

Corner Inlet, Vic

by Trevor Stow, special pics by Bruce Postle

Corner Inlet is a big, open estuary that abuts Wilson's Promontory in southern Victoria. Wilson's Promontory is the southern most landmass on the Australian Mainland.

For Melbourne anglers it is just a matter of taking the Mulgrave Freeway out of the city and picking up the South Gippsland Highway.

History More than 12,000 years ago

the sea level was six metres higher than at present. The "Prom" was a group of islands with only mountain tips showing above water level. When the sea dropped to form the land bridge to Tasmania, a series of sand dunes formed over a basalt base creating the Yanakie Peninsula. This constructed a link between the previous islands and the mainland, so that when the sea level rose again, it formed the present day

Wilson's Promontory.

White man discovered this area in about 1804 when sealers on one ship alone obtained over 600,000 sealskins. This is more than the total number of seals present today in the whole of the southern Australian waters. Once this industry collapsed, early pioneers turned their attention to mutton birds (for oil) timber, and finally farming which is still practiced around Corner Inlet today.

Estuary Corner Inlet is a large body of shallow water. It has extensive flats and numerous channels. Most of the fishing is done in the channels and spinning for flathead and other species on the flats. Very few anglers avail themselves of this fishing, preferring the deeper water.

This inlet provides the angler with a wide variety of fish including flathead, King George whiting, gummy sharks, seven gill sharks, snapper, trevally, flounder, mullet and salmon. A good run of large snapper enters this inlet around October each year and remains in residence for several months.

Species vary with the seasons with

the warmer months seeing most fish in the inlet and arguably the best fishing, however, even in the cooler months flathead, trevally and sharks are still present in good numbers.

During a recent trip to this area during late autumn, my mate Bob and I decided to take a charter for the day. We chose to use Shane Smart who operates a very nice 28 foot SharkCat called *Kato*. Scott informed us that a few KG whiting were still about, fishing for trevally had been good recently and he was hopeful that we would pick up some pinkies (snapper). This is the advantage of hiring a charter when in an unfamiliar area. They know their water and can put you onto fish

straight away. When time is a consideration this is a huge advantage.

The weather leading up to our trip had been brilliant in Gippsland. Typical autumn weather with calm sunny days and a temperature in the low 20's. Rain had been unheard of recently and the farmers were all short of water. Needless to say the day we arrived, rain pelted down all day and a strong north westerly wind sprung up. Top temperature for the day was only 14 degrees.

This weather did not stop our plans. The SharkCat, with its twin 200 hp Yamahas was quite capable of handling this sort of weather. We headed off in an easterly direction



towards the tip of Wilson's Promontory. Shane was looking for a drop off, not far from shore where there was good reef and little weed to worry about. We anchored in about 24 metres of water.

Shane felt that we had a good chance to catch trevally or pinkies in this area so we brought out the light gear. Bream rods, egg beater reels and 6 kg mono. The current is quite strong in Corner Inlet and as a result we were forced to use quite heavy 4 oz running sinkers. A slab of my favourite bait, WA pilchards was opened and we baited up. For the first half an hour the action was a little slow but then a school of trevally moved in and we were kept busy either fighting fish or baiting up for the next couple of hours.

The trevally were not big, around 30+ cm, but they were great fun on the light gear. The occasional very small pinkie also showed up, as did a few rubbish fish such as wrasse. After lunch we moved into one of the channels in the area to target KG whiting. As the current was reduced and the water depth was only about 8 metres we were able to use considerably smaller sinkers. Pipsis were the preferred bait.

We did not catch any whiting but picked up quite a lot of small flathead, which we returned to their mums. We had not struck the fishing

at anywhere near its best but we had a good look around this pretty area and got a huge amount of valuable information from our charter boat operator.

Offshore Access to Bass Strait is simple from Corner Inlet. Singapore Deep Channel provides anglers with a good safe passage into the sea from the inlet. Once outside, the Seal Islands and Rabbit Island are about 30 kms from the Port Welshpool boat ramp and therefore within the reach of most modern offshore trailerboats. The Seal group of islands has huge schools of kingfish at times and some of them are quite large.

