



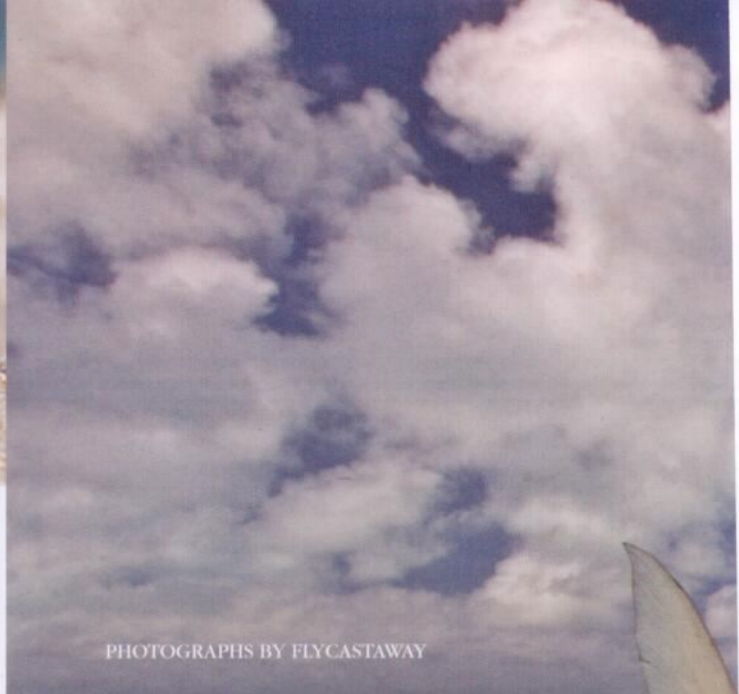
Above: The archipelago is dotted with little cays – this particular one was home to some noddie terns. Adult birds don't build nests as such; they simply lay their eggs on broken coral or a piece of driftwood. While the youngsters learn to fly, sharks patrol the waters looking for an easy snack, much like a trout rising to a mayfly!

Insert right: Peter (left) and Kevin Whittaker (right) respectively managed to hook a golden and greenspot trevally from the edges of a massive shoal of bonefish, while Keith Rose-Innes (middle) was already hooked into another trevally.

As fly anglers, we always dream of experiencing that perfect fishing day. Finer details may differ from person to person, but the general idea is usually the same: thousands of happy fish as far as the eye can see, ready and willing to accept your flies. The reality, however, is that this ideal will almost never unfold as we imagine it and, when it does, it's often so far removed from our frame of reference that we fail to even recognise it. Or worse still, it's like a dog chasing a car – once he catches it, he doesn't know what to do with it. As such, the dream always remains unattainable – or so I thought, until recently.

About seven years ago, I visited an archipelago of islands in the middle of the Indian Ocean, roughly 260nmi from the coast of Mauritius, called St Brandon. We caught some very good fish on that first trip, but with limited opportunities I couldn't explore the true fishing potential of this tropical paradise and knew that we needed to return. However, for years several logistical problems and red tape hampered our plans and we couldn't arrange a return trip. Then, at the end of May 2009, we finally received the all-clear from the relevant authorities and headed back to St Brandon – eager and filled with anticipation.

It is always intimidating to arrive at a new destination not knowing where to start fishing, so this time around we exploited all the perks of modern technology: historical weather data for the last 15 years, as well as updated, high-resolution satellite images – the two most important things when planning an expedition of this kind. With this knowledge at hand, we could study the fishing potential of the archipelago and predict the best period to go, weatherwise. We could also identify areas worth exploring beforehand, which one would not normally be able to see from sea level once on location. Three weeks flew by in a blur of planning sessions, amassing mountains of gear and poring over endless spreadsheets of weather data. But when we stepped onto *MV Gryphon* in Port Louis harbour, I knew that we had done our homework and that it would be worth it in the end. I was not wrong, but the way it turned out nevertheless exceeded my wildest expectations.

