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Lynton Heffer (Heff)
Owner / Editor



Jase Teelow
Gunnell Rod Australia



Jake Collette
Master V Skipper



Jamie Beitzel
Fishing On the Daintree



Ethan 'Choppa' Scott
Junior Reporter



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Front Cover:
Jamie Beitzel's
Daintree Charters
with a super Large
Mouth Nannygai
on a coastal trip
- 8.5kg of fish



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Daintree Power House Fish

By Heff

Recently during the November Reef Closures Steve from Dragon Lady and myself headed north to have a fish with Jamie Beitzel, born and bred on this river and the best river guide in FNQ. Steve despite having lived in the area for 35yrs had never been on the Daintree River and actually had not been across on the ferry which we would do later that day to have a camp over at Jamie's property. So he was quite excited about the whole prospect.

So we made the short 40 minute drive up the highway to the tourist precinct just prior to the ferry. It's good to see that council have in recent years spent a bit of money on this busy parking section of the river because for a long time it was very 3rd rate.

We caught up with Jamie just before midday with him having just completed a morning charter. The day itself was stinking hot and calm but there was a hint of a breeze which actually made it quite comfortable under the shade of his canopy on the boat. We were fishing the run out tide following the new moon so there was a fair bit of water flowing down stream. Jamie said the river had dirtied up quite a bit with the bigger tides which had been making things a bit more challenging.

With live bait already collected from the morning charter we headed downstream and then went up the south arm of the river. Steve was quick to comment that he was quite surprised by the vast expanse of water within the system itself as we travelled to our first secret spot.

With line baited Jamie eluded to us if you

hook up don't muck around as there was a lot of structure below the water.

Steve was first cab off the rank with a smaller fingermark which fought valiantly for its size and was released for its effort. 15 minutes in my rod keeled over and it was not easy to get the rod out of the gunnel with the drag set high and a decent fish on the other end. As soon as I was able to go toe to toe I knew I had something quite decent on. With the braided line you feel exactly where this fish was ducking for cover. For a couple of minutes it was an arm wrestle with both of us having momentum at different stages. It all soon came to an abrupt end as the leader cut across something sharp. My gut feel it was the gill rakers on a big barra itself. According to Jamie it could well have been a big barra despite not jumping out of the water or possibly an extra large fingermark which made the right turn at the right time. He assured me though that this spot has seen himself leave from here with his tail between his legs with the big fish winning the battle on many, many occasions.

Proceedings went a bit quite before Steve dragged in a legal grunter which we were happy to let go. ▶



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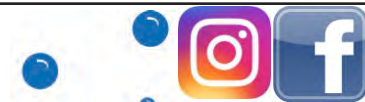
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Daintree Powerhouses Cont ...

With live bait getting a bit lower we traveled up near the mouth of the river as secured some more sardines to see us out for the rest of the afternoon. I hadn't been on the river for some time and it truly is a very scenic vista to take absorb.

We went a bit further back upstream and fished along a deeper channel along the mangrove bank. It was definitely classic fingermark territory but they weren't playing the game as the tide was seriously ripping at this stage.

We then made our further upstream to a section of river where the tide was more reasonable and lined with some hefty sunken mellalucca trees which had fallen in over time. Jamie pointed out the surrounding trees on land and the height of them, so these fellas which had fallen into the river offered a lot of structure stretching a long way out towards the middle.

It wasn't long before Steve went head to head with something substantial. Just when we were confident he had the upper hand it dove deep into trouble. He could feel the head shaking down below but the line was really snagged. With the aid of the electric motor we tried to pull him out from various angles but it was a lost cause. Once again the Daintree fishy's were too good for us Port Douglas boys.

