Fishing and camping at Brunswick Heads
Wayne Kampe | October 2003 - Area Articles / Queensland / Southern QLD / Brisbane /

I FELL in love with this holiday destination as soon as I stopped the car. I’d driven into the Ferry Reserve camping area with my dad and just as we arrived a small tinny was being hauled up the ramp in the caravan park. To the usual "Any luck?" query the grinning tinny owner held up two of the fattest mud crabs I’ve seen in quite a while.

And it got better. While the old fellow and I had a hot brew we watched enthusiastic surface feeding fish (tailor or trevally) chopping into bait fish pushed in against the nearby oyster racks in the river. It was a great introduction to a very angler-friendly area.

Brunswick Heads is situated around 50km south of Tweed Heads. This neat coastal town is 34km south of Murwillumbah, and 19km north of Byron Bay and smack bang on the Pacific Highway. Many believe that this destination is just the right distance from the southern corner of Queensland to be easy to get to, yet far enough away to keep the mob at bay.

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation at Brunswick Heads is very generous. There are any number of holiday letting agents in the area, but for folk like you and I who enjoy camping there are no less than three Byron Shire camping grounds available.

On the western side of the Pacific Highway is the Ferry Reserve Camp Grounds (ph. (02) 66851872). Waterfront camping is a feature here, along with the use of the ramp (small boats only) located nearby. Cabins are available for hire and there are plenty of both powered and un-powered sites available. Upriver views are spectacular, with the rugged mountains making a spectacular backdrop.

Closer to the main town area is the Massey Greene Caravan Park (ph. (02) 66851329). This camping ground is also on the Brunswick River and features cabins plus powered and un-powered sites. It’s only a short stroll into town from this camping ground.

The Terrace Caravan Park (ph. (02) 6685 1233) is located on The Terrace which runs off Park Street on the eastern side of town. A large number of the shops and facilities of the town are virtually across the road, but this is still a very quiet little camping ground. It’s situated on the picturesque Simpson’s Creek, an arm of the Brunswick River. From here it’s a simple matter to walk down to where Simpson’s Creek joins the Brunswick River to give the blackfish a go in winter.

FISHING OPTIONS

This destination combines river, beach, and rock fishing in the most ideal situation. The Brunswick River, is not too large, nor is the rock fishing too difficult because it involves the river walls at the mouth of the Brunswick. And beach fishing is virtually unlimited, the only limiting factor being access to a given area.

I’ve mentioned that the river contains mud crabs but there are also plenty of big fat whiting, along with flathead, bream and the much sought-after mangrove jack. The sea walls regularly offer good tailor fishing (the north wall is usually the best), with jew showing up during flood times. An interesting feature of the northern wall is the fact that there are excellent rock outcrops handy to the wall as well. When a southerly is blowing this is the place to be for the tailor, which hang around in the white water created by wave action against the rocks.

Most river walls are great places to fish but this one is even better due to the close proximity of the rocks and their attraction as a fish habitat. Access to the north wall is via the Ocean Shores area, and the road to the wall is fairly easy to find.

The surf beach on the northern side of the river wall is an almost irresistible attraction for beach anglers, with good holes and gutters regularly forming just north of the rock outcrops. These gutters are like all beach features in that they tend to become deeper or flatten out depending upon weather and wave conditions. What might be a great hole full of fat summer whiting or greenback tailor one week can be just a flat section of beach washed by wave action the next week.

Beach worms abound here, and if there’s a better bait for whiting or dart than a fresh beachworm then I have yet to see it. Cars rarely travel this beach (permit holders only) so the worms aren’t unduly shy.

South of the Brunswick River, the beautiful expanse of beach stretching down to Byron Bay features many great gutters and holes for the beach angler to explore. They are seldom crowded, so it’s just a matter of finding the location that really takes your fancy and giving it a go.

FISHING THE BRUNSWICK RIVER

The very clean and unpolluted Brunswick River is a little gem. This small river holds far more fish than its modest size would indicate, and any angler with a sense of adventure and a hefty supply of lures can have a great time here searching for mangrove jacks in the snaggy areas that these fish love.

Flathead, bream and whiting are also there for anglers who are just after fish for dinner rather than the chance of a tug-of-war with a sportfish determined to keep the lure as a prize. There are plenty of holes and flats with features such as weed beds, drop-off areas and
oyster beds to attract these fish.

Just a word on the Brunswick River bar. While there is a boat ramp for larger boats on the western side of the town marina, the river mouth bar is a notorious bit of work and should be probably best left to local experts who are experienced at reading its treacherously shallow waters. Yes, there is great offshore fishing around the nearby reefs but the bar has claimed many craft. If you’re a newcomer to the area I recommend that you walk out onto the wall and have a very long look at the water depth and available channels before attempting a run offshore.

OVERVIEW

Brunswick Heads is a picture postcard location. The views upriver of the hinterland are stunning and the area has plenty to offer visitors seeking local handicrafts and the like when fishing is not on the agenda.

All three camping grounds have picnic tables, sheltered camp kitchens, BBQ facilities with tables and chairs nearby and plenty of places to just sit a while and rest. Shade trees are in abundance too.

Although Brunswick Heads is a small town, the visiting angler is well catered for with bait and tackle available at both the local bait and tackle store and the BP service station. All manner of food outlets are here and there’s a golf course as well.

But then, who’d want to play golf when such great fishing is available?

1) Young Daniel Gillooly looks pretty happy with this great bag of whiting from the Brunswick River.

2) Now that’s doing it tough! Fancy camping at Ferry Reserve and having to take in that view up river!

3) The Terrace Caravan Park is a shady and very restful place on the eastern edge of town.

4) The eddy created where Simpson’s Creek joins the Brunswick River is a favourite fishing spot.

5) Anyone for some beach fishing? The beach south of the Brunswick River is a fabulous area for beach anglers.

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