

Southbound

IDOL CHATTER
HARRY CONNICK JR.
TALKS NEW ORLEANS

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A TRIO OF FISHING
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LURE YOU IN

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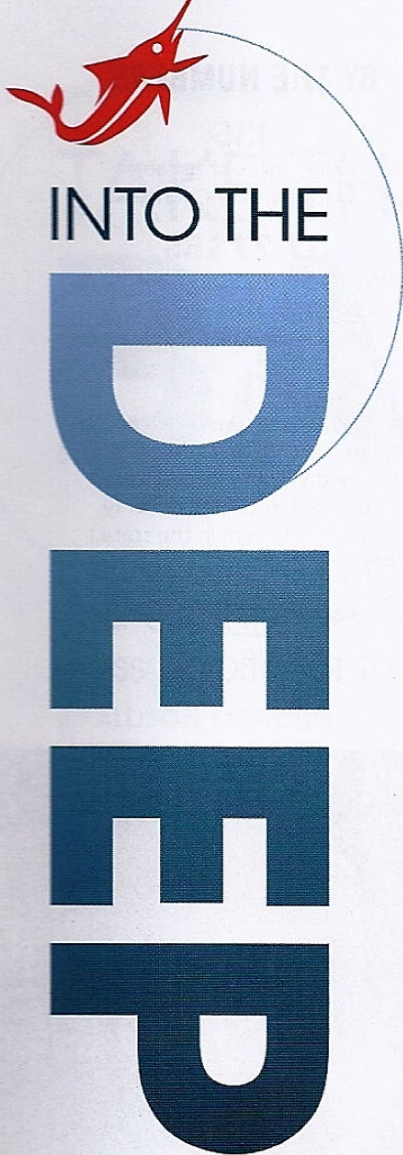
DISPLAY UNTIL MAY 12, 2014



A stylized illustration of a fishing scene. The background is a light blue sky with a large white sun or moon in the center. On the left and right sides, there are stylized blue mountains. A fishing line is cast from the top right, with a red bobber floating on the water. The water is a darker blue. The text 'GO FISH' is written in large, bold, dark blue letters. The 'O's in 'GO' are partially obscured by the red bobber and the fishing line. There are three red fish icons: one near the 'O' in 'GO', and two near the 'F' and 'H' in 'FISH'.

GO FISH

During these warm months, what better way to enjoy the outdoors than casting a line in the South's abundant waters? Whether you're a novice fisherman or an experienced angler, you'll be hooked by these excursions.



Cast a line in the waters of Alabama's Gulf Coast, home of the world's largest fishing tournament

BY BRET LOVE

CARNIVAL IN MOBILE, Alabama, is over. In this coastal city, where it's believed the first American Mardi Gras was observed in 1703, the parades and pageantry are done for the year. The beads have been swept from the streets; the Kings' and Queens' coronation costumes have been put into storage.

But forty-five minutes south, on Dauphin Island, the Mobile Jaycees are hard at work planning one of the area's other major annual events, the Alabama Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo. Founded in 1929, the Rodeo has earned the Guinness Book of World Records title of the world's largest fishing tournament, attracting more than 3,000 anglers to the area every summer.

For the young men who make up the Mobile Jaycees—working-class guys who earn a living as landscapers, plumbers, and police officers—the Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo is every bit as important as Mardi Gras, carrying on a rich maritime tradition that dates back hundreds, if not thousands, of years.

You begin to understand the importance of water to Mobile long before you get there.

Coming south down Highway 65, you're surrounded by the 260,000-acre Mobile-Tensaw River Delta, the second-largest delta in the country and a National Natural Landmark. The Mobile and Tensaw—plus the Apalachee, Blakeley, and Spanish Rivers—all feed into Mobile Bay, creating a rich ecosystem that includes cypress-gum swamps, brackish water marshes, and submerged grass beds.

The region's copious rain brings silt down these rivers into the bay and ultimately out into the Gulf of Mexico, creating nutrient-rich waters that make Mobile a haven for wildlife, including 300 species of birds, forty-six species of mammals, myriad reptiles and amphibians, and more than 125 species of fish.

People have been harvesting this fruitful plenitude for centuries, with prehistoric habitation dating back at least 5,000 years. Archaeological digs of the shell mounds along Bottle Creek, the Tensaw River, and Dauphin Island suggest that Native Americans of the Mississippian Period (1100 to 1550 AD) lived on a diet consisting primarily of oysters and fish. Even today, these waters remain crucial

to the area's population, with the Port of Mobile and shipbuilders such as Austal USA and BAE Systems Southeast Shipyards employing thousands of locals.