We then shifted a touch further upstream to the next fallen tree and it was Steve who found himself again with his hands full. There was some really high hopes when this fish which was pulling line at will starting to ascend towards the surface and away from the structure. Was this going to be Steve's first ever barra! It shot out towards the middle at a rate of knots and then a big silver fish launched into orbit. It wasn't a barra but a big 1m queenfish which cartwheeled and jumped all over the surface. Then for some strange reason it motored back towards the bank. Behind it we saw a big swirl and then in the blink of an eye there was a commotion on the surface. With water frothing everywhere the water turned red. A good sized shark had

nailed it. Steve had been battling sharks on the reef in recent times and none of us were expecting the same treatment in the river. With one foul swoop half the fish had been eaten and Steve retrieved the top half of the fish. Once again the Daintree had left us in its wake.

From here we tried a couple of more spots upstream but the time of tide was against us. Being so warm we were keen to head across to the river to Jamie's 10 acre property which had a cold creek stream running through it for a swim and a beer.

Late afternoon we enjoyed that refreshing swim, had a walk around his most interesting property before tucking into his beer battered fish which was exceptional. We ate the remains of the queenfish and some large mouth nannygai he had in stock. His touches to his beer battered fish were that good it's the recipe in the magazine this month. From here it was beer and giggles around the campfire till late before laying down under the stars for Forty Winks.

In the morning it was a coffee around the remaining campfire before departing and arriving back in Port by 9.30am. On behalf of Steve and myself a huge thank you to Jamie and his lovely wife Edie for their superb hospitality. It was just awesome to get out of town and do something a bit different. I'll give you the tip you won't find a better river guide and experience in FNQ than James Beitzel on the Daintree Fishing. ■



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The Dragon's Den

By Steve Adamson

Since our last report we've been ticking along bit by bit with charter work taking a definite drop in days. November can be a bit patchy in normal times and you then add in reef closures for 5 days plus Covid 19 limiting tourist trade, it was no surprise our figures were down from previous years. On the bright side if I can say that, coming weekends are busy till Christmas with a good push from local businesses offering us their staff Christmas parties and this has been gathering steam in recent years. It's very popular with the 'tradies' in particular with the majority of them being male orientated. They'd prefer a day out on the water, drink a few coldies and catch a few fish amongst laughs.

On the fishing front we saw some really handy catches at the end of October and start of November. This dried up a bit leading into the new moon and the consequent spawn Reef Closures. Our best days saw a dozen or so trout come back to the docks with a mixed bag of large mouth nannygai, spangled emperor, sweetlip, stripeys and moses perch. We only came across the odd spanish mackerel on the floating line plus cobia. There was enough fish to go around and the variable winds made anchoring off the chain that bit more challenging. Every spot we visited had us on the compass at different angles and the currents had a bit of say in it as well. Unless you know what you are really doing I'd imagine a lot of people driving a boat would struggle big time at this time of year.

During the 5 day reef closure I had a couple of overnight



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breaks, the first staying in Cairns at Harbour Lights and next on a fish and camp out with the ever impressive Jamie Beitzel's Daintree Fishing which was a real eye opener for me. Thanks Jamie for a wonderful experience and I highly recommend anyone to spend a day fishing with this legend of the game.

Back to work following the closure and with massive tides still playing a role, we caught truck loads of fish but mainly your smaller reef species such as moses perch, stripeys, sweetlip and a few coral trout. Still clients were walking off the boat with a substantial number of fish. The shark activity at this point was at fever pitch and we lost a lot of really sizeable fish particular on our large mouth and trout spots.

Just prior to releasing this report we had a couple of days with a corporate work group with a full capacity boat. It certainly kept us crew busy and the guys did catch some good fish. There was a shift in the wind to the south east which assisted our anchoring and if they were more apt overall at angling they could have bathed themselves in glory.

