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VOLUME 238 PRICELESS

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Features

Post Spawn on the Reef  
Lakefield Wrap Up  
5 Days on GBR  
Plus Local Reports

OCT 20





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Contribute - Most Welcome

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# Breathing in the Saltaire

5 DAYS ON THE GBR By Damian Collete



Recently we had a husband and wife combination up from Brisbane and took them out on the Great Barrier Reef aboard our luxury Allure 47ft game boat for a wonderful adventure. The Allure game boat has a state of the art master stateroom with ensuite, stylish Roswood galley and lounge with all the mod-cons, an upstairs dining area on the flybridge and ample deck space for fishing. It also has a tender which allows for island exploring.

The clients met us at 8.30am at the Yorkey's Marina and we left the harbour in very pleasant conditions. The forecast was indicating a couple of really nice days ahead before the winds picked up moderately. So pretty much I had the locations picked out for each day to suit the conditions.

With the weather on our side we ventured straight to the Linden Bank and Opal Ridge on the outer edge of the shelf for some light tackle game fishing. Considering the time of year there wasn't too much other boat activity out this wide so we ploughed the paddocks at our own will. There was a bit of bird life working the water and bait schools scattered around. I didn't mark any marlin on the sounder so we stuck with the light tackle gear trailing hard body lures on the short lines and skipping garfish on the riggers. It was probably just that bit early in the season before the big black marlin were due to arrive.

Anyway it proved to be a good choice and we kept the reels turning with regularity nailing some quality northern bluefin tuna and spanish mackerel. I was a little bit

surprised not to come across some wahoo or even yellowfin tuna. Anyway we had a fun filled first day with good results before scooting in behind Opal Reef for our first night on the water.

Day 2 saw us trailing lures inside the reef heading north towards Morning and Evening Reefs. Once again we ran across good numbers of northern bluefin tuna and spanish mackerel. It was a good way to break up the run having rods keel over quite regularly.

By early afternoon we changed the program and dropped the pick for some classic reef bottom fishing in a few different areas. This section is still relatively untouched and there is some awesome reef fishing to be enjoyed. All the prized species were on cue as we tangled with the best including coral trout, large mouth nannygai and red emperor. There were other notable fish as well. The further you travel north it is so notable the water clarity just gets better and better. This turned out to be such a good day before we settled in behind the safe anchorage of Escape Reef. ▶



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#### GBR 5 DAYS Cont ....

Keeping an eye on the weather we had half a day on Day 3 to make the most of it. So we hit the shelf bright and early with the heavy tackle gear to try for a marlin. We gave it a good shot for several hours before conceding it was not quite their time. I was a bit surprised that none were marking on the sounder this further north.

So with the last of the ideal weather we went back to the reef and fished Escape trailing some really deep diving lures between the gaps. Here we saw the reels get a solid work out catching numerous spanish and scaly mackerel plus a bonus dog tooth tuna which the client had on his bucket list to catch. He was so ecstatic with this result. It wasn't a monster by any means but by crikey they go harder than any other tuna in the ocean.

Having done enough on the outer edges we made the trek west to Hope Island for the night anchorage. The winds had started to gather some momentum and we arrived late afternoon into the lagoon for one of the most picturesque sun sets in Australia. The sun slowly settles across the mountainous northern aspect of the Daintree rainforest and is a magical moment. The clients certainly agreed as they wined and dined in the twilight of the evening on the back of the boat. It is one of my own very favourite spots on the GBR. A island sand cay, surrounded by reef and literally no-one else was there at the time.

Day 4 was all about Hope Island itself and with our anchorage we were literally metres away from the golden shores. It was a complete day of relaxation for the clients. Exploring the island, multiple swims and naturally some fishing off the beach. We caught several Gt's casting poppers and it was a good way to stretch the arms. With the wind blowing from the south east the western side of the island was literally calm.

In the evening we had dinner on the beach with accompanying drinks and soaked in another wonderful sunset.

On the last day of the trip we headed home south trailing lures pulling the boat into neutral often to tangle with more spanish mackerel and tuna along the way. This was before we had an extended lunch at McKay sand cay where the clients frolicked on these unique land forms and swam in the pristine waters. From here it was a relatively short run home where we disembarked our clients back in Port Douglas.

