

NORTH HAVEN - JAMIE ROBLEY - As featured in Trailerboat Fisherman Magazine

The mid north coast of NSW has a number of excellent destinations to suit everyone from the serious offshore angler to the casual weekend family fisho. Pretty much everything from marlin and wahoo to bream and bass can be caught in the waters along this part of the coast, depending on the season.

Just to the south of Port Macquarie is the mid sized town of North Haven, which is one of those very versatile places which would appeal to most people who enjoy casting a line. North Haven is situated on the northern side of the Camden Haven estuary system and there are several other small towns also in the vicinity including Laurieton and Dunbogan. So although the area has that laid back north coast appeal, it's certainly not backwards as far as shopping and facilities go.

I had previously visited the area on numerous occasions, enjoying the high standard of estuary fishing there. During my latest visit however, I got to sample the offshore scene and didn't come away disappointed.

My mate Wayne towed his plate alloy boat up from the Central Coast and we camped in our tents for a few nights at the Brigadoon holiday park. Sadly, some heavy rain greeted us as we arrived, which didn't make for very suitable tent setting up weather. The rain soon passed though and we enjoyed a few days of fantastic weather and great fishing, with plenty of kingfish and teraglin to keep us busy.

OFFSHORE OPTIONS

It was interesting to check out the depths and reefs systems along this part of the coast. Compared with a number of other parts of the NSW coast that I've fished, I would have to say there is certainly no shortage of reef, humps and other features off North Haven. Both to the north and south in 15 to 30 metres you don't have to travel far at all to find somewhere to fish. If nothing happens at one spot it's always a short drive to the next, this is particularly so to the north, between Bonny Hills and Port Macquarie. Further out there are also some very good features in 50 to 70 metres. As far as distances go, you'll get to the 70 metre mark some 12 km out from the river mouth and 30 metres is only around 2 or 3 km out.

All the usual offshore species are caught in these waters, with kingfish, snapper, pearl perch, trag, flathead and jewfish being the main ones pursued by local anglers. One of the stand out fish here are teraglin or trag. The night we tried out wide the action was full on and although it took us a while to work out which baits the trag preferred and how best to hook them, it wasn't long before we were pulling them in one after another. The bite only tapered off as the moon rose above the horizon, but by that time we had caught enough anyway.



The standard of snapper fishing is also very high here, especially through winter and early spring when the reds tend to be in closer. Anglers who like to target snapper on soft plastics can do exceptionally well here. As a starting point, head north off Bonny Hills and Lake Cathie to fish the numerous humps and reef in 15 to 25 metres.

When the warmer currents move in from about December through to May there are plenty of kings, samson fish and bonito to play around with. Longtail tuna and cobia are other frequent visitors and out wider you can expect marlin and mahi mahi. If it's a really good season then wahoo and Spanish mackerel are also a chance.

THE ESTUARY

The estuary system is reasonably complex, but mainly comprises of the Camden Haven river, which runs through Watson Taylor Lake and then on towards the large rock walls at the mouth of the river. On the northern side of the river is the slightly smaller Queens Lake. There are also two small feeder creeks here, the Stewarts river which runs into the southern end of Watson Taylor Lake and Herons creek which empties into Queens Lake. On top of that, the interesting Gogleys lagoon is situated close to the Camden Haven river mouth, on the southern side and this meets the main river via a small opening along the large rockwall.

All manner of features and fish attracting structure can be found here, with a lot of sand flats and weedbeds which hold a lot of food items such as prawns, shrimp, crabs, pink nippers and worms. Pink nippers can be pumped on the numerous sandflats at low tide, which make great bream or whiting baits to be fished along the edges of these flats as the tide rises again.

Plenty of small mullet call this estuary home and they are easily trapped around the shallows or caught by using small dough baits suspended under a quill float. They make first class flathead baits or can be used as cut baits for bream.

Through the cooler months the lower reaches of the river become a magnet for those fishing for blackfish or luderick. In fact the Camden Haven river has a reputation for some of the best luderick fishing along the east coast and people travel the distance from Sydney to fish here in winter. Local green weed for blackfish bait is normally available here, but if you have a good supply closer to home, by all means bring some with you as it may turn out to be the better bait.

Lure casters who are more interested in chasing bream, flathead or whiting will have a ball here from about November through to the following May. It's a particularly good system for flathead, but bream and whiting numbers can be pretty good at times. There's also a chance of running into a jewfish while casting soft plastics for bream or flathead, mainly along the rockwalls and at the Dunbogan bridge. A few estuary cod also lurk along the rockwalls, so if you catch one be sure to return it unharmed, as these fish are totally protected in NSW waters.

ROCK AND BEACH

There are some great options for the rock hopper or beach angler around the area. Firstly, the end of the north wall is a top place to cast big lures or soak baits for jewfish after dark. Some rather large jewies have been caught here over the years, so be prepared and bring along a gaff, as some of these rocks are some distance off the water and if a swell is running it can be difficult, if not dangerous, to try and go down to pluck a jewie out of the water by hand.

Some good tailor and bream fishing can also be had towards the end of this wall. Other species which may be encountered out the end include salmon, tarwhine, sharks and large rays.

There are also excellent rock fishing opportunities nearby at Point Perpendicular, Bonny Hills and further south at Diamond Head. Once again, good jewfish are caught from these rocks. These days a lot more people are casting large soft plastics or hard body lures for the jew, rather than soaking baits. There's no doubt though, that good baits like fresh tailor or mullet heads, live baits or fresh calamari squid will entice jewfish if they're in the vicinity.

Tailor, bream, drummer and luderick are other popular rock fishing target species in the area. However, by drifting out a live slimey, yakka or garfish during late summer or autumn there's a good chance of hooking a decent kingfish, cobia or Longtail tuna. Other fish that are possible from the local headlands are groper, silver drummer, salmon and a variety of sharks and rays.

Beach fishing rewards may come in the form of jewfish, bream, tarwhine, tailor, salmon and whiting, with flathead and dart also on the cards. Grants beach, right in front of North Haven is a convenient starting point, but if sea conditions or beach formations aren't suitable there, head south to Dunbogan beach or further south again to Diamond Head. Like much of the NSW coastline, the months from about December through to May or June are generally best for beach fishing.

LAUNCHING FACILITIES

There are several ramps on the Camden Haven estuary. The most popular for offshore anglers is near the main drag at North Haven, just down the road from the bowling club. Small to mid sized vessels will have no problems, but those launching larger boats should be aware of the shallow flats adjacent to these ramps. So if you're a first time visitor, take a look at the ramps and tide charts prior to launching. The river bar is pretty good compared with some others along the mid north coast. It's quite protected in a southerly, but can get a bump on it when north easterlies combine with a run out tide.

Another launching option is at the Crowdy Head boat harbour, about 30 minutes drive south. The ramps here are first class and very protected, so big boats won't have any problems at all. Crowdy, Old Bar, Bonny Hills and Lake Cathie are all great places to take the family on half day trips just to break things up a little, with different shops, beaches and so on.



ACCOMMODATION

All manner of accommodation is available around the North Haven and Camden Haven area. From camping and caravan parks, to motels and B&B operations. During my latest visit I stayed at the Brigadoon Holiday Park, which I ideally suited to those with boats and even has its own launching ramp. All in all, North Haven is one of the most versatile and user friendly fishing towns along the north coast, so I would highly recommend a visit.