



# “Kanimbla” to the Frederick Reef

*Special Report By Bruce Robson For F&B's CFL Award Program*

**W**hile no man is an island unto himself, there are some reefs that are isolated, remote and not part of a major continent. One of these is Frederick Reef.

The average atlas will not show this reef, and the best many indicate is the outer edge of the Great Barrier Reef. The Barrier Reef extends out to about 200 kilometres from its southern end and a conglomeration of reefs at a place is known as Swains Reefs. This is approximately east of the Gladstone and Rockhampton area.

Over the years, countless fish have been hauled from the Swains Reefs by

Grant, Paul and Sinesy with three great wahoo that would leave most fishermen in a trance for a couple of years ! A daily occurrence out here 'on the edge of the world, the only downside was the severe loss of lures . .!!



This is something you don't see every day - a very rare photograph of the Frederick Reef and lighthouse at high tide. To get here, you need to travel some 400 km east of Australia, roughly 'opposite' Bundaberg and Gladstone in Qld.

professional and recreational anglers. A further hundred kilometres to the east is the 30 kilometre long and narrow Saumarez Reef. To reach Saumarez Reef, boats have to leave the relative shallow water of the continental shelf and cross over water that is 1000 metres deep.

Beyond Saumarez, the water deepens to 3000 metres, and the colour becomes more purple than cobalt. It is east of Saumarez that some of the best fishing reefs in Australia are found. One hundred kilometres to the east of Saumarez lies Wreck Reef, where Matthew Flinders foundered one night. Approximately the

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same distance to the south east lies Cato Reef. To the north east of Saumarez is Frederick, while a bit further out beyond Frederick and Wreck lies Kenn Reef. These four reefs are almost 400 kilometres offshore and except for a few small sand cays, they submerge at high tide and, the cays undoubtedly are awash in rough weather.

Boats required to venture this far offshore are beyond the capacity of your average Chevy Suburban at the launching ramp. What is required is a capable and well appointed vessel. The vessel that, in my opinion, is the best out of Gladstone is a twenty five metre by nine metre aluminium catamaran named *Kanimbla*.

It has twin 220 horsepower diesels, top speed of eleven knots, air conditioning, hot and cold showers, various creature comforts, an excellent crew, great food and weighs in at

hefty 264 tonnes gross.

The stability of such big cats needs to be experienced in comparison to their single hull cousins, they are much less inclined to rock and roll. Even with all this going for us, the decision as to whether to go all the way to Fredericks was dependant on the weather.

On *Kanimbla* there are five Twinfisher dories. These are the four metre versions and are powered by 18 horsepower outboards. Again, the difference between the dory sized cats and similar length monohulls is very marked in terms of safety, comfort, stability and fishability. By popular demand of the fishermen, all seats are movable – therea no cross thwarts. As well as required safety gear such as EPIRB, lifejackets, flares etc., each

dory has a two way radio and sounder. They are kept on the upper deck of the *Kanimbla* except when in use.

This was to be the first trip to Frederick for any of us. However, most of us had fished Saumarez on a number of previous occasions, as well as a few of us to the other outer reefs. Additionally, on such a trip, the majority are often more interested in sportsfishing while a few maintain an interest primarily in bottom bouncing. The planning had been intense, with wahoo being one of the targeted species. Stories from previous trips to Frederick were sparse and, readily accessible maps non-existent. The trip would have to have a strong exploratory component and this only heightened the anticipation.

