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Everglades Tarpon

Landing These Giants on Light Tackle is a Thrill You Don't Forget

By ZANE GREY

TOWARD the end of March the gales increased both in violence and frequency, and the water grew so muddy and cold that fish were driven out to sea. As the date for my trip into the Everglades drew closer the prospect for good weather appeared more and more remote.

Then, just to keep our hopes from dying, the wind shifted to the east and the temperature rose. As on many previous occasions we began to delude ourselves with a conviction that the bad weather had broken. But after a day of the prevailing trade wind it once more veered to the south, and the barometer began again to fall. In twenty-four hours the barometer dropped to 29.70, and kept falling. The wind worked south and then southwest, a hot, moist wind. Next day almost a dead calm prevailed. Still the barometer kept falling!

My boatmen, Captain Knowles and Captain Thad Williams, both native to this latitude, predicted a hard northwester. But it did not come as soon as they expected. That night and the next morning went by without any further sign of bad weather, except in that descending barometer. It dropped to 29.50. This was approaching hurricane record.

We were to board the Ladyfish at noon, but one thing and another kept us busy on land until late afternoon. Still I was not so distracted by mail, telegrams, supplies, and the like, that I could not keep my weather eye open. It was indeed most fascinating to note. There was that ominous calm! The palm trees drooped in melancholy quiet. The sea was disturbed as if by far-distant violence. To the south and west a dull black belt of cloud rolled up, and moved northeast. It blotted out the westering sun. Then a warm wind sprang up again, still out of the southwest. The clouds heaved up and spread over half the sky.

About sunset a strange light, green, brilliant, shone upon the sea. I could not tell whence it came. Again the wind lulled. The cloud bank, low down, grew purple in hue. It was beautiful and fearful. Captain Williams called my attention to a rumble of thunder. It was far away. How menacing the sound! The approach of a storm is oppressive on land, but vastly more so on the sea. On the sea there is no escaping its force.

WE GOT aboard just before the storm appeared about to break, only to find that something important had been forgotten. I went back with Captain Thad. He scanned the west and north where the black belt had lifted, showing one of gray beneath. Thunder rumbled, and lightning flashed across the darkened sky. The spray flew over the little boat, wetting me and tasting salty on my lips. It was cold. The wind struck us strong and gusty, and far across the green tumbling white-crested water showed the gray pall of rain.

My errand accomplished I ran back to the dock and leaped upon the bumping launch. The rain was falling fast and cold. Darkness had about settled down, and the grim hard sea and sky were forbidding. Yet still the storm had not broken upon us. I stood up in the rocking launch and let the rain and spray wet my face.

No sooner was I safely on board the house boat when the northwester struck us with heavy wind

and rain. Darkness fell, and the roar of sea and gale was something to arouse fear in one who respected the elements. I watched for the flashes of lightning, and when they came, I saw the angry lashing sea, and the deluge of rain, and the scudding black clouds, in a most wonderful fleeting instant.

Everyone at Long Key had advised against our undertaking the trip in the face of past bad weather, with worse impending. R. C. did not show any rapture over the prospect. But I found myself on board because I did not particularly hate storms, and because I always believed the sun would shine tomorrow or next day, or some day.

I am a sun worshiper, like a desert Indian or an Arab, yet I fancy I could not appreciate it or love it so much if

I had never the contrast of leaden sky and stinging sleet or freezing rain.

Anyway, we were on board, comfortable in the spacious brightly lighted saloon of the house boat, the deluge roaring on the roof, and the waves pounding on the hull.

By and by the fury of the storm abated, and only a pattering of raindrops or a gust of wind made us aware of the inclement weather outside. During the night I heard the wind moaning round the boat, and felt the slow heave of the sea. Morning dawned bright and steely, with a northwester in full blast. But we weighed anchor and bit into the teeth of it. If this article were to be a chronicle of bad weather I might have much material. But bad weather is only something to make us love good weather. Every storm cloud had golden sunshine at the back of it.

