



Patrea's prized capture, a beautifully conditioned Murray Cod - a fish of near legendary status, but one that is increasingly hard to capture, and caught by relatively few anglers.

Patrea's Cod

Story & Pics By John Barker

The difference between a good weekend fishing trip, a great weekend trip and one that you'll remember for ever more, often comes down to the last minutes, on the last day - and just one special fish. That's what happened to John Barker and his family, when a weekend on Coolmunda Dam turned into one of 'those' memorable trips.

Arrival My daughter, Patrea and her boyfriend, Daren, travelled from the Gold Coast to Coolmunda Dam while I travelled from my hometown in Boggabilla. They had the tent pitched right on the water's edge by the time I had arrived, so Daren and I launched my 3.85 Quintrex Explorer, which is powered by an Evinrude 15hp outboard as well as a 32lb thrust electric motor. It has a Hummingbird portable sounder and is, in my opinion, the ideal small craft for freshwater fishing.

Fitted with swivel seats and a carpeted floor, it is also the most comfortable small craft I have ever owned. The stability of pointy-nosed punts instills confidence when landing a fish; two people can stand on one side with safety.

While Daren and I were busy launching the Explorer, Patrea had prepared barbecue steaks with a light salad. This was consumed sitting in out comfortable camp chairs and washed



down with a cold beer.

The Dam Coolmunda Dam has a surface area of 1742ha and is only 19m in the deepest part. Situated 270km west of Brisbane on the Cunningham Highway, the dam is 10km east of the pleasant township of Inglewood, which has all forms of accommodation plus a hospital, should you require medical attention.

A service station is located 399m on the western side of the turn-

off and a caravan park is on the right as you enter Lake Coolmunda. As you proceed, you will pass two well-kept picnic parks with toilet facilities.

The first park has an excellent boat ramp and the second is tucked in behind the wall and has the best shady trees you could ask for.

After crossing the causeway, (MacIntyre Brook) a turn to your left takes you into the camping ground, which has no amenities - only

garbage bins.

When fishing Lake Coolmunda, bait is the way to go in the cooler months - shrimp, yabbies and worms. In the warmer months lures and bait work well.

Strategy We decided to try the northern side of the dam wall where, on previous visits, we have had success.

After spending a couple of hours trolling, changing lures frequently, the only fish we caught was not much



Top: Joe's Explorer is nicely set-up for lure fishing the dams - note the two aft facing forward seats
Above: Ern Oranawicz with a lure caught golden, plus (right) another by Patrea - and below, this little fella was nothing if not game, and released.



Lessons What I like about this style of fishing is that the camp can be set-up right on the water's edge. The boat can be pulled up in front of the camp with all the gear left in it, ready for the next day's fishing. Of course, this depends on the size and draft of the particular boat in question; it has to be light enough to be pulled out to deeper water if water is being released from the dam. Should the reverse apply, an anchor or tying up to a handy tree prevents your pride and joy from floating off. This occurred to a

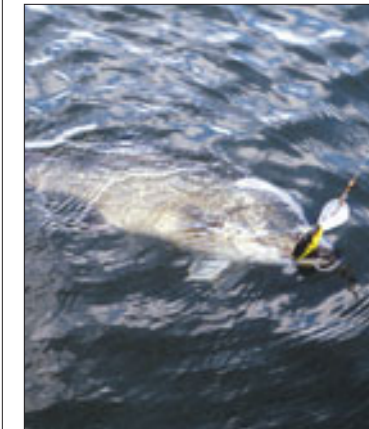
bigger than the lure it attacked. Changing tactics, we headed for the trees on the southern side of the dam. Trolling hard up against the trees has always been successful but after changing lures and trying different depths, we could only come up with one small golden, which was quickly released. As the afternoon wore on, the fishing didn't get any better. With the setting sun we headed back to camp feeling a little dejected, but buoyed by the eternal optimism that runs in every fisherman.

