

# Hinchinbrook on foot

## Land-based options for working the tides



Yet another barra for Ian. This time taken while fishing right beside a boat ramp, a location most anglers wouldn't give a second glance.



This little barra is the result of a wading session on a beach, pinpointing fallen trees. Wade with caution.



Ian Salmon in action, this time from a manmade rock wall on the top of the tide.

**A**NGLERS who frequent northern Australia will be acutely aware that boating activities are dominated by tides and wind.

The majority of tropical boat ramps outside of major cities are accessible only on the upper half of the tide.

While at Hinchinbrook recently we had a few days when tides were ideal.

However as the days passed we would need to be retrieving the boat after dark to have enough water to access the ramp.

Many of our favourite fishing creeks are only navigable on the upper half of the tide, drying to a series of pools separated by sand bars as the tide drops.

This, along with several extended periods of 30 knot-plus winds saw us unable to use the boat.

That was OK for a couple of days but we had limited time at our disposal and precious days spent in camp soon became a source of frustration.

I was developing cabin fever by midafternoon on our third blown-out day so took advantage of a break in the rain to flick a lure around.

I drove to a nearby causeway where a creek (unnamed because the sign was blown away by Yasi) ran under the road into a small lagoon.

This was in the midst of a typical tea-tree swamp with dark water, lily pads and abundant birdlife.

Small tarpon were rolling regularly as I walked to a clearing to cast.

A dozen or so casts produced a tiny spangled perch; not what I had expected but not really a surprising capture in tropical freshwater.

Ten minutes later a larger fish took the lure and leapt, revealing a chrome body that at first glance I mistook for a barra.

On its second leap I got a better look and identified a tarpon, much larger than the little tykes seen flicking earlier.

Two more similar fish and, in the late afternoon, the mozzies and sandflies convinced me to call it quits and head back to camp.

The following day, with wind of 33 to 40 knots forecast, I joined long-time fishing friend, Ian Salmon for a walk along one of the more sheltered beaches to throw a lure.

Perhaps the term sheltered is relative as we faced gusty wind and stinging airborne sand as we fished.

Although we were essentially fishing an area of beach, we were targeting a variety of fish-holding real estate.

One small section of



Fishing for Sport

by NEIL SCHULTZ

manmade rock wall produced an estuary cod and a few visible strikes from barramundi, a couple of which were landed.

Further along, we targeted fallen mangrove trees, courtesy of cyclone Yasi, with surprisingly consistent results.

At first glance most of these trees didn't appear worth any attention but there were fish present on many of them.

Again, barramundi were the main predators in residence but the occasional mangrove jack and estuary cod added a little variety.

These were all tempted on very slow retrieves using shallow running lures, the best of which on the day were Fysshelures 4" Calliope.

Ian is a master of this slow retrieve technique and just kept catching fish in many instances where I became merely an observer and cameraman.

Later in the morning, as the tide dropped, we fished a couple of small feeder creeks as the last of the resident baitfish were forced out into open water.

Trevally scooted around our ankles as they ran down small diamond-scale mullet in water a mere 30cm deep.

Flathead too gathered to feed as the tide bottomed out and Ian scored a couple of very healthy lizards.

Close gutters were probed with long casts where our lures were ambushed by barracuda ranging from little tykes to scary monster class specimens.

Heavy overcast conditions helped keep the fish active, but, as is the case with most angling in tropical estuaries, the tide was the main influence on the feeding activities.

At the top and bottom of the tide, when water flows decelerated, we had our best successes.

Slower flowing water allowed us to probe between the branches of snags, putting our lures where the fish were holding.

Try that when the tide's rushing and all you'll achieve is a rapid lightening of your lure box.

The ebb tide also allowed more access on foot as water receded from mangroves, allowing

us to walk around tangled stands of trees rather than trying to climb through.

In other scenarios we fished the top of the tide when predatory fish pushed up onto flats to feed.

This is always worth trying where you notice garfish, mullet or archerfish flicking on the surface.

Wading is something about which you should think long and hard in the tropics.

Certain locations are virtually croc free but there is always a risk that one of those fearsome creatures will be nearby.

Measure the risk and act accordingly, it's your choice.

Box jellyfish are the other animals you should consider, so take precautions like wearing long trousers and carry a container of vinegar. ↵



One of a handful of tarpon tempted by a Tail Turner while spinning a tea-tree creek from the roadside.



A handsome land-based salty barra taken on a Fysshelures 4" Calliope.



Ian Salmon with a quality jack caught while walking the bank, casting at fallen trees.