Onwards to Christmas I guess and we are still not sure what will transpire with the borders closures on knife's edge. ■

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Port Douglas Marlin Challenge

By Heff



The 2020 Port Douglas Marlin Challenge was always in doubt mid year, but a hard working committee led by Damon Gruzdev got the tournament up and running in a slightly different format to normal. Amazingly 10 boats signed up for the 4 day event and was well received by all that participated. The difference this year is that there was no briefing night and sail past on the first morning. The boats could start from wherever they wanted and abide by the designated start & finish times plus the daily radio schedules. Everyone still however made the pilgrimage back to Port Douglas for the presentation night on the last night and enjoyed great food and company at the Port Douglas Combined Club. In such a hard year for everyone the Port Douglas Marlin Challenge provided the only dedicated heavy tackle game fishing tournament on the east coast of Australia. An absolute credit to everyone involved.

It came down to the last day to determine the eventual winner with local boat Above Grade coming home with a wet sail completing 6 tags with one marlin estimated over 1000lb.

The final tournament results:

Day 1 Champion Boat - Iluka (2 tags)

Day 2 Champion Boat - Above Grade (3 tags)

Day 3 Champion Boat - Little Tubs (1 tag)

Day 4 Champion Boat - Above Grade (3 tags)

Champion Female Angler - Lily Sims (Bounty Hunter)

Champion Male Angler - Ben Henderson (Above Grade)

Champion Boat - Above Grade captained by Gavin Goodwin

Champion Angler Overall - Ben Henderson on Above Grade

Runner-up Boat - Iluka captained by Reg Moore

A huge heartfelt congratulations for Captain Gavin Goodwin, his crew Todd and Stretch and angler Ben Henderson - a well deserved win!

The boys took home some awesome prizes - Penn 130 rod and reel, lure roll with a heap of Blue Dog lures and a little over \$7000 in cash from the Calcutta.

It was also fantastic to have some female angler participation this year so a BIG congratulations to Lili Sims, junior female angler on board Bounty Hunter who took out the Champion Female Angler award with 3 fish on count back from Crystal Trkulja on Little Tubs. We haven't had a female angler prize winner since Lisa Goodwin won Champion Angler back in 2013!

Thank you to everyone - all the boats, anglers and crews that took part this year, as well as a big thank you to The Port Douglas District Combined Club for providing an awesome venue. ■



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Making the Best Made Plans

By Heff

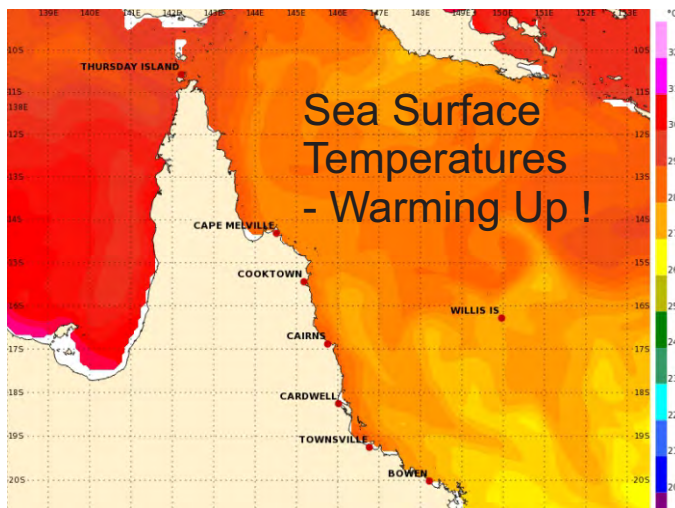
Up here in the Far North Qld tropics I thought it was important just to give an update on what has been happening from a daily roving eye on the ground. We have a lot of local readers on-line but also a huge audience elsewhere from around the country.

At Fishing Port Douglas our boats have been operating at around 40% of normal trade and quite frustrated with the chop and change of QLD border closures. The QLD election to vote Labour back in just showed the vast numbers of retirees in the state itself, many from originally down south, and also the normal trade of the bigger townships supporting their own economy. The general voting overpowered the tourism industry voice by a fair margin which unfortunately employs ten of thousands of people and one of the state's biggest revenue earners. For us in our field of work it was a very disappointing result. Since the election I've seen dozens of shops close their doors within the Port Douglas precinct and the marina activity remains largely inactive except for a handful of operators. Even the larger companies are predominantly sitting idle. It is a tragedy to see this all unfold before your eyes.



