

"HOW-TO" FROM AROUND THE WORLD

BIG GAME FISHING

THE EDGE

March/April 2006

big game fishing

**TROLLING
FOR TUNA**

Down Under Approach

**PUERTO
VALLARTA'S**
Monster Yellowfin

WORLDWIDE BIG GAME FISHING



"HOW TO"

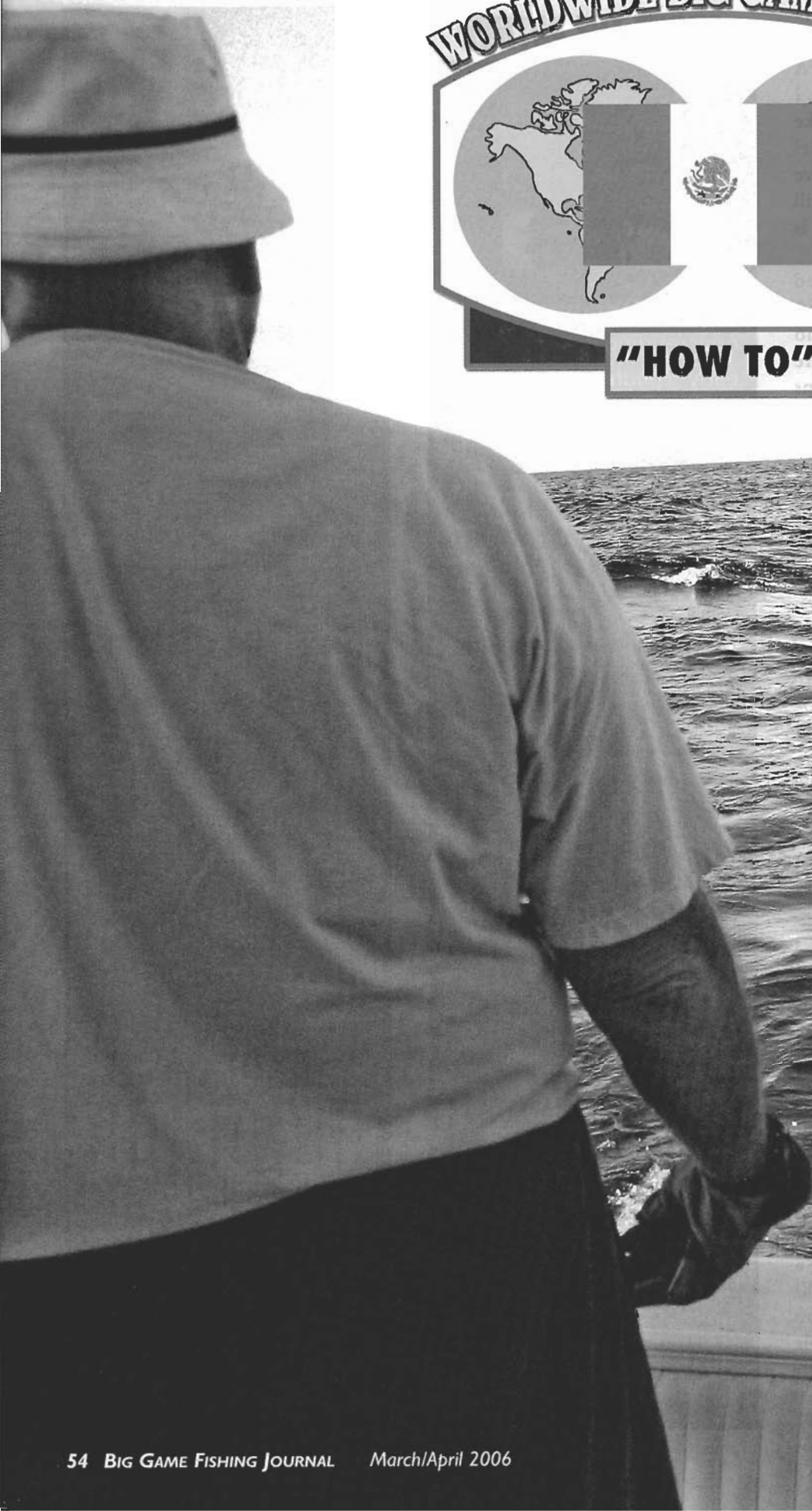
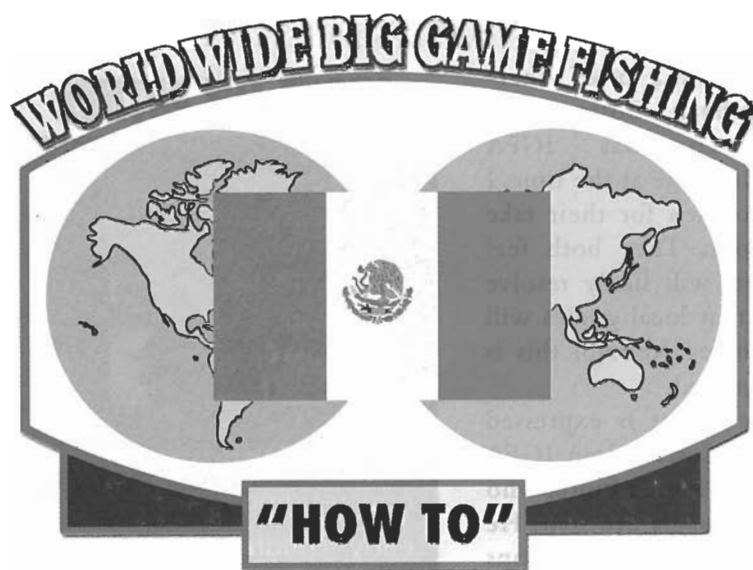
COSTA RICA
A Fishing Paradise

