

Gear Review – Berkley Nomad baitcasting pack rod



First fish on the new rod!

I haven't been in the market for a new pack rod for a while, to add to a telescopic light baitcaster rod and a 20-30lb 3-piece baitcaster for the last ten years, as well as some spinning rods like my Voodoo Stix, on top of an old Ocean Series telescopic rod I bought probably 25 years ago.

The old telescopic rod wasn't as short as I liked (preferably 40cm to fit in my backpack, pannier, suitcase, or even briefcase), but it had survived fishing around the world, including some squid down Westernport Bay and some nice trout, with only needing to replace the tip and tip cover about 20 years ago. My Easter trip though saw the plastic butt cover break in my bag, with its length pushing the boundaries of my soft bag. Fishing the Natone trout ponds (reported in [CAA Places to Fish](#)) I also saw that whilst the butt was good for beach fishing, it was a bit long for the kids. Perusing the Burnie tackle shops I saw the cheaper telescopic rods hadn't changed from this reliable design, and noted the next size down would do my needs for about \$30.

A timely email from a tackle shop chain caught my eye with the Berkley Nomadic pack and telescopic rods. The telescopic rod was a bit too long, but research showed the 5'6" baitcaster rod came down to my required 40cm with its five pieces, had guides suited to braid, and was rated at a good intermediate size of 4-6kg. My interest was piqued. I noticed it retailed for \$150, but was typically available for \$90-\$70 now that it is a couple of years old. I filed the information away until I got back home.

Being banished to Melbourne on the way back, I made a timely stop to get some fly tying materials. The evening before I used the old telescopic rod to help my host identify what fish was still surviving in his dam after the bush fires a few years back. After being snagged by some decent fish on some spoilt chicken, I was contemplating buying him his own telescopic rod, and I realised this was a great opportunity to trade up. So, stepping into the stores from Flinders Street I found the required rod section. I found the small \$30 rod wasn't available but discovered they had the Berkley Nomadic baitcaster rod there to inspect. After some discussion (it was recommended as a light-medium cod

and barra rod good for 10kg/20lb), the rod had its tube located and I benefited from being able to carry it around the rest of the day on my tour of fishing and outdoor stores. It feels a bit lighter than many rods, probably from the separated butt, lighter than a pistol grip or maybe even my pack spin rods – surprising for its strength. It comes in a nice oval rod tube – the end have locking tabs on them, which may be common now but aren't on any of my 10 year old rods tubes. The plastic is also a reasonable thickness, maybe half as thick again compared to my old Ugly Stick pack rod tube that developed a split after 5 years of abuse. As I was returning to Canberra the next day I didn't get to test it out (besides which, I didn't have any baitcasters with me).



The full package. Opaque section on the clear rod tube is where the lugs lock in.

Only a few days later I was packing for a short notice trip to Bay of Plenty in New Zealand. The home of Surtees Boats, and featuring regularly on Big Angry Fish, I had previously had fun on the Australian salmon there, so added some lures, the rod, and my baitcaster to my bag (actually, my suit carrier). I have been using a left-handed Abu Garcia Black Max low profile reel for a while, I think with 12lb braid on it and, after a few trips to Brogo, 20lb fluoro carbon as a shock leader. This made a nice compact reel to take.

After looking for some trout with the North Island rivers still recovering from Cyclone Debbie, we made use of a great weather window to head out for a couple of half days. Three cousins the first day, four the next. Passing a land-based game fisher, we started with some drifting, and I tied on a snapper double flasher rig and a 2oz sinker and gave some jigs before leaving it near the bottom whilst helping out get the boat sorted. Once organised we moved to anchor in about 15m, and with no unbaited jigging success I tried a squid head on one of the hooks, gave a few jigs and I was on! Calling for the phone for the action shot, I landed a 45cm snapper and started the day. We got a few each, and I like to think the lighter braid and sinker helped the hookup rate. After some experimenting, I confirmed the snapper were hitting the hook with the squid on it and succumbed to bait fishing with a flasher. Being a light butt, I used the trigger grip as a pivot point, pushing down the butt for an aggressive jig when I wasn't raising it by my right arm for a slower jig when holding the reel.

Returning for dinner, and an evening kiwi walk after cleaning the catch, we planned the next day with eagerness. We all took out 1 rod each, and I had my pick as still being my pack rod.

The next day we didn't bother with the drifting – although I was a little disappointed, with about five schools of aussie salmon around us near the current line, all chopping the surface. Once again I was able to land the first fish, albeit just undersize. Then we were into the school. We all hooked up on 1 or 2 snapper each. Casting up near the anchor, which had a berley bag attached, I had a good hit or two. After some running around, up came a nice snapper and a nice aussie salmon on a double hookup. We saw the snapper start to thin out as the salmon moved in, and then I had an even bigger run. Unlike the salmon which still broadly circled the boat, this did a loop or two before taking off. I tightened up the drag with minimal change. Seeing the spool get down to less than the width of my finger, I decided to gingerly use my thumb to either slow this likely kingfish down. After a few brief seconds, it was relief as the line became loose. Upon inspection, it broke at the shock leader wind-on knot (not the hook), what looked like actually cutting through the fluorocarbon and reaffirming the kingfish over the shark.

I tied on another jig for some half-hearted bottom bouncing – in reality the hope for another kingie! But they had scared the snapper off. We moved around, and I switched to trolling until my cousin got a bit bored, so we went back to anchor. The peak tide seemed to have passed, but I still had fun casting from the foredeck some minnow-style lures in the hope for an aussie salmon but all was quiet. However, it was a nice break from hauling up all those snapper and salmon. We'd been so busy, we didn't take any photos whilst we were fishing! Soon we had to head the short trip back and clean the fish, and enjoy some snapper for dinner.



Typical snapper, and the kahawai (Aussie salmon) I had on with my double hook-up, ready for the smoker

I was over the moon with the rod, especially noting the compact size. Using a left-handed reel though I found that as the reel seat thread is the foregrip, it unwound if I used my right hand on it whilst fighting a fish. Fortunately all my other baitcasters are right-handed, and I was able to hold the reel and the trigger grip to fight the fish instead. Whilst I wouldn't go heavier braid, perhaps using a larger capacity spool like an Abu 5600 or 6600 when saltwater fishing would be worthwhile to allow for those bigger running fish like milkfish, kingies, and sambos. The rod had no trouble casting the 7.5-10cm plastic minnows, and I'm sure would have handled my Tassie devils (medium size) or soft plastics if I'd have used them.

The rod showed no strains from the jiggling and good hook-ups. It was bent over basically double a few times, and with a good number of guides the line didn't shortcut the taper like on other rods. It has quite a reasonable sensitivity on the tip, but stiff enough for light jiggling or soft plastics. I could

feel the nibbles at my hooks, and by releasing the line to let the “injured baitfish” sink within a few more nibbles I was generally hooked up on the 2/0 circle hooks.

I think this rod will be a great addition to my collection, able to flick lures for trout, a great bass rod, and also able to handle the smaller barra and cod, as well as a good estuary and shallower saltwater rod for flathead, and maybe even a jewie....I will need to test that at our saltwater outing!



Bringing up that first fish – note my last section wasn't quite straight but the taper is quite smooth, and the extra guides in the top sections avoid the line shortcutting the rod

Bonus review: I bought some cheap plastic pliers (black and white above) in Tassie for \$16, which were great for dehooking. Might be a bit big for trout though, but nice and lightweight, don't rattle like Boca-stye grips, and would be good for natives (leave the fish in the water if releasing big natives). They were so popular, I donated them to the boat.