It was a 5 day trip full of different styles of fishing and just the tip of the iceberg as to what can be the trip of a lifetime. The scenery, the pristine reef, the swimming, the islands and sand cays plus the fishing makes for an adventurous experience. Seriously if you had 4-6 friends or family you can achieve this type of trip for well under \$1000 per day per person. We can tailor make any trip and take in the very, very best of the Great Barrier Reef. Call Heff on 0409610869 for more details to whet the appetite. ■



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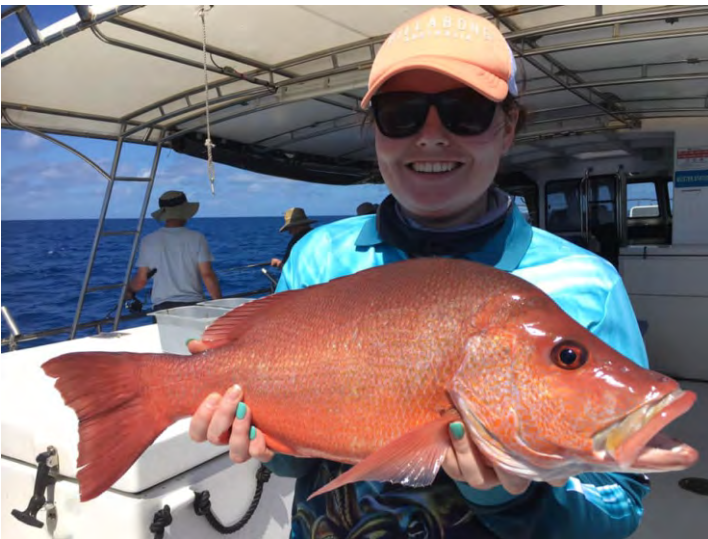
# The Dragon's Den

By Steve Adamson

Since we last spoke it has been an indifferent month or so for various reasons. The school holidays saw some very average weather to start with and no-one left the harbour, then we had a mechanical glitch when conditions came good - absolute shocking timing. So we really didn't or couldn't take advantage of the extra people around town. If something is going to go wrong it will be this Covid year.

Back on track, the weather sort of settled around that 15-18 knot range for a couple of weeks on end. Certainly not your expected calmer conditions for this time of year. It was fine though as we saw a steady flow of people join us for a charter. The fishing was at the better end of the stick I must admit and could have been considerably better if the sharks had backed off. I've noticed over the past few years in particular that when the weather starts to warm up, so do the men in grey suits. They're not your smaller versions either being 3-4m of pure bronze whalers with massive heads and broad shoulders. You certainly wouldn't want to jump in and have a swim with them.

On the bright side we did however come back to the docks with quite a few decent hauls of fish in recent times. Male coral trout were prolific whilst the females went into lock jaw leading into the new moon and a likely spawning period. The nannygai were handy enough but often hounded by the sharks in the slightly deeper water. we caught quite a few good red emperor and the spangled variety were very consistent on most trips. Gold spot trevally made cameo



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appearances and some long nose emperor played a role. We caught cobia on the float and off the bottom, so overall we tended to come back with a mixed bag of fish. As mentioned the coral trout were our best species to target with the conditions on offer.

We did catch one day a black tail sea perch, related to the nannygai and you may only see half a dozen caught over the course of the year. They have a similar body shape, however the snout is a bit more elongated and when chilled the black tail becomes more pronounced. They are equally as good to eat, so no problem there.

We recently enjoyed a 5 day lay off due to reef closures and have another one to go mid November. Back in the day when first introduced it was over 10 days per block which really put a big dent in business trade.

Looking ahead, state border closures will only see us experience minimal trade in coming weeks. I sense the QLD population have already got their travel or holiday needs satisfied and we'll only probably run a couple of charters a week for a bit to come. Hopefully we see a complete turnaround leading into Christmas. ■

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## Lakefield Barra Fishing

By Dan Francis

Several weeks ago a group of us mates ventured to Lakefield and enjoyed tremendous success on the barra despite being in August and the water temperature not ideal. With the National Park due to close its roads in the near future before the wet season, I was keen to get in another trip and did so very recently. With warmer weather and better water temperatures I was really optimistic as to what we may catch.

