



WINTER TROLLING AT WAIHAU BAY

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MATHEW HEWETSON





Trolling for gamefish in winter in Godzone seems unnatural and you need plenty of layers.

Waihou Bay is a remote, isolated part of Godzone that is famous for its' big blue marlin grounds over summer and now recently for bluefin tuna in winter. Editor Matt Hewetson recently visited in July for the first time.

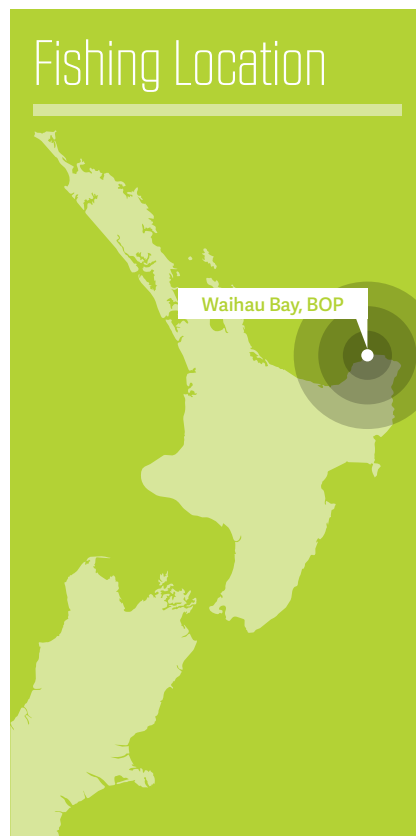
Southern bluefin tuna are highly prized the world over for their excellent table qualities. Growing to around an average weight of 140kg and reaching 250kg, this species is smaller than their other larger cousins, such as the Atlantic or Pacific bluefin. They are still a worthy opponent, capable of blistering speed and deep down, dogged fights. I have caught one before down in Fiordland and although only around 18kg, it was a great battle and I was eager to resume contact with a larger one at a later date.

My opportunity came in late June when Kane Tapper from DeCoro Fishing Supplies invited me down to fish with Coastal Fishing Charters who are based in Hicks

Bay. Owner and skipper Aaron Sargent has good game fishing experience on board his 8.6m Senator and word had arrived that the winter tuna run had started earlier this year. I had also seen photos posted from an old school mate, Warren Knudsen who had been down fishing there the week earlier and had landed several good bluefin.

Driving down from Tauranga to Hicks Bay takes almost 4 hours and the coastal drive from Opotiki to Waihou Bay is outstanding, with its' Pohutukawa lined bays and deep, blue water within casting distance from the rocks. This place just oozes fishing opportunities and I wondered why its taken me so long to make it to this part of Godzone. It reminds me a lot of the fishing grounds in the Far North, with few people around and a magical untouched beauty that makes you feel relaxed and away from the crowd.

Fishing Location



DESTINATION Waihou Bay



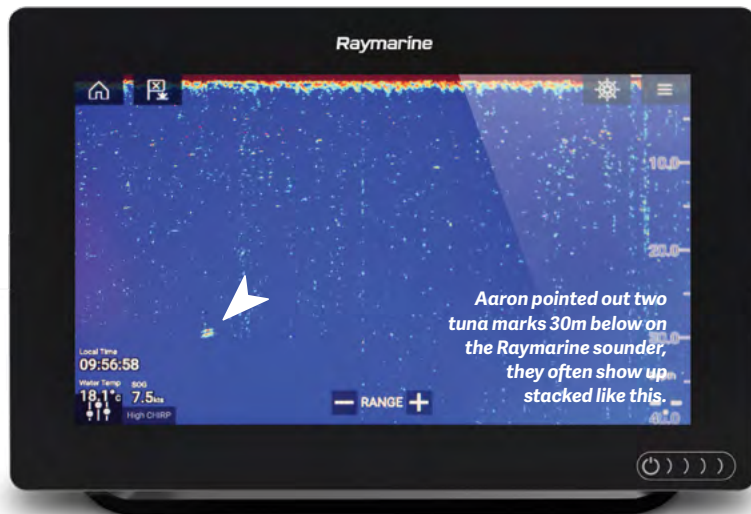
Skipper Aaron works the area where the bluefin have been caught around the 1200m mark.



Southern Bluefin Tuna

Scientific Name: *Thunnus Maccoyii*

- ♦ Southern bluefin tuna (SBT) come from the family Scombridae and found in the open southern hemisphere waters of all the world's oceans, mainly between 30°S and 50°S, to nearly 60°S. Reaching up to 2.5 metres (8.2 ft) and weighing up to 260kg (570 lb).
- ♦ SBT, like other pelagic tuna species, are part of a group of bony fishes that can maintain their body core temperature up to 10 °C (18 °F) above the ambient temperature. This advantage enables them to maintain high metabolic output for predation and migrating large distances.



Aaron pointed out two tuna marks 30m below on the Raymarine sounder, they often show up stacked like this.

Not far from the Waihou Bay Lodge where we were going to call in for an ale and to see who had also made it down, Kane started to feel unwell and suggested for me to drive the rest of the way. Along down the road he asked me to stop quickly and upon hitting the brakes, Kane tried to exit the van but didn't make it time as he chucked all over the door, floor and dashboard. I suspected food poisoning was to blame by the dodgy chicken nuggets from the BP he had bought in Tauranga, as we pulled up to the lodge to sort him out and take a breather before we drove the last windy part to Hicks Bay.

