

# Great Dividing Range Fishing

Jason recorded his recent adventures coming back from the Tropics.

## Jason

Following Xmas and NY, it was then time to pack for a trip north - 4.5 tackle trays, three reels, and 1.5 rods and a packraft got included. With a teenager onboard, there wasn't any fishing on the way up (but some big downpours). However, I hoped to get a number of trips in once up there, and take a week on the way south to do some fishing, particularly in northern and central NSW which is usually skipped on the run to get back to Canberra.

Arriving in Central Queensland, my parents' tinnie hadn't been used since 2022, so it was a little of getting the cobwebs and gumleaves out. I did get some casting practice in where the freshwater flowed into the salt (fishing for mangrove jacks, with the barra season closed in saltwater), but it was pretty quiet.



Our junior angler and I tried Awoonga Dam for a shakedown, trolling some lures, and casting into a backwater area where a creek flowed in (and out of the wind). Although \$100,000 was on offer for catching tagged barramundi, we only got a few trees, but saw some nice blobs on the sounder - I like to think they were big barra rather than freshwater turtles - but many of them we down deep. Fun was had in the bow on the bouncy ride back at 20 knots as we skipped across the waves.

The rain from Cyclone Koji slowed the fishing down a bit, and my hope for a Dawson Saratoga was fading with flooding on the McKenzie River (where I learnt to cast rattling lures and minnows for yellowbelly) flowing down to there and the Fitzroy, at 10m and rising where I used to fish.

I'd visited one of the rivers/boatramps once the cyclone/depression rain stopped, but the tide was heading out, with only a few fish for the cast net (and potential rocks to catch the net), and then met a kid who was also carrying a net (& had already caught ...and released a mangrove jack). I settled for casting one of my Christmas Decoration Flies, until it eventually snagged on a submerged tree. So, I enjoyed a sunny swim at the beach and grabbed some Tweed Bait prawns with the hope of luring my junior angler out before he flew home, but it was down to the day of departure to use them up.

I managed another trip out to Awoonga, aiming to wet a line in the same area and see if the rise in water level and creek flow attracted any fish - nope. I did find a boat or two fishing the old river line where it was deeper and I thought I'd seen a barra. With daylight darkening from clouds, and an hour or so to sunset I headed back. The Friday afternoon, I counted 28 boat trailers, so the dam was getting good use, but

only 5 boats were visible - I assume most were at the back of the dam, for those wondering on such a large dam where they might start.

Although I was heading off home the following Monday, after some family celebrations, I managed an early morning trip, hoping to catch some of the high tide and use up the prawns. After finding a nice corner and flooding tide of the mud into a backwater, I tossed out a prawn in the deep water and cast a DIY surface lure into the mangroves. Then the lure was snagged on a mangrove, so I motored in, tangled the bait, and realised the anchor line wasn't attached in this boat and my niece called to say goodbye. Fortunately, all but one bean sinker was recovered, followed by a small grunter, and then a couple of different bream ...and no takes on the lures casting or the troll back to the boatramp.



*A bream, and a grunter, align with the fishing report from Boyne Island Tackle & Bait. Blue salmon had also been coming in on the high tide before the cyclone arrived.*

After cleaning the boat and packing the mangos, it was time to do the fishing road trip home. I'd picked a few spots along the way to wet a line, and survey for future fishing. One key aspect was the previous number of NSW Council of Freshwater Anglers' invites to Ebor, so it was a key aspect, along with collecting some rod-building bits on the way. I'd also reclaimed my old Darwin baitcaster rod, to make up for the lack of the other half-rod, leveraging the number of rods I'd left at my parents' previously. BTW, soda/mineral water on a stuck carbon fibre rod does help separate the pieces (I used a sugar free mineral water).

My first stop was Mingo Crossing (over Bjelke Petersen Dam area for barra and saratoga and perch), 3-4 hours away. About a decade ago I found a town (maybe Monto) with a river in the middle, but Monto Caravan Park wasn't overtly taking tents and with Toowoomba now on my plan, a little out of the way. The Mingo Crossing Rec Area had a bad review, but the caravan park had good reviews, which appeared on Google Maps as a street or two back from the water. Interestingly, most of the rivers in the Burnett /Darling Downs were dry, but fields were green. I arrived to dusk to 'Welcome to Paradise Dam - Catch A Catfish!' A few casts of the spinnerbait after dark had me realise how much dam weed there was, and only very small slurps on the surface. After removing the weed yet again in the wind, I realised in the dark I had removed the skirt, and gave up for the night!!