This time it was a family affair with my wife and young lad plus the in-laws which are great value. It was an 8 day adventure with 7 days of fishing to be enjoyed securing a great campsite on the water via National Parks. It's a solid 5hr road trip to Lakefield from Port Douglas which may seem a bit of a hike, but worth every effort. Having done this trip numerous times I pretty much have everything in place for such a period and longer if needed. Once off the bitumen the road from Laura into the Park was in reasonably good condition with the normal corrugations you'd expect in the bush.

We began the trip right on the full moon and having set up camp first job was to get the pots in for freshwater cherabin as live bait which the barra just can't resist. We did strike a bit of a hurdle here because of the moon. Seriously at night it was as bright as day and we struggled to readily catch them as we normally do. They do like the cover of darkness and move around more freely. So live baiting was pretty much



put on the  
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to speak for a few days till they started to move around.

So it was a case of reverting to lure fishing which I thoroughly enjoy as it is. With the tinnie in tow as well we began our lure endeavours in the immediate section of river. In the first full day fishing we plucked a few nice sized barra amongst the snaggy banks, but quickly discovered we were land locked in this one particular stretch of water.

The last time we were here the water levels were considerably higher and we could travel vast distances in the boats. However this time with water levels considerably lower the avenues to more water holes were too shallow to even attempt. So pretty much the boat was spasmodically utilised for the remainder of the trip.

So if we were to see more of the country it was a matter of getting the hiking boots on do it the old fashioned way. I guess for several days in a row we would travel by foot 5km away from the camp whether it be upstream or downstream, so by the time you got back to camp you had covered several miles and a cold beer was needed.

Legging it around you probably take in a lot more of the surrounds and with the plentiful shade provided by the big mellalucas along the banks it made it relatively comfortable. As we traveled it was very notable the bigger water holes had an end point with only a rock bar or side stream with a trickle of water heading downstream into the next.

There was also a lot of smaller isolated pools only a few feet in depth and you could see the bottom of the river quite clearly. One wouldn't be blamed from moving on immediately onto a bigger stretch of water. However as it turned out these unsuspecting ponds accounted for so many barra it wasn't funny. The amount of barra caught in 1ft of water was amazing.



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These shallow pools being land locked with barra caught within, were incredibly hungry. Obviously as water levels dropped so did the food supply. What we found was they would sit along the bottom of the river amongst the weed beds even if 1ft of water with their darker backs providing the perfect camouflage looking from above. We couldn't even see them from up on the banks. What we found worked best here were weedless soft plastic lures and also surface stick baits. We would watch our lures swim across the water and then an almighty boof and eruption would come out of nowhere. The anticipation and adrenalin rush of your lure getting ambushed in such skinny water was exhilarating I must say. Then once hooked they have no deep water to dive down to, so all the fighting it done on the surface. To watch a tranquil pool of water turn into a boiling frenzy is incredible to witness. Often this burst of amplified noise would see other barra get excited and chomp on anything that passed their nose resulting in a few fish being pulled from the one section. Sure we caught several fish by foot in the deeper holes but the shallow water fishing was the big surprise for me.

Once the moon began to slide we started to obtain more cherabin and we did well live baiting in the last few days of the trip. Hooked by the tail under a float and cast amongst some heavy timber the barra can't resist the constant

flicking of a delicacy above their noses. Here you have to have wits about you because once they inhale the prawn the reaction time you to steer them away from trouble is critical. It is a relaxing way of fishing until you hook up and generally speaking you'll catch more bigger barra using this method.



Over the 7 days of fishing we caught around 45 barra, the biggest being 84cm and the average size being around 68cm. Only a couple were kept for consumption, the rest released. When you look back at the previous trip a few months prior we caught probably a few lesser fish however we caught quite a few around 90 - 100cm and the overall average was easily 72-75cm. I believe the waters had been heavily fished in between our trips thus the change in size. It's a theory and I'm happy with that assumption.

Besides that abundance of wildlife to see I noticed we still had our resident big male crocs in the couple of bigger holes at the camp and just up the river. They are 4.5m and 5m in length and a timely reminder you have to have your wits about you in these remote places. We saw heaps of smaller models around 1 - 1.5m in length hanging in the smaller shallower pools during our walks.

Again Lakefield did not disappoint and one of my favourite places to roll out the swag and take in one of Australia's premier fishing locations. ■



  
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# Post Spawning on the Reef

By Heff



In current years we have had two sets of Reef Closures to reef fin fishing, one in October and the other November. Both last for 5 days apiece around the new moon period. The closures have been around now for well over 15yrs and initially they lasted for 10 days each time. A few years ago it was brought back to 5 days after reviewing the data.