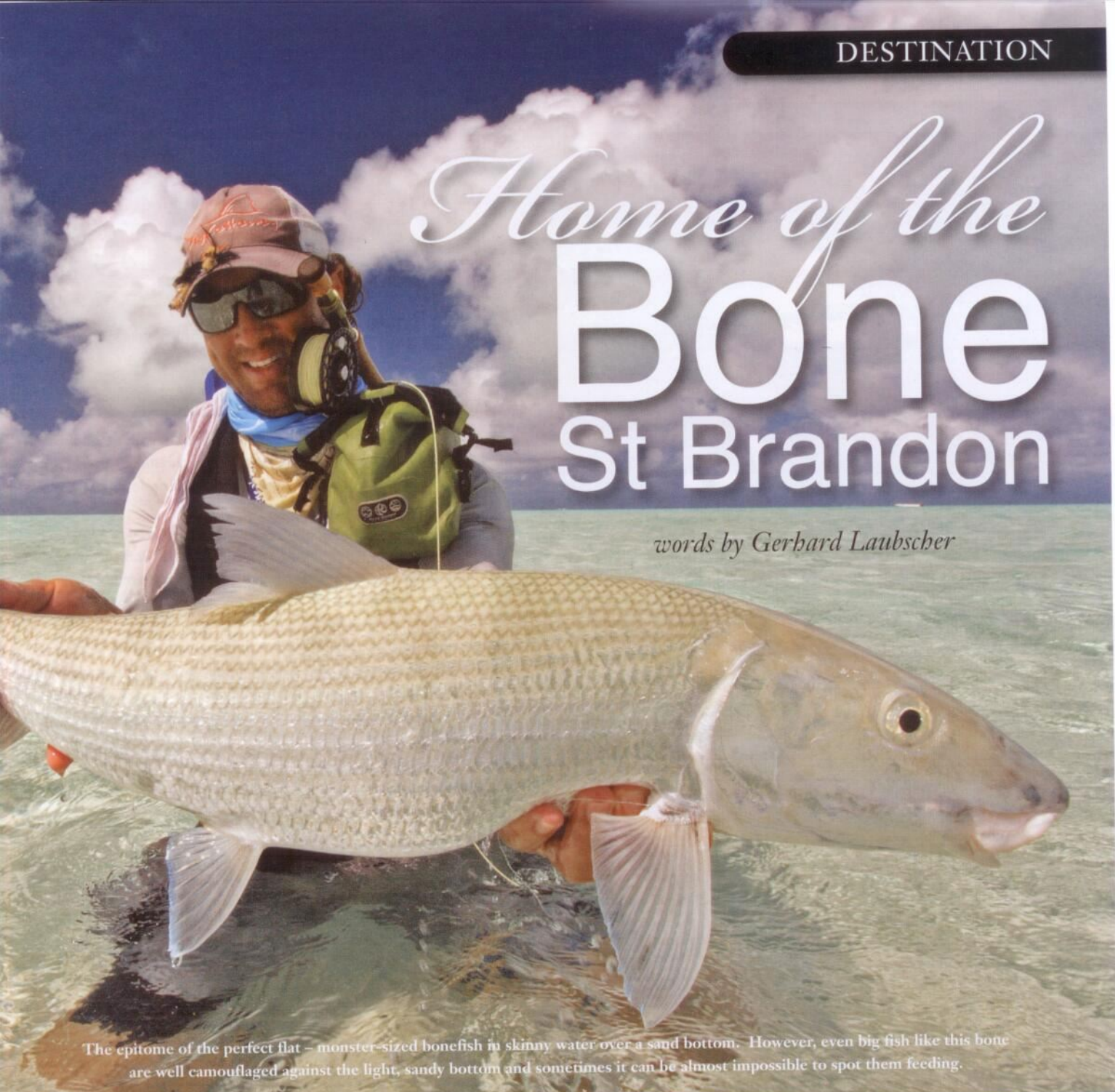


St Brandon offered us several new frames of reference. We caught more fish than we thought possible and found what we firmly believe to be the finest bonefishery we have ever experienced – squadron after squadron of huge bonefish roaming the flats, eager to take almost any offering. This was epitomised one day when Grant Dunbar got confronted by more bonefish than he had ever seen – shoals of bonefish the size of rugby fields. Now Grant has been around a bit, but he became so flustered that he just lost it and headed off in the opposite direction as if the tide was chasing him. Later that night, as we sat on the back of the boat and laughed about it, Grant said he was trying hard to “not find any bonefish”! If nothing else, this is positive proof that, as anglers, we will never be satisfied.

I know words will fail to describe St Brandon appropriately. I just hope that this pictorial will do justice to what I consider to be the best bonefishing venue on the planet.

