

Dawn to Dusk

By Brett Craik

Producing a varied catch at times can be a little difficult as you have to vary not only your techniques and equipment but most importantly locations in any given day. Fortunately diving from Brisbane where a healthy mix of fish species can be found it is possible to produce such a varied catch although you need to be prepared for some travel and hence a long day.

We had a plan for an epic day such as this for quite some time its just we never got around to it like many of our other hair brained schemes, that was until a fortuitous combination of favourable tide times and favourable winds came together to fit our plan perfectly so we made the appropriate arrangements and we were off. It was going to be a lot of travel and with the escalating fuel prices it was going to be expensive too so we had make it worthwhile.

We arrived at the first location prior to the sun even waking up so we had plenty of time to get all geared up before the sun would grant us enough light to dive the first location which was a wreck in about 12 – 14 metres on sand. Upon entering the water we were met with a pleasing 15 metres vis, more than we expected the wreck being clearly visible from the surface although the current had started to run so we had to moderately kick to stay on top of it. I went down first and as I approached the hull I noticed several very large shapes moving around the structure, as I closed in on the



hull I could see the large shapes were Qld Gropers three of which would have easily gone 150 kilos while the forth was definitely in excess of 250 kilos. It took a few dives for us to get used to them as they flew in next to us on every dive they were both curious but cautious at the same time, which I always find peculiar considering they could kill us at any given moment if they so chose to. They would look straight at us with their mouths wide open, and we are talking mouths you could easily fit right into, they are such truly impressive creatures.

I lay on top of the wreck and looked over the side to see a nice tuskfish swimming merrily along the sand, he did not see the thunder bearing down on him from above, in a brief moment he was stoned which I was very pleased about as the mere thought of a powerful tusky taking me into the wreck gave me a headache. I returned to the surface with a very wary eye on the groper which had now decided to escort the fish up, interestingly they did not attempt to take any fish while we were there I was left thinking perhaps they only eat whole cows. Doug was not phased by these brutes as he passed me on my assent he too wanted a shot, I dealt with the fish at the surface while watching Dougie I could see him target and fire although it was not quite clear enough to tell what fish he had stoned until he pulled it clear of the wreck, when that familiar shape of a coral trout took form, Doug was excited hitting the surface "I got a trout" while it wasn't that big it was nothing to be sneezed at as we don't get many around Brisbane although I have noticed more appearing the past year or so, perhaps the ocean's are warming up can't complain about the trout the more the better bring em down I say!

Now it was Dan's turn, landing on the sand near the corner of the main hull he then began swimming around it in search of prey when suddenly a mangrove jack appeared in front of him from under some twisted metal, it began to swim away but not fast enough to evade Dan's projectile as it slammed into the jacks gillplate. Doug was set to go again and found himself lying on the sand out the back of the wreck when he looked towards a large school of bream one of which way in the back looked a little different it was larger too. Doug extended and took the shot which was so far away it was almost out of sight the beauty of using a 1.6m gun, he then began hauling up a nice snapper to add to the already quite diversified selection and we had only been going for 30 minutes.

The current had picked up by now and was becoming a little too strong to effectively stay on the wreck without expending much needed energy for the dive, it was too small an area to drift dive so a change of location was sought, next up a ledge from 14 – 23 metres.

The visibility here was just good enough to make out the drop from the surface, that's really all you need to work the Ledge. The first few dives produced little so we hit the area with some pretty heavy burley, the response was predictable a few cod appearing within minutes a couple of which took our fancy and ended up in the esky, but overall the area proved to be a little barren, so time to move again.

Next up was some shallow coffee rocks which proved to be very quiet it really is an on off sort of place like many of the joints around Brisbane, with the visibility not too crash hot here we did not waste too much time and just kept on moving.

This was followed by a drift in a well know mackerel haunt, we were confident of finding a few fish here although at first sight the water appeared a little dirty from the boat but it turned out to be manageable. I entered the water first only to have my spear fall out of the gun as I must have knocked the trigger in the boat somehow, as I was pulling it back up to me for a reload I could here Doug start to yell "mackerel!" I could not see but assumed he was yelling at me since I was first in the water he would have no doubt assumed I was ready to take it down as I normally would have been if it was not for a cruel twist of fate. Doug wasting no further time swiftly loaded and took a dive racing down to 15 metres where the mackerel had been. The mackerel had not surprisingly disappeared at this point but Doug held on making some attracting noises to the full extent of his breath hold and just when he could take it no longer the mackerel made a timely reappearance. This was a fatal mistake as a shaft came crashing through and out the other side of the body. The shot was solid so the mackerel was quickly killed and boated while Dan and I continued to dive now with the added advantage of a burley trail we were creating. Doug was ready again the burley now causing more activity on the reef below he descended once more to the deck this time in 20 metres well out of sight of us but I could here his gun go off before finally



