# the tight line

Borumba Saratoga - Brown Trout - Fishing Kiribati - The Tight Line Vol 5

### The Tight Line Volume 5

I have been admiring Yoshi Taguchis photography for some time and we are very happy to have his article on saratoga in our magazine. Hopefully we will be seeing more of his photography in upcoming issues.

Jon Norling is well known around the South East QLD gamefishing scene. In more recent times, he has turned his attention to flyfishing. The article on fishing the Murchison region of New Zealand details his quest to catch some of the awesome brown trout that reside there

After enviously hearing stories for so many years about fishing in the Republic of Kiribati, I finally managed to go there in June this year. Christmas Island in Kiribati is best known for it's bonefishing, but is also gaining popularity as a giant trevally spot. The final article for this issue shows just some of the reasons why I'll be heading back again next year.

Next issue we will be featuring the amazing Montebello Islands in Western Australia, as well as taking an in-depth look at fishing photography

Till next issue,

Duncan O'Connell



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Cover and index page pictures by Yoshiaki Taguchi





Yoshi's Toga Obsession

Yoshiaki Taguchi

#### Beautiful Fish and Excellent fishing Environment

In 2003, I came to Australia. The first thing I did was read fishing magazines and search for what kind of fish I could chase. There were so many attractive fish in Australia, it is no wonder non-Australians called this country a 'Fishing Heaven'. In the first magazine I found a very beautiful fish named saratoga (southern). Its big scales (like a prehistoric fish), a pattern of light pink spots on the olive back and silver or gold body, were totally different from fish I had ever seen. Immediately saratoga became the top of my bucket list. After I finally managed to obtain my own boat I rushed to Lake Borumba to meet with saratoga straight away. It was good remote area, yet there were camping grounds nearby.

Lake Borumba's main body is steep and plain but the upper reach is unreal to me; when I saw the timber area first time I felt like time slipped to hundreds of years ago. Surrounded by mountains, big trees, lots of standing timber, goannas and birds, where Saratoga inhabit are just perfect for anglers who love nature and tight casting to structures.