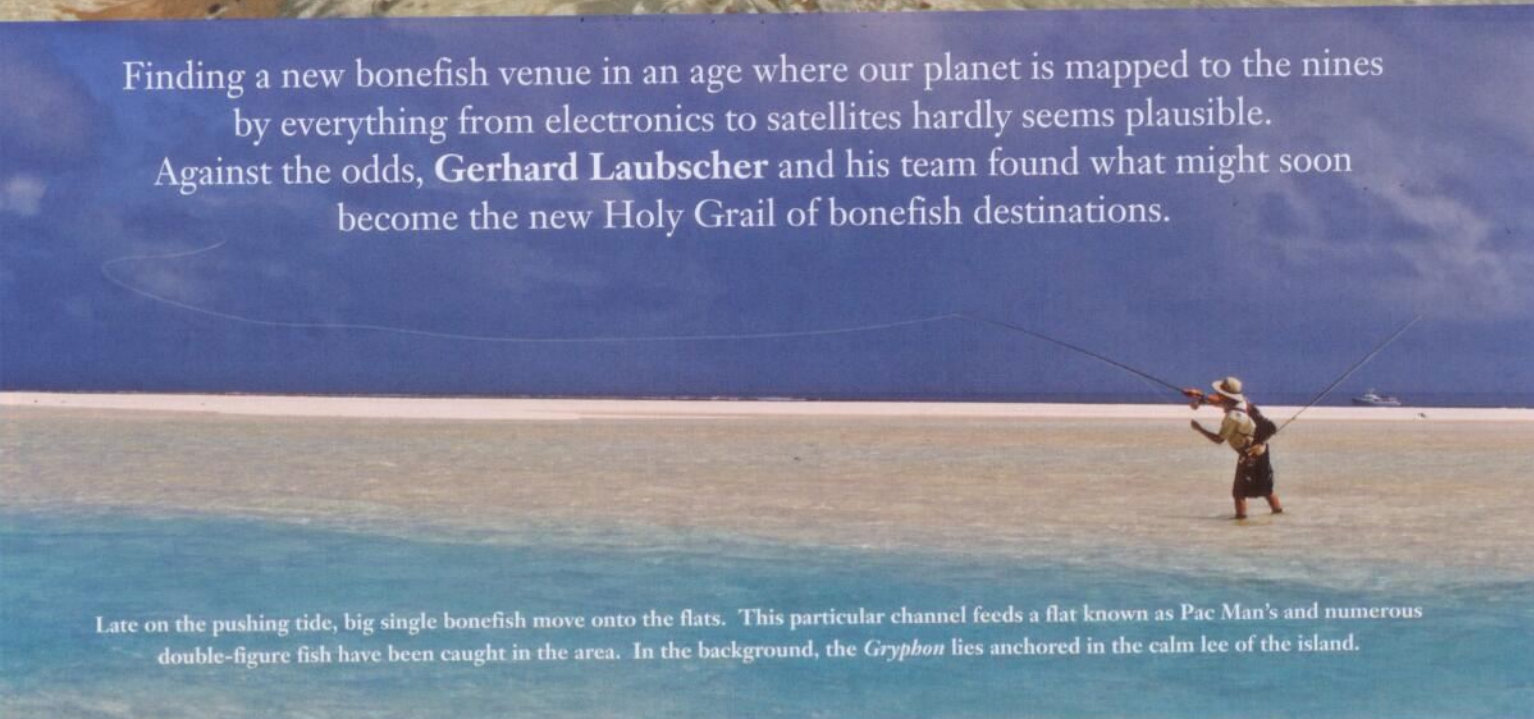
Home of the Bone St Brandon

words by Gerhard Laubscher

A man wearing a cap, sunglasses, and a life vest is smiling while holding a large, silvery bonefish in shallow, clear water. The fish is the central focus, showing its detailed scales and fins. The background shows a bright blue sky with white clouds and a calm sea.

The epitome of the perfect flat – monster-sized bonefish in skinny water over a sand bottom. However, even big fish like this bone are well camouflaged against the light, sandy bottom and sometimes it can be almost impossible to spot them feeding.

Finding a new bonefish venue in an age where our planet is mapped to the nines by everything from electronics to satellites hardly seems plausible. Against the odds, **Gerhard Laubscher** and his team found what might soon become the new Holy Grail of bonefish destinations.

A wide-angle shot of a fisherman in a hat and gear standing in shallow, clear water, casting a fly. The water is very shallow, revealing the sandy bottom. In the far distance, a boat is anchored in the calm water under a blue sky.

Late on the pushing tide, big single bonefish move onto the flats. This particular channel feeds a flat known as Pac Man's and numerous double-figure fish have been caught in the area. In the background, the *Gryphon* lies anchored in the calm lee of the island.



Above: Double trouble first morning! Shoaling bonefish could be found all over a flat that was christened Pac Man's – and the only thing the fish wanted to do was eat!

Left: As long as you use a heavy leader, you can land fish in the coral bommie infested areas. Grant Dunbar holds up one of the many exquisitely coloured bluefin that couldn't say no to a quickly stripped Flashy Profile.

