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# Report on a Bonefish Sport Fishing Feasibility Study on Aitutaki, Cook Islands

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Prospection from 12 to 20 November 2009

**Herlé Hamon and Michel Blanc**





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# **Report on a bonefish sport fishing feasibility study on Aitutaki, Cook Islands**

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Herlé Hamon, fly-fishing specialist

## **Background**

I am currently a travel agent specialising in fly-fishing and I work for an agency in Paris, *DHD-Laiika Voyages*, a leader in sport fishing travel in France. I am also a journalist and photographer for several fishing magazines in France and the Technical Director of the company *MV Illusions live aboard*, which specialises in bonefish and trevally game fishing in the Seychelles.

This feasibility study was carried out as part of a strategic development plan for sport fishing in the Cook Islands, formulated in April 2009 by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Cook Islands Ministry of Marine Resources (MMR).

I carried out a seven-day fishing prospecting survey on Aitutaki from 12 to 20 November 2009, together with Michel Blanc, SPC's Nearshore Fisheries Development Adviser. Three other people were directly involved in the fishing expeditions, i.e. our guides Pepe Pepe, the mayor of the village of Hollywood and an Aitutaki government employee; Etu Davey, a former bonefish net-fisher, and Terua Davey, Etu's younger brother, also a former net-fisher, who spent a day with us on the flats of Aitutaki.

We explored a dozen 'flats' either on foot or in the MMR boat, for a total of 25 hours of fishing. We also tested three 'milks' (or 'muds') for a total of 5 hours of fishing. During the week of prospecting, 9 bonefish were caught and 20 more were hooked, most of which were lost due to the lines breaking in the coral heads (see the attached detailed report on the fishing trips, along with a 'Google Earth' map of Aitutaki).

Fishing conditions were difficult due to the constant wind, going from 10 knots on the first day to more than 25 knots on the fourth. The sky was cloudy 30 to 50% of the time from the fifth day onwards, which made very difficult to spot any bonefish.

We used the MMR's boat, a 23-foot open hull Yamaha, for our trips to Aitutaki lagoon and as a "platform" while prospecting the deepest flats.

During this week of fishing, I put together two sets of fly-fishing tackle, i.e. an 8

weight (wt) to test for bonefish and a 12 wt for giant trevally (GT). In the muds, I also used a size 10 set (see appendix for bonefishing techniques and advice on tackle).

We had planned to test fish at the uninhabited coral island of Manue, located about 50 nautical miles from Aitutaki, using the 10 m boat of Mike Henry, a local businessman. In the end, this trip was not possible due to a lack of time and the rather inclement weather.

The comments and recommendations below are based on my knowledge of bonefish fishing and comparisons with the other destinations I have been able to prospect over the past few years with a view to arranging sport fishing trips for the French and European markets.

### **General comments**

Aitutaki already has a well-developed tourism industry, particularly for honeymooners, and a large range of hotel facilities from small family residences to luxury hotels. We visited a few of them at the end of our stay. For organised fishing holidays, the places that have nice bungalows at the seaside and a restaurant nearby would be the most popular. Of the sites we visited, Mr. Terepai Moate Junior's Paradise Cove Lodge, Mr. Mike Henry's Tamanu Beach Resort and the Samade on the Beach meet those criteria.

There are international air connections to Rarotonga from New Zealand or the US and from Papeete. Several flights each day allow you to then go from Rarotonga to Aitutaki, which is very important for tourists who want to visit the atoll.

Another advantage that Aitutaki has is the beauty of its lagoon. A wide range of tourist activities are available such as scuba diving, snorkelling and organised tours to the "motus". The large variety of activities would allow fly-fishers to bring their families along with them.

During our stay, we were able to test all kinds of biotopes, with varying levels of success. However, Aitutaki atoll does appear to be a particularly good spot for bonefish development and growth, given its shallow lagoon, the immense feeding areas formed by the flats and the virtual absence of any large predators inside the lagoon such as barracuda and different shark species, e.g. lemon sharks, blacktip reef shark or silvertip sharks.