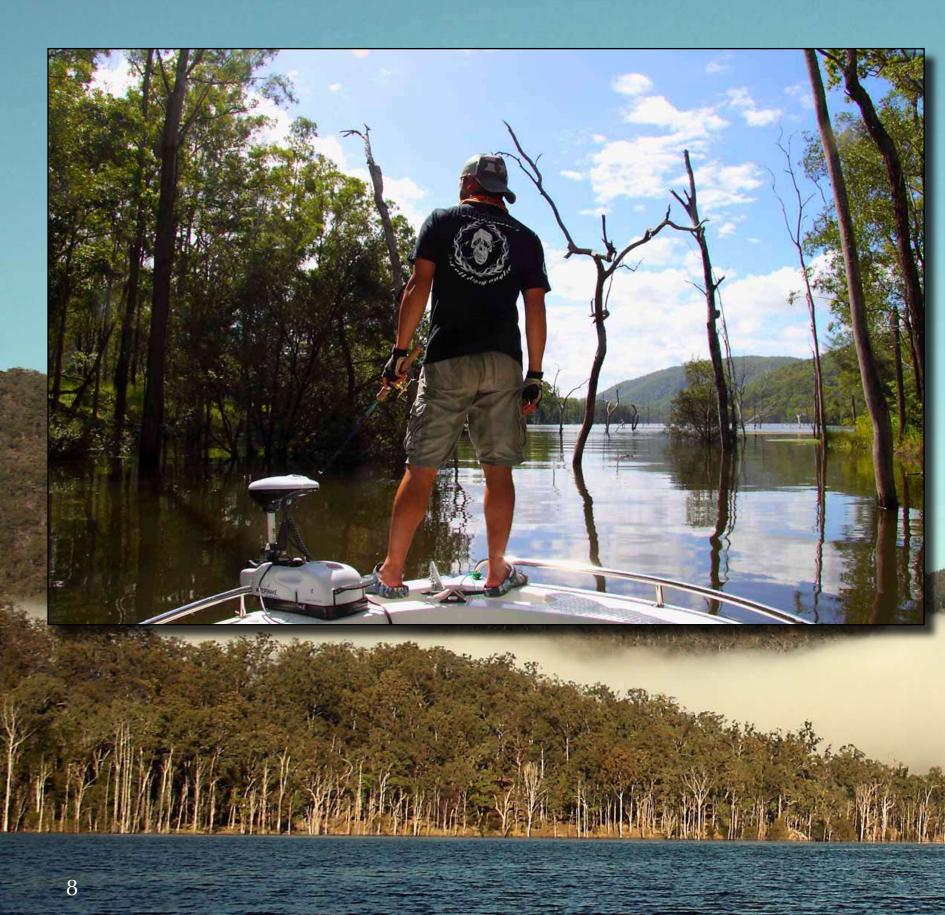


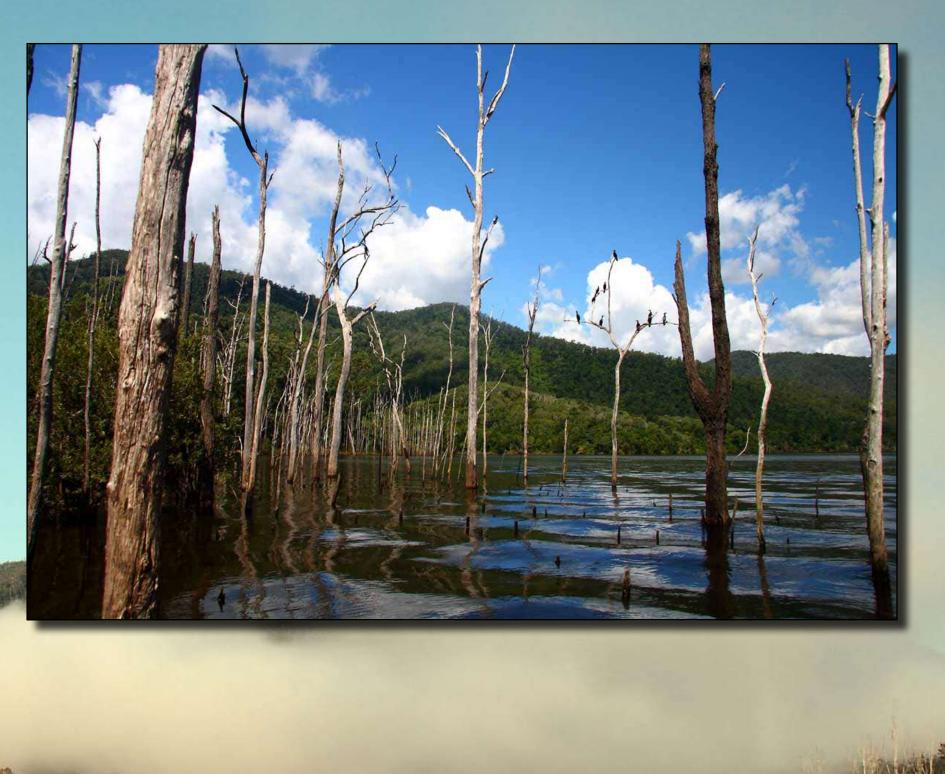


#### Season, Approach and Water Temp

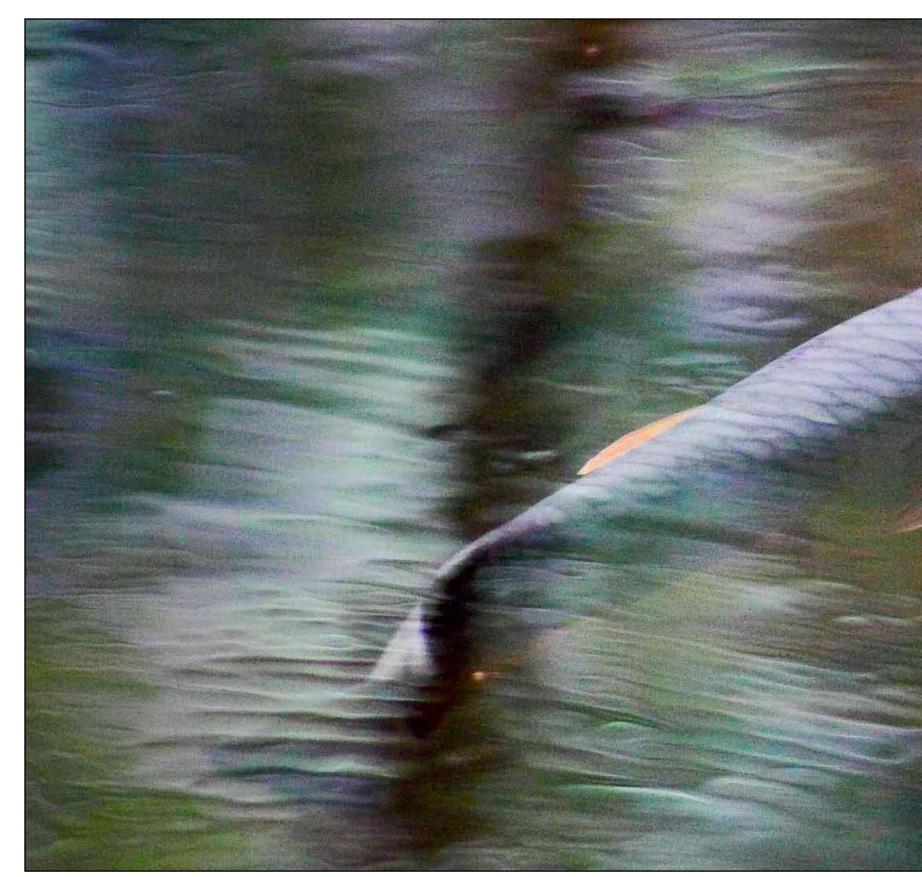
Saratoga's spawning season is in the spring. After spawning, female take their eggs in their mouth and protect eggs. During that time female Saratoga won't take any lures or lose interest to feed. Even after the hatch, female Saratoga protects their babies using mouth as a house. Personally I don't target Saratoga during this time from August to October.

One of my friends has a Saratoga as a pet and he told me that when the water temp is less than 23 degrees, its action becomes really slow. For that reason it is good idea to target them between mid Nov thought April.





Wall Hard Alexander





Most experienced anglers know how important approaching is. This is especially during holiday or long weekend when the fishing pressure is high. When you approach to the fishy point, imagine 'hunting', stalking very quietly and do a long shot. Remember they swim near the surface which allows them to sense unnatural sound easily.

#### Lure, Line and Fight.

Catching Saratoga on surface lure or fly is simply the most exciting way to enjoy them. Although the hook up rate is lower than sub-surface lures, I often use poppers to chase Saratoga. Pencils (stick baits) are also good; however Saratoga tends to missbite more often since the pencil bait does dog-walk action. Normally I cast toward timber or weed edge as close as I can, and give 1 or 2 pops, wait and retrieve slowly until the lure is away from the structure around 1-2m. Luse PE line 6-20lb and fluorocarbon leader 6-20lb. In my opinion, the main line does not matter so much as long as you can cast your lure accurately



between 15-20m (if you are using surface lures only). However, you need to choose your leader carefully because Saratoga are occasionally a little bit shy due to high fishing pressure.

While you are retrieving don't leave your eyes from the lure. In some cases saratoga make a swirl right before attacking your lure and following by a huge toga explosion. Be ready and enjoy the best moment in this fishing.

Once saratoga is on, you will see some

crazy jumping actions and headshake (more like a whole body shake). If you like to see toga jumping action then keep your rod up. For those who want to seriously catch them, then make sure to keep your rod down to avoid jumping. It is hard to keep the hook in saratoga because of their fighting style and bony mouth. Keep the line tensioned and weaken your drag slightly, this can enhance the chance of landing the fish.

I like to use light-medium action rod to cast small-medium size lures and

to reduce the shock from jumping or headshaking. On the other hand it is harder to set hook on their bony mouth, for that reason I use PE line and fluorocarbon leader (to get maximum impact to set hook). If you like to use fast action rod, I suggest using nylon line (to absorb shock) 6-12lb without a leader.

#### Pictures, Catch and Release

As a Japanese person, fish is definitely an important dish but saratoga won't be recommended for the table. However, they are great for game fishing so be prepared to catch and release. They are rare and beautiful, taking photos of them is a must do. Be aware while you are getting a beautiful shot please avoid slipping your finger into their gills and make sure they are back in the water quickly.

Some Japanese anglers have traveled here and experienced the Saratoga fishing, they were all impressed how entertaining and beautiful they are. If you have not caught one yet, be there in this coming season: you will see what I mean! Savvy Series, Champion Series, Champion Extreme Series.

# Tournament Quality Rods for Discerning Anglers

Dobyns Rods purchased within Austrália are covered by unconditional breakage warranty for the life of the original registered owner. No matter how you break it, your rod will be replaced with a brand new one for \$150 incl GST.