Executives from these companies are among Mobile's wealthy residents, whose children are crowned King and Queen at private Mardi Gras balls held by the city's fifty-odd "secret societies." It's an honor passed down from generation to generation, like a cultural heirloom.

For Mobile's working-class residents, fishing the waters of Mobile Bay and the Gulf of Mexico is an equally beloved, multi-generational tradition.

Richard Rutland, a thirty-year-old member of the Alabama Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo Executive Committee, has been fishing this area most of his life.

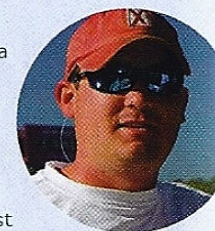
As he navigates his Skeeter SX 240 boat into open water, he recalls a childhood spent reeling in speckled trout, redfish, and flounder with his father and grandfather. That was before he joined the military and deployed to the Persian Gulf. Upon his return to the United States, he entered competitive fishing tournaments with his dad and eventually became a guide. He's proud that Mobile's artificial reef system is the world's largest, making it an ideal place for the Rodeo.

He knows the best spots by heart and searches for slicks on top of the water, which indicate fish feeding. Seabirds hovering and diving (CONTINUED ON PG. 88)

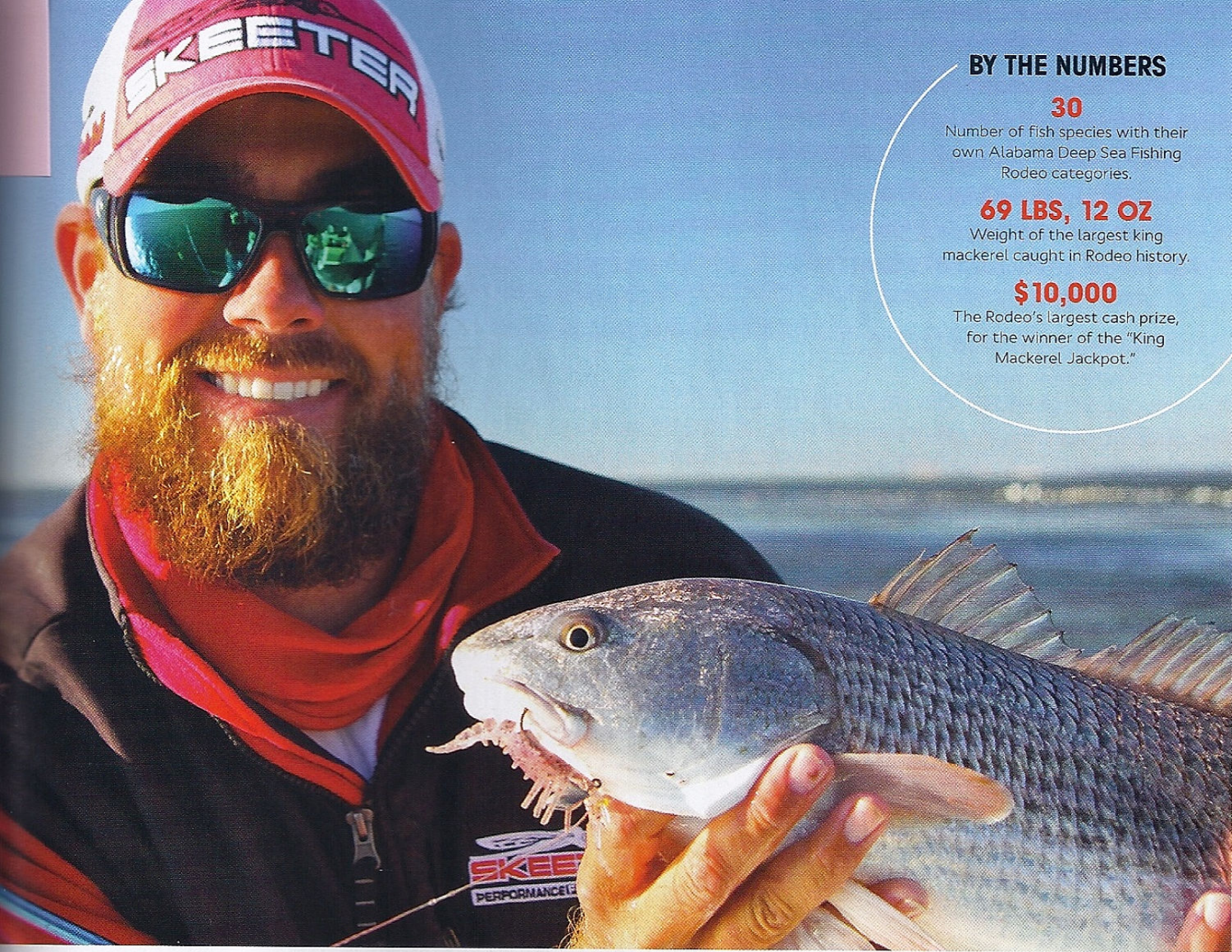
FISH TALES



"One night, me and my friends had the great idea to go forty miles out to catch the early morning snapper bite. There was a front coming through, and we knew it was gonna get rough. The first twenty miles weren't bad; the next twenty, we saw six-foot waves. It was so rough that even the captain got sick. About an hour into fishing with no bites, I dropped down one last time and hooked up. After a thirty-minute fight, we glimpsed the fish, and nobody had seen anything like it. Turns out it was an African pompano. We finally boated and weighed it: thirty-two pounds. We headed in with just one fish, but it was well worth the trip."



—KEVIN MAURIN, twenty-nine, board of directors member for the Alabama Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo from Mobile, Alabama



BY THE NUMBERS

30

Number of fish species with their own Alabama Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo categories.

