

## Point Lonsdale Bronzies



Looking through some old fishing books, a very old black and white photo of a bronze whaler shark caught from the Lorne Pier caught my interest. One of the two people in the photo was Ron Giles. The other wasn't named.

The article and photograph certainly got me going. I didn't get a wink of sleep that night as I tossed and turned, images of big sharks racing through my mind. I resolved to catch a big shark from a pier and that was that.

It was such a defining moment that I wasted no time in visiting the tackle store and investing in a 24 kg game fishing outfit: But where would I fish for a shark?

Geoff Wilson, suggested the Point Lonsdale pier would be worth trying, even though it had been 30 years since he and Ian Munro first land based shark fishing from there.

Mick Kollaris, a close friend of mine for many years, noticed the new tackle, and after the inevitable string of questions wanted in. Just as well because fishing for big fish is a team effort.

A howling westerly gusting to more than 30 knots greeted us as we arrived at the Point Lonsdale Pier around 9.00 pm. It was low slack water and, hopefully, the combination of offshore wind and incoming tide would send our large bait of tuna, rigged on 14/0 hooks and wire cable trace, out to where it would interest a shark.

No problem there: Our bait was soon hundreds of metres out from the pier. But that combination of wind and tide had angered to the sea: Waves now crashed in, first over the sheltering reef on the right hand side of the pier, and then against the pier itself as the reef was covered

The pier shuddered as the building waves repeatedly raked the pylons and wooden decking, submerging the low landing under a blanket of white foam, the same low landing where we had intended to subdue any shark we might hook.

It was certainly a startling experience for us first timers on the pier in these conditions, but it didn't seem to worry the constant stream of curious folk, sauntering out for a breath of fresh, if somewhat bracing, salty air.

"What are you after mate, a shark or something?"

"Yes mate." I answered.

"Good Luck fellers! No sharks have been caught here for ages."

Well, come 2.00 am it when we both jumped to the growl of the 50W.

The crowds had thinned out somewhat so we had the pier more or less to ourselves as the reel snarled off once more, then accelerated to a scream:

Yes! This was what we came for.

As we'd let the line out earlier in the night, we'd fixed pieces of Styrofoam on it to keep any belly from sinking to the bottom and becoming snagged. Now, as I pushed up the lever I could see them popping off the line away into the darkness as the rod loaded up with 8 kg of drag.

Mick fitted the gimbals belt on me as line poured from the reel in great long bursts toward Queenscliff. Getting all that line back against the tide took ages, and without a harness, it was hard work.

In fact it wasn't until an hour later that first, the trace – and then the distinct shape of a big shark over three metres long – glided into view before continuing right under the pier and out the other side.

Somehow, I got a rope fixed to the rod and reel and lowered it over the side while Mick managed to hook onto the line on the opposite side of the pier.

This enabled the recovery of the rod and reel, albeit on the opposite side of the pier to the low, and very wet landing where we hoped to secure the shark, but the big bronzie was having none of that. Instead, it arced up a treat making it impossible to hold onto the trace.

When the trace did come within reach once more, we did something we would later regret, but in the heat of the moment it seemed a good idea.

We wrapped wire trace around the end of one of the decking planks and held on as waves continued to rake the pier, tossing the shark back and forth on the taut cable.

Our gaff was too short to reach the shark, the low landing was awash and unreachable from our position, and walking the shark ashore on this side of the pier was impossible: Sooner or later something had to give.

After half an hour of this stalemate, a particularly big swell took the shark under the pier and around one of the pylons with such force that the big game swivel snapped and I copped a thick ear from the trace as it lashed back over the rail catching me across the side of the face.

Bloodied but unbowed, we vowed retribution. Next time would be different.

A 7.7 metre flying gaff and a steel noose attachment was added to our tackle; so it was with renewed confidence we arrived at the Point Lonsdale Pier once more in uncannily similar conditions to those we experienced on our first trip.

