

Ulladulla Billies

Story & Pics by Trevor Stow.

The South Coast of New South Wales has a unique magic that is hard to explain to people not lucky enough to have lived there or visited the region. And whilst most big game fishing has historically emanated from Bermagui, the fact is, almost anywhere along the Shelf starting off Jervis Bay and running down to Tathra, will produce spectacular, world class fishing. And fortunately, most people overlook Ulladulla . . .

The south coast of New South Wales has been renowned for its game fishing even before Zane Grey made it world famous. Ulladulla, Jervis Bay, Bateman's Bay, Narooma, Eden and of course, Bermagui, are all well known locations. Ulladulla, however, could be the most under-fished game fishing location on the eastern seaboard.

The reason that the crowds rarely fish Ulladulla is that Sydney siders have an obsession with heading north to locations such as Port Stephens, South West Rocks, etc. On the other hand, Victorians tend to flock to Bermagui but rarely go any further north. In fact, most Victorian game fishermen know nothing about Ulladulla. A few fishermen from Canberra find their way to Ulladulla, but often they prop at Bateman's Bay, which is an hour or so closer to Canberra. But rest assured, the locals and a few others "in the know" realise just how dynamic Ulladulla sportfishing can be.

Where exactly is it, you interstaters ask? Ulladulla is situated a comfortable 3 hours drive south of Sydney. Melbourne



fishermen will find that it is about 2 hours further north than Bermagui. This makes it a good 10 hour trip; easily reachable in 1 day's drive.

Port Facilities Ulladulla is a significant professional fishing port and as such, has quite good facilities. The entrance to the sea could not be much better or safer. It is basically a small bay, protected by 2 substantial rock walls and good water depth at the entrance. It is protected from most winds.

There are 2 concrete boat ramps that service the port. The southern ramp is by far the most popular. It is situated right on the edge of the

shopping centre. The northern ramp is the better ramp for boats over 6.0m as it has deeper water. Both ramps have excellent parking areas for cars and trailers.

There are numerous game fishing boats moored in the bay and it is usually possible to tie up to the wharfs, although the professional fishing fleet take up most of the berths and space can become a premium.

Ulladulla Ocean Rescue has a great piece of real estate, situated on the port, overlooking the bay, the port and quite some distance out to sea. They operate on the usual radio bands.

Canyons There has been a succession of big blue marlin taken on the south coast over the last 5 years. David Leighton nailed a blue of 417.6 kg on 37 kg back in 1998 that turned out to be an all Australian 37 kg tackle record. This marlin was taken between Ulladulla and Batemans Bay. If you think that this was from a big game fishing boat, think again. David was fishing out of a 5.75m Haines Signature at the time.

In the same year, well known charter boat skipper, Bill Dunkley found his client Wayne Cummins a blue off Bermagui, that was just under 400 kg.

Then at Batemans Bay in 1999, there was the

much publicised Malanie Kisbee who landed another blue that almost pulled the scales down to the magical 1000 pound mark. This great fish weighed 452.2 kg (996.95 lb). Melanie was unable to weigh this fish for 5 hours after capture which was unfortunate as it probably would have topped the 1000 pound mark at capture.

The action continued for Bill Dunkley at Bermagui in 2000 when "Bill Collector" caught and tagged another blue marlin of around 400 kg. Likewise "Ultimate 2" also fishing out of Bermagui tagged another that was estimated at over 400 kg. *Ultimate 2* then weighed in a 421 kg blue marlin a week later.

These blue marlin are all exceptional fish, and prove the fertility of the grounds off this NSW south coast. As well as the great blues, black marlin are also caught on a regular basis. However, we must point out that it is the hard-fighting striped marlin that makes up the great bulk of the catches on this coast.

The far south South Coast of NSW (generally regarded as the strip between Ulladulla in the north, and Eden in the south) is prolific because it has a great combination of deep reefs, canyons and the magical 1000 fathom line all within reach of a well equipped trailer boat, not to mention charter boat operator.

