

# Perched in Placencia

A lot of action in a few days in a fast changing Belize town.



Author presents a fly to a finicky permit in the shallows near a mangrove key off the coast of Placencia.

**J**ulian Cabral has owned Whipray Caye for eight years. However his father, also a permit fisherman, started leasing it 40 years ago. The tiny, 3-acre island has only a few cabanas and sits eight miles off the coast of Placencia, the country's humble but pleasing resort town, which some people say is on the brink of overdevelopment. The town, nor the peninsula on which it sits, wasn't

By Brian Irwin

wired for power or phone until 1991. Prior to that, life was simple with generators, hurricane lamps and the surrounding productive waters providing all that the native Garifuna peoples needed.

The town has changed, but the keys have not. After a night at Cabral's lodge we set out at sunrise for the nearby shallows, a turtle-grass flat known as Permit City. Dozens of tails stirred the water on this "slow day." Other

days, there can be hundreds of permit there. We came up dry.

A shift to Cabral's neighboring Moho Caye eased us into a coral-ringed island with thin flats skirting the shoreline. Baitballs pressed up against the beach as dozens of resident tarpon and bonefish prowled the shoreline. One bonefish brought me closer to a grand slam, but short strikes on the tarpon and the morning's permit made this unlikely. So, the next morning, I turned inward, toward the mangrove-lined backcountry waters.

To the west, or "inside" the lagoon that separates Placencia from mainland Belize, a different fishery exists. Cabral's nephew, Dermin Shivers, took me out at sunrise to fish. Within ten minutes of departing the dock adjacent the pub where I drank just five hours earlier, we were poling in creamy emerald water, with

dense mangrove stands on all sides of us. Tarpon rolled and roiled, attacking poppers at every cast. Some were juvenile, some 25 pounds, and the action on an 8-weight rod was electric.

I was still inside the 24-hour time limit on a grand slam, but my hopes were faded. We'd only seen one permit in the lagoon, so our sights turned to the muddy water of the lagoon's creeks. Still fishing topwater, the dark shadows of rays in the mangroves meant that snook were near. In the flats, snook stick to rays like glue. And on my third cast, the water erupted and I was in for the battle.

Southern Belize holds rich water, few anglers and a taste of what life was like yesteryear. But the area is changing, with new lodges and amenities attracting more visitors and fishermen and women. The pressure on the fish is increasing, but this is still Central America and time



Top left, clockwise: The panga is the inshore/offshore/flats/mangrove-backcountry boat for Belize and most of Central America. With it the anglers at Whipray Caye, and elsewhere in Placencia, look for bonefish, tarpon and snook and a lot of other species.

*Southern Belize holds rich water, few anglers and a taste of what life was like yesteryear.*

**FOOTCUSH**  
Patented

**ANTI-FATIGUE BOATERS DECK MAT**

**TWO SIZES**  
40" x 14" x 1 1/2"  
24" x 12" x 1 1/2"

Absorbs pounding waves and vibrations to relieve aches & pains of feet, knees, and back!

**WWW.FOOTCUSH.COM**  
FOOTCUSH PRODUCTS CO.  
(888) 811-5361  
Visit our website for more info and a dealer near you.

**HAL-LOCK**<sup>TM</sup>  
Locking Outrigger Pulley  
Eliminates halyard creep

"Ingenious New Product"  
~ Saltwater Sportsman

Marine & Outdoor Products  
www.gotomop.com • 1-877-777-5126

**FOR SALE**

**Bahamas**  
Custom designed beach home  
3 bed / bath built on hurricane proof stilts in 2007 with sweeping sea view from sunrise to sunset. Most beautiful beach on the island. Just step off the deck and on to the beach. Fish from your beach, the bonefish flats, or take your boat out to the deep.  
Contact: budlaughlin@gmail.com

**Captain Van's ACTION BELIZE**  
SNOOK/TARPON/CUBERA & MORE  
**www.ActionBelize.com**  
918.250.8884 888.383.6319  
\* AIRLINE VOUCHER AVAILABLE \* EASY FLIGHTS \*

**Costa Rica - \$650 pp**  
Incl. 5 nights + 3 half-days Fishing  
(904) 591-2161 FishingNosara.com