*Kanimbla* departed the

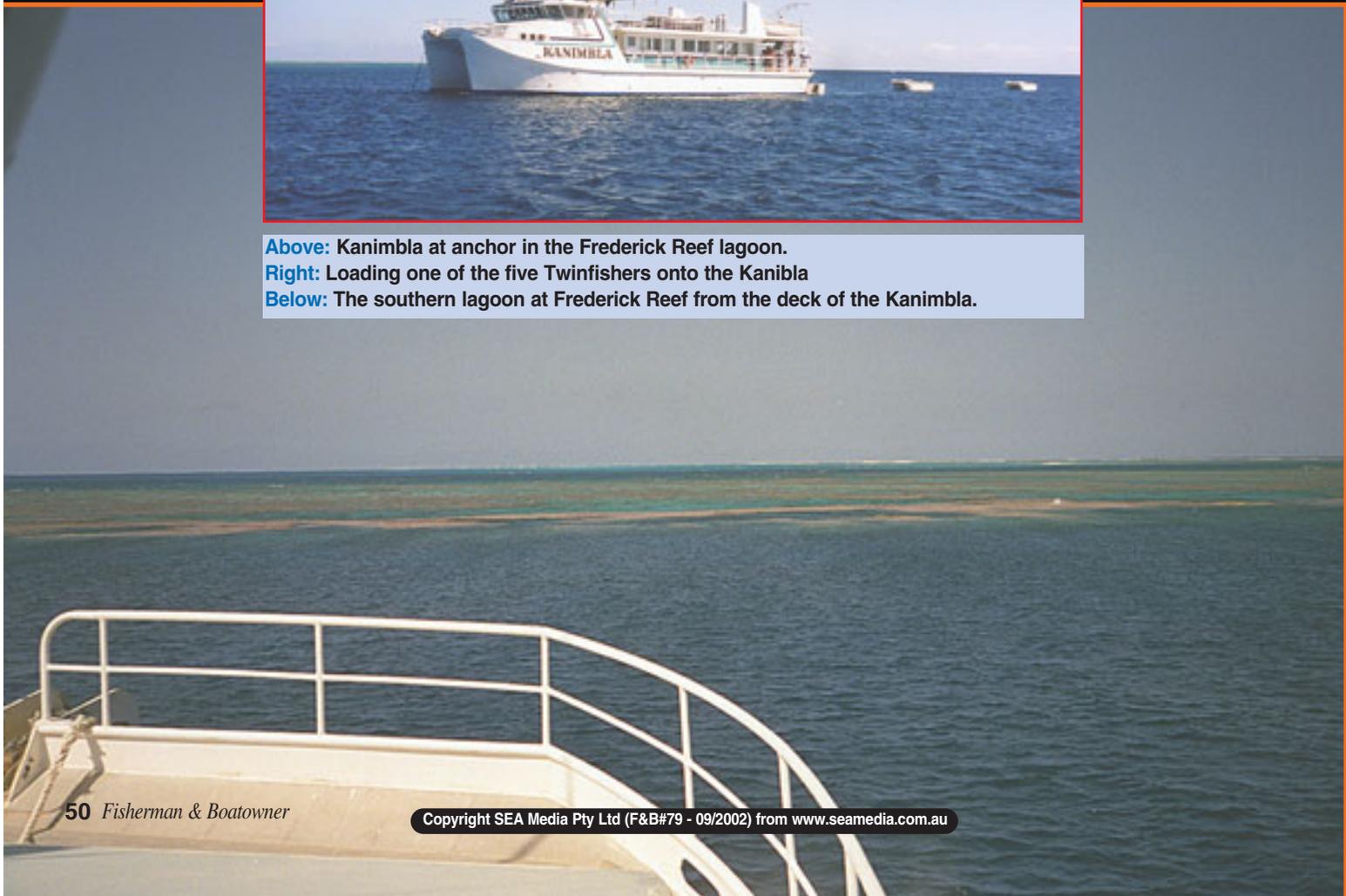
Gladstone Marina at 1700 hours on the Saturday and headed into a low south easterly swell. Sleep was



**Above:** Kanimbla at anchor in the Frederick Reef lagoon.

**Right:** Loading one of the five Twinfishers onto the Kanibla

**Below:** The southern lagoon at Frederick Reef from the deck of the Kanimbla.



easily found, and on arising at daybreak, we were beyond the southern tip of Swains and heading towards Saumarez. Trolling the voids produced nothing like the almost continuous marlin strikes of the previous year. In fact, the only fish we saw were flying fish.

Saumarez, although also slow by usual standards, produced a number of green jobfish, smaller dogtooth tuna, dolphin fish and GTs. The weather was promising and the forecast was for at least three days of fine conditions – the long awaited trip to Fredericks was going to become a reality at last.

We anchored behind the north east cay at Saumarez to enable an early departure. The motors rumbled into life at 0200 hours and the anchor chain rattled as we awaited the open seas. Suprisingly the ocean was as flat outside the reef as it had been inside. The

next time my eyes opened Fredericks was not far over the horizon.