seeing his dark form come into vision, followed by an obviously stoned fish. The fish was brought closer and I could see it was a lovely jobbie around the 7 kilo mark they are such a nice fish to eat, hunt and to look at too, Doug has a knack of finding big ones. Both Dan and I were kind of dumbfounded as we had both been down there only moments before and not seen anything like that, such is diving and such are fish. Doug boated that fish while Dan and I pushed ourselves a little harder now but we still could not seem to find anything worthy of our shafts, that did not seem to be a problem for Doug as on the next dive, his third of the drift, what does he do but spear a second smaller jobfish! It really was an amazing drift a Spanish and two jobbies in the space of 25 minutes from three dives, there are just so many quality fish around 20 metres its staggering at times but I guess you do have to get to em. Rather unsurprisingly we decided to stay in this area a little longer but the next drift produced very little, its strange like that, when the wind changed towards the end of the drift we thought time to move once more, we had more reefs to explore and being on a tight schedule we had to go now.

Tracking south we found some shallow coffee rocks in about 10 metres of water when we could clearly see bait being shredded by something large. The schools of bait were

moving too fast for us to get close to in the water from a spearing perspective as is often the case around this area, unless the bait ball is really large they will disperse before you get near them. Time being of the essence we pulled the pin and continued south to a secret little cray area of ours. Twenty minutes later we pulled up in 15 metres of water and got straight to work locating crayfish on the first dive no surprises there as the water temp seemed to be favourable. The vis was not that great maybe 10 metres max and tinged with a green particle filled colour too. To combat this problem Doug placed a 1.5m gun on the bottom the rig then provided a good mark on the general area where we could base out dives from to extract the crays, this was only possible here due to a lack of current. Using the marker we began performing dives with the cray guns, short weapons of 30 – 50cm in length, they make the job a whole lot easier, often you can place a shot from point blank range between the eyes which usually will kill the cray instantly, by killing them instantly we have discovered the flesh tastes a whole lot better almost to the same quality of a colder water cray, well I did say almost. Working the area fairly hard we had managed to pull some very large crays, they seemed to be all large today for some reason it was great.

I descended with Doug on the next dive hoping to pull a couple of crays simultaneously from the same hole, a hole that had been marked for extraction on a previous dive. Doug hit the bottom then did a double take he had spied something that did not register something odd for the area a pearl perch! The Pearly was a nice size too and only in 15 metres of water which is very shallow for a fish like that they are normally far deeper, that is why they are considered a challenge to hunt it is certainly not because they are skittish as Doug was able to swim right up to it and plug it even easier than a coral trout. Doug was pleased they are an exceptional table fish, we all looked forward to dining on that one.



It did not take long for us to reach the boat limit on the crays freeing up some time to give a deeper pinnacle a bit of look. Thirty minutes later we jumped in to a semi-blue 15 metres vis dive location where we were met with a wall of mac tuna rather large ones at that, normally they tend to take flight quite quickly but these fellas hung around for quite a while, in which time a Spanish snuck in but also managed to sneak away as two guys trailed after him that was a lucky escape he will never know just how close to death he was. We spent some time running burley from then on but it did not produce a hell of a lot except one of those tail sightings that spearo's often speak about, Doug

was the diver he had seen the tail end of something huge describing it as either a massive wahoo or a billfish. I have been in that situation countless times over the years, although often it's a case of wow I wonder how big that shark actually is and I wonder how close he actually passed behind me.

The sun was now beginning to lower itself towards the horizon we had only a couple of other spots to check in shallow before heading in, time to move location again. The crew was certainly beginning to tire now, it had been a long day.

The last couple of spots were very shallow from 5 – 10 metres the water was nice and clear so it made for a slightly easier end to the day. We were obviously tired but the glint in our eye of the hunt could still be seen and within a couple of dives both Doug and I had picked up a couple of parrots and a jack each which was great. Then just as I swam over to Doug towards the boat I could see he was holding a fish I have not seen for a very long time, a Jewie! We don't get a hell of a lot of them around this area mind you we never bother targeting them we are usually too busy after the hoo and macky's so it was nice to see one again even if it was just a small one. I thought to myself where there is one there may be more so I did one last dive swimming through a bunch of rubble and past hordes of crap fish then I saw that shape as he flicked away from me. I followed him behind a large rock where I quickly headed to the other end getting there before him I was able to steady myself to place a good shot when he popped around the other side which he did, the fight was short and well now I had one too, pretty happy with that.

It had been a great day and an epic day at that, the range of fish speared was incredible, from Parrots, Tuskys, Mangrove Jacks, Gold spot wrasse, Coral Trout, Cod, Crayfish, Jobfish, Spanish Mackerel and Jewfish we almost covered the spectrum. From dawn to dusk we had travelled almost 150ks by boat and had dived our arses off, a very rewarding experience which shows the benefit of covering different terrain on a single day, I hope to repeat the trip again in the near future.