

Wonga Go Dam Fishing?

<https://www.hookabarra.com/our-farm/>

Having spotted this location on a television show, and with recommendations from JQ, I thought it would be a good spot to take the family for a fish. After initially convincing my young angler to go there, he changed his mind. With a timely repeat of the episode on television two days before we left, once my wife and kids went home, I saw a quick change to pop to this fish farm for a quick fish before driving back.

Whilst sounding like Awoonga Dam, the barra farm at Wonga is near the beach, at the edge of the Daintree rainforest. For those wanting to fish, I recommend both booking in and discussing fly fishing. I found out the owner, who often guides the fly fishing, was away, but the couple of other staff there were quite helpful. Checking on the bite windows may also influence the fishing sessions you choose.

Initially told the first session was booked out, and the number of people and young kids would prevent me from fly fishing, I headed there anyway in the hope I might be able to wedge into the gap between the 10:30 and 12:30 session, instead of delaying my return for a short fly session following my first hour of fishing.

I was rewarded by spotting two people trying fly fishing for barra when I arrived, and was able to join in. I didn't need to sanitise my fly line and rod as it had been a while since using it, and I suspect once they saw I was half competent, they were happy to leave me fishing the pond/dam whilst they put the new customers who were spin fishing on the other one.

From recollection, I think the website mentioned they had baitcasters, but the rods I saw there were all rigged with spin reels, and mostly with soft plastics. I think the other two fly fishers used the farm's fly rods. They need staff (like ghillies) for each pond, but by staying close to the others I was able to stay on the pond, and was self-reliant enough to let them focus on the other paying customers.



Hook-up near the outflow, with the Daintree in the background

My first half hour saw me hook a few fish, but pulled the hooks on a couple (alas, no cameras nearby). My father hooked up finally on a soft plastic, which they thought was a mangrove jack initially but resolved to be an 80cm+ barra (they also don't have brag mats on hand). Alas, his fish came from the pond that had to be returned so the length was just an estimate.

The next half hour saw a couple more taps, and a couple more fish hooked, the last one I lost by lifting my rod too high. Recalling we had paid for three 1-hour sessions, and only two of us were fishing, we were allowed to do 90 minutes each and at about 88 minutes I hooked up. Having eased my drag after losing the previous fish, I managed to bring this one in, with the barra behaving like a brown trout with a couple of runs from my feet.



Pond oxygenator operating in the background

Where were the fish? Some were on the edges, but we found mostly they struck from the middle. I fished near the paddlewheels, which oxygenated the water and have a 3m exclusion zone around them. I saw what I'm sure was one of the albino fish near the froth (but it was the only unhooked fish I could see in the murky water). The outflow at the other end was also a hotspot, with more small fish there and my father spotted some bigger ones near his outflow. Around 3m from the outflow I found to be productive.

I had hits and hookups both on a weedless barra lure I found (I think JQ took us through this one), a clouser they suggested I use, and a more bulky saltwater fly I recall tying one evening with Geoff D. It was great both to use these two flies we tied on CAA fly tying nights, but also to practice some barra fishing in an environment where you at least had the confidence you were casting to water with barramundi in it, allowing to concentrate on casting and retrieves rather than trying to find fish.



With the session ending, it was time to enjoy some fish and chips whilst my catch chilled down. I opted to keep my catch (\$16/kg, and coming in at 4kg) but you can also purchase frozen fish (which would be gutted) for a similar price, or fish fillets, which would travel better. Foam eskies are sold there, but they provide ice for free in the plastic bags with your fish which can get you back to your accommodation or cooler if like us you left them in Cairns. Both the fish n chips and the catch were tasty.

