

August 2022

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Australian Bass



Percalates Novemaculata

THE BRONZE BATTLER

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President's Message

It is a great time of year because we know the warmer weather is coming, heralding the start of a new bass season. I am certainly looking forward to the warmer weather after the wettest July on record and 2 years of la Nina weather patterns. There is a potential 3rd on its way we will just have to wait and see.

I am very excited about our upcoming bass catch in October the hallmark of our club's proud heritage. Whilst I am unsure what the outlook regarding the weather will be. Let's plan to have a large turn-out at the general meeting in October prior to bass catch weekend. We will have briefing, a club raffle and family & friends most welcome. I will be there early & welcome the opportunity to enjoy a meal with all & sundry.

Wishing everyone the best of success & look forward to seeing you in October.

Regards & tight Lines

Chris Ghosn

From The Editor

Apologies for the many false starts with club events, it really has been a difficult year for scheduling. Looking forward to hearing about all your early season bass exploits for the October battler.

Thanks, and Best Regards

Matt McHugh

Jungle Adventure

While enjoying a few quiet beers at the famous Pub with No Beer at Taylor's Arm on a previous bass trip, Rico and I talked about future adventures and fish to we'd like to tick off the bucket list. While the hit list was long and varied, one fish we were both keen to chase was the Jungle Perch. Before the end of that trip, we had committed to planning a JP adventure in the Cairns region as soon as we could. However, getting this trip off the ground took some planning and perseverance! With everything booked and all preparations made, just the week before our planned trip, an intense low-pressure trough parked itself over the coastal tropics and dumped 600mm of rain over our campsite and the systems we intended to explore. With major flooding and downright dangerous river conditions the only option was to cancel and start planning again.



It was only 2 months later when parked our hire 4WD near our first chosen system with just over an hour of light left in the day. As we ran down to the river to check it out, we saw a beautiful wide pool being fed by a relatively fast flowing stream closed in by lush rainforest. There was a rope swing on the biggest tree, and as I carefully surveyed the gin clear pool beneath, a 30cm JP drifted slowly into view as it moved between 2 boulders not far from the bank. While stoked just to see one straight away, we now ran back to the car to unpack and ready our rods and backpacks as quickly as we could. We both chose small surface

offerings in the hope that we could get on the board in the best possible way. Despite the excitement, croc safety was always front of mind, as it is well known that the big salties push right up into the upper freshwater reaches at times.



We cast simultaneously and within the first 3 metres of my retrieve my lure was flung into the air by what looked like a tail slap. We've all seen bass do this on occasion when they are not in the mood to bite, and it appeared now that JPs exhibit the same behaviour. Despite several more casts in the same vicinity, the fish would not show itself again. As we boulder hopped upstream, we took turns casting at the prime holding positions. After half an hour or so of casting into beautiful crystal-clear eddies and skipping stick baits under stands of lomandra, we had raised plenty of small JPs but could not convince one to hit the lure. Rico went to a plastic and got hit on his first cast. On the second cast he was hit again and converted for a small beautifully marked JP in the 20cm range. We were both over the moon that we were on the board so soon into the trip! With numerous fish visible in the pool Rico landed his first fish from, I persevered with my surface offering only to be rejected through several more "tail slaps". It was time for a change. Within a few casts after changing to a small plastic I was on the board too.

After this pool the river narrowed into a stretch of boulder strewn rapids for a few hundred metres before opening out into a beautiful still pool with deep shadows below the rainforest canopy. There were two significant tree snags against a steep bank, and we

agreed to take one each. Rico took the first and I crossed the river and snuck along the bank edge into good casting position for the second snag. My cast was on the money and after only a couple of metres of retrieve in mid water there was a sizeable flash from the shadows beneath the snag at the same time as my line sprung tight. I knew straight away it was a better fish and after a short run parallel to the undercut bank it came into view in the middle of the pool. I scrambled down the bank and gently secured the solid fish with a thumb grip on the lower jaw. Rico had seen the action and responded to my call that it was a better fish and rushed up to help get a proper measure and a decent picture, which was not easy in the rapidly fading light.



At just over 350 fork length and very thick-set, I was absolutely stoked to land a good fish so early in the trip! A few more casts in the same pool were all we could squeeze in before total darkness. One more nice fish at 29 fork took the tally to 4 in just over an hour on the first afternoon. To say we were chuffed would be an understatement. The hour drive to our accommodation was spent discussing the plan for the next few days.