DX 703 SF

www.ejtodd.com.au

## Available at all good Tackle Stores

### Champion Extreme Series

Model	Length	Handle	Line Class	Lure Weight	Action
Spin			CAO I		$\mathcal{F} = \{ f_{i} \}_{i \in \mathcal{I}}$
DX701SF	7'0"	Cork-split	4-10lb	1/16-3/8oz	Fast
DX702SF	7'0"	Cork-split	6-12lb	1/8-1/2oz	Fast ,
DX703SF	7'0"	Cork-split	8-17lb	3/16-5/8oz	Fast
DX743SF	7'4"	Cork-full	8-17lb	3/16-5/8oz	Fast
DX762SF	7'6"	Cork-full	6-12lb	1/8-1/2oz	Fast
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Cast					
DX701CF	7'0"	Cork-split	4-10lb	1/16-3/8oz	Fast
DX702CF	7'0"	Cork-split	6-12lb	1/8-1/2oz	Fast
DX703C	7'0"	Cork-split	10-17lb	1/4-3/4oz	Fast
DX744C	7'4"	Cork-full	10-20lb	1/4-1oz	Fast
DX745CFH	1 7'4"	Cork-full	12-25lb	3/8-1 1/2oz	Fast

# Murchison Meande

After many years of blue water fishing, Jon Norling discovers his lighter side in New Zealand

As some of you are aware, I have given the game fishing away to concentrate my efforts in other directions, one of which is fly fishing. This is a short report of two weeks spent in the Brown Trout Capital of the World; Murchison, in April 2011. Kim Allen joined me for the first week, with my wife's cousin, a local dairy farmer, Robin, joining me for the second week.

Murchison is located in the northwest of NZ's South Island. This town of only 600 people serves the surrounding dairy community and attracts small numbers of tourists by offering white water rafting and acting as a base for hiking the surrounding wilderness areas. From a fishing perspective, it is located

# rings

on the mighty Buller River, with about 30 other rivers located within one hour's drive, such as the Maruia, Gowan, Wairau, Matakitaki and Owen. All of these rivers are populated by wild Brown Trout. Whilst research on the area indicated that most of the trout were in the 3-6lb range, we encountered a large number of fish in the 7lb to 10lb category. However, these larger fish were warier and smarter than other fish, resulting in a huge challenge for us! For those not familiar with trout, Browns are heaps more difficult to catch than their Rainbow cousins, which are the dominant fish in the North Island.

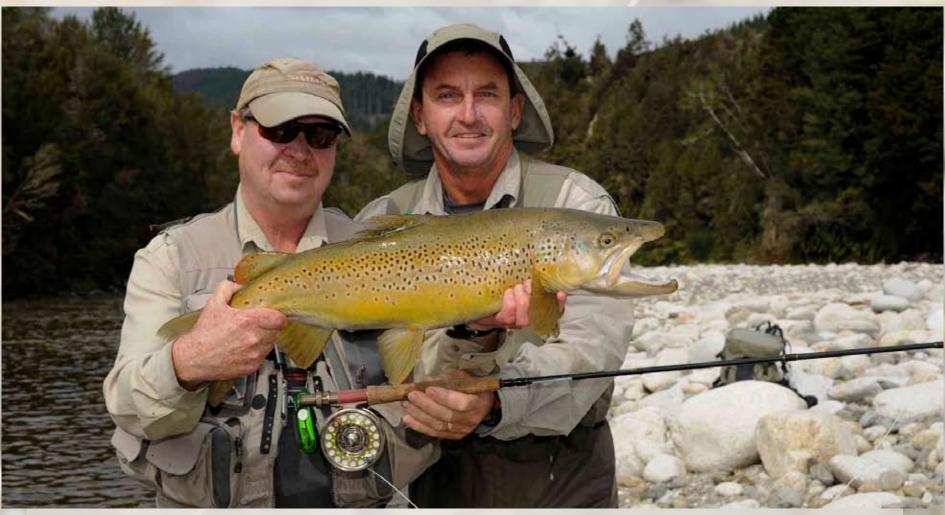
Whilst the boisterous rivers, scenic wilderness valleys and gorges are integral to the Murchison fishery, what sets it apart from other fisheries is that it is all about sight fishing. The fish are hunted by stalking carefully along the riverbank in order to sight the fish before they sight us. A guide is an absolute necessity. Not only do they know the access spots and which rivers fish best in the different conditions served up by the weather, but they can spot fish. I thought I had great eyesight, but the guides can see fish I can't. I would have only spotted about 40% of the fish encountered before spooking them and even when the guides pointed them out to us, I still couldn't see about 10% of the fish.

When the guide has spotted a feeding fish and pointed it out to you, a discussion ensues as to where to stand to cast and get a drag-free float and what weight of flies to use to get down to the depth the fish is feeding at. The real challenge ensues: Am I good enough to get into position without alerting the fish? Can I cast the fly into a rectangle about 2' wide and about 4' long delicately so as not to spook the fish? Can I do it on the first cast? Can I detect the take? Can I strike quick enough if using a nymph or slow enough if using a dry fly? All of these questions confront me as I struggle to maintain position on the slippery rocks and try not to think about the fish's size – which I know is in the 8lb

#### to 10lb range!

The fishery does not involve lots of casting. It is all about stalking and fooling the trout into taking an artificial fly. An

and landing only three or four. A beginner would catch no fish. In fact, in six days' fishing, novice Robin only caught two fish due to the fact that he had not mastered the art of casting.



average day's fishing typically involves sighting only about a dozen fish, not all of which are feeding. An experienced angler might be able to cast to maybe nine of those fish, get takes from about five fish In twelve days of fishing (nine with guides), we caught a total of 41 trout (not counting the little dinks that sometimes grabbed the fly meant for their larger relatives). More than a third of these fish (16) were between 5lb and 9.25lb! We saw several fish larger than the 9.25lb, including one that spat my nymph out before the strike indicator could be taken underwater! As stated above, I consider this to be a truly world class fishery, Unlike Rainbows, feeding Browns like to sit out in shallow water where they can be seen more easily. They especially like to sit in the eye of pools, in the seam behind the eye, under the bubble trail about halfway back in the run, in riffles



given their size, the sight fishing and the scenic wilderness areas. Whilst there can be some great hatch fishing down the southern end of the South Island, they don't have the size and the weather gods are meaner towards anglers down there. and in the smaller pocket water. They seek a constant supply of food, yet also shelter from the fastest water. Browns can also be found down in the tails of pools, but these are typically trout that are not feeding (resting or sunbaking?) and prove very

#### difficult to catch.

There can sometimes be some jockeying for position between trout, with the larger trout dominating the prime lies. In one pool, the guide spotted a good fish halfway down the run in deeper water than usual it was sitting just behind a big flat rock and I could only see the trout when it put its nose on that rock. Changing to a heavier set of nymphs, I carefully crossed through the tail of the pool and waded up the opposite bank. I then placed several casts over the spot, being directed by the guide, to no avail. I then tied on a heavier lead nymph, which did the trick. The indicator went down and I was into a nice 7lb fish that took off down the pool and through the rapid into the pool below. After much scrambling, we were able to net and photograph the fish. Upon scrambling up to our original position in the pool to retrieve the guide's pack, there was a smaller fish feeding on top of the big flat rock, sitting only 2' in front of where the 7lb fish was caught. Being Kim's turn

and knowing that I had the correct weight of flies on my outfit, Kim then carefully crossed through the tail of the pool and waded up the opposite bank. He was able to successfully catch the 3lber.

