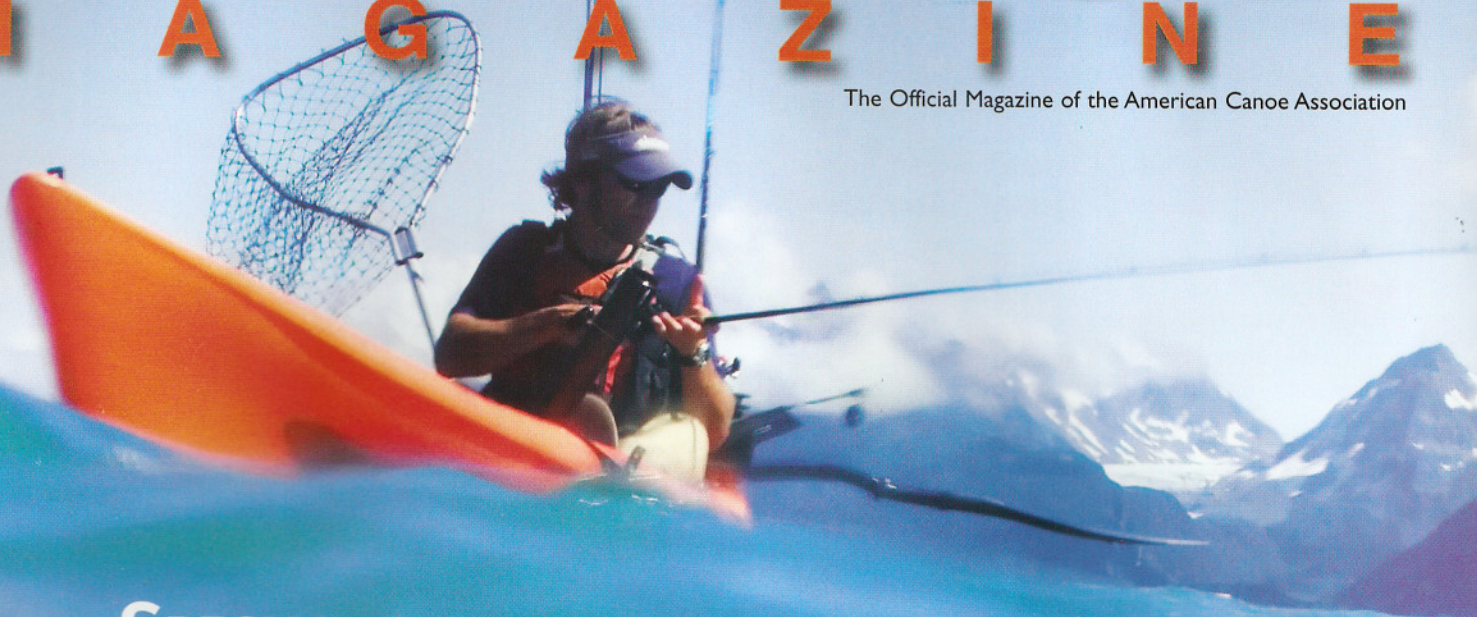


GET CODDLED! SPECIAL PAMPERED PADDLING SECTION! P. 54

PADDLER

M A G A Z I N E

The Official Magazine of the American Canoe Association



SPECIAL

KAYAK FISHING!

SUPPLEMENT!

