

Yo Ho, Yo

With a Laid-Back Attitude and Hot Fishing, Rum Cay May Be Paradise

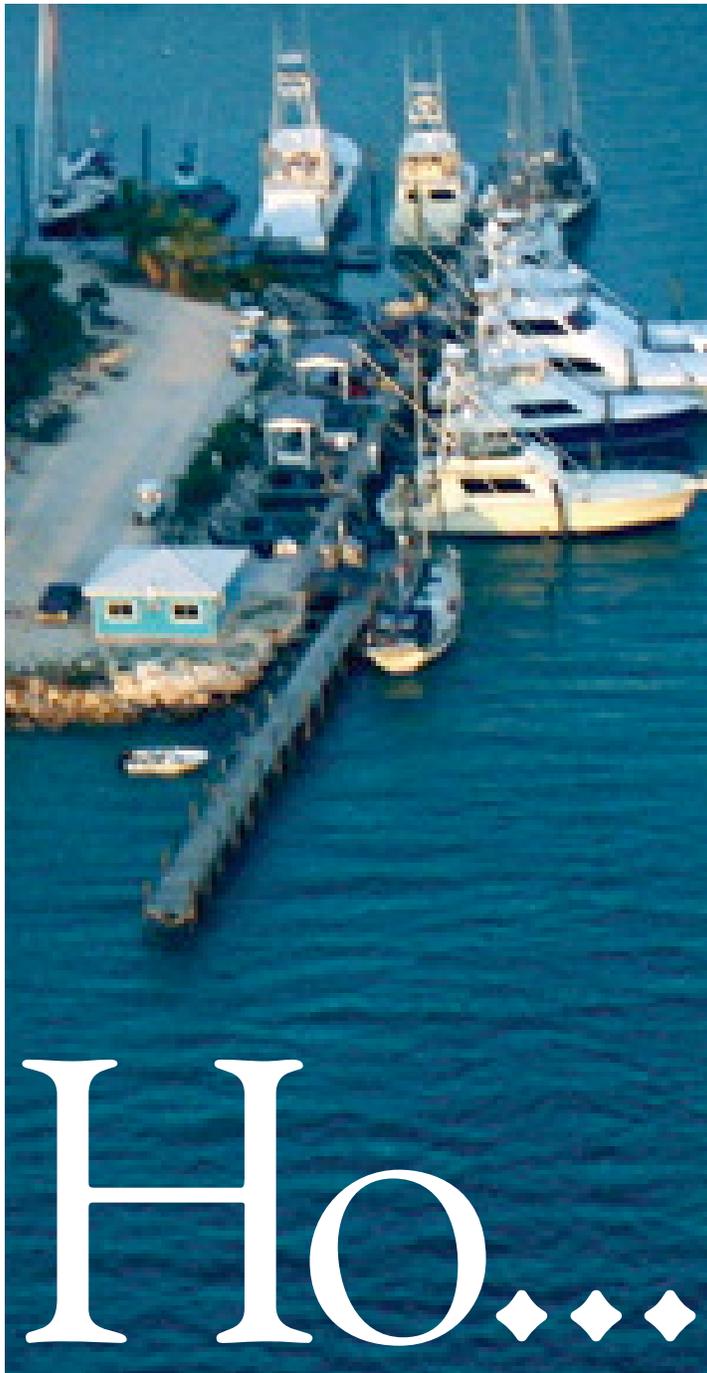
By John Brownlee

YOU'VE GOT TO LOVE A PLACE WHERE GREAT fishing starts about 500 yards from your slip. You can literally fish all day out of Rum Cay, in the southeastern Bahamas, and never put the boat on plane if you don't feel like it. Where else can you experience an incredible marlin bite so close to the United States and burn only 20 gallons of diesel fuel a day?

If you think I exaggerate, think again. Sumner Point Marina, currently the only marina on Rum Cay, sits on the southeast corner of the island, right in front of a finger of

reefs that jut into the ocean in a generally southeasterly direction. Almost everybody starts their day off Southeast Point, as it's called, and when you reach the outer buoys of the marina entrance channel, you're practically ready to drop the outriggers.

