



IN AND OUTBACK

A tranquil spot in the QUEENSLAND OUTBACK is one of the *BEST PLACES* in the country to FISH FOR COD. And getting there is *HALF THE FUN*, says Rob McFarland.

“IT’S FISHING,” SAYS DAVE Downie, pushing back his weathered Akubra. “Sometimes you catch one, sometimes you don’t.”

Dave should know. As a fishing journalist for more than 40 years, he’s fished all over Australia and is acutely aware that the sport is as much about serendipity as it is about skill. Which is just as well because as a complete novice, my early casting attempts are laughably inept. However, thanks to Dave’s patient tuition, I finally succeed in getting the fly to land in the river. Eventually, it almost goes in the direction I’m aiming.

We’re in ‘cod country’, an outback region of southern Queensland famous for Murray cod that can grow to a startling 45 kilograms. Dave tells us he recently pulled a 22-kilogram fish from this very spot on the banks of the Dumaresq River.

Dave assures us the river is “full of fish”, but it’s reluctant to share its spoils today. Part of the problem is that it’s nearing noon; as Dave explains, “fish tend to shut their mouths in the middle of the day.”

Today’s adventure started with a limousine pick-up from the Star Gold Coast at the rather un-holiday-like hour of 5.30am. The early start is necessary because it’s more than 300 kilometres from the coast to this outback fishing spot. To make the journey by car would take almost five hours, so the only way to get there and back in a day is by helicopter. Oh well, if you insist.

Leaving from Gold Coast airport in a plush six-seater Airbus H125, we head inland toward Springbrook National Park. Flying at →



THIS PAGE: *The undulating Gold Coast hinterland; Dumaresq Homestead from above.*
OPPOSITE: *Dave on Dumaresq Homestead. A rock escarpment presides over Springbrook National Park.*

At this hour, the undulating valleys are filled with early-morning fog, like vast forested cauldrons.

DAVE DOWNIE'S TOP FIVE QUEENSLAND FISHING SPOTS

CAPE YORK Famous for its remoteness, big barramundi and queenfish.

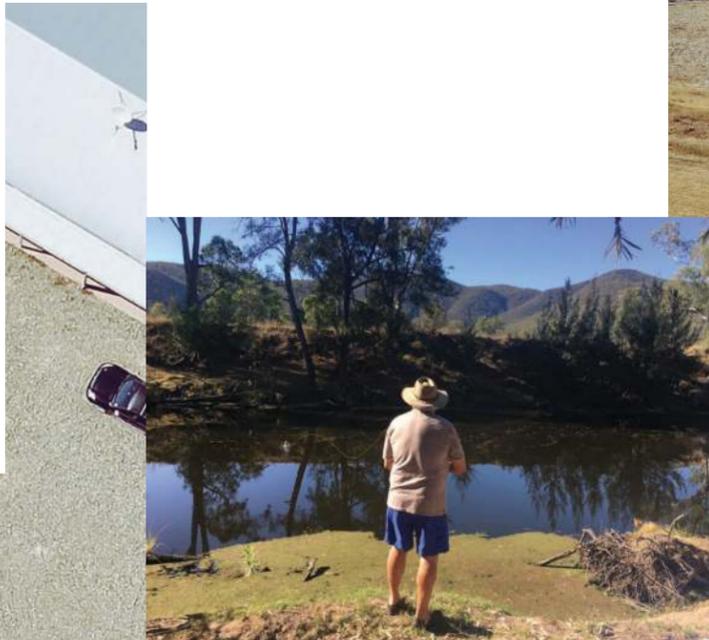
EUNGELLA DAM Located 100 kilometres west of Mackay, it's home to the sooty grunter, one of the hardest-fighting freshwater fish.

FRASER ISLAND The best beach fishing in Australia and a mecca for tailor fish.

CAIRNS AND FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND Has an incredible diversity of species all year round including marlin, mangrove jack and coral trout.

MONDURAN LAKE At 100 kilometres west of Bundaberg, it holds the record for the world's biggest barramundi.

Visit qld.gov.au for rules, regulations and licence requirements for recreational fishing in Queensland.



DETAILS

Go Fish Australia's one-day outback fishing trip includes airport limo transfers, helicopter flights from Brisbane or the Gold Coast, an expert fishing guide, all equipment and bait, morning tea and a gourmet lunch. The cost is \$1840 per person based on five people travelling. The company also offers a similar package to the rainforests of Byron Bay, as well as coastal and beach offerings including a new one-day heli fishing adventure to Fraser Island, and can create bespoke packages throughout Australia. gofishaustralia.com.au

under 200 metres, we skim over sprawling homesteads, eucalypt-covered ridgelines and exposed rock escarpments. At this hour, the undulating valleys are filled with early-morning fog, like vast forested cauldrons. To our left, just over the border in New South Wales, is the distinctive silhouette of Mount Warning.

An hour into the flight, the scenery suddenly changes. The trees get shorter and sparser and the landscape lightens from a deep green to a montage of parched yellows and browns. We've hit the outback, and it's been more than two years since the last proper rain.

We land on the lawn of Dumaresq Homestead, a 365-hectare cattle farm with a spacious six-bedroom luxury farm stay. Over morning tea on the property's shaded verandah, we meet Angela Esdaile, who, together with Dave, runs Go Fish Australia, a company that specialises in bespoke fishing adventures. Thanks to Dave's encyclopaedic fishing knowledge and Angela's extensive tourism experience, they can organise everything from luxury day trips like this one to more rustic multi-day adventures all over the country. The reason they use this property is because it has exclusive access to 11 kilometres of the Dumaresq River.

From beneath the dappled shade of ghost gums and stringybarks, we spend the next two hours idly casting into the river's tannin-stained waters, letting the fly drift downstream on the current before reeling it in and trying

again. The process takes on an almost meditative quality and I find myself worrying less about catching a fish and more about enjoying the scenery. A selection of beers by Great Northern Brewing Company and a bottle of Starward single malt whisky certainly helps.

While none of us catch any fish, one of the group manages to snare something even more elusive. A photographer is using a drone to take some aerial shots and the enthusiastic angler manages to accidentally snare it with an errant cast. "Let's call that a catch," says Dave, winking.

We retire to the homestead for a gourmet lunch of Queensland produce. After a sumptuous selection of crabs, prawns and Moreton Bay bugs, we tuck into seasoned chicken and thick slabs of steak cooked on the barbecue. Queensland might not be as renowned as other states for its wine, but the accompanying drops from Sirromet Wines in Mount Cotton are all excellent – particularly the 2010 sparkling pinot.

"Of course, the idea is that we cook whatever you catch for lunch," says Dave, his blue eyes twinkling from beneath his Akubra. "But it's a bit difficult to grill a drone."

We still have the helicopter flight back to look forward to – an exhilarating journey that will see us cross the Granite Belt and follow the Currumbin Valley toward the coast – but for now we settle back in our chairs, top up our glasses and speculate on the ones that got away. **AT**

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: *Dave Downie shows how it's done; The landing 'lawn' at Dumaresq Homestead. OPPOSITE:* *The hinterland wearing its early-morning cloak.*

