

FLY FISHERMAN

PRE-SEASON • 1979
Volume 10 • Number Two
January/February • Price \$1.50



*Casting for snook or small tarpon along a roadside canal in southern Florida.
Photos by the author.*

ALTHOUGH SALTWATER fly-rod-
ding in Florida is often practiced from
a boat of some type, it is entirely pos-
sible to fly-fish in the south Florida
area for snook, tarpon, ladyfish, red-
fish, black bass and jack crevalle
without using a boat. All you need is
a road map and an automobile to get
you there, and in some cases fishing
afoot is actually more productive
than fishing from a boat. The targets
are roadside ditches or canals that
connect with salt or brackish water,
especially if they are affected by the
rise and fall of the tides. Many of
these canals are so small and shallow
that a boat would scare the fish, yet
they can hold large snook and tarpon.

You'll find many of these canals in
the Miami and Homestead area, but
the best producer I know of has al-

Fly-Fishing Florida Afoot

CHICO FERNANDEZ

CHICO FERNANDEZ is a professional
fly tier and one of south Florida's top
fly casters. Miami is his home.

ways been the Tamiami Trail Canal
that follows U.S. 41 across the south-
ern part of Florida and through the
Everglades National Park. The area
to concentrate on is located between
the towns of Ochopee and Marco, in-
cluding the Everglades Canal that
runs along State Highway 29 and the
Marco Canal along State Highway
92. Both of these canals connect to
the Tamiami Trail Canal.

It is also possible to fish the Tami-
ami Trail Canal past State Highway
92, from Marco to Isles of Capri, pro-
vided the water level is very high.
Otherwise, leave that section alone
since it is normally too shallow to
hold fish.

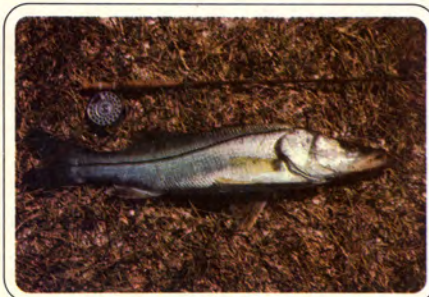
Looking on your road map you will
notice that U.S. 41 runs through the
city of Miami and that the Tamiami
Trail Canal runs all the way into the
southwest section of Miami. How-
ever, the water in this part of the trail
is too fresh for good snook and tar-

Retailer: Notice of display-
allowance plan is within last
four pages.



01

Fly Fisherman



A flock of birds in the everglades may signal the presence of baitfish. Directly above, a snook of this size on light tackle can be an exciting challenge.

pon fishing. You should find better fishing if you drive west on U.S. 41 for approximately one hour, or about 50 or 60 miles. The fishing usually improves right after you pass the town of Ochopee. Water salinity increases in this area because it is closer to the Gulf of Mexico, and many small feeder sloughs join the main canal.

Once you reach this area, you can drive slowly while looking for strikes against the opposite side of the canal. But don't depend entirely on signs of feeding fish. Birds—such as egrets,

blue herons and spoonbills—and sometimes even raccoons feeding along the shore are good signs that lots of baitfish are in the area, and the baitfish attract the gamefish.

At flood tide you are less likely to see signs of feeding activity. The baitfish have gone deep into the saw-grass sloughs, and the gamefish are spread out over a large area. But as the tide starts to recede, water from the saw grass and mangroves will drain into the main canal, washing baitfish with it. Snook, tarpon and other fish will slowly move back and forth in front of these sloughs waiting for the lower water level at which the baitfish will be forced out into the open. This is the time when you can see fish feeding along a section of shoreline that could extend from just a few feet in the immediate location of a slough to several hundred feet up and down the canal.

Wind is another factor that can affect the fishing. Since the Tamiami Trail Canal runs east and west, and you are casting from the south shore, a north wind helps move the water into the canal more rapidly than normal during a falling tide. Therefore, an early-morning or late-evening fall-

ing tide during a north wind can be a fly fisherman's dream.

In order to stay with feeding fish, you must move quickly and often. Let's suppose you have hit conditions just right and you manage to land a few fish near a slough full of baitfish and feeding gamefish. But now things have slowed considerably with only a pop here and there every few minutes. It's time to jump in the car and look for another spot with feeding gamefish.

Other times the canal will seem dead and not a single strike will show. In this case you'll have to blind-cast in the most likely area, moving on when you feel you have covered each area adequately. Other times you can see rolling tarpon moving along the canal—not feeding but just rolling and moving, rolling and moving. You get out of the car, run ahead of the school of fish and cast in front of them. If you hook up, by the time you have landed or lost your fish the school may be so far ahead that you'll have to get back in your car again to catch up with them. If you don't, you could easily find yourself several miles away from your car by the time it's all over.