The flats themselves cover a large surface area just next to the main island and around nearly all the secondary islands. The flats mainly have sandy bottoms, along with some coral and mud bottoms (which can still be easy crossed on foot) that sometimes alternate with sea grass and seaweed beds. This diversity creates

a biotope that is very rich in food for bonefish, which root for sand worms and marsh worms, small crabs, shrimp and, sometimes, small fish.

In comparison to many other game fishing destinations, the number of bonefish that we saw or caught during this test was relatively low. However, the very large size of the specimens makes Aitutaki a very attractive site for confirmed anglers looking for trophy fish. For the moment, Aitutaki is a destination for experienced anglers who are more interested in quality than quantity. Novice fishers would probably have a lot of difficulty catching these big bonefish, which are very cautious, few in numbers and very powerful.

There are also large schools of small trevallies on the flats, which lend an added interest to this destination. They can be caught with the same flies used for bonefish.

We saw and tried to catch several giant trevallies (GT), weighing from 7 to +20 kg, on the flats. These fish are highly sought-after since they are a real trophy for fly-fishers. Very powerful, they require sturdier tackle than that used for bonefish. For that reason, it would be better to advise anglers going to Aitutaki to have at least two sets of rods and reels (see appendix for advice on fishing tackle). These giant trevallies are another very good drawing point for Aitutaki.

Our discussions with local authorities and the MMR highlighted the potential of the nearby uninhabited island of Manue, which has a reputation for hosting lots of fish, particularly giant trevallies. The lack of accommodations on Manue could undoubtedly be remedied by setting up a bivouac on one of the smaller islands with small tents for customers to sleep, perhaps a solar shower and a table for dining. Although it is a bit small and lacking in comfort, Mr. Mike Henri's 10 m boat can transport sport fishers to Manue when the weather is fine. A stay combining Aitutaki and Manue would probably be a very attractive fishing trip for many anglers.

### **Bonefish management plan**

In all the destinations that have good-sized bonefish populations, whether in the Caribbean or Indian Ocean, these fish are not caught to be sold or to be eaten. They are, however, popular for sports fly-fishing, which has become a veritable tourist industry and supports, either directly or indirectly, hundreds of people.

It seems that net-fishing has brought about a serious imbalance in the age pyramid on Aitutaki. This could mean that this type of fishing has intensified or become more efficient over the past decade. The smallest specimen caught during the week weighed about five pounds, which would be a good-sized adult at many destinations. We did not catch any juveniles, even in the muds, which most often act as a focal point for small fish weighing one to four pounds. There

seems to be enough large bonefish genitors to recreate a decent population if an effective management plan were to be implemented for this fish.

The most effective measure would be a total ban on net-fishing for this species, together with a ban on selling catches. If such measures do not seem feasible over the short-term, the place to begin would be a fishing ban on bonefish during their reproductive phases and very strict quotas, e.g. 2 bonefish per day for each boat and which have to be caught with a rod and line.

Protection zones should also be set up, particularly in those areas where fish gather during spawning. Areas that are strictly reserved for sport fly-fishing or other activities such as kite-surfing, snorkelling or for transporting tourists by motorboat will also have to be created so as not to hinder the fish's pathway to the best bonefish flats, while at the same time taking into account Aitutaki's tourist activities. During our week of prospecting, we fished at several flats (see Google Earth map). I recommend that the following areas be reserved for fly-fishing: the areas around Flats 1 and 4, along with Flats 6, 7, 11 and 12.

I also suggest that regulations be drawn up to ensure that the best flats in the lagoon are only available to anglers accompanied by a professional fishing guide. Other flats such as those that can be reached on foot and are near the hotels could be left open to anyone who has a fishing license. These measures would make it possible to avoid over-exploitation of the best fishing sites, as this is of no real benefit to the community of Aitutaki.