The next 2 days fishing different streams produced great results, with tallies of 34 and 27 respectively. However, the highlight of our trip was day 4. After a quick breakfast we left our accommodation in the pre-dawn gloom with a long drive ahead of us to an isolated stream we had picked out on the map. The first highlight came before the sun was even over the horizon when we encountered a female cassowary and her 3 relatively large chicks on the

side of the road. To see a wild cassowary is very high on the list for most wildlife enthusiasts and the significance of the encounter was not lost on Rico and me. The chicks were quite inquisitive and came right up to the car. We spent about 5 minutes with them with not another car in sight. The pic hereabouts doesn't do the encounter justice, but what a privilege and what a start to the day!



Like all streams in the area, we were sure our targeted water would hold JPs, but in what numbers and what sections were all unknowns. JPs are catadromous just like bass, and after the big wet season and heavy recent rain for most of the coast between Mackay and Cape York, our assumption was that many of the better fish would push up as far as they could toward the impassable waterfalls that punctuate most systems in this mountainous area. We stopped a few times along the way to check out other streams and some access points in case this plan did not come off, however in our wildest dreams we could not have anticipated the day we were in for.....

After parking the car and a short trek through the dense rainforest, we were greeted with a beautiful, fast flowing, boulder-strewn stream that was clearly a much higher energy environment than the systems we had fished on previous days. Signs of recent flooding were obvious, and we surveyed with awe the bankside scouring and flood debris that was wrapped high around tree trunks above the bank. It looked like we had timed our visit well, as the river was still flowing nicely but the water gin clear. Our research prior had indicated that best bite periods are often in the window following a good fresh but when the water has dropped and cleared.

Surface action had been hard to muster in previous days and most of our fish had come on various plastics and small hardbodies. Because of this, we both opted for plastics first, and within a few casts we were both on the board. As we bush-bashed and waded our way upstream, we landed a steady stream of fish up to the high 20s fork length. While not big fish, it was fun fishing sight casting to and trying to tempt fish in tiny pools that were only a few metres across in between the rapids. After a long but productive section of narrow rapids and tight granite gorges we came to a huge, shallow open pool with a few large midstream boulders and a shady lomandra-lined bank on the far side. We both changed to surface offerings and for the next 30mins it was almost a fish a cast, with “pack attacks” from JPs ranging from tiny into the mid-30s fork length on any lure we threw. There were even occasions where multiple JPs were attempting to steal the lures from the hooked fish’s mouth. With the action we were fortunate enough to experience in this pool, it was plainly obvious that these fish had either never seen lures, or it had been a very long time since they had.



The next pool produced another highlight. I changed to a small popper and hooked a medium JP before I moved the lure. While bring it in over a series of larger mid-stream boulders, a far bigger fish appeared from a shadowy crevice and rushed at the JP.... Jack! A solid mangrove jack that looked to be in the 50cm range charged in what I thought was going to be an attack on the JP. However, as it neared the JP it swam straight up beside it at full speed and attempt to steal the popper from the JP’s mouth. It missed on the first swipe,

so I left the still hooked JP in the clear shallow water only a couple of metres in front of me and yelled out to Rico. The jack continued to bash the popper, somehow without hooking up or severing the 10lb leader. After 20 seconds or so of commotion it drifted back a few metres and held position in open water like it was waiting for something. I quickly pulled in, unhooked and released the traumatised JP (which seemed to swim off a little dazed), and changed to a larger suspending hardbody in a natural baitfish colour. With my heart in my mouth, I lobbed the lure a few metres in front of the Jack, wound it down a metre or so and twitched it a few times. The jack charged it but frustratingly put the brakes on with the lures just centimetres from its nose. A couple more casts and another 5 lure changes failed to tempt it, and eventually it slunk off to the lair it had first appeared from. I made a mental note of the exact spot so we could put a few casts in on the way back downstream.



From this point the river changed significantly. The terrain became noticeably steeper and the rapids bigger and wider. The pools became deeper, and the average size of the fish increased. We pushed on in the hope that we would encounter a 400+ beast. After a long, steep rocky section we came to the biggest pool we had encountered yet, and the waterfall flowing in at the head looked as though it was probably impassable to the fish except in the most extreme of flows. This pool was probably about 80m across and 100m long, was obviously very deep, and just had to hold bigger fish.....

We both changed lures, Rico to a larger 100mm floating stickbait, and me to an 80mm medium diving timber hardbody. We cast simultaneously and the action was almost instant. Two lovely fish in the 34-fork range were quickly positioned for a photo together and we

cast again. The action in this pool was incredible..... most casts resulted in either multiple hits or fish landed. After a frenzied 20mins or so and 20+ fish landed between us, the fish flicked a switch, and the action was over. After the action we'd just enjoyed and the pristine setting, I just had to dive in for a swim. I swam over to the base of the waterfall and sat for an incredibly relaxing and refreshing few minutes with the water pounding my back and shoulders. This was a place that will remain etched in my memory. The effort we had put in to get to this system had paid off in spades!

