

North Stradbroke Island

Jay Perham | September 2006 » Feature Articles /

SEQ has some of the most amazing destinations for people who enjoy seeing beautiful, pristine environments that abound with flora, fauna and some of Australia's best-managed coastal and marine parks.

Within these parks the fringing islands of Moreton Bay would be among the easiest and most accessible for those who live in the greater Brisbane area. Moreton Island and North Stradbroke Island are both serviced by a daily barge and water taxis. In this article we are going to cover North Stradbroke Island and how to best plan a trip for beach fishing and 4WDing. Although Straddie does have sealed roads for standard vehicles, we are going to discuss travelling to Main Beach for some 4WDing along the beach and a complete self-contained camping weekend.

If you haven't ever driven offroad or on a beach before and want to give it a go, you will be in for some fun. This is a great adventure that any novice driver can tackle with a few helpful hints.

Getting There

Barges and taxis leave from Toondah Harbour, which is located at Middle Street, Cleveland. On arrival, all vehicles and passengers are greeted by one of the staff members who will direct you on what to do next. Make sure that you are at the landing at least 15 minutes prior to departure. The barges all have modern facilities including a bar and a snack shop.

When onboard it is time to sit back and enjoy the beginning of your holiday. This trip takes around an hour. When it is time to wake up at the other end, the barge sets down at Dunwich, so any last minute items that you may have forgotten on your trip across can be purchased here. As you drive away from the barge the tourist information centre is about 250m to the left. It is there that you must pick up your camping and beach driving permits. If you are going to arrive on the island out of office hours, visitors must call in advance and pre-pay for all permits; the information centre will then arrange a place for you to pick up these permits.

From Dunwich head straight through the town intersection, this road will take you past the local airstrip, Brown Lake, the local golf course and on to the Causeway that links the road to Main Beach. When you reach the Causeway it is a good time to check over your vehicle for any loose objects and tie them down. It's also a good time to lock in your front hubs and engage 4WD. Keep up good speed when driving down the track and on to the beach. This part is probably the second hardest 4WDing of your trip.

Most standard 4WD vehicles will handle general beach driving and getting to the camping grounds easily. Cars should be in a safe roadworthy condition as normal road rules apply on all beach-driving destinations in Queensland. It is also a good idea to get your vehicle checked over by a mechanic to ensure that there is no chance of breakdown whilst you're on holiday. Breaking down or having an accident will lead to some rather expensive bills if a 4WD modified tow truck is required to get you and your vehicle off Straddie.

Double Up

If you have never done this before, it is always better to have more than one vehicle. This isn't always that easy to plan, so the second best option would be to organise your trip on any long weekend or holiday season. At least then you know that there will be someone on the beach that has good experience and can offer you assistance should you run into trouble. The next step is to plan your barge trip to coincide with the tides. Driving on North Straddie is a lot more dependent on tides than all other islands. The best time to be on the beach is within 2 hours either side of low tide; this gives you four hours of good solid sand to drive on. The trip from Dunwich to the first camping ground is about 45 minutes. Remember to plan your return barge trip with the tides also. Basic 4WDing equipment, like one snatch strap, rated shackles, gloves, a tyre pressure gauge and a shovel should be collected before any offroad trips are even attempted.

Camp grounds

The first of the camping grounds is located about 10km to the south of the Causeway and is marked by a sign on the top of the dunes. Some access tracks are a little hard to negotiate for first timers, so it is a good idea to walk up a few of the access tracks and decide which will be the easiest one to get up.

Most of the camping grounds are linked by a maze of tracks over the back of the dunes so it doesn't really matter which access point you choose to try. About the best advice to give at this point is to let your tyres down, almost all the way down. I have split rims and inner tubes so I run my tyres at about 12psi; check with your tyre dealer as to what a safe pressure to run your particular tyres, as all are different. Once this has been done and you have chosen an access, take a good run up of at least 200m, select low range and get up to a speed so that you will be in about fourth gear by the time you make the ascent. Keep the motor revving as high as possible and blast your way up the dune. Get one of your passengers to stand at the top of the track so they can stop any other vehicles from coming the other way. Only change down a gear if your tachometer drops below 3000rpm. If you don't make it on the first attempt, unload some weight and try again. There will always be someone around willing to help you get up even if they have to snatch you up the hill.

Everything must be catered for when camping on the beachfront. There are no amenities like running water or composting toilets provided. Bathing in the numerous lakes and lagoons with soaps or detergents is strictly prohibited due to the delicate nature of these slow flowing

waterways. Any showering or cleaning with detergents must be done at a minimum distance of 50m. Fresh water can be collected at Dunwich and most of the local businesses are obliging providing tap water for campers. So taking water drums with a large capacity is a good idea.

Unlike most of the more popular places for locals to get away for the weekend, North Straddie welcomes dogs onto the island and for this reason is an obvious choice for many. Of course with this privilege comes the responsibility of being a conscientious owner and ensuring that your pet remains on a lead at all times. Owners must pick up their animal's waste and dispose of it properly. Pets must also be controlled so as to not disturb other campers or wildlife.