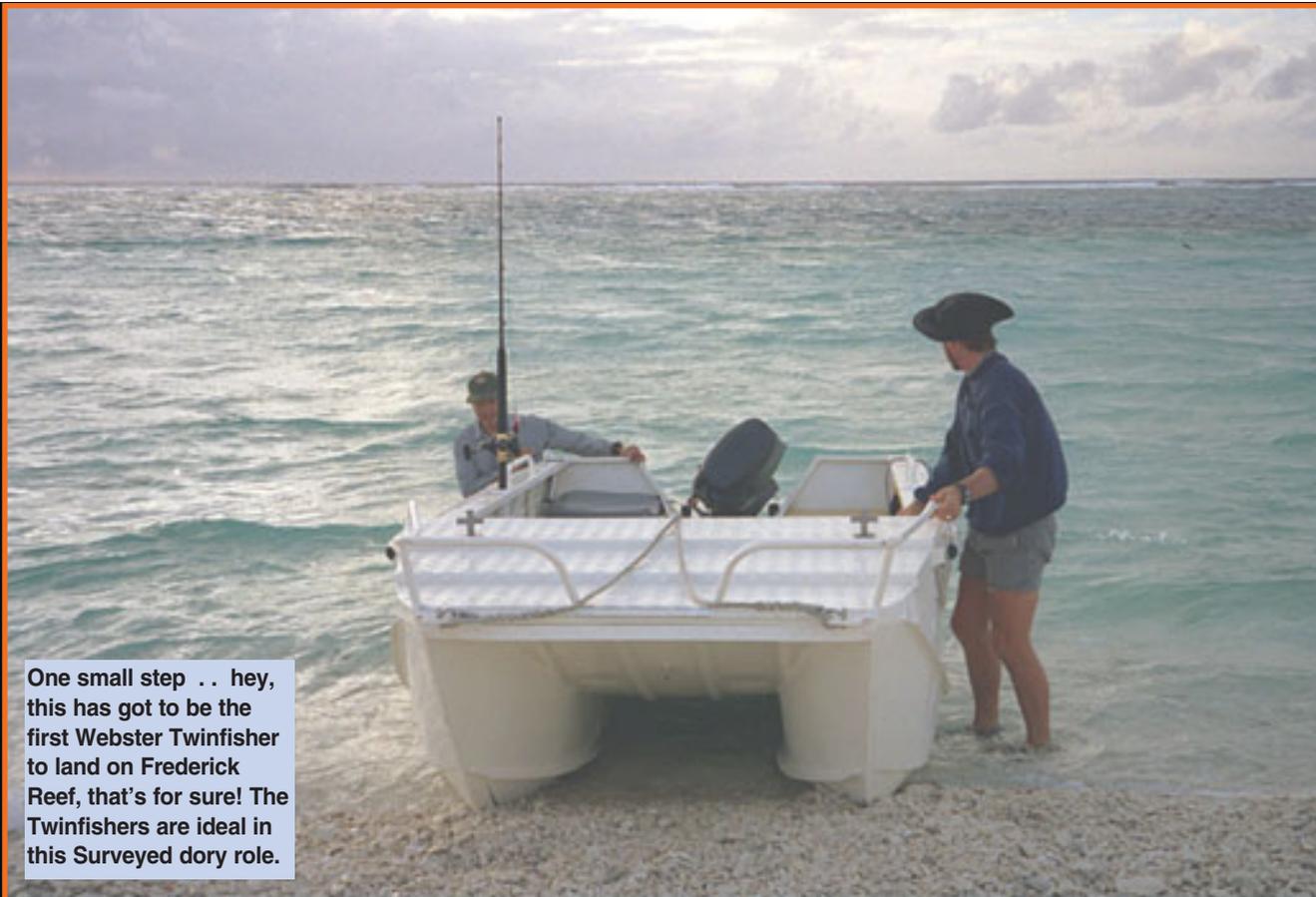
The distinctive looking Frederick Lighthouse slowly appeared ahead. After breakfast at 0800 hours we launched the dories onto an almost glassy surface and headed to the eastern side of the reef.

Around the eastern front of the reef were schools of yellowfin tuna breaking the surface in a feeding frenzy. Trolling near them produced numerous fish to 15 kilos with the best around 40 kilos. For a few of our group these were their largest ever catches and, considerably bigger than Port Phillip whiting! It wasn't until we trolled outside the yellowfin that we discovered the wahoo were eating the fin for brunch. We were catching wahoo to 35 kilos within

hours of arrival, as well as losing many more to thrown hooks and snipped line. Returning to Kanimbla that afternoon Grant's blue and white Yo-Zuri bibless was monstered by what initially appeared to be a shark. During a battle of monumental proportions, during which time we travelled for quite a few kilometres retrieving and losing line, we passed by schools of smaller yellowfin on an oily ocean north of the Light and further from *Kanimbla*. The thought crossed my mind that perhaps this creature was towing us to his lair rather than the other way around. As it was getting late in the day, cutting the 'shark' free was discussed, but a foul hooked wahoo was finally gaffed in the tail and pulled into the dory. It was hard to decide who was closer to complete exhaustion, the angler or

the fish. The sun set on Day One at Fredericks, and much gear was in disarray. On some





One small step . . . hey, this has got to be the first Webster Twinfisher to land on Frederick Reef, that's for sure! The Twinfishers are ideal in this Surveyed dory role.

occasions, lures were being bitten off faster than they could be replaced. Mr Halco, Mr Elliott and their colleagues must have made a fortune in sales for the weeks preceding our trip, gone quiet for a week, and then had another bumper sales week as we replaced what had been lost.

No definite figure on the number of lost lures was kept, but it must have been in excess of a hundred. Some lures were just damaged beyond repair. I had a Lively Lure Mack Bait split in two. It is a solid resin lure and fortunately has two stainless wires within it that attach the terminals. It was the wire that held it together and stopped the rather energetic wahoo from escaping.

