

# Permit Pursuit

by  
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I have been told hundreds of times over the last twenty five years that I must be the luckiest guy in the world...that I have the best damn job a person could ever dream of. I used to brush this off, downplaying it with some mumbo jumbo about it being great and all, *but* the job has its challenges and isn't always what it's cracked up to be, blah, blah, blah. Well, I am taking that all back! I do in fact have an amazing job, and feel blessed beyond my wildest dreams for the privilege to meet, help and befriend some of the most incredible people in the world.

And now, after close to thirty years of guiding and fly fishing in some of the most spectacular places in the world, I have a fish story to share; a tale that will live in my mind forever...or at least as long as all those haunting memories of the ones that got away!

It was Friday, the second to last day of our week at the new ESB Lodge (located on the south end of Espiritu Santo Bay on the Yucatan Peninsula). Our stay, for the most part, had gone well, despite the weather not being particularly cooperative. Daily the sun had played cat and mouse with lots of clouds, and there were gusty winds that would change directions as many as three times a day. Yet we had a great group of guys on the trip, and they had been busying themselves with some excellent fishing for tarpon, bones, permit and snook. The food was great, beer and margaritas cold and plentiful, and we had shared a lot of laughs.

This was to be a solo day with Jorge Ortiz - the new guide that used to work for Grand Slam Lodge up in Punta Allen - so I would be getting 100% of the shots. Jorge is young - 24 years old - and like his brother Alejandro is strong as an ox, spots fish like an osprey, poles relentlessly all day into the stiffest of winds, and has got some healthy guide swagger. Importantly, he speaks close to perfect English, having taught himself. He's got it going! The wind that morning was not too strong, blowing about ten knots out of the southeast, so Jorge and I decided to make the 45-minute downwind run to the permit fishing grounds of Cenote One and Cenote Two. It wasn't long after coming off step and poling onto a beautiful flat that Jorge spotted a laid-up permit. We got no less than thirty shots at that fish, switching rods/flyes on the fish twice, but he would not eat, despite our best efforts. We pushed on, continuing to hunt the flats for permit, but only got some fleeting shots at schools of moving fish. Finally, poling into a new bay, Jorge spots a group of nice-sized permit moving toward our skiff and I get a good frontal shot, dropping a tan Casa Blanca Crab five feet ahead of the school. Two of the fish rush the fly, one inhales it, and we are tight to a permit! The fish makes one of the best runs I have ever experienced in my life, from *any* fish, an honest 150-plus yards. I finally ask Jorge to start poling toward the fish to gain some backing. The fish makes three other strong runs and finally, after some nasty down and dirty fish fighting and keeping the fish off balance, we have him to the boat and tailed. Thirty minutes - incredible - and an 18-pound fish. Jorge and I share high-fives, snap lots of pictures, and are jacked! After downing some Gatorade and calming down, we continue to hunt permit. We see some fish and get some chances, though nothing that would be considered a good and legitimate shot. Finally, we decide to break for lunch at 12:30 pm, and give ourselves a rest. Thirty minutes later we are back at it, and get some really good looks at singles, pairs and schools, but the fish are spooky, and Jorge is now poling straight into a 15-knot wind. We finish up the Second Cenote Flat, put up our gear, then head out toward Punta Herrero straight into the teeth of the wind and chop.



### **The first permit of the day**

About two thirds of the way home, Jorge decides to fish a spot called Tabasco Cantos, a long and skinny flat that borders a rocky shoreline in the lee of the wind. About twenty minutes into our drift, Jorge sees a fish about fifteen feet from the shore – and the stalk is on. The permit is swimming erratically and aggressively chasing something, probably shrimp. The fish is big and tailing constantly, blowing up water and mud in great rushes (the sound of him thrashing the water is loud and unforgettable), but continues to swim away from us at a good clip. Jorge relentlessly poles after the fish and we get several feeble attempts in a nasty crossing wind, right to left, but it is clear the permit is not seeing the fly. We chase the fish for at least two miles, maybe more, and it is still distancing itself from us, even as it never ceases its aggressive feeding. Jorge is soaked with sweat and getting tired and I am a wreck on the bow of the boat...until the fish finally turns toward shore (this is all in no more than eighteen inches of water) and we are suddenly positioned perfectly. I take the shot, he rushes the fly, and game on!

This fish takes off toward deeper water - fortunately with no coral - and after a fifteen minute fight we have him to the boat. We estimate the permit at about 24 pounds, just a toad. Motoring him to shore to snap some pictures, I am thrilled for Jorge...he needed those two fish more than I did, and we were both super happy and excited! We celebrated with a couple of Gatorades, and made our way back to Punta Herrero, buzzing...

This has to have been one of the most amazing sequences of making a play on a fish and getting the eat in all my history of fishing - simply magical! It incorporated every sense - visual, audible, scent - moving both Jorge and I to the core.

When I first got in the boat that morning with Jorge, I had declared, "Today we will get three permit". He laughed and said, "*Posible*", and we ended up just one short - what a great day!

Muchas gracias, Jorge. I will never forget that last fish – ever!



**The permit Jorge and I pursued for so long and finally got him to eat**