VANUATU
BILLFISH
TECHNIQUES

SOUTHERN BLUEFIN
Fact or Fiction?



Don Ray - © '97

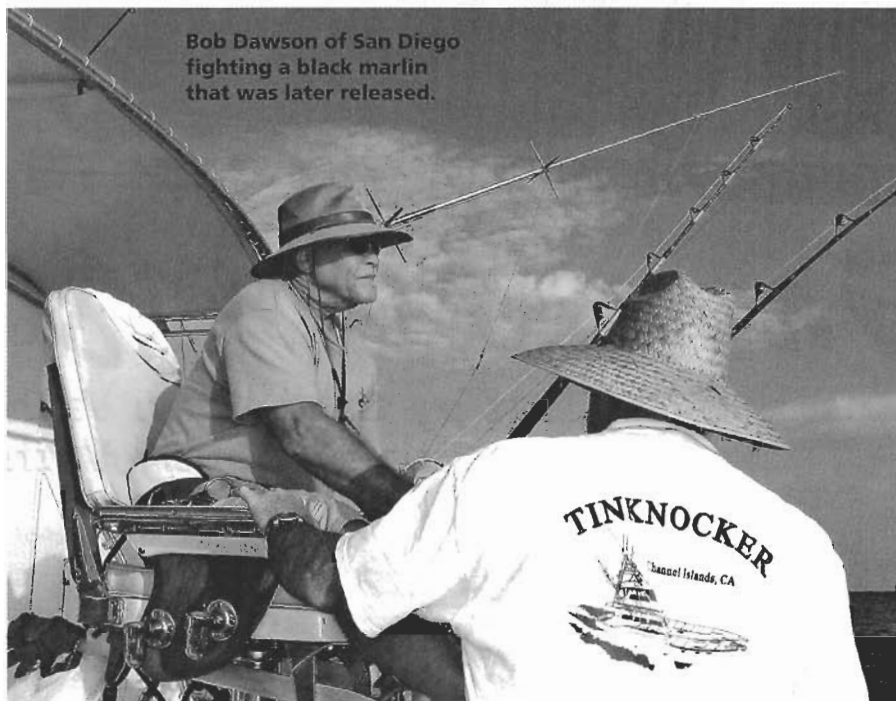


Puerto Vallarta

Big Game Fishing

Text by Capt. Stan Vath
Photos by Sandy Vath





Puerto Vallarta, Mexico—a place of friendly people, fabulous restaurants, great hotels, nice marinas and incredible big game fishing 32 miles offshore. While some foreign nationals claim they just discovered this place and the great fishing, this is just a fantasy. Many of the local Mexican charter company's are second and third generation and are really in tune to the huge marlin and yellowfin tuna that ply their local waters.