It will also be very important to enforce these management measures and to make the community understand that in the end, everyone will gain from sport fishing for this species, which will generate a new high-end tourism on the island. In fact, anglers who travel in order to hunt down bonefish are good consumers, e.g. meals, local crafts, tourist visits in addition to what they spend on accommodations and fishing expeditions. A study carried out in Florida showed that a live bonefish can bring in several hundred US dollars to this state each year even though this extremely bony fish has a very low market value. This figure should be food for thought since bonefish on Aitutaki are often given to the pigs after large net catches!

An additional measure that would allow the whole community to benefit from this tourism would be a fishing license that each angler would have to purchase on arrival in Aitutaki in order to be able to fish the flats. A figure of NZD 200 per fisher per stay seems appropriate. The place the licenses would be issued still has to be decided but it should be somewhere easy to get to, e.g. the Office of Tourism or the Ministry of Marine Resources. On Christmas Island, fishing licenses are purchased directly at the airport just after you have gone through customs; in the Los Roques Islands in Venezuela, national park rangers issue them.

Finally, it is important that bonefishing management on Aitutaki be part of a participatory management plan. We recommend that a bonefish management committee be set up on Aitutaki as quickly as possible. This committee could bring together one or more representatives from the various groups involved in this new activity, e.g. Ministry of Marine Resources, Office of Tourism, fishing guides, the hotel industry, the Aitutaki mayor's office and the local government.

### **Fishing guides**

At first, the cost of the services of local fishing guides will have to be relatively low. At the current time, a fee of NZD 300 per day for one fisher and NZD 400 for two seems reasonable. Eventually, it will be possible to raise this rate when the quality of the services and the guides' skills improve, e.g. NZD 400 for one fisher and NZD 500 for two. In general, at the end of their stays, satisfied fishers give a tip equal to one day of fishing.

A fishing day must last at least 8 hours on the water and 9 to 10 hours is better for most customers. Fishing days have to take into account the tides so as to optimise the time spent on the flats.

For the moment, it seems difficult to imagine having more than three or four local guides for bonefish fly-fishing on Aitutaki. As Butch Leone and Jubilee Reu are currently the only guides who work professionally, there could possibly be one or two more. When several guides are working at the same time, they will have to communicate with each other to decide which fishing areas each guide will prospect with his/her customers. That will make it possible to avoid having several guides and their customers at any one fishing site at the same time.

Of all of the people we met during our visit, Etu Davey was the one who displayed the best talents for and the most interest in working as a fly-fishing guide. He has excellent knowledge of the lagoon and the fish's habits as well as very good eyesight, which is indispensable for becoming a good fishing guide. He also quickly picked up the basics of guiding taught during our stay such as positioning with regards to the wind and sun, approaching the fish, how to move the fly, the type of fly (colour and weight) to be used depending on the kind of flat, the length of the leader and the diameter of the tippet. So, Etu has all the abilities needed to become an excellent fishing guide and earn a living from this activity. Although he received an 8-wt rod, fly line and a few flies, he needs more equipment to train himself and to be able to help out future customers who might come to Aitutaki without their tackle. The best would be for him to have one or two rod-reel-fly line sets. His boat will be well designed for fly-fishing in the lagoon once some work has been done on it, e.g. setting up a platform for the



guide above the engine, a platform for customers to cast their lines in the front of the boat, rod holders and places for customers to sit when travelling around the lagoon.

A 40-60 horsepower engine (there wasn't any during this trip) would be better for this hull and how the boat will be used in the future.

We suggest that a license for fly-fishing guides be created on Aitutaki. One of the conditions for getting this license could be taking part in a multi-disciplinary training course that would include first aid, financial management of a small business, customer relations, small vessel pilot's license as well as a technical module on fly-fishing for bonefish, similar to the one given during our visit, e.g. casting techniques, knots to use for fly-fishing, tying bonefish flies and prospecting bonefish flats.