couple of friends and I at Pindari Dam. We awakened to a pleasant sunrise to find our 4.3 runabout had disappeared. One of our number sighted it floating contentedly about 700m offshore, in perfect conditions. A short discussion was held, with one bloke offering to swim out to retrieve it. I pointed out this idea was fraught with danger, not only of drowning, but owing to his portly appearance he ran the grave risk of being harpooned! The only option we had was to approach our fishermen neighbours and ask for their assistance, which was generously given amid roars of laughter, much to our embarrassment. Our wayward boat was soon returned. Water was running over the spillway at the time and had the conditions been windy, I hate to think what the end result would have been. Moral of the story? *It pays to secure your boat overnight!* Patrea and Daren had put a big tarp over their cabin tent, giving me plenty of room to unroll my swag under shelter should the weather change. I always keep my swag in the back of the Ute to prevent unwanted guests; ants are the most common but not the worst offenders. Remember, you are camping on the water's edge and snakes aren't uncommon in this environment, so zip up your tent, or roll up your swag and place it in a safe place while you're out on the water during the day. After a well-cooked roast dinner and a yarn around the campfire, we all retired for a good night's rest only to be disturbed by the

night calls of the birds and scurrying possums, which I find comforting. **Day Two** After a hearty breakfast under the first rays of dawn, the Explorer took us over to the trees across a calm dam. Down went the lures with the enthusiasm only a new day can generate. I used the electric motor in the calm conditions and Daren caught a golden which was just over the legal limit, and released it. We were having a repeat performance of the previous afternoon, and as the morning wore on, I started to feel drowsy, so we returned to the camp. I decided to have a nap while Patrea and Daren explored other areas of the dam. They returned fishless, so after having a leisurely lunch and discussions about our chances, we decided to leave our afternoon outing until 3pm. I turned over the helm to Daren who, I might add, is a highly experienced boatie, and sat up the front with Patrea. It was back to the trees, as this was the only area that had shown any potential. Patrea immediately verified our judgement by catching a golden just under 2kg. Daren was quick to reply with a golden just over the legal limit and I joined the party, my fish being the same size as Daren's. All the fish were released after a quick photo session. The wind had come up, making it impossible to use the electric motor, so Daren kicked over the outboard, pulled in his lure and concentrated on looking after the boat. To our surprise, Patrea and I got a double hook-up, which is rare in freshwater fishing. Both fish were just

over the legal limit. We were using totally different lures: Patrea's was black with a large bib and mine was an iridescent, pinkish lure with a much smaller bib. I suppose the old saying is right: "If they're hungry they will eat it." Still, it comes down to just three things – action, depth and colour – and in certain conditions it can be one of the three or all three at once. I own a deep troller, but haven't fixed the bracket to the Explorer. The alternative is to put a big lump of lead on your line, with a 1m trace so as not to choke off the lure's action. The disadvantage is you lose the rod tip sensitivity and have to repeatedly check for weed, small sticks and on the rare occasion, small fish. The fish went off the bite but Patrea was not deterred. In an effort to entice a reaction, Patrea changed lures, fished deep, fished shallow, but to no avail. I suggested we try between the trees on the southern side, in open water. Daren guided the boat to the area I indicated. Patrea changed her lure to what she called her favourite; the black one with the large bib – you know, the type they sell out of a box in tackle stores for \$5 – announcing she was going to catch something decent. Dark lures down deep have served me well so I thought it was a wise choice. I offered to take the helm as the wind had dropped, but Daren insisted it was no trouble. To amuse myself, I read the sounder, which told me we had 14' of water under us. It was 5.30pm and we were running out of time when I was startled by a

yell from Patrea. I looked up to see her rod in a nice fighting curve with the tip underwater. Thinking she may have caught one of the big goldens the Coolmunda is famous for, I turned to pick up the landing net when Daren said it wasn't a big golden. There is only one fish that



rolls like that – a Murray cod. Patrea skillfully steered the fish toward the boat and with a lazy flick of his tail, the cod took a cruise under the boat. Patrea eased it back to the surface as I leaned over with the landing net and let the fish swim into it. As I laid the cod at Patrea's feet she could not believe the size. At 12.5lb it wasn't a big cod but it was the biggest cod Patrea had caught so far, and I'm sure it won't be her last.

After a photographic session and with dusk approaching, we headed back to camp armed with higher spirits than the previous afternoon. We gutted the fish and placed it on ice. I must admit that I honestly don't know who was prouder of Patrea, Daren or I. It only takes one good fish to make an enjoyable fishing trip and we certainly had that, thanks to Patrea.