On the trek back we stopped at only a few of the better spots for the odd cast, including the Jack's lair, but he had seen enough and did not materialise. A few more fish here and there brought the tally to a mind blowing 134 JPs. And we were back at the car just 6 hours after setting off! We could not have been more content on the long 4WD back to our accommodation. We both agreed that this would be a day that we would never forget.



Day 5 yielded another 14, although 5 of these were 34 fork length or better. Day 6 was a short morning session before the return trip to the airport, but we still accounted for another 11 JPs, bringing the total for the trip to 223 JPs from 7 different streams across 4 full day's and 2 short day's fishing.

This had been a true bucket list adventure that had exceeded all expectations. The effort in research and physical preparation had been well worth it. The long hikes, tired legs, blisters,

thorns, snakes, careful croc surveillance and some very sore “JP thumbs” were all part of the package and only added to the experience. Aside from the fishing, the fantastic wildlife encounters, total tranquillity while falling asleep to the sounds of the rainforest, the stunning beauty of the Daintree and its numerous streams, the chats with locals, and a few beers in the Daintree Hotel were worth the trip alone.



The mangrove jack encounter had not been a great surprise, as we were aware that both jacks and small barra often push way up into the fresh sections of the tropical streams. In all we had 4 mangrove jack encounters but didn't manage to hook any of them. We didn't see a barra, but that hardly mattered. We expected that we might encounter a Sooty Grunter at some point, but we never did. And that, for me, is more than reason enough to plan another trip!

Jason McMaster

FINALLY!! My First Kingfish

OMG! It's been a long time coming! Admittedly, I have not spent a lot of time specifically targeting the mighty kingfish, but I have hooked a few over the years only to lose them. I have lost them trolling big Rapalas in Port Hacking, but mostly I have hooked them on bream gear. I don't need to say that usually doesn't end well. Yes...yes... plenty of people have done that and have been lucky to land the occasional kingy, but not me.

Back in 2017 I bought my big NW Mariner 12.5 pedal yak mainly so that I could use it to target kingfish (& other "big" fish). However, most of the time it was used to chase bream. I've also been out on Peachy's boat once or twice hoping to get on to kingfish. We were at Middle Harbour on one occasion where I did have a brief hook-up on a Chasebaits Ultimate Squid. Hook pulled after a few seconds.



My last kingfish hook-up was on the Cooks R around (or after?) lockdown in 2021. At the time, there were quite a few kingfish around the Kyeemagh boat ramp & Cooks R mouth. I was fishing solo on the pedal yak but casting a tiny 2" Grubz on my 7ft, 1-3kg bream outfit with 6lb leader. I hooked a kingy off a moored boat almost opposite the ramp. On this occasion, I was starting to entertain the thought I might land this one! I managed to slowly work it to the middle of the river, away from the moored boats. It was quite a long battle – at least 10mins. Back & forth it went – I would gain a meter or 2 of line only to see it disappear again. I never saw the fish, but eventually my leader broke about 1m above the hook, with another 75cm of leader to the leader knot. Weak spot in the leader? Fish ran it through some underwater junk? I'll never know.

On another occasion, a few years ago I was on the small yak fishing Woodford Bay on the LCR. There were a few of us fishing the LCR that day. It was quite a nice day, with some bream, etc caught. I remember Rico was nearby when I hooked up, trolling an Attack

minnow on 4lb FC straight through. You would think a kingy would have made short work of that, but somehow, I had it on for quite some time. I was being towed all over the place including the fish going between a moored boat and its front anchor rope. I had to pass the rod through the gap while the yak was on the outside of the rope, and it kept going! Eventually it broke me off on another, inevitable anchor rope. I was amazed how much line I had to wind in – probably well over 100m.

Recently I made friends with a new fishing buddy – Ed, our Shoeless Mike's good mate. He is a trout fanatic having grown up in the Blue Mountains and in the last 3+ years, also right into kingfish and pelagics off his Hobie Compass with 180 drive. He has had a LOT of experience fishing the Harbour for kings, usually in North Harbour and North Head. Even though the end of June is not the best time for kingfish, we went out on Saturday, June 24. We launched off the sand next to Davis Marina, Balgowlah on the south-western side of North Harbour. Very easy launch. Ed is a VERY enthusiastic guy and the days leading up to Saturday was filled with MANY text messages outlining strategies, spots, tips, etc. I had just bought a rod specifically to target kingfish off the yak – an ABU Garcia Veritas 7'2" 6-10kg rod. I paired that with a Daiwa Tierra 4000 with 30lb braid & 10kg leader. This was to be its first outing.