Suffering ^{the} Adirondack Canoe Classic

July/August 2006

\$4.99US \$5.99CAN

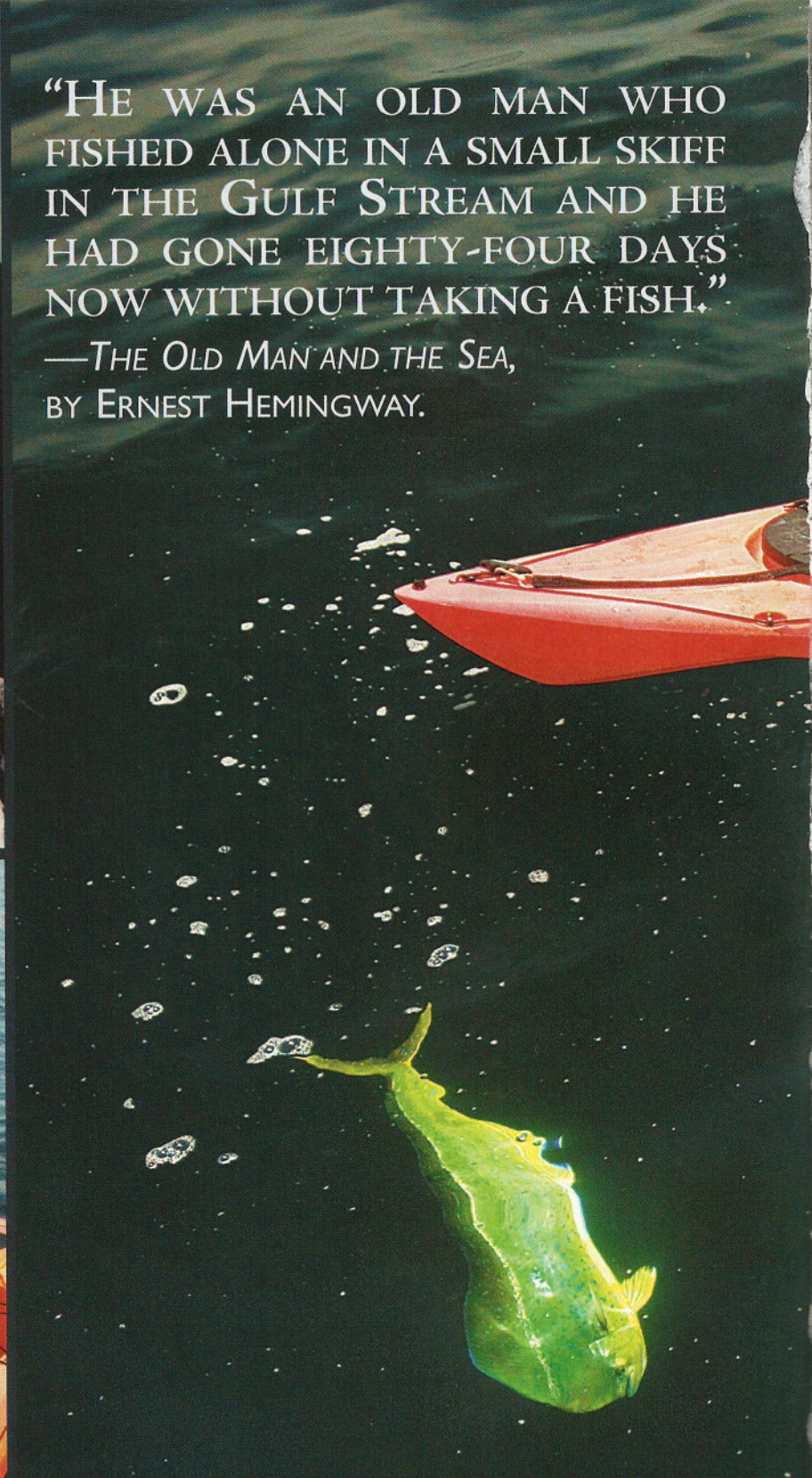
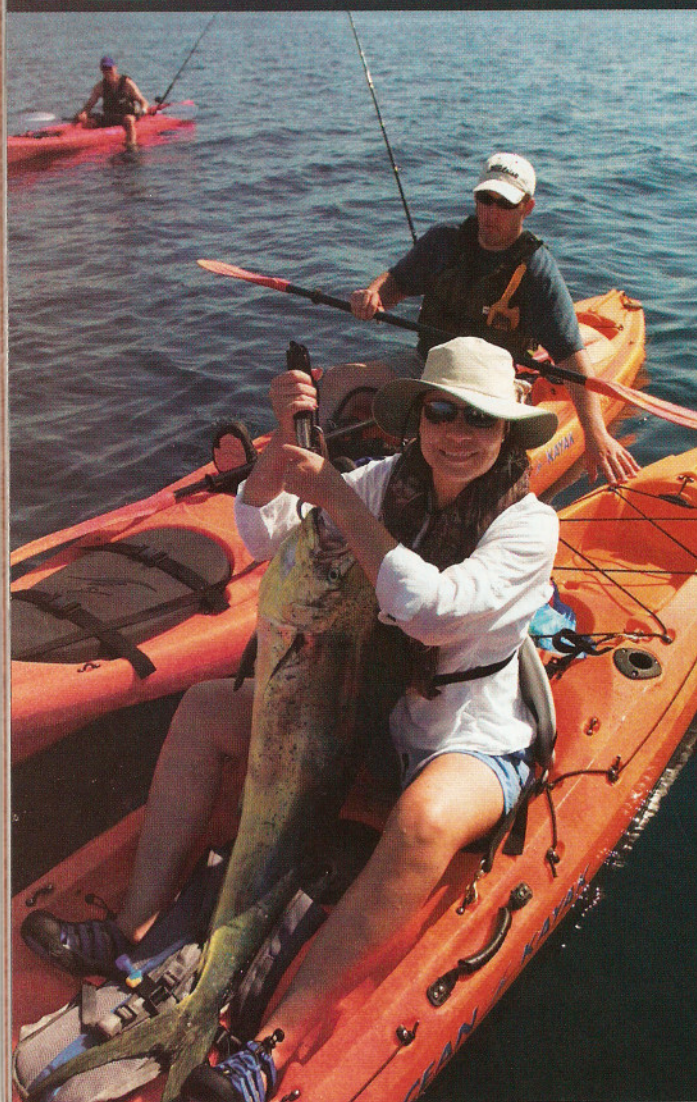