March twenty-seventh was a beautiful summer day, and East Cape Sable was a lonely green-fringed white-beached shore that invited exploration. We anchored just off the most easterly point. The beach curved in a league-long line from this point to the next; a gleaming half circle under the sun, lapped by rippling green waves, and bordered by coconut palms, at this season with green and gold drooping leaves, and gray slanting trunks. The grove on the point was open, sunny, colorful, full of soft rustlings of leaves, and fragrantly dry.

Lines of exquisite shells, left by each tide, and therefore always changing, made the beach glistening white and rose and pink and pearl gray, so delicate and beautiful that it seemed sacrilege to walk crushingly over the fragile mounds and lines. It was indeed a shore of shells; and the white and gold sand consisted of sea shells broken to atoms by the waves.

If there is anything I love it is to wander along a lonely shore. I was not able to wander far, or gather many shells, or invite my dreams under the shady palms, out of the blinding glare and heat, because brother R. C. espied tarpon rolling. He always complains to people of the strenuous life I lead him, but I have observed that in cases like this he sees the fish first.

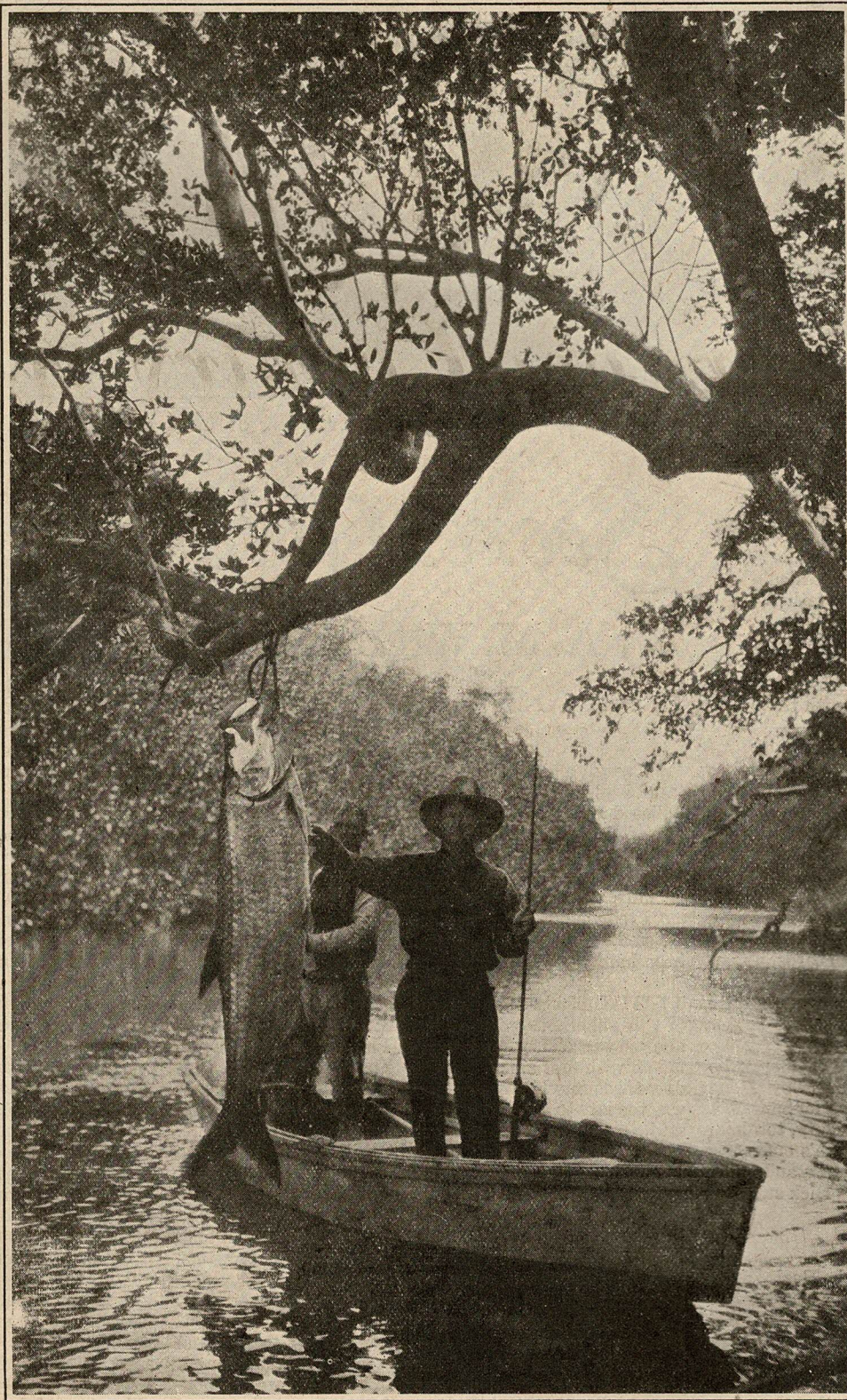
Indeed tarpon were rolling in shore and off shore. The water was not quite clear, being a greenish yellow color, more like river water than that of the sea. Perhaps the rivers of fresh water pouring from the vast Everglades have some little effect in this coloration. The tarpon had come in from the sea, through the green channels, on their way up these rivers.