10000

On one particular trophy river, we had a stunning start to the day, with four fish netted from the first four fish sighted – 3lb, 6lb, 8lb and 5.75lb. That was champagne fishing, due to the river being in spate from rain and slightly coloured – the fish were all out feeding and were not as wary as normal. Unfortunately, we couldn't make it five from five, but we did finish with seven fish for the day, with Kim busting off on another large one.

The next day, we returned to the same river (just a bit further upstream) hoping for a repeat performance. It was not to be. Whilst the fish had increased in size, the spate had reduced and they were very wary. Lunch was uncomfortably quiet, with the score at zero from seven! We soon came to a large pool with two large fish feeding. The lower fish was a definite double, with the higher fish a good 8lb. It was my turn. I got in behind the fish and watched it. It was constantly swinging wide to the left into the current to feed. I therefore chose to cast 2' to the left and above this trophy fish. One cast, I told myself (to reverse the poor casting from who was positioned to the side, said the fish had taken the fly (the indicator slightly paused, but never went down, and didn't pause long enough for me to see – standing directly below the fish). I then kicked myself for not striking the instant the fish's head turned back to the right. Another



earlier in the day). I visualised and cast ... perfectly. I watched the fish, it moved to the left at about where my fly should have been, then I switched my eye to the indicator, but nothing!! It did not move. The fish swung back to its position and froze. It did not feed again! The guide, lesson learnt the hard way.

Kim missed the 8lber and then we spooked a 12lb to 13lb giant in a dead still pool in an impossible lie! Light was now failing us and time was against us. We came upon three great fish in a pool and





my turn for the first fish. Second cast resulted in the indicator going down, a quick strike and I was in! Unusually the fish tore up to the head of the pool disturbing Kim's fish, then swam down past me to get into the pool below, showing us his great depth! I was able to turn him, so he tried his hidey-hole under the far bank. It became a stalemate and I was sure I had just found another way to lose a fish that day! I waded across to him and, trying different side-strains, was eventually able to coax him out of his hole and then carefully around a log lying under the bank (not previously seen), but at what cost to my 5lb tippet? The fish had calmed down a bit, so I nursed the tippet through the remainder of the fight as I coaxed the fish gradually to the guide's waiting net. The result was the best fish of the trip at 9.25lb!

My last day was spent in an upper tributary in a deep gorge. The water was crystal clear and very small, but the fish were BIG, although the guide warned that they would be a challenge. It was raining and the rocks were wet and slippery, making for a difficult hike. In one very still pool, there were three trophy fish. I waded into the tail of the pool to tempt the largest fish that was sipping small dries off the surface. Tying a #16 Adams dry to the end of my 15' leader with only 3.5lb tippet, I placed what I thought was a good cast in front of the trout. It immediately spooked, then swam up to the head of the pool and put the other two down! This was river really was going to be a challenge!

We also found that the really clear small water was deceiving. It

was difficult to judge the depth of the fish and therefore the weight of fly needed to get down to them. I spent some time on a number of fish, resulting in two pretty reddish fish of 4.5lb and 6.5lb to the net. Another fish was sitting high in the water column taking the odd dry off the surface. It took my #16 Adams, but spat it out prior to my delayed strike (need to wait for the fish to expel air before striking on a dry). It continued to feed, so a #18 dark mayfly was tried. Its snout came out of the water to take it, but rejected it before closing its mouth. It was then spooked and we moved on!

The last encounter of the day was memorable. It was getting dark (did I mention the rain?) and we were stalking the last pool of the day. The guide said it always held a trophy fish, but it wasn't in its usual lies. The guide then scaled a 30' rock on the far bank to sight into the head of the pool. There he was, feeding strongly in the fast water under the bubble trail. But I couldn't see the fish from where I had to cast. By this time, I had extended my leader out to 22' (based on earlier rejections) with a tippet of 3.5lb. A #18 Pheasant Tail was placed under a #14 Adams to act as the indicator. I cast with instructions from the guide. It was not easy to get a drag-free float, with me needing to cast over the eye of the pool. After about the fourth cast, the guide said that was the one, but I still couldn't see either the fish or my Adams! I repeated that cast several more times and then I saw a large snout gently poke out of the water, the guide yelled strike, and I found myself hooked to a real angry Jack (it had taken the dry). It sat in the current and shook its head, whilst snapping its jaws open and shut. That didn't work, so the fish tore down to the tail and tried to go down the rapid, which would not end well. I followed, racing over the slippery rocks, applying side strain and was able to coax it away from the rapid. It then raced into its hidey hole under the big 30' rock. It sat in its dark hole shaking its head. The guide yelled for me to pull it out, but I

was already worrying about the state of my tippet! After a couple of minutes, my efforts paid off, only to see him swim into another hidey hole and do the same thing. He was still shaking his head and another stalemate was reached. I was offered lots of advice from the sidelines once again to no avail. After several more minutes, I was able to once again coax him out. The big brown seemed to be a bit more under control as I edged him into the shallows and we could see how deep and heavy he was. He seemed to be only a minute or two away from the net when the tippet gave way! Oh well, we were going to release the fish anyway and it was a terrific encounter - still it would have been nice to know if he weighed the magical 10lb!

Anglers need to wear camouflage clothing, chest waders (the water is very cold to Queenslanders), wading boots, rain jacket, hat, polarised sunglasses and insect repellent (sandflies are much larger, numerous and vicious than our midges!). A 6-weight rod is a perfect allround outfit, although a 5-weight could be used in some situations. I use Sage fly rods and find that the Z-Axis is perfect for this type of fishing. Distance casting is not required, only short accurate casts with mostly weighted nymphs. Plenty of casting practice should be undertaken before you touch foot on NZ soil.

