

Scout 242 Abaco: Prepared for Action ► Long Range Kayaks?

# *Pacific Coast* SPORTFISHING

The Saltwater Magazine for America's West Coast and Mexico

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Jim Sammons

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November 2005



# Going Loose Range in

FEATURE AND PHOTOS BY JIM SAMMONS

# Long Kayaks

**H**ave you ever found yourself sitting on your kayak wondering what fishing was like a hundred years ago? The quantity and quality of the fish must have been incredible. Add to that the ability to go after these fish in a kayak, getting into areas even the smallest boat couldn't, using modern fishing equipment. Any serious angler would drool at the prospect.

Well, Mark Olson of Ocean Kayak and I, had the chance to do exactly that – well almost. We didn't actually step back in time but it sure felt like it. Owner John Klein and captain Brian



The crew of the *Q105* made everything easy for these kayak anglers. They loaded and unloaded the 'yaks and helped make this a trip to remember – and do again.

Sims of the *Qualifier 105*, an impressive long-range sportboat out of Point Loma Sportfishing, invited us to bring our kayaks along on one of their seven-day skiff trips to fish the Baja coast and offshore islands. They were interested in exploring the idea of adding kayaks to their existing skiff armada, giving their clients another



Using the Q105 as a mothership gave us easy access to live bait and a comfortable base to come "home" to. Anglers not in a skiff or kayak fished off the big boat for calicos and yellowtail.

option for fishing the islands. Mark and I were to be their very willing and happy, Guinea pigs.

Being an avid reader of most fishing magazines, I had certainly heard of and dreamed of fishing places like Cedros, Natividad, Benitos, and Chesters Rock, but honestly never thought I'd be able to fish them from my kayak. The next thing I knew, we were preparing to leave on a trip to do just that. The trip that we joined was a Barry Brightenburg/Fishtrap lure sponsored expedition to target calico bass, yellowtail, and other sportfish in these unspoiled areas.

Mark and I arrived at the landing early, rapt with anticipation of the upcoming adventure. Having never been on a trip longer than a day and a half, we were both wondering what it

would be like living in close quarters with other fisherman seven days and how we would mix our style of fishing with theirs. When we arrived at the landing, kayaks in tow, the looks we received from the other anglers on the trip were a mix of awe, curiosity and "look at these crazy S.O.B.s." Mark and I have both been in the kayak fishing industry for many years and are used to those reactions. We were just anxious to introduce our fishing brethren to our style of fishing, not as a way to replace boat fishing but as another weapon in the arsenal to reach the same objective, which is getting to pull on fish and having fun.

The premise of these trips is to give anglers the opportunity to fish in areas the big boats can't reach, which is

something that kayak anglers have appreciated for some time. Though skiff anglers are able to get in close, kayak anglers, with the ability to glide right over the dense kelp, can get in even deeper in areas where the fish have never seen a hook. Mark and I were eager to try it out in an area we had never seen.

After a 24-hour run, we reached our first fishing destination, Isla San Benito, a group of three small islands off the Baja coast. Fishing around islands, using the Q105 as the mother ship has two huge benefits, you can always find a spot to fish out of the wind and you have a large, comfortable vessel to get you there or to board if conditions get rough. The first day of fishing whet our appetite for things to come. Within



minutes of placing my first bait in the water, I landed a six-pound calico, a few minutes later I tossed a live bait up into some boiler rocks and hooked a fish that proved to be too big to stop before he broke me off in the kelp. This was on 20-pound test with my drag pegged. Over the next five days of fish-

ing, this would happen many more times, on even heavier gear. On the first day, I fished mostly live bait with great success, but from the next day on, the fish chewed plastics and iron with abandon so that's what we stuck with. Thankfully, Barry was very generous with his supply of swimbaits because we really went through them, and it would be hard to find a more productive lure while fishing the kelp and boiler rocks.

Each morning we'd awake in a different location, unsure of which of the many incredible spots we would target for the day. We would paddle into small coves that I'm sure no one had paddled into before, and pull a dozen calicos off single rocks. The fish we caught on this trip were not the variety we find off Southern California, we were catching fish with an average weight of five pounds and many in the six- to eight-pound range, with my largest, which was the largest on the trip, going one ounce shy of nine pounds. We had many instances of pulling in a four-pounder only to have a six-pounder

yank the lure out of the other fish's mouth, or fish chasing the plastic right out of the water as we were lifting it for the next cast only to crash into the side of the kayak.

One time, I was retrieving my lure and could see a pack of calicos following it, when out of the corner of my eye I saw in a flash – a large white seabass swooped in and grabbed the plastic. Once again, I was wrapped in the very thick kelp and broken off before I could fully comprehend what had happened. One of our other mornings was spent being entertained by a feeding frenzy of calicos the likes of which I had never seen. Imagine an area the size of a football field with calicos five pounds and larger crashing the surface and flying out of the water hitting anything you put in the water. We caught fish on half of a plastic tail – some even caught fish on a bare leadhead. I've been fortunate enough to fish in many locations and this trip offered some of the best fishing I've ever experienced.

