

World Cup Invitational La Ventana

October 16th 2006

Where are the fish, where are the fish, WHERE ARE THE FISH!!!!!!!????

What a difference between running a meet, and being a competitor. Its 1 week before the 1st International World Cup, and the fish reports for the area is not that promising.

I've got Rob Torelli, Ian Puckeridge, and Andy Ruddick from Australia coming, along with 3 Brazilians and a host of some of the top American divers to try their hand at bluewater Baja style. This is the first meet of this style, cash prize, and most of these divers are my friends, who have agreed to shell out hard earned bucks to dive for 5 days in the waters around La Ventana Baja.

This area is home to many world records for big game fish, and this time of year is as good a bet as any to hit it right on timing.

I can focus on all the logistics in organizing this meet, travel dates, rules, all the things that make a successful meet, but the only thing I can't change is the fish!

I chose the date based on the moon phase, and I'm hoping it pays off.

Here's what Brian has to say about the day before the event, doing some scouting and hunting for dinner fish.

After arriving in La Ventana on Saturday night, it quickly became apparent that our pelagic quarry was few and far between. A number of divers, including the Aussies, had been scouting for days and all lamented the lack of fish.

So I set out with Peter Marley and Scott Leavitt on Sunday to scout and shoot reef fish. Visibility was terrific on La Reyna and La Reynita with many nice pargo and cabrilla!

I was using a sporasub 130 with a Carl Kapanski breakaway that David Sipperly had loaned me. I chose this gun as I was suffering cracked ribs from an earlier fishing misadventure, and for continuous reloading and reef shooting- it worked great.

While trying to line up a good cabrilla on La Reyna, a school of 8 to 10 skipjack swam over me in about 60ft. I could have shot one that I judged to be about 12-14lbs. Tournament rules barred the shooting of pelagics while scouting.

After an hour or two of spearing pargo and snapper on La Reynita, a wall of 15-25lb yellowfin swam within range. Twenty minutes later while beginning my

ascent from a 40ft hang, a nice Wahoo allowed me to keep a bead on him all the way back to the surface. Mentioning these encounters to my panga mates, Peter Marley allowed he'd also seen a Wahoo.

Returning to La Ventana that evening, I chose to tell the group about the fish I had seen, but not where I had seen them. I divulged this to generate some enthusiasm as most divers were bumming out over the lack of fish.

October 23rd 2006, 7am, day 1 of the meet.

Oh yeah. The only other thing I can't change is the weather! Hurricane Paul is strengthening to force 3 and heading for cabo. Skies are overcast, and seas are flat, probably because of the major pressure drop prior to the storm.

First day of the meet finds east coast diver Brian Jesserun in first place with his first Wahoo ever, after shooting and loosing two fish, he connects with a smoking 85lb beast that took his gear for a ride at La Reynita amidst a good crowd of competitors.

Not long after that, I'm on the surface filming 3 Wahoo swimming thru the group, when I look up and see a diver headed directly for them. I think to myself, "Excellent! This guy is going to stick these fish, and I'm right on the spot with the video!"

Well, the diver was Brian, and he already had his Wahoo onboard for the day, so he couldn't shoot.

But, Ian Puckeridge did see them, and put a good shot into one, let him run off for a bit, and finished him with a second shot, and into the panga for his first fish on the board.

There were two billfish sighted, several other misses and lost fish at the spot that day, but in the end, it was Brian with his monster Wahoo and a Toro put him in 1st place. Ian with a 57 lb Wahoo and a milkfish in second place, and a few other divers with milkfish and Toro making the minimum weight to place on the board.

Here's Brian's account of that first day.

The first morning found red floats littering the sea around La Reynita. Not discouraged, Scott Leavitt and I joined the fray. I again chose the sporasub 130 as I could have taken all 3 pelagics the day before and in consideration of my ribs. Fifteen minutes into the tournament, 2 Wahoo come in range, I miss! Choosing not to get upset I calmly reload while hearing another diver shouting and swearing. Another miss! Ten minutes later, 4 Wahoo. I belly shot a big one. It breaks free after about 30 seconds. Oh well. I reload, relax, and hope is rewarded! Five minutes later, 5 Wahoo cruising 1ft below the surface and one big one. I focus on the small ones ignoring the one I want. This brings him closer,...closer... now! I knew I had a good hold as he screams under me taking the 75ft line and float for a ride. I notice Mike Maguire and said, "Got one!" He

said, "Congratulations" having witnessed the encounter. Fifteen minutes later the panga driver struggles my first Wahoo onto the boat.