The Ministry of Marine Resources could also consider hiring part-time guides and training them, with their salaries set in advance. This would ensure better control over guiding activities and its economic benefits and would allow guides to have full-time jobs and so, to carry out other tasks when there are no customers, e.g. taking care of their tackle, monitoring the reserves and sport fishing zones, participating in training sessions and teaching school children about the need to protect the environment.

At the current time, it is difficult to give any precise figures about the annual number of customers. As most anglers who travel spend at least six fishing days per trip, a local guide who had 20 clients per year would work 120 days, i.e. 20 weeks a year, for a mean estimated income of NZD 36 000. The fishing licenses for those 20 fishers would bring the community more than NZD 4000.

### **Promoting this destination**

Aitutaki could be promoted as a fly-fishing destination, in part, via the Internet. A special page should be created on the official Cook Islands Office of Tourism site. At the same time, each local guide could have his/her own website in order to be in direct contact with potential customers. The SPC also plans to produce a small promotional flier to be distributed in the Aitutaki hotels.

The photos from this prospection have already been made available to Richard Story at the MMR and Michel Blanc at the SPC. These photos could be used to create websites and for the promotional flier.

Game fishing on Aitutaki can also be promoted through specialist magazines. I have already written a nine-page article about my prospection tour for the

French magazine “Partir Pêcher” (Going Fishing), which specialises in fishing trips throughout the world. This article will appear in the March 2010 issue. The article could be translated and published later in specialist magazines in Australia, New Zealand and the United States.

I also plan to put a special page about Aitutaki and the Cook Islands on my website about fly-fishing trips, [www.pechealamouche.fr](http://www.pechealamouche.fr)

Finally, as soon as I got back to France, I was able to find four customers who want to go with me to Aitutaki and, no doubt, Manue in October 2010 for an initial sport fishing trip combining fly-fishing for bonefish and casting and jigging.

### **Conclusion**

The island of Aitutaki has some very good assets for developing bonefish fly-fishing. However, strict conservation measures need to be taken to improve fish density on the flats, as it is currently too low. The very large size of certain specimens makes this destination a future leader in this type of fishing in regards to anglers looking for trophy fish.

## **The major bonefish destinations**

**Seychelles:** high density, big fish, over 12 lb possible, today the top site but there are big differences between the islands. Nice varied flats, i.e. sand, coral, turtle grass. Islands prospected: Farquhar, Providence, Poivre, St Joseph, Remire, African Bank.

**Christmas Island:** very good density, average sizes are quite low (2 lb) but there are big fish in certain spots and at certain times of the year. Most of the flats are sandy.

**Bahamas:** the self-proclaimed "Bonefish capital", this small country offers a range from excellent to very bad! If you want to be successful, you absolutely have to go off the beaten path. Andros and the Exumas are very interesting but the fishing lodges there are expensive.

**Florida:** there are very big bonefish in Florida and very good guides but the problem is that the fish know lots more about the flies and ties than you do!

**Cuba:** good density in certain spots (Gardens of the Queen, Isle of Youth, Cayo Largo, Las Salinas), extremely varied flats with lots of tidal pools and mangroves. Average size of about 4 lb, with some specimens of up to 7/8 lb.

**Venezuela, Los Roques:** this Caribbean island group is a wonderful bonefish destination. Fish are plentiful and sometime very big (over 12 lb). You can find all types of flats and beaches there.

**Mexico:** the different bays in the Yucatan (Ascencion Bay, Esperitu Santo and Chetumal) have good-sized bonefish populations but the fish are often quite small. Fishing is done in tidal pools and the flats are frequently quite dark and made of turtle grass.

**Honduras:** While there are bonefish around the Bay Islands, this destination is less interesting than those mentioned above.

**Belize:** This country is more interesting for permits and tarpons but there are bonefish there, particularly at Turneffe Island, which has vast flats.

**Guadeloupe:** it does have bonefish, some of which are quite big. The population is only average in comparison to other more conventional destinations but some 10 lb fish can be found on the flats.

**Hawaii:** These volcanic islands do not have many flats but they do, however, have big and powerful bonefish. The average size is about 6/7 lb and fish that weigh more than 10 lb are not rare.