At Ulladulla, marlin are regularly caught from the 70 fathom line, right out to the 1000 fathom line and over the canyons in between. Ulladulla has 2 significant canyon formations. The closest are the Ulladulla Canyons. GPS marks for these canyons are:

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With a double hookup on striped marlin (below) creating heaps of activity in the cockpit, the looming southerly was the last thing on the angler's mind !



Below: Author Trevor Stow locked up and fighting a good size striped marlin. Note comfortable support for his lower back from the kidney harness.



S 35 23 670
E 150 56 090

S 35 20 000
E150 57 970

S 35 20 110
E 150 52 140

S 35 23 010
E150 49 240

The Ulladulla Canyons are situated about 30 kms east of the port. Finding the fishing area is quite simple even without a GPS. Simply head directly into the morning sun until you hit the 70 fathom line and start trolling.

The other canyons in the area are the JB Canyons (Jervis Bay Canyons). GPS marks for these canyons are as follows:-

S35 11 960
E150 58 600

S 35 12 200
E150 59 060

The JB Canyons are about 50 kms from Ulladulla which can stretch the fuel capacity of some trailer boats especially if they are trolling plastic for a prolonged period. However many anglers plane out to the Ulladulla Canyons and then troll north to the JB Canyons and back to the Ulladulla Canyons. It is not uncommon to pick up marlin between the 2 canyons.

Fishing Methods

Towing plastic, and particularly large 12 and 14 inch lures, is the most popular method at Ulladulla. There are often large bait schools of slimys together with striped tuna present in this area. Some slow trolling with these bait fish is done, particularly when the marlin are located.

We fished the southern end of the Ulladulla



Canyons recently. We set up 4 x 300mm marlin lures and 1 small 150mm pink tuna lure out the back, hoping to catch a striped tuna for bait. On the first day that small tuna lure got hit by several marlin, but the larger lures went untouched. Unfortunately, the small lure did not hook up.

The next day, after towing plastic around for hours we located a large bait school of slimys. After filling up our live bait tank we bridled up a slimy and started drifting over the school. Within no time we had a nice striped marlin of around 85 kg hooked up. An hour later, this fish was tagged and released.

Next day we headed back to the bait school. We estimated it would have covered an area of around 10 acres, and was close to where we had the action the previous day. We had a tank full of slimys in no time and began drifting and slow trolling over and around that school for the next 5 hours, all to no avail.

We could see a strong southerly change coming, and knew that we only had a couple of hour's fishing left, so we decided to put the plastic back on and have a troll. Remembering the hits that we had the previous day on the small

pink tuna lure, we put out 2 x 300mm lures and 3 x 200mm (8") lures, and headed for the 100 fathom drop. Just before we reached the drop-off, we had a double hook up on the small plastic lures. One fish spat the hook after a few minutes, and we tagged the other following a good fight.

With an eye on the weather we put the lures back out and headed back in the direction of the previous hook-up. We had only traveled a few hundred metres, when we had another double hook up, again on the small lures. As our spare crewman was winding in the remaining lines, a third marlin hit one of them! Fortunately, it did not hook up.

For the next hour we fought the 2 striped marlin, both about 100kg. They were duly landed and tagged and we headed back to port in a big hurry.

This story just goes to prove that you have to be flexible. One day we caught marlin on livies, the next day all they seemed to want was small plastic. Although the locals mainly use plastic with some live bait trolling, there is no reason why these fish could not be caught using switch baiting or skip baiting techniques.

As well as marlin, yellowfin tuna, albacore and mahi mahi (dolphin fish) usually turn up in good numbers and there is the occasional wahoo and spearfish caught. Ulladulla is well known for its commercially caught broadbill which can also be taken on rod and reel.

Season The marlin season extends from late December to April but of course this varies from year to year. As a rule of thumb, the peak season is from February onwards, but naturally, this is directly related to the water currents and bait schools. Marlin can be caught in water as low as 20 degrees but somewhere closer to 23 degrees is preferable. At times the water at Ulladulla can reach 26 degrees which is really starting to get a little too warm.

Ulladulla and its sister town Mollymook are good sized country towns with plenty of accommodation and good shopping. There are many other interests in this area including good golf courses, bush walking, great beaches and forest drives. It is actually a wonderful place to take the family, even if some members are not keen fishermen.

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