All the driving and preparation should only take you about 45 minutes from when you left the barge. All that is needed now is to select a suitable area and set up camp.

Fishing options

North Straddie's fishing options are endless – every form of fishing is available from open ocean rock fishing and beach fishing to sheltered or open water boat fishing. On Straddie's western side, Moreton Bay offers year round smooth water fishing due to its numerous surrounding islands and waterways. The eastern side of the island is a complete contrast with beaches and rocky headlands that are open to the elements and at the mercy of the oceans' ever-changing mood. This is why Straddie is known worldwide for its fantastic beach fishing.

Almost every species of fish that enters into Moreton Bay will pass by the beaches long gutters and holes to forage. Some extraordinary catches have come from anglers chasing whiting and dart, hooking into the occasional 'unstoppable'. The most famous of these larger predators is mullocky, which can grow to gigantic proportions in this area. One of the best things about Straddie is that it's a year round fishing destination – any place, any time of the year can turn up red-hot action.

Fishing the beaches in the summer months, the main target species are whiting, bream, dart, flathead and the odd shark and pelagic. For the most part, beach fishers who regularly fish this area use sidecast reels like the Alvey 5000. Its robustness allows for days of fishing on end without any maintenance issues – very handy when driving up and down the beaches in search of good fishing gutters. These reels, when matched with a whippy tipped rod about 9ft long, will handle fishing for all of the species encountered in summer. They also have the required line capacity if you do hook onto something big. When fishing in summer, it's quite common to get prevailing northerly winds that create a fair bit of side sweep down the beach. So remember to take extra sinkers to help overcome this problem.

Winter months usually require the use of two outfits. The one mentioned above for day fishing and a bigger rod and reel for afternoon and night fishing. During the cooler months, fish that can be encountered are generally the same as summer, only larger. Also expect chopper and greenback tailor, mullocky and the occasional snapper. When beach fishing at this time of year longer rods to 12ft are more commonly used as the surf tends to be bigger and a lot more powerful, so it is necessary to keep your line as clear as possible from the shore break. This will stop your bait from being prematurely washed into the beach. Prevailing winds during winter are mostly from the west so it is not as necessary to use a lot of sinker weight, most anglers actually don't use any weight when chasing tailor or mullocky.

Bait can be collected on the island and fresh baits always outfish frozen ones. For the smaller bread and butter species, pipis can be dug up from the beach in the hundreds. The best time to dig for them is on low tide as the vehicles drive up and down the beach. The pressure from the tyres on the sand makes the pipis visible as small 50-cent-sized blobs of raised sand. You really can't miss them! There are thousands polka-dotted at about the mid-tide mark. Dig as many as are required for a session, because there will be more to collect next low tide. The easiest way that I found to dig pipis is to get the dog to do it! Just point at the sand say 'dig', stand behind him and collect them as they are launched from the sand!

Beachworms are around in droves on Straddie but are a bit shy due to the traffic, so find a quieter bit of beach either up towards Point Lookout or to the south near the 'Pin.

A cast-net is also a valuable tool as good fresh hardheads are also abundant on the western, sheltered side of the island. Worth a quick throw to get a few on the ice after getting off the barge.

Choosing which gutters to fish can be the difference between catching a few and doing really well. Stradbroke can sometimes have long gutters that stretch for a kilometre or more and often without any holes at their ends. A little time taken to stand up high on the sand dunes and assess the beach formations is well worth the effort. If extra long gutters have formed the best area to start looking for fish activity is where the gutter is at its narrowest, these points are usually much deeper than the rest of the surrounding gutter. Waves will usually break closer into the beach and create a steep drop-off; it is there that the cunning fish wait for their next meal to be washed over the shallows. Another good place worth a bait is in the rips that push discoloured water straight back out to sea. Predatory fish wait at the head of these rips for small crabs, worms and fish that have been caught up in the current. To fish a rip, use minimal or no weight, feed line out as your offering is sucked through the breakers and in to the deeper water. This is probably the most common way to fish for the likes of tailor; usually big schools can be seen smashing the surface at the head of a big rip.

Half the fun is getting there

On most occasions the journey is better than the destination. North Stradbroke Island is one of those rare places that the destination is as equally as enjoyable as the journey and time away from work. It is truly one of the top five Australian beach driving destinations. I hope that this article will encourage more first time, or even experienced 4WDers to get over there and enjoy its natural beauty and first class fishing.

Facts

Valuable Contacts

Stradbroke Island Tourism:

Junner Street

PO Box 107

Dunwich, QLD 4183

Ph: (07) 3409 9555

8:30am – 5:00pm (Mon – Fri)

www.stradbrocketourism.com

Stradbroke Ferries:

Toondah Harbour

Middle Street

Cleveland, QLD 4163

Ph: (07) 3286 2666

www.stradbrokeferries.com.au

PERHAM – Straddie Fish Map

Map of North Stradbroke Island.

Images