PLUS: Tao's helicopter huck for Hollywood, last descent of China's Mekong, Paddler Geography Quiz, Eric Jackson on technique, texting for river beta, and more!



“HE WAS AN OLD MAN WHO FISHED ALONE IN A SMALL SKIFF IN THE GULF STREAM AND HE HAD GONE EIGHTY-FOUR DAYS NOW WITHOUT TAKING A FISH.”

—THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA,
BY ERNEST HEMINGWAY.



GOLDEN MOMENT: KAYAK FISHING GUIDE JIM SAMMONS ON A DORADO (ABOVE); AND CHARGING THE BIG WATER (TOP, LEFT); KELLY MILLER HOISTING HER ICE-BREAKER (LEFT).



East Cape ECSTASY

A KAYAK FISHING ROOKIE CHASES BAJA GAMEFISH

by Jeff Moag

photos by Jock Bradley

Jim Sammons turns and looks each of us in the eye. “I have to warn you,” he says. “I’m a very sarcastic guy—to the point that I have to warn people about it.”

We’re speeding down a narrow two-lane toward Baja California’s East Cape, where we’ll fish from kayaks for roosterfish, tuna and marlin. I’m nervous: I had fished in the ocean exactly twice, and now the dean of big-game kayak fisherman is telling me that he won’t cut me any slack.

Sammons, who owns La Jolla Kayak Fishing in San Diego, Calif., is only the second man to hook, fight and land a marlin from a kayak. Since boating a 140-lb. striped marlin in 2004 he has assisted his clients in landing 11 more—including nine during his last trip to Punta Colorada. Sammons usually only hunts billfish with experienced clients, but he seems inclined to make an exception for the magazine writer, which means I may soon do battle with the apex predator in the Sea of Cortez. Marlin have three-foot spikes growing out of their noses and swim 50 mph—only sailfish are faster, but that’s little comfort. They also have spears and swim in these waters. I am way out of my league.



