

# Stanage Bay, Qld



Just when you thought the Gulf or Hinchinbrook was the best option, Tony Harold has submitted this excellent report - and it's sure going to change a lot of thinking !

**M**y little patch of paradise is Stanage Bay, approximately 75 nautical mile south of Mackay. It is the main land access point to an excellent fishery. Stanage has several names when you look for it on a map or in a phone book. Stanage Bay is one name, another is Thirsty Sound and the other is Plum Tree - the settlement on the most northern point of the mainland.

The area is set in the Northumberland Isles, a large group of "mainland" islands including several smaller groups of islands namely the Cannibal Group to the south east, Duke Isles and Percy Isles to the north east, the Bedwell Group to the north, as well as Quall and Long

Island to the west.

Stanage is also surrounded by one of the largest areas of mangrove estuary systems on the east coast.

#### Getting There

To get to Stanage you will need to turn off the Bruce Highway 75 kilometres north of Rockhampton, or about 40 kilometres south of Marlborough. About a kilometre south of the turn off on the highway, is a small service station, Kunwarar Independent. Once you turn off, there is 105 kilometres of dirt road with livestock along most of it. The first 65 kilometres are not too bad, but the last 40 kilometres need to be taken with care.

It is nothing like the corrugations going to the Cape, but there still can be a lot of

damage done to both car and trailer if both are not in good condition. I have smashed a rear window on my Landcruiser, and broken a side support holding the boat on the trailer in seven years. My mate wasn't so lucky - he smashed the rear window on the canopy of his ute, and both mudguards fell off his trailer on his first and last trip.

I believe it is the dirt road which has kept the fishing in such good shape, since it is too far for most trailer boats to travel by water, and a lot of fisho's do not want to tow their boats in on the dirt.

I am not too concerned when I tow my boat in, taken with a bit of care and some thorough maintenance each time, it is a worthwhile drive in. I have an old

aluminium 5.8 metre Stingray half cab with a 1995 140 hp Yamaha on a solid trailer. The outfit is in excellent condition with all the right fittings but she is certainly no oil painting when compared to the new generation boats, but I have as much fun with less worry and lot less invested.

#### What You'll Find

Once in at Stanage, there are 2 small settlements on the ocean front that you will drive through. Continue along and you will come to the end of the road which is the settlement of Plum Tree.

Here there is a general store which is also the local pub, service station, take away food, ice, and bait shop. All the prices are quite reasonable so it is not worth carrying in your fuel and ice.



You've got to study these pretty carefully to get your head around the different scales - this area being one of those on the edge of several charts. The distances in this part of the world are big - Stanage to Middle Percy is approx 33-35 nm.

The shop is open from 7 to 7, seven days a week and may be open later depending on how busy the bar is. The Plum Tree general store is only a couple of hundred metres away from the ramp. There is a boat storage yard with bait and ice, some hardware and camping lines near the General store, called Stanage Bay Marine Centre and Accommodation.

If you fall in love with the place, you can leave your boat there for a small weekly fee, just be aware that fresh water is an issue.

There is no town water (only a town dam) so water has to be used sparingly. So cleaning out the boat and motor can be a bit more difficult than at home. Ice can also be bought at the Barra Lodge which is at the first settlement before Plum Tree. Charter trips and accommodation can also be arranged at the Barra Lodge.

The boat ramp is two lane concrete on a fairly steep angle down to just below half tide, then it is a mix of sand, mud and shale,

so it is basically a half tide and better ramp unless you have access to a tractor.

There is ample parking, but just be aware on king tides the lower section can be in a tidal zone. Beside the boat ramp is the Thirsty Sound Volunteer Coast Guard base with its new 28 foot Cat on a trailer with a large tractor ready for work. The base is manned on most school holidays and public holidays. They are also on the air on VHF Channel 79, 80,16 on most days from their