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	<p><u>BIMINI GROUPE,</u> <u>INVENTING A FISH</u></p> <p>by</p> <p><i>Karl Sydor</i></p>	<p><i>Print Page</i></p> <hr/> <p><u>Return to Previous Page</u></p> <hr/> <p><u>Go Photo Gallery</u></p>
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Have you ever heard of Bimini Grouper? Maybe you have and maybe you haven't. A couple friends of mine (Dick Rauber from Tampa and Joe Fezio from New Orleans) and I think we invented the name under desperate conditions.

We had cruised to Bimini in my 32-foot Hatteras sport fisherman the middle of May a couple of years ago, looking forward to a great three-day weekend of fishing, drinking, eating and having fun. Sounds like a rowdy group, huh? Not really, we're just older men who don't want to give up our youth.

Anyway, we exited Hillsboro Inlet, Pompano Beach, Florida on Friday at about 8 AM and with the Bimini coordinates in our GPS, let it guide us towards the Bimini Channel, about a 48-mile open ocean cruise. Although the Hatteras is capable of cruising at 24-25 knots, due to five-foot seas, we had to throttle back to 14 knots to keep from pounding the boat (and our old backs) into oblivion. As a result, the trip was longer than we liked, but we arrived off Bimini in a little over three hours after leaving Hillsboro.

We decided to do some trolling for a couple of hours before entering Bimini Channel, but given my past experiences of getting processed through Bimini Immigration and Customs, I was anxious to get docked, fueled up and clear through customs. We didn't catch anything that day, but we were bent on getting some advice from the locals to find out where the fishing areas were. Well, that was a mistake. The locals wouldn't part with any information and suggested we hire one of them for a day to go on the boat with us as a guide. Not knowing who would be of real value to do this, we hesitated and decided to go it alone.

LET'S ROCK N ROLL!

At the docks one of the boaters told us to go south of Bimini where fishing was recently productive. Armed with that information and having a new top gun Simrad chart-plotter GPS on board that identified every nook and cranny of the western Bahamas islands, and a reasonably good fish finder, we were ready to catch fish. Before we left homeport, we had loaded up with rigged dead Ballyhoo to troll for Dolphin, and Squid and other bait for bottom fishing, and plenty of ice to keep the fish cold until we grilled them. Yes, we were ready for the catch!

We headed out of the Bimini Channel to a couple of hundred feet of water and then turned south. We weren't too sure how far south we had to go, and anxious to fish, we decided to place our lines out and troll in that direction. Surely, this was a safe way to find that fish haven. After the first hour or so, our excitement started to wear thin...where were these fish? Surely, we had traveled pretty far south, where were they? Well, we were not going to give up so, undaunted, we kept going south. At some point we made a tactical decision to go out to deeper water to scout out other areas and circle back to see what we might pick

up. But to no avail. Curiously, we hadn't seen many other boats fishing.

Then we decided we hadn't gone far enough, so once again we pointed the bow south and continued to troll. Not even a Barracuda! Well, being only human beings, we began to get discouraged and talked about changing our strategy. The previous week, a boater friend of mine from Fort Lauderdale who had fished Bimini recently told me of a hole that's right off a ledge not far from the Bimini Channel. He said it was a great place for catching Yellow Tail Snapper. So, Yellow Tail, here we come!

Having traveled pretty far south, it took quite a while to cruise back up to Bimini. When we arrived at the suspected ledge location, to our surprise there were about fifty boats already trying to catch those Yellow Tails, or whatever was hanging out there. Not to be outdone, we weaved the Hatteras through the maze and found what looked like a good place to catch our fill and dropped anchor. Yes, this must be the place!

NO YELLOW TAIL?

We didn't see anyone catching fish, but then Joe reeled in a fish he hadn't seen in Louisiana. I recognized it as a gray Triggerfish; I told Joe we throw those back where I live. Joe, being the diehard Italian that he is, refused to throw back the Triggerfish, and tossed it into the fish box. I wasn't too keen on that, but before long Dick and I were hooking into Triggerfish and keeping them. I won't say we slaughtered them, but at least we had something to show for our efforts. More than the other boats did, anyway.

Well, after we had caught our bounty, we decided it was "Miller-time," so we hauled in the anchor and headed for our berth at the

Big Game Club. Our plan was to either eat our catch that night or go out to dinner. Joe insisted he fillet the Triggerfish; I can't say I encouraged him. In fact, I thought he had lost his mind, but let him do whatever kept him happy. Dick and I stayed back to wash the boat down.

Joe returned to the boat with the fillets and smiling from ear to ear. He had met a local native man at the fish cleaning station who told him that Triggerfish were excellent eating and showed Joe the secret of how to fillet them. Joe was convinced that we would have a feast tonight. I must admit my stomach was churning at the thought of eating Triggerfish.

That year, Big Game still had the big outdoor gas grills, so Joe and Dick commandeered one and with as much seasoning as they could put on the fillets, began to grill them. In the meantime I did the baked potatoes, vegetables, etc. I visited Joe and Dick at the grill site to see how they were doing; I was worried...the Captain Morgan's Rum was disappearing pretty fast. I wanted to be sure they were still up to the job, but no problem, they were doing great.

MOMENT OF TRUTH

Joe and Dick came back to the boat with the fillets looking very grilled and tasty. We proceeded to devour the fillets with gusto as the wine washed them down our gullets.

Unbelievable...these grilled Triggerfish fillets were great! Obviously, Joe was proud of his accomplishment, but I was more reluctant to celebrate and tell the world about this discovery. Finally, I told Joe and Dick that this was a great meal, but somehow I couldn't tell the rest of the world what we had eaten. Having empathy with my plight, Joe suggested that we tell our family and friends that we had caught and eaten Bimini Grouper.

Who would want to appear ignorant and challenge such a name of a fish? No one! Thus, the name Bimini Grouper was created.

Having lived this lie for a couple of years, I finally decided to look up information about the Triggerfish in my Florida Sportsman book "Sport Fish of Florida." I couldn't believe what I read. It actually described Triggerfish as an excellent eating fish. Well, I'm ready to come clean. I'm finally ready to reveal to the world that I actually chewed and swallowed grilled Triggerfish, and I liked it. Hey...don't laugh! Remember the old saying, "Try it, you may like it."

EPILOGUE

By the way, I forgot to tell you that after our sumptuous Triggerfish meal, we met some guys on the dock who had caught Dolphin that day south of Bimini. When we described where we had trolled, they told us we had stopped too soon, that the Dolphin were only a short distance south of where we gave up. Well, as they say, maybe this was meant to be, otherwise maybe the world would never have heard about Bimini Grouper.