



Ah, the cold weather is finally coming to an end, and we can see the light at the end of winter's dark tunnel. The 130s are still stashed away, but definitely not forgotten. The 80s, 50s and light tackle have already been serviced and ready for use. With the month of March, comes the beginning of a new fishing season along with high hopes for beautiful weather, calm winds and great catches. Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, is where it all starts for Northeast big-game fisherman.

The Hatteras Experience

Southern hospitality is alive and well here in Hatteras. You'll find nothing short of super people to welcome northern anglers all suffering from winter boredom and acute cabin fever. The Hatteras experience, like any other true fishing island, grows on its visitors. With its laid-back attitude, miles of pristine beaches and hundreds of homes, both on and off the water available for rent, it's not just for the hard-core angler anymore, but for the enjoyment of the entire family.

But hard-core fishing is exactly what Hatteras is all about. Contact any marina at any time during the day and get a Gulf Stream fishing report. Charter a boat for yourself and family and friends or be part of a "make up" trip and create some new fishing relationships! There is always somebody who can help with a half-day or full-day charter, or just to answer any questions you might have about the great fishing the "Graveyard of the Atlantic" has to offer. Hatteras is also a mecca for surf fishermen — so when the winds are blowing and the offshore fishing is a weather washout, head to the beach with the family, but be sure to bring your surf fishing gear.

MARCH: King Mackerel, Bluefin, Blackfin & Yellowfin Tuna

I've been a mate aboard the charter-boat CHAPIN for several years, and like everyone else plying these waters, we try to be as prepared as possible for any type or style of fishing we may encounter on any given day. During the month of March,

Get a Jump on the Season's Big Game Fishing Experience!

Hatteras in the Spring

By Capt. John Oughton

ing mackerel are abundant. We troll or drift dead baits to catch these fighting fish.

To minimize the search for a productive area, Capt. Mitch McFredrick looks for locations with bait-holding temperature or color changes in 10 fathoms or less of waters that have a rocky or rough bottom. The area around a wreck can also hold bait and be extremely productive.

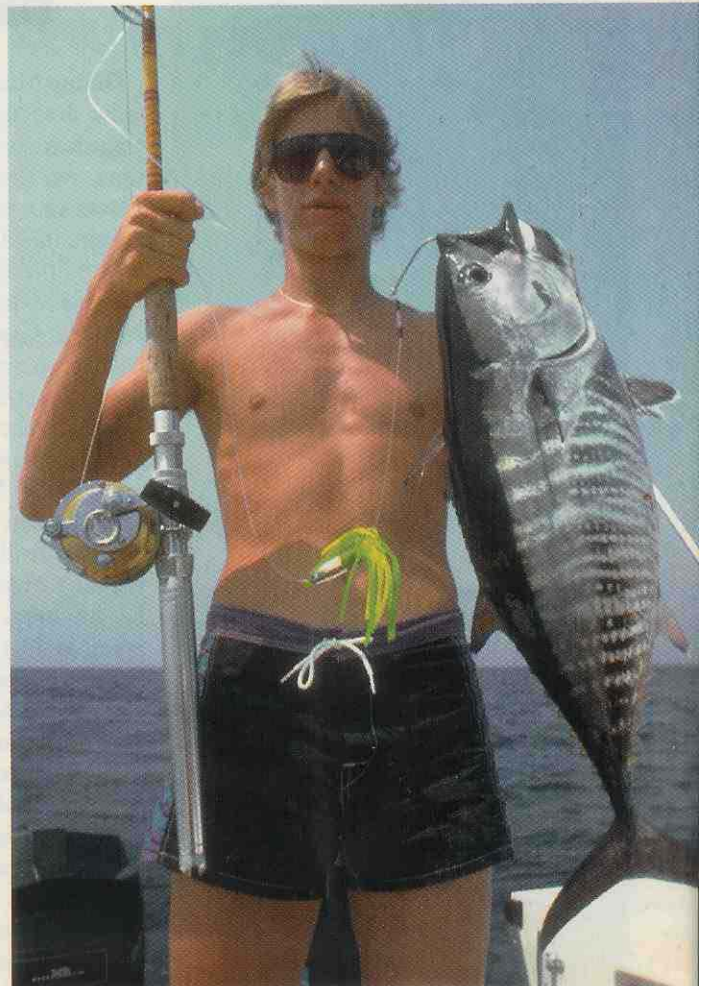
Using light tackle for king mackerel is a must. Capt. Mitch keeps available aboard the CHAPIN both spinning and conventional gear, all spooled with either 20- or 30-pound-test line. One or two planner rods equipped with swivel tips and spooled with 100-pound Spider Wire are also good to have at the ready.

