Carefree at Cania

Dave Magner  |  April 2010 » Feature Articles / Queensland /

If you are looking for a place where you can get away from it all without roughing it too much, then central Queensland’s Cania Dam might be just the place you’re after.

Located on the banks of Lake Cania, overlooking the dam wall, Cania Cabins offers basic, home style accommodation with a list of exclusions. It’s not often you pick a holiday destination because of all the things it hasn’t got, but that’s exactly what makes Cania Cabins such a unique and refreshing place to getaway to.

what’s missing?

Well, how about no mobile phone reception for a start? Doesn’t that sound great? There’s no television either. Yep, even better. Now for the biggie, the dam doesn’t even have any barra in it! Don’t stop reading! Hang on for a bit and I’ll try and explain why not having any barra swimming around in Lake Cania is actually a plus for this pleasant little waterway.

Let’s start by looking at the nearby lakes.

Callide is probably the closest dam and it’s only an hour or so up the road and it has got barra. The barra aren’t that big at present due to a fish kill there a couple of winters back but they are making a recovery and it won’t be long until monster fish are getting caught there again. Awoonga isn’t that far away either and we all know about the barra fishing there. Then there’s Monduran with more barra, and even poor old Wuruma down near Eildsvold has got the odd barra in it. As you can see, the place is surrounded by barra waters so if that’s what you’re after, pack your heavy outfits and head to one of those dams instead.

Now don’t get me wrong, I love my barra fishing but I also enjoy chasing other freshwater species for a change. The sad fact of the matter is that most of the time impoundment barra fishing is plain hard work! In my experience, those big silver fish seldom come easy and every hook-up is hard earned by investing bucketfuls of perspiration and concentration.

Actually, I reckon you only need two things to be a good impoundment barra fisher: The first is the patience of a saint and the second is a steely determination to succeed in the face of adversity. The reality is that a successful day chasing impoundment barra at places like Monduran or Awoonga can often be measured by a number of hook-ups you can safely count on the fingers of one hand. Contrast that with a trip to Cania where even the most casual of efforts go well rewarded. If you like uncomplicated fishing with plenty of action then Cania really is a light tackle playground.

That’s exactly the reason why the family and I head to Lake Cania. We primarily go there because the lake has a willing population of native fish species that usually bite their heads off. Officially the dam is stocked with Australian bass, saratoga, silver perch and snub-nosed garfish. There is also a naturally occurring population of eel-tailed catfish and spangled perch. It’s a delightful mix of species, all of which are more than comfortably handled on nothing more than 4-6lb braid and a light spinning outfit.

Likewise, I absolutely love the fact that we can’t get mobile phone reception while staying at the dam. It means there’s no way for work to find me and, better still, the kids can’t spend all day on the phone texting their mates. The same goes for the lack of a television. Neither of the cabins has a TV and that means evenings are spent playing cards or board games or simply talking amongst ourselves. It’s quality family time that’s getting harder and harder to find in this busy world.

The Fishing

I’d have to rate Cania’s bass as some of the most obliging fish I have ever come across. They take lures with gusto and if you have any sort of half decent bait you almost have to find a tree to hide behind while you put it on your hook!

As I mentioned above, you don’t have to get all high tech and spend a fortune on fancy lures to get in on the action. We catch a lot of fish on hardbodied minnows and the technique involves nothing more fancy than drifting the edge of the dam tossing our lures in tight to the bank. When we are feeling really slack, we even do a bit of trolling and it’s a rare day when you can’t troll up at least a couple of fish.

Of course, you don’t have to take the laid back approach if you don’t want to. We have had lots of fun fooling bass on soft plastics in Cania. The fish are absolute suckers for plastics and you can either fish the edges like you would with a hardbodied minnow, or work over the schools of suspended bass in the main basin. Most sorts of plastics work okay but Berkley Gulp Alive has been particularly effective for us in the past.

One of the things that I really look forward to when planning a trip to Cania is the possibility of tangling with a toga or two. Cania has a large and willing population of these fish and they fall for most of the same tactics used to fool bass. They also seem to have a particular fascination for spinnerbaits and using these whirligigs gives you a really good each way bet. Saratoga are also suckers for a well presented fly and if you want to tangle with one on the end of your fly rod then there are few better places you could head.