I had long declared that I just want to land my first kingy. I didn't care if it was sub-legal, nor did I care if I had to use bait. I had some frozen squid, but I rigged a 7" Zman jerkshad on a big worm hook to start with. I also had 2 other outfits on board – a 6'6" 3-6kg with 20lb braid and 10kg leader and a 7ft 2-4kg outfit with 6 or 8lb leader. I landed a legal trevally from among the moored boats while I was waiting for Ed who was catching livies (yakkas) before heading off. He got a few biggish yakkas on a Sabiki rig. He is towing a live bait tube.

We headed to the marker pole marking the rocky reef off Fairlight. Ed said that can often be productive for "rats". We both had a sounder and there were schools of baitfish all over the place. On this occasion, that reef proved to be empty of kingfish, so we fished a few more marker buoys on our way towards Quarantine Beach. We fished around Quarantine and the point there, also for nothing. Rounding the corner after Quarantine, I met one of its residents, a large seal sunning itself on the rocks. It paid no attention to me drifting by. Ed told me he's been robbed of his live bait by seals there before.

By this stage, I had changed to a sinker and circle hook with squid strip. Plenty of pickers around. We kept on going, heading past Old Man's Hat towards North Head. We finally rounded the corner of North Head and found a boat hooked up. They said there were kingfish there, so we fished near them. We could see schools of bait with the occasional larger fish. Ed had a massive bust off on a 9" Sluggo. The fish we could see being landed by the boat were mainly sub-legal kings. Ed had a live yakka being towed behind him, suspended by a "sausage float".

I only had 2 kingy bites. The first one was when I rigged the squid strip with circle hook just passed through once at the end of the strip. I had a big bite only to not hook up. Obviously, the fish just took the end of the strip and ripped the bait off the hook without hooking itself. I then rigged the strips with the hook passed through twice and secured with a half-hitch above the hook. The second bite came when the rod just loaded up and I was on! Classic circle hook hook-up?!

The power of kingfish is just unreal but put into perspective, it wasn't even a legal fish! My new outfit handled it fine, and it wasn't long before I netted my first ever kingy! I was stoked, screaming for joy like a mad man. In my mind, to achieve it on the kayak made it

even better. It was a chubby kingfish around 55/60cm. The circle hook was just through its jaw hinge, just like circle hooks are supposed to do. A few pics and back it went.



We went more around the corner where we were sheltered from the ever-strengthening westerly breeze. It looked deceptively calm in the lee of North Hd. I didn't hook anything else. Ed managed 3 other hook-ups on his livies. None of the hook-ups lasted very long before his fish would spit the hooks. Ed reckons they were probably rat kings choking on his big livies. They were a bit too small to properly inhale the yakkas.

We then made our way back. Once we rounded the corner back into the now stiff W wind, it was a long, very wet pedal into the wind. It seemed like ages before we got close to Dobroyd headland where we got some shelter from the wind, on our way back to Davis Marina. We stopped for a few minutes at the Fairlight reef marker pole. Plenty of bait there still and lots of pickers. A few more casts among the moored boats before we called it. It was around 4pm and we had been on the yaks since around 7am. I mapped it later and we had covered at least 12/13k's. My legs were a tiny bit tired the next day, but I felt fine. Now... a legal kingy next time! Thanks Ed! We just need to get you onto a few bass next summer as his only bass fishing has been on Tallowa Dam with Mike. He enjoyed it, but I said he needs to get on to "real" bass fishing on a river somewhere...! I'm sure his trout spinning experience will be very good grounding for bass fishing as his casting should be pretty good.

HS Tham

Doug and Matt and the Yearly South Coast trip

What started as an excuse to get out of Sydney after the first Covid lockdown, has turned into a yearly trip for Doug and me. Each year the trip seems to get a bit longer and the itinerary changes slightly, but it is always fun.



This year we went midweek at the end of June and had 4 nights away. The first 3 nights were spent in an Airbnb on Burrill Lake. In the middle of winter, it is very quiet and peaceful, and we practically had the lake to ourselves. We arrived on the Sunday afternoon and checked in and immediately decided to take the rock gear and some prawns down to the mouth of the lake. We cast around for some drummer but didn't land anything substantial other than a few undersize ones. The main aim was to get some blackfish bait and we achieved that with a couple of handfuls of weed and cabbage. In the evening we went off to the Schnitzel Restaurant in Ulladulla, great place. The owner even gave us a couple of free beers.



