

Hunting Yellowfin Tuna off Cape Point by Charles Mathee

When the phone rang it was my good mate Pierre who was frantically trying to string his sentence together regarding Yellowfin Tuna 62kgs, my attention immediately focused on every word he had to say. Pierre had quietly gone about doing some investigative work regarding tuna hunting off Cape Point and he managed to get on a charter and bag himself a 62kg Tuna.

That was it, Sakkie Le Roux, Pierre Marais and I were chomping at the bits for more action and so started the preparation for probably the most enjoyable diving experience we have encountered in our 15 years of spearfishing. The dates had been set and the three of us were to meet in Cape Town on Saturday 16 April 2005.

Pierre had arranged the charter with Local diver Deon van Anwerpen, one of the pioneers of yellowfin hunting in the Western Cape. Deon a no-nonsense commercial out of Gordon's Bay, not only knows the area extremely well, but is well connected in the diving and fishing circles. Deon was to join us diving on the trip and he had arranged for Patrick Christodoulou to skipper on his 32 foot Cat "Magofter".

I managed to fly into Cape Town on Friday the 15 April and spent the evening at Deon's house catching up with him and Pierre. The stories of huge yellowfin breaking the surface and smashing the chum line had the adrenalin pumping. Deon emphasised the fact that this trip was going to test our gear to its ultimate potential. I had stopped in at the Dive Factory on route and managed to have my equipment checked out and luckily stocked up on a number of extra spears, an action that I always finds bucks the trend on my superstitious nature.

With a quick check up on Buoy weather and the expertise of local knowledge, the first trip was to be on Sunday 17 April.

Sunday April 17

At 6:30 am on Sunday 17 April we left Gordon's bay Ski-boat club. It was a perfect morning with not much wind predicted. We headed out towards Cape Point together with a number of other fishing boats. Patrick's boat "Magofter" was equipped with state of the art navigation and sounding equipment and I noticed that the water temperature was around the 14 degree mark in False Bay. At about 8 am we were a couple of nautical miles off Cape Point when the bird activity started. Suddenly the sight of yellow fins breaking the surface and chasing bait fish had the adrenalin in all five of us pumping. In no time at all we pulled a couple of lures through the birds and we had the ratchets going. Four yellowfin tuna later in the 35-40 kg class had the boys running for their suits in anticipation of putting some steel through these beasts. Deon was adamant that there was no need to panic as these were small fish however Sakkie and I looked at each other with a surprised look of excitement. A couple of miles further out we were greeted by the Aughulas current and the water temperature had suddenly climbed to the 18-19 degree range. There was no wind at all and suddenly the sea had a mirror like appearance.

Patrick started looking for the Long Liners as these boats provide a perfect chum line, to attract tuna. We headed out to an area known as the Canyon and came across a few long liners working the area. On route between the boats we came across some flotsam and this is where all the action started. By this time the water temperature had risen to 20.5 degrees.

Patrick had spotted some Dorado's underneath the floating log, and before anything could be said, Sakkie and Pierre had entered the water. Pierre managed to line up a 12kg fish out of the shoal and landed the fish successfully. Sakkie had quietly gone about business stalking the bull out of the shoal as they moved away from the flotsam I noticed Sakkie heading down into the abyss and heard the shot go off. Sakkie had managed to shoot the large bull dorodo. When I swam over to him, I noticed the fish was a fantastic specimen and was pulling him around in its attempt to free itself. Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a fish that looked like a Wahoo and to my surprise I was greeted by this elusive creature at about 50 feet, albeit out of shooting range. It was not long thereafter that Patrick had attracted the Wahoo's attention using a spinner rig and the specimen made its way to the hatches by means of rod and line.



The shoal of Dorado's had moved away from the flotsam and it was at this point that we got out the water to allow for the possibility of the shoal returning to the floating object.

About 30 minutes had passed and within minutes of Deon, Pierre and I entering the water a large object appeared out of the depths and started feeding on the chum line. To my astonishment, I would see the yellow dorsal fins of the Yellowfin tuna appear and disappear with pieces of chum. It was at this point that my decent was met with the up coming beast, travelling at some bizarre speed. The tuna made its way towards the chum line and hesitated at the sight of 3 pieces in front of its nose. I squeezed the trigger and the 7.5mm spring steel hit the fish at which point all hell broke loose.

Instantaneously my 30metre bungee had disappeared and my Tommy Botha float clipped me on the back of my head. The next 50 minutes was the most tiring experience in an effort to subdue to the speared fish. The bungee had been stretched to its maximum breaking strain and on three separate occasions the fish pulled me and the float under the water. On several occasions I tried in vain to retrieve line from the fish, had it not been for the one way retrieval system on the floats, the struggle may have lasted considerably longer. Back at Gordon's Bay ski boat club the fish weighed in at 95 kg's. An awesome days spearfishing and a great start to the rest of the dives that were to follow.



Friday April 22

After four days of cold front the next trip was set for Friday 22 April. We launched at 6:30am, however the mirror like appearance that greeted us on day 1 was not to be seen. By the time we passed Cape Point we realised that this was not going to be a pleasant day out on the tuna grounds. The water was slightly greenish and was battling to get over the 18 degree mark. This however did not stop the enthusiasm in search for probably the strongest fish pound for pound in the ocean.

After a hard days diving we returned unsuccessfully to Gordon's Bay.