The rolling of tarpon had always been fascinating to me. I first saw it in the Panuco River at Tampico, Mexico. It is merely a fish habit, like any other, and consists of a lazy roll to the surface, showing sometimes the whole body. According to the light the color of tarpon varies. Here one would look green backed, there tinged by gold or bronze, and again all silvery. When a tarpon showed in the sun he shone like a burnished shield.

Wherefore R. C. and I went trolling in Captain Thad's small launch. With the easy motion, the comfortable seats, the green foliage of the shore line, and the rolling of tarpon, it was delightful. R. C.'s terse remark was pertinent:

"Well, I'd say with fish striking this would be some sport!"

(Continued on Page 18)



END OF A NOTABLE BATTLE IN THE HEART OF THE EVERGLADES



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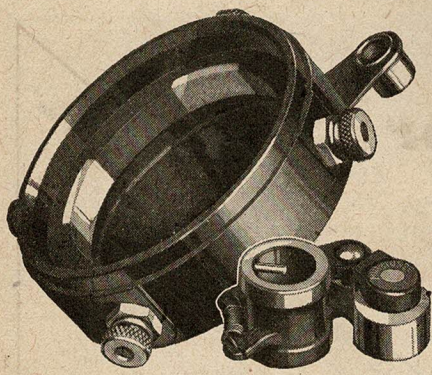
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IMAGINE a theater in which the acoustic properties varied with the seasons of the year. During the summer months, say, you could not hear the voices from the stage as well as in the winter months. Then the farther you were from the stage the more difficulty you would have in understanding the actors throughout the seasons.

This condition exists in the great theater of broadcast listeners. Those who occupy the rear seats in this theater do not get uniformly good reception throughout the year.

Do not be alarmed by the fact that you have only a balcony seat in the radio theater. You are of course farther from the stage—the broadcasting station—hence you do not get as reliable reception at all times of the year. Even so, you have the advantages of less interference from local broadcasting stations and from other receiving sets, advantages which the owners of radio installations in the cities do not have.

How much will the range of my radio vary with the seasons? This is an important question to all those listeners-in who wish to know what to expect from their radio set. It is in answer to this question that this article is written.

The exact variation in receiving range of your set during the seasons of the year cannot be definitely stated. Nevertheless, it is possible to make a fairly good estimate of this range. In doing this consideration must be given to the type of receiving set, the general nature of the installation and to the prevalence of interference—either static or the man-made variety.

Like a Noisy Audience

SUPPOSE that a theater audience had a habit of eating peanuts and of conversing with one another while the actors were speaking. Conversation and peanut eating are not commonly allowed in theaters. Yet this is equivalent to what you have in the radio theater if your receiving set is picking up static or interference from oscillating receiving circuits in your locality.