For fishing in fast water, total leader lengths of 13' to 15' are adequate, whilst in the slower waters with warier fish, I found that I needed to use 20' to 22' leaders with 6x tippet (3.5lb)! For most fishing, a 9' 3x tapered leader with 5' of 4x (6.5lb) tippet is sufficient. A lighter 5x (5lb) tippet is used between the two flies, with the trout mostly taking the trailing fly. More proficient casters can use 12' tapered leaders in place of the 9' leaders. In conditions when the trout are particularly wary, a 15' 4x or 5x tapered leader with a 5x or 6x tippet is the way to go - if you can cast it in the wind! Tapered leaders should be nylon (will float), whereas tippets should be

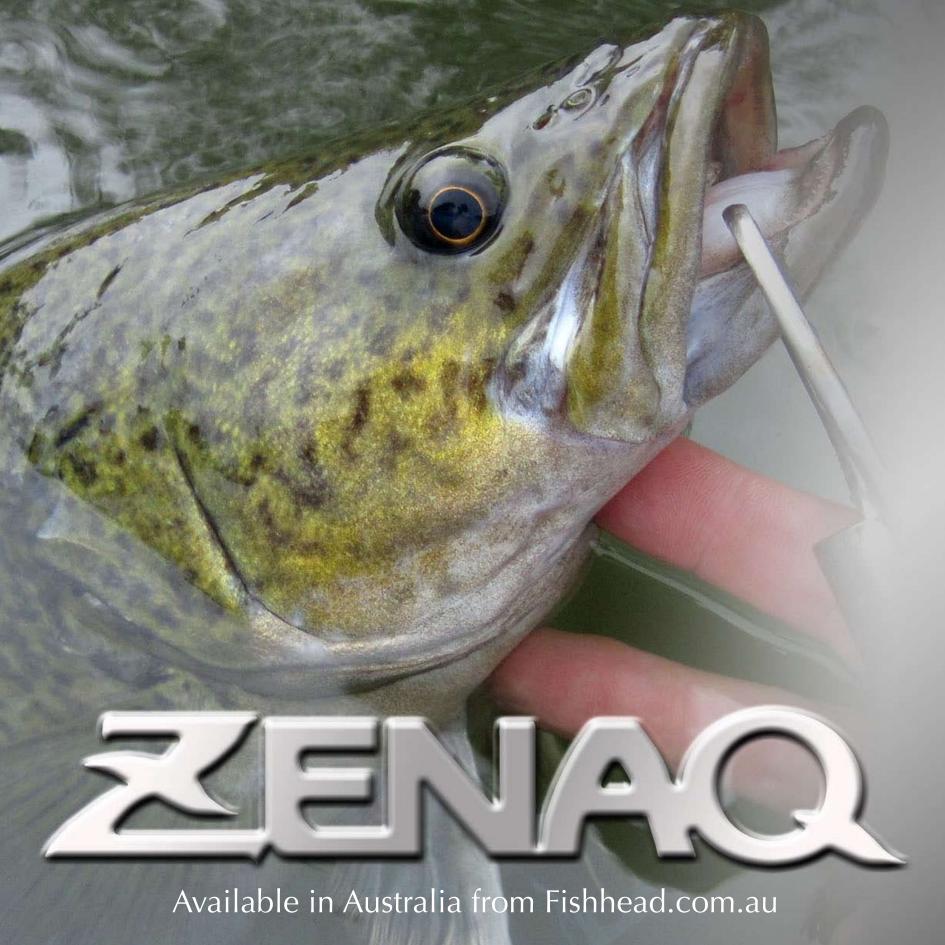


fluorocarbon, which is less visible to the fish and is heavier than water.

A trick I learnt from one of the guides was the use of micro rings, tiny stainless steel rings with an inside diameter of 1mm or 2mm. These are used to connect the tapered leader with the tippet. Its advantages are that knots to the rings are stronger and that it saves shortening the tapered leader every time the tippet is replaced, which is often.

Strike indicators are an absolute necessity when fishing with nymphs, which was about 95% of the time. In faster water, a dressed green piece of polypropylene tied with an overhand knot above the ring was sufficient. In calmer waters, a tiny piece of sheep's wool or simply a small dry fly was used, due to the trout sometimes getting spooked simply from seeing the strike indicator.

During the warm weather months of mid-January to mid-March, large dry flies imitating the cicada is a very effective pattern. However, this is the most popular fishing time and anglers can be tripping over each other on some rivers at this time. Small dry flies, such as #16 Parachute or standard Adams, are a good choice at other times when a dry is required. Nymphs, however, are the mainstay of this fishery. A heavier nymph (to get down in the fast flowing water) is used above a smaller less weighted fly. The heavier nymph is typically tied on a #14 hook. It should be tied in various weights to match the water, but if not tied with a tungsten bead, it won't be heavy enough! Any standard pattern will do, such as Hare & Copper, Pheasant Tail or Brown Bomb. The point nymph should be small (#16 or #18) and tied in a variety of weights (but less heavy than the heavier nymph). Pheasant Tail, Gold Beadhead Hare & Copper, Brown Killer and Rubber Leg nymphs worked well on the point.



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#### **Duel Hardcore Shad**

The Duel Hardcore Shad is a deep diving lure that represents a good cross between a steady retrieve crankbait and the more erratic action of a slender profile jerkbait. At 75mm long and weighing in at 10g the 75SP has become very popular for targeting iconic sportsfish like the Mangrove Jack. A suspending lure, the Hardcore can be ripped down into a snag and held right in the strike zone, making it a great choice for steep rocky banks or tree lined creeks. The Hardcore dives to 3m allowing you to target the base of the structure; prime habitat for Jacks. With summer quickly approaching it's now time to break out the heavier gear and chase some red devils. The Duel Hardcore Shad 75SP is the perfect lure for the summer season in SE OLD.

Daiwa is not normally known for its fly reels, but this reel is likely

to change that. The New Era is a cartridge reel, allowing anglers to change lines quickly and easily with the 3 supplied cartridges. This itself is not unusual, however, the colour coded cartridges are made of aluminium, not plastic, making the reel strong and rigid under load. The New Era has a sleek large arbour design with smooth drag. On a recent trip to Christmas Island, it performed beautifully on a variety of fish, from hard running bones to bulldozing Triggers.

Daiwa New Era



### **OSP Tiny Blitz MR**

O.S.P make some of the finest lures on the market today; a recent addition has been

creating guite a stir amongst local Australian anglers. The Tiny Blitz MR is a small fat profile crankbait measuring 44mm and 6.3g. It features all the innovations that have made O.S.P a leader in lure design. The unique honeycomb body design allows



the lure to have thinner walls without sacrificing strength. This means more weight can be positioned where it's needed for perfect swimming action and long casts. Being a silent lure the Tiny Blitz is perfect for highly pressured waterways. The local bass population has been going bananas over the Tiny Blitz since its recent arrival and it's only time until the big bream in locations like Lake Macquarie get a taste for this little gem!