**French Polynesia:** The prospected zones are Tikeau, Fakarava and Rangiroa. You would have to start from scratch here but there are bonefish, which are sometimes very big. Magnificent flats but bonefish populations are not evenly spread out among the islands and this fish continues to be caught commercially, particularly during spawning periods, which has a dramatic effect on the populations.

**Maldives:** The flats are very nice but, unfortunately, there are few bonefish; in any event none of the islands have a serious offer for this type of fishing.

## **Some technical notes about fly-fishing for bonefish**

### **In the “muds”**

The least recreational but often the most productive type of fishing consists of letting your fly sink in the “muds” or “milks”, i.e. water that has become white and opaque due to enormous schools of bonefish, which are often small in size, searching the bottom as a group for food. In such cases, you can catch 10 fish in a row without seeing what you are doing and just waiting for the fly to touch the bottom. Of course, this is not very interesting and would only be useful for getting used to how the fish fights back.

In that case, the only thing to do is to let out your leader, sometimes up to twice the length of the rod and attach the heaviest fly in your box. Then, it’s just a matter of waiting for the artificial lure to reach the bottom. In most cases, the bonefish in these schools are small but on Aitutaki the bonefish caught in the muds were also very big, which did, then, make this type of fishing more interesting.

### **From a boat**

Here, fishing is done from a boat mainly in tidal pool areas with very soft bottoms that are incompatible with wading. On Aitutaki this may be the case along the islands where the depth does not allow efficient fishing on foot. The boats used vary depending on the destination but in many places they are very well-equipped flats boats that can sometimes be used in 15 cm of water! In other cases, they are “panga” or Yamaha-style hulls, for example.

The guide sits on a platform located above the engine and uses a pole to slowly move the skiff along. Being higher up allows the guide to easily spot bonefish and allows you to get the best position for casting. In most cases, these zones are no more than two meters deep and a weighted fly works well.

### **Wading**

Here we will discuss the most enjoyable and often the most effective type of fishing. When, as on Aitutaki, the bottom allows it, nothing is better than a stroll in shorts in 28°C water, with your polarised sunglasses perched on your nose! Here, every scenario imaginable is possible, from a few dozen fish coming towards you to the big one tailing all alone. In any event, you have to move slowly and cautiously. Don’t forget that the bonefish has earned the nickname of “Phantom of the Flats” and they are not easy to spot, particularly on a first trip.

You must be ready to cast at a moment's notice and keep your fly in hand so as not to get it hooked on the bottom and miss a good opportunity. Then, you have to adapt the weight, colour and size of the artificial lure to the flats' water level and composition. In turtle grass, a light fly equipped with a weed-guard is perfect. On sandy flats, a heavier and more voluminous fly will undoubtedly make the difference by dragging along the bottom. In terms of colours, a good rule is to match the colour of the streamer to the surrounding biotope.

## **Advice on suitable tackle for bonefish**

### **Rod**

Nowadays, all the well-known brands offer very high-performance saltwater fly fishing rods. Four-piece rods are very practical for air travel. The Thomas & Thomas Horizon 2 and APEX, the Sage Xi2 and Xi3 and the Winston Boron 2X are little marvels that are light weight, powerful and provide excellent control of the fish. At the mid-price range, the saltwater models from Sierra, De Charrette and Loop offer good quality-to-price ratios.

For bonefishing, the standard approach is to use a 9 wt rapid action rod with size 8 line to make it easier to cast into the wind, come around and control the shoot. Lighter rods with size 7 or even 6 line can be used when weather conditions are excellent, e.g. no wind and a very bright day. However, such conditions are relatively rare on the flats and a light breeze is often welcome to cool things down and increase the quality of fishing.

### **Reel**

Another important component, the reel should be “Large Arbor” for greater recovery speed, a factor that can easily be understood in those instances when the bonefish is more than 100 metres away when he suddenly decides to check what brand of wading shoes you are wearing!