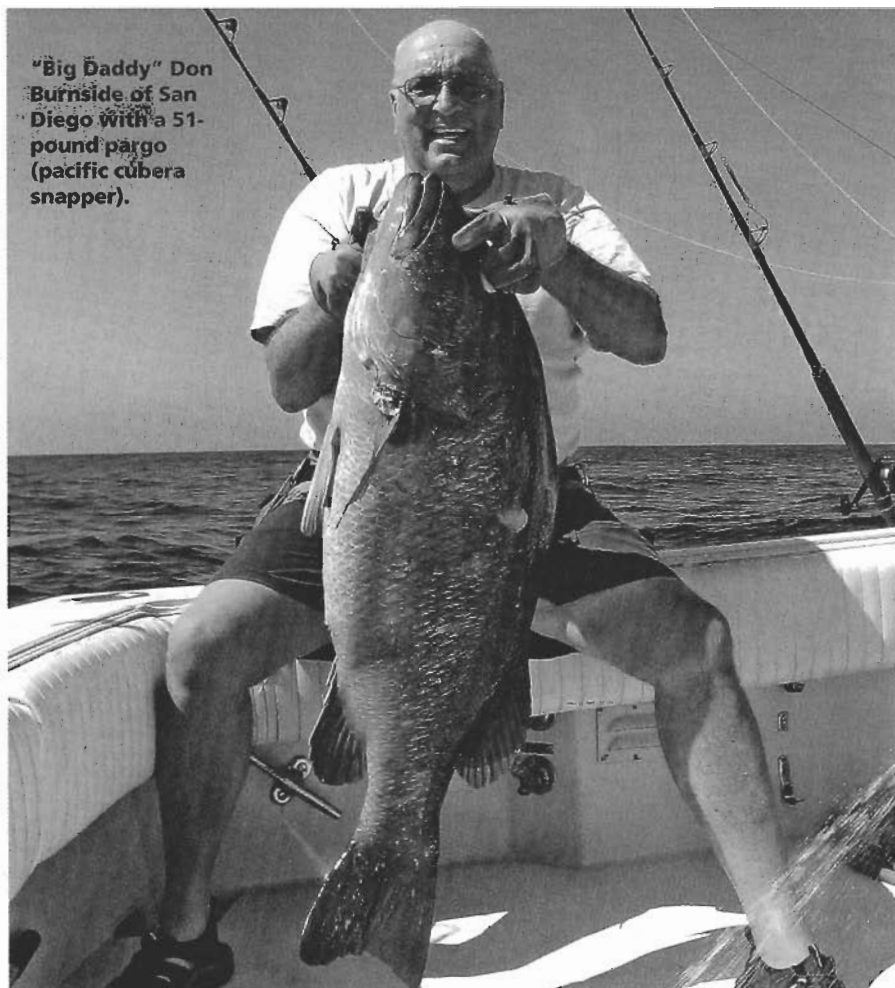
I first heard about the giant yellowfin tuna down there six years ago from the GM at P-line Don Newman as he had fished it himself. He gave me some information and I contacted Danny Osuna from the MARLA II, but could never make the dates work so it went on the back burner.

My first trip to Puerto Vallarta was on our current Sportfisher "TINKNOCKER" a 60-foot Hatteras when we brought her from Florida through the Panama Canal and home to Channel Islands Harbor, California in 2002. We spent three days there and really enjoyed the people and surroundings. We did not fish much

on this trip because it was time to get home after 45 days of travel.

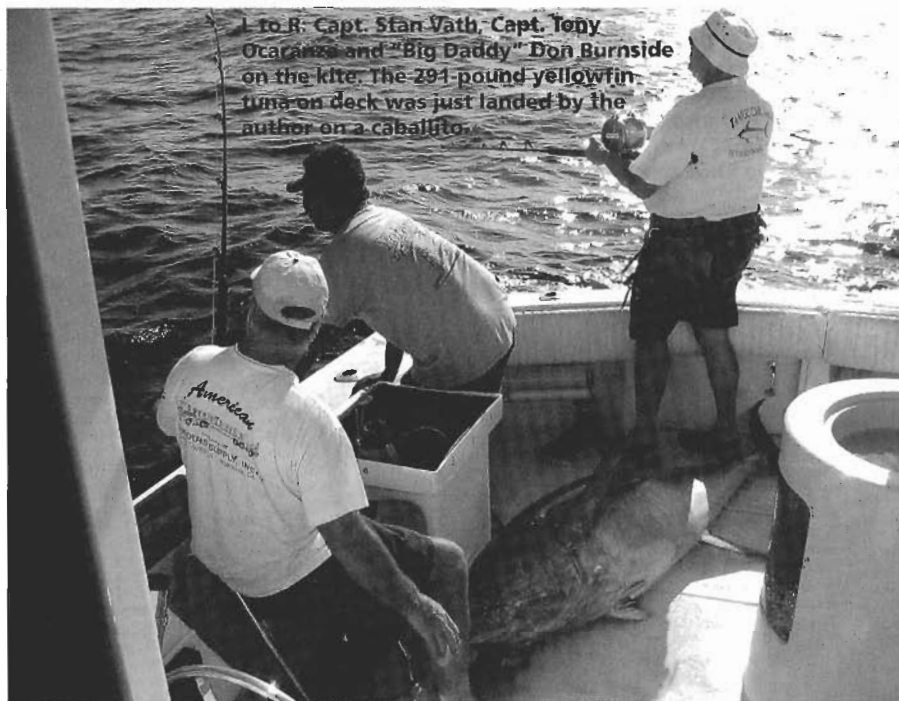
However, I knew we would return as soon as I could outfit "TINKNOCKER" with the proper bait tanks, tuna tubes, necessary rods and reels, and terminal tackle to target 300-pound plus yellowfin and huge black and blue marlin. This took over a year, but we finally got it done.