Moving forward there is a lot of trepidation as our Premier has shown she will close down our borders in a heartbeat, thus sucking the life out of the tourism industry. Even as I write we've had numerous last minute cancellations and forward cancellations as well. The biggest issue coming up I sense is that we'll see a massive rate of cancellations over Christmas, even those with the best made plans. Prior to now, southern states have already planned to stay within their own borders and you can't blame them. If you planned to come to FNQ or QLD that could be swept away in the blink of an eye.

In the meantime, we'll be realistic and just accept that we'll only see QLD people up here this Christmas and we truly appreciate it, trust me. However it will not cut the mustard in regards to getting tourism back on its feet. We as a region, I highly suspect will just remain in the fetal position for some time to come and we'll see a national tourism mecca go through further harder times. Hopefully we have something left to offer all Australians, if and when we eventually get back to some normality and also the rest of the world. This is undeniably a slice of paradise we want to showcase. ■



*Hot Tip -
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Rattlin' Around Rifle Creek

By Steve Adamson



With another set of Reef Closures during November preventing us from operating our reef charter business for 5 days, it was teed up with family to go away camping for a few days. We were all geared up for a trip to Lake Tinaroo on the Tablelands but by the time we got around to it all the campsites around the lake were booked out. Bugger, so the back up plan was an easy choice - Rifle Creek up over the range and only a short trip from Port Douglas. I had previously been there a few weeks prior and really enjoyed the location. This time I had my son and his wife and two daughters join my daughter's two young boys and myself. It was great because Leigh, my boy has all the toys when it comes to camping in the bush. You name it, he has got it and it makes life that bit more comfortable which I enjoy. His job was to look after his own family and I had to be responsible for the two grandson's. As it turned out I renamed the two boys 'Speedo' and 'Slow Mo' which I hope is self explanatory. North and South Poles when it comes to doing most things. This time around, having been there recently, I got onto Google Earth after some advice and we decided to go into the bush a bit further where there appeared to a good body of water. Being fresh fed from the Julatten Ranges it was always going to hold a good batch of water to explore. We

settled near the Font Hills cattle station and it was a great camping spot. We had a nice cleared area for the campsite, a great safe access to the water for the kids near the camp and about 1km of water at our disposal to explore. Once the over extensive, flash campsite was set up, thanks to Leigh, it was out to explore and set the crab pots. Barefoot, shorts and singlet, what more would you want. We strategically placed our quota of pots along various locations upstream and down stream from our main area. I knew there would be some nice red claw around and was also a bit hopeful for some big Mitchell River type fresh water prawns, also known as Cherabin in such a good body of water. Fresh water crabbing is easy, some meat, even boiled vegetable, hard fresh fruit or a can of cat food spiked is all you need to entice these fresh water crustaceans. I have heard they are mostly vegetarian eating bits and pieces dropped into the water from surrounding trees. They are also carnivorous for fish and other meat mainly to remove it from their immediate habitat. Basically they'll eat anything and are the vacuums of the fresh water river system. You may get some during the day but they really venture out of their holes under the cover of darkness. A check of the pots just before you hit the fart sack and at first light will do the trick. ➡




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As they days rolled on it was about the kids which aren't content to sit under a shady Mellaluecca tree and have a coldie. So it was on the go from dawn to dusk with brekky, exploring, kyaking, swimming, some fishing, collecting firewood, with also lunch and dinner thrown in if they behaved! Campfire time in the evening was very highly appreciated and there's nothing better in my opinion as well. It is quintessentially a very Australian and outback experience.

Besides the perfect temperature and environment for swimming and kyaking we did fish for quite some time, mainly towards the back end of the day and we caught some really nice sooty grunter. I was happy to throw a small popper lure around whilst I set the kids up with a high tech bait rig. A bit of cooked sausage suspended under a float. You would be very surprised how much attention this got and accounted for the biggest fish of the trip. I'm guessing we would have caught around 20 fish over the 2 days we did activity.