It must also have a good brake and at least 150 metres of backing. Many models have these features, e.g. Abel, Sage, Orvis, Sierra, Loop, in a price range from about 250 to 700 euros. Obviously, quality is not the same from one model to another and so you have to check to make sure the one you want to buy does have at least a minimum amount of saltwater treatment. Everything depends on your budget and how you want to use it. We should also note that new materials have allowed the production of very lightweight and high-performance tackle. So it is really possible to invest in a size-10-line reel that perfectly balances your 8 wt rod and can also be used for tarpons and permits as well as for freshwater salmon and pike.

### **Line**

The two profiles to remember are the WF and the TT (Triangle Taper) whose weight is concentrated towards the front and have a long, thin running line, which makes a rapid and long shoots easier. New technologies offer line that is perfectly adapted to the marine environment and high temperatures. Anglers no longer have to deal with overcooked noodles that get knotted up every time they

cast or, in contrast, stiff hard washline that rubs on the rod's rings at every shoot. The coating, i.e. the plastic that covers the heart of the line, is now more resistant to abrasion, smoother and deep lubricated so as to slide better and facilitate upkeep. Fly-fishing for bonefish is usually done with a fly-line with a sinking tip. A good size 8 line in a neutral colour like gray, blue or pale green will cover any situation you might encounter.

The Scientific Anglers and Bermuda Triangle Taper bonefish models are excellent and use the new coatings mentioned above. The AST (Advanced Shooting Technology) from Scientific Angler, the J3 Coating from Royal Wulff Products, and Monic "Phantom" line are also references for this type of fishing.



## Main traits of bonefish biology

From the Albulidaen family, our bonefish's real name is *Albula vulpes* in the Atlantic and Caribbean and *Albula forsteri* in the Pacific. It has many common names and can be, depending on the country, the “macabi”, “banana fish” or “grey ghost”.

The name bonefish is a perfect description of this fish, which is full of bones and generally not a popular food item – something that is a windfall for sport fishers! As bonefish has limited commercial or food value, few studies have been done on it and we know little about how it reproduces. We do know, however, that bonefish gather during the full moon to leave the islands and breed at sea, at intervals that vary depending on the ocean and island. This spawning feature will have to be confirmed for Aitutaki as some local fishers have suggested spawning occurs around the new moon. Juveniles first go through a larval stage before transforming into small bonefish. They then live in fairly large schools that can sometimes contain several thousand specimens. The larger the bonefish get, the more solitary they become. Their mean size is between 3 and 8 pounds but the largest bonefish caught weighed more than 20 lb and were over 1.1 metres in length!

Bonefish mainly eat crustaceans such as crabs or shrimp but also sandworms, sea urchins, shellfish and even small fish. Their pharyngeal teeth allow them to easily crush the hardest shells and carapaces. Overall they are shaped like barbells with their mouths slanted down to better root around in sandy or muddy areas for food. Their heads are streamlined and the big eyes are protected by a perfectly smooth, transparent membrane that allows them to stick their heads in the sand or mud all the way up to the gills to capture their prey.

They live in a large number of countries in the tropical equatorial zone. They can be found from Florida to Brazil, on the coasts of Western and South Africa, from Hawaii to the Tuamotu Island going through the Seychelles and Indonesia. Unfortunately, only a few of these tropical paradises have those clear water flats that lend themselves so well to fly-fishing.

## Areas test-fished in Aitutaki lagoon

### Day 1 (Friday, 13 November), high tide = 6.17 a.m., low tide = 12.39 p.m.

Local guides: Pepe Pepe, Etu

Flat No 1: poling, 8.05 to 10.00 a.m.

Caught 1 bonefish (10 lbs), Sighted 9 bonefish (one bite)

Flat No 2: wading, 10.30 to 10.50 a.m.

Sighted 2-3 timid bonefish (no bites)

Flat No 3: wading, 11.10 a.m. to 12.10 p.m.