So you see, no matter what the action is, you must be on the move all the time. In canal fishing this is just a way of life.

When fishing canals, be careful of passing cars. Even the smallest Volkswagen, if hooked by your backcast, will be impossible to stop even with the finest tackle. The odds are that you will break a rod, or at least lose an expensive fly line.

The different species of baitfish in each canal should be your guide to the type, size and color of fly to select. Also, the salinity of the water should have something to do with the fly you choose.

I normally use flies tied on 1/0, 2/0 and 3/0 hooks, measuring from three to six inches in length, when I fish in canals with mostly salt water. My most successful color combinations have been white and red, yellow and red, light blue, and my favorite—a hackle streamer in white, yellow and grizzly, which I call the Sea-ducer. Baitfish in these areas tend to be large, from three to six inches in length. These baitfish are usually mullet, large killifish and needlefish. Occasionally shrimp are also present.

On canals farther into the everglades area, with low salt content or none, I use flies tied on #4, #2 and #1 hooks. Overall pattern sizes run from one-half to three inches. Here the flies used are darker since the baitfish that live in the inland canals soon take on the darker color of the water. Dark brown, brown and grizzly, yellow and brown, black and similar dark shades are used more often. The usual baitfish here are small killifish and some small mullet.

If you like surface lures (they are some of my favorites), the time to use them is very early in the morning and at sundown. Poppers, sliders, and Muddler Minnows tied on 2/0 hooks in either yellow or dark brown are a good bet for tarpon or, if you are lucky, a very large snook.

As a general rule, canals closest to the salt are bordered by mangrove trees with their easily recognizable "propped-up" root formation. On the other hand, those canals closest to fresh water have mostly saw grass along their banks. But don't let this change of scenery throw you off; both are typical snook and tarpon habitats.

Remember that snook and tarpon are found in salt, brackish and fresh water. Whether you find jacks and

ladyfish, or black bass mixed with them will depend on the salinity of the water you are fishing.


Size of fish will vary, but most of the tarpon should run 3 to 10 pounds, with an occasional 20- or 25-pounder—I have seen some that might have been 60 or 70 pounds, but that is unusual. Snook may run one-half to 10 or 12 pounds in the winter, and in the summer (when it's 90-degree weather and the mosquitoes and horseflies are all over you) they can go 20 pounds and more. Jacks, ladyfish and black bass are small, and rarely will you see them over three pounds. The Volkswagens run about 2000 pounds, so keep your backcast away from them!

An ideal fly rod for this fishing may be bamboo, fiberglass or graphite, 8½ to 9½ feet, taking a #8, #9 or #10 line. When casting the smaller flies, a rod for a #6 or #7 line can be a lot of fun. Single-action reels with 100 yards of backing should be sufficient.

Leaders should be around 5 to 8 feet long with tippet size ranging from 8- to 15-pound test and with a shock tippet of 30- or 40-pound test. For almost all of my fishing I use floating weight-forward fly lines. Sometimes the canal will be 40 feet wide, at other times 100 feet wide, and I want to reach as many sloughs as I can.

I don't use a shooting-taper because of the accuracy that is sometimes needed for this type of fishing. I have come to prefer standard tapers in order to be able to carry 50 to 75 feet of line in the air to make an 80- to 90-foot cast, rather than carry 30 feet of shooting-taper and try to shoot 85 feet with accuracy. Incidentally, fly lines tend to wear out quickly in this kind of fishing because of the sand, mud, bushes, grass and other obstructions over which you must often lay your line to reach feeding fish. Other items to bring along with you are polaroid glasses, a hat and plenty of insect repellent, especially in the summer months.

While almost any day of the year could provide good fishing afoot in this area of Florida, the period from Thanksgiving through March is normally very good, and June and July are the months for big snook and tarpon.

Next time you get to Miami, take a drive west into the everglades with your fly rod in the car. You may be pleasantly rewarded. 



tools
for the craftsman

Adjustable Steel Planing Forms
Bamboo Rod Binder
Belding Corticelli Silk
American & Efid Binding Cord
URAC 185

Splicing and Scarfing Blocks
Nickel Silver Tubing
Pratt and Lambert Varnish
and many other fine items
required by the custom builder

Please direct your inquiry to:

**THE GREAT AMERICAN
ROD SHOP**

**New Berlin, Pa. 17855
[717] 966-1901**

catalog \$1.00 [refundable]
Hours by Appointment



SLATE RUN
by Earl C. Martz

A signed and numbered limited edition of 950 full color prints.

\$40.00 ea. \$ 90.00 framed
\$60.00 remarked 110.00 framed

All orders include \$2.50 for Shipping and Handling.
PA residence add 6% sales tax.
Send \$1.00 for color catalog.

Sportsman Specialties Co.
P.O. BOX 217 DEPT. A
YOUNGWOOD, PA 15697