Once again, the pier trembled as the combination of a strong westerly wind and incoming tide infuriated the sea that surged white and menacing around us. Slack water was at midnight, and by 1.00 am, our bait – once again a large presentation of tuna – sat some 300 metres out from the pier.

You could almost smell the bronzie in the air, but time rolled by and we had to wait until shortly after 3.00 am for the 50W to sing what was to become a familiar song.

This time I was going to pace myself, because – if our previous encounter was anything to go by – it could be a long tough battle. I banged the lever up to full strike and held on as once more, the Styrofoam pieces popped off the line for as far as I could see out into the darkness.

Something like 400 metres of line had disappeared from the reel before the shark altered direction. First it had headed straight out into The Rip, but now it was swimming in a big arc toward the lights of Queenscliff.

And once again it took an hour before the trace, and then the shape of another big bronzie materialized in the beam of Mick's spotlight. This time though, the long handled flying gaff was at hand and Mick made no mistake.

The shark was soon manoeuvred onto the landing, assisted by the heaving swell and perhaps our good timing. It was a time for jubilation; any thoughts of the hard work that lay ahead of us were suspended for the time being as we savoured our sense of accomplishment.

I fished with Mick on most occasions, but there were times I met the challenge of the bronzie alone.

One night, when fishing alone from the pier, I brought in a good size bronzie, and was about to lead it around to the low landing, when I felt it bite onto a pylon, I could feel the crunch of its jaws on the mussels right through the pier. Shining the spotlight over the side, I could see it there hanging on for grim life

Once again the long handled flying gaff saved the day and another big bronzie was added to my growing tally.

Another night Mick hooked a big shark that all but emptied his reel. That run only stopped when the hooks pulled with only a few metres of line covering the hub of his 50W.

Here is a run through of the tackle and bait Mick and I have used to catch bronzies from the Point Lonsdale Pier.

### **Tackle:**

- Quality game fishing rods and reels with 24 kg (50 pound class) as a minimum requirement.
- Large Ansell balloons are preferred, because – providing you have a favourable wind – they get the bait out into the strike zone quickly, an important issue if you are targeting bronze whalers.
- A long handled (7.7 metre) flying gaff and wire noose.
- Black Magic gimbals belt and Harness

- Hooks we've used include the Mustad 7699 Sea master in size 14/0 which require careful sharpening. We've also used the Owner super mutu circle (model 5127-241 in size 14/0). That will get the job done but these must be used with a thorough knowledge of baiting up with circles.
- Traces are 600 lb, nylon coated cable using a Flemish Eye, and the correct size crimped sleeves for all joins and attachments.
- Baits of tuna and bonito get the job done ahead of the rest and are attached to the trace with electrical cable ties.
- A hand held spotlight should also be regarded as essential.

### **Time and Tide**

A strong westerly wind on an incoming tide stands alone as the best conditions possible for bronzies, especially when these conditions continue into the night during the months of January, February and March. These conditions normally occur in conjunction with a cool change after a hot day.

Statistically, those nights with a high tide around midnight or later are the most productive; especially should the wind be a strong west or sou-wester. These tides occur at both the new and full phases of the moon.

Bear in mind though that high tide does not coincide with high slack water which occurs some three hours later when the level of the falling tide in the ocean reaches the same level as that inside Port Phillip Heads.

### **Species:**

Although various species have been taken by Point Lonsdale Shirkers over the years, including seven-gilled sharks, blue sharks, hammerheads and even the, now protected great white, the target species from Point Lonsdale pier is unquestionably the bronze whaler shark.

Catching one of these is a measure of your ability to get a quality bait of tuna quickly into the strike zone on adequate tackle before one of the grey marauders that lurk around the pier can get to it.

By grey marauders, I refer to the common, seven-gilled shark. Although seemingly unavoidable under some conditions, these sluggish creatures represent the down-side of shark fishing from the pier. But then, if it weren't for these, some would-be Point Lonsdale sharkers would catch nothing at all.