

April 9th, 1963

John Steinbeck
190 East 72nd Street
New York 21, New York

Dear John Steinbeck:

I was delighted to get your letter and enjoyed it thoroughly. I just returned from a three day collecting expedition on a shrimp boat with lots of experience, lots of dead specimens (that were meant to be alive) and indigestion from turtle soup with a pinch of sea sickness-- the weather was rough and stormy. Notwithstanding minor annoyances, I enjoyed every bit of my stay and I'm fast becoming an experienced shrimp fisherman's deck hand: I can operate the winch, clean and patch a net, keep the boat on course and cull shrimp and head them semi-efficiently. I've come a long way since college! I like being with shrimpers, they're the last of the strong, rank non-conformists. I enjoy listening to their philosophy on women, religion, superstition and politics interspersed with salacious stories. But I think I have heard everything when one shrimp said to me accusingly, "You appeal to man's worse and most vain vice; you feed his curiosity while we only feed his greedy guts." I've been trying to puzzle an answer to that since, but I can't, it's got me bugged. Is curiosity a vice?

But the trip was worth while even though I came back sort of grimy, stale and tired. I found a new dogfish-shark, Mustelus norrisi never before recorded in this area which made a professor of ichthyology very happy. He has now discovered and described the occurrence of M. norrisi in the region of the St. George Sound and Apalachee Bay, taken off a shrimp trawler and delivered by the Gulf Specimen Co. Now isn't that being kind to them?

You're right, the great taxonomists are decent and helpful people. Elisabeth Delichmann of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard has volunteered to identify all the holothurians I send her for my catalogue. Since holothurians are hardly known in the Gulf, she agrees that I can be of great benefit in contributing to the field so she sent me an extensive, hand typed key of the holothurians I am likely to find in this area. I agree with you, there are a few great people in the field and Rim Fay of Pacific-Bio Marine is one of them. I understand he has a little shack on the beach in Venice, California and has an active interest in marine animals other than selling them. Fay and I agree on one major part of the collecting business-- we enjoy ourselves. He holds Ed Ricketts in the highest regard

as I do. I wish I could have known Ed, but I do know him as millions do, through your writings.

You mentioned you wish you could see Panacea, Florida. Well, I shall hold out a lure as does my best selling item, the batfish, Ogcocephalus nasutus. The batfish has a lure in the top of his head, and when he sees a choice shrimp, he pushes this worm-like lure out like a piston, wiggles it appealingly and the gullible shrimp snatches at the lure and our batfish jumps up with his powerful, flipper-like fins and has shrimp for dinner. We have just had our house built and I have a spare guest room which looks out on Dickson Bay, surrounded by tall, green pine trees and cool breezes. I have large tanks to keep marine fish and invertebrates and a boat to keep the aquaria stocked. I have general knowledge of the beaches, channels, off shore reefs and islands and the natural estuaries. I'm on good terms with shrimpers, mullet fishermen, snapper fishermen, crabbers and town loafers all along this section of the coast, so it might promise to be an interesting vacation for you. I figured it would be better to enclose a map of where Panacea is because when I begin to tell anyone of its location, I become discouraged. As a matter of fact, I took me five years to be able to find it by car when I studied in Tallahassee. Panacea to me is a Panacea, but a horror to the tourist. It's a little string of stores, crab picking plants, oyster shuckers and a fish house, and in the middle sits Gulf Specimen Company.

By the way-- many thanks for the compliment on the letter head. You're the first one to comment on it and that makes me feel so good. Actually I put a hammerhead shark on because I can never get enough of them, and there are too many moray eels in this area and I can't get any sales for them.

The best description I can give of the Gulf of Mexico is to compare it to the great plains of the middle west, submerged. The northeastern portion of the Gulf (Florida Bay) is a flat shelf which extends out into the Gulf for a few miles, it is seldom more than twenty meters deep, and more frequently not over three meters. Then the shelf gradually slopes off ~~the~~ relatively flat sandy bottom not over fifty meters deep until what the fishermen call "the middle ground" is reached. The middle ground resembles the rolling hills of Ohio, rising and falling, depth ranging anywhere from ten to two hundred meters. These coral and limestone hills are roughly a hundred miles long, fifty miles from shore, and after that is the great basin. Which is very deep. This description is not very satisfactory, I know, but you should see the unsatisfactory literature on it. The fishermen are far more concise. The shallow, extending

shelf region, which we affectionately call the bath tub, particularly in the summer when it's warm and soupy, is ~~the~~ major collecting grounds. This shelf is covered with five feet or less of sand, mud and saragassum weed and under that is solid limestone. But the secrets of the flats are yet to be discovered. Unlike the Atlantic we don't have rough, smashing waves that uproots marine life and scatters it widely over the coasts, but rather a calm, flat, warm pool where marine creatures live in vast numbers.

Again, many thanks for your encouraging letter. Please write when you get time and when some of the pressure has eased off.

Sincerely,

Jack Rudloe

Jack Rudloe