

Fishing On The Fourth of July!

Getting out of bed early when you're on vacation seems really stupid, unless you're headed to the beach to fish. No matter how early I've gotten up, had a cup of coffee and a biscuit; by the time I've made it to a favorite fishing spot, there was someone already there! The exception to this is Fort Pickens State Park near Pensacola Beach, Florida where the beach is rarely overcrowded.

This was a beautiful Forth of July morning. My son, daughter and I had just driven over the two bridges from Pensacola and had turned down Ft. Pickens road. After we paid our toll for the day at the entrance gate we were free to fish where ever we wanted. It was going to be a day of fishing just like it was when the kids were still kids.

I've fished on the gulf side of the road at Fort Pickens for years, and most of the time went home with as many fish as I cared to clean. At the end of the strip where the rock jetties are, the fishing is always good. I prefer to fish on the Gulf side of the park though, where there are even fewer fishermen. This weekend there were more visitors to the beach than usual, but still, the beach area at Fort Pickens was not crowded at all!

On the way to the beach, we stopped at Grays's Tackle and bought some frozen shrimp and a few more hooks and sinkers as well as out of state fishing license for my daughter and me. It isn't good to start fishing then have a game warden spoil your day.

Upon arriving at the parking area, I threw my tackle box, bait bucket, ice chest and beach chairs onto my surf cart and we headed to the beach. We saw two other fishermen about 50 yards away, but other than them we had the place to ourselves!

We found a spot that looked good and settled in for the day. After setting the ice chest down and untangling the lines on my rods, I pried loose a few of the frozen shrimp, stuck them on the hooks and threw both sets of baits about thirty yards out into the gulf. I then sat down in my chair with the rods in their holders aimed at the sky, and poured myself a cup of coffee from the thermos I always carry.

I was thinking of looking for some sand fleas to use as bait, when one of my rods jerked, then bent halfway as if something was trying to take it on down to New Orleans. I dropped my coffee and grabbed the rod that was thrashing. I had a pretty good fish! Luckily I had the drag set correctly and after a few minutes of listening to the line peeling off the reel, I began retrieving and soon saw a flash of silver as I pulled the fish onto the shore. It was a good Pompano, one of the best eating fish on the entire Gulf Coast.

I looked around and saw that both my son and daughter had a fish on also. I tossed the fish into the ice chest as my other rod started jerking. It was another Pompano! We hadn't been there for more than ten minutes and we had already caught four Pompano that were over two pounds apiece!

As all fishermen do after catching a good fish, they look around them to see if anyone else had witnessed such a fantastic event. Down the beach about 50 yards away, I saw the two fishermen I had spotted earlier. One of them had a fish on the line also. It appeared that a school of Pompano were running down the coast and had stumbled onto our baits!

After settling down and pouring myself another cup of coffee, I baited up again and threw my hooks out into the water. I waited anxiously for another jerk on my rods. An hour later I was still waiting. We had seen no further action from the other fishermen and we were all beginning to get impatient for another bite. We caught more fish later that morning, but the mad attacks on all our baits didn't happen again.

It was a memorable holiday. We left the beach that morning with a cooler full of fish and a lot of memories of a special Fourth of July in the sun.

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