



*Fishing And Exploring The*

# **HINCHINBROOK WILDERNESS**

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## Fishing The Hinchinbrook Wilderness . .

From almost every corner of the continent, Hinchinbrook Island and its associated townships of Cardwell and Lucinda, are thousands of kilometres from mainstream Australian boating families. It's a daunting task for a family to travel these distances and they

**O**ff the wet tropical coast between Ingham and Tully in Far North Queensland, approximately 1,500 kilometres from Brisbane, lie fifteen Continental islands, eleven of which are National Parks.

They range in size from the 60 kilometre long, 39,000 hectare Hinchinbrook Island, to tiny Tween Island. The islands present a landscaped spectacle of sandy beaches, precipitous headlands, waterfalls, rugged mountains, mangrove swamps, coral reefs, sheltered bays and dense rainforests.

The waters extend into the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, part of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area.

Hinchinbrook is Australia's largest island National Park. It is separated from the mainland by the relatively narrow Hinchinbrook Passage. Thousand of acres of mangroves

certainly require a special incentive to do so. The incentive here is the opportunity of visiting what is definitely the best small boat fishing, boating and camping area the writer has ever seen. And on of the most beautiful places in Australia.



fringe the shores of this deep channel which is scoured from sand and mud by strong tidal currents.

Rising 1142 metres from the centre of the island is Mount Bowen, the largest in the chain of rugged mountains on the island.

These mountains form the backbone of the island's southern half. To the north west, a range of lesser peaks of older volcanic rocks occur, creating an undulating skyline descending to the sandy beach of Hecate Point, four kilometres across the channel from Cardwell. The

spectacular north face of Mount Bowen drops 1121 metres in cliffs and forested rocky slopes almost to sea level.

Coming from the southern cities, the Hinchinbrook region represents a change of staggering proportions. For fishermen and boatowners, it is an area of indescribable beauty, with hundreds of miles of safe waterways literally teeming with

fish spawned in the vast mangrove forests surrounding the island and passage.

Here, there is no pollution. No traffic. No hustle and bustle of city life. Just the sounds of silence emanating from one of the most beautiful national parks in the world.

Silence ? Yes, something we city folk find takes some getting used to. There's a wonderful description of this (silence) in the excellent Queensland Parks and Wildlife brochure, Hinchinbrook to Dunk Island. The QPWS wrote

*"In the mangrove forest, as the flooding tide licks at the lower branches, an eerie silence descends drowning the sounds of urgent underwater activity as predatory fish invade muddy flats in search of crabs and molluscs. At low tide, a cacophony of slurps, pops and clicks emanates from the glistening blue-grey mud as snapping shrimps, crabs and mud skippers warn intruders or signal amorous intentions."*

*"Thirty one species of mangroves convert sunlight, water and mud into food in the form of millions of leaves. Fallen leaves are eaten directly or after decomposition, by many of the teaming inhabitants - the first step in a perpetual cycling of nutrients into the marine ecosystem."*

**Where To Start:** There are two definite 'ends' to Hinchinbrook Island. This 68 kilometre island runs approximately north-south with anything ranging from a few hundred metres of water to several miles distance between the island and the mainland. This is known as the Hinchinbrook Passage, and is a long, calm-water passage running from the town of Cardwell (in the north), to Lucinda in the south.

Cardwell and Lucinda are both tiny country coastal communities eking out an existence largely based on tourism, although in Cardwell's case, the trucking industry which rumbles through the town every day, certainly impacts on the local economy.



Both towns are surrounded by sugar cane farms, with Lucinda in particular, at the head of a valley of farms that run all the way back to the major regional community township known as Ingham.

Ingham is a much larger town, although in the main, the residents of the three townships (ie, Lucinda, Cardwell and Ingham) defer back to Townsville 150 km away to the south as the major centre for things such as hospitals, major purchases of goods and equipment, etc.

Townsville is a very substantial city in its own right, and is deservedly regarded as the industrial capital of the north. Cairns is seen as the tourism capital of the north.

Nevertheless, Cairns is also an important part of the Hinchinbrook infrastructure, but as it is a further 185 km to the north (through the townships of Tully, Innisfail and several other smaller communities), most of the Hinchinbrook people seem to defer to Townsville, first.

Coming from the south then, readers need to make a conscious decision to either stop off early at Lucinda and save

**Left:** "Take Two" anchored in Guyundah Creek on the western side of Hinchinbrook Island - that's towering 1121 m high Mt Bowen in the background. **Above:** The Cardwell jetty. **Below:** Well known local sportsfishing enthusiast and fishing columnist, Heather Hamilton with a fine 85 cm barramundi caught in Mendel Creek.



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