ARE YOU looking for somewhere warm to wet a line this winter that can only be reached by 4WD or boat? A great option is to head for the tropics and try your luck at the beautiful Byfield coastal area, on the Central Queensland coast north of Yeppoon.

Byfield is one of the largest expanses of undeveloped territory remaining on Australia’s eastern seaboard. From the sea it appears unchanged from the way it was when Cook sailed past aboard the Endeavour in May of 1770. The spectacular coastline of wide sweeping beaches broken by dramatic, rocky headlands is backed by massive parabolic sand dunes covered in wallum heath and eucalypt woodland. The undulating sandy landscape is drained by rainforest-lined creeks, and overlooked from the west and north by vast ranges of rugged granite peaks. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park protects the crystal clear waters of this coastal paradise, and the sparkling blue horizon is broken only by the Keppel Islands to the south-east and Flat and Peak Islands to the north-east.

A large part of this exceptional region is protected by the Byfield National Park – almost 9000 hectares of pristine coastal wilderness that offers a variety of nature-based recreation opportunities, including 4WDing, bush camping, swimming, boating and (of course) fishing. The remainder of the area is made up of Five Rocks Conservation Park, Byfield State Forest, vacant crown land, some sand mining leases and a small portion of freehold land at the tiny settlement of Stockyard Point. The Defence Department’s massive Shoalwater Bay Military Training Area forms the northern boundary of the park, while to the south the coastline is interrupted by the Waterpark Point headland at the entrance to the mangrove-lined shores of Corio Bay. Further south, the Rydges’ Capricorn International Resort makes an ideal base for those wishing to soften their adventure with all the comforts and activities of a world-class resort.

As well as its wild, natural beauty, Byfield is also considered important in a biological sense, as it is home to a number of endemic, rare and threatened species of plants, including the Byfield fern, and is an important habitat for local and migratory birds such as the little tern and beach stone curlew. The jagged rocky headland known as Five Rocks is fringed with dazzling coral reef, and the sparkling blue water is full of colourful fish, turtles, dolphins and, in winter, humpback whales.

At Stockyard Point is the small (12 sites), well laid out Five Rocks Camping Area. These camp grounds are in a shady setting amongst the banksias, and provide modern amenities including toilets, drinking water and cold showers. A number of holiday houses are available for rent for those who don’t wish to ‘rough it’.

Vehicular access to Byfield is strictly 4WD only. The first long, steep, sandy climb stops low-clearance vehicles dead in their tracks, so only those drivers who know what they’re doing will make it to the camping area and beaches. Most of the tracks through the park are single-lane and quite narrow, so you will get scratches on your paintwork – but it’s a small price to pay to visit such a beautiful spot! There’s a general store at Byfield Village (outside the park, 25km from the campground) if you need supplies, and there are a few permanent residents at Stockyard Point should you require emergency assistance.

Pedestrians can reach delightful, vehicle-free Five Rocks Beach via a short walking track from the campground, and it’s possible to drive down to and along the very scenic Three Rivers Beach or Nine Mile Beach for several kilometres. You can spend hours exploring the spectacular Five Rocks formation, both above and below the waterline. The coastal views from atop the pillars are breathtaking, and so too the vibrant coral gardens that cling to the rocky ledges of this unique feature. Anglers willing to pack a rooftop tinnie have the choice of fishing the sheltered coves around Five Rocks or the calm waters of Corio Bay, while land-based anglers can chase surf, rock or estuary species from anywhere along Byfield’s sandy shoreline.

If you’d like to check out Byfield for yourself, the Dirty Weekends Central Queensland 4WD guide book contains all the facts you’ll need to make the most of your visit, including detailed tour directions and planning information. A word of warning though: if you visit Byfield once you’ll be going back. It’s simply stunning!

1) Rocky headlands can hold anything from barra to trevally and a wealth of species in between.
2) Long golden beaches hemmed in by rocky headlands are as attractive to sightseers as they are to anglers.
3) There’s a lot of sand driving to be done in this region, so make sure you’re familiar with the techniques.
4) In this area you’ll find beautiful untouched beaches.

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