

GREEN ISLAND LAKE CONJOLA

Located halfway between Sussex Inlet and Ulladulla, on the NSW South Coast, lies a small island a few hundred metres North of the mouth of Lake Conjola (at low tide a sand bridge often joins the island to the mainland). Measuring about 250 metres in diameter, the island resembles a squashed teardrop and has a circumference of around 900m, making it an easy swim for an experienced spearo or a confidence builder for the intermediate diver.

I usually access the island around Christmas each year, whilst holidaying at the Lake Conjola caravan park. By then, the East Australia Current is in full motion and most years, 15 or even 20m vis is possible. I access the island by walking the 1.5km from the caravan park, but whenever I can, I catch a lift from one of the guys on their jet skis (usually after over exaggerated promises of fish when I return), just remember to take some water on your float, as dehydration is a real issue.

If you do walk, you will need to cross the river at some point and depending on the tide, you may have to swim. The lower portion of Lake Conjola prohibits spearfishing so you need to ensure your gun is unloaded and make it obvious you are not attempting to spear, even though large Flathead abound this portion of the lake.

Once at the island, you can either swim clockwise or anti-clockwise. For me, the decision comes down to the swell and wind. Being Summer, the Nor-easters prevail, but usually don't generate too much swell. If I'm lucky enough to score that ride, I generally jump in on the Southern shore and swim anti-clockwise. If walking, generally I swim clockwise but either way, the diving is good.

Starting on the Northern side from the beach, it is all sand but smooth boulders start to appear as you approach the island. Flathead, Whiting, Mullet and Garfish are very common, but from time to time I've nailed some very nice Blue morwong in this corner. Also, if a Southerly wind or swell is present, diving this Northern side at low

tide, is quite good as the land bridge creates some protection for a few hours.

About 300m North of the island and directly off the beach, is a patch of rock about 400msq which holds a variety of fish. Nice Rock blackfish, Blue morwong, and especially Bream, are generally present during Summer months. Also, between this reef and South back to the island, are about 4 lone patches of rock only about 5msq each. These isolated rocks are a haven for species taking refuge on the exposed sand. If you can find them, look carefully and approach quietly. I like to dive to the bottom when I first see them and approach slowly. I've scored Bream over a kilo, as well as some nice Flatties lying in ambush next to the structure. Whiting also abound here.

Back to the island, if you continue East on the Northern side, the bottom drops away on your left with thousands of round boulders sloping quickly to a depth of about 15m where the bottom levels out. These boulders hold most of the Morwong species plus mosaic and Six-spined leatherjackets. If you burley here and keep really quiet, some good (2kg) Snapper often move in from out deeper. They are very cagy and make a very rewarding species if you take the time and can sit on the bottom in ambush, but burley is the key.

Continuing East, you'll come to a solid ledge jutting out perpendicular from the island and depending on the angle of any Southerly swell, sometimes a wrap around wash occurs. If not too large, the resulting white water nearly always holds Luderick and Rock blackfish. Once past this section, the water gets a little deeper, but only around 10 to 12 metres. Tassies abound here as do Red, Blue morwong and Black reef jackets. If you head out wide (North of the island), anything is possible. I've seen Salmon, Bonito and even Kings. This spot is also popular for boatie's fishing, so keep an eye out and make sure you have a float and flag.

Continue East, and you start to poke out past the island itself and you will notice

a series of North-south running benches as the depth starts to increase. To reach the 15 metre mark, you will find yourself a good 60 to 70 metres East of the island. Sometimes here, you will notice a little current but I've always seen schools of Salmon here and they are great fun to chase. A lot of people don't rate Salmon, but I smoke them and reckon they are excellent cold the next day served with crackers, or blended into a great smoky salmon dip.

Sometimes the swell from the South becomes too much so I continue with caution or I head back and work the drop offs on the Northern side of the island. But if it's not too big, there are some great cracks (well cracks as big as a car) right up on the shore of the Eastern side of the island. White water always covers them, but if you dive down and approach from below, these large cracks are chocker's with fish. I always expect to see Jew, but never have (maybe you will) but it always has great Rock blackfish, big Bream and often Tailor. These cracks present so many choices that sometimes you just don't know which one to take.

A series of these ledges occur all along the East coast of the island and even as you round the Southern side and head West. The main difference with the Southern side of the island to the Northern, is that it shallows quickly and a large reef extends a few hundred metres Southward. This reef has undulating channels which range from 2 metres down to 4 or 5 metres. One commonality of this reef, is that it is covered in thick kelp, almost like a forest. Schooling throughout this forest, are large schools of resident Luderick as well as Salmon, Bream and even Garfish. This reef is ideal for the less experienced spearo and can be easily accessed from the beach, just swim anti-clockwise from the beach and when you reach the South-western corner of the island, head East and you can't miss it.

Once done and back on shore, I gather all my gear and contemplate the walk back to camp. I just wish I could call that jet ski. Well, at least I have my rigcord, where I've



A typical catch of Whiting and Drummer.



The Travelling Spearo
Craig Shephard

Craig and company with a Luderick and a Red mowie. If you ask nicely, you can often swing a boat ride out to Green Island.

strung my fish. I loop the extra cord up, secure my gun, fins, throw them over my shoulder and head back.

After you have conquered Green Island, head South just over 5km to another local hot spot, Bannister Head, Mollymook. The advantage of this spot is that you can drive to the top of the headland and the walk is only 50m down the hill to the Lucky Stone Beach. The entry is located on the Northern side of the head and is protected from the South, but no good in a strong Northerly.

As with Green Island, the terrain and species become more oceanic as you head East along the Northern shore. Bannister has more gutters than Green Island which seem to hold more Tassies and Blue morwong. In fact, I've regularly found balls of Tassies and Blue mowies of 20 or

30 at a time. They are generally just out of sight from the surface, but if you dive to around 15m, you should see them almost every dive. Also, there are nearly always large Wobbegong sharks with the Tassies.

Nearly halfway round the headland, there are a series of large sloping rocks on the shore and you will notice the swell, if present, seems to roll or even slide up these slopes rather than crash into the shore. There are also a few gutters that run right up inside the shoreline itself. Over the years, I've found this section to hold the most pelagic species, especially Salmon, Bonito and occasionally Kingfish. Also located here, are a few bommies, one breaks the surface but a few are hidden. The terrain all around this area rises and falls dramatically and dense schools of baitfish are often present, hence, why I think the

pelagics like it.

The headland continues East then South around to Mollymook Beach, but right on the South-eastern corner, the underwater terrain changes again. It's almost as though an ancient cliff has fallen into the sea and created large caverns inbetween the fallen segments. Cruising around these caverns, are the largest Silver drummer you will ever see, plus I've seen juvenile Grey nurse sharks here on a number of occasions.

Whether you choose to dive Green Island or Bannister Head, remember that these are but two locations suitable for spearing in this region. For only a few kilometres North of Lake Conjola, is Bendalong, but I'll leave that for another story.

Remember, stay safe and only take what you need. 🐟

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Lake Conjola is a fantastic family holiday destination for the kids as well!



A Flathead shoots off after being disturbed.