Sighted 1 bonefish (no bites), Caught 3 island trevally (*C. orthogrammus*), 1 bluefin trevally (*C. melampygus*)

Flat No 4 wading, 1.20 to 3.00 p.m.

Sighted a school of some thirty bonefish, one firm bite (line broke)

### Day 2 (Saturday, 14 November), high tide = 7.22 a.m., low tide = 1.35 p.m.

Local guides: Richard, Etu, Terua

Flat No 5: wading, 7.45 to 8.15 a.m.

Sighted 1 bonefish, caught 1 brassy trevally (*C. papuensis*), Sighted several trevally

Flat No 1: poling, 8.50 to 9.35 a.m.

No bonefish sighted, 1 brassy trevally bite (line broke), aggressive attack by giant trevally (*C. ignobilis*) – 20 kg

Flat No 6: poling, 9.45 to 10.00 a.m.

No bonefish sighted, sighted 1 giant trevally (< 20 kg)

Flat No 7: poling, 10.15 to 10.40 a.m.

Sighted a small school (3-4) of bonefish

Flat No 2: wading, 10.50 to 11.10 a.m.

No bonefish sighted, sighted 1 giant trevally (8 kg) fly not taken

Milk (north-west of Flat No 4): fishing from mooring (2.30 to 4.30 p.m.)

Caught 3 bonefish (8 lbs, 7 lbs, 5 lbs), line broke twice, 1 came off hook

Day 3 (Monday, 16 November), high tide = 9.15 a.m., low tide = 3.13 p.m., moonless night

Local guides: Etu, Pepe

Flat No 8: wading, 9.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. (north of harbour, west coast)

Sighted 15-20 bonefish, line broke twice, 1 came off hook

Milk (north-west of Flat No 4): fishing from mooring (3.00 to 4.30 p.m.)

1 broken line (bonefish), 1 brassy trevally caught (1 kg)

Flat No 4: wading, 4.45 to 5.30 p.m.

Sighted a school of milkfish, caught 1 island trevally (½ lb), sighted 2 bonefish

Day 4 (Tuesday 17 November), high tide = 10.02 a.m., low tide = 3.56 p.m.

Local guides: Etu, Pepe

Flat No 2: wading, 7.45 to 9.00 a.m.

Sighted 5 bonefish, caught 1 'striped' trevally (1 kg)

Flat No 9: wading, 9.10 to 9.50 a.m. (superb motu, black rocks and sheltered bay)

1 attack by GT, hook not taken, caught 1 (5 lbs) brassy trevally

Flat No 4: wading, 10.05 a.m. to 12.05 p.m.

Sighted 2 big bonefish, 1 GT, caught 1 big bonefish (14 lbs)

Milk (north of Flat No 4): fished at mooring (1.55 to 3.05 p.m.)

No bites

Day 5 (Wednesday, 18 November), high tide = 10.46 a.m., low tide = 4.36 p.m.

Local guides: Etu, Pepe

Flat No 10: wading, 7.50 to 9.50 a.m. (Aitutaki village, south flat)

Sighted some ten bonefish including 3 big ones, line broke once, caught 1 (4-5 lbs), sighted 1 brassy trevally (6 lbs)

Flat No 8: wading, 10.00 to 11.00 a.m. (Aitutaki village, north flat)

Sighted 4-5 bonefish, sighted 1 GT

Flat No 4: wading, 2.20 to 3.40 a.m. (sic)

1 broken line (trevally), caught 1 brassy trevally (8 lbs), no bonefish sighted

Day 6 (Thursday, 19 November), high tide = , low tide =

Local guides: Etu, Pepe

Flat No 11: wading, 7.30 to 10.30 a.m. (east bay, south flat)

Sighted some ten bonefish including 2-3 big ones, tailing, caught 1 bonefish 1 (7 lbs), caught 1 brassy trevally (4 lbs)

Day 7 (Friday, 21 November), high tide = , low tide =

Local guides: Etu, Pepe

Flat No 12: wading, 6.50 to 10.00 a.m. (east bay, Central Hollywood flat)