Assume that you have a receiving set located at a distance of 200 miles from a broadcasting station, and that you are obtaining clear reception without interference. Now if static commences it may

Radio and the Seasons

By WATSON DAVIS

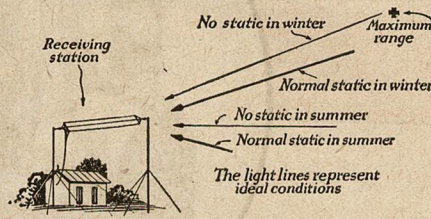


Fig. 1.—The lengths of the lines represent comparative receiving ranges in winter and summer

prevent you from hearing the broadcasting station, although it does not reduce the strength of the signals. The only way in which you could get good reception would be to move nearer the transmitting station. Thus static limits your receiving range.

Of the four seasons, winter and summer cause the greatest variations in receiving range of your radio set. In the fall and spring the effects produced are intermediate between those obtained in winter and summer. At any season the greatest receiving ranges are attained at night.

The illustration shows the comparative receiving ranges of your set in winter and summer. The light lines show approximately how much these distances would be increased if static and other interference could be completely eliminated. If this were possible your receiving range in summer would compare very favorably with that obtained in winter, although it would not be so great because conditions in summer are not so favorable to the transmission of radio waves.

Since static cannot be eliminated, it is necessary to wait for that season of the year when it is not in evidence, in order to get most distance.

How can one determine the actual range of a particular type of receiving set in winter and summer? This can be done with a fair degree of accuracy provided the following conditions prevail:

1. Reception from Class B broadcasting stations which use from 500 to 1000 watts of power.

2. A properly installed antenna and ground system such as previously described in these articles.

3. The receiving antenna so located that there are no large obstructions in the vicinity.

4. Freedom from man-made interference and static which is worse than the average for the particular season.

In estimating the receiving ranges given in the following table, night reception and the use of heat phones is assumed:

KIND OF SET	RANGE IN MILES	
	SUMMER	WINTER
Crystal	25	100
With one-tube Audio-amplifier	50	150
With two-tube Audio-amplifier	75	175
Single-tube Regenerative	400	800
With one-tube Audio-amplifier	600	900
With two-tube Audio-amplifier	800	1000

As a general rule the greater receiving ranges—400 miles and over—are less reliable than the shorter distances. Remember that the maximum receiving ranges specified in the summer are not always to be expected because on some nights static will be unusually bad or transmitting conditions will be unusually poor. On the other hand you may, on particularly good evenings in winter, sometimes receive from greater distances than those specified.

Overcoming Static

THE maximum range given for a set using a crystal detector is much less than the minimum range specified for a regenerative tube set.

This is because of the great sensitivity obtained by regeneration.

If the table considered the volume of sound obtained by the use of a crystal detector and two-tube audio-amplifier, this apparent discrepancy would be lessened.

As the illustration shows, static has a good deal to do with cutting down the range of your set in summer. Radio frequency amplification somewhat reduces the effects of static. Therefore, its incorporation in the radio set helps to secure a little more uniformity in receiving range in winter and summer. The well-known neutrodyne circuit employs radio frequency amplification. A description of this type of set will be begun in an article in an early issue.

Everglades Tarpon

(Continued from Page 11)

These tarpon did not appear to be striking. But the pleasure of riding among them on that rippling water close to the white beach was all-satisfying. By and by, however, I had a tarpon strike. My hook appeared to have attached itself to a log. I knew, though, that the obstruction was alive—a tarpon. It was the feel of it. We were using light tackle, and I struck as hard as I dared.

"Ha, you've hung one!" called R. C. The water exploded and out came the fish, a small one, about fifty pounds, and he shook himself so swiftly that he blurred in my sight. That was why it is so difficult to obtain clearly defined pictures of leaping tarpon. This fellow cracked down, popped up again, and wrestled in the air, turning over.

When I brought the tarpon to the boat Captain Thad lifted it half out, and carefully extricating the hook released it. This appeared to be the only method pertaining to such tarpon fishing; and if sharks are not present the released fish may live.

