

OFF THE DOCK

WITH D. A. MANN

~ Passing on the Pass ~

7/8/26

For those fishermen who wanted Midnight Pass reopened, be careful for what you wish. Before the hurricanes, I frequently fished the Pass, Spanish Point, and up through Little Sarasota Bay. There were Pompano sprinkled in the Intracoastal in the Bays, Speckled Trout in most of the grass flats, and the occasional Bluefish, Flounder, and Spanish Mackerel on the slopes of the channel. The Pass was the sweet spot. If you wanted Pompano, drift the channel. If you wanted Trout, go back in the Pass to 4-5 feet on the grass bottom. It always produced. The water was clear, the current was good, and the food supply was plentiful. Today, the only thing that is plentiful is the sightseeing boat traffic, the loud music, and a never-ending sand bottom that has covered the grass and is filling in the channel. Boats are anchored in all directions with people standing in the middle of the Pass in knee-deep water drinking. And worst of all, the fishing is nonexistent. There used to be inshore guides going for Snook and Reds along the overhanging Mangroves all the way back to the sand dune. It was normal to see half a dozen boats anchored over the flats pulling in Trout and at least a couple drifting the channel for Pompano. Now, it's only pleasure boaters entering the Pass from everywhere.

True, the water has a better "flush"; but, the bottom is paying for it. You change the bottom and the direction of the flow, you change the fishing. The Intracoastal directly in front of the Pass has lost over two feet in depth and ten feet in width. From the north bridge of Siesta Key down through the Venice Jetties, fishing habits have changed; and,

not for the better. Ask any inshore guide (if you can find one) and they'll tell you that fishing since the storms of 2024 has gone downhill. It's perplexing to say the least. It seems to be the worst between the larger passes. North of Big Pass and south of the Jetties seem to be in good shape. If I was a marine biologist, I might be able to figure it out; but for now, I'm just a local fisherman out looking for a cheap thrill.

If you are woven from the same cloth, you'll find your *thrills* between markers 14 and 17 in Roberts Bay, 17 to 19 in Blackburn Bay, and marker 1 behind Snake Island. Fish Roberts on an incoming, Blackburn on an outgoing, and Snake anytime you're passing through.

The Pompano are schooling for the first time this year.

Let the fun begin.