We bumped into a few local Tauranga

guys, Glenn Sheaff was one who had come down to chase tuna for a couple of days. They had been out that day with no luck and said it was quite rough, but the forecast was looking a lot better for tomorrow.

HICKS BAY

We had a good feed and catch-up at the lodge then jumped into the "smelly van" to drive the 40-minute drive to Hicks Bay where we were going to stay the night and launch from in the morning. We arrived to find nobody was home, so Kane called Aaron who was across the road at his neighbours and for us to go over.

DESTINATION Waihou Bay



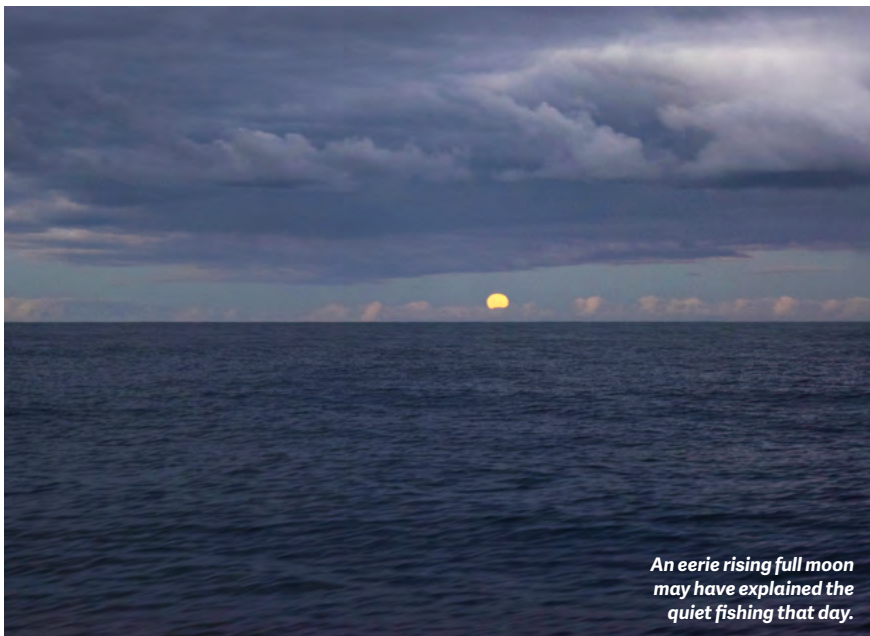
It glassed off in the late arvo with no wind, looking back in to Waihou Bay.

"We trolled five Red Gill lures and Aaron is a big fan of using dredges and tows two with the rubber looking sauries in the lure spreads"

been caught with few double hook-ups also reported. Aaron put in a call to a commercial tuna contact who said they were still way out fishing off Gisborne on the main tuna schools and it was still too early for Waihou.

We continued to troll for the rest of the afternoon and the only action was a double strike from a couple of fat skippies which got us keen and sharp again. However, that was our only bit of excitement for the day as we headed back in just as the sun was setting and the rising full moon was an impressive sight as it came up in the east.

Back in we learnt that an 120kg striped marlin had indeed been caught, that's impressive for late June. Kane and I would have loved to stay another day, but with work commitments back in Tauranga we had to drive back that night. As we left the East Coast we were amazed at the sight of constant trailer boats coming down to Waihou as we passed about 30 trailer boats. Word was out, and Friday was shaping to be a big day down there with over 100 boats out trolling. I can see why Waihou appeals to so many anglers and I too will be sure to return. **FIGZ**



An eerie rising full moon may have explained the quiet fishing that day.

We were welcomed by the locals into their house and where a good gathering was enjoying a few Steinies and talking about the fishing. Kane and I had already eaten but when we saw the fresh paua, hapuka and kina that was served up we just had to dig in. Such great hospitality and we discussed a plan with skipper Aaron and Paul Jury from Lusty and Blundell who was also joining us fishing tomorrow.

The next morning, we got up in the dark and made our way down to the beach only 100m away and launched the big Senator with the tractor. The sea was very calm, with barely a wave coming into Hicks Bay. We headed out to the 1000-1200m where the other trailer boats had arrived to start trolling. I counted about a dozen boats around us and the sea got calmer throughout the morning with the warm winter sun coming out and the sea

temperature reaching just over 18 degrees at one point. We thought we might even see a marlin in the gear it was looking so blue!

We trolled five Red Gill lures and Aaron is a big fan of using dredges and tows two with the rubber looking sauries in the lure spreads. Kane and I were staying put in the cockpit watching the lures like seagulls and unfortunately with the rich kina and paua from the night before, I was dropping some potent gas bombs much to Kane's regret. I don't think Kane is that keen on-going fishing with me again!

After trolling all morning, the radio was quiet and then we heard that a boat close-by had hooked up and we could see them playing the fish as we trolled past. Over half an hour later and they landed a nice 70kg+ fish. It was quiet though and we wondered if the full moon had an effect, as the previous week several nice fish had



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Coastal Fishing Charters has an 8.6m Senator (Strictly Fishing) with twin 200hp four-stroke Yamaha outboards, with a maximum speed of 42 knots and a cruising speed of 20 knots.

To book a trip contact, Aaron 021 542 127 or visit www.coastalfishingcharters.co.nz

Accommodation/Bar/Restaurant: Contact Waihou Bay Lodge, Ph: 07 325 3805 or email: yhaubay@xtra.co.nz