The crab pots faired reasonably well and we caught around 15 quite big red claw and yes, around 6 cracking cherabin the length from your finger tip to your elbow. That I was really impressed with.

Other than there's always a heap of wildlife side attractions. Birds galore, goannas and even a bush wallaby strolled through the camp. The most intriguing I thought was a massive 3m python which we spotted on the first day living on a fallen tree across the river. This big fat fella each day would shift position across the tree to suit his needs, so much he had cleared a distinct path through the moss on the woodwork. We did spot him at one point sliding into a crevice on the fallen tree which is where he would curl up for a proper sleep. I guess he would eat small birds, frogs, field mice and anything he could wrap his fangs around.

Here's an interesting part of the trip, we did have some neighbours not too far away and they approached for a hand as the had experienced a flat 4WD battery. Bugger me dead it was the Australian personality Ernie Dingo. So anyway we drove up to their site with jumper leads where there around 30 of those dome, mossie net swags set up in a

circle. It was a group of indigenous males from Cairns and Ernie was running a certain program. Apparently he does this right across the country taking struggling males out on trips like this into the wilderness. It did appear there was also some cameras in operation so some sort of documentary was in process. I have since learned it is Camping on Country which features on Bush TV Enterprises and has been running since February 2019. They have already produced five camps with around 30 the men attending each camp. Ernie Dingo is the driving force behind the Camping on Country program and is the Ambassador and attends every camp to inspire and encourage the men. The program is enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men to be leaders in their own health and well-being. Through five-day camps on country, the program is focused on improving the health of men living in remote Australia by engaging them with culture, hunting, cooking, social emotional wellbeing, yarning circles and creating a safe space for them to heal and open up. He was an interesting fella I must say but he would have to be from my point of view the most recognisable indigenous person in Australia. Who would have thought in the middle of nowhere !!

In summing up it was delightful break with the family, kid safe if you teach them the lay of the land, no crocs (freshies only) and mobile free. It really is a great little system not too far away from home. ■



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On the Daintree Charters

With Jamie Beitzel




I always get a bit excited this time of year because the Daintree River probably fishes the most consistently for the year. The bigger tides around the moons can make it a bit tougher dirtying up the water but outside of this it remains a wonderful colour which is ideal for fishing. The weather has definitely gone up a notch but generally we can always find a bit of a breeze where we fish to make it a lot more comfortable. The shade from the centre boat canopy is also a godsend and drops the air temperature by several degrees.

I've done the bulk of my fishing within the river itself but did do a few charters along the coast as the weather was really settled at times. Just plonking around my inshore marks I was able to acquire some thumping large mouth nannygai ranging between 7-9kg. The never let me down giving the client a good arm pulling experience on appropriate sized rods and reels. For many they have never caught anything much more bigger than a pilchard in their lives. They also give a great return of one of the

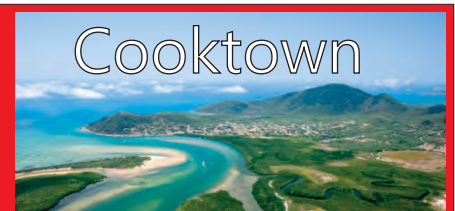
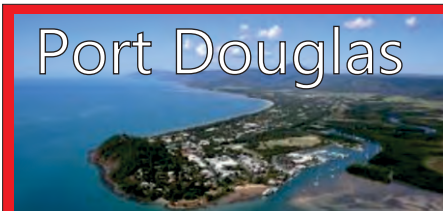
tastiest fillet you'll pluck from around here. Within the river itself I've been hunting around my usual haunts at this time of year with a good supply of saltwater within the system. It does open up a few more options with the salt pushing up that bit further. To be expected the fingermark have played the game on most occasions and there's been some thumpers at times. At this time of year they fight tooth and nail and a very rewarding catch. Incidentally we have come across many a barra which are released with absolute care and they have been your good sized 75cm river fish. In the deeper water they have tended to fight it out down below as opposed to on the surface. Other than this there's been quite a few grunter venturing around the system and the channels are thick with river trevally and still the occasional big 1m queenfish. Moving ahead I expect similar results up our way for the several weeks to come. It will be warm but I'm expecting the fishing will be red hot. I'll see you on the Daintree or nearby soon...