This was the highlight of my fishing experience for the tournament. But overall, the real highlight was getting to know the Aussies, the Brazilians, and reconnecting with the other divers I've met throughout the years.

Lets back up a bit.

November 2005. I was in Lapaz with my wife and another couple, when I talked with Andrea about doing a bluewater meet in 2006.

He was all for this, and so the planning started. We agreed on the LaVentana area, and he started working on the logistics, not an easy feat in Mexico.

Meanwhile, I started with the promotion.

I contacted probably 75 divers from all over the world, and put out a feeler as to who might be interested in attending a world cup meet, with a different format.

I was surprised how few replies I got, probably 5 or 6 out of 75 emails, but I continued to work with those that were interested.

Mike McGuire was invaluable with his ideas and support for the development of this meet, and always there to bounce ideas off of, or come up with his own.

Needless to say, it began to take shape, with a handful of northern CA divers signing on, James Hardsy, a newcomer to bluewater was extremely eager to enter, along with Bonnie Row, Ralph Tieman, Larry Schuldt, Glenn McGuire, Paul Verveniotis, and so the core was born.

It built slowly with 2 Brazilians, Silvio Emilio de Oliveira, and Max Grandin Junior signing on from Brazil.

The development of the rules, format, accommodations, boats, etc took mucho time to put together, but I knew if we were going to do this, it had to be done right.

My plan was to promote and host a World Cup event, and as such, there was to be no grey areas in the rules, or implementation of them.

South of the border, Andrea had posed the idea of hosting the meet at 2 private estates, located within 200yds of each other directly on the beach and LaVentana.

We would house the competitors there, bring in a staff for cooking and cleaning, and serve all meals out of the main house with beautiful terraces overlooking Isla Cerralvo, and Pt Arena. We enlisted a local pangero, Fabio, to bring 10 more of his fellow captains together to be our boats and captains.

The idea being that by supporting the local pangeros, and bringing some from Las Arenas, La Ventana, and El Sargento, we would hopefully spread some good will, and work to promote good feelings toward spearos, that's not always there for us.

The format for the meet was, 5 days of diving, with 2 on, 1 off, 2 on. The center day being a day to rest, diver, take some bottom fish for the freezer at home, or whatever you wished.

The rules clearly stated NO bottom fish during the meet.

You were allowed to take 1 fish per species per day, with a total of 5 fish per day the max.

You could only submit 5 fish for the entire meet, and were allowed to take only 1 billfish for the entire time.

We eventually changed the 1 fish per species to 2 fish per species after seeing how many fish and species were available at meet time, we felt it better to give the competitors an opportunity to shoot another of each species, instead of maybe bagging only 1 fish for the 4 days.

The pangas were lottery draw every day, and the captains were given an incentive of 300\$ US for the top producing captain, as well as 300\$ for the most favorite captain.

We eventually listed 22 divers, with Ian Puckeridge, Rob Torelli, Andy Ruddock, and Doc Lopez as team Australia. Doc being the token Yankee onboard.

Silvio and Max were joined by Francisco Loffredi from the 2001 bluewater meet to make up team Brazil.

USA was represented by Glenn and Mike McGuire, Paul Verveniotis, James Hardey, Dave Edlunds, Bonnie Row, Peter Marley, Cliff Cook, Wade Binley, Brian Jesserun, Scot Leavitt, Bernie Finnerty, Ralph Tieman, Larry Schuldt, and Gregory Yakovlev.

Back to the game.

October 23rd, 4:30pm.

After the weigh in, the sky cut loose. Torrential rains, forecast for the hurricane to hit sometime tomorrow did not bode well for the next days meet. We weathered it out, and had a fine meal prepared by Judy and Anna, after the claiming of the fish and a couple of beers, it was off to bed for preparation for the second day.

