water. A couple of nice Groupers were caught, but their season was closed. The puffers were the most interesting. They would gulp in air to become 2-3 times their normal size, but, like a balloon, when thrown back, would release all that air before they hit the water! I enjoy casting bladebaits, and asked if it was OK if I use some that I had brought along. Captain Jack was open to that and set me up with an appropriate spinning rod. A couple of years ago, I had tried them in the Gulf with little results when bait was producing. This time both bait and bladebaits produced. They almost were tagged as a "Lizzardfish lure" (a skinny, ugly, inedible bottomfish) until they started catching other species also by increasing the speed and keeping them off the bottom more. Just another reminder to always check your depths and speeds!

This turned out to be **one of the most enjoyable and educational saltwater fishing trips I have ever had**. Captain Jack returned us to CBs' Marina and fileted out the fish we kept to take home. I mentioned that **he might want to look into using the larger Spoonplugs on the troll out in the ocean**. They can be very effective tools to get better speed and depth control for larger fish in deeper water. Also, **using them with 3-way rigs can bring other lures deeper**. Besides that, **the new large JB-1 and JB-2 lures would be ideal for better sized fish and extreme depths that are found in the ocean. Captain Jack sounded interested** in these concepts and will look into them and report back later. If you are ever in the Sarasota, Florida area and are looking for a great charter experience, **contact him** at 941-922-7672 or check on his website at: **seadogfishing.com**.