We saw several good-sized tarpon roll, and hoped to hook one of these. In the next hour R. C. caught two, one about sixty-five pounds, the other forty, out of which we got some pretty leaps. At sunset the tarpon ceased rolling and we returned to the boat.

BEYOND Middle Cape the topography of beach took a radical change, and features more in harmony with the word sable began to be manifest. No more graceful palms! A dark green line of brush and sedge absorbed the narrowing sandy beach. North West Cape stood out boldly. Once

round that I could see the great wall of mangrove forest, grim and forbidding, facing the Gulf defiantly.

The Everglades hid behind this barrier. My gaze took in leagues of mangrove wall, of an irregularity beyond description, a lofty front of solid green, striped by myriads of tree trunks. Many were dead and bleached white.

Rivers of the Everglades, large and small, broke the green phalanx, where they emptied their dark waters into the Gulf.

We anchored off one of the mouths of the Shark River, far enough out in the bay to catch the breeze. The tide was on the ebb. Captain Thad bundled us into the small boat, with tackle, bait and cameras, and in half an hour steered us into the mouth of a creek invisible until we were right upon it.

At length we came to where this passage-way entered a larger creek, something over a hundred feet wide. A breeze ruffled the water; the tips of the mangroves waved and threshed. The widening circles and foam globules on the smooth surface of the amber water attested to the presence of tarpon. We ran the bow of the launch into the mud of the bank and prepared to fish.

Now to troll for tarpon in open rivers or swift channels or shallow bays adjacent to the sea is one kind of fishing, this was decidedly another. No greater contrast could be found in angling for the same species of fish.

The kind we were soon adopting had more to recommend it, perhaps, than the other. We were in the lonely forest wilderness, strange despite the sunlight, silent somehow for all the cry of birds.

By and by the wind died down, and then there was a deep silence, broken at intervals by bird notes.

And up and down the gleaming shadowy creek tarpon were rolling. Here in this quiet water they slipped out, nose and fin and tail, seldom making more than a ripple and some patches of foam. Sometimes a large one churned the water in his swirl. Another would make a noise like a puff.

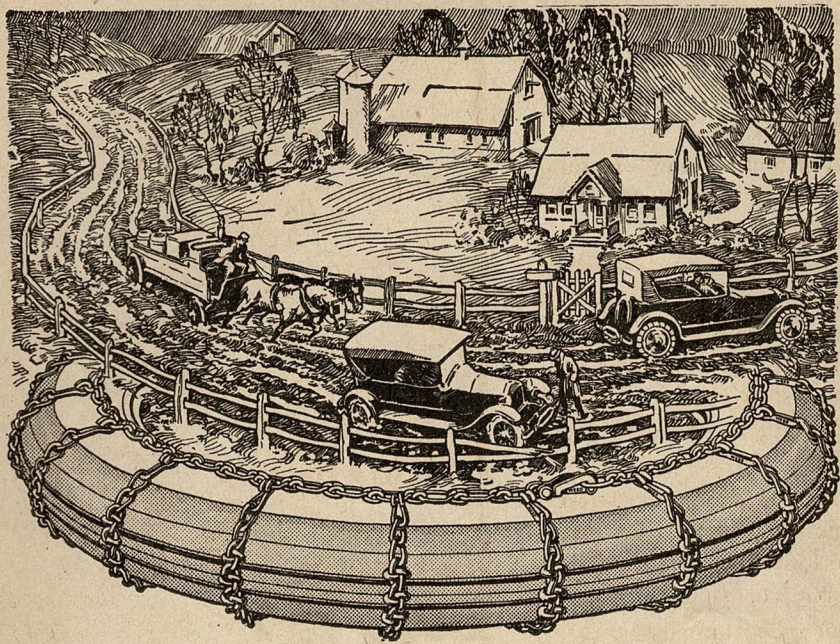
They were there in abundance, large and small, showing in a creek they could almost leap across. That was the unbelievable and thrilling fact to me. Hundred-pound tarpon in a creek no larger than the sunfish brooks of my youth! Then to see them and hear them added wonderfully to the excitement.