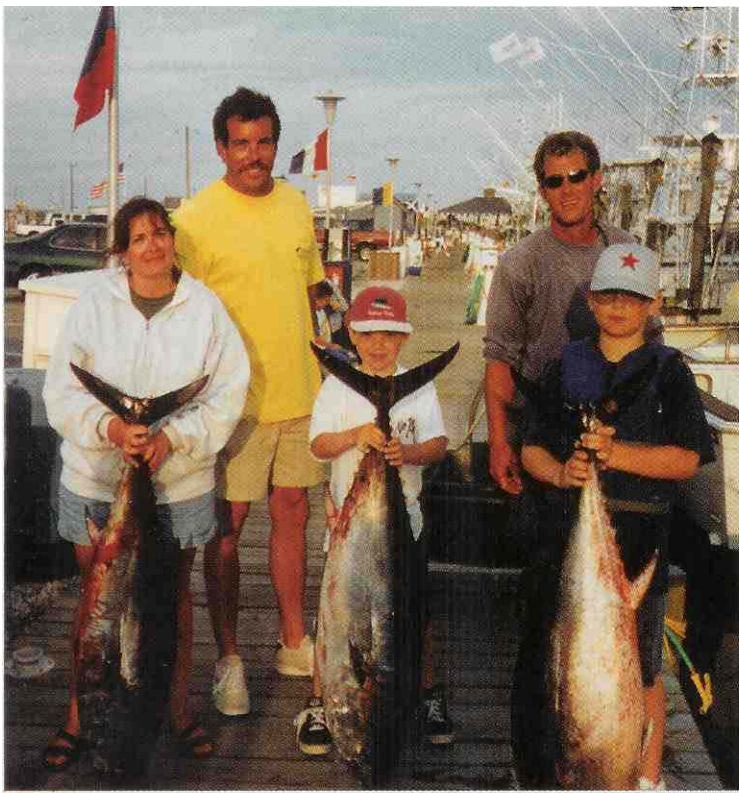
When trolling for king mack's we usually pull five to six lines. Two of these rigs are run from the long-rigger — trolling usually one naked ballyhoo and one with a sea witch covering. We put out a shotgun bait or two deep behind the boat and two planner rods set off the transom. From the planner rods, we drag a spoon on one and a ballyhoo coupled with a sea witch on the other. Strip baits with double-hook rigs are also very effective.

Leaders are made up several different ways. Most deckhands use light-wire leader along with two 4/0 treble hooks. Using about a 3-foot section of wire and figure-eight knots, tie your treble hooks about 5 inches apart with one tied to the end of the leader.

We make another type of leader using 130-pound mono with two 7/0 long-shank hooks, one hooked through the eye of the other then covered with a sea witch.

Some days, when the mack's are really snapping, you can dead-bait them. This is nothing more than locating bait pods on some rough bottom and drifting ballyhoo above them. A good tip is to jiggle the bait as you drift giving it a little motion, making it look more appealing to the macks. We also use Hookup jig heads and a trailing treble hook made up on wire leader to get great results.





about the author



From bass in the canals of Southern Florida to bruisers in the canyons of the Northeast to the great offshore fishing the "Graveyard of the Atlantic" has to offer, John Oughton has, all his life, followed his passion. Currently working as a mate aboard the charterboat CHAPIN, berthed at Hatteras Island, North Carolina, you'll always find John working the cockpit, keeping his charter cliental fighting fish and happy.

Tired of the winter cold and ready to get into some fishing action long before the northern waters warm and the weather cooperates? John has a suggestion that just might fit the bill. We'd like to welcome John back to the pages of THE JOURNAL with this article on early season fishing on the Outer Banks.

During March, tuna fishing surely gets the crew fired up. With yellowfin the most abundant species found in 35-150 fathoms, we also find good catches of 50-pound-class bluefin along with their smaller cousin, the blackfin tuna, closer inshore in 20- to 50-fathom water.

Similar to locating productive king mackerel areas, Capt. Mitch looks for water color changes, temperatures changes and as little current as possible. Mostly, we find the yellowfin in the warmer, deeper water and the bluefin and blackfin in the cooler shallower water. Many times, we find blackfin tuna mixed in with schools of king mackerel.

When trolling for tunas, Capt. Mitch has the CHAPIN well prepared and ready for anything. We drag from 10 lines to as many as 14 rigs behind the boat, mostly tipped with rigged ballyhoo. On occasion, we set out several spreader bars or spoons; they both can be very productive.

There's no real way to understand lure color patterns. It almost seems as if something changes within fish's eating habits quite often. I've caught tuna on some of the prettiest baits rigged and some of the ugliest plastic lures I could find. If they are hungry, they'll come up and eat.

Aboard the CHAPIN, we troll all 80s and 50s while tuna fishing. The 80-pound outfits are used for all the long baits. The 50-pound rigs are used in tight to the boat. Half of our outfits are setup with wind-on leaders. Using a blood knot, we tie our leaders directly to the line eliminating the swivel. The rest of the rigs are equipped with 90- to 100-pound ball-bearing snap swivels. Aboard the CHAPIN we use Islander Trackers and find that they work really well on tuna during this time of year.

