

# Gone Fishin’

CAPT. LEO HILES SHARES HIS FISHING KNOWLEDGE

## The Blue Ghost’s golden rules

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From the Gullet

### Guide shares back-to-basic strategies

Capt. Leo Hiles got the boat up on a plane and shot through a cut in the mangroves that revealed, like a trap door, the winding, shady shallows of Jones Creek, which traces the shores of Jones Island and Orange Island, just within the canopy.

“I hate these kinds of mornings. It’s too calm,” Hiles shouted over the purr of the engine. “Those fish see everything and hear everything. I’ve got a spot with some big trout I want to show you that we’re going to check first.”

Running Jones Creek is one of those all-or-nothing kinds of deals. After banking into that first turn, there’s not much room to back down. If you lose your hydroplane, a 1-1/2 foot-deep creek as crooked as fishing knot instructions is no place to get up and running again. We saw some clammers whack their prop trying to shoot the creek mouth at the end of the day. They were lucky to get their engine working again.

The Blue Ghost—Hiles’ 14 foot 1975 Brummell—had no problem tilting through the creek’s hairpin curves, though. After about 10 minutes, we burst out of the trees into the wide-open grass marshes on the other side of a stretch of Mosquito Lagoon’s un-navigable flats and impassable hammocks.

## HILES’ HINTS

Hiles is 64 and has fished here since he was 13. He has retired from several careers, including 20 years in the Army, and now he works as a guide in Edgewater and holds “Inshore Fishing Techniques” classes.

Aboard the Blue Ghost, Hiles operates on a “back-to-the-basics philosophy of four golden rules: know the area; know how to read the water, no noise (you *and* the boat); have confidence and patience.”

“That last one is your worst enemy,” he said. “If you lose your confidence and patience, that’s it. You’re done for. You might as well go home.”

Hiles tells his students to key on points and sand spots and, in the interest of stealth, to shut off the engine as far as a quarter of a mile away from their target.

Hiles also said to use whatever noise you must make to your advantage.

“Make your choice about what side you’re going to fish and run on the opposite side. The noise will run the fish over towards the side you want to fish,” Hiles said. “It’s better to run by a spot fast than it is to stop on top of it. Just run by and make your way back quietly. If you stop right there, the fish will know where you’re at.”

Hiles is full of pointers, like popping a fish out of the water right into your hand like the bass pros on TV.

“With smaller fish, reel in until there’s a rod’s length of line out. When you lift your rod up, the fish will come right up to your hand,” Hiles said.

## TROUT AND MORE

At Hiles’ first stop, a flock of 20 great white pelicans and another skiff were floating around, but those big trout weren’t home so we ran south toward El Dora and Slippery Creek. The water was clear as spring water. Three skiffs were within sight.

A slight wind put a little chop on the water, just enough to break up a watchful fish’s view of our outline. We started casting 6-inch boot-tailed soft baits called Gambler Green and Pepper Shad.

We trolled around, anchoring occasionally in water less than 2 feet. Hiles said the baits retrieve better when you are anchored and that it is more difficult to feel the bait’s movement in the water when you are drifting.

Nothing was biting, though. We trolled a few hundred feet to some depressions about 3 feet deep, and suddenly the bite was on. The day had heated up a tad and the slightly deeper water was holding fish looking for protection from the cold air, or maybe the other anglers.

“We were so close, yet so far,” Hiles said as he reeled in the first red, a 24-incher. “The slightest change makes all the difference.” Hiles got enthusiastic with his casts, whipping them out and yelling, “Go, greenie! Go get ’em!”

We had found two schools, a pack of rat reds and one harboring reds in the 20-to 24-inch range, judging by the two largest we caught. We drifted across the depression in the flat, and a few casts to a shoreline point turned up a 3-and a 4-pound trout.

Then one of the skiffs cranked up, ran right past us and right over the school, ruining the spot.

We headed back to the mouth of Jones Creek, where we caught and released a few more little reds and a trout, bringing the days’ total to nine reds and three trout, plus another hard-pulling red that ended up being the one that got away.

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An Old Salt Suggests: “Don’t crowd the banks fishing the flats. It disturbs the bait and that spooks the fish. You’ve got to leave that bait swimming natural.” Capt. Leo Hiles, Edgewater

### How Leo works the shad

Capt. Leo Hiles recommends a smooth, even retrieve, fast enough to feel the resistance of the bait’s tail wiggling through the water. Rig this bait with corkscrew bait holders and a 1/32-ounce sliding bullet weight. “If it doesn’t swim with its tail wiggling right, back the bait off one turn,” he said.