Deep blue water runs close to the southern shore of Rum, so by the time you get your lures in the water, the boat's already trolling in several thousand feet. "When people ask me where to fish, I always tell them to come out of the marina, turn left a little and drop the riggers," says Trey Rhyne,



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TEY RHYNE

owner of the *Over/Under*, one of the area's few charter operations. Rhyne operates a fleet of small aircraft and a 54-foot Bertram out of nearby Cat Island, but he frequently fishes Rum and uses it as a base of operations for exploring the far reaches of the southern Bahamas.

When you look at a chart of Rum and where it's situated among the other islands, you begin to understand why this area is such a great marlin-fishing spot. Just a few miles southwest of San Salvador and due east of the northern tip of Long Island, it's right on the eastern edge of the Bahamas chain. Surrounded by very deep water, Rum lies squarely on the migratory path of virtually everything that swims north or south through the islands.

A Natural Fish Magnet

Strong currents sweep by the island's eastern shoreline and over two major fingers of coral reef extending out from the island's southeast and northeast corners. Most of the fishing takes place around these two points.

"The last couple of years, Southeast Point has been the most productive spot," Rhyne says. "We like to troll around the tip of the point, starting at the 100-fathom line and working our way southeast on top of the ridge that extends out to the third contour line, in very deep water." Depending on the time of year, this area offers superb fishing for blue and white marlin, wahoo, and yellowfin tuna, with a springtime run of huge dolphin thrown in for good measure.

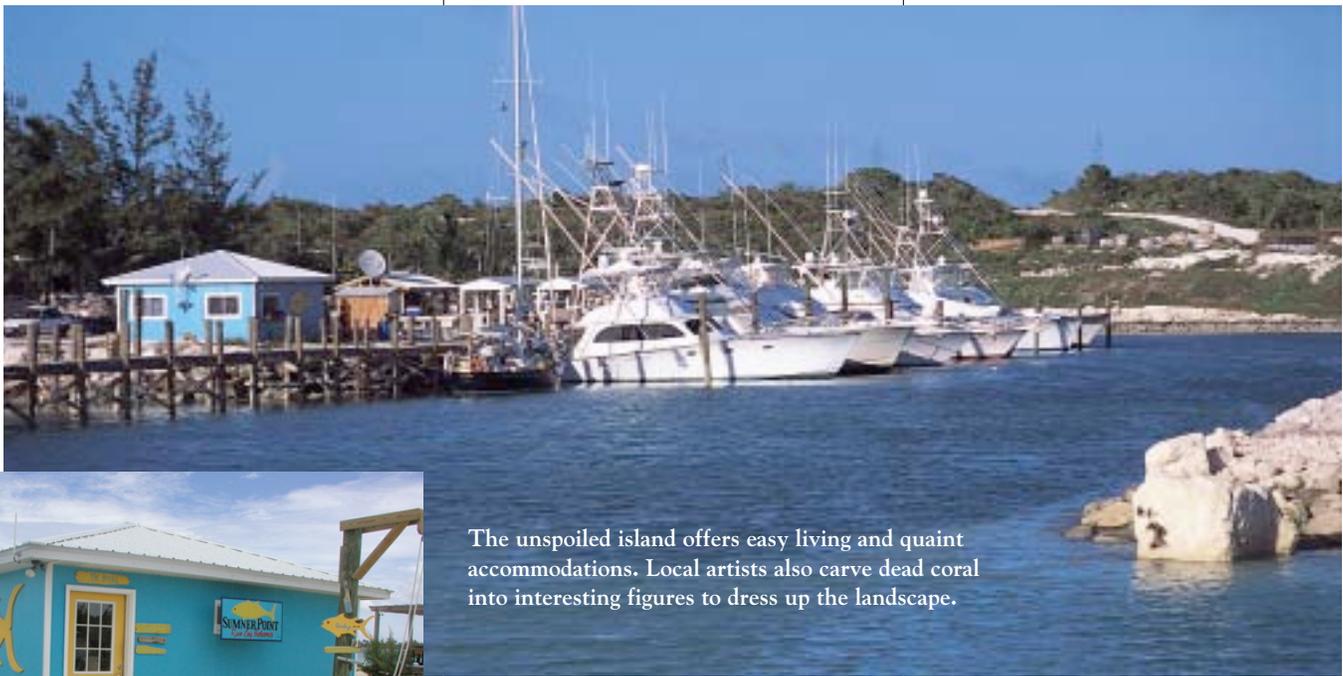
At times the northwest corner of the island also turns on, producing some nice catches. Anglers will also report fish at the southwest corner, especially along an area called Sandy Point, where deep water runs almost up to the beach.