October 24th, 5:30am.

Andrea showed up and we talked about the updated forecast, which showed the storm to hit sometime around 2pm, and discussed holding a short day, with competitors staying on the south end of the island, or roca Montana.

By 7am, the pangeros were out front, all the divers on the beach, and we're doing the pow wow with Fabio, who is pointing out the white clouds above the mountains due south of us.

"That's it, right there" he said. "That's the storm, and when it hits, we maybe able to get you guys back to the beach, but we'll never be able to pull our boats after it arrives"

So, with that forecast, we cancelled the second day, and everyone headed off to stow their gear and consider options for a hurricane day.

I'd like to add that the reason I choose the date I did was for the moon phase, but also due to the fact that the 15th of October is generally accepted as the end of the hurricane season. So, this storm was highly unusual for this late in the season.

7 or 8 of the divers opted to head for LaPaz to stay the night, and the rest of us hunkered down to weather the approaching storm.

Mike McGuire was staying with his family down the beach at Palapas Ventana, a small resort built on an arroyo above the beach. This place is owned by a gringo named Tim Hatler, that I had the pleasure of riding with during the tournament.

The walls of this arroyo were in bad shape after the pounding they took in the 2 storms over the summer, and with the advent of this one approaching, he was in high speed to sand bag his house and property as well as he could to attempt to stop even more erosion.

Not to mention that the main water line for the entire town was precariously hanging below the culvert and the road, and would most assuredly blow out when the rains came.

Tim had welcomed us all to his restaurant and bar to weather the storm with movies, internet, and beer.

Mike came up with the idea of helping this guy try and save his place, and when we all showed up there, after sandbagging his drive and house, some flow diversion work, we all focused on the water line.

Paul Verveniotis, AKA Phineus J Whoopy, took over with ideas on how to shore up the line, and the next 3 hours were spent moving about 5 yds of rock by hand, wheelbarrows of sand, and makeshift props for support of the line.

It was fine example of the generosity of all these divers, people who had payed money to come and dive, compete, and generally take they're minds off of work, pitching in with heavy manual labor to help this community.

I got to say, some of the locals who drove by when this was going on, were perplexed. You could see them thinking "what the hell they doing that for? It's only going to get torn out in the next storm." I'm sure some folks appreciated our efforts besides Tim.

We spent the remainder of the day hanging out, waiting for the storm to hit.

Glenn and I did a little open water post hurricane swim. Tossing and turning in the brown water along the beach, trying to not run into any debris coming out of the arroyos.

That night found us back at the house, enjoying another fine dinner and second guessing the arrival of the storm.

The latest forecast was for it to hit Los Barriles at 2am, with lots of rain and wind.

October 25th, 5:30am.

Well, you guessed it. Andrea arrived with the latest update, seems it had turned south in the night, and was no longer a threat. A fair sized south swell was up,

but other than that, we looked good to hit the water again, so we raised the pangeros, and lined a day of fun diving.

We wound up having to pitch our gear out of the boat and swim to the beach when we returned due to the south swell, but everyone had a fine day bombing the reefs, and searching for pelagics.

October 26th, 5:30am.

Game on.

Everyone was in high spirits, with fairly flat seas, and a light breeze blowing, we were excited to get out to the high spots and see what the storm had blown in. Most of the crew headed for La Reynita where the majority of the fish had been taken, and were not let down as the Wahoo showed up right off the bat.

Seems Mike had some trouble holding on to one, and someone else was doing the acupuncture job on them as well until Ralph finally got a good holding shot in one and landed a nice Wahoo for his first ever.

I filmed him landing the fish, and then the narrative on the boat with him and Larry trading off on the story, then back in the water.

I saw a float going up current, what looked like a fish on, so I gave chase. It turned out to be Ian, and he didn't have a fish on, he was just swimming up current.

I slid up next to him and watched him dive, throwing his flasher up current and watching to see if anything came in on it.

James had come up to see what was going on, and he was hanging off to our right about 30ft or so. I took the opportunity to swim over and fill him in on the appropriate ground rules on flashers and what not. I told him if a fish came in on Ian's flasher, do not dive on it as it was Ian's fish. No sooner had the words left my mouth than I turned to look and here's a 60lb Wahoo sailing right up to his flasher.