Victoria is not known for its range of sportfish. The odd yellowfin tuna is hooked and even the occasional marlin or two, but what Victorians lack in yellowfin and marlin numbers they make up for in other species, particularly shark. Good numbers of thresher, mako, seven gill and gummy sharks are all present.

Thresher sharks in particular are a great alternative game species. They are remarkable looking and distinctive fish with a tail extending almost the same length as the body of the shark. This majestic creature could well be Victoria's premier sporting fish. It is as fast as any fish you are ever likely to hook and their aerial displays include tail walking,

somersaults and leaps into the air of up to 10 feet. Threshers are generally bottom to mid water feeders and are happy to take a wide variety of baits including barracouta, slimy mackerel and most other oily fleshed fish.

Also in this area southern bluefin tuna are successfully targeted by the game fishing anglers. Large snapper, large flathead and KG whiting, sweep, snook and silver trevally are also present in good numbers at various times of the year.

Although the entrance to Bass Strait is not difficult and good fishing is within reach, care needs to be exercised in this area. Wilson's Promontory is susceptible to wind and tide. Mornings can be fine, sunny and settled but by afternoon, a strong wind can suddenly spring up and make conditions dangerous for the unsuspecting angler. Fuel can be a consideration when you have to head home into a rough sea. It pays to seek local advice and watch the weather reports.

Ramps There are three main alternatives for those wishing to fish Corner Inlet. First there is a concrete boat ramp situated next to the Yanakie Caravan Park at Yanakie. Although capable of accepting most trailerboats at high tide, it is almost useless at low tide. As a result fishing trips have to be planned around the



Kato's skipper, Shane Smart, hooking a trevally - with Singapore Point (Wilson's Promontory) in the background.

tides. There is no jetty here and boats have to be boarded some distance from the shore.

The second alternative and probably the best is to launch at Port Welshpool. Port Welshpool is where the trans Tasman ferry Seacat used to dock until it ceased operations a couple of years ago. As a result the facilities here are brilliant. This ramp can handle boats of virtually any size and for that matter in virtually any weather.

There are two jetties here. One, the Port Authority Jetty is approximately 1 km long. The other is also a significant structure that is used by the commercial fishing fleet and also pleasure boats. Both these jetties offer land based anglers a realistic chance to catch fish. Bream, mullet, silver trevally, garfish and flathead are regularly taken.

The Lewis Channel at Port Welshpool provides good deep water and a comparatively short run out to Singapore Channel and offshore from there.

The third alternative is to launch at the Toora boat ramp. This is a good ramp with a reasonable depth of water so launching is possible at all times. However, the Toora Channel is



narrow and can be difficult to follow for those not familiar with the area. Also Toora is only a few kms from Port Welshpool so why not use these superior facilities? If you are fishing from a small tinnie then all of the above is fairly academic; you can launch anywhere.

Other Attractions This is an excellent area for the family. Not only is the fishing good but there are lots of other things to do and see in the immediate area. Port Welshpool offers shallow water and a sand beach that is ideal for young children. Nearby Shallow Inlet is renowned for sail boarding and it is one of the few places in Victoria where vehicles are allowed on the beach.

Waratah is an exclusive holiday township with a beautiful and safe

PROM Coastal Charters is an excellent way of getting to know these intricate, shoally waters, and skipper Shane Smart knows them well. He's based at Yanakie Caravan Park, and can be reached on 0429 935 583

surf beach, good playground and picnic shelters.

There are two national parks in the area. The magnificent Wilson's Promontory is the best known and perhaps one of the most spectacular national parks in Australia. The other nearby national park is Tarra-Bulga situated in the heart of the Strzelecki Ranges and featuring towering eucalypts, cool tree ferns and a famous suspension bridge. Both these parks are renowned for their extensive walking tracks.

In fact, there is so much to do and see in this area it almost warrants an article of its own.

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