Dawn Tuesday was a little more promising at Mingo Crossing, but I skipped inflating my kayak. A wander as the sun was rising found some promising water at the edge of the park (shown in the photo),

and something charging baitfish from underneath. A number of casts resulted in one good flash (silver perch?) near the bank, but no strikes on the minnow and yabbie lures. Although it was a Sunwater Dam, it wasn't part of the [Queensland Stocked Impoundment Permits System \(SIPS\) program](#), so probably not as good fishing there as might have been at Monto or near Goomeri, but the hot shower was good before breakfast, paying my site fee, and hitting the road.

I saw at Ban Ban Springs a creek crossing 4 kilometres away, so figured it was worth a look and a cast, and to top up my coffee. Something large (~1m) was on the surface, not quite freshwater crocodile, not tortoise, but maybe saratoga. Fish behind the tree were also being chased by something deeper. A few casts of my yabbie lure failed to get a response, but I did get a surface investigation right by my feet, below



the high bank. Sure enough, I was watching three lungfish rise, and enjoyed trying to catch them with my camera instead. Two were about 60cm long, their tail fins about 15-20cm high, who tended to rise as pairs, independent of the larger one, who responded to the clink and rattle of me putting my rod back in the

ute rose by the bank again and looked at me.

A traveller heading inland advised the creek had been barely flowing two weeks earlier, and only a metre or two wide, so perhaps these fish were triggered by all the rain. I can't remember seeing one before (perhaps as a kid with post-cyclone floods), but after the Canowindra Fish Museum on the way north, it was great to watch these prehistoric air breathing fish.

Further south, stopping at BCF Warwick to collect an item, I took the opportunity for a fishing report from the only tackle store in town - before I booked a campsite on a nearby river. Although there were three [SIPS](#) impoundments around Toowoomba and Warwick, paying the SIPS fee for an hour of quick fishing near the shore didn't

inspire me. As there had been only one fish - a yellowbelly - reported to the store (and the rivers only starting to flow), with a number of hours fishing reported to get it, I decided my QLD fishing was over, and headed for the [DPI Fishing Access Website spots](#) south of the border where good water was more likely, having seen the Gwydir on my way north.

Many spots near Tenterfield were daylight access only, and the sun was going down, but I found a spot before the town that looked promising. I took my rod down next to the bridge - I still had my crawfish on. I cast upstream, two winds...and on!

Bugger, I was still on the rocks by the bridge, above a blackberry bush in shorts and sandals, and had a fish on that I got down to the reeds.

Eventually I got through the blackberries, down to the water, and landed a 15" yella - measured on the tackle tray



from the Great Northern cooler.

Maybe I shouldn't have been so eager for two more casts before I climbed back up from the water's edge... with my ankles and shins bleeding away (& a fish yet to clean). I wasn't too eager to go wading in deep reeds for the lure after it snagged closer to the bridge,

let alone potential mozzies and leeches. For those interested, I think the lure was a Dr Fish Crawfish (or similar), the trebles appeared about size 2 and the internal ball bearing and clattering claws no doubt triggered the aggressive response at dusk. It's visible in the reed and the fish in the photo...and is still at the bridge!



I took some photos for the DPI Anglers Access Website feedback and I drove to my next fishing spot and overnight stay on the Clarence River, rising to a nice dawn on Wednesday.

Copmanhurst Freecamp was reasonably easy to find. Although flowing like a trout stream (I still wasn't sure if it was it was a brackish part of the Clarence River) my early morning shore casts resulted nothing but spooked baitfish and seeing lots of garfish and that it was fresh. With a big cliff opposite, with overhanging trees in back eddies, and the sun out, I took my kayak over and cast around, before trolling downstream with my favourite bass lures.

While this was happening, I noticed a Land Cruiser pull up, with a mulloway-style 7' spin rod, and they cast a bait out near the tents on the other bank, and had a chuckle. After untangling a snag, I looked back to see this teenager getting photos with a fish!! I kept paddling, having both not had a bite there at dawn and busy balancing water flow, snags, and casting the lures.



A short time later, I noticed a shark-like pectoral fin, and whiter underbody, and recognised the catfish that had taken the bait. Oh yes, I forgot to mention in QLD I did spot three lungfish in a flooded river, quite a sight (& not the saratoga I hoped I might have been casting to, nor crocodiles or eel-tailed catfish).

Talking to an arriving caravaner as I packed up, he noted that Copmanhurst Freecamp used to be very different before the recent floods. There were camps along the bank upstream, which was now the vertical sandstone cliffs visible in my photo. It was a shame someone had vandalised the toilet block (possibly previously damaged by the floods), and left trash in the grass, but hopefully it is better soon. The river was quite stable and the bank was better camping, and a toilet block

nearby in Federation Park. The only store/pub also had a poster up with the local bass caught and next competition 7 Feb. So, while the section I fished was bare rocks and some trees (barely any weed), there must be some good spots around.

