

Bimini's

By Frank Haiko

BLAZING BOTTOM

It couldn't get much better than this.

As we set up just before dark, it seemed that our anchor had only just hit bottom and instantly we were hooked up to our first mutton snapper of the night. A beauty of a fish just over 12 pounds. This was just the start of an action packed evening. By the end of the trip we had caught our limit of tasty muttons and released quite a few more. A total of 34 with the largest being about 17 pounds is not a bad catch in anybody's book. We also tallied 3 grouper and a handful of nice flag yellowtails to spice up the catch. This, just like many others was a typical night of Caribbean reef fishing in the middle of April.

During the spring, hard fighting muttons school up on the edge of the drop-off just outside Bimini, all the way up to Great Isaac's. The fish usually congregate in 60 to 100 feet of water and always around structure. Reefs, ledges, wrecks, and drop offs all make for prime mutton habitat. Mutton snapper with their great eating qualities are hard fighters, and sometimes tend to be leader shy. Certain tactics and techniques must be employed to ensure success.

Tackle should consist of a beefy conventional outfit spooled with quality 20 to 40 lb mono. When anchored on the edge off Bimini the current can be rather strong. You will often need more weight than you think when fishing this depth of water. It is not uncommon to have to need 20 or more ounces of lead to keep your bait in the prime area, the bottom! Make sure to have plenty of sinkers and terminal tackle handy. If the current is not too severe, go with the lightest weight possible that will get the job done. As a tip, remember that muttons aren't exactly fond of a noisy sinker bouncing on the reef so try and keep your lead put. As far as your leader, 15 to 20 feet long is the standard and utilizing fluorocarbon will help with leader shy fish

while definitely being the preferred material during daylight hours, due to it's low visibility. For hooks, more and more anglers are turning to circle hooks. Remember though, with circle hooks you do not need to actually set the hook. Just leave the rod in the holder and when you notice a couple of thumps, reel like crazy before the mutton takes you back home into the jagged edges of the reef.

The preferred rig when bottom fishing in Bimini territory is actually very simple to tie. You will need 2 barrel swivels, an 18 to 24 inch section of mono (lighter than the leader material) a 10 to 20 oz bank sinker, a 20-foot section of leader material and a circle hook. First, slide one of the barrel swivels onto the main before tying the second one on. The first swivel should slide freely up and down the main line while coming to rest on the second swivel. Next, tie the 18 to 24 inch section of leader material to the first swivel (the one that slides) and then make a 1 to 2 inch loop in the other end of the

section. This is where you attach your sinker. Tie your 15 to 20' leader to the second swivel and then finish your rig by tying on your hook. I like to use a loop knot to attach the circle hook. This lets the hook turn freely in the fish's mouth and helps prevent pulled hooks. With the first swivel having the ability to slide up & down the main line you can actually adjust the distance from your hardware that your bait drifts in the current.



Capt. Steve Mosher with a deep drop grouper pulled from 1300 ft.

The Bahamas

By the end of the trip we had caught our limit of tasty muttuns & released quite a few more. A total of 34 with the largest being about 17 lbs.—not a bad catch in anybody's book.



If conditions allow and you are drift fishing rather than anchored you can simply use a standard sliding sinker rig with 2 to 6 oz of lead. Regardless of which rig you use a long leader is still recommended.

As for bait, live pilchards or plug ballyhoo work best. You can also butterfly a grunt or any other small reef fish that you might catch. When fishing during the spawn it seems like you could put down almost anything fishy and they will eat it.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with fishing Bimini waters, finding productive structure for muttuns, grouper and other bottom dwellers is not that difficult. The edge right in front of Bimini near what is known as Bimini Barge is a great starting point. This area is fished by many with peak activity occurring during a full moon period on a nice weekend. It is not uncommon to see up to 40 boats fishing this area. Use care when anchoring here and be aware of the neighbors you will be fishing next to all night. As a good rule of thumb, use plenty of scope. If seclusion is more up your alley, there are numerous pieces of productive structure all the way up to Great Isaacs. The key to success is finding the structure itself, whether it be a natural reef or a local wreck. Muttuns, big ones in particular, will usually be in the

sand surrounding the structure so do not be under the assumption that you need to be right on top of it.

In Bimini waters muttuns usually average 7 to 15 pounds. In our region, southeast Florida, muttuns aren't as numerous as throughout the Caribbean although trophy fish can range all the way up to the low twenties and with enough effort, putting together a solid catch on a regular basis is quite possible. Locally, anywhere along our coast you can find productive real estate. We are fortunate enough to have a great artificial reef program, and most often you can locate a wreck that has not had a lot of fishing pressure convenient to whatever port you fish from.

Another very exciting alternative while in Bimini is the deep dropping technique. Fishing baits on the bottom in depths ranging from 500 to 1500 foot is quite the rush. It takes an

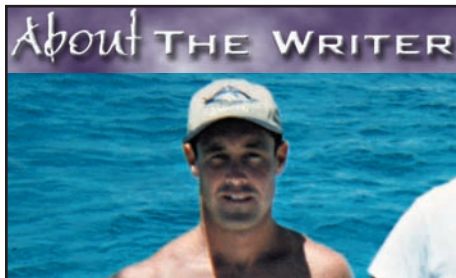
absolutely magnificent creature to withstand the water pressure at such depths and a variety of incredibly tasty snapper and grouper inhabit the nooks and crannies in these extremely deep waters. With very little fishing pressure and the lack of light penetrating so far down, action during both the night and daytime hours can be incredible. For the most part multiple hook rigs baited with squid or chunk baits are deployed on outfits equipped with electric reels. Plenty of lead (were not talking ounces, were talking pounds) ensures that the bait remains directly on the bottom. It's often difficult to notice a bite with so much line out so be sure to check your baits at regular intervals. You will often be thrilled at what's waiting on the other end.

Only keep the fish you will eat and be sure to abide by all local rules & regulations for size and bag limits. All these species are excellent table fair and all very hard fighters.

The Bahamas

Experiencing Bimini's Blazing Bottom is a great time for the die-hard angler as well as the entire family. An exotic weekend getaway for south Florida boaters starts by making the crossing on a Friday and staying the weekend. You can troll for dolphin, wahoo and tuna, or deep drop for snapper and grouper during the day while tangling with big fat muttuns at night. Is that a dream come true or what?

Room rates and dockage are both very affordable while in Bimini although I highly recommend you bring along plenty of bait, tackle, fuel, accessories, and most importantly, spare parts.



About THE WRITER
Frank Haiko was born and raised in Broward County Florida. He has fished his entire life both locally and in the Bahamas. Only twelve when he took his first trip to Bimini he has been hooked ever since. Frank currently works at the Complete Angler Tackle shop in Pompano Beach and can be reached at 954-815-7553.



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Now that's a bunch of BIG tasty muttuns!