As with its close neighbor San Salvador, the wintertime wahoo fishing off Rum Cay, which starts around December and lasts through March, produces massive fish, with 100-pounders relatively common. Hordes of tuna arrive in the early spring and stay pretty much all summer, and the marlin fishing peaks from May through July. These are just rough rules of thumb of course, because you can catch any of these species in any month of the year down there.

With the trolling grounds just a stone's throw from Rum Cay, boats need not travel far to find concentrations of marlin, both whites and blues.



JOHN BROWNLEE



The unspoiled island offers easy living and quaint accommodations. Local artists also carve dead coral into interesting figures to dress up the landscape.



JOHN BROWNLEE (2)

Pick a Spread

On a typical day captains usually work their way along the drop-off toward the tip of Southeast Point, zigzagging on and off the reef, until they reach the end. Many will stay in that general area or even work their way back toward the island's southern shore and the pocket created where the reef line turns to the west. That's a well-known place to find tuna birds and an overall great spot to fish.

"The marina side of Southeast Point holds the biggest concentration of bait," says Rhyne, "and it's probably the best place to find meat fish. I like fishing from the tip, all the way back to the marina." Rhyne prefers fishing the leeward side of the reef's points, since baitfish tend to get washed over the reef in the current and predators wait for them in the lee.

Other Rum Cay experts agree with this philosophy. "We've had some of our best fishing right out in front of the marina, west to Sandy Point," says Capt. Robert Hollingsworth, who has been running private boats out of Rum since the 1980s. He fishes closer than a lot of other captains, preferring to work the reef drop-offs in water as shallow as 150 to 250 feet. "I feel like the fish are



WILLIAM TOWNSEND

more aggressive in there," he says, "and I've even seen some guys be successful working shallower than me."

Hollingsworth believes that the dark of the moon brings improved fishing, and although he fished a lot of bait in the early years at Rum, he eventually made the switch to lures. He now pulls a spread of various makes and models. "We never seemed to catch any big fish with bait," he says, "but the lures have been very productive for us, and we've seen a lot of big fish in recent years." He says that in a typical season, he and his clients will fish about 70 days and catch 40 to 50 blue marlin.

Rhyne also migrated over to plastics on the *Over/Under*, but he usually runs one-skirted bait in the spread for good measure. "When we made the switch to pulling more lures, the marlin didn't seem to care," he says, "and we like to run a skirted bait in the mix because it

lets us keep up a relatively fast trolling speed of say, 7½ to 8½ knots so the artificials work right." Rhyne always keeps a pitch bait rigged and ready, too.

My Favorite Haunt

I spent two weeks fishing Rum last summer, and a lot of the boats ran a spread consisting of three artificials and one Spanish mackerel, usually pulled on a short rigger line. My crew used a combination of lures and horse ballyhoo rigged on mono leaders behind small lure heads or Ilanders, and we got our share of bites. Our standard game plan resembled Rhyne's, as we would start off in front of the marina and work our way out to the tip of Southeast Point, but we found more consistent action fishing the finger of reefs off Northeast Point. After trolling around Southeast Point for an hour or two, we would make our way north along the eastern shore of Rum and then work our way to the northeast, toward the tip of Northeast Point. The eastern side of the point lies to windward, and a small piece of reef juts out about halfway to the point. We found tuna there most afternoons, and we managed to hook two blue marlin around this smaller point as well.

One afternoon, we trolled toward a flock of birds off the point and saw a school of yellowfin crashing the surface. My son Ben was working the cockpit and quickly ran a cedar plug out on the center rigger, in addition to our usual spread. As we trolled into the tuna



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Blue marlin start showing up in March, but the action really heats up in June and July. Most of the boats troll combinations of baits and plastics.

