



Big fish often call for the "GT jump" - literally having to take the fight to the fish. This one was no exception.



In the boat and the odds are looking slightly better - still no guarantees though...

BOYS DON'T CRY

The GTs were following me that week. Totally. It happens sometimes – some days you are completely in tune with the ocean, and other days you are totally out of sorts and nothing seems to go your way. When you are feeling in tune and your sixth sense is guiding you, then you ride with it for as long as possible. I was totally riding it on a recent trip to Cosmoledo Atoll in the Seychelles. The fish just kept appearing in front of me as if by magic, and I couldn't help myself – I just kept catching them. I was not complaining – no sir, not by a long chalk. You have to make hay while the sun shines and I was making the most of it, making up for all those fishless days we anglers all have to endure to truly appreciate the really good ones. I was relaxed, just going with the flow and not forcing it, and when you are in that state of mind things just tend to go your way.

It wasn't all success though. Two days previously, I had been faced with the inevitable question from some of my clients: "Which leader should I use?" In an effort to convince them that an 80lb commitment leader was the way to go if they wanted to land that trophy fish, I was confronted with the not unexpected reply: "But what if I lose my fly line?" "Well," I always say, "considering the amount of money you have spent and the distance you have travelled just to walk on this hallowed ground, I wouldn't worry too much about a fly line." However, I completely jinxed myself with the very next sentence. "You know," I blurted out, "in all my years of fishing these atolls, I have never lost a fly line to a GT. To the odd outboard propeller, yes, but never ever to a GT."

Oops. Bad karma.



Calling for another GT jump - Patrick (the skipper) obliges and manages to tail the monster.



Typical of great moments in one's fishing career - the camera not wanting to play along - oh, well, too tired to care anyway.

On a recent trip to Cosmoledo, Field Editor Graeme Field went in search of big GTs. He found the fish, but little did he know he was in for the tussle of his life!

Two hours later, my new Sci Anglers 12-wt line was significantly shortened by a rather large GT in the surf at Astove Island. That particular fish was so big that I actually tried to pull my fly away from it as it charged, but the fish was too quick (or, more likely, I was too slow) and it engulfed the fly before I could run for cover. Not needing to cart many backup lines around with me (I never lose them, remember), I rigged up my only spare – complete with commitment leader number two. The first cast I made with that new line was also the last. Casting at a GT on the back of a huge stingray, I somehow managed to foul-hook the stingray and, well, when it felt the prick of the hook, it proved all but unstoppable!

Goodbye fly line number two.

There was nothing left for me than to approach the same client, cap in hand, and beg a spare line from him, which he kindly donated. But, sheepish now following the unlikely turn of events, I sneakily slipped a 12" class tippet of 30lb into my leader and skulked off for another shot at a (smaller) GT.

The following day started pretty well. Within the first 30 minutes of reaching South Island, I had landed a good GT and had seen a few others cruising around. I was fishing with a

father-and-son team, Chip and Tim Stringer, and was on the western side of the island with Tim later that morning when I made a cast off a steep ledge and hooked into a pretty sizeable grouper. By sheer brute force, I managed to keep it out of any holes and landed a spectacular mottled-brown grouper that pulled the Boga to exactly 30lb. I was feeling it! Although co-hosting rather than guiding the trip, I spent the rest of the morning helping Tim get into a couple of fish, and by 2pm the tide was really high and we decided to break for lunch. The tender boat arrived after collecting Chip from the eastern point of the island, and we anchored in a sheltered bay in the lee of the island.

Although the wind was blowing onshore pretty forcefully, I decided to walk the 50 yards or so over the island to the windward side, just to have a look around. Here, the waves were splashing up against the horrendously sharp coral ledges that fringe South Island, the wind was howling into my face and the water was pretty rough. I stood there for a while contemplating having a walk around, but decided against it and turned to head back to the lee of the island.

Did I mention that the GT's were following me that week!



