

LEISURE

Cajun casting call

Hidden treasures can be discovered in Louisiana

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Staff Writer

Jean Lafitte and his infamous band of swashbuckling pirates never had it so good as when they reigned terror on the Louisiana intercoastal waterway.

The maze of countless bays and marshes that empty into the Gulf of Mexico provided refuge for Lafitte and his crew from the local authorities.

It also served as a place where they could hoard any newfound wealth.

There was, however, one valued treasure they left behind that today's angling fraternity covets.

Inhabiting these waters, which combine incoming tidal salt water and fresh water from the north, are schools of speckled trout, redfish, drum and flounder.

When hooked on the end of a line, these fish can put up quite a scrap. And once landed and placed in a cooler, they can provide a culinary delight.

Rumour has it the famous Cajun chef Paul Prudhomme one day accidentally burned a side of redfish on the skillet and concocted a dish called blackened redfish. Go to any seafood restaurant today and order blackened redfish; your wallet will feel the pinch.

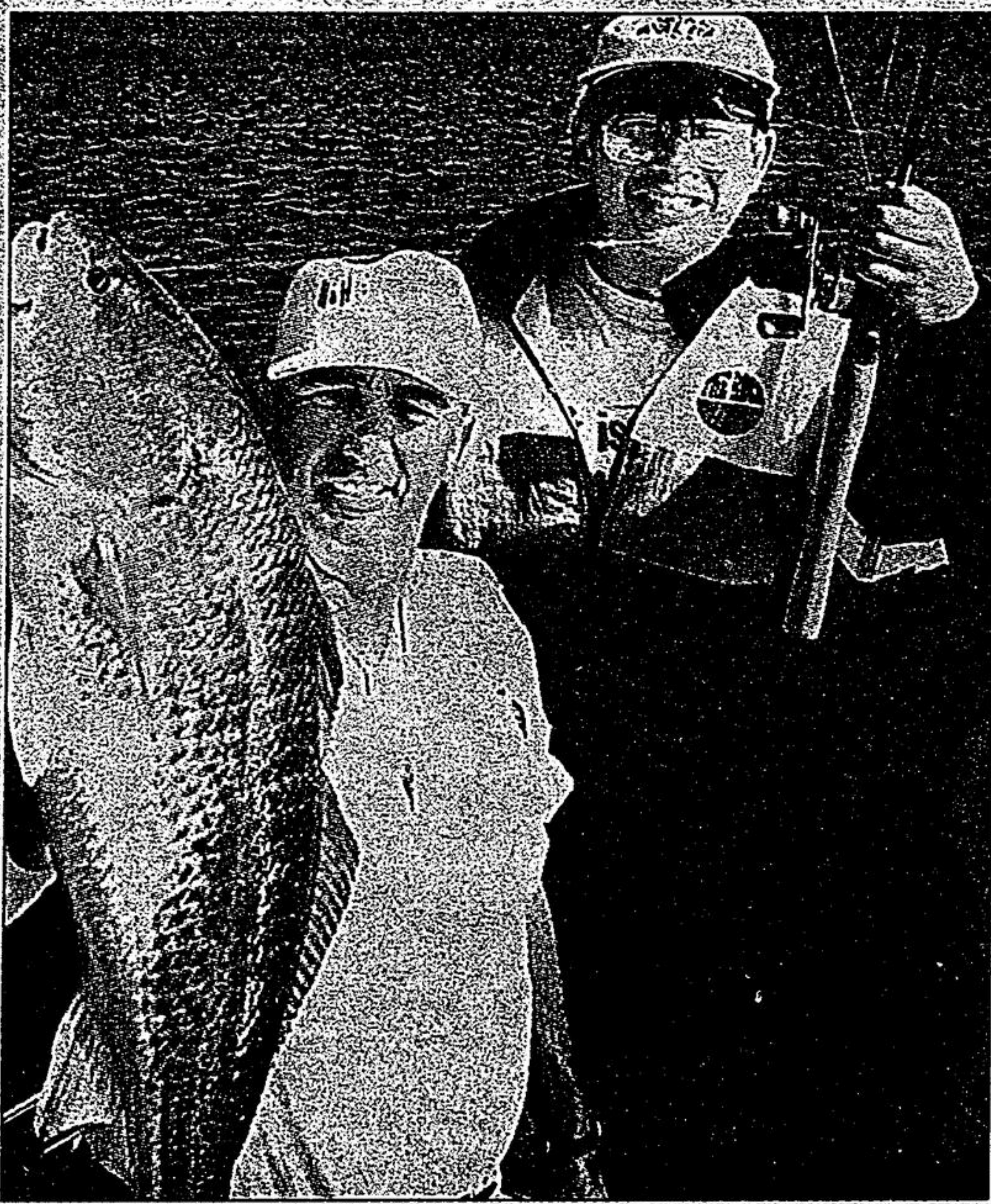
Fishing the intercoastal waterway can be done year-round.