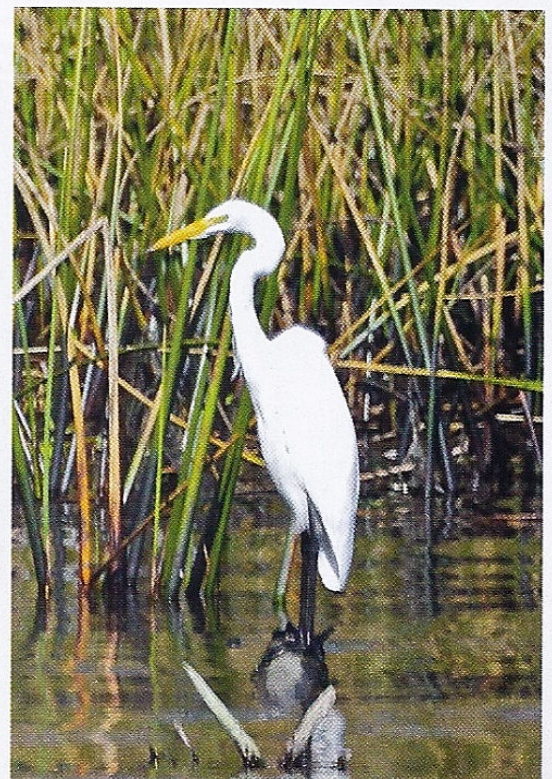
69 LBS, 12 OZ

Weight of the largest king mackerel caught in Rodeo history.

\$10,000

The Rodeo's largest cash prize, for the winner of the "King Mackerel Jackpot."

Above: Captain Richard Rutland of Cold Blooded Fishing. Right: An egret fishes in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta. Below: Deep sea fishing in this region can yield a wide variety of fish.





DARIEN

2014 Schedule of Events

March 22: **St. Patrick's Day Parade**
Shellman Bluff
www.TheFriendsOfShellmanBluff.org

April 7-13: **NGA Golf Tournament**
Sapelo Hammock Golf Club
www.SapeloHammock.com

April 11-13: **46th Annual Blessing of the Fleet**
www.BlessingOfTheFleet.com

June 14: **Darien Heritage Fest**

June 28: **Red, White & Blues on the Bluff**
www.VisitDarien.com

Oct. 18: **Sapelo Island Annual Cultural Day**
www.SICARS.com

Nov. 1: **Darien Fall Fest**
www.DarienFallFest.com

Nov. 7-8: **Fort King George Encampment**
<http://gastateparks.org/FortKingGeorge>

www.VisitDarien.com
for Additional Events

(CONTINUED FROM PG. 68) of public trout water in North Carolina, receiving 16,500 rainbows, browns, and brook trout between March and August. Because it's hatchery-supported, fly fishermen must share the water with worm dunkers and spinner throwers, but there's enough gullible trout for everyone.

Then there are the Davidson's rugged headwaters, where aquamarine plunge pools hold small but feisty rainbows and brook trout. This is where solitude-seeking anglers can spend days casting to wild trout without seeing another soul, the only sound that of chattering kingfishers and the swish of fly line. ♥

AREA ATTRACTIONS

Asheville

A half-day's drive northeast from the rivers of Western North Carolina, this funky city is famous for its eleven craft breweries, acoustic music scene, and riverfront arts district. *explore-asheville.com*

Davidson River Campground

Situated on the banks of its namesake river, this pretty campground has 160 shaded sites for tents and RVs. When the bite is off, take a hike along the adjacent Art Loeb or North Slope trails, or visit one of the 200-plus waterfalls in the area, including Whitewater Falls, the highest in the East at 411 feet. **828-862-5960**