I gave up, packed up, and headed to the coast at Sawtell & enjoyed the yellowbelly with an old friend for dinner. Almost forgot to fish before I left Sawtell on Thursday, I had a few casts the next morning in the Boambee estuary, but like my arrival, the river was in full flood, and no hits on the lure. I'd definitely missed the low tide to



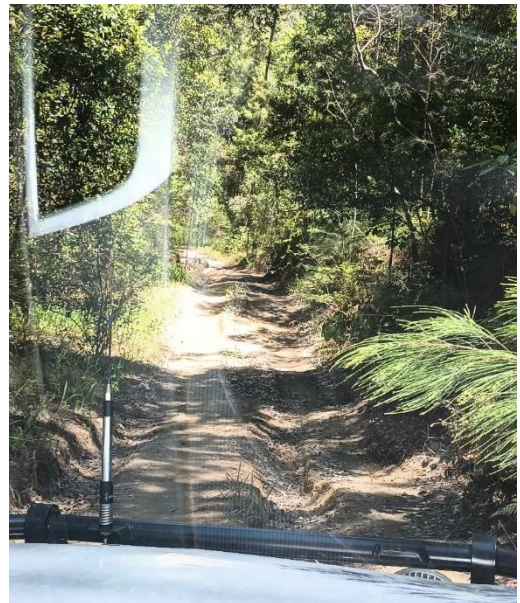
collect yabbies, but it was good catching up with an old friend.

Yellowbelly, cod, and bass water fished, it was off to Ebor to chase trout! I had a few Angler Access spots, one before Ebor, but soon discovered the road I was taking was Waterfall Way, was blocked by a landslide earlier in the week.

Finding a rough track detour (and no fish in Boggy Creek), I eventually got to Arties Bridge.

Alas it, and a few others (marked

as unverified on the DPI Angler Access map) were heavily overgrown, so I went to the Ebor Conservation Area. Brown water, wind, and middle afternoon result in no action, so I headed to the Tamworth Music Festival, but I noted much nicer water in Ebor itself and the Dutton Hatchery area, to the west of where I stopped, which I look forward to returning to (and the many freecamps).



The rest of my journey (Friday/Saturday) was more focussed offroad, and a detour to collect one teenager from Mascot Airport (waylaying my plan to fish Oberon and Wyangala Waters), so I stopped fishing (and the swim in the harbour probably made me smell better after a couple of days on the road). Coolah (my turnoff Southwest after fishing Ebor & missing the rivers out of Armidale) had some good looking water for cod, where it had been raining on my way north a few weeks earlier in my trek up Fossickers Way.

In the end, the score of legal fish was NSW 1, QLD 0 (although QLD did get 6 undersized fish)

**Finding Where To Fish.** On a road trip, planning your 'rest breaks' and layovers can be helped with a bit of online research. My 2022 trip had seen some good water, but my return had the Gwydir River (my target water) in flood. Speaking of which, the BoM QLD floodwarning page had a good link to regularly updated water levels of the

major rivers/dams/weirs, and Google Maps satellite view showed me the riverbed in Gayndah which crossed it off of my list for likely fish.

The NSW DPI Angler Access [website](#) (and [mobile version](#)) was quite useful (& much better than the limited information QLD has), but when opening up a potential spot, make sure the validation/discussion points are there in the lower part of the description of the location. A few spots I saw had been noted as Verified by NSW CFA, and the terrible spots I found had not been verified at all (an opportunity for me to submit some). I was surprised by the lack of locations in northern NSW (eg the many creeks on Clarence Way), so Copmanhurst Freecamp stood out in my early trip planning as a layover or rest stop.

Angler Access information. I didn't save any app or ArcGIS maps to my phone, so I was only accessing the Angler Access data with internet access, and screenshots was very valuable to get the address back - especially as the webpage resets every day or so, requiring agreement to the terms before the map loads again and you need to zoom back in from all of NSW, but map history helped find some Angler Access spots. The spots appear to be stored under a 6-7 digit reference number.

Take me fishing! (Routing) However, once you select Angler Access/ArcGIS to route you to the location, Google Maps was used within the Angler Access website, but I think it needed copying (or searching) in Google Maps app separately to keep the route active. This was because the NSW DPI route (within the DPI webpage) is done through the web browser and drops out. This helped when I found poor access, and wanted to investigate nearby locations.

Perhaps you might make use of the Angler Access site for your next fishing/family trip