

JACKSONVILLE KAYAK FISHING CLASSIC SETS RECORDS



Dog tags, measuring stick and kayak all had to be visible in official scoring photos.

The 4th Annual Jacksonville Kayak Fishing Classic was, once again, the largest kayak fishing event in the world.

Two-hundred-eighty-two paddlers fished for a cut of over \$60,000 in prizes, supplied by more than 100 sponsors. Participants came from across the map. Representatives from Washington State, Michigan, California, Texas, Virginia, even a sponsor from England, named Andy, lent an international flavor to the awards ceremony, giving away a kayak with his British accent and dry wit.

Non-anglers and competitors alike snapped-up thousands of raffle tickets and won great prizes, often without wetting a line. The end result was a \$22,000 boost for Daniel Kids, Florida's oldest children's services organization.

"We are thrilled to be associated with such a world-class event, and want to thank the kayak anglers of North Florida for their generous support," said Jim Clark, President of Daniel.

The good cause was met with good fishing. "The fish-catching this year was sensational, simply the best ever," said tournament director, Mike Kogan. "After (subtropical storm) Andrea came through we were concerned, but the weather cleared and the bite was on. More than 12 anglers scored impressive slams, and more than 14 over-slot redfish were photographed and released."

That's right, the fish were photographed and immediately released into the water from whence they came. The Kayak Classic is CPR tournament – catch, photograph, and release. Special tokens and measuring sticks, distributed at the captains meeting the night before, had to be visible in the picture. Some nice fish were snapped by angler/photographers who forgot to include these and were, thus, disqualified. It's trickier than it sounds if you don't have anyone around to help you, as I found out. I fished the Yak Classic and got to use the measuring stick and tokens (dog tags from Army Navy Outdoors). My redfish was nearly two

feet long and the camera didn't have a wide enough angle to fit him all in the picture unless I stood in the kayak and hoped he sat still for a photo. You thought toddlers were difficult to work with? I had great fun and managed to snap some nice pictures of my finned friend who was not nearly big enough to win me a new kayak. That honor belonged to Bradford Lydick of Yulee who caught a 37.5-inch redfish and took home a Hobie Outback Revolution.

Still, I felt the day had been entirely worth getting out of bed for - at 4a.m. - when I looked around at the scenic expanse of marsh and sky as my redfish towed me up the creek as though we were in some Florida version of the Iditarod. Eventually I played the fish into my hand. The eight-pound line and small hook I used to fool him held strong. As I released the fish and watched the dorsal fin zig-zag out of sight in two foot-deep water, I could only look up and say 'perfect'. I love it when a plan comes together and everything works out the way it is supposed to. It doesn't happen that way often enough, which made this experience all the more special.

I learned that the big reds are as far back in the creeks as they can get. This makes



kayaks the perfect vehicle for getting to them. I actually scooted mine over 20 feet of practically dry land to get back into a hole where I caught a small trout.

I also learned that most of the biggest reds bit topwater lures, including the Rapala Skitterwalk and the old Zara Spook. They were likely all caught during the morning under the low clouds and fog that blanketed our region as a high tide flooded the estuaries of North Florida.

Trout were somewhat scarce. There was a division for fly fishermen. Only two trout were caught by the "fluff-chuckers" as Kogan affectionately refers to them. The award for 3rd-largest-trout-caught-on-fly went to an angler who caught a flounder.

Jacksonville's "Outback" Bill Smith won top trout honors in the open division. There was nothing small about his 23.5-incher. Smith won a Wilderness Systems Tarpon 160I kayak.

Iko Carrasco won a Malibu X-Factor kayak for catching an 18.1-inch flounder – the biggest of the day.

In the fly fishing division Rich Santos had the biggest red at 32.2 inches. Rusty Fissette won the biggest trout-on-fly with a 15-incher.

Thirteen-year-old Chris Morrill won the Temple Fork Outfitters Jr. Angler award. Anne Smith won Lady Angler honors.

The ultimate goal was to coral the largest aggregate of the three species – a slam. Todd Derringer of St. Augustine caught the biggest slam. His redfish was 25 inches. His trout was 20.6. The 17.8-inch flounder brought his total to 63.4. He won a fully equipped Ocean Kayak Big Game Prowler – worth well over \$1,200.

In a super-light race, Charles Ganoie had the second-biggest slam at 62.2 inches, with Justin Loudermilk right on his heels at 61.9. Blake Beltz caught 59.5 inches of fish to take 4th.

Sponsors who contributed to the cause included, Thrifty Outdoors, Black Creek Outfitters, Dicks' Sporting Goods, West Marine, Army Navy Outdoors, All Wet sports, The Salty Feather, and Pier 17, among many others. Any company in the kayak industry in general, should be applauded and supported for their efforts and generosity.

To plug-in to the North Florida kayak community, visit JaxKayakFishing.com.



Justin Loudermilk had 3rd biggest slam.



Jr. Angler winner Chris Morrill.



Greg Naylor with 36-inch red, good for 2nd.