

FISHING FOR YOUR DINNER

BILL SCEPANSKY HEADS TO THE OUTER BANKS OF NORTH CAROLINA FOR A MUCH-NEEDED VACATION WITH HIS FAMILY AND SOME CLOSE FRIENDS.

BEYOND CATCHING UP ON SOME R&R AND SPENDING QUALITY TIME WITH THE FAMILY, HE WAS DETERMINED TO CATCH A SHARK!

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KERI PAMPUCH

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Clockwise from top left: Not exactly a shark! Oh well, catching croakers was just as much fun.



Our beverage of choice was Carolina Blonde, which is brewed by Foothills Brewing Company in Winston-Salem.



Shark steaks on the barbie! The American-made Avet Reel.



Getting ready to land the big one! Nuggets of shark meat will win over even the most finicky of kids.



CATCHING A SHARK IS NO EASY TASK. IT REQUIRES BIG BAIT AND BIG TACKLE! SURE, YOU CAN CATCH ONE BY A FLUKE CHANCE ON REGULAR, LIGHT-SURF TACKLE, BUT YOUR CHANCES OF PULLING IN A 5-TO-9-FOOTER WEIGHING SEVERAL HUNDRED POUNDS WITH DOZENS OF RAZOR-SHARP TEETH, KNIFE-LIKE

fins and sandpaper skin, are slim to none without breaking your rod in half or spooling your line. So, I needed to be prepared. Everything I read and everyone I talked to said I would need a heavy-action rod, a reel with tons of line capacity, super-strong braided line, a fighting harness and steel leaders. Basically, I needed to be ready for one serious battle.

Well, I was!

I wanted a rod that would truly be able to handle an “8 n bait” scenario. This means a rod that can rocket out at least a 5-to-8 oz. weight plus half of a fish or so as bait, for at least 75 to 100 yards (hopefully farther) – not something that any old surf rod will do well, or at all. I researched different brands and configurations, and it became pretty obvious that shark tackle was fairly specialized, at least for the type of surf fishing that I was going to be doing.

After much searching, I found quite a score. Dream Weaver Custom Rods in Elizabethtown! (209 N. Market St. 717-215-6945. Dreamweaverrods.com.) I explained my needs to Barry Weaver, the owner and skilled rod artisan, and a month later, he had exactly what I needed for the job. My custom rod is a thing of beauty! Its elegantly simple design is a study in “less is more.” Twelve-plus-feet of ultra-light, ultra-strong Rainshadow blank-based power! Fuji Guides and Reel Seat, plus an easy-to-clean, less-to-mar-or-scratch finish and only a few key whips of color, including an awesome name plaque and shark decal, keep it strong yet streamlined and ready for battle.

NOW, FOR THE REEL. Originally, I was looking for a Penn reel, since this is what I remember seeing my grandfather have, plus I knew they were an American-made icon in the fishing industry. I was disappointed to learn that only a handful of their reels were being manufactured in the U.S. I then discovered Avet Reels, which received an incredible endorsement on tx.sharkfishing.com, as well as on other well-traveled saltwater-related sites.

Avet Reels was started by two California doctors who love fishing and wanted to produce reels of unsurpassed strength, beauty and longevity. The reels are made with precision-machined, marine-grade aluminum with fewer moving pieces for a simpler, more durable and corrosion-resistant design. In a matter of 10 years, Avet has become one of the leading reel manufacturers in the world and one of the only companies that can still truly say, “Made in the USA.”

My Avet HXW casting reel is a beast in ballet slippers! I could pull in a whale with this thing. Yet, it looks like a flawless work of art. It has two speeds: one for huge torque during the main fight and another for quick line recovery. Over 20 lbs. of drag, coupled with tons of line capacity for those thousand-foot runs and a handle

that just feels right for the fight, make this one heck of a weapon! Check out the website or call and ask for Scott Throop, who is very knowledgeable and very helpful: 818-576-6895 or avetreels.net.

JUST AS IMPORTANT as the rod and reel is the choice of line and terminal tackle. I'm talking about the weights, the hooks, the wire leader, swivels, clasps, etc. Use the wrong hook and you can do serious damage to the sharks that you would otherwise release. Use the wrong line and the shark will simply barrel roll and abrade it off with its skin (that's if the teeth don't bite through it first). Too many connections or knots that aren't right for the application – see ya expensive hook, line and sinker!

This is where someone who does this type of thing every day is critical. So, we headed to Cabela's in Hamburg. With a huge selection and a tremendously knowledgeable, generous saltwater pro by the name of Mike Melley, we were steered in the right direction (and actually spent less money in doing so). Mike told us that all of the contraptions and special connections in the world don't catch fish, especially when it comes to powerful sharks. Here again, less is more.

