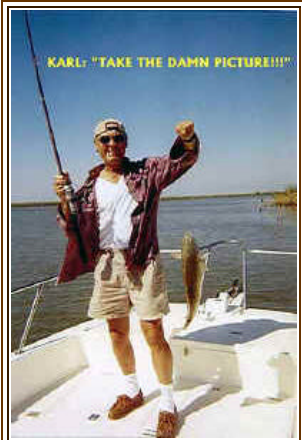


THE TAJ ON THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER DELTA

	<p><u>WHAT'S THE TAJ?</u> <u>by</u> <u>Karl Sydor</u></p>	<p><u>Return to Previous Page</u></p> <p><u>Slideshow</u></p> <p><u>Print Page</u></p>
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THE TAJ ON THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER DELTA

WHAT'S THE TAJ

Yes, you're reading the title correctly; it says the TAJ like in the TAJ MAHAL. Well I've been to the TAJ, but it's not like the real TAJ MAHAL. It's a 120-foot barge on a cut off from the South Pass of the Mississippi River Delta where it flows into the Gulf of Mexico. There are three major passes to the gulf with South Pass being the center pass. The TAJ is only 1.5 miles from the open Gulf. The TAJ is a fishing camp on a barge; you'll see what I mean later.

Joe Fezio (from New Orleans), Dick Rauber (from Tampa) and I (from the Fort Lauderdale area) planned one of our annual 'man-trips' to this area for some great southern style salt-water fishing. Joe is a member of the TAJ club, which consists of about 20 men who support the TAJ, the lodgelike

barge. We decided to make our trip in October 2001. I flew to New Orleans Thursday afternoon and Joe picked me up at the airport; Dick drove from Tampa. We planned this to be a four-day weekend, returning on Sunday.

LOU'SIANA LIVIN'

That night we stayed at Joe and his wife Patsy's home, which is a beautiful three-story home built on piers, located in Covington, Louisiana on one acre of property on the Flowers Bayou. The ground floor is fully enclosed having a workshop for Joe, fishing equipment storage area, freezers for Joe's catches and an office for Patsy. The two upper floors look as if they were designed as a modern style home with a lodge-like layout. Early next morning, we loaded up a special trailer Joe had custom built to carry all the food supplies, fishing equipment and bait. He trailers it with his SUV to Venice Marina, about an hour south of New Orleans, where Joe keeps his 25-foot Sea Cat, a catamaran open fisherman with twin 150 hp Suzuki's. Joe keeps the Sea Cat, named Catsby, on a trailer in a shed at the Venice Marina. After we got there, the marina crew dropped the boat in the water; we placed all our provisions, bait, tackle and personal bags onboard and then headed down the Mississippi. This was my first experience on a cat hull; it was a very fast, smooth, enjoyable and exhilarating ride.

ARRIVING AT THE TAJ

THE TAJ ON THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER DELTA

About 40 minutes later we arrived at the TAJ; I had only a little idea of what to expect. One can only get to the TAJ by boat; it's moored against a marsh and anchored in place. From the outside the TAJ looks rather plain. However, after we tied the boat to it and went inside, I could not believe my eyes. The members had made a floating palace out of it. It is truly a man's place, although, the wives and girlfriends also stay on it. The lodge has five bedrooms, two full baths, a completely outfitted gourmet kitchen, dining room, playroom, satellite TV, and, of course, a massive bar. Fresh water comes from rainwater and is filtered and purified by a complex onboard water system. There is an enclosed porch at the east end of the barge with a barbeque grill outside and a roof top patio at the west end. This lodge is complete and self-sustaining.

We unloaded the boat and got ourselves settled down. Being from Florida, I was concerned about the cool weather, I had heard that it had been very cold there lately, even though it's right on the

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(2)

Gulf of Mexico. Not knowing what to expect, I packed everything I could, including a salt-water fisherman's slicker outfit complete with pants and suspenders. Thank goodness, the weather was great and I didn't need to wear them.

FISHING THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA

We fished Friday afternoon, Saturday morning and Saturday afternoon. Joe initially ran the boat out onto the Gulf. He took us to a couple of locations called 'mud-lumps' where there can be some good fishing. A mud-lump is normally an area close to shore where the mud actually grows in height and width, and rises out of the water. Mud-lumps are known to sometimes get higher and wider and at other times sink below the surface. A fisherman must become aware of them and not get too close otherwise he could run his boat aground in mucky, mud. There are hundreds of oilrig platforms within boating distance, but it started to get windy and choppy, and since we weren't having any luck fishing on the Gulf, Joe thought it would be better if we went up the river.

We ended up fishing off a marsh area on the South Pass. We caught mostly Redfish, but also caught a few Drum fish (related to the Redfish). For the weekend we caught a total of thirteen fish. I was ecstatic because this was the first time I ever caught Redfish, although I had read about them in my fishing magazines. Joe wasn't impressed with our catch; he said they usually catch more.

LOU'SIANA FEAST

Joe made sure that our dinners were sumptuous with barbequed steaks one night and fresh fish on the other. Fresh shrimp, salad, baked potatoes, and an assortment of vegetables accompanied these meals. Our drinks consisted of beer and soda while fishing, Martinis before dinner, wine with dinner and a variety of choice liquors and quality cigars after dinner. As they say, it doesn't get any better than this!

FEREL GOATS

On the marsh across from the TAJ we were visited by a wild herd of brown goats, called ferel goats. Apparently, someone brought these animals to the marsh many years ago; they survived and began to grow in population. Now they are a sight to see as they roam these marshes. They seem to disappear, like ghosts, as quickly as they had appeared; then, they come back the next day.

AUREVOIR

Well, Sunday morning came only too soon. We were the only ones at the TAJ for this weekend and we had the responsibility to clean it up. It was like being back in the army doing latrine duty for those who know what I mean. I'm not complaining though, it was well worth the experience and

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I'm a Jersey boy, in fact, born in Jersey City and brought up at the Jersey shore. What a thrill this was for a Jersey guy to be running by boat on the Mississippi River and the Mississippi River Delta, and actually fishing there. Yes, I've been to the TAJ and I can tell you this was one of our 'man-trip' experiences I'll never forget, not to mention the great company of my good friends, Joe and Dick. Thank you guys for a great and memorable time!

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