
**FISHING
YOURSELF
SINGLE**

ANDY COETZEE & CRAIG THOMASSEN

Fishing Yourself Single

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Craig Thomassen
Fishing Yourself Single

Preface

This book is a collection of stories from our wanderings and experiences all over Africa and her beautiful islands. We have been fortunate enough to visit much of our amazing continent, mostly in search of fish.

This is not a fishing book. It is a collection of thoughts, special moments, experiences and incidents that we found funny, touching or interesting.

Although the title of the book refers to loves lost through an obsession with fishing, this wonderful pastime has brought us both into contact with many remarkable characters and sparked some incredible and lasting friendships. The stories within these pages are a collection of memories that bring us both great pleasure. It seemed Fishing Yourself Single a good idea to share them with others and perhaps to encourage the reader to explore more of our awesome continent.

Some stories may have moulded themselves in our minds over time, and some of them may not be exactly as they happened. In the effort of trying Fishing Yourself Single to tell a good yarn, we may have embellished some of them a bit. The spirit of the time is what we have really tried to capture. It was never our intention to cause any offence to anybody who may appear in any Fishing Yourself Single of these stories. If, perchance, somebody Fishing Yourself Single does feel affronted, please feel free to go outside, take a deep breath, scream at the universe,

then pick up the phone and make an appointment with your therapist.

Bassas da India

The sea was rough. We were sailing right into the wind, Fishing Yourself Single and that meant that the yacht was smashing into swells that were being driven into us.

The rising and falling of Fishing Yourself Single the bows and wallowing in the troughs were making us sick. There wasn't a person on board who wasn't feeling off-colour, including the skipper and crew. I don't normally get seasick, but I had thrown up everything inside me, and had no urge to replace it. I couldn't even consider going into the cabins or any enclosed part of the boat. The second I passed through the companionway and out of the cool sea air, I felt the sudden urge to throw up. I was stuck outside.

We were on a 10-day charter, and had been sailing for 20 hours. It felt like a lifetime had passed on that boat. I was doing my turn on watch at about three in the morning, and I was the only soul awake for hundreds of miles around. The only lights to be seen from where I sat were the green glow of the radar screen and the empty screen of the echo sounder. The Fishing Yourself Single water was too deep to show a profile of the seabed. It was a strange and eerie feeling.

We were in the Mozambique Channel, heading directly away from the African mainland. Our destination was a little-known atoll called Bassas da India, about 250 nautical miles directly east Fishing Yourself Single of Mozambique. Bassas is an undersea mountain exposed on a low tide and completely covered by water at high tide. It is 50 nautical miles from the nearest land, a tiny French-occupied speck by the name of Europa Island. Bassas has been a shipping hazard since the days when traders and pirates ran the seas between Europe and the East. It is the graveyard of many ships, old and new. The French guard it jealously, and rumour has it that there is treasure encrusted in the coral of the atoll.

Very few people have been privileged to visit the remote, unspoilt ocean wilderness of Bassas da India. It is one of the last corners of the earth where one can feel like a true explorer. The fish that live at Bassas have, more than likely, never seen a man or a fishing lure. The thought that we were enormously fortunate to be on this trip kept our spirits Fishing Yourself Single up, despite the hammering that the ocean was giving us.

Dawn brought a change in the weather. The wind dropped; the swells subsided with it and the sea became less violent. It was still bumpy, but we weren't smashing our way through mighty swells and wallowing Fishing Yourself Single in deep troughs. The skipper told us that the water would quickly flatten out, and that the worst was over.

We celebrated by drinking sweet cool drinks and eating plain pasta with no rich sauce on it to churn up our weak stomachs. I had lost my sunglasses overboard during a violent puking

session the Fishing Yourself Single previous afternoon, and had no spare pair. I was worried, because the sun reflecting off the water for the next nine days was really going to hammer my eyes. Luckily for me, Fishing Yourself Single the skipper rustled up a spare pair of cheap sunglasses that he was happy to loan me for the trip.