As I turned, I looked down (literally at my feet) and straight at the stupendously broad back of one of the biggest GTs I have ever seen. A lot went through my mind in a very short period of time right then. "It's too big!" was the most prominent thought, closely followed by "I'll never land it without a boat!" and not far behind that, "I'll just lose another fly line!" All the while, my hand was following instructions from the little guy on my other shoulder, because the next thing I knew I was roll casting a #6/0 needlefish pattern at this fish and telling myself things like "There is a boat – it's just on the other side of the island!", "Hell, what's a fly line cost anyway?!" and "You don't get a shot like this every day – take it!" So I did. I cast at the beast and it rose like some prehistoric freak of nature – but as gently as you like, it sipped in the fly like a trout taking an emerging mayfly in an evening rise.

Until I set that hook, that is.

Let me try to paint a picture of the lay of the land. I'm about 6ft above water level and standing on a continuous ledge of some of the sharpest and most dangerous coral you can imagine. The island stretches out long and thin on either side of me, and numerous nasty undercut coral ledges form bays, points and snags that will slice a fly line in two in the blink of an eye. The fish is in water about 6ft deep and is hugging the side of the island, literally about 4ft from the edge. About 300 yards away, directly out to sea from me and straight into the wind, is the surf line and the reef edge, beyond which it drops sharply into unfathomable depths – the no-go zone.

An instant after feeling the hook strike home, the fish decided to tear off along the edge of the island, closely hugging every nook and cranny along the way. One thing that I have learnt with GTs is that the harder you pull against them, the harder and faster they run. Had that fish put any distance between us I would have been in trouble, so instead I kept only enough pressure to stay connected and keep my line tight enough to avoid the coral – and I tore after the fish. Doing the 100-yard dash over ankle-twisting, razor-sharp coral while holding my rod above my head, alternately reeling and yelling into the radio for backup, would have been a sight to behold. Somehow I managed it and stayed connected to the fish.

I was lucky.

The fish ran out of steam about 50 yards short of the surf, and with very few turns of line left on my reel it turned and started heading back towards the island. At this point, I had some support from Tim and Chip, who had come charging through the brush to see what was going on – and to tell me the devastating news that the tender boat was not coming around because the water wasn't deep enough. Back to the radio, this time resorting to humble pleading. Finally, when the fish was a mere 75 yards away, the tender boat burst into view around



At least one reasonable pic of a fish of a lifetime.

the point of the island. For the first time in the fight, I allowed myself to think that I might actually land this fish. However, with the jagged coral and waves hitting the island, the boat couldn't get near me. It was time for a good old "GT jump". I launched myself off the ledge and into the neck-deep water. As I let the fish pull me away from the rocks, I heard two more splashes behind me as Tim and Chip decided that they didn't want to miss the grand finale, and without a second thought plunged in as well. I guess they found their way into the boat, because eventually I was grabbed under the arms and hoisted backwards into it, landing flat on my back on the floor. Finally, things were under some semblance of control, and together with the skipper I managed to work the weary fish close to the boat. It stayed alongside for a long time, stubbornly refusing to allow its head to be lifted to pull it close enough to land. Finally Patrick, the skipper, jumped in and tailed the massive fish for me.

The rest all happened so fast.

This huge creature was slid into the boat, hoisted onto my lap, and cameras started firing. Well, kind of started firing. My battery died almost immediately, and we were down to Chip's new digital camera. Unfortunately the LCD was difficult to see in the bright sunlight, so he was just shooting randomly. In an effort to get the fish back into the water as quickly as possible, we didn't check to see how the pics had come out until after I had revived and released the fish. By then, we realised that Chip had had the camera zoomed right in, effectively cropping out parts of me and of the fish.

It didn't really matter. What *did* matter was that I had landed an absolute monster of a fish, one that I very much doubt I will ever better in my lifetime – and on a 30lb class tippet. The fish was measured at over 135cm with a girth of just under 1m. All of the graphs and formulas commonly used to calculate the weight of these fish put it at over 110lb – a trophy in every sense of the word, and one that will remain with me forever.