

Bonefishing The Beach at Casuarina Point, Abaco Bahamas

Document Date: 1/26/2014

Instructions for fishing the beach in front of Abaco Palms, Calypso, Camp David, and Kokomo (owned by Kathy and Gary Heacock).

Welcome! Many people come here to fly fish for the elusive gray ghost (better known as the Bonefish). However, at certain times of the year, especially in the winter, when we (from up north) want a getaway, these bonefish can be more difficult to catch than in May. This tutorial is written for anglers who are fishing the surf/beach in the winter using a light tackle casting rod with bait. *While these instructions are targeted to anglers with a fair amount of fishing knowledge, less experienced anglers with no idea of what some of this stuff is can follow the same basic diagram for a regular spinning rod using basic monofilament line.*

The tackle shops in Abaco typically carry only large offshore type fishing rods and reels, and except for a couple of basic rods at the Ace Hardware store in Marsh Harbor, they don't sell light tackle equipment OR terminal tackle. And what is available tends to be very expensive--so bringing your own rods, lines, hardware, hooks, etc. is the best policy.

The best setup for surf fishing the beach is light tackle spinning rods that break down for transport on an airplane. Here is what I use:

The Rod

I use a 3-piece breakdown rod called the Tsunami Classic Series 7'6" long, TSCS 7 6 3 MF (Medium Fast), with line capacity of 8 to 15-lb test. Bring 2 rods in case one gets damaged. These and similar rods are only about \$75.00 and can be found on line or at specific tackle shops. The beauty of a breakdown rod is that you can fit it into your checked luggage bag along with all of your terminal tackle and other necessities. I find that the LL BEAN Duffle Bag type luggage on wheels with a handle is great for transporting fishing gear. And if you also fly fish, you can attach your fly rod case to the outside of the bag all in one piece of checked luggage.

The Reel, Line, and Terminal Tackle

A good spinning reel is a Shimano Stradic 4000 capable of holding at least 200 yards of line for the long bonefish runs. I prefer 10-lb braid Fireline filled to within 1/8" of the reel arbor. The green color is a good choice. [There is a lot of wind in Casuarina Point and I have found the Power-Pro braid seems to get more wind knots than Fireline, but the braid choice is yours].



I use braided line versus monofilament because the diameter of the braid is smaller than the mono at the equivalent weight using 10-pound test so you can fit a lot more line on the reel arbor. Plus, the braid does not have memory problems that can cause problems.

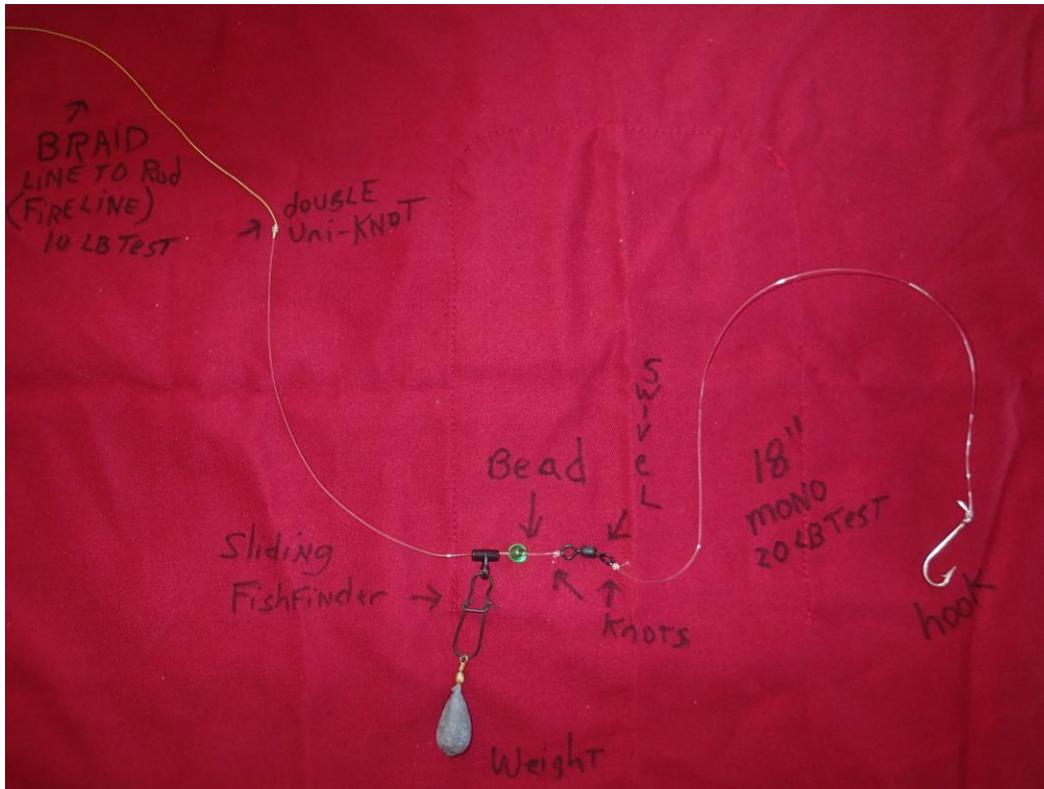
Tied to the end of the Fireline is a piece of 20-lb monofilament leader: a good choice is Trilene Big Game mono. These bonefish do not appear to be leader shy so there's no need to use fluorocarbon with the added expense. I tie a piece of 2-foot mono to the braid using a double uni knot and the instructions are on the back of the Fireline box. This is a strong knot.