WHAT LURKS BELOW:
YELLOWFIN ENDGAME.

Most kayak anglers come to the sport as fishermen first, and kayakers second. I'm an exception, more fearful of baiting my own hook than running Class V whitewater.

At least I'm not alone. Kelly Miller hasn't caught a fish, or tried, in 10 years. Yet she's come with her husband, Craig, who insists the luxury spa treatment they'd scheduled after the fishing trip doesn't constitute a bribe. Now Kelly is the first of us on a fish, grinding resolutely as Jim coaches from the support boat, a 25-foot super panga. She proves an excellent student, pulling with short strokes and reeling down on a fine dorado, keeping a solid bend in her rod. The fish's trademark yellow flanks and iridescent blue spots flash in the morning sun.

The trip is starting well, even if the roosters we are hunting are nowhere to be

found. Cries of "Hook up!" come steadily; by early afternoon all five of us have landed either dorado, jack crevalle or bonito. Everyone, that is, but me.

Now comes my turn. My clicker ticks over: *Zzzzz . . . Zzzz*. I run through the instructions Jim had given us the night before: With roosters, you've got to be patient. "When the clicker goes off, count to 10, slowly," he'd said. And then? "Slam it in gear and wind like hell." *Zzzzzz. Zzzzeeeeeeeeeez!* I forget to count, mashing the drag full on and spinning as fast as I can, shouting, "I'm on!" There he is—jumping clean out of the water. Twice, three times. He's not big but he's a fighter. Here comes Chuy in the panga, just in time to witness my triumph.

"What is it?" I ask.

"Ladyfish."

"Do I keep it?"

Chuy doesn't laugh, but I can tell that he wants to. I lift the 18-inch fish out of the water to let it go, but it saves me the trouble, slipping the hook with one nimble twist.

I wouldn't catch a fish the next day, nor the day after that.

While I spend fruitless days on the water, my wife wanders the beach watching the Hotel Punta Colrada's resident bulldog dig for sandcrabs, and reading a book about affirmations. After the second day, she blesses me with this one: "Tomorrow you're going to catch five fish. I just have a feeling." I try hard to believe.

On the third morning, we join Chuy—his real name is Jesus Andres Cañedo—in the panga and motor north. We slip into the



kayaks a mile offshore of *casa Scott Glenn*, so named because the actor either owns the house, or used to, or visits there often. Chuy doesn't know for sure. Never mind, I say. Today I'm going to catch five fish. Roosters. "Okay *maguey*," Chuy says, and I step over the rail into my kayak. I can see the baitfish leaping inshore.

I feel energized and at one with my surroundings. It's a feeling I know and crave—the prospect of eminent action. Only the coming test is different this time, not a difficult rapid but sportfishing's answer to Roy Jones Jr.: pound-for-pound, one of the toughest inshore fighting fish on the planet.

I troll through the bait zone, careful not to paddle too fast. Nothing. I paddle 100 yards, turn and make another pass. Then another. Vince Driscoll ghosts by in his yellow Big Game.

"They're heeere," he says.

Indeed they are, but they're not biting.

WE SHOOT DOWNWIND TOWARD THE LIGHTHOUSE, THREE MILES DISTANT. I KEY MY GPS UNIT: 4.3 MPH. SOMEONE YELLS, "BAJA SLEIGH RIDE!" CHUY WHOOPS LIKE AN EXTRA IN A ZORRO FILM.

An hour later Craig catches a dorado, but our collective record—one lonely fish for 15 hours of trolling—suggests that something is amiss.

Eventually my optimism succumbs to contrary evidence, and I try something new. I stand up in my kayak, apply extra layers of sunscreen and, finally, go swimming on the theory that leaving my baited hook unattended cannot fail to provoke a strike. No dice.

Soon a pelican makes a splash next to Vince's bait and prepares to dine. He shouts and slaps the water, but the bird could care less. So I point my bow at the scavenger and sprint; I'm barely a boat-length from the pelican when it takes flight.