Mike from Susquehanna Bait and Tackle in Lancaster provided some cool mackerel lures – sharks love mackerel! Once in North Carolina, TW's Tackle in Corolla pointed us in the direction of the most productive holes on the beach.

SO, ARMED TO THE TEETH with the right tackle, fresh bait and perfect conditions, we go fishing and wham – no shark! However, it wasn't a total wash. The four of us did catch fish. And, just as the old adage goes, we agreed that a bad day of fishing is way better than the best day of work.

Luckily, North Carolina has no shortage of seafood markets, so I bought some shark steaks and proceeded as planned. For this month, you will find three delicious, shark-inspired recipes. The first is a New England-style shark and seafood chowder, where the mildly flavored, succulent shark meat mixes well with the creaminess of the soup and the flavors provided by the bacon, crabs and clams.

Then, for the kiddies – shark fingers! If your kids love chicken fingers, they will love these. If ever there was a meat that “tastes like chicken,” shark might be it. A light, crisp coating, some lemon and roasted-pepper tartar sauce make this a dish fit for the entire family.

Lastly, we have shark steaks dipped in clarified butter, grilled and served with local baby potatoes, grilled sweet onions and a salsa made from local cantaloupes, avocados, red onions and mint. This will have you tasting shark the way it should be served!



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A FISHERMAN'S PARADISE

Fall is an opportune time to visit the Outer Banks. The crowds are gone, the weather is gorgeous, the water is warm, rental rates are very affordable and best of all, fishing is fantastic.

FISHING OPTIONS

Brackish Fishing: The brackish water of the sounds is teeming with bass; September and October are prime time.

Fly Fishing: Again, the sounds and ponds provide opportunities to go after whatever is in season.

Surf and Pier Fishing:

One-hundred-plus miles of accessible beaches beckon, with Hatteras Point being the hot spot. Piers dot the islands from Kill Devil Hills to Hatteras. Can't-miss months are October, November, March and April.

Headboat Fishing: The Crystal Dawn (Nags Head) and Miss Hatteras (Hatteras Village) offer such options as sound, offshore and Gulf Stream fishing. Capacity is approximately 50, which makes the cost for a day on the water very affordable (approximately \$110 per person).

Charter Fishing: Oregon Inlet Fishing Center, Oden's Dock and Hatteras Harbor Marina (as well as others) are home to large fleets of charter boats. The allure is billfish – OBX is touted as the “Billfish Capital of the World” – with the height of the season being August/September. Another draw is yellowfin tuna, which is caught year-round. Wreck fishing – the shoals off the coast are called the “Graveyard of the Atlantic” for a reason – is yet another attraction. Of course, the big lure is the Gulf Stream, with the cost for a boat out of Oregon Inlet being in the neighborhood of \$1,750 (split four to six ways) and slightly lower out of the docks in Hatteras.

YOU NEED A LICENSE!

North Carolina instituted a licensing requirement in 2007. Non-residents (16 and older) can buy a 10-day Coastal Recreational Fishing License for \$10. A year-round license is priced at \$30. Visit ncwildlife.org for details.

WHAT'S BITING?

September: White marlin, blue marlin, sailfish, tuna, grouper, snapper, Spanish mackerel, king mackerel, spot, bluefish, speckled trout, sea mullet, channel bass, shrimp and striped bass.

October: King mackerel, tuna, bluefish, snapper, grouper, channel bass, spot, speckled trout, flounder, oysters, shrimp and striped bass.

November: King mackerel, tuna, bluefish, snapper, grouper, speckled trout, flounder, oysters, striped bass, sea mullet and clams.

December: Tuna, bluefish, flounder, sea bass, speckled trout, clams, oysters, sea trout, snapper, grouper and striped bass.

COTTAGE RENTALS

After Labor Day, rental rates dip. Plus, most companies are agreeable to renting for less than a week. The selection includes condos, traditional cottages and luxurious oceanfront homes. Outerbanks.org is a good starting place to find a realty company. If you're heading for Hatteras Island, check out Outer Beaches Realty – owner Alex Risser is an E-town native and a trustee at Elizabethtown College (outerbeaches.com).



Clockwise from top left: New England-style seafood and shark chowder.



Still waiting...I was hoping one of Corolla's famous horses would stroll by, but no such luck.

Thank goodness for seafood markets! Our shark-steak dinner was saved!

Sunrise and still no shark in sight!