I hit record on the camera, and James says "like that?"

Yeah.

Ian leveled out, waited for the shot, and off to the movies. I followed watching him play the fish, never putting too much resistance on it. He picked up a second shot gun from the pangero, worked the fish up, and killed it with a shot to the head.

All the time I'm thinking "This is perfect. I got the whole thing on video!"

I jump in the boat, get some story from Ian, and everyone's happy.

The rest of the day played out well, with some other folks getting shots and missing fish. Dave Edlunds and James went up into shallow water to look for jacks and roosterfish, and low and behold, Dave puts a bullet into not one but two roosters, having them wrap the line around a rock and rip off.

Glenn is down the beach with Cliff, and he makes a clean shot on a rooster. The fish streaks down the beach, turns and comes back, then runs right up on the beach! Glenn scrambles into shallow water, tackles the fish and lands it sitting on the beach! Oh well, whatever it takes!

The day ends with Wade and Gregory coming in from Roca Montana with a nice 40lb dorado taken by Wade.

Ian is now in the lead with 140pts, followed by Brian with 104, and Wade at 40pts.

The north winds made up in the afternoon, and were forecast to blow harder the next day, but everyone headed to bed early in anticipation of last licks for the final day of comp.

October 27th 5:30am.

The north winds been howling all night, and in the morning it looks more like a dirty left surf break than the beach we had been staging on for the last 4 days. The pangeros showed about 6:30 by truck, and given the conditions and forecast, the last day was cancelled due to high winds and seas. All the divers took this graciously, although I know everyone was geared up for a last stand on making it in the money.

This gave us an opportunity to have the awards in daylight, so we set up the terrace with chairs, put the trophy and prizes above, and the ocean behind, with palm trees swaying in the north winds, and started the party! Ian Puckeridge took home 2000\$ US for first place, along with a gift certificate for Palapas Ventana, a shot glass from Palapas Ventana which was filled with tequila, and a beautiful plaque for the champion.

Brian Jesserun took second and was awarded with a beautiful Rob Allan 130cm Carbon Tuna gun, and a gift certificate from the Palapas also.

Wade Binley, Mr. Dorado, took third, and scored a beautiful Daryl Wong rear handle 120c, and a gift certificate from the Palapas.

There were other prizes reaching down to 8th place, also a pair of Edge blades by 20Fathoms, signed by all the competitors that went into a raffle for anyone who didn't win a prize. Silvio Emilio won the blades, and I asked if he was going to use them, or hang them on the wall. He replied, " take a picture, frame it, and hang that on the wall. Use the blades"! I couldn't agree more!

All in all I feel it went well for a first time, and I want to thank all the competitors for they're understanding with the weather, and willingness to take a chance on a first time event.

I also want to extend a big THANK YOU to all the sponsors who graciously donated the excellent prizes.

Rob Allan and Florida Freedivers for the Carbon tuna gun, complete with inflatable float, hard float with trail line and bungee, and a gun bag.

Daryl Wong, Rick Bettua and Aimrite for his bitchin rear handle gun and inflatable float.

Tim Hatler at Palapas Ventana for they're gift certificates, hats and shirts.

Andrea Tomba and Desea for all his efforts and hard work in bringing the idea to fruition. He was the first guy on the beach in the morning, and the last one at night, and did not miss a beat to arrange what ever was necessary for the comfort and pleasure of the competitors.

20Fathoms.

An interesting point:

There were virtually no Wahoo around before the low pressure from the storm arrived.

I could guess that the fish sense the pressure drop, and start to move around, but it would be only speculation. There was a slight drop in water temp leading up to the event, that may have played a part in the fish arrival also. I'm just grateful they showed when they did!

Also, Rob and Ian found a dead oarfish up in the shallows, and we were able to take some footage of this extremely rare deepwater fish. It was probably 18-20ft long.

Keep your eyes peeled. The flyer/invitation for next year's World Bluewater Invitational will be out soon, and it promises to be bigger and better than ever! Please contact me if you are interested in the 2007 meet.

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