"Thanks, Buddy," Vince says. "You're due." Damn right I am.

The next morning I wake to the sound of wind. We gather on the hotel patio to sip coffee and contemplate a chaotic four-foot swell. Chuy normally meets us with the panga offshore; today, he comes to the hotel. It's very windy, he says. The fishing will be off. Besides, there's no bait.

Now Vince steps up. The sun, already four fingers above the horizon, glints in his eyes like a bad idea. "I came here to fish," he says. So we do.

Bill Johnston, a prison chaplain from Sugar Land, Texas, is the first to launch through the breaking surf. Vince and I steady his Ocean Kayak Prowler 15 as he takes two big waves over the bow, and then strokes into the clear. The veteran of Vietnam and two heart surgeries also came here to fish. The rest of us follow, giddy with Bill's success and our own audacity. Soon we wave down the last bait seller and buy his entire catch, a few small mullet.

Vince's insistence is rewarded with a powerful jack crevalle, a fish the Mexicans call *toro* for its bull-like strength. I catch a mild case of seasickness.

The seas are too big for the charterboats to dock at the hotel, so their captains anchor in the lee of a sandy point marked by a modest lighthouse. While we fish, Chuy spends an hour ferrying high-rolling cruiser fishermen to the beach, where they're loaded onto busses for the slow ride back to the Punta Colorada. We have other plans: a bit of big-water paddling for the benefit of the camera and hotel guests. The sportboat anglers already think us crazy for hunting marlin from kayaks. Now Chuy thinks so, too. "*Gringos locos!*" he cackles, as we pound northeast into the swell. The paddling is the tonic we need after a desperately slow day of fishing. Five of us surf

into the beach, tallying four clean landings and one spectacular wipeout.

That afternoon Craig comes to our patio table. He's wearing a shirt showing a half-glass of water and the caption "Half Full." In kayak fishing, as in any paddling endeavor, the right group makes the trip. The fish have snubbed me four days running but I can't complain about the company.

We pass the afternoon reminding one another that being on the water is reward enough, though the platitude's principal target is me. The others have been taking dorado, skippy, pompano and *toro* all week. The question now comes regularly: "How are you going to write your story if you don't catch a fish?"

"It's all part of the story arc," I answer, though the truth is I don't know. I take comfort in their concern, however. My fishing skills command no one's respect, but my perseverance is endearing in a sad kind

of way. The crew is rooting for me, like a tribe of displaced Cubs fans. The next day, when Jim hooks a three-foot needlefish from the panga, Vince urges me to take the handoff. "Go get that rod," he shouts. "You're a journalist, you have no ethics!"

But I came to write about kayak fishing, and I want to do it pure—to fight a great fish truly and well, as Hemingway might put it. I think often about the writer's luckless Old Man and his noble marlin. Kayak fishing has humbled me and earned my respect, just as that mighty fish earned the Old Man's admiration. Kayak fishing is no hook-'em-and-grind-'em sportfishing charter. It's hard work that rewards skill and savvy, as well as another thing I seem to have in very short supply—luck. I have to do something to change mine.

That evening I shave for the first time since catching the ladyfish, symbolically cutting away my bad luck and beautifying myself for the fish-hoisting victory photo. Then I lie awake, wondering if it will be enough. I wake a full hour before my alarm goes off. The hat! On ladyfish day I'd worn the blue one. Every day since I've worn the white. I throw back the sheets and pick up the blue cap.

Fifth time's a charm, I tell myself. It's going to be a great day. No, really, it will.

We drop the kayaks into a brawny swell five miles offshore. I slip a live sardine onto the hook, pay out 60 feet of line and take exactly four paddle strokes. Zzzz. Zzzzeeeeeeeeeeeeeeez. Wow. It really is the hat. Now focus—count of 10, slowly. Wait for it...I slam on the drag, feel the rod load up.

"Are you on?" Jim shouts.

