

The JOSFC Offshore Reef Guide Book

First and foremost this is a great book. It is filled with the history of the Reef's off Jacksonville Florida, compiled and written by Captain Charlie Hamaker. It is actually interesting reading just for pleasure.

Now for the Numbers. Over three quarters of the GPS numbers are spot on. The other quarter are a mixture of numbers converted from Loran T.D.'s and numbers that are no longer good due to time, storms and shifting sands.

The numbers are from over 15 years ago, and at that time the GPS units used a map datum of WGS 73. BUT they were in the process of switching to WGS 84. That is the map datum that the book's numbers are done in. Now most GPS units do an automatic set-up and get it at WGS 84. HOWEVER some still set things up with the old WGS 73. You need to check your set-up under Map Datum and make sure it is on WGS 84. That will put you on most of the numbers. If you use WGS 73 you can be as far as a third of a mile away from the actual spot. About a quarter of the GPS numbers were converted from the old LORAN TD's, and while close, you can still be 50 yards or more off. **The trick is go to a number, if you don't find anything, start a spiral out from that spot, and 95%+ of the time you will find something within 5 or 6 circles. Mark it and then erase the old number that didn't have anything under it.**

A GPS unit will take you BACK to the exact spot you marked on it, but using numbers from another GPS unit on your GPS and you can be off 10 to 50 feet.

NOW, over the last 10 years, some of the spots are ridges that run for 10 to 50 yards long or longer, and where we had a number marked has sanded in, and the other end of that ridge or drop-off is now uncovered. Others are what we call "Live Bottom" and don't really show any structure on the bottom. **You need to learn how to read your bottom machine, and know which is hard bottom and which is soft or sand or mud.** Over the years, some of the hard bottom spots have sanded over, and opened up hard bottom 30 to 50 yards away. If you find a hard bottom, nothing will show at first but if you drop a bait on it quite often you will see it start to show fish, after you start fishing it.

If you want some good current numbers, the Club also has Chart we sell, and have at the club house. That Chart was updated in 2008 , and every number on it was physically verified with a GPS unit. Bring your book, and copy the numbers from a chart!

Still talking about numbers.

Always have a pencil and note book, and watch your bottom scope as you are trolling or running to another spot. When you go over a reef or show fish on the bottom, circle back and check it and if it looks good, hit your "Mark" or MOB button, then mark in your book roughly where "Waypoint # XX" is so you can later

name it and copy the numbers into your book. Your "Book" is your backup for when you lose your electronics! Your "Book" is a book of numbers that you have found that are not on a chart or a commercial book. Remember, your GPS is (A) a computer, and (B) an electronic being used around saltwater. It is going to fail, crash, lose all its data, go Bottoms up, it is going to lose every waypoint you have stored in it at some time, so keep a hardcopy "Book" of your numbers!

You need to realize some of the spots are no bigger than your boat, so you need to learn how to anchor to put your boat on the spot. It sounds easy, but it does take some practice to get it right.

I have been on boats where the people on one side of the boat were catching fish, and the people on the other side were just drowning bait. Anchoring is that critical sometimes.

Make 3 or 4 "Float jugs" (*An empty Clorox or similar jug with a light nylon line with about a 5 pound weight on it.*) with lines for the different depths. (*Don't forget to mark the line length on the bottom of the jug.*) When you mark a spot on your bottom machine, toss the jug with the right line for the depth behind your boat to get it as close to the spot as possible. You want the jug floating as close to directly over the spot as you can get it. Go directly up current and drop anchor (*If in doubt as to the direction, Call Captain George Strate on the Mayport Princess, on Channel 8 and he will give you the compass heading, or "Anchor Lay" to use.*) and then back down to your jug. **Don't drift, power back to your jug**, stopping short and making sure that your anchor has set, or is holding, then let out line until you are showing the bottom on your scope, or you are by your jug.

Another thing I learned that surprised me is that you can fish 10 spots within a 500 yard radius, 9 of them will be holding Grunts, and Sharks, and the 10th will have Grouper, Snapper, Trigger fish and good fish all over it. So if you are not catching good fish at one spot after 15 minutes, MOVE, try that other spot 100 yards away. It just might have good fish on it. Some times the difference between catching Sharks or good fish is switching from fishing the low side of a ridge or drop-off to fishing on the high side or vica-versa.