

By Capt. Sonny Schindler

SEEING DOUBLE!



Catching your first billfish is something an angler will never forget. Shooting a banded duck will most certainly stick in the mind of the hunter who pulled the trigger. It is these moments that we, as outdoorsmen, live for. But what happens when the same thing happens twice?

November 27, 2010 and February 18, 2011 are two dates that Bay St. Louis native, Captain Brian Gagnon will never forget. On these two dates, 16 months apart, he caught the same redfish, at the same location, on the same bait!

Catching redfish is not a huge deal for Captain Brian Gagnon. He fishes more than anyone I know on his days off. Did I mention when he is working, he is a charter fishing guide. Captain Brian runs a pristine 72 foot Chandeleur mother ship named the Southern Way. He has been guiding fishermen to the Chandeleur Islands and Biloxi Marsh since 2004. He has caught thousands of redfish in his lifetime, but never the same one twice.

With the exception of my older brother, I have known Brian Gagnon longer than any else in my life. We went to the same day-care, we were neigh-

ighbors growing up. We went to high school and college together; trust me, WE HAVE MET! Knowing him my entire life, I don't think he has ever told me a "fish story." He would rather truthfully say he went fishing and caught nothing, though seldom the case. He would rather take pride in the fact that he was out on the water.

Both times he caught the fish, he took pictures with his phone and

sent them to me. The fish is very distinguishable because of the number and pattern of black spots on it. This was the "thing" that made it stand out for him. He had never caught a bull red with such a unique spot pattern. Catching the fish once made it memorable, but twice made it legendary.

"Everything was the same, except for the time of year," Captain Brian admitted when asked how he caught the fish for the second time. "I was in the same skiff, fishing Taylor Reef (near the mouth of Bay St. Louis), fishing with my buddy AJ Pace. Pace, also a captain on the Southern Way, took the picture of the fish both times. "We did not do anything we should have though. We did not measure it or weigh it. We were just blown away to see that fish again." The first time Captain Brian and Captain Pace caught and released the big red, the fish was measured at 35 inches. Captain Brian commented, "The fish looked in great shape this last time, and looks to have put on some weight." Since the fish was caught pre and post spill, it gave Captain Brian hope for the future. "It was such a relief to know that fish has survived since the BP Oil Spill. Hopefully this is a sign that they knew to get away from that oil." It was a big deal for me to watch that fish swim away this last time."

As far as the artificial bait used to catch the fish both times, he was tight-lipped on that. I was impressed he told me where he caught it. He did however have a message for anyone who might catch the hefty rec in the future. "Let that fish go, it is mine and we have a history, it deserves to fight another day."

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