Sighted a dozen bonefish including several big ones, caught 2 bonefish (7-8 lbs, 13 lbs), caught 1 brassy trevally (4 lbs), line broke on 1 big bonefish

### SUMMARY

9 bonefish caught

11 bites or broken lines

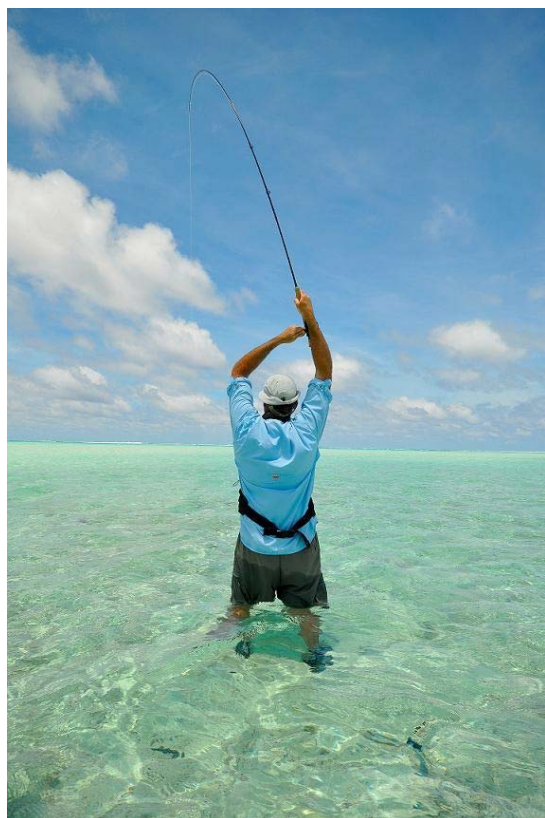
Some 120 bonefish sighted

Fishing time (flats): 24h50

Fishing time (milks): 4h40



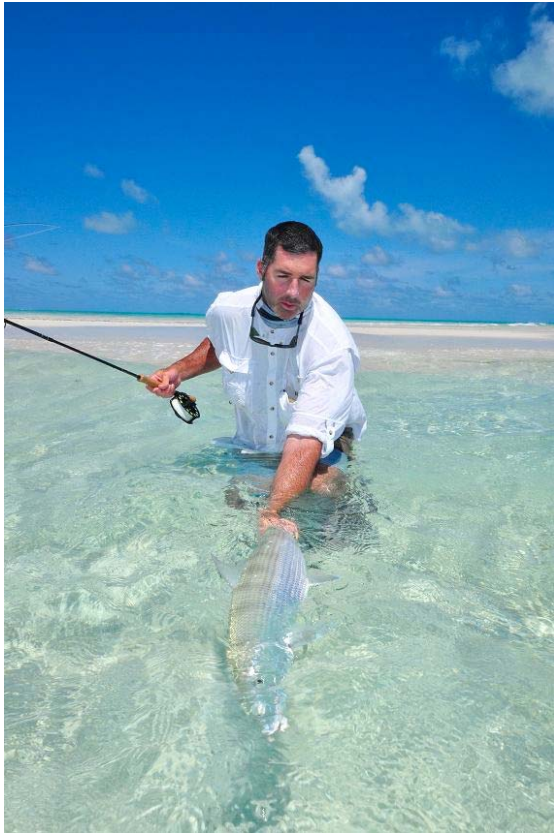
## Illustrations



1 and 2: Consultant Herlé Hamon in fly-fishing action (wading the flats)



3: Herlé with local guides Pepe Pepe and Etu Davey showing on bonefish in the 12 lbs+ category



4 and 5: Bonefish are fragile animals that need to be landed, handled and released with great care



6: Brassy trevallies are common in Aitutaki and they bite well on the fly!



7: Island trevallies are another common catch on the Aitutaki flats



8 to 10: Popper casting and fly-fishing in the muds was practised from the MMR boat