Suffering from severe cases of bass thumb (which took several weeks to

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	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
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Striped Marlin	•	•	•									
Pacific Sailfish												
Swordfish	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Mahi Mahi												
Yellowfin Tuna	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Wahoo												
Roosterfish												
Shark	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Groupers	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
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heal), we headed off the beach at Cedros looking for some bigger prey. They too were more than willing to cooperate. Within an hour or so, I landed five yellowtail weighing up to 28 pounds. Mark put a few on his kayak as well, all while trolling surface iron. We were seeing schools of breezing fish in the hundreds, and had the sun not begun to set I am sure we could of landed many more.

Before I discovered kayak fishing, I spent many days fishing the rail of the local sportboats. I know how hard the captains and crews of these boats work, but that doesn't come close to what we saw from the crew of the *Q105*. The professionalism and the "what can I do to make your trip better" attitude of these guys was incredible. Even in the face of dealing with something new like a couple of kayakers and all of their gear, there was never a hesitation to help. If anything, we felt as if we were in the way as they would hardly let us lift kayaks or do a thing to help. They were generally ready, with our gear in

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Fishing from the kayaks put anglers up close and personal with quality calicos like this. Though live bait was available, artificials like Fishtrap swimbaits (provided by trip sponsor Barry Brightenburg) were very effective.

the water before we were ready to go.

On these trips, you will fish hard. If you aren't fishing from the kayak or skiff, you're fishing on the big boat. Many yellows were landed from the big boat with the biggest of the trip going 49 pounds. With this type of fishing, you will build quite an appetite, which the boat's chef is happy to keep under control. This is certainly not your half-day sportboat fare of grilled burgers; you'll be fed like a king, probably more than you should be. A typical days itinerary goes something like this, breakfast, fish, snack, fish, lunch, fish, snack, fish, dinner, desert, sleep, get up and do it again. Even with all-day paddling and skipping most of the snacks, I still managed to gain weight on the trip.

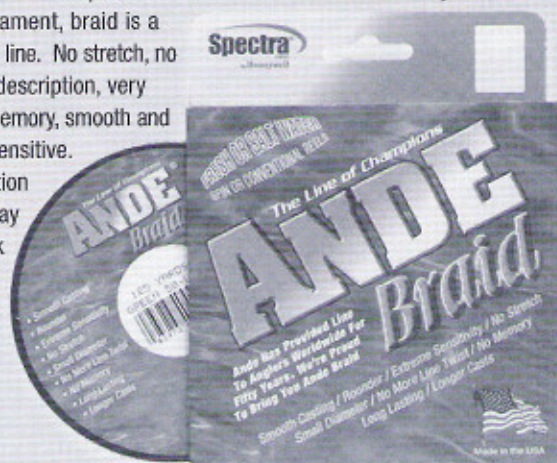
The ethic among the captain, crew and anglers on the trip was one of catch and release of all calico bass. This attitude should ensure a great fishery for years to come. I only wish the same would happen along our local coast so we could once again see fishing just like the good old days.

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If you plan to join one of these trips in the future here are a few lessons I learned that might help you.

■ **Fish spectra** – These fish were not line shy and were more than happy to pull you into the kelp, with the spectra you may just get them out of the weeds before they break you off. Many of the guys on the trip were fishing straight spectra with great success. (Also see the article by Bob Hoose on page 40).

■ **Fish heavy line** – These fish seemed to pull harder than the local fish and you really need that extra pulling power when you're fishing calicos and are hit by something much larger – or meaner.

■ **Use good gear** – When we first got on the boat, I saw the racks were full of gold, mostly Shimano Trinidads. When a fish is running towards the sharp rocks, you'll really appreciate the pulling power you will get from these kinds of reels.

■ **Bring many plastics and heads** – You'll go through a bunch of them. Using Super Glue to repair them will help but still count on losing a bunch.

■ **Don't forget the iron** – Just about everything will eat them. Megabaits worked great for the deeper jigging and of course, the surface irons are a staple in any tackle box and are the go-to setup for the yellows.

■ **Bring your VHF radio** – You'll want to stay in contact with the big boat and the skiffs.

■ **Flex Wrap** – Saves a lot of agony.

■ **Wear good paddling clothes** – You may be south but the water is cold, good paddling clothing will make a huge difference in your comfort.

■ **Listen and learn from the crew and other passengers** – Even in a group this small you will find a wealth of knowledge.

■ **Tip the crew** – They deserve it.

For any fisherman these trips are incredible, for calico bass enthusiasts, this is the trip of a lifetime.

If you're interested in joining one of these incredible kayak fishing adventures aboard the *Qualifier 105*, contact Jim Sammons of La Jolla Kayak Fishing at 619-461-7172 or [Kayak4Fish.com](http://Kayak4Fish.com), or call the *Qualifier 105* office at 619-223-2786 or visit them online at [Qualifier105.com](http://Qualifier105.com) to book your trip.

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