Don't sound like a spaz, I think to myself. Then, sounding confident: "Yeah. I'm on."



HUNTING BIG GAME IN BIG WATER.

The dorado leaps three times in 60 seconds, and then I have him in the kayak. He's not big, but I've never seen a more beautiful fish. His flanks shine like gold and his spots flash like blue pearls. Best of all, he's a real-live gamefish—enough to pin a story on if I have to. I hold him aloft for the camera, thank him sincerely, and give him back to the sea.

I fish for two more hours in a pod of stinging jellyfish. They wash into the kayak with the breaking swells, and in half an hour I take five serious hits. I rub one off my leg and then brush my lips. The sting spreads across my face, but it doesn't last. Soon it's replaced by a far worse pain in my back and groin. My lymph nodes are processing the poison, and I feel as if I've taken a low blow from a young Mike Tyson. I've caught my fish and I'm ready to quit. But the day is less than half over,

and people, real fisherman, are watching. I troll dutifully onward.

A needlefish nibbles my bait, and I pull in the sardine to check its health. Not good. I key the VHF. "Jim, my bait's dead; I'm coming in for a new one."

(ECTASY CONTINUED ON PAGE 96)

Pretty. Smart. Paddles.



Introducing the new "Angler" kayak paddle from Branches. Whether it's your lunch or a trophy - measure it right in your boat. The Angler has a measuring tape right on the shaft. *Now that's SMART!*

bb
bendingbranches
angler

bb
bendingbranches

812 Prospect Court • Osceola, WI 54020, USA

866-755-3405 • www.bendingbranches.com

The panga is less than 100 yards away. Hardly worth putting my dead bait back out, but I'm trying hard to be an optimist. I feed out some line and start to paddle.

Then, without warning, my reel screams to life. There's no point in counting to 10; whatever has my bait intends to keep it. I take the rod from its holder, grip tight with both hands, and put it in gear. The rod goes instantly bendo, but nothing else changes. The line smokes off the reel at the same furious rate, the clicker continues its high-pitched howl. The monofilament is a blur, flashing back and forth across the spool as the big fish runs. My Shimano TLD 15 is loaded with 300 yards of 30-pound mono. The fish takes two-thirds of it without slowing down. Just my luck. I'm about to get spooled.

Kayak anglers talk about using the kayak as a secondary drag. That's my only hope. I have to get the kayak traveling straight behind the fish in the next 20 seconds, or kiss my line, and my precious story arc, goodbye. I bring the rod tip to the front of the kayak, engaging my torso to swing the kayak around with the same desperate conviction I'd use if I were sideways in a Class V rapid. The bow swings around to the fleeing fish, and the kayak builds speed. The tone of the clicker drops an octave, slows again, and stops.

"I'm on!" I croak, sounding very much like a spaz. "I'm on to something really freeing big!"

The fish and I have reached our first stalemate. He is still stronger than the drag, but rather than taking line he's pulling 250 pounds of man and kayak. Neither can I gain back any line. We shoot downwind toward the lighthouse, three miles distant. I key my GPS unit: 4.3 mph. Someone yells, "Baja sleigh ride!" Chuy whoops like an extra in a Zorro film.

Now the fish turns into the wind, running for deeper water. I feel the rod load up with the extra pressure, and for the first time since the fight began, the fish slows. He pulls me another quarter-mile before I finally take five feet of line. The fish takes back six. For the next few minutes we seesaw, as the inevitable advantage of weight and

technology work its toll on the brave creature. Finally I see him, 15 feet below in the clear blue sea. Rows of tiny fins flash golden in the sunlight. "Yellowfin," I cry.

I struggle with the gaff—I'd never caught a fish big enough to require one—and Jim returns exuberantly to his sarcastic nature. "You gaff like a girl," he hoots. "No, that's not fair—Kelly would have it in the boat by now."