#### Sage One

If you are going to make a fly rod and call it the 'One', then you've either been watching too much Highlander or you think it's pretty damn awesome. Luckily, everyone who tries one agrees (the awesome bit, that is). Compared to its predecessor, the Z-Axis, the One is lighter, crisper and more powerful. The taper feels similar to the super fast TCX, but it still has plenty of manners for delicate presentations. If, god forbid, I could really only have one fly rod, then this would be right at the top of the list. At Fish Head we sold out our first shipment in quick time, but by the time you are reading this, we should be unpacking a big box of shiny new Ones for anglers to try out.



#### Carpenter Gamma 160H

the main difference with this model is extra weight towards the tail which gives it a more exaggerated darting action and a deeper dive on the sweep. The extra weight on the tail also helps with the casting distance. Currently available in black/silver only!

Gamma 160H stickbait is no different. This lure proved itself on a recent trip to West

### Daiwa Squid Jigs

Looking for something different in Squid jigs? These feature cloth patterns depicting schools of tiny baitfish

Carpenter is renowned for their exceptionally

Australia's Montebello Islands where

they accounted for GTs up to 45kg

and spanish mackerel to 40kg. The

gamma series are floating stickbaits,

high quality rods and lures and the new

swimming along. Whether you are trying to tempt squid which have seen it all or looking for something cool for the collection, these are perfect for any egiing fan.





#### Saltiga Dorado Rods

It's been a long time since the first series of Saltiga Dorado rods were released, so the new

models have been hotly anticipated. The range covers from PE3- PE8 and 7'1" to 8'6". The most important changes are new carbon cloth (called 3dx by Daiwa) and construction techniques borrowed from Daiwas high end bass rods. These advances give the butt section a lot more lifting power than the previous models without adding weight, as well as making the tip sections more responsive.

The AR71 has already become a favourite with the staff at Fish Head as the perfect reel to match to the new 4000 Saltiga reel for everything from offshore snapper plastics to big longtails on stickbaits. The PR73S and CB77S will be a hit with anglers chasing kingfish, mackerel and tuna on PE4 and PE5. The old M-Over 80 has been replaced by the new M-Over 83 which has considerably more power than the predecessor. It would make an ideal all-round tropical sportfishing rod for targets as varied as queenies, mid-sized trevallies and tunas. Lastly there is the BG86 which makes an great tuna/GT stickbait rod for long distance casting of weights up to 160g. With the 8'6" length it will probably be spot on for many anglers looking for a powerful rockfishing rod to tame big kings of the ledges in Southern NSW.

## THIS IS CHRISTMAS

**LEGERER** 

### NO, NOT THAT CHRISTMAS



Anticipation of a fishing trip can be both a good and bad thing. It's great to be pumped about an upcoming adventure; the preparation phase of the trip can be a major part of the whole event. Gathering the information and gear required for a trip has its own rewards and challenges. There are occasions, however, where the reality just doesn't measure up to the expectations. There can be so many reasons for this ranging from unforseen circumstances such as weather and politics, through to outdated information and the age old problem of the fish just not wanting to bite. Many anglers also expect that when you go to a remote destination, the fishing will always be hot and furthermore the fish will be easy to catch. Now most of these challenges can be overcome by preparation and/ or attitude adjustment, but there are still some things that are just out of your control.

It was with these thoughts in mind that I stepped on to the tarmac at Christmas Island, in the Republic of Kiribati (pronounced kirr-i-bas). Looking at the ground, it was easy to see why the airport had been closed the previous year, causing the cancellation of our previous trip. The runway itself seemed OK now, if a little bumpy since repairs had been made. On the other hand, the rest of the tarmac was crazed with cracks, scattered with loose gravel and had the odd tuft of grass peeking through. The airport building itself was in an equal state of disrepair to the tarmac: a timber shed which looked like it might fall down at the first hint of a strong breeze. Not a great introduction you might think, but really it just gives you an understanding that there aren't a great deal of resources on the island and that things may not run to the schedule that we as westerners have come to expect in our lives. In other







words a little warning to slow down and relax, things will happen at their own pace.

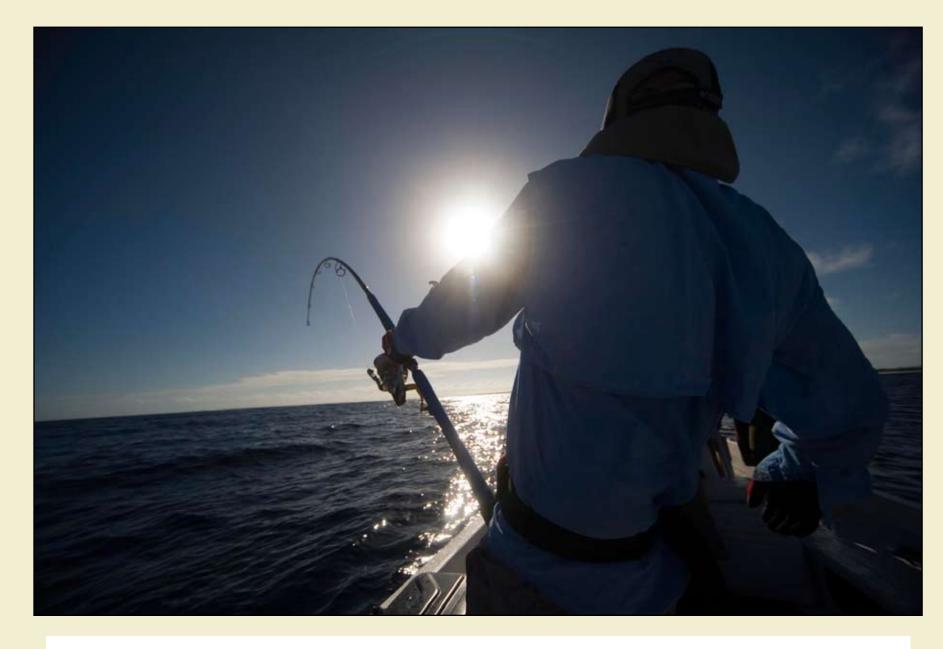
Before going any further, it should be pointed out that Christmas Island in the Pacific Ocean is not the island of the same name in the Indian Ocean where Australia sends boat people. The nation of Kiribati comprises of several groups of islands, mostly uninhabited, spread over thousands of kilometres of the Pacific Ocean along the equator. Located roughly halfway between Fiji and Hawaii, Christmas Island is the worlds largest coral atoll and encompasses an enormous lagoon. The lagoon is ideal habitat for bonefish which form the backbone of the local tourist industry. For 20 or more years fly fishers have been visiting, originally from the USA but increasingly from Australia. Due to their reliance on a catch and release fishery for much of their local income, islanders are very conscious of conservation. This means that populations of sportfish such as bonefish and giant trevally are protected from exploitation.