To the monofilament line I add in this order: A sliding black fishfinder rig that has a weight holder, an aqua blue bead to match the color of the water (the bead is



there to prevent the weight from wearing down your knot) and then a uni-knot tied to a black two-way swivel. To the other end of the swivel I tie on an 18" piece of 20-lb test mono line with another uni-knot to the swivel and then a sharp #4 hook on the end of the mono.

Beach Fishing Rig in Full Detail.



Weights and Swivels

You will need to put a weight on the sliding fishfinder rig. Determining the weight size requires experimentation on your own with the tides/current/wind. You want to keep a fairly taut line out in the water but some slack is OK too. Weight sizes $\frac{3}{4}$ ounce to 2 ounces work well. It is best practice to use the weights with the gold swivel on top. The gold swivel weights fit better on the fishfinder rig and



work better than straight lead weights. Use the smaller size fishfinder rigs for less tangle on the ocean floor.



Drag

Do not set the drag on your reel too tight or too loose; the first run a bonefish makes will be fast and furious so you want to let him speed away and a too tight drag may interrupt that flight.

Sand Spikes

Sand spikes for holding your rods in the beach sand need not be large, but must be dug into the sand pretty deeply, because when you least expect it, a bonefish will grab your bait and your rod with it and you may have to go swimming if your sand spikes are not pounded deep into the sand!



The Bait

Do not use a baitholder hook, it will be too difficult to catch and release the bonefish. On the hook you will put some conch bait, cut up into little pennant style pieces. Shrimp works better, but we could find no local live shrimp and conch works fine. You can catch your own conch or go to Long's Seafood store in Marsh Harbour to purchase fresh.



Do not leave the conch in the refrigerator or it will get too mushy. Freeze what you won't be using each day. To thaw, fill the bag of frozen conch with warm water, wait 5 minutes, cut about 20 pieces up and refreeze the rest of the conch.

Fresher always seems to work better. Keep your bait on top of ice in a Tupperware container in a cooler with a rag and close the cooler or the flies will get to it. You will want to check your bait every 10 to 15 minutes after not getting a bite and change the bait.



Tides

Kathy will supply you with a tide chart with your packet of information from the rentals. This is a very worthy piece of paper that you need to pay attention to! We have caught most of our bonefish on the rising tide at the beach to near high tide, when the bonefish cruise the shallows and use the little trough right off the beach to look for bait. Sometimes they will swim right past your ankles. When the tide is farther out, about 2 to 3 hours before high tide, cast far, when it's nearly high tide, cast closer in. The time of day doesn't seem to matter a whole bunch, but in the winter when the water has had a chance to warm throughout the day, and the higher tides fall in the later afternoon, this is generally a good bet.

At low tide, it's always fun to attach your rod to a kayak using some bungee cords, pack a little lunch, and take off to the big sand bar to the east side of the beach. Paddle out there, pull your kayak onto the sandbar and walk out to the farthest point. Over the east side of the bar is a deep trench that is a channel for fish to cruise around in and you can stand on the sand and cast into the deeper channel. Here you can find mutton snapper, some reef fish like triggerfish that cruise through, and other types of good eating fish! This same rod/rig setup that you use on the beach is good for this channel fishing too! There are also bonefish travelling around that area at low tide as well.

Weather/Wind

I have not determined that the wind going against the tide or with the tide makes a difference here at the beach surf, I have caught fish at both times. However, if there is a big wind front carrying seagrass onto the beach or a cold snap, it takes about 2 days for the water to return to normal where you can catch bonefish again. I do not yet have a handle on best water temps for catching bonefish, but warmer is better.

Fishing (and Catching)

This setup may sound complicated, but it really works. We have caught over 25 bonefish in the past 3 years of being there for a week's vacation. You probably won't see anyone else fishing the beach, but it is a fun pastime when you bring your cooler, your chairs, a little table, some cold drinks, and throw your line out. Also, the local Bahamians will probably laugh at your setup because they never use weights with conch. However most of them fish from boats where you don't need weight.



The weight is used on the surf beach to allow you to cast out into the water and to keep the tide from washing your bait right back up on the beach.

In the three years that I have fished Casuarina, I have always caught a bonefish within the first hour of being there, a few steps from the rental house, so that is exciting. Remember to dig the sandspike rodholders into the sand deep! You can downsize the hook and catch smaller bonefish, but if you do hook a bigger bonefish, they can straighten out a little hook unless it is very sturdy, but you will probably catch more bonefish with a smaller hook. I notice that the smaller bonefish will run towards you at the beach so you need to reel fast to keep the line from going slack. The bigger fish seem to want to take off to sea, so let them go while they're taking line and then start reeling them in when they let up a little. A bigger bonefish will make several runs. Try to guide them away from the boat moorings to avoid getting hung up.

Cast into clear areas of water, steer away from the weed patches. Although I have caught most of my bigger bonefish **in between** two weed patches as they use that for cover from predators to cruise around in. If you get stuck in a weed patch, wiggle it out, check your bait and recast. A good spot is to the east side of the Blue Calypso house and to the right side of the moored Carolina skiff, (the only boat

with a steering wheel). In between the two weed patches there is a good spot where we pulled 7 bonefish out in one day.

Sometimes, when the fish are lazy, it pays to reel your bait slowly in once you cast it far out in the water. One revolution of the reel handle in about 10 seconds moves the bait just enough that a bonefish can pounce on it. Sometimes when you reel closer into the beach, little fish will start playing with your bait and tugging on it but can't get their mouth around the hook. So, although it can be frustrating, don't give up. Sometimes a bonefish will cruise through, see the little fish on the bait which triggers a competitive fury in the bonefish who will then snap up on the bait, giving you a run for the money.

The Payoff!



Any questions please feel free to contact me at: lisadoricchi@yahoo.com

Good Luck!