Below: Towards the end of the first day's fishing session, the tide started falling and the huge shoals of fish made way for massive singles. Kevin Whittaker waded the edge of Pac Man's where he found this double-figure fish.



Right: Part of the archipelago's exceptional birdlife, this inquisitive fairy tern was not shy to fly right up to anyone getting too close to its colony.



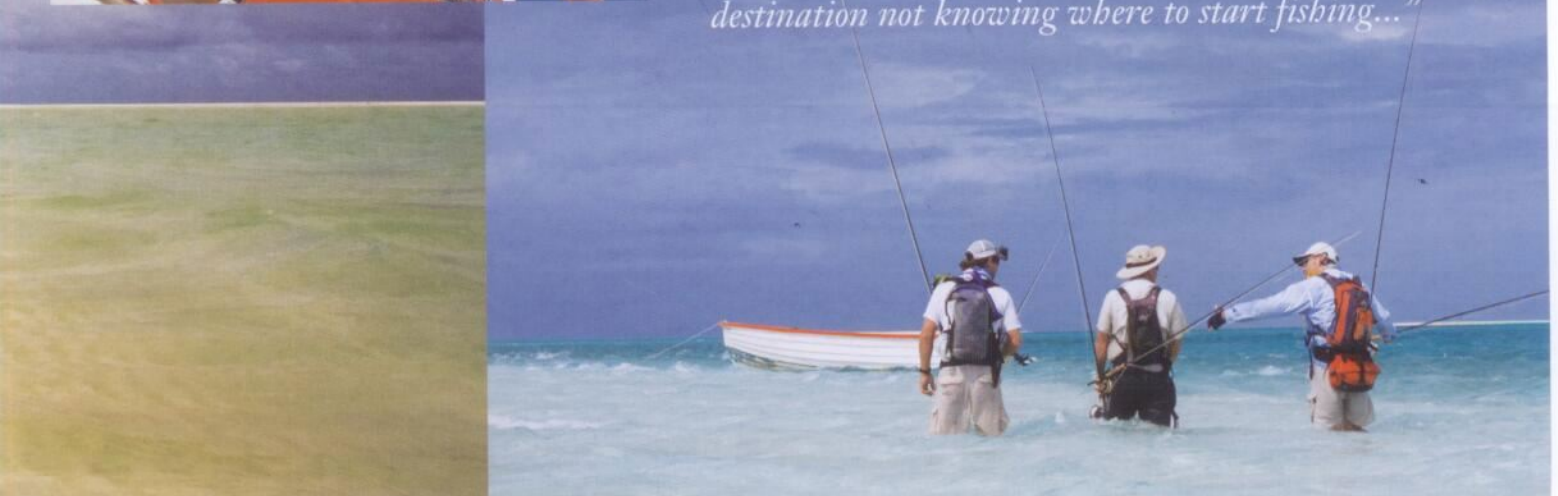
Above: Golden eye. Keith with a golden trevally that was caught at Ile de Paul in the north. These bottom feeders readily take a well-presented fly and give a good account of themselves during the fight.

Left: Anglers getting ready to board the tender boats. This turned out to be the author's best bonefishing day ever, and with just a few clouds on the horizon, you couldn't get a better setting.

Below: The one that got away. GT fanatic Sakkie Bezuidenhout explaining in graphic detail exactly how big the GT was that had just broken his fly line.



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This page:

Above: The calm before the storm. Paul and Kevin landing two blacktip sharks on a tiny island. St Brandon has a healthy shark population and from time to time they will take a well-presented fly. These two bruisers put up a tough fight before being successfully released.

Right: The only moment that is better than landing a big bonefish – watching it swim away knowing you have handled it with care. This fish was hugging the edge of a storm ridge, which made landing it successfully more difficult as the line or leader could easily be severed on the rough edges of the ridge.

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Top left: Approaching one of the many white sandbars (later to be named Bulgaria), the author witnessed a frenzy as schools of juvenile bonefish burst onto the sand while trying to avoid a shoal of hungry trevally. A comedy of errors unfolded as everyone reached for their 12-weights but soon realised that they were holding the wrong rods – they had spooked a shoal of 20-plus permit. Confusion reigned as the guys lunged back at the boats to grab their 9-weights. Fortunately all was not lost. Fifteen minutes after spotting a fish and making a quick cast, Grant Dunbar was holding a healthy 106cm GT that had given him a good workout!

Left and insert middle: Monster bonefish flats heaven. This fish crushed a little chartreuse Pillow Talk that was bounced along the sandy bottom.