However, the arrival of fall begins a productive and ideal time to wet a line, suggests veteran Louisiana angling guide Phil Robichaux.

Providing expert advice to novice piscators for almost 40 years, Robichaux points out the fish are attracted to the intercoastal waterway during the autumn months because it harbours an abundance of food.

"It's like a Chinese food buffet where people line up at the table," says Robichaux, describing the assortment and availability of forage.

Not only does the fishing activity pick up in the fall, but for those anglers wishing to try their luck along the Louisiana intercoastal waterway during this time of the



Angling guide Phil Robichaux holds up a 15-pound redfish caught by Mike Hayakawa.

year, the weather conditions begin to provide relief from summer's scorching heat and humidity.

Making a trip to the Big Easy of New Orleans in mid-October, the timing could not have been better to get in on what promised to be an exciting outing for sea trout and redfish.

Accompanied by angling sidekicks John Yancey, Al May and Dean Angerdina, we took a 30-minute southerly drive to the outpost of Lafitte and met Robichaux before sun up.

Setting out behind the backdrop of towering petrochemical refineries that occupy the shoreline, we boarded Robichaux's 22-foot custom-designed bay boat and ventured onto an enlarged body of water known as Barataria Bay.

Maneuvering our way past several shrimp trawlers and pipeline freighters, we had a 20-minute boat ride before reaching our fishing grounds.

Robichaux knew where the motherlode was; upon arriving at our spot, mullet were clearing the water surface. This was a sure sign that these baitfish were attempting to escape their predators.

With the thermometer hovering near 88 F, we wetted our lines in relatively shallow and stained water of five to six feet.

Utilizing open-faced spinning gear and baitcasting reels equipped with 12-pound monofilament test line and a one-foot Berkley Fireline shock leader, we tossed our quarter-ounce round head jigs, tipped with a white plastic shrimp imitation body, towards

the shoreline.

Robichaux suggested I make a sharp but slow jiggling retrieve. It wasn't long before I felt a sharp tug on the end of my line.

Within moments, a one-pound speckled trout surfaced as it tried to free itself of the hook embedded in its mouth. The fish eventually succumbed to the boat and was placed in the cooler.

At the same time I was battling a fish, Yancey, May and Angerdina were preoccupied with sea trout on the end of their lines.

Robichaux also got into the act and promptly hooked a fish. Handing me the rod, I sensed the fish on the other end had some big shoulders as it tried to muscle its way towards the Gulf of Mexico.

Robichaux knew right away I was in the midst of battling a redfish. After making my reel sing soprano on several occasions by peeling off a few yards of line, the redfish, at close to 15 pounds, was a welcome addition to our cooler.

Comparing the fighting characteristics of this fish to an Ontario steelhead, Robichaux promptly coined my catch as a "Louisiana steelhead".

The action we experienced was not centered on one specific location. At each locale we came away with assortments of sea trout, redfish, drum and the odd flounder.

By the end of our seven-hour outing, we had boxed 100 fish.

With that many fish in our possession, one would assume that we would spend a long day cleaning them under a hot sun. Under Robichaux's guidance, however, fish cleaning is part of his duty.

In Louisiana, each angler is allowed 25 sea trout with a 13-inch size limit, five redfish and five drum with a 16-inch minimum limit and one measuring over 27 inches.

Fishing this playground requires a salt water licence, which many guides provide. The cost for a one-day licence is \$250. Most guides also supply bait and tackle.

Anyone wishing to try their hand at fishing the Louisiana intercoastal waterway can call Robichaux at (504) 348-3264.



PHOTO/MADELINE COLLINS

Historian Ian Craig of Kleinburg, left, and Kortright curator Allan Foster will lead a historic hike up the Humber Saturday.

Hike along the Humber

BY MIKE ADLER
Staff Writer

Why not take a trek this Saturday on the oldest road through Vaughan?

Those who do will be following in the footsteps of European explorers, pioneers and the aboriginal people who first followed the East Humber River north.

The path is called the Carrying Place Trail and the seven-kilometre hike north from Boyd Conservation Area on Islington Avenue to Kleinburg is sponsored by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

"They're going to be covering some fantastic territory," promised Ian Craig, a retired teacher who is organizing the walk to point out historic areas along the river.

In 1793, John Graves Simcoe, Upper Canada's first governor, followed roughly the same trail north to the Holland River and then reached the lake which still bears his name.

There is still a lot of hope for the Humber, but few natural pockets are left along the river in Vaughan. Those remaining are under pressure, Craig said, even on the edge of Boyd, where Vaughan is threatening to extend Pine Valley Drive over some sensitive ravines. "I want people to see that," he said.

The walk leaves Boyd at 10 a.m. and finishes at 2:30 p.m. Return transportation will be available at Kleinburg, but participants should bring a lunch.

More information is available from Craig at 893-1323 or from the TRCA at 416-661-6600, ext. 5237.

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