



PHOTOS BY DALE SANDERS

Hogfish aplenty hang around wreck sites like the one at top. Above: Sharks — large and small — must be dealt with, especially when trying to get your catch into the boat.

waters of the Bahamas — you're best off with a boat that provides a high vantage point. A flybridge can work, but a tuna tower really gets it done by allowing the spotter to look down more perpendicularly to the surface and obtain a clearer picture of what's below.

To eliminate surface glare, be sure to use a good pair of polarized sunglasses and stay under shade in order to remain sharp and observant. I like brown or amber lenses, although gray is the only color that provides true color clarity — an important factor in discerning the subtle features of a wreck site.

Clues to finding underwater wrecks can sometimes be found in the sky. Birds circling over water, especially near islands and cays, could signal bait over a wreck or structure or perhaps migrating or feeding game fish. In addition, the presence of large numbers of cudas, which tend to hang out around wrecks, is well worth investigating.

I recently joined Capt. Larry Laffler of Stuart, Florida, aboard his 42-foot Post *Hungry Bear* on a wreck-finding trip around Bimini.

DALE SANDERS

BASE OUT OF BIMINI

Bimini offers an excellent jumping-off point to base your wreck-finding expeditions because you'll find all the necessary amenities for much-needed respites from the sun and all that pumping and winding you'll be doing.

Although a number of resorts are available on North Bimini, I always stay at the famous Bimini Big Game Club (800-737-1007). It sports a fine restaurant, as well as outdoor grills. The resort offers comfortable rooms and the largest marina available, complete with fuel, electricity, ice and water.

If you're planning on staying aboard your boat at a dock, Weeche's Dock and Sea Crest Marina, also on North Bimini, provide excellent facilities and also offer a limited number of rooms.

Before heading to the Bahamas by plane or boat, make sure you're up to speed on all fishing laws and customs' regulations. Call the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism at 800-327-7678 for the latest details and requirements.

Laffler believes that the most important factor in finding wrecks involves spotting out-of-the-ordinary bottom patterns. Colors such as orange or reddish hues may indicate that coral or sponges have encrusted the uppermost portion of a wreck.

In grassy areas, other dead giveaways are donut shapes, which occur due to wave and tidal surges that uproot and erode grasses around wrecks. The center of the donut is the wreck. Often in areas that have miles of sandy bottom, grass will be able to grow only near a wreck, creating a dark, pronounced donut because the wreck deters sand erosion, allowing organic material to accumulate so marine flora can take root and flourish.

Although you can hunt around with your depth sounder to locate structure that may be a wreck, you'll do much better trolling around with a spotter or two in the tower, scouring the waters for telltale signs of an old or recent wreck.

Get Ready for Great Fishing

Once you've identified a wreck, it's extremely important that you avoid the urge to get too close to it or run the boat over it. By staying a distance away and remaining as quiet as possible, you'll avoid spooking the

Often, the best way to spot a wreck is to sit on the bow and look for changes in coloration; this prop stuck out like a sore thumb!

