

Wingan Inlet & River, Vic

with Trevor Stow



This little gem of an inlet is situated in Far East Gippsland, south of Mallacoota and north of Marlo. It is a small, picturesque waterway that offers some very good estuary fishing. Trevor Stow report & photographs.

The Fishing

There are all the usual saltwater estuary species of fish in Wingan; including tailor, garfish, leatherjackets, mullet, estuary perch, bass, silver bream and flathead but by far the most sought after species in this waterway is the black bream. Anglers travel miles to catch this great sporting fish.

There is no professional fishing in this system and the bream have bred and prospered. The average bream is about 35 to 38 cm in length, 700-900 gms if you like. A good bream is 38 to 42 cm and weighs 900-1200 gms. In our experience there are not many bream over this figure. Most anglers are pretty happy to catch bream of around 800 gms- that's just under 2 pounds in fisherman's language.

In the top end of the lake and up the river estuary perch are to be found. These fish lie close to the many snags in the river and in the ribbon reed in the lake. The perch are terrific sporting fish and very good to eat.

Whilst estuary perch can be caught on bait, they are a great species to pursue using lures, soft plastics or flies. Motoring up the river using an electric motor and casting into the snags can be very rewarding.

The flathead fishing can vary considerably from year to year. Over the past 2 years the flathead fishing has been very good and there is presently a good population of flatties present in the lake. The best flathead fishing is usually up the river more so than in the lake.

Tailor are a common species in the lake and can

be seen chomping through the bait schools at all times of the day. They can readily be caught on a lure such as a silver Wonder Wobbler cast into the bait fish school or by a fly such as a Clouser.

As this waterway is almost totally surrounded by native forest and vegetation, there is very little scope for shore fishing, except a small area at the jetty, so a boat is essential.

Bait

Baits that work in other estuaries in East Gippsland also work well here. The number 1 bait in Wingan is prawn. Prawn can be collected locally in the summer months but it is advisable to grab a few packets in one of the bait shops on the way to the inlet. Frozen prawn works quite well but local prawn



(ie East Gippsland prawn) seems to work better than interstate prawn. It is a good idea to peel the heads off the prawns after you buy them as they will keep longer.

Sandworm catches its share of fish although it tends to attract smaller fish. Sandworm is not as easy to come by as it once was. It can be purchased at Johnsonville Store, Nicholson Store or one of the bait and tackle shops in Lakes Entrance. A major disadvantage of sandworm is that it will not last more than a day or two.

Other popular baits include live mullet, in fact any small live fish, shrimp, crab and fresh fish flesh such as tuna or tailor. Shrimp are readily available in the week beds.

Most of the successful fishermen in this shallow inlet carry 2 long poles in

their boat. These are used to anchor the boat at both ends and therefore provide a steady fishing platform that allows the angler to see any movement in their rod or line. A boat swinging free on an anchor makes detecting a bite quite difficult. Also the bottom of Wingan is quite weedy and a swinging boat will drag the bait back into the weed where the fish are less likely to pick it up.

Boating

This is a small waterway with no boat ramps. Near the camping area there is a small jetty and small sandy beach and this is the only area that boats can be launched as there is no other road access and the lake is almost entirely surrounded by native vegetation. This launching area is quite shallow and boats are

normally slid off the trailers into just a few centimetres of water. This is not normally a problem as Parks require that boats are powered by no more than 20 hp motors so therefore this lake is virtually restricted to small tinnies.

Boating within the lake and river is fairly straightforward although there are a few obstacles to watch out for. At low tide the channel to the entrance can be quite shallow even for a small tinny. Also the tide can be very strong in the vicinity of the entrance so boaters should beware. On a recent trip one of our group had to jettison his crew member as his 15 hp motor was not strong enough to propel the boat against the outgoing tide with 2 on board. Fortunately the crew member was able to walk along the shore and

get back in the boat further up the lake.

This is a shallow waterway and Polaroid glasses are a must so that the skipper can pick out the deep water and channels. In the lake itself there are many shallow areas that will cause even a small tinny to run aground.

Up the river it is mostly clear sailing except about 2 km upstream from the lake where there is a submerged rock that needs to be avoided and also the last few hundred metres before the falls where there are many large rocks just under the water. A forward scout up the pointy end of the boat, again wearing Polaroid glasses, is a great asset.

Getting There

To reach Wingan, take the Princess Highway east past Cann River and look for the



Look, it's a pretty tough, fast-paced way of life down there at Wingan, so we were kind of glad when Trevor Stow volunteered to file this report for F&B readers. Just hope he didn't over cook the sausages . . .

smaller cleared areas set aside for camping. These smaller areas are not grassed and most only accommodate 1 or 2 tents.

Fresh stream water has cleverly been collected and channeled into a pipe in the camping area, which spills it into a hollowed out log and eventually the unused water trickles back into the inlet. This water has quite a tannin color. It is suitable for drinking however we make it a habit of taking our own drinking water and use this water for washing the dishes etc.

Camp sites can be booked with the Conservation & Environment office at Cann River or you can take your chances on getting a site on arrival and pay at the honesty box at the camp park. Parks officers regularly patrol the area.

A good quality bush pit toilet has been constructed in a central location to the camp sites. Small hot plate BBQ's are scattered around for use by the campers. Parks Victoria request that all fires be restricted to these BBQ structures and that only gas cooking be done elsewhere. This is a high risk fire area and care needs to be taken to ensure everybody's safety.

This is a wonderful little estuary system in absolutely pristine condition. With anglers limiting their catch it should continue to provide great fishing for everyone for many years to come.

Oh! Did I mention the oysters and abalone readily available around . . .

F&B



West Wingan Road turnoff. This is a gravel road of approximately 34 kms. The road can be closed seasonally during wet weather and can become quite slippery following rain but generally the surface is in fairly good condition although pot holes are always present to some extent.

The road is normally quite Ok for the family sedan although a 4WD does make life a little easier. Caravans are advised not to use this road.

It is approximately one hour's drive from the Princess Highway into the lake.

A few kilometres further east is another road with Wingan marked on the sign.



This is a trap for new players as it does not go to the lake and is usually blocked by a locked gate

Facilities

There are no shops at Wingan. The nearest shop is at the small town of Cann River which is over one hour's drive away where

there is a small supermarket and petrol stations.

A bush camp park has been constructed at the lake's edge. The park consists of a grassy area cut into the local bush only a few metres from the water's edge. This area is capable of accommodating 8 to 10 tents. Higher up the hill are