Yakkin’ about Oberon
Alex Hickson | September 2014 » Feature Articles / New South Wales /

Positioned southwest of Lithgow near the town of Oberon, Lake Oberon (Fish River Dam) is located in the western catchment of the Central Tablelands. Its primary feeder is the Fish River, itself an excellent trout water to cast a bait, lure or fly in.

Lake Oberon (dubbed by anglers as Oberon Dam) has a historical pedigree for its trout fishing. In times gone by Oberon Dam was renowned for its abundance of big trout. Anglers toting fly rods came from far and wide, even from overseas, and Oberon Dam became an acclaimed stillwater in many early Australian outdoor magazines.

Along with both rainbow and brown trout, Lake Oberon currently hosts a growing epidemic of redfin. It’s a consequence of being located in the warmer western drainage, and with periodical drought periods this species has worked its way up stream and ultimately into the dam. A combination of events has taken its toll on the fishing in this dam over the last two decades. Limited access points have condensed anglers and this, coupled with the redfin epidemic, has essentially put this dam out the trout angler’s ‘places to visit’ list.

After some lobbying by local outdoor enthusiasts, anglers and local businesses, the local council liaised with adjoining property owners and the short of it was that Oberon Dam has been rezoned, making it open to non-powered boating. One of the access points called ‘The Reef’ has been upgraded, with the local council putting in vehicle and trailer boat access to the water’s edge and an adjacent car parking area. It makes it very easy to pull up and launch a kayak without any carrying or trolley trip.

Before pushing off the bank just make sure you have your lifejacket with you as this dam is classed as an alpine water and law dictates you wear a PFD at all times. Oberon Dam has an elevation of around 1000m and its southerly location ensures it receives very changeable weather. It’s known for its cold, windy weather and even on a nice summer day it can make sense to get an up-to-date weather forecast before heading off.

Being able to access the whole dam after staring at distant points and granite outcrops for many years has put a really exciting tilt on this dam, and for the first time visitors have a chance to explore this dam properly without the annoying barriers like barbed wire fences, gates and ‘Private Property’ signs.

I wouldn’t consider Oberon a very big dam but it is quite open to the elements and before heading off I generally take into account the prevailing winds. I prefer to head off into the breeze as it’s not uncommon for the breeze to pick up and become quite strong, and it’s much kinder on your body to come home with the wind behind you. There are some bays and steep edges to access if annoying winds kick in, but the main message is to watch the weather.

**THE FISHING**

The fishing prospects at Oberon Dam have become a one horse event these days, with the redfin plague dominating catches. Trout are still caught though, and annual stocking of rainbow trout still continues by NSW DPI/Fisheries. As an added bonus 2013 saw Fisheries release 50 broodstock fish into the dam. Needless to say these big fish sorted out a lot of men from the boys, with some fish still being hooked occasionally.

The resident brown trout are members of a healthy stock of self recruiting fish that migrate up the Fish River arm of the dam each winter to spawn. These fish are now considered ‘wild fish’ by many anglers because brown trout haven’t been stocked into Oberon Dam for several decades now (apart from one small stocking of 500 fish in 1998). These fish are a highly sought-after and esteemed if caught, and it is hoped that most are released.

If you are like me and enjoy a feed of redfin, this is the reason you will gear up and head to Oberon Dam with your kayak. Redfin sizes in Oberon Dam are quite mixed but schools of good size fish can be located with a little perseverance. Many if not most kayak anglers these days have a sounder on board, and these are a primary piece of equipment when hunting redfin on any dam. If you don’t have a sounder, the next best thing is to try some trolling with some diving lures. The densities of redfin in this dam usually ensure fish will turn up at some stage.

When a fish is caught, try going back over that area again. If you catch another one it could be worth pulling up and trying some vertical presentations. Locating a school is just the start – choosing a lure should be dependent on wind and the depth the fish are holding.

If the fish are in the shallows (i.e. about 4m or less), try casting toward the bank or maybe position yourself against the bank and cast out, the option is yours. Using a searching pattern, a number of different lure styles including blades, diving minnows and plastics can be used in this shallower water. Schools of larger redfin could be pushing fry in towards the bank or larger solitary redfin will be hunting for whatever they can find, be it a yabby off the bottom or another redfin chased down in mid water.

Cooler months can reveal redfin sitting in over 25m of water, seemingly huddled on the bottom. Not an easy target, especially if there is some breeze. Dense, heavy lures such as ice jigs and blades are front line lures in these circumstances and are must-have lures when you come to this dam in your ‘yak. Fished on 2-3kg spin gear, these lures will plummet rapidly. It makes interception quicker, and you’ll still maintain a good feel through the line and rod of what going on down there.
Other lures to bring include a range of trolling lures that will cover different depths. Trolling will give you a good opportunity to further explore this dam rather than get caught up with chasing schooling fish. Many of our Australian-designed native styled lures suit this type of fishing; their increased depth capabilities and wide actions definitely seem to appeal to the local redfin.

It’s worth mentioning that shore-based locals spend a lot of time casting medium-sized soft plastics from the bank with good success. The larger size obviously helps casting distance and it seems to single out a better class of redfin as well. Soft plastics used from a kayak with finesse techniques have untold prospects in this dam for shallow and deep water presentations.

Currently there is no camping at the dam itself but the town of Oberon is close by and has hotel, motel and van park accommodation.

For the first-time visitor Oberon Dam can be easily explored over a weekend visit and certainly you could troll around it in a good day on the water if the redfin don’t slow you up. It’s definitely a piece of quiet water that should be put on the kayak angler’s hit list.

**Facts**

**Lake Oberon**

Location: Adjacent to the town of Oberon approx. 2.5 hours west of Sydney

Open to passive vessels only (paddle, pedal, electric motors and sail)

Species: Redfin, rainbow trout, brown trout.

Classified as a general trout dam by DPI/Fisheries NSW.

Classified as an alpine waterway by NSW Roads and Marine. Lifejackets must be worn for any on-water activities.

Capacity: 45,000ML

Surface area when full: 410 hectares

Elevation: 1000m

Accommodation and further details: 0263 298 210.

**Images**

Redfin sizes vary in Oberon dam with plenty big enough to knock a couple of tasty fillets off. Oberon’s redfin like deep diving lures with wide actions, like this 60mm Viking Talisman.
The area known as The Reef offers vehicle access to the water edge, a parking area and a pleasant viewing or picnic spot. There are already plans to increase the facilities in this area.

Oberon Dam has some interesting monolithic granite boulders scattered throughout.

This dam is a great place to chase a fish or two in your kayak.
A sounder will help you find schools of redfin in Oberon Dam. The next predicament is catching them!

With the haze of summer bushfires all around, the author shows off one of the better redfin caught that morning.

Oberon’s redfin vary in size but you can usually get enough for feed.
Being of moderate size, Oberon Dam is an ideal kayak fishing destination.