

# To catch fish, you have to know where they're located

## Fishing News

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After running 40 minutes from the Flamingo docks across a part of Florida Bay that isn't a secret from anyone, my fishing buddy stopped his boat and declared in a stage whisper:

"Big trout right here. Start casting."

He looked all around us — the furtive kind of body language that would get the attention of an alert cop if we were in Phoenix without proof of citizenship.

We had been fishing scarcely five minutes when he, Don Causey, reeled in a stout splasher that we mistook for snook, and then for a sea trout until he got it aboard. It was a bluefish, unexpected at the end of April but not surprising.

In the distance, an outboard engine hummed.

"Boat coming," Don said. "If you have a fish on when they pass, lower your rod. If they ask how we're doing, tell them we haven't caught much."

The guys on the other boat waved as they passed. When they were out of sight Don repositioned the boat.

"Big trout right here," he said again and right there I caught a little trout.

### Geography lesson

Here's the lesson in that part of this story:

To catch big fish you have to know where they are, or at least where they were the last time you were there. The last time Don was there, he and his wife caught two limits of trout, four each.

He wouldn't have revealed it to those guys on that other boat if they had stopped to pick our brains, but we could have told them truthfully that we hadn't caught much.

Next we headed for one of the Florida Bay back country's four no-motor zones.

I'm not allowed to tell which one it was, but judging by the other boats and people we found on the mangrove creek leading to it that Thursday morning, it can't be very secret.

Still, those zones might as well be secret because so few people fish in them. Why not? Because you not only can't use



Photo/ARNOLD MARKOWITZ  
Don Causey shows off an impressive backcountry snook caught in a no-motor zone near Florida Bay.

a motor there, you can't even have one on your transom. No electric trolling motors are allowed either. If you want to take an outboard boat past the sign that says you can't, you have to unbolt the engine and lift it into the cockpit.

How big an outboard can you handle like that without your back caving in or the engine falling in the water? You can't step overboard to steady it because the shallow bottom's too soft.

The solution is to muscle a canoe or kayak onto your skiff, park the boat and rope it to mangroves, ease the motorless boat over the side and paddle into the restricted zone.

Don's 14-foot fiberglass canoe is heavy, but he devised a way to hoist it onto the deck diagonally, bottoms up. He loops a dock line through the canoe's handgrip and ties it around the skiff's bow cleat. That's pretty secure.

We loop the rope over the canoe's hull while I hold the

other end to prevent bouncing. Don knows the art of leverage well enough to slide the canoe from boat deck to the water and haul it back up, single-handed. You can do the same thing with a kayak, although foot for foot it's likely to weigh more than a canoe.

You mustn't bring any more tackle or other goods on the boat than you can shift to the canoe, for thieves disguised as fishermen might steal anything that isn't tied down.

I suppose fear of theft keeps a lot of people from paddling away from their motorboats. They probably guess that hot-wiring the ignition is as easy as stealing a car the same way.

All that seems like a lot of work, doesn't it? Not so sure you have enough physical stamina, are you?

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