

# Flying Gaff on the Avalon Bank

By John 'Afishinado' King

I had been fishing pretty hard for a couple of days running charters out of Avalon on Catalina Island so I decided to give the Afishinado a rest and sleep in. I lay in bed enjoying the fact that it was 8:30 in the morning and I had nowhere to go. I could hear the urgent ring of my cell phone in the charging cradle downstairs, but I knew that I would never make the dash from the bed to the phone in time, so I just let it ring. Soon enough the urge for coffee put my feet to the floor so I sauntered on down to see if the caller had left a message. "John, this is Scotty Costa, we are wired to a huge Thresher on the Avalon Bank and we need a flying gaff. Call me." Now that is a message that would get any true fisherman moving.



The unwritten rule in my book is that when a fellow fisherman calls for a gaff, you get him one as quickly as you can. Believe me, the day will come when you need one and it is good to have some Karma points in the flying gaff department. I called a few buddies on the island and got message

machines. "No time for messages" I thought. I told my wife Karen to bring the coffee and a muffin to Float 5, "We have an adventure in store for us today," I said as I went out the door with my boat keys in hand.

It took some digging, but I found a flying gaff handle and a gaff head in my boat. I started the engines on Afishinado just as Karen was pulling up with the coffee. As I dropped the stern line, I noticed the sand line was flying a bit high. My worst fears were confirmed when I went to the bow to drop the hawser only to find it would not drop, it just hung there. I hurried back, shut down the engines and found that the sand line had indeed gotten wrapped in the running gear. I pulled, dropped, twisted, and generally failed at clearing the line. Not good. My choice was to jump in and free the line, or take the 14-foot skiff off shore and find Scotty to get him the gaff.

Karen agreed that the skiff was the best option so we zoomed out of the harbor and right into a freshening breeze that made the run pretty bumpy. I knew Scotty was on the Avalon Bank which is located about 6 miles off-shore, however, I was in the skiff with no GPS and, as I soon discovered, no working VHF. The cell phone worked well enough for Scotty to know I was coming, and for him to relay that they were near the



freighter. We spotted the freighter on the very distant horizon and made a bee line in it's direction. We fought our way offshore with a stiff breeze in our face and a choppy south swell. I made out a boat on the horizon and headed for it. Wrong boat, but one with a working VHF.

A quick VHF call revealed that we had actually passed Scotty who was a bit to the West of our position. (Those freighters move pretty fast.) We now had a compass course to run and soon we came upon the duo locked in battle with a fish that Scotty described as "big as a cow." We handed off the flying gaff and decided to stick around to take some pictures and to assist if needed. The fish was circling deep and the small 19-foot Parker center console, appropriately named 'Rip Some Lip' was spinning from the pull of

the big fish. The angler, Gene Eubank, was on the ice chest in the bow with the rod fully bent. He had been there for about 5 hours by the time we arrived and it was another hour before the fish was ready to be taken.



Scotty took the first gaff shot and we could hear him grunt as he pulled up to stick the gaff. The fish simply rolled out of the gaff shot like a running back rolls out of a tackle. Scotty could not believe it. "It didn't even penetrate her skin!" he yelled.



Gene had backed off the drag, so the fight was still on. Another 15 minutes and the fish was in position again. This time the gaff shot stuck and the fish was pulled close to the boat. Gene dropped the rod into the holder and picked up a puny little hand gaff. "No wonder they needed a flyer", I thought. The small gaff helped to

control the fish, and after such a battle she was pretty much done.



The two had trouble getting the big fish into their little boat, so I jumped on board to lend some girth. We pulled, but the fish would not budge. We finally agreed to one last try and positioned the boat to allow the



swell to help lift the fish into the boat. We timed the swell and as the gunnel dropped to sea level we pulled and managed to get a good portion of the fish into the boat.



With some effort, she finally dropped in, but that was looking to be a big problem. I ran to the bow and Scotty fired up the outboard. The boat was overly full of men,

fish and water, and was dangerously close to dipping to allow more ocean in.



Not a good thing. We got her started and never stopped until we made the harbor.



Karen made it back ahead of us to alert the media, however, we learned that Avalon had passed an ordinance just after the movie "Jaws" that prevented anyone from entering the harbor or from weighing sharks within the city limits. We could not even hoist the fish for pictures, "bad for tourism" we were told.

Undeterred, we taped the fish out at 93 inches long, and 60 inches around. We proceeded to dress the fish outside the harbor and every time we looked at the fish, we just had to laugh at the size of this monster. We never did get to weigh her, but we did manage to get some insight into the size of this fish using the formula girth

squared X length / 800 which told us the fish was about 418 pounds! After we dressed the fish out completely, we divided the meat into three sections. One of the sections weighed out at 127 pounds, fully dressed.

If there is a moral to the story, and there is always one, it is that the ocean is an infinitely amazing

surprise. Scotty and Gene were heading out with a plan to fish Mako. They had 50# test on a 50 wide with a 14 foot 150# line leader. They were optimistic, excited and ready for anything, almost. Who would have known they would find themselves locked onto a monster fish for more than six hours in a small boat on the open ocean. We head out to find

adventure, and to find out something about ourselves, and in this seemingly endless mass of liquid mystery we discover why fishing is such an addiction....because you just never know.

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