I was up early walking each morning and caught some glorious sunrises. Later, on the Monday morning, blackfish were on the agenda, but with a tide change at 8:30 am it would take a while for clean water to start moving into the lake at the road bridge. We launched the boat and started fishing around the bridge, but it really wasn't until the tide got going that we started to catch a few, coinciding with a change in water quality. It went from black tannin to clear blue in an hour, amazing! The fishing was tricky, but we got enough for the start of a feed between us. We had another quick rock session in the afternoon for not much result and then a good Chinese meal at the Milton Hotel.



On the Tuesday Morning we headed up into the back lake. We did this last year without catching much and it was no different this year. We at least got a couple of fish, including a keeper bream to take home. We then had a much better session on the blackfish with a few quality fish mixed in with smaller fish. It is a very consistent spot, provided you are prepared to move around and follow the fish as the tide rises and falls. Doug was getting some nice casts in with the centrepin and generally his boat is a great platform for this type of fishing with plenty of room for two anglers and long rods. In the evening we headed back for another Schnitzel, what a place!



We packed up early on the Wednesday morning and headed to Greenwell Point via the Bunnings and BCF in Nowra to stock up on a few bits and pieces. I'd booked a room at Coral Tree Lodge Caravan Park due to its proximity to the Shoalhaven River and Broughton Creek. It has its own boat ramp, so, very ideal for our purposes. We dumped our gear and launched the boat. The intention was to have a fish in the main river for EPs and bream, but the wind was a bit uncomfortable, so we headed straight for Broughton Creek, arriving at the mouth for the tide change.



Broughton Creek is one of my favourite places to fish, lots of snags, lots of deep corners and banks and some real brawlers in there. We moved slowly around the mouth of the Creek, thoroughly fishing the bridge and the entry way rock walls. Eventually the tide started to move a bit and I got hit close in and then next cast hooked up just off the bank. I called it for a big bream, and it ended up being a not so big, but solid mid-thirties fork bream with a blue nose. The next fish to the boat was a lovely flathead close to 60cm that picked up Doug's grub next to a snag, that one went in the keeper bag. Then the bites started to come consistently. Doug and I both pulled a few keeper bream before I hooked something solid on a shallow bank near a creek mouth. It fought cleanly and ended up being a high 30 fork bream. That was only a taste of what was to come though.



On the next reach I persisted with my technique of a very subtle slow wind of a cut down motor oil slim swim. This bank was deep with a lot of fallen timber, and you really had to watch the line to see the bite as it would get hit on the drop. I missed a couple of these subtle bites before coming up tight on a very solid fish that took off towards a snag then turned into the middle of the river. Once in the middle of the river it was just patience to bring it to the net. A lovely 410 fork estuary perch shaped like a football. I'm not sure what our tally was at the end of the day, but it was a solid session with some quality fish coming to the net and released and a few smaller bream and a flathead making it to the fridge. Wednesday night was pub night in Greenwell Point, and we had a great pub meal, plus, I won a voucher at the butcher in the meat raffle!



We checked out early on Thursday morning and headed straight for the butcher where I swapped my voucher for some cabanossi and pepperoni and treated ourselves to a pretty ordinary breakfast at the Greenwell Point chippie. Not good. From there to the boat ramp near Berry on Broughton Creek. It was Doug's turn for fish of the day this time. The wind was a bit worse this time and some of the banks that fished well on day 1 were tough on day 2. Doug was persisting with changing up his lures and was determined to catch a good fish on a suspending lure. It was a much slower day all round, with enough fish coming to the net to interest us, but an absence of the quality perch from the first day. We worked our way up higher in the creek and that was where Doug nailed an absolute belter EP on a double clutch. It was on a tight turn with a deep corner and a nice set of snags, just screaming fish. It took him into the timber, but he coaxed it out nicely and landed a lovely perch over the 40-fork mark.

We pulled the boat out and headed back to Sydney. It really is a great winter tonic. Looking forward to next year already. Thanks to Doug for driving and taking the boat and for the great company.

Matt McHugh

Coming Up

Wiseman's Ferry Bass Day Sunday 11th September

The old boat ramp @ Wiseman's Ferry is useable. We will keep an eye on it and send out more details closer to the day, including potential meeting place for a get together.

Bass Sydney Club General Meeting

Date: Tuesday, 11th October @ 7:30pm BYO

Where: NBC Sports Club , 166 Windsor Rd, Northmead NSW 2152

The food in the bistro is quite good and there will be a few of us there early for dinner, please join us.

Hawkesbury Nepean Bass Catch

Date: Tuesday, 15-16 October

Details to follow, including where we will be camping. It will depend on access and river conditions over the next month.

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