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Reel Cooking with Mick Hart

Battered Fish with a Twist



By Heff this month: This recipe was shown to me in person by Jamie Beitzel On the Daintree Fishing and was the most mouth watering version I've enjoyed ever. There's a couple of subtle changes to your standard way of cooking which are highlighted below.

Ingredients

Filleted fish of your own preference, preferably with firmer flesh and fresher the better.

Self Raising Flour

White Vinegar

Salt and Pepper

A can of Lager Beer

Supa Fry Cooking Fat

Cook on Gas



Method

For the batter mix flour, salt & pepper, a splash of water but importantly a strong flavoured beer and a good splash of white vinegar. Mix well with a whisk till you've got a firm texture of batter.

With the fish cut into preferred size, dust in flour before coating in batter mix.

With a cast iron pot heat up Supa Fry Fat block (in Red packaging) on gas high then lower the temperature once it is tested with a sample piece of fish. From this point on, all fillets will swim and float around until till golden brown. Remove and place on paper towel. Seriously the heat from cooking in this oil will only allow you to eat the fish some 10-15 minutes later.

This evening we cooked up some defrosted nannygai and fresh big queenfish (which was surprisingly bloody awesome).

Due to the Supa Fry Fat it is probably something you'd do every so often but the best you'll wrap your lips around.

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The Great Bridge Debate with Bruce Belcher

Prior to the last local government elections, one of the issues related to the subject of whether or not a bridge was preferred over the Daintree River, rather than the ferry. It's always been a contentious subject; certainly since we arrived here in 1983. I guess that the time has finally come for a decision. I commend the new leader of the DSC for putting it to the people to decide on the 26th of October, 2020. There is a strong body of conservationists who publicly oppose any change and I understand their desire. I have friends that are quite opposed to the retention of the ferry; insisting that a bridge would allow the wider community to benefit from seeing Cape Trib; without the inconvenience of waiting in a queue, for a long time, for the ferry.

My personal vote will be for a 2-ferry service. As a conservationist, I believe that this service would keep the "fast people" out. It might seem discriminatory but I like to use the old adage that the bridge might kill the goose that laid the golden egg. After all, Cape Trib is a special place for tourists. I know this because I have asked tourists throughout many years of discussion and unanimously the response has been overwhelmingly in favour of the ferry. The tourists believe that the ferry service suits the ambience of the region whereas arriving in this special destination and seeing a bridge would be a huge disappointment. I'm talking to people from all walks of life from all over the world, believe me, they insist that this region is so beautiful, compared to other parts of the world.

Having two ferries seems easy enough on the surface but like anything involving such operations there will be monumental problems getting through the red tape. The biggest task will be to acquire land on the north side, adjacent to the current landing. I notice there's private land there which would need to be purchased. Assuming the land was acquired and all the necessary paperwork was completed, I can't see too much in the way to progress even though it might take several years to finalise it. So, this coming voting day can't come quickly enough. If those who vote for a bridge are successful, I believe that the journey to finally achieve this could take over 10 years.

There have been four suggestions for potential crossings. The first one is just upstream from the boat ramp, which means that the north side access would need to penetrate about 300 metres of mangroves. Another is near the Daintree village, which has its merits. One of the others is near my place, just up from Pig Island. It's easy from there but the north side would have to traverse the Jack's cattle property, which is flood prone. That would need a causeway.

It's easy to be emotional in this argument but we must be rational and accept progress. To get this voting day is good. I personally believe that the community would be in favour of a 2-ferry service rather than an ugly bridge in a conservation zone, which the magical Daintree River is in.

See you next month.



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