As for the rest of the fishy population, we tend to treat these more as by-catch than actual target species. The goldens are the Dawson River...
strain and seem to be most active in the shoulder seasons of spring and autumn while the water is not too hot.

The silvers are probably a year round proposition but I rarely ever chase them. It’s probably something I should do however as silver perch up to 4kg have been caught, and at that size they would be an impressive performer on light tackle. Bait seems to be the best medicine for silvers but they will take tiny poppers and small minnows or spinning lures if you want to give it a try.

Weather To Go

There is only one thing which does restrict my visits to Cania a little, it’s the weather. Cania is up pretty high in the hills by Queensland standards and it gets very cold in winter. I’ve been there on a winter morning and it was -4°C and the nearby paddocks are a total white out with frost. Incredibly, it can get even colder than that.

Summer is the direct opposite, it gets very hot. There is not a lot of shade on the dam so fishing during the middle of the day in summer is not recommended. This is the other big plus for staying in the cabins right on the lake. Being right there allows you to easily get off the water once or twice a day and avoid the worst of the heat.

We usually go out early in summer for some surface action, then come back and have lunch. Once the sting starts to go out of the sun, we head back out again and fish until dark. It’s a good way to make the most of the day without getting burned to a crisp.

Other Attractions

The other real beauty of heading to a place like Cania is that non-fishing partners or friends can still keep themselves entertained. If you enjoy bushwalking, there are some excellent tracks within the gorge that take you to places you wouldn’t expect to see in such seemingly dry country.

There is also an abundance of native birds and animals to be seen. Kangaroos and other native marsupials can frequently be seen grazing on the grassy verges while the nearby caravan park has evening bird feeding sessions and quite a few of the parrots and lorikeets are tame enough to be fed by hand.

Speaking of bird life, I never cease to be amazed at the wide variety of birds I see around the banks of the dam. Everything from tiny wrens and quail to large birds of prey are on show. The dam also has some of the biggest sulfur crested cockatoos you will find and their haunting calls add a real country atmosphere to your stay.

As you might have guessed, we love our trips to Lake Cania. Since we have discovered the joys of staying at Cania Cottages, the pull of the place has only got stronger. We just love the laid back and relaxed atmosphere and I’m sure that once you’ve given it a try, you’ll want to keep coming back to Cania too.

Facts

Lures for Lake Cania

While it is not essential to have a bulging tacklebox to fish Lake Cania, having a selection of the following lures would be a great starting point:

• No. 3 StumpJumpers;
• Bandit Wasps;
• Mann’s 5 and 10 plus divers;
• Viking Talismen;
• 60mm Boomerangs;
• McGrath Divers;
• Trollcraft Prism Murins and Fizz Tails;
• Spinnerbaits in large and compact sizes;
• Assorted soft plastics (Gulp, Beetlespins, Sliders, etc.);
• Assorted flies (small Dahlbergs, Bass Vampires, etc.);
Facilities and Accommodation Options

There is a well grassed and shady recreation area adjacent to the main boat ramp at Cania. Camping is not allowed at the dam (except during the local fishing competition) but there are public toilets, electric barbecues and shelter sheds on site.

There are a range of accommodation choices within a short drive of the dam. The closest option is Cania Cottages, which are located near the Brett’s Cania Boats, Bait and Tackle store that overlooks the dam. These holiday houses provide basic but comfortable accommodation at more than reasonable prices. Contact Brett Powter on 0427 606 422 or email – e-mail address hidden –

There are also two caravan/tourist parks nearby. The closest is Cania Gorge Tourist Park, which is around 4km from the dam wall. The other is Cania Gorge Tourist Retreat located just inside the entrance to the national park.

Getting There

Cania Dam is about 230km west of Bundaberg, and can be reached via Cania Road, which branches off the Burnett Highway 12km north of Monto. From Brisbane it is a distance of approximately 480km or about a six hour trip.