On our visit we had a mixed group of anglers, some dedicated fly fishers, while others were more interested in the possibilities for jig and popper fishing.

Our base was Ikari House in the town of London. Despite having no sleep on the overnight plane and far too much of the local rum whilst transiting in Fiji, no time was wasted in getting gear unpacked and rigged for the days fishing. Not having caught a bonefish before, I was ready with 6 weight in hand in no time while the rest of the group were split between flats fishing and bluewater exploration.

A short while later Jason, myself and our guide for the day, Kuritaro stood on a blinding white flat staring at the water for signs of bones. There were plenty of fish to see on the flat: milkfish, goatfish, triggerfish, various trevallies among others. Most of these species were pretty easy to spot and Kuritaro called them out as we slowly shuffled along. But no bonefish. Finally the call came:





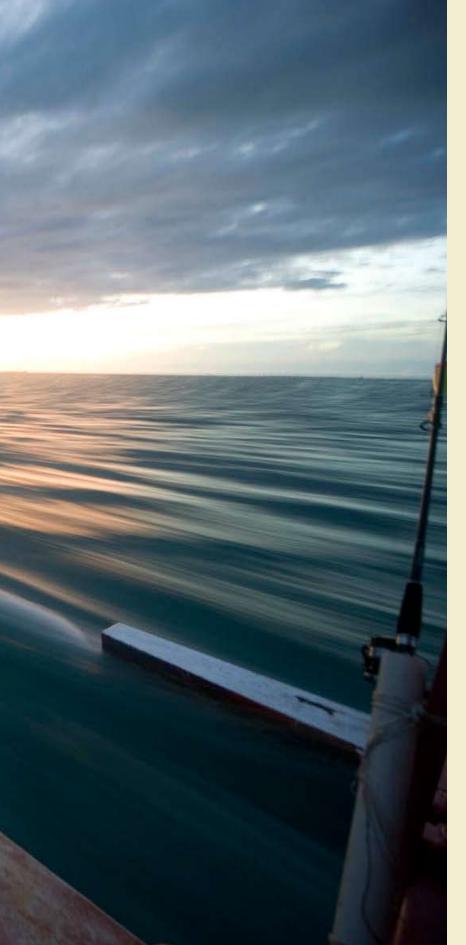
'Bonefish 30 feet, 11 o'clock!'. My eyes strained to see what I was casting at... nothing there as far as I could tell. I cast anyway.

'Strip, strip, strip, recast 20 feet, 1 o'clock' was the next call. Still can't see anything, but I follow instructions anyway. Bang! Everything comes really tight, really fast and just as quickly goes slack again. Line flapping in the breeze and the dumb look on my face indicates a popped leader. Damn! I have a quick think about what just happened and come to the conclusion that my usual aggressive strip strike is not going to cut



it around here. A quick re-tie and a few minutes later I have my first small bone fish flapping around my knees. Jason soon follows suit and we are on the board! Naturally after the first one things get easier, well a little easier. I actually started to see the odd bonefish. Amazingly they can be quite visible one moment while tracking towards you. As soon as the bonefish turns side-on they vanish completely, frequently to re-emerge right under your rod tip a few seconds later. When hooked, the bonefish lights the afterburners and heads for the horizon at warp speed. Small bones throw in the towel

# Late Afternoon Run home



pretty quickly, often skipping across the surface as the angler cranks them back for release. Large fish demand far more respect as they make multiple runs into the backing, often doubling back and running at the angler, then stubbornly circling in close until the fishes head can be brought to the surface. Way too much fun. My best bonefish of the trip came at the end of the first day. We were stalking a flat with the sun and wind at just the right angle and we could regularly see big bones mooching up to us as we walked. Most of these fish spooked as the fly landed, even with a long lead of a few metres, but finally I got one which pounced on the #6 fly like it was his last meal. The fat 70cm fish was a more than fitting way to cap off my first days bonefishing, infact if the trip had ended right there and then, I think I still would have been satisfied.

Jig and popper fishing was the other attraction on Christmas Island

for our group. Initially there were some reservations as the boats had no GPS or sounder on board. The concern was that finding and staying on reliable jigging spots would be a major challenge. The reality was that the guides and boat driver could navigate to the same spot within metres each day if required. We verified this with our handheld GPS unit that we carried (along with Satelite phone and EPIRB for saftey reasons). You could be forgiven for thinking that there was a carpet of fish along the bottom in some areas. It seemed like no matter where a jig was

dropped, something would climb on board in no time. The reality probably is more like generations of trial and error has given the guides a very good idea of where the best reefs are. For the Gilbertese, catching fish over the years has been a matter of life and death, while to us technology dependent Aussies, it really does just look



like they drive along the coast randomly selecting spots to fish. What was a little more hit and miss was the depths that we would stop in. Christmas Island is part of an ancient volcano which has more or less eroded down to sea level. Outside the surf break, the depth drops away very quickly in places. 40-50m of variation in where you pull up on a drift could be the difference between 40m of depth and almost emptying the reel on the drop. In the shallows, long nose emperor, GT's, red bass and coronation trout were common. In the mid depths of 60-80m species like green jobfish, almaco jacks and black trevally became more common, while if you are willing to drop further off the edge then bar cod and other unidentified critters start eating the jigs. It would be possible to go to Christmas Island and do nothing but jig the reefs around the island, though you probably will have to take out a loan to pay the excess baggage bill! Likewise with fishing soft plastics in the shallows. A few of the guys brought

lighter outfits and a good supply of 5 and 7 inch plastics. They came back beaten and broken with empty tackle bags and stories of being blown away time and time again, with just the odd trout or emperor to show for their efforts. The mind boggles as to what sort of fish would turn up with the aid of a decent sounder on the boat.

