Photo- From left Tom Hughes and Bill Fassbender are pictured fighting large jetty game fish while a school of sharks feeds right on the surface only yards from their fishing boat.

Photo – High leaping tarpon are the main attraction for jetty fishermen and can weigh up to 200-pounds!

Photo – Tom Hughes is pictured gaffing Bill Fassbenders 8.5 Spanish mackerel that attacked a live pogy fished at the tip of the St. Mary's south jetty rocks.

“Jetty Tarpon, Sharks & More”

By Terry Lacoss

Watching the ocean for any signs of bait fish, Bill Fassbender, Tom Hughes and myself motored out to sea from the mouth of the St. Mary's inlet. It was a beautiful morning with light and variable winds that had laid down a somewhat rough ocean from the previous night.

Typically morning jetty fishermen will experience light southwest wind during the summer fishing season allowing both small and large boats to fish at the fishy St. Mary's inlet and rock jetties. However if you wait to the north side of high noon, a brisk sea breeze often sends small boaters back to port. With this in mind, cast netting a live well full of live pogies in good time is critical in targeting jetty game fish before afternoon seas are building.

Luckily we did not have to navigate too far before a trio of pelicans were spotted dive bombing into schools of surface feeding pogies. My first cast produced a strike, but my second cast was a “Home Run” producing a net full of medium size pogies, enough for live baiting and chumming too.

Soon we were anchoring my 26-foot Triton bay boat just offshore from the very tip of the St. Mary's south jetty rocks where a shallow sandbar dropped off into the deep nearby channel. Live pogies, also referred to as menhaden or bunker, were barbed on 7/0 kahle hooks and were free spooled right to the bottom of the drop off.

For the next 30-minutes it was constant shark action with a variety of small sharks attacking our barbed baits. We finally decided it was time to move when Bill Fassbender reeled in a huge 8.4 pound Spanish mackerel that had struck a live barbed pogy! We still moved to a new jetty fishing location, was on the ocean side of the south jetty rocks about half way from the very tip of the jetties to the beach.

Once again nearby sharks soon located our chum slick forcing us to move once again where we soon anchored on the channel side of the south jetties and right off from the very tip of the jetty rocks.

Chum was discarded once more at a steady pace into the deep waters of the inlet. Once gain we were completely under a shark attack, however this time the sharks were much larger, putting up an awesome fight before the shock leaders was cut, or we dislodged the hook very carefully from their toothy mouths.

Soon the tide had slacked and our chum began to gather on the surface only some 20-feet from our fishing boat.

“Look at all those sharks feeding in the floating chum, “ Tom Hughes said while putting a deep bend in his stout saltwater fishing rod. “I have never seen anything like this, this is awesome!”

Several sharks continued to splash the surface as they tore into the floating chum as both Bill and Tom fought large sharks deep in the channel.

A high noon approached we decided to navigate back to the Fernandina Harbor Marina as a stiff sea breeze began to chop up the surface of the ocean and the threat of an on coming summer storm was soon to come.

Unfortunately we did not hook into a school of Amelia Island jetty tarpon, but the shark encounters were very exciting and offered all of the rod bending that we could endure for our morning of jetty fishing.

For terminal jetty fishing tackle employ a 7-foot medium heavy boat rod, outfitted with a Penn 4/0 fishing reel. Fishing reels are filled with 40-pound monofilament fishing line, a fish finder is attached to the main line where the snap allows fishermen to change the weight of their bank sinker. The tag end of the main line is then tied to a 50-pound black barrel swivel. Next a six foot length of 80-pound monofilament shock leader is attached to the reaming side of the barrel swivel. Finally a 6/0 to 10/0 J-Hook is tied to the tag end of the shock leader which is determined by the size of the live baits.

While the main species of game fish targeted at the St. Mary’s rock jetties include tarpon and redfish, fishermen can also expect to catch sea trout, flounder, black drum, Spanish mackerel, king mackerel, bluefish and a wide variety of pelagic sharks.

With a major menhaden run at hand, shark, red drum, kingfish and tarpon fishing at the St. Mary’s jetty rocks just doesn’t get any better!

The next Ska Division V tournament will be the “Ancient City” kingfish tournament held from St. Augustine Florida on July 6th. The “Greater Jacksonville Kingfish Tournament” will be held on July 19th and the Fernandina Beach Fishing Rodeo will be held on August 4th. For more information please visit [www.fishska.com](http://www.fishska.com/), or www. nsfafish.net.