

Off the coast, the word is 'Shhhh'

Hundreds of islands harbor a bounty of fish and beaches

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HELLMAN BLUFF — If there's a place where "Keep this a secret" comes to mind, it's the Georgia coast, strung with barrier islands as big as Bermuda, and back islands — 1,600 of them — as large as hundreds of acres to the size of a pickup truck. To find so many wildly beautiful islands in one state is remarkable enough, but it's the fishing that draws anglers here.

Around and between the islands, a mighty 8-foot tide flushes 378,000 acres of salt marsh with brackish, food-rich water: the chemistry of a great fishery. In May schools of 60 to 100 redfish start cruising the mud banks. In June, tarpon over 100 pounds roll a boat-length away. Tripletail, a fine fighting and dinner table fish, lie inches below the surface, and a kingdom of critters, from snowy egrets to wild boar, join in the feed. "It's the last East Coast outback," says Steve Holley, a tournament sportsman who manages a fishing camp here.

My family and I loaded up the car and headed to Holley's neighborhood, the Bluffs: Shellman, Contentment, Pleasure, and Dallas bluffs, to name a few. On a coast known for fishing, the unincorporated speck north of Brunswick is



Eagle Island (above, foreground) with the Darien River above it and the Atlantic Ocean on the horizon.

Captain Scott Dykes, a guide, holds a redfish before throwing it back.

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one of three hot spots. Although resorts and mega-yacht marinas have yet to find the Bluffs, Georgians have fished here for over a century. At Contentment Bluff run by Holley, they rent the circa 1930s cabins or spend weekends in trailers with gleaming center-consoles in tow.