Throwing poppers at GT's is one of the main reasons for my visit to Christmas Island; stories of monster trevally from the bommie just in front of the lodge had us salivating at the possibilities for hooking into a fish over the magic 50kg mark. The first part of the week certainly didn't produce much in the way of good fish, though Kurt did manage to donate a few favourite lures to unseen beasts. The presence of a longline fleet moored in front of the town seemed to be playing a part in the slow GT fishing According to the locals, any GT within miles of the fleet had taken up residence under the ships to pick up





scraps thrown overboard. The suggestion was that we should head to a spot well down the coast away from the influence of th ships. It was a fair distance, but predominantly on the lee side of the island which made for a relaxed trip. At the first area we started drifting over, a dozen GT's were landed on jigs and surface lures in the first hour or two, along with a bunch of quality reef fish. After we'd tired of this, the guide English suggested we try the 'good GT spot' around the next point. We all looked at each other as if to say 'there's a better spot?'. He wasn't wrong either. A current line boiling out of the blue depths pushed up against a coral ledge, creating a huge eddy against the shore. For the next few hours, a school of GTs in the 15-25kg range seemed to follow the boat around, ready to pounce on just about anything that hit the water. There may have been bigger fish there, but when you are being pack attacked by multiple fish every second cast then it is pretty hard for anything else to get a look in. Poppers, stickbaits and swimbaits all

worked equally well. After losing count of the number of fish caught I ended up putting the rod down and picking up the camera. My reasoning being that good opportunities to catch GT's hitting poppers on still cameras only come along once in a blue moon. The real reason was more like: my back aches and I can't fight another fish! I did sneak back later in the day for a couple more fish, but by the time we headed home, I was totally stuffed. Even the lure of catching a couple of nice wahoo didn't get me back on the rods. Kurt was keen on a couple of 'hoo and it didn't take English long to spot a couple of 'wahoo birds' as we rounded a point. A pair of minnows went in and a short couple of minutes later both rods went off. Kurt boated a nice fish, while Gordo dropped his. The pattern continued each time we passed a point with Kurt eventually landing a healthy 20kg wahoo and Gordo pulling the hooks on everything that touched his lure. We began to wonder if Gordo even had hooks on at all. While that day will go down as one of my best



Kurt DeVilliers makes casting big poppers all day look so easy





### A popper gets munched by another GT





Copra from coconuts is one of the islands main exports





ever days fishing, The lads who went back the following day easily eclipsed the number of GT's that we landed!

My final days fishing was spent on the flats in the back country. This area provides some great opportunities to stalk some big bonefish in protected bays, if your presentations are up to it. As the day progressed my leader got longer, then lighter and the flies did likewise. It didn't seem to matter though. Single large cruising bones would patrol the edge where they could easily be spotted. I'd crouch down and lay a cast well ahead of the fish and wait for its approach. When I figured they were within sight of the fly I would begin to strip. Without exception, every decent size fish that day turned tail and fled like I'd just dropped a brick on its nose. Other anglers fared much better picking off a steady stream of fish through the day, but the back country on Christmas Island is one place that I have some seriously unfinished business.

Barely a blink of an eye after that, we

were standing on my front lawn back in Brisbane unloading the taxi, already planning a return trip. As it turns out, pretty



much everything went to plan with only a few minor hitches. Fish were caught, flight connections were made, nothing broke down and no-one got ill (apart from the last day, which may have been influenced by the night before). Happily, none of my usual pre-trip concerns came to fruition. We were able to enjoy fantastic fishing, meet some great people in a stunning and remote location.



# **Chistmas Island Tackle**

#### Fly Tackle for bonefish

6-7 weight fly rods with floating lines pretty much covers the bonefishing. Several anglers had 8 weights as well (myself included) but these didn't see much use on bones. They are however ideal for triggerfish which are quite common on some of the flats. Most bonefish flies in tan / sandy colours worked well, but the guides have a preference for very sparse ties. Having a variety of weights and sizes (mainly 6 and 8 and a lesser number of #4) seemed more important than having many different colours. I used a 6wt Sage TCX with Daiwa New Era Reel; the rod felt perfect on the shallow flats while the reel is a cassette design allowing fast changes between lines. For much of the flats fishing I used a Rio Midge Tip Line. It is not technically a saltwater or 'flats' line at all but it worked very well. The MidgeTip has a 3 foot line intermediate tip section which



allows the use of a 9-10 foot leader instead of the 12+ foot leader which is more common at Christmas Island.

Fly tackle for GTs: When fishing the flats for GTs it was a toss up between anglers as to whether 10 or 12 weights were best. 10 weights are easier to cast for long sessions on the pancake flats, but the 12 has more stopping power and ability to turn over big flies. As it turns out, we didn't run into very large GTs on the flats, so 10 weights proved to be fine. If you were going to Christmas Island specifically for big GTs, then definitely consider taking a 12 or 13 weight rod. Lines for the GTs on the flats were all floaters because there were frequently small corals on the edges to snag up anything that sank.

In flies, large bush pigs, flashy profiles and bend back flies (4/0-8/0 size) all worked well. Most of the flies were pale in colour with mixtures of white/olive, white/ pink and so on, being successful

#### **Jigging Tackle**

We mostly fished PE5-8 tackle, the heavier tackle proved to mostly be a good move as the bottom was treacherous and even small fish could reef you in no time. Heavier gear also helped land the many 15-25kg size GTs fairly quickly. Rods used included Daiwa Saltiga S-Extreme XHFS, Zenaq Fokeetos and Synits.

Travelling with jigs is always a problem due to the weight, though snags, wahoo and the odd screaming bust-off made our bags a fair bit lighter for the trip home. I mostly stuck with tried and true tropical jigs - 150-250g shorter lures like Patriot Designs Blast Edge, Seven Seas Hookers and FCL SL jigs along with some Maria Blueflames for variation. These all worked very well though I would have liked a few more 400g long jigs for some of the deeper spots we fished, perhaps to crack a larger almaco jack or black trevally.





#### **Popping tackle**

We took a ton of popping tackle to Christmas Island. The dilemma each day was which rods to take and what to leave behind, as the boat wasn't set up for carrying lots of GT tackle. The popping grounds are generally situated in fairly deep water (20-40m) and excessively long casts were not needed. Most fish hooked dived straight down and slugged it out under the boat. We mainly fished PE 8 rods such as the FCL Labo 80EXT, 81EXT and Carpenter Coral Viper for their ease of use with a variety of lures. These worked well overall, but some of the shorter rods like the Daiwa S-Extreme GTXX and Smith Tokara made the job of lifting a stubborn fish a fair bit easier. This was especially so when the bite was red hot and you wanted the fish in the boat as quickly as possible, to minimise crossed lines with other anglers as well as getting back into the action quickly.

Lures that worked on the GTs varied throughout the week. Early on when fish

were hard to come by, blooping poppers such as FCL Ebipops, Cuberas and Hammerheads worked best in bringing the fish up. Later in the week when the GT bite was pretty hot, a variety of lures worked well. Stickbaits and swimming lures were employed a lot more, mostly because they take less effort to work that the big bloopers, rather than any preferences by the fish. I used the FCL CSP 200 quite a lot as well as the ASWB SS120.

We also have a couple of great sessions on yellowfin tuna in the 15-25kg class off one of the deeper points. They were schooling about 50m deep, judging by the height of the birds flying high above them. Generally I would have considered yellowfin to be a stickbait target, but these deep schooling fish responded very well to the big GT bloopers. It took no more than a few minutes of casting on most occasions before a fin would hit the surface in pursuit of a popper. jigs in the 200g range worked under the poppers were also quite effective.



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