

Kimberley catches a 'Northerly' aspect

By Mick Allan

I recently returned from another superb Greenmount Press fact finding expedition into the mighty Kimberley with plenty of piscatorial pursuits to regale you with.

Our plan of attack was to head into Doubtful Bay through George Water and then up the Glenelg River, which is rarely visited by boats because most of the area is uncharted and, as you would expect, is very remote.

After three or four days in the Glenelg we planned to steam back out of Doubtful Bay and head as far north as time would allow — stopping at as many interesting places as possible along the way.

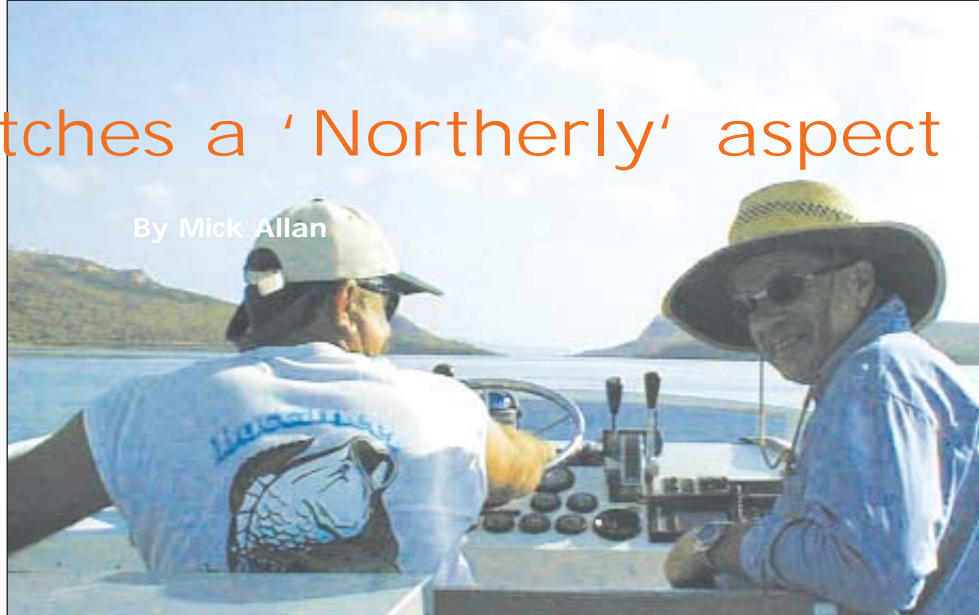
Like all well-laid plans, it didn't quiet work out that way.

The Glenelg River system had a reputation for being full of barramundi and crocs. We planned to test this theory (the barramundi part) pretty solidly. And we wanted to do it on big spring tides (10 metres or more) because of the navigational uncertainty.

A side affect of the big tides was the huge volume of water rushing in or out. This limited fishing times to the top or bottom of the tide when the water was steady enough to get some decent lure action happening.

Unfortunately this meant the fishing was a bit average with only a couple of barra caught over two days on the top of the tide. We explored the area thoroughly, spotting plenty of crocs and likely fishing spots for neap tides — so we will definitely be coming back.

The Glenelg will hold special memories for one of our crew who went for an unplanned midnight dip while stepping



from one boat to another. He would have left Thorpey in his wake as he made his way back to the boat — this was no place for a recreational swim.

We decided to cut our Glenelg stay short and headed back out into Doubtful Bay — and the trip out provided an awesome experience. Where the bay narrowed down, a big incoming tide created huge whirlpools and a lot of very troubled-looking water — not to mention fishermen. The boiling passage was one kilometre wide and several kilometres long.

To give an idea of the water force, 'Utopia' would normally cruise at 14 to 16 knots with a bit of throttle to spare. We were flatout doing one knot trying to push through the incoming tide. To add to the drama, one of the tinnies broke loose twice and had to be rescued and towed back to Utopia. But that's all in a day's sailing in the Kimberley.

Our destination was the Sale River to check out the fishing and some caves magnificently adorned with aboriginal art, further up the gorge. We dropped anchor at the top of the tide as far up the river as boats can go. After the skipper caught some live bait (small mullet) in a throw net, we started fishing.