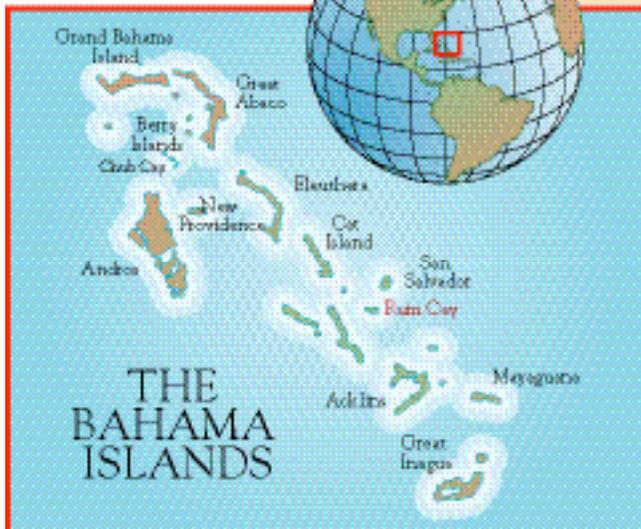
melee, the cedar plug quickly got the nod as the shotgun line went down. Ben and I were alone on the boat and shorthanded. Before we could get the tuna under control on the shotgun, the long rigger bait, a horse ballyhoo behind a purple-and-black Ilander, came tight for a doubleheader.

I pulled the throttles back to a low idle and came down from the bridge to clear lines and work on the second fish as Ben was already reeling in the cedar plug rod. As I cranked in the other long rigger, the one rod remaining went off right in front of our eyes. Something big ate the large artificial drifting behind the dead boat, just beyond the short teaser, leaving a cannonball splash. We kept at the task at hand as a large blue marlin, easily 500-plus pounds, erupted behind the boat with the lure in its mouth and started greyhounding across the surface on its side. We quickly decided to cut off the tuna and concentrate on the blue.

By the time I got back to the bridge and began backing down, the fish had dumped two-thirds of a 50-wide, but Ben began to regain line as I spun the boat and chased the fish moving forward, parallel to where the line entered the water. When we got much of the line back on the reel, I spun the boat backward, and we found ourselves straight above the fish. Ben pumped and wound methodically, but progress

came slowly. The fish still had over 200 yards of line out.

The big blue swam away from the reef on the initial strike, but then turned and swam back toward the point where we had hooked it. I saw that the tuna birds had formed up again. School-



size yellowfin were mixed in with larger fish and crashed around the boat as we backed up slowly, right into the middle of the feeding frenzy. Suddenly, the rod tip popped up, and the marlin was gone, broken off. We sat in stunned silence for a second, and then Ben wound in the remaining line. Small

Ins and Outs of Rum Cay

Rum Cay has only one town, Port Nelson, and very little in the way of supporting infrastructure for tourists. Only 60 or so full-time residents live here, and finding an open grocery store or a restaurant is often chancy at best. But Rum is ruggedly beautiful, and the locals are friendly and eager to help in any way they can. It's also the only place I know where wild cows roam the island, staring at you from the middle of the road as you approach in your golf cart.

The island's lone marina, Sumner Point Marina, was literally dug out of the ground by Bobby Little, the son of Robert Little Sr. of Florida, who purchased 100 acres of land on Sumner Point in 1965. Little bought land-excavating equipment, taught himself how to use it, and single-handedly dug out what is now the marina.

Sumner Point is home to the Out of the Blue restaurant, which was closed during our visit as the owner searched for a new chef. It also has the Green Flash bar and grill, which served meals most of the time. The marina

has an eclectic and funky charm. Visitors and locals gather most nights for a dock-side potluck dinner, and a pack of friendly Bahamian "potcake" dogs greets you each afternoon as you pull into your slip. It's an intimate place where friends are easily made. The marina also offers the only motel rooms on the island, with several one-bed-

room cottages and one two-bedroom house for rent.