Saturday April 23

Saturday greeted us with calm seas and the route out to the tuna grounds was a lot more pleasant than the previous day. A couple of nautical miles off Cape Point we came across some bird activity and the sight of the yellow fins breaking the surface. Once again, in no time at all, we had the lures out and the ratchet was screaming. Minutes later we had a 20-30kg yellowfin in the hatch and the scene was set for the days diving.

We arrived out at the tuna grounds an hour later and were greeted by the sight of several boats fighting fish. Patrick decided to put some lures out while we kitted up. A couple of minutes later, having not trawled to far the ratchet was screaming. That was it, Sakkie had kitted up in no time at all and the sound of the ratchet going had him diving over the gunnel in search of the shoal of tuna. Watching from the boat, I could see that the shoal had come up and Sakkies motions indicated that he was in the action thick and fast. Deon continued chumming the water in an effort to ensure the fish remained near the surface in the open blue ocean.

In the frantic action, Sakkie managed to put a spear into one of the fish and he was water skiing behind the beast. He was being pulled all over the ocean in the struggle to land the fish and attracted the attention of a little mako in the passing vicinity, 30 minutes later he had secured the fish and swam it back to the boat, a great start and Sakkies first tuna weighed in at 60Kg's.



We dived hard for the rest of the day and managed to see a number of yellowfin around the 60 feet mark but the fish were not stopping for anything. A couple of beasts in the 100kg class made brief appearances before opening up the accelerators into the depths of the Aughulas current. One of these beasts managed to bend my 7.5mm spear like a piece of spaghetti and my brief fight with the fish was short lived. Later that afternoon Pierre and I came across arguably the biggest fish we saw on the trip to date but the tuna had other ideas and headed for safer waters.

Sunday April 24 – Chaos erupts!!!

Sunday morning dawned and another perfect day was forecast. Patrick and Deon decided that the day was to start out on the same co-ordinates as we ended the day before. Pierre by this stage was chomping at the bits to land his second tuna. With Sakkie and I both having landed decent fish on the trip, it was Pierre's turn to take the first drift. As you all know taking the first drift is of utmost importance in any diving environment.

As it turned out the morning drifts produced no fish. The water temperature was around the 18 degree mark and was slightly greenish in colour. Pierre managed to see one yellowfin in the chum line; it made its appearance on several occasions but disappeared as quickly as it arrived.

By midday four wary divers were resting their heads on the deck of the boat when suddenly Patrick noticed some boats running out deeper to the Canyons.

Patrick suggested we try new grounds and opened up "Magoofter" with a turn of pace. The 10 Nautical mile journey took no time at all as the two 300hp Yamaha motors purred into action.

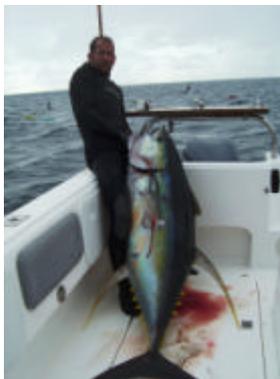
We arrived at the sight of two boats fighting yellowfin. All the tiredness had suddenly disappeared and Pierre and I jumped in on the first drift at the new grounds. With minutes the sight of numerous yellowfins smashing the chum line graced our presence. Amidst the chaos Pierre had I had both shot fish and were both fighting them in the normal dog fight manner that the tuna struggle. Once again my bungee was stretched too is maximum and I was being towed around the ocean in pursuit of the fish. I was constantly aware of

being caught in my float line as the powerful fish, showed no mercy in its quest to rid itself of the spear.

Half an hour later both Pierre and I had successfully landed our fish. Pierre's fish weighed in at 50Kgs and mine at 65kgs.



Patrick had moved us in behind a long liner and once again Pierre, Deon and Sakkie entered the water. Instantaneously the tuna were flying through our chum line. The next two hours that followed was the most exciting diving any of us had ever experienced. Three divers were in the water and fighting tuna. I managed to jump in armed with a camera and witness huge yellowfin tuna screaming past me while destroying the bait in the water.



Pierre was fighting a huge fish, Sakkie was being dragged to all parts of the ocean in his fight and Deon had managed to put a spear into a 65kg tuna using a 1 metre Rabitech gun, the problem was that he only had a short float line attached, as this gun was to be used as a kill gun. Luckily Sakkie had attached a spare gun on the Rob Allen float but it was unloaded. Deon managed to hold the tuna by grabbing on to the spare gun as it flew past him. Chaos had erupted as all three divers were fighting fish! Sakkie had also shot his fish using a spare float and it was not equipped with the one way retrieval system. I managed to swim back to the boat and grab another rig, swim it back to him and he continued fighting his tuna.

In the space of an hour Pierre had landed his 87kg Tuna, a brut of a fish, Sakkie was picked up about 800 metres from where we first started and he put a 78kg Tuna on deck. Deon "Ox" van Anwerpen had fought his 65kg tuna without giving it any slack. Deon decided that he had not had enough and continued his quest for another tuna. It was not long before he landed another 40 kg fish in all the activity we had created in the ocean. Patrick was skippering and chumming while all this pandemonium broke out and deserved a good couple of "soapy cokes" on his return to Gordon's Bay.

What a day! This was an awesome spearing trip and a great bunch of guys to share it with. Do spearing trips get any better than this?