The skipper and author heading in to the uncharted territory of George Water and the Glenelg River.

(Photos by Geoff Parker.)

The barra took a real liking to the live bait with at least four 'bust offs' before yours truly eventually boated one — which turned out to be the fish of the trip at 87 cm. With the first one under my belt I caught a second in no time at all. Then the third one busted off when the fish did some circle work with the anchor chain.

Catching barra using live bait is a real game of patience. Your reel needs to be set to free-spooling so when the fish takes the bait they feel no resistance at all. If you strike too soon they will spit out the bait; if you leave it too late they will find snags or rocks and bust you off. The rule of thumb is when they jump they are hooked and it is then you put the reel into gear and go for it.

We overnighted on the Sale with another magnificent meal of barbecued Glenelg and Sale barra washed down with a couple of crisp Margaret River whites.

The next morning we walked up the gorge to the fresh water pools where we caught barra, jacks and sooties by tossing lures at the many submerged rocky snags.

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Some of the crew with their catch of the day.



One of the tinnies being rescued from some very troubled water.



Exploring the Sale River gorge.

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This is an exciting fishing experience as you can actually see the fish hit the lure.

We climbed the gorge walls to check out several rock art galleries and the magnificent views up and down the valley. Then it was time for a refreshing dip and to head back to Utopia.

We left on the runout tide to the mouth of the Sale for some queenie fishing before making camp on the beach for the night.

Our queenie spot was a rocky point at the mouth of the river just on sunset. The setting was picture perfect. There was not much happening until a big queenie jumped right beside us and grabbed a bait dangling just over the side as we moved the tinny away from the rocks. Once over the initial shock it was on, with the queenie hooked and dancing off into the sunset at a rapid rate. After a titanic tussle the fish won by pulling the hook when cen-

timetres from the landing net.

The next morning we fished Vinnies Creek and a couple of other creek systems before heading to Raft Point for some mud-crabbing.

The price of Fireline came sharply into focus when a shark was foul-hooked in the tail with a lure. It was like burning \$20 notes with the Fireline peeling off the reel as the shark headed for open water. There was no hope of stopping so the line was cut.

We also discovered another way to catch barra when we ran over a good size one with the tinny as we headed back to the boat.

The crabbing was very successful with a mouth-watering feed in the esky after a couple of runs of the dillies.

A LITTLE FURTHER NORTH

It was time for us to head further north to Deception Bay for the night. Arriving just on dusk we jumped into the tinnies for a quick fish and look around. It didn't take long to realise that this bay was aptly named.

The deception was how quickly it became very shallow on a falling tide. One of the tinnies had to resort to the Moree version of shallow water navigation — a system which cleans the bottom of the boat but relies on having a spare propeller or two on board.

Once again we had a splendid dinner with mudcrabs, fresh fish, salads and chilled wine.

We headed off next morning to try our luck on a couple of inshore reefs near Kuri Bay. Our target was big goldies which are a tremendous table fish. We caught a few, but once the sharks found us it was time to move on.

Our reef fishing was regularly interrupted by whale watching. These magnificent creatures were heading south to Antarctica for the summer with their calves in tow. It is always a highlight of a trip to see these beauties in all their glory.

After most of the day spent fishing different reefs we headed south to Samson Inlet where we found a real paradise with deep clear aqua blue water and hot fishing.

We trolled and flicked lures along vertical rock walls and mangrove runoffs catching jacks, GTs, queenies, barracuda — even a couple of barra.

We camped on the beach at the entrance to the inlet and were keen to be up and at 'em again in the morning.

After a great morning's fishing it was time to head south again with a long trip ahead of us back to Gibbings Island. We broke the trip with some reef fishing and more whale watching before arriving at Gibbings on sunset.

As this was our last night there was plenty of reminiscing helped by Kimberley cocktails on the beach as we watched the sun set and started to plan next year's trip. One thing to come out of the trip was that the further north we went, the better we liked it.

The enjoyment and success of a trip like

this is made possible by the invaluable experience of our skipper Darryl and his deckie/cook Dale.

FISHING TIPS

Two things about our fishing gear this year made a big difference.

The