Sumner Point Marina
U.S. Phone: 954-232-2082
Bahamas: 242-331-2823
www.rumcaymarina.com

SPECIES AVAILABILITY

BLUE MARLIN	F	F	G	G	E	E	E	G	G	G	F	F
WHITE MARLIN	F	G	G	E	E	E	G	G	G	F	F	F
YELLOWFIN TUNA	G	G	G	E	E	E	E	G	G	G	G	G
WAHOO	E	E	E	G	G	F	F	F	F	G	G	E
DOLPHIN	G	G	E	E	E	E	G	G	G	G	G	G

E EXCELLENT **G** GOOD **F** FAIR

teeth marks in the line confirmed our fears; a tuna bit the waxed loop we had fastened to the line to attach it to the outrigger pin, ending the fight.

But we redeemed ourselves the very next day, catching our second marlin of the trip — a smaller blue of around 250 pounds — less than a mile from the same spot. We caught a third blue in deep water off the tip of Northeast Point a few days later when my friend Bill Gilbert, of Islamorada, flew in with his family to join us for a few days. Gilbert caught the boat's third blue on a very rough day. His fish came in from the side and jumped on a lure run off the long rigger. As we trolled down-sea, the fish appeared in the crest of a wave behind us. The boat settled into a trough. We watched in awe as the fish, which appeared suspended above our

New Plans for Rum

As is the case with many of the Bahamas islands, change is in the wind at Rum Cay. A British development group called Montana Holdings Ltd. purchased 900 acres near Cotton Field Point, the first point of land along Rum's southern shoreline west of

Sumner Point.

Montana Holdings plans to build a world-class resort on Rum, named Rum Cay Resort Marina, which will include a superyacht marina

and a luxury hotel, along with an upscale residential community with fine dining and shopping available. They even plan to add spa and fitness facilities. Rum Cay has a brand-new 4,500-foot runway, built to accommodate such development. Find out more at www.rumcay.com.



JOHN BROWNLEE

If the marlin bite slows to a trickle, you can always find a few bull dolphin for the grill.

Over/Under Charters

Rum Cay has no scheduled airline flights to its new airport, so Trey Rhyne and Over/Under Charters are your best bet for getting there. He offers flights to Rum from Fort Lauderdale and can obviously arrange a complete package that includes air travel, accommodations, and charter fishing aboard the 54 Bertram *Over/Under*.

Over/Under Charters

Office: 866-682-8862

Flight Bookings: 305-852-8015

www.overundercharters.com

heads in the water, came rushing down into the spread with mayhem on its mind. What a spectacular bite!

We also caught a blue marlin off of the seldom-fished reef on the northwest corner of the island. There isn't a pronounced reef extending offshore underwater from the northwest point, but rather a shallow reef that drops off quickly into deep water. An old wreck, still visible but greatly reduced in stature by numerous hurricanes, sits near the north end of this reef, and tuna birds bunch up in the waters between this point and Conception Island, only a few miles to the northwest. We caught our blue under a flock of birds, only a mile or so off the point, after returning from a day of fishing around Conception.

The northwest side gets fished lightly because it's on the opposite corner of the island from the marina, and since the fishing is so productive right out front, no one bothers to travel that far. As Robert Hollingsworth points out, though, "The farthest place to fish around Rum is only 16 miles from the marina." So it's an easy run to any corner.

Last season, many described the fishing around Rum as subpar, but, to be more accurate, things just got off to a late start. We caught six blues there during the last two weeks of June, but soon after we left the fishing went off for three days straight, mostly at Northeast Point. Some boats got as many as 15 shots at blues in a single day in shallow water up tight against the reef.

Like most places, you never know from day-to-day what will happen here, but on average, Rum undoubtedly offers some of the best marlin fishing anywhere in the Bahamas. And even though the blue marlin showed up late, boats fishing Rum (and throughout the Bahamas, in fact) saw an abnormally high number of white marlin. "Our average of whites to blues ran much higher than normal this year," says Rhyne.

Rum remains a distant outpost, but it offers a laid-back charm and a slow pace that relatively few hard-core marlin fishermen have come to love. This combination of old-Bahamas ambiance and great offshore fishing makes it seem like paradise to those of us who desire nothing more than good conversation on the dock, a cold Kalik and red-hot marlin fishing right at our doorstep. If this sounds good to you, then a trip to Rum Cay should definitely be on your agenda. 