

The Ultimate Wet Trip: Stanage Bay

Bad weather - even Cyclone Larry - ultimately couldn't hold back the good ship "Pedro" and its crew from making the much anticipated run from Sarina (south of Mackay) down to Stanage Bay, a couple of hundred kays south, and in the centre of what may have described as the last real frontier of fishing in central Queensland.



Neil's mate John practising to be a mud lark in the pursuit of live bait - (Ah, such dedication!)

For some time now, after coming back from our trip to the Gulf of Carpentaria and up the eastern side of Cape York Peninsular, my friend John and I have been considering our next adventure in Pedro, my 5.3 metre Stacer half cab, and one of the destinations we thought about was Stanage Bay.

Having read a number of articles in F&B written by Bob Ford when he was travelling through the area in his trimaran, where he described the fishing as equal to anything on the east coast, plus another feature article in F&B's Sea library (*Tony Harold / Stanage Bay / F&B #77*) we had a yarn with a couple of the local pro fishermen who had been there, and received good reports.

Eventually it was decided that we would make the trip as soon as the cyclone season had passed, and the weather had cooled off a bit. We planned to leave Sarina Beach around 16-2-06 and travel to Stanage Bay, which is only about three hundred kilometre's south of my home, and check out the town and boat ramp on the first day. The area is very isolated, being halfway between Mackay and Rockhampton and involves a 100 kilometres of dirt road travelling behind the Shoalwater Bay army training area, and across to the coast from the Bruce Highway.

As it is a dirt road of variable



The author, Neil Dunstan, stands beside Pedro and the faithful Commodore ("Who needs a 4WD!") and his broken 8kg rod.

quality, we were hoping this would not be a problem. Having just completed a refurbishment of the trailer under Pedro (which is eighteen years old) but not having done many road miles with it since, I was not 100% confident, so we wanted an early start, just in case we had any problems with the trailer.

Weather Watch

The way we picked the dates for the trip was totally related to the tides, as this area has the largest tides on the east coast of Australia. So we selected the time of the smaller tides, as some of the larger tides can easily be as high as eight metres with runout tides as low as minus a metre. These tides, combined with a bit of a sea can be

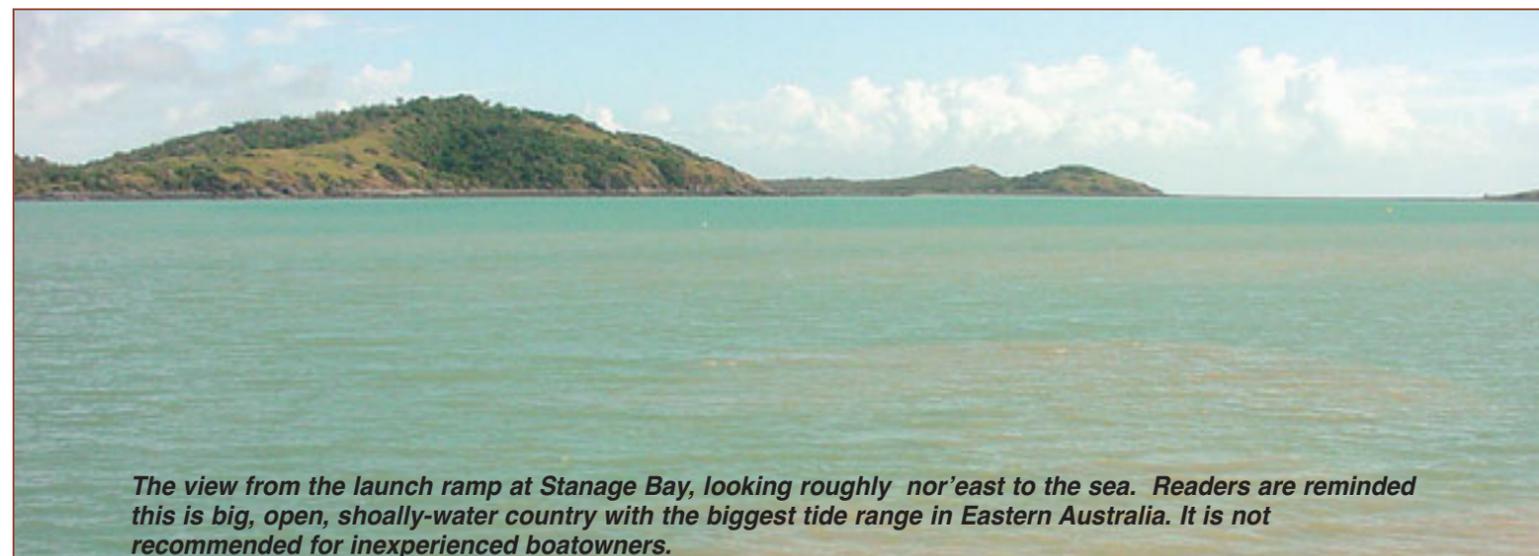
very dangerous, so small tides are the go.

One interesting phenomenon associated with these tidal conditions is the tidal bore which is quite scary if one is not expecting it. This occurs where the tide runs out in a creek till low water, and when the tide starts to return, the water is still running out. At this point, the incoming tide just bores over the top of the runout creating a standing wave which races up the creek, and is sometimes a metre high! Quite a spectacle, especially as it makes quite a roar coming towards you, and is pretty scary if you don't know what is happening.

By the time 16-02-06 came around, the weather was terrible, with thirty



Above: This is what you need up here - even the big 4WD F-250's were struggling a bit at mid to low tide. However, Neil worked the 2WD Commodore quite easily at high tide. Below: "Welcome to Stanage Bay" signs 100 km back on the Bruce Highway. The road in to Stanage can be a challenge.



The view from the launch ramp at Stanage Bay, looking roughly nor-east to the sea. Readers are reminded this is big, open, shoally-water country with the biggest tide range in Eastern Australia. It is not recommended for inexperienced boatowners.