Our second trip to Puerto Vallarta was in September of 2004. We had to wait a couple extra days in San Diego to dodge Hurricane Javier, but he passed over Baja and we were on our way again. The 1227 nautical mile trip down the Pacific side of Baja, California and across to mainland Mexico takes seven to eight days as we fished along the way. We stayed in Nuevo Vallarta at Paradise Village Marina when we arrived. The docks are first class and the security is 24/7 with the access tightly controlled by magnetic keys. As a guest in the marina you also have access to the five star



hotel, pools, gym, golf, restaurants, etc. There is also a mini-mall on site that has just about anything you need including groceries. Cabs and rental cars are readily available if you want to check out the surrounding areas, go into Old Puerto Vallarta or to reprovision at Wal-Mart or Sam's Club. A trip to Punta de Mita (the northern point at the mouth of Banderas Bay) is a must if you have the time. Be sure to stop by and see Hector Lopez at Margarita's restaurant for great meals, beverages and local information. He is awesome!

There are basically two places to fish the giant yellowfin and marlin off Puerto Vallarta, Roca Corbetena (the rock), about 32 miles offshore of Puerto Vallarta, and El Banco (the bank), about 53 miles from Puerto Vallarta. The biggest myth about Puerto Vallarta is that you are going to catch a 200-to 300-pound yellowfin



1 to R: Capt. Stan Vath, Capt. Tony Ocaranza and "Big Daddy" Don Burnside on the kite. The 291-pound yellowfin tuna on deck was just landed by the author on a caballito.

the first time on the water. We found this out promptly as we did not catch

a cow (yellowfin over 200 pounds) until the day before we were heading

Basil Pappas of BHP Tackle with a pair of the standard grade 160-170-pound yellowfin tuna caught at "El Banco." In this photo, the boat was anchored in the Punta de Mita anchorage.



home after eight weeks of fishing. There is a brutal learning curve in every fishery, and Puerto Vallarta is no exception. We had no problem catching world class wahoo, dorado, pargo (Pacific dog snapper), sailfish and 100-to 150-pound yellowfin on a regular basis, but the cows eluded us. One of the highlights of the trip was a simultaneous hook up of a 173-pound yellowfin and a 52.6-pound pargo both caught on slow trolled

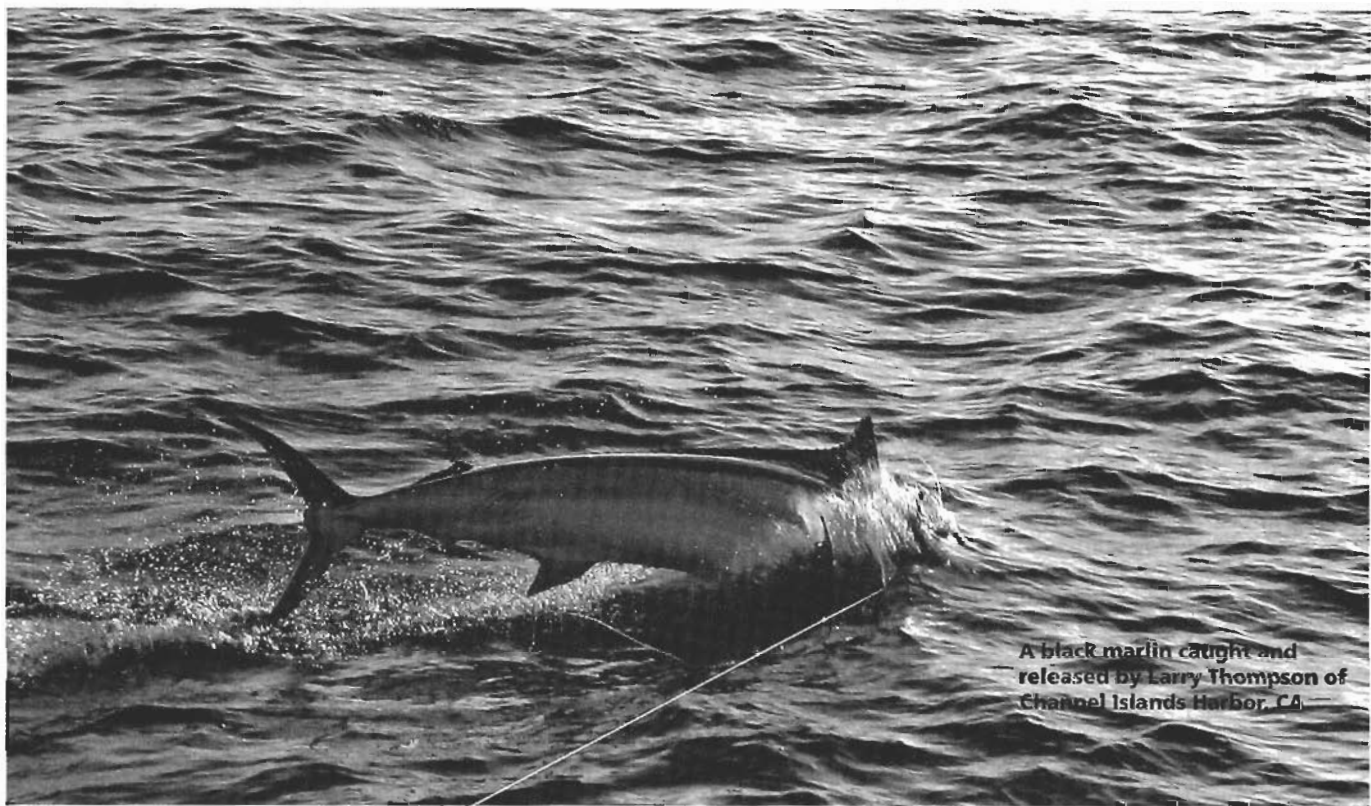
skipjacks as we went over a high spot. We finally learned the fishery enough to land a 192-pound yellowfin on a caballito (goggleeye) and a 221 pounder on a slow trolled skipjack the last two days of our trip.