From a commercial point of view, whether it be recreational or professional, to lose 20 days of business was a big hit. It still is today to lose 10 days but a much better arrangement.

We've just been through the first round of closures and the authorities have seemed to have got it right on these initial dates. The timing of the closures is not always water tight and it can depend on the ocean conditions and each year can differ slightly. The word amongst the recreational charter fleet was they were convinced a couple of

weeks prior to the October closure that a lot of the reef fin fish would spawn during this first round. The main reason being all the roed up female fish went into lock jaw and only male species of fish were caught leading into the new moon. The fact the females went off the bite was an indication they were in preparation to spawn. The same could be applied to nannygai species and emperor as well.

Well we all sat back and watched the days tick by during the closure. The weather was not overly kind as it panned out, so it wasn't a big deal. With a sensational forecast predicted following the closure it was going to be interesting to see what the fishing would do. The general consensus over the years is that the reef fin fish feed eagerly post spawning. If you hadn't eaten for well over a week and had to complete an exerting task in the process, you'd be ravaging as well.



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Well this analogy proved to be right because the reef fishing went ballistic as soon as we were allowed back on the water. With glassed out conditions the GBR became a playground for many and craft of all sizes could travel wherever they desired. Just as an example, and despite being a Monday for the first day following the closure, the local boat had not been that busy for a very, very long time. A lot of people must have called in sick for work that day. And from all reports the fishing was exceptional.

On our charter boats at Fishing Port Douglas the coral trout were as thick as rabbits, the nannygai were super keen and big plus the red and spangled emperor were equally handy. All these fish had dropped all their roe and sperm and their stomachs were relatively empty, thus their appetite to feed. A lot of fish were still caught up in the shallower water where they spawn between 15-25m. They will gradually tend to trickle back down to the deeper water. In saying all this there were some species which didn't have appeared to spawn and they included stripies, sweettip and moses perch. They were carrying breeding concoctions and they will likely spawn during the next full moon. Different sections of the entire reef spawn

at different times and what may apply here locally doesn't necessarily equate to systems a further north or down south. It would be ideal if GBRMPA could establish a system whereby you could re-open a grid of reefs once spawning has occurred. For us locally we feel the next lot of closures will be a waste of time considering our preferred targeted species have for the most already done their job. Next month we'll have to see what goes on. ■




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# On the Daintree Charters

With Jamie Beitzel



I always get excited this year when it comes to fishing up on the Daintree. The river itself has its best moments for the year and even the coastal fishing is more than handy with better conditions on offer.

I've seen quite a few repeat clients from over the many years but also a lot of new faces thanks to Heff from Fishing Port Douglas. It has been an enjoyable period and it's been busy enough to say the least. I'll begin with my efforts on the river itself. It's always a good time to fish below the ferry and we've seen a lot of the preferred species come to the fore. Barra, mangrove jack and fingermark have all played an important role in providing a good day on the water. We've been mainly getting them on live bait but have snagged quite a few barra and jack on lure for those capable. The mangrove jack in particular have become super aggressive and I must add of really worthy size. They pull hard and a challenge for any angler to keep away from the trouble of the mangrove banks. My new 120lb Min Kota electric motor has been a godsend especially with lure fishing. You can pick a good stretch of river and quietly pepper away with consummate ease casting lures along the bank. You'll be surprised how your strike rate will multiply with one of these at your control. And the controlling

is the easy part with the use of a remote control steering the boat. It's like flicking through the channels on the TV, which men just love doing.


There has been a bit of activity north of the ferry and on those longer river trips we follow the tide up there and have been securing further barra and mangrove jack. Other than this I've come across grunter cruising the flats downstream and there's always a barrage of trevally coming into the system to add a bit of difference.

The weather in regards to wind hasn't settled as one would expect for this time of year but have managed a few trips along the coast fishing inshore reefs and patches. There's been some sizeable large mouth nannygai around and some trout which have become a bit more patchy leading into their spawning time. A big nannygai however always brings the house down and for most the biggest fish they have ever landed. That's what it is all about ...

