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The Fall Ascent

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The Worldwide Authority
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The Mexican Threat

“YOU’RE NOT GOING to get yourself shot, right?” my girlfriend asked after I told her I had accepted an invitation to fish Mexico’s Lake El Salto this past June.

“The only shots I’m worried about come with a little salt and a slice of lime,” I replied, hardly impressing her on multiple levels.

Dave Precht (editor in chief), Bruce Akin (CEO of B.A.S.S.) and I were heading to the premier bass fishing destination in North America, and our thoughts were far from drug cartel wars, which have created a thick fog of fear that continues to shroud the country’s tourism industry (see page 56).

We refused to be intimidated because we had important tasks to complete: get a true understanding of the threat to American anglers who question the safety of fishing Lake El Salto; test the new Abu Garcia Revo with four days to catch monster bass; and aid in the fight against the overpopulation of 8-ounce Pacifico cervezas at Angler’s Inn, the host lodge for our stay (www.anglersinn.com).

“How about \$5 to whoever catches the big fish each session of the trip?” offered Precht as we were being shuttled to the lake.

“Sounds like easy money to me,” I replied, struggling with the math just a bit. We would be fishing four days. There would be a morning and

afternoon session each day. I’d win \$5 from Precht and Akin per session. That means I’d fly home with an extra \$80 ... or 800 pesos.

Muy bueno.

Once we arrived it took only a few minutes to unpack, attach reels to rods and head to the guide boats.

The lake was at the lowest point anyone could remember. At full pool, the water laps at the bank just 100 yards from the lodge and spans about 22,000 acres. We hopped in a van to drive a mile down to where the boats were stationed and found only 7,000 acres of water to figure out.

“The fish are in piles,” the van driver said.

And he was right.

Each boat caught around 50 fish in four hours, with Precht landing the session’s biggest at 7 1/2 pounds. He got lucky.

As for my impression of angler safety, there were no problems whatsoever. While talking to any Mexican citizen I could find that could understand my Spanglish between the Mazatlan airport and the lake, the overriding theme for avoiding violence in Mexico was simply this: Don’t sell or buy drugs.

“All of the violence here is between drug gangs. They don’t want to hurt innocent people, especially Americans, because they don’t want the attention,” I was told. (Task No. 1, check.)

The next morning Akin won the big bass pot with a 7-pounder, and we all had more than 60 fish in the boat.

Akin and I were to fish together next, and we experienced the most incredible crank-

bait bite I had ever seen. Casting Bomber Fat Free Shads to a point that was lined with trees and fell to more than 30 feet deep, we averaged a fish per minute for one hour and two minutes. The biggest was 7 1/2 pounds, the smallest in the 3-pound range. If ever there was a test for a reel, that was it. The Revos performed flawlessly. (Task No. 2, check.)

I managed to scrape out the big bass of that session an hour or so later, when an 8-pounder engulfed my black-and-blue jig, but that was to be my only \$5 prize. Precht would go on to win the remainder of the bets, boating 8 1/2-, 9- and 9 1/2-pound bass the following two days, the two biggest of which were caught while we were fishing together.

Absolutely no bueno.

Needless to say, the little Pacificos came in handy while drowning my sorrows. (Task No. 3, check and check.)

All-in-all the trip was a resounding success at a lake and lodge that are world class. As far as I can tell, the only real threat in Mexico came in the form of *Bassmaster’s* editor in chief, who took all my money. If you plan to go, avoid Precht at all costs and you likely will have the trip of a lifetime.

James Hall

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