Davidson River Outfitters

You don't have to own wading boots to dip your toe in the sport. These Pisgah Forest outfitters can hook you up with the requisite gear and a guide for either float or wade trips. *davidson-flyfishing.com*

Flat Rock Playhouse

Whether it's a musical tribute to the 1960s at their downtown Hendersonville stage or a performance of *My Fair Lady* at their main stage in historic Flat Rock, the Playhouse brings Broadway quality to the Blue Ridge. *flatrockplayhouse.org*



Trout House Falls

In nearby Brevard, rent a streamside cabin or riverfront cottage located on an 8,000-acre private preserve. You're steps away from the trout-rich East Fork of the French Broad. From your rocking chair on the porch, you can quaff a local beer and watch trout work the evening hatch. *trouthouse-falls.com*

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(CONTINUED FROM PG. 70) He competes in at least ten local tournaments a year, casting his line all weekend with the hope of winning \$2,000 in prize money for the biggest bass. His typical strategy is to find a spot where the sea vegetation changes—that's where bass like to congregate. But he can tell by the lake's color and the wind speed whether he needs to adjust his plans. During the tournaments, he calls his dad to report his latest catches.

Clayton takes the ranch's guests on pontoon fishing trips around the lake, pointing out bald eagles, sea otters, egrets, and telltale ripples in the water created by bass. If you turn off the boat's motor and listen, you'll hear wild boar calling out to each other from beyond the cypress trees.

Gray clouds begin to gather, casting shadows on the water. Clayton revs the boat's engine and steers it toward the ranch. He knew it would rain as soon as he saw the cows this morning; instead of grazing in the open, they were gathered in clusters beneath the trees. "Sometimes, Mother Nature speaks to the animals first," he says, his jaw clenched against the wind. And you think: He looks like his father. ♥

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RAILROAD VALLEY

AREA ATTRACTIONS

Creek Ranch

Ranch guests experience Old Florida living with an extravagant twist. Before you arrive, the kitchen is stocked with your favorite snacks and beverages. A private chef prepares all meals, which may be eaten on the screened-in porch while cicadas offer a serenade. Rooms are decorated in an elegant mishmash of styles—Western, Asian, and Americana—and are named for members of the Coker/Black family; some include steam showers and private porches. During your stay, tour the grounds on a massive swamp buggy, make use of the property's four-wheelers, horseback ride, and feed the animals. And, of course, fish. creekranch.com

Legoland

Surprisingly, this 150-acre Winter Haven theme park (on the former site of vintage attraction Cypress Gardens) is just fifteen minutes from remote Creek Ranch. Ride roller coasters, drive a Lego boat, and check out the new water park. florida.legoland.com

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LAKE LANIER
Convention & Visitors Bureau

(CONTINUED FROM PG. 72) en masse are another good indicator of a feeding frenzy—often referred to as a “boil”—in the waters below. Once he locates the fish, Rutland reels in keepers at a steady pace, observing a catch-and-release approach unless fishing for food.

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 temporarily cast a dark cloud over the future of Mobile fishing. “I remember sitting on the end of the dock crying,” Rutland says, “because I thought I’d never catch another speckled trout in my life.” But the region has since rebounded in spectacular fashion, with Rodeo record-size catches of lane snapper and yellowfin tuna in 2012.

For the fishermen of Mobile, a record catch is every bit as meaningful as being crowned King of a Mardi Gras ball—and potentially, far more lucrative. Every participant in the Alabama Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo is entered into the drawing for a new \$20,000 boat, which beats a bounty of plastic beads any day. ♥

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AREA ATTRACTIONS

Cold Blooded Fishing

Captain Richard Rutland offers inshore and offshore fishing charters departing from Dauphin Island and the Mobile Causeway, with live bait, tackle, fishing license, and cleaning and bagging of your catch included. coldbloodedfishing.com

Historic Mobile

Founded in 1702 as the first capital of colonial French Louisiana, Mobile has nine major historic districts whose beauty rivals those of Charleston and Savannah. The Midtown District, which features numerous nineteenth-century buildings and is on the National Register of Historic Places, is especially worth a tour. The Fort Conde Inn, in the heart of the downtown historic district, offers a perfect base for exploration. cityofmobile.org, fortcondeinn.com

Mobile Carnival Museum

Mardi Gras may only last a few weeks, but this festive museum captures both the regal and raucous sides of the city's Carnival celebration all year long. See dazzling artifacts, from jewel-bedecked capes to parade floats, showcasing more than 310 years of Mardi Gras history. mobile-carnivalmuseum.com