When I finally hoist the tuna for a photo my arms are quivering. Jim is saying it's the largest yellowfin one of his clients has ever caught. I tell him that's going straight into my story, with no fact checking. The Boga grip's verdict is 28 pounds, but Jim swears it's at least 35—he found the hand-held scale buried in the sand and says it's always been a little sticky. Vince paddles by and I give him a high-five. My forearms are burning. Chuy leans over the rail of the panga and shakes my hand. He's laughing. Seconds later he's back, holding a sardine in one hand and motioning with the other for my

hook, as if to say, "You came here to fish. Now get going."

I paddle about 100 yards before Jim's voice crackles over the VHF. "You did good with that Yellowfin, brotha." So this is what kayak fishing is all about. For 30 seconds I just bask in it.

Then the second yellowfin strikes.

The second tuna is as strong as the first, but seeks the depths rather than running at the surface. He's almost a twin of the first one, which is to say he weighs 35 pounds. Later I catch and release two dorado, ending the day with five fish and a renewed appreciation for the power of positive thought.

My story arc complete, three of us decide to swing for the fences, spending the next day trolling ballyhoo for marlin. We get nothing but a disinterested nibble from a needlefish and, hours later, a tiny skipjack tuna. I find it distressingly easy to fall back into the vernacular of the unsuccessful fisherman.

"You know Jim," I say, "I would've liked to catch a marlin, but just being out here is reward enough." ▼



GREAT THINGS COME TO THOSE WHO WAIT.

WORD CLASSIFIEDS

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

PIGEON RIVER COMMERCIAL USE PERMIT FOR SALE Includes: 1 bus, 1 van, 1 trailer, 9 rafts, 63 paddles, 63 pfd's, 63 helmets Info: call Matt Moses (828) 713-1913 or email matt@mtmtn.com

EPOXY & RESINS

WE HAVE SEVERAL TYPES OF EPOXY RESINS for coating, gluing, and composite construction. Our largest fiberglass inventory includes many weights of standard woven materials as well as a good selection of biaxials and triaxials. Carbon and Kevlar fabrics are also available. We offer the best prices and product value in America. Our normal hours are from 9am to 5pm. Mon. to Fri. See our website for complete info and prices. www.raka.com RAKA INC., 3490 Oleander Ave., Ft. Pierce, FL 34982; ph. (772) 489-4070

GEAR

STABILIZER FLOATS FOR CANOE OR KAYAKS! Canoe Seat/Yoke-wheels-sail kit-rowing. Free Catalog! Spring Creek. (800) 937-8881; www.canoegear.com

JOBS

DENALI NATIONAL PARK RAFTING JOBS Established raft company looking for safe, sober, river guides, CDL bus drivers, photographers, office staff. Housing available at low cost, includes dining commons, rec room, satellite TV, showers, and laundry. IF YOU LIKE TO GET HIGH, DON'T APPLY. Job descriptions and contact info available at www.raftdenali.com

MISCELLANEOUS

STOP THEFT IN PADDLESPOITS! Post/View stolen gear for free! www.BOC123.com, hosted by Boulder Outdoor Center and sponsored by *Paddler* magazine.

ADVENTURE SPORTS ONLINE—Your Internet resource for outside adventure! Find outdoor gear, outfitters, adventure travel operators, outdoor tips and skills, events, clubs and more. www.adventuresports.com

RACKS

ALUMINUM RACKS TO FIT ANY VEHICLE! Clamp-on pick-up rack, universal (suction-cup) rack, hitch rack. All carry two canoes and have loading bars. Spring Creek (800) 937-8881. www.canoegear.com

Sting or BEE Stung!
Enhance Performance with our Energy & Protein Bars & Gels
Available at: REI, EMS & Nashbar
www.honeystinger.com
866-GO HONEY • Steamboat Springs, CO.

World's Lightest Aluminum Trailers
Trailex
Hand Crafted For your individual needs Since 1963
SPORT UTILITY TRAILERS
LIKE NO OTHER
Canfield, OH
800-282-5042
www.trailex.com