I REALLY did not expect to get a bite. I had been used to having tarpon almost jerk me overboard on their strike. But here we were assured they bit very gently—just a tug and slow movement away.

Time sped by. The sun sank; the breeze died; the tarpon ceased to roll; the vast gloom of an unknown region seemed to settle down. And clouds of gnats, almost too tiny to see, and small black mosquitoes, made the last half hour almost unendurable. Finally we gave up and raced down the labyrinthine channel toward the sea. What relief the breeze that freed us from our tormentors!

At six o'clock in the morning a soft pink glow suffused the east. Though it was clear daylight the air appeared full of mist, and the dark lines of mangrove forest were dim and mystical.

(Continued on Page 20)

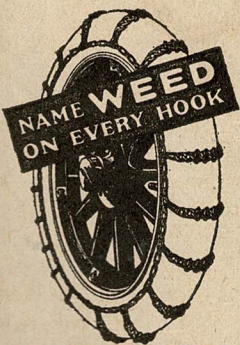


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(Continued from Page 18)

At seven o'clock we were on the little launch, dragging rowboats and speeding for the mangroves. By the time we had reached the mouth of the river where we had entered yesterday the sun was shining hot and a warm wind was ruffling the bay.

The tide appeared to be on the rise and about halfway in. We were somewhat late, as Captain Thad liked best to start in with a rising tide. Moreover the water in the river was muddy from the incoming flow. Entering the creek from the river we were soon in the cool shade of the spreading mangrove branches. White cranes and blue herons rose to fly before our advance. In and around the meandering water-course we glided on, and before eight o'clock reached the wider place where we had seen the rolling tarpon. Not one was visible this morning.

Captain Thad did not particularly like the tide and conditions, but decided to try fishing, anyway; and soon R. C. and Knowles had lines out from the opposite bank, and we did likewise from our side. Then we settled down to wait.

A tarpon surged not fifteen feet from where R. C. sat in the skiff. Next one broke near the boat where I waited, and another rolled just over my line. How tantalizing the blaze of silver! Several more rolled within sight and then followed the usual spell of blank water. Under such circumstances time passed fleetly. The tide was running in almost at flood when a sharp whistle from R. C. electrified us.

AS I LOOKED I wondered how many thousands of times in my life I had shot an eager gaze across a space of water to see if my brother had a bite. He was standing up, rod extended, in an attitude that never failed to thrill me. I saw his line running out, upstream, not far from the opposite bank.

"Look sharp!" called R. C. "I'm going to soak him!"

He swept up the light rod and it bent double. The line strung straight, lifted by a moving weight. Then I saw a deep furrow in the water.

"Ready! He's coming up," yelled R. C.

A heavy splash preceded the wagging shape of a tarpon. He came half out, crashing the water white. I snapped the camera on him. He plunged down, and making a wide turn headed away from us. In another moment we judged from his manner of action that he was not much of a leaper. Nevertheless as R. C. tried to hold him, finding it impossible on the nine-thread line, he made a sousing splash, out of which he stood three-quarters of his length.

During the following few moments the tarpon broke water several times, affording me opportunities for pictures. But he did not perform such acrobatics as we were looking for. And at length he settled down under the surface and gave R. C. all he wanted to risk on the light tackle, without rowing after him to recover line.

Once he was round the bend downstream out of R. C.'s sight. Again he crossed the creek and swam upstream close to the bank, under the leaning mangroves. R. C. was hard put to it to drag him from butting into the launch. He went two hundred yards upstream before he tired of that.

ON HIS way back R. C. got the line in and hung to it doggedly. The finish of the fight ranged within fifty feet of the skiff. He took a good deal of handling; and whenever he was brought near the skiff he threshed and pounded, splashing boatman and angler, to our great enjoyment.