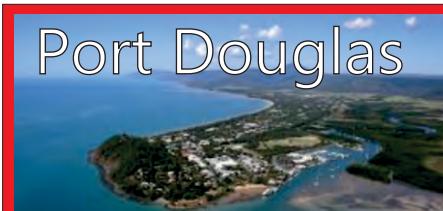
Looking ahead we have barra closures from the 1st of November and we must release them, plus a couple of reef closures as well. In saying this I'm looking to really enjoying my time on the river. This time of year is prime time before the wet season tries to dictate otherwise. See you on the Daintree or nearby soon ....



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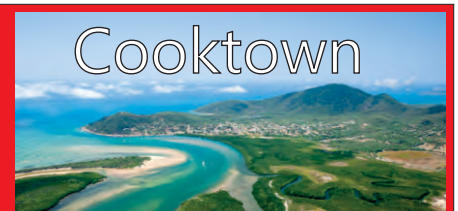
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# Reel Cooking with Mick Hart Spring Time Feasting BBQ style



With heaps and heaps of sporting events to get through in the next few weeks on TV, try this simple suggestion which is quintessentially FNQ. This is as apposed to meat pies, sausage rolls and hot dogs. Very, very simple and way, way more classy! AFL, Rugby, Horse Racing, Car Racing and Golf - here we come!

### INGREDIENTS

12 medium prawns, peeled (tails intact), deveined  
1/2 kg firm, thick white fish fillets, Emperor or Nannygai, cut into 2cm pieces  
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil  
1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves  
Your preferred spicy tangy sauce from the supermarket  
1 lemon, cut into wedges  
Mixed salad leaves, to serve  
Crusty bread, to serve

### METHOD

Thread prawns onto 4 skewers. Thread fish onto remaining 4 skewers.  
Drizzle with oil. Season with salt and pepper.  
Heat a barbecue grill or chargrill pan on medium-high heat. Cook skewers, turning, for 3 minutes or until lightly charred and just cooked through.  
Sprinkle seafood skewers with parsley and serve with tangy sauce, lemon wedges, mixed salad leaves and crusty bread.  
Based on 2 people and adjust according to extra party crowd (which is likely at this favourite time of the year).



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# magical daintree

RIP DAN IRBY with Bruce Belcher

A good old friend passed away a couple of weeks ago and he was a fixture here in tourism since 1993. I thought it fitting that I should describe my involvement with him in the Magical Daintree.

Last Thursday evening a wake was held for him at the Cross Roads bar and grill. About 60 people attended. His name was Dan Irby and those in tourism would remember him for his night time tours, with a spotlight. Dan's health deteriorated over the last few years and his death was caused by eventual organ failure. This was all foreseen but death brings out emotions in us all and there is mourning.

Prior to 1993 Dan had spent a holiday in the far north and caught up with a couple of old mates he'd known from Melbourne at Monash University. While he was here and that he'd heard a lot about the Daintree, he was keen to have a look. According to his mates he was most impressed with his visit that it instigated a decision to terminate his career in Melbourne and settle here. An American, Dan applied for a position at Monash in the early 70s. He was successful and moved to Melbourne as a single man at about 30 years of age.

One of his first outings here was a fishing trip with Dick Fapani who was a local fishing guide on the Daintree River. During their time together, Dick mentioned that his fishing business was for sale so Dan immediately said he'd buy it, such was his enthusiasm for this place. Then Dick said his house was for sale also. Dan said he'd buy that too! So, an immediate sea change happened, complete with security of having a house and business.

Apparently, the fishing proved to be too difficult, so there was an eventual change into nature tours. A couple of years later he acquired a 10- seat open boat and set it up for night tours. This was his forte as he was a scientist. His nature- based tours gathered worldwide feedback. I met him in 1996 after the big flood destroyed the car park in the village and I moved my operation to the Western Precinct, adjacent to the boat ramp.

Some years passed and my application to have my operation moved to our property, was approved in 2001. Dan had been



parking his boat in a small creek which was difficult to use and his personal mobility was decreasing. So, my wife and I offered him the chance to use our pontoon as a base. This helped him considerably as he needed a shop rider vehicle to get him to the boat as his knees were struggling to support his weight. I even cooked his dinner to take home. He met a companion, Jhoey, who was invaluable in his activities. She's from overseas and spent many windy and wet evenings on the river.

His kidneys failed recently and although he and Jhoey dealt with it, things weren't enough to halt or slow down his deterioration. What a shame all that knowledge was snuffed out instantly. Rest in peace, Dan. See you next month.



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