

Golden Bones and Beaver Island

By Steve West



Kevin Morlock decked out in 21 Century professional fishing guide sun protection.

Beaver Archipelago offers as fine a flats fishing experience as any place in the nation. The name is a take off on the popular bone fish, also not good eats, that one sight fishes for in shallow tropical salt water.

A "big" bone fish is 8 pounds. A big golden bone is over 30 pounds. Bone fish angling requires an expensive trip to places like remote Caribbean islands. Golden bone fishing happens close to home and Beaver Island is world class. Sport anglers from as far away as Texas California have come to Beaver in search of a fresh water fly rod personal best.



Gavin West fights a 20 pound golden bone and wins. Indigo Guides practice catch and release for bass and carp.

A big fish story

The sun was hot at about 4:00 p.m. in early July. I was standing in the casting position in the bow of the Indigo Guides charter boat. The best light tackle carp fishing guide in northern Michigan, Kevin Morlock, was polling the boat through 18 inches of gin clear water northwest of Beaver. Kevin was scanning the shallows ahead with the skill of the true pro he is when he said, "There is a big one at 11 o'clock - behind the large rock - about 40 feet."

I was tired after a long day in the hot sun, cocktail hour was approaching, this might be my last cast and my son was up four fish to my one. Important bragging rights were at stake. This cast had to be right. I double hauled and let it go. The fly line laid out straight as an arrow and the Morlock Super Rockhopper fly, with pink glitter body at the end of 8 feet of leader, landed a few feet beyond a true Jurassic Carp. "Strip it," said Coach Kevin. I hopped the fly slowly along the bottom toward the fish. She turned directly into the path of the 2 inch artificial bait.

They aren't good to eat, are they? They are eatable but not even in the ballpark of whitefish or perch. Why would you want to catch them? Because they are very changeling to catch and one of the world's toughest

fighting fish. In Europe, their native habitat, they are widely considered a prized sport fish.

The name golden bones has been applied to the common carp in recent years by writers like Field & Stream magazine's Kirk Deeter who has written that the

At this point things begin to blur a bit. Kevin or perhaps it was what's his name said, "Did you see that mouth open, it's the size of a coffee cup." The huge fish engulfed the fly. I pulled the rod tip up almost like I knew what I was doing. The fish knew what it was doing - heading for Charlevoix. Next I heard, "Holy s**t, it's the biggest of the day." My brain reminded me, "You have 12 pound test leader."

About 15 seconds later I realized that the monster carp had taken half a football field of line, in spite of a properly set drag. All the fly line was gone and I was into the backing line that is seldom seen as its existence is to simply fill the reel. Then the fish took a 90 degree right turn and began pulling all the line sideways putting more pressure on the 12 pound leader. You could hear the line ripping through the water. The fish was too far away to see.

The line went slack. Had the light leader broken under the strain? I imagined the comments from what's his name. Oh the potential ridicule I would suffer, "The old man broke one off." I started reeling as fast as I could. It seemed like minutes later



NorthernIslander Cub Reporter Steve West cradles his 31 pound baby.

when Kevin said, "The rod is loading. She's still on."

The fish was headed directly toward the boat - at ramming speed. About 20 feet from the boat the fish did a 180 turn and, slower now, proceeded to take all 150 feet of my fly line again. Cocktails would be delayed. "Water please." This was going to take a while.

It took 20 minutes to get the fish to the net. There were moments when it wasn't clear who was going to quit first. After weigh in (31 pounds) high fives and the photo session and with a little help the hefty gal jumped back in Lake Michigan and swam away - slowly.

An all day trip for two, including lunch, is under \$200 per person. You can use light spinning or fly tackle and it's included as well. Indigo Guides (www.indigoguideservice.com) are top notch and will do bass trips or split the day between species. Add this to your Beaver Island to do list. You won't be disappointed.