They had a most difficult time with him, or at least Captain Knowles had, for on the several instances when he grasped the leader, he was deluged. Once he disappeared behind flying water and spray. But finally he secured the tarpon with a stout rope and detached the hook.

"Hundred an' fifteen pounds, I'd say," called Knowles.

"Well," sang out my brother, and I knew what he was going to say. "I'm ahead of you. Better get a move on."

We fished for another hour, without seeing another tarpon roll or getting a strike. At flood time the water was too muddy. No doubt the fish had gone up the channel into the clearer creeks that bisected the mangroves. We gave up for the day, more than satisfied.

When we reached the mouth of the river and turned into the bay we ran into a hard southeast wind and a choppy sea that wet us thoroughly by the time we reached the house boat.

In Florida waters tarpon are caught by trolling, drifting and still-fishing. Crabs and mullet are the best baits. Small tarpon will strike at a spoon when they are in playful mood. Trolling, of course, is the most strenuous and sportsmanlike method of the three. In deep water a strike from a heavy tarpon is a violent shock and something to remember. Moreover, added to the thrill of the tremendous strike there are the swift runs and lofty tumbles peculiar to this fish when hooked. His endurance, too, is tenfold what it appears to be in shallow water.

I have had some memorable fights with tarpon, upward of three hours and more, and in only one of these battles did I finally conquer the fish. For such large tarpon light tackle would not be my choice. But on the shoals of the Everglades and at the mouths of the rivers and in the small creeks more sport and excitement are to be had with the light rigs.

AT FLOOD tide the following day Captain Thad guided our house boat, dragging its launches and skiffs, into the green winding lane that was called Shark River. The name was a misnomer. In the first place there were no sharks. In the second place it was a winding green creek, with many side channels, making the mangrove forest a matter of many islands.

Some were large, but most were small, and round or oval, with dark green foliage rising to a graceful mound. The heavy timber extended for miles. But at length the forests gave place to mangrove shrubbery, broken at intervals, where the level grassy plain of the Everglades gave welcome to the seeking eyes.

Twenty miles or more from the sea we dropped anchor in a wide island-dotted lake of amber-colored river water. Birds were sailing about; small fish were rippling the surface.

From here we departed in the launch to take to one of the many estuaries running into the lake. Its many turns were bewildering and its tributaries or branches were innumerable. We glided down shaded lanes where we had to bend our heads to escape the low-spreading branches.

Deep creeks of amber water, with banks of heavy foliage, where ducks and cranes and herons rose and fish splashed on the surface, appealed particularly to me. We saw numerous alligators, as they came sliding off the banks.

In and out and around we went, through this labyrinthine web of waterways, at last to emerge into a beautiful long stretch of stream, quite wide, where the brown water was glinting with flash of silver tarpon, and wild fowl seemed thick as bees.

WE TROLLED up this long green-bordered lane, catching some of the baby tarpon on bass tackle, and also several snook, a game fish about which we had heard much. He looked something like a pickerel, was a silvery yellow underneath, gray-green on the back, and had a black stripe down the median line. Those we caught were small, but they struck hard, fought well, and leaped repeatedly.

Soon we began to see the flocks of birds, like white clouds, rising from the trees, and knew we were nearing the wonderful rookery of curlew. So we put away our rods for our cameras.

Though we saw birds everywhere, in the air and on the foliage, we were not in the least prepared for what a bend in the stream disclosed. Banks of foliage as white with curlew as if with heavy snow! With tremendous flapping of wings that merged into a roar, thousands of curlew took wing, out over the water.

They flew across the stream, soaring high, and circling they sailed round back of us, to swoop down. For half a mile as we passed up the creek, this flight and noise of birds was incessant. It was a most wonderful experience.

Once, at the point where the rookery was most thickly populated, Captain Thad yelled at the top of his lungs. Then rose a deafening din. Thousands of curlew on their nests took wing, crashing up out of the foliage, and joining the thousands of male birds, they darkened the light of the sun.

EDITOR'S NOTE—Another Everglades Fishing article by Mr. Grey will appear in an early issue.