

WM BROWN



A close-up, action-oriented photograph of a diver holding a large shark by its mouth. The diver's hands, wearing black gloves, are visible at the top of the frame, gripping the shark's upper jaw. The shark's mouth is wide open, showing its teeth and tongue. The shark's body is dark with prominent yellow and white stripes along its side. The background is a blurred, turquoise ocean surface, suggesting the scene is taking place underwater or just below the surface. The overall composition is dynamic and emphasizes the power of the shark.

The Hook

THIS LATEST TRIP started as many of my past fishing adventures do with a visit to my favorite NYC fly shop, The Urban Angler. I have known the owner, Jon Fisher (yes, his real last name!), for some 30 years. I would go to the shop—then on 26th Street—when we were both much younger and it was owned by his father. I would hang out, test equipment I couldn't afford, and then dream about exotic and far away fishing destinations.

Oddly enough, after all these years Jon and I had never fished together. So when he suggested I check out the Black Sands Lodge on the Bahía de Solano in Colombia for Wm Brown, I asked if he would come along.

Black Sands is a blue-water fishing outfit, a 30-minute flight from Medellín on the jungle coast of the Pacific Ocean, just south of Panama (and an ideal export zone to get a certain white powder stateside, but that's another story!). The flight was quick, and we landed in a type of airport that felt very familiar from my experiences in other far-off fishing destinations—more shack and shed than terminal. With bags in hand, we loaded into a pickup truck and headed to a panga, then changed into shorts and Birks for the ride to the bigger boat. That would afford us a few hours of fishing while commuting to the lodge, which turned out to be rustic but beautiful and very well appointed.

We spent the next couple of days fly-fishing for sailfish and yellowfin using sardines as bait, and the season was just ideal for that. We could see sailfish cresting the water and attacking baits, while we remained always within eyesight of the amazing jungle shoreline that descends into the sea. Also in our group were Stephen Lewis, who was photographing the trip, plus John Fisher and Filipe Morales, who was the captain and owner of the lodge—all of 30, he's incredibly knowledgeable and enthusiastic. All that his team—consisting of one Colombian guy and one Guatemalan—wanted

to do was catch fish, which provided an infectious kind of energy.

We would attract the fish by running teaser lures without hooks. As the sailfish came up on the teasers, the crew would quickly reel them in and then throw this kind of big, popping, feathery fly that imitates a bait fish or squid. You'd pray that the fish would take it—and when they did, you'd hold on for the fight of your life. They're the most acrobatic fish, and kind of just run for it—before you know it, it seems like 200 yards of line are out, and then the fish jump up. They tended to average a 20- to 30-minute fight.

We also saw schools of spotted dolphins chasing the sardines. The crew would throw out casting nets and collect the sardines, which were like rocket ships in the water. We were lucky enough to see a couple of big blitzes where the dolphins had schooled up all the sardines and then attacked them from all angles, systematically. It was incredible. You could throw a fly rod in and hook up these balls of speed and muscle. They averaged around 15 to 25 pounds, and it took everything you had to get these fish to the boat.

We kept most of them and ate them over the course of a couple days. I made a delicious ceviche and also an appetizer with the sardines that were saved from being tossed overboard for the tuna. It really reminded me of fishing out east in Montauk, just on a much bigger scale—fly-fishing for striped bass and albacore when the blitz is on. You have these big schools of fish around, which you can catch on the fly. It's pretty exciting and epic. Fishing for sailfish is best described as moments of absolute calm interrupted by pure violence, as these monsters come up and attack your teaser baits and you get ready to hook up with one of them. It's just the most beautiful thing.

We spent two and a half days fishing. The food that was prepared at the lodge was just incredible—







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think tuna crudo, but in the sushi style. So often at fishing lodges the food leans towards disappointing plop, but this was so good. It was also the first time I was greeted after a fly-fishing trip by someone holding fresh towels to wash off the day's accumulation of salt water and sweat.

The evenings were early as we were super exhausted, particularly after a couple of gin and tonics. We would start up again at six in the morning and just hope for the best. And we did see prodigious amounts of fish every single day—the ones

we caught ranged from 80 to 100 pounds, and were gently released afterward. Altogether, we caught a dozen or so, and I personally caught five.

After making our exit from the airport shack-turned-terminal—following cold beers at a local restaurant across the street—we made our way into Medellín. Back in “civilization,” we were soon treated to dry-aged tuna and mahi-mahi at an excellent restaurant called Krudo. As satisfying as the fare proved, I was reminded once again that there’s nothing quite like angling it in yourself.