All that day and the following night, the sea gradually flattened. On the second morning of the journey, dawn broke over a mirror-calm sea, without a ripple to disturb its smooth surface. There was a misty haze in the air, so that we could not see the horizon or discern the point where sea became sky and sky became sea. It was utterly surreal. Flying fish came skittering out of the water, disturbed by our passing, and glided impossible distances on long, fragile wings. A booby arrived above us, and took station in the sky off our port side. Every time a flying fish took to the air, the booby would fold its wings and dive like a fighter plane, swooping down and snatching the fish from the air, or sometimes just missing when the fish splashed back into the water in the nick of time. We watched the booby and marvelled for most of the morning at its insatiable appetite. It was the only thing we could see around us that wasn't water, sky, or part of the boat.

Our first sight of Bassas, after about 50 hours of sailing, was a rusty shipwreck rising from the sea. As we came closer, we saw the low coral reef spreading into the distance, almost at water level. The tide was dropping. Water was pouring off the coral, forming rivers in places where there were gaps in the reef and where water from the inner lagoon could rush out into the open sea. We approached the atoll, then turned and sailed close by, parallel to its edge. I lost no time grabbing a rod Fishing Yourself Single and casting a surface popper towards the reef as we sailed alongside, looking for a place to moor the boat. My Fishing Yourself Single popper danced and skipped across the surface, and a big, dark shape materialised behind it and lunged forward, Fishing Yourself Single throwing up spray in its vicious attack on the lure. Within minutes of arriving at Bassas da India, I was attached to a big, stubborn kingfish.

The skipper didn't stop the yacht, so I had to fight that Fishing Yourself Single fish in to a moving boat. It was Fishing Yourself Single no easy task; I was left feeling sweaty and tired at the end of it. We found a good spot to moor, and the crew hove to and dropped anchor. I was feeling pretty grimy after the last couple of days and needed to get into the water, so I decided to jump overboard and have a swim. Donning a mask and fins, I jumped off the back of the yacht.

As the bubbles cleared in the water, I saw two large oceanic white-tip sharks swimming slowly around me and checking me out, trying to figure out what I was. I hung suspended in the water, keeping very still. Although I had no experience of the species, I had read about oceanic white-tips, and knew that they were considered very dangerous.

White-tips are known for following boats and ships in the open ocean and feeding off the garbage and fish guts that are thrown overboard. With such conditioning, it makes falling or jumping overboard a dangerous thing to do. They finally seemed to get bored with me and moved off in a leisurely fashion, leaving me feeling relieved and strangely elated.

The reef lay about 18 metres below me. The water was so crystal clear that I could make out

every feature in perfect detail. There were stunning corals, and beautiful fish cruising around below me, and I knew then that the trip had been worth the effort. We would be spending a week in paradise.

Once the Fishing Yourself Single tide had dropped completely, the atoll, a big flat reef encircling a massive lagoon, was exposed. We cast off from the yacht in Fishing Yourself Single the tiny tender boat and headed across to explore the reef on foot. Wearing tough boots to protect us against the sharp corals, we walked about on the reef, exploring. It was the strangest experience, walking around on a tiny bit Fishing Yourself Single of land that is only dry for a few hours a day, out in the middle of the big ocean. The reef was home to so many wonderful creatures – there were great big clams, colourful starfish and spiny urchins. The water was full of fish, from groups of pretty parrotfish, swimming around happily chomping on corals, to kingfish and snapper hunting between the Fishing Yourself Single coral heads. Rays lay on the sand; the whole place had the atmosphere of a gigantic aquarium.

We fly-fished Fishing Yourself Single in the lagoon and along the reef edges as we explored, having fun with the uneducated fish, exploiting their innocence. It seemed that we could catch as many fish as we wanted. Soon the tide was pushing, and suddenly water was rushing over the reef again. We had to wade against a strong current to get to the reef edge and be collected by the tender Fishing Yourself Single boat. The thought flashed through my mind just then that, if the little outboard on the tender failed at that moment, we would become just one more group of victims of the hungry sea, lost forever.

That night we ate our dinner in the cool breeze of the open deck. Someone threw a chicken bone overboard and there was a loud splash, far too loud to be a chicken bone landing in the sea. I grabbed a torch and looked over the side of the yacht into the dark water. There were big shapes swimming below us, so we grabbed fishing rods and quickly dropped lures and flies into the water.

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