Live bait making is the key to consistent success on yellows and marlin. Live bait can be purchased much of the time, but not always. You have to put in your time finding the caballitos on the no-moon phase and keep

the spots on your plotter/computer. We use four fly bait rigs with the shiny flies. You will also catch a number of other baits that work well and are sometimes mixed in. Anchovetta, oho de peras, small jacks, mullet, ladyfish and others will also work well in the right conditions. We found many ways to deploy these baits including the kite, helium balloon, fly-lined, fly-lined with a small torpedo sinker and slow trolling. The big baits (7-to 12-pound, skipjack or tuna) really work well at times. However, some days they are really tough to catch. There is also a myth that you do not need tuna tubes. Nothing could be further from the truth. Sometimes we catch eight or 10 skipjack in one spot either on chrome jigs with 5/0 or 6/0 barbless Siwash hooks or slow trolled huchies rigged with small circle hooks. It's important not to tire the skipjack out or make them bleed. Heavy line is needed to get the bait in quickly and into the tubes so it will live longer. If you get a bleeder, your only option is to fish it immediately, toss it back or chunk it. We put six in the tubes and fish the rest immediately. Slow trolling the big baits is the norm down here and it is really exciting when you get a knockdown.

How long should you let your quarry run with the bait is a tough call. Ask five different people and you may get five different answers. five to 60 seconds is the range and I just use my gut. (Usually 10 to 20 seconds) You generally will hook a huge fish on these big baits which is why most boats fish them exclusively when available. The key to landing / releasing these huge fish is to have zero tackle failures. Many large fish are lost due to poor knots, improper crimps, bad line / leader, and faulty rods and reels. There is no room for error when fishing these giants!

Huge pargo 30 to 60 pounds, wahoo 35 to 60 pounds, and dorado 20 to 50 pounds. are generally avail-



A black marlin caught and released by Larry Thompson of Channel Islands Harbor, CA

able and sometimes much larger. We catch them on feathers, Mauraders, jetheads, Rapalas or similar jigs trolling eight to nine knots. The small live baits also work well in the right conditions. Sailfish 80 to 140 pounds are also plentiful at times, especially at El Banco. They prefer the smaller skipjack, caballitos and occasionally a feather.

This years trip was a real learning experience and believe me we made notes. We made many friends down there and kept in contact over the year.

Our third trip to Puerto Vallarta was in September of 2005. Larry and Dennis Thompson along with "Big Daddy" Don Burnside helped me run the boat south. This year started off better than anyone could dream of.

On 09/25/05. Don gets a knock-down on the port rigger, lets it run and pulls the 12/0 39950 BL Mustad Demon circle hook into place and hooks the first yellow of the season. He caught it on an eight-pound slow trolled skipjack

(two knots) at Roca Corbetena. It was sure nice seeing three gaffs go into it, but even better when the fourth went in and it slid through the transom door into the cockpit. We were stoked! I took the measurements several times and it taped