APRIL: Blue Marlin, Yellowfin, Big Dolphin & Wahoo

April brings a burst of springtime to Hatteras, the weather improves, the ocean usually calms down nicely, but, weather wise, we're still not out of the woods. April also brings lots of vacationers to the Outer Banks. Home rental is easy and, for the most part, inexpensive. There are many motels and hundreds of private homes available through local real estate companies for weekly to annual rental. The atmosphere in Hatteras is coming alive during this time of year and the fishing is just heating up!

Some Key Places in Hatteras

• Home Rental •

Midgett Realty
P.O. Box 250
Hatteras, NC 27943
252-986-2841
800-527-2903
<http://www.midgettrealty.com>

• Marinas •

Hatteras Harbor Marina
Hwy 12 & Gulfstream Way
P.O. Box 537
Hatteras Village, NC 27943
252-986-2166
800-676-4939
<http://www.hatterasharbor.com>

Oden's Dock

P.O. Box 477
Hatteras, NC 27943
252-986-2555
<http://www.odensdock.com>

Teach's Lair Marina

P.O. Box 520
Hatteras, NC 27943
252-986-2460
<http://www.teachslair.com>

• Motels •

General Mitchell Motel

P.O. Box 37
Hatteras, NC 27943
252-986-2444

Hatteras Harbor Motel

P.O. Box 489
Hatteras, NC 27943
252-986-2565

Hatteras Marlin Motel

P.O. Box 250
Hatteras, NC 27943
252-986-2141

Hatteras Charter Websites

• CHAPIN

<http://www.chapinsportfishing.com>
E-mail: info@chapinsportfishing.com
Capt. Mitch McFrederick / John Oughton (mate)

• FIN FANTASY

<http://www.odensdock.com/finfantasy/index.htm>
E-mail: fishman@interpath.com
Capt. Ricky Jones (18 yrs. exp.), Shane Austin (deckhand)

• NATIVE SON

<http://www.fishnativeson.com>
E-mail: info@fishnativeson.com
Capt. D.M. Gray (18 yrs. exp.), Barry Peele, Jr. (deckhand)

• HARPERS FOLLY

<http://www.harpersfolly.com>
Capt. Tom Harper

• HUNTER

<http://www.hunter.com>
Capt. Walt Spruill (9 yrs. exp.)



Capt. Mitch and the rest of the sportfishing boats berthed on the Outer Banks begin to expand their catch expectations. Big blue marlin move into the region and lurk on the edges of weed lines, temperature and color breaks. Being an apex predator at the top of the food chain, these creatures are there to feed on almost anything that swims, and they have a smorgasbord to choose from this time of the year.

Large gaffer dolphin roll in with the sargasso weed along with toothy wahoo, and don't forget — still more yellowfin.

During this time of year, we find weed lines, color changes, temperature changes and bait scattered about almost anywhere from 35-200 fathoms of water. Again, the offshore currents are a major factor in locating your quarry. Less current allows the fish to remain in the same general area for a period of time. More current moves them away quickly.

Capt. Mitch likes to keep two hookless teasers behind the boat most of the day with pitch baits ready for use in the cockpit. Things get really crazy when we're tuna fishing with 12 lines in the water and a 700-pound class blue marlin comes up and begins beating on the teasers.

MAY: Blue Marlin, Big Dolphin, Wahoo & Yellowfin

Spring is in full swing by May here in Hatteras, and noticeable changes are taking place everywhere you look. Big makos eat the short-rigger baits and chase yellowfin. Lots of big gaffer dolphin and wahoo are caught all along the coast. In May we continue to find yellowfin tuna along the edges of the Gulf Stream and big blue marlin still out there along weed line edges, temperature and color changes. Inshore we sometimes spot a sailfish fin or two, but not many charter captains fish for them.

May also brings the fifth anniversary of the Hatteras Village Offshore Open fishing tournament, hosted this year by Oden's Dock. The tournament date is May 5, and it brings a \$75,000 purse to the victors.

JUNE: They're All Here and Hungry — Just 20 Miles Off The Beach

So this brings us to June with lots of good weather, great fishing and the exciting Big Rock Tournament, which can now be fished from Hatteras. Blue marlin fishing is in full swing with most of the fish released in the 200- to 600-pound class.

June also brings bailer dolphin and good catches of wahoo, and of course you'll still find a few yellowfin. Fishing in anywhere from 35- to 200-fathom water, we locate pretty, purple water in small pockets. We anticipate anything from double header blues, to triple header whites, to a strong wahoo bite. A piece of debris can produce loads of bailer dolphin.

Let's see now; we've got to have lots of wire leaders made up. Dink rigs for white marlin ready and baited to go, heavy baits like spanish mack's or perhaps a few mullet for the bigger fish and some mono leaders for the tunas, and last but not least, fresh bait cut up and on stand by with bailing rods ready to go for that school of dolphin under a piece of flotsam.

For you northern boys, Hatteras is a great place to come south with car or boat, kick off your shoes and get a jump on the great early season big-game fishing the area has to offer. For you southern boys, no need to travel 70 miles off the beach to get into the Gulf Stream. You'll be fighting big fish 20 miles offshore in no time and back at the dock at 5 o'clock, ready, willing and able for dinner and quality time with the family. 