Pete lost a large fish only to wind in the 2 cm nose piece of a Halco Laser Pro. It was cut away as if by a saw – such is the ferocity of the denizens at the drop off. Many rings and hooks were straightened beyond belief and a number of sizeable bustoffs occurred from what were probably big dogtooth tuna. Broken rods and reels were a sight that was going to become more common.

One of the true luxuries of such a charter is to retire to *Kanimbla* at the end of the day to have an

ice cold beer while comparing stories and watching the deckies fillet, clean and pack the fish. The crew also put the boats up and clean them while the cook prepares the evening meal – *oh, what a cruel world!*

Night fishing, for the truly addicted, commences with the sharks that come to eat the discarded fish frames and scraps. This usually lasts for an hour or so after dark, then it's either larger sharks, a school of fish or, it may just go quiet. In suburbia it is unusual to be able to wake up in the middle of the night and just drop a line over the side to see what is around – but quite possible out there.

Someone else is usually trying the same idea. At night while the starlight reflections danced on the water and, with the nearest other humans being over one hundred kilometres away, the solitude of the place and our miniscule size in the grand scale of things was more apparent.

On Tuesday the wind blew at 15 knots from the northeast and continued this way for the rest of our trip. The conditions became choppy but the Websters managed the conditions without any problem other than flying spray.

The spray caused the sunglasses to 'fog' with salt but the wahoo had no such problem. The early session provided seven such fish to thirty kilos.

Some guys took a dory to the reef and fished with flies and lures in the lagoon where they caught some nice bluefin trevally and were wiped out by giant trevally in the shallows. A later session at high tide produced no such result but gave a lasting impression of how precarious any life would be for any land based creatures on the reef. Some sizeable green jobfish and other reef species were landed by those drifting on *Kanimbla*. Bottom fishing takes on new dimensions when the sea floor can be seen in fifty metres of water.

A trip to the horse-shoe shaped southern lagoon revealed a number of broken reef areas in a 10 metre deep lagoon. Amongst the reefs were numbers of large Japanese sea bream. These were caught in good numbers until small reef sharks decided they wanted a piece of the action.

Wahoo maintained their position as the 'most wanted' species. There were times we had triple hookups on the three lures behind the dory. Returning to



(L-R) Wahoo, dogtooth, author Bruce Robson with a trevally, a superb coral trout, and a couple of very nice green jobfish. Add in mackerel, barracuda, marlin . . . Frederick Reef is truly an extraordinary fishing area.





A magnificent vessel, *Kanimbla* is close to the 'state of the art' in the world of motherships and charter boats. **Right:** Author Bruce Robson.

*Kanimbla* after a fishing session would provide a visual feast of up to eight wahoo on the cleaning table. While few billfish were sighted, Bill caught and released a 50 kilo marlin on a Halco Trembler. Unfortunately he did not have his camera on the Webster at the time. Barracuda were an ever present pest as were hard slogging red bass. Coronation trout, long nosed emperor and coral trout supplemented the growing number of packs in the freezer. The skipper advised that it was catch and release from Wednesday afternoon as we were in excess of our requirements.

Some strange catches occurred too - such as a 120 mm bottom dwelling goatfish that got caught on the rear hook of a 200 mm lure trolled near the surface in fifty metres of water. We also netted some small transparent larvae about 100 mm long. It was eventually decided that they were probably juvenile eels - what a long and dangerous journey for such creatures. Other strange minute bright-eyed creatures



would just swim around in the light at night.

Jigging provided some of the more energetic fights with white lures outfishing the chromed species by three to one. Wahoo, jobfish and, sharks all seemed to like eating these pieces of metal. One all mighty wahoo emptied my Penn Spinfisher 9500ss of 24 kilo line on its first run. Having the right size outfit for jigging makes such a difference to ones ability to keep on jigging. If it is too heavy, like my 700 gram bonito look alike that was once taken by a 70 kg dogtooth, then early exhaustion

sets in.

On Thursday evening we set sail from Frederick on another smooth sea for the Swains Reefs. Just as we approached the first reef on Friday morning a twenty kilo spanish mackerel selected my hand painted black and white lure out of a pack of multi-coloured similar sized siblings. Fishing back in the Great Barrier Reef provided many of the more usual species such as coral trout and sweetlip. It was then the finish to the fishing, packing up and the trip back to the dock.

At 0500 hours with the cooler air temperature, there was the need to find car keys, put on shoes for the first time in a week, distribute the fish, farewells (with promises to return next year) and a long drive home.

Plans for our next trip, where to explore, species to target, and rigs to modify will form part of the discussions and emails into the future. However, it is the memories of isolated and remote reefs, screaming drags, big bust-offs, lost lures, great companionship, an excellent crew and a great boat that will have to sustain us all till that trip.

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