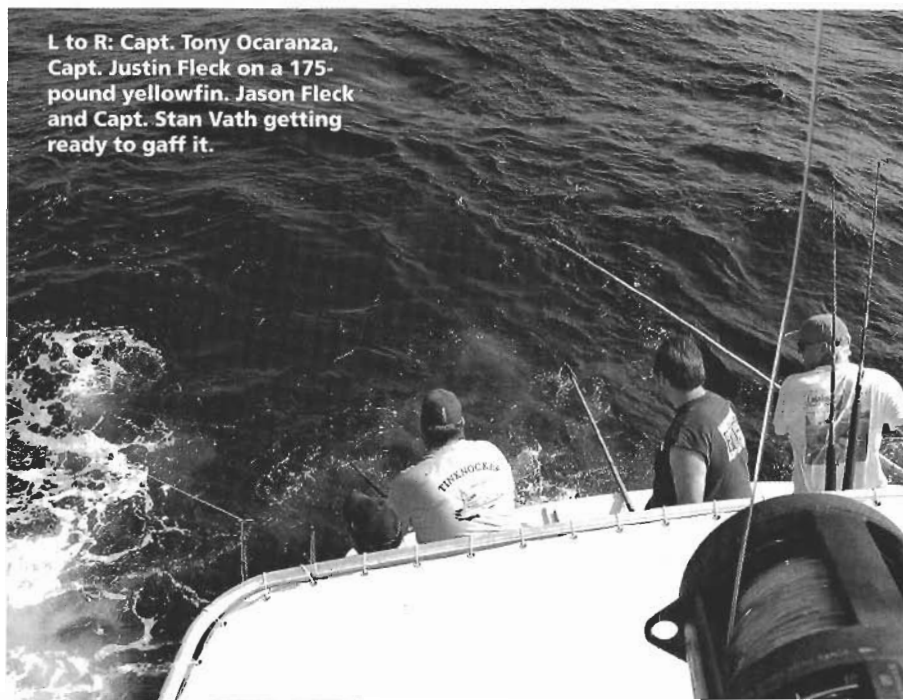
307 pounds conservatively (73 x 58). Later it went 313 pounds. on our Scalemaster certified scale. What a way to start the trip off, but a tough act to follow. The rod was a Calstar 655TSS. The reel was a Penn 80ST packed with 200-pound



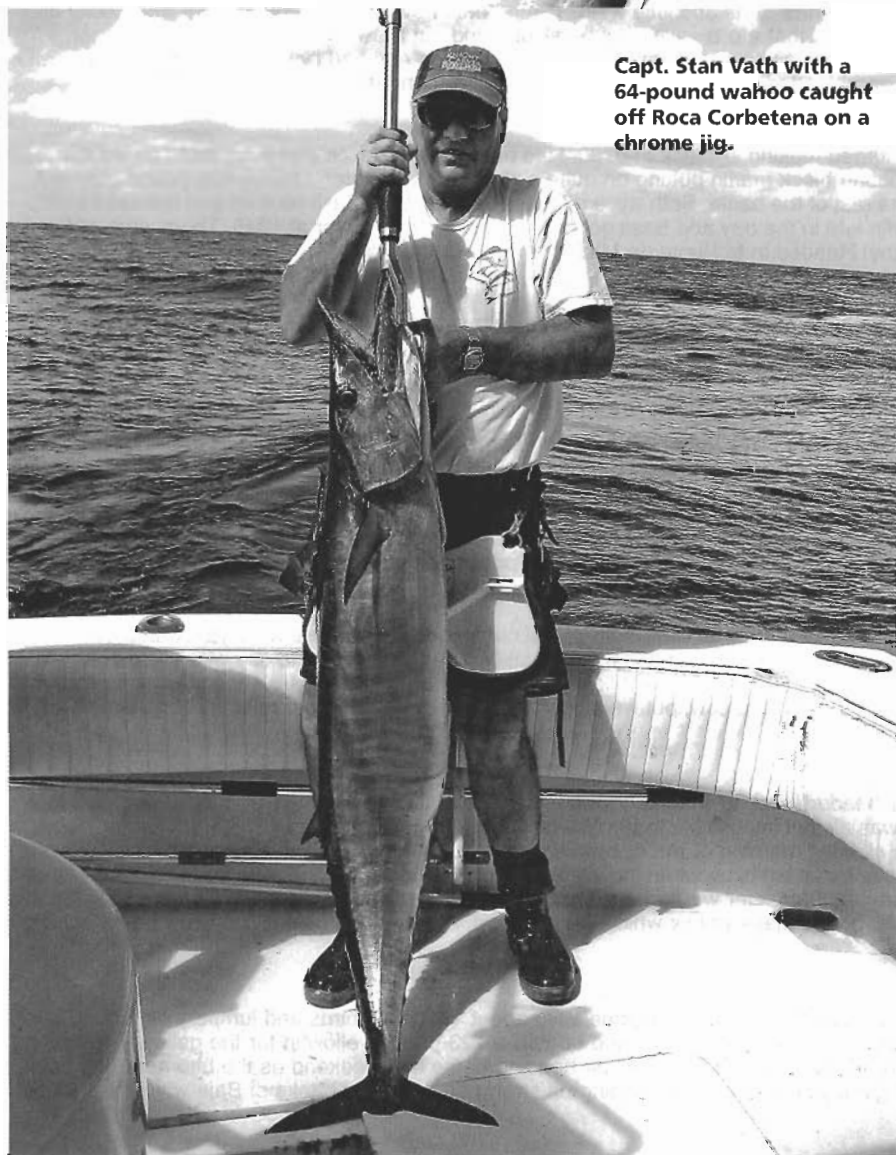
Releasing a huge black marlin off Roca Corbetena.

hollow Jerry Brown Spectra with a BHP Tackle 25-foot 200-pound FC Topshot. The water temperature was 88 degrees. Jason Thompson also caught two huge pargo with skipjack trolled on the downrigger. The fish weighed in at 30.6 and 55.2 pounds.

To recap this years trip, we fished an average of three days a week. We caught seven black marlin 250 to 500 pounds, two blue marlin 350 and 500 pounds, two striped marlin that were between 150 and 180 pounds and one sailfish, all released successfully. Twenty-three yellowfin between 80 and 185 pounds were landed with many released. Many smaller yellows were also released.



L to R: Capt. Tony Ocaranza, Capt. Justin Fleck on a 175-pound yellowfin. Jason Fleck and Capt. Stan Vath getting ready to gaff it.



Capt. Stan Vath with a 64-pound wahoo caught off Roca Corbetena on a chrome jig.

Four cow yellowfin were taken, 311, 291, 226 and 224 pounds. Several pargo were caught including a 51 and a 55.2 pounder. Only two wahoo, 35 and 64 pounds were boated along with many dorado in the 20-to 40-pound range.

To summarize Puerto Vallarta in a nutshell, I must say it is the best vacation / big game fishing location we have ever been to. The locals are awesome! We fish stand-up harnesses as we are long range tuna fishermen. However, many of the local charter boats have fighting chairs also. I have listed what I consider the top local charter company's in Puerto Vallarta. We fished many days side by side and traded information as well as live bait with each other. The fishing can be fickle, but can turn around in a heartbeat. Any bait could produce a world record fish. Best time is August through October for yellowfin and marlin.

My best advice to anyone fishing the offshore waters of Puerto Vallarta is not to use any tackle or gear that is not capable of hooking, fighting and landing any of the giant game fish that ply these beautiful waters. 🐟

MARLA II SPORTFISHING

Capt. Danny Osuna
01(152) 329-295-5073
Email: marlas_fishing@yahoo.com
32 Foot Pacemaker twin diesels

YOLARAY SPORTFISHING

Capt. Tony Ocaranza
From USA Dial- 01(152) 322-292-1317
In Mexico Dial- 322-292-1317
Email: Enzo@Yolaray.com
Website: <http://www.yolaray.com>
34 Foot Atlantic twin diesels

DHAMAR SPORTFISHING

Capt. Danny Gomez
011 52 322 103 5688 (cell)
011 52 329 295 5397 (home)
Email: danny@dhamarsportfishing.com
<http://www.dhamarsportfishing.com>
27 foot Super Panga
Twin 4-stroke Mercury's

PARADISE VILLAGE MARINA

Dockmaster: Dick Markie
Phone: 011 52 322 226 6728
Email: dmarkie@paradisevillage.com
Website: <http://www.paradisevillage.com/marina.htm>

PUNTA DE MITA

MARGARITA'S RESTAURANT & BAR

HECTOR LOPEZ (Local Lodging & Information)

Phone: 011 044 322 779 6279
Email: xltisla@hotmail.com

VILMA'S YACHT SERVICES

Licenses, Documentation, Port Clearance, Immigration
Paradise Village Mall Upstairs
Phone 011 52 322 297 2274
Email: vilmayachtagency@yahoo.com
Website: www.vilmasyachtagency.com
VHF 22 or 16

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



CAPT. STAN VATH is an avid Big Game fisherman as well as a Big Game hunter and has a USCG 100 Ton Master License. He is a California native and has fished and hunted since he was a young boy. He lives in Channel Islands Harbor, CA with his wife Sandy where he fishes and dives the Northern Channel Islands regularly for Halibut, Yellowtail, White Seabass and occasionally Rockcod. He has been on 25 plus Long Range trips (16 days or more) in pursuit of his favorite game fish the "Cow" Yellowfin Tuna. These include over 15 trips to the Revillagigedos Islands off Mexico, 3 trips to the Clipperton Atoll, Panama, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Belize, many spots off mainland Mexico and most of Baja California. Stan is a retired Sheet Metal/Air Conditioning Contractor hence the name of his boat "TINKNOCKER" a 60' Hatteras Sportfisher. One of the highlights of their 2002 ICW Trip from Ft. Lauderdale, FL to Nantucket, MA and back was a trip to the "Canyons" off Montauk and a good score on Albacore and Yellowfin tuna. Then off to the Panama Canal and home to California fishing and diving the entire trip. Having caught many YFT over 200 lbs. his largest to date is a 291 pounder caught off Puerto Vallarta in 2005.

10/03/2005

Headed over to Marina Vallarta to pick up 50 caballitos and off to the Rock. Arrived at 0900. Big bait was tough to catch. We only made four all day—three skipjack and one bonito. Landed a 250-pound black marlin around 1100 hours, and it was released successfully.

Trolled until 1530 and nothing but a sailfish that ruined one of our baits. Tried the kite and helium balloon, but no takers. We started slow trolling the kite up-wind and also had our last skipjack out at 1800 when we got a knockdown on the port rigger and let it run a long time before pulling the 14/0 Super Mutu into place. This fish started off slow, but turned into a good fighter. It charged the boat several times and we had a couple of close calls. Twenty minutes later, we had a couple gaffs in a 226-pound yellowfin. TINKNOCKER's second cow of the season. Eleven boats fished the Rock today and only the MARLA II and YOLARAY caught cows also. Into Punta de Mita anchorage for the night.

10/04/2005

We headed back out to the Rock at 0500. Today was supposed to be the best weather of the week, but in actuality, it sucked. 15- to 20 knots of wind and a confused 5-to 8-foot swell. We made five skippy's right off and started fishing. No other boats showed up until after 0900. We only had one knockdown all day and it did not stick. That's fishing. The MARLA II reported they caught a 330-pound yellowfin (taped) and the YOLARAY reported a 350-pound yellowfin.

10/10/2005

Basil Papas of BHP Tackle just flew in to fish with us this week. Headed out to make bait at 0400. It was tough as I could see them on the meter, but not many bit. Got out to the Rock at 0730 and made some skipjack and started trolling. It was a long day with another 350-pound black marlin, 64-pound wahoo and a 50-pound yellowfin for our efforts. The big boys eluded us today. Got in to the Punta de Mita anchorage for the night at 2200.

10/11/2005

Got up at 0330 and headed for El Banco. There were eight boats out there today and the skipjack were scarce. The weather has finally turned around and we are really enjoying the nice seas and little wind. Three boats never made a skippy. We were lucky and got six right away. First take down was a big wahoo that ate a seven-pound skippy and cut the wind-on clean off like a razor. We kept trolling until about 1500 with no results. We put the kite up and put out a helium balloon and had fly lined caballitos out as well. Basil got a 90-pound yellowfin on a caballito and I landed a 110 pounder on the kite with a oho de pera.

10/14/2005

Headed back out to the Rock at 0430 and started making skipjack at 0730. Had our tubes full quick and three extra so we started trolling. In just a few minutes we had a 250-pound black marlin putting on quite a show. Minutes later, I had a 500-pound blue marlin that only jumped once and stayed down the rest of the battle. Both were released successfully. Basil hooked and released a 250-pound black marlin. I got a 135-pound yellowfin late in the day and Basil got one on the Yummee Flyer at 1845. There were over 40 boats fishing Corbetena today. That's too many! Headed in to Punta de Mita to anchor for the night.

10/15/2005

Headed back out to the Rock at 0500 hrs. We counted 41 boats today and could have missed some. Skipjack making was really crowded, but we got some and started trolling. We had some bad luck with our tuna hookups early on, but stayed with it and ended up with five yellows ranging between 100 and 165 pounds.

10/18/2005

We left the dock 0430. With the full moon, bait making was out of the question so we went over to Marina Vallarta to buy caballitos. They are being rationed and we got 20 from Rafa and 20 from two Pangas we saw just outside the marina on our way to Roca Corbetena. On arrival at the Rock we got a few skippy's and we started off trolling. We are having a less than desirable hookup rate on big baits and are still experimenting with bridled baits and the trap rigs and timing. This appears to be somewhat normal by the chatter on the radio, but it's tough to miss a fish on a skippy. We ended up with five yellowfin between 125 and 175 pounds, and a 40-pound dorado. We fish right up to sunset and head in to Punta de Mita to anchor for the night.

10/19/2005

Back at the Rock at 0730 and filled the tubes quickly with three extra baits to put out immediately. There were yellowfin around and most seemed to be in the 100-to-185-pound range with a few bigger and a few smaller. The highlight of the day was a kite bite in the late afternoon. It was hammered on the surface by a 150-pound plus yellowfin which makes for a hell-of-a show. Our last fish right at dark was a 185-pound yellowfin. We thought it might be a cow, but we all agreed it was just under and released it as we did with all the others today.

10/26/2005

Left Paradise Village Marina at 0420 and headed over to Marina Vallarta to get caballitos. We then headed to out to Roca Corbetena and tried to catch skipjack which was almost impossible today. We quit trying for Skippy's about 1030 and started fishing the kite and fly lined caballitos. This was the slowest morning of the season and only a 35-pound sailfish and a small yellow were caught and released early afternoon. At 1300 we had a big blowout on the kite and a nice fish going. The fish came to color and three gaffs went in to the 224-pound yellowfin. Thirty minutes later we had our fourth cow of the season on deck, a 291 pounder. Soon after we had a boil on a kite bait, it was an 80-pound class yellow which we released. A huge tuna seiner showed up and started cruising around and things went dead.

11/09/2005

We got up at 0400 and made some bait. The Rock slow all day but came alive about 1730 with birds and jumpers all around and not another boat in sight. We released a 400-pound plus black marlin and boated a 123-pound yellowfin for the galley. The action was red hot for the last hour and of course we missed a couple. We will be heading home this weekend as the bite here has been off and tuna seiners are moving in. Also, the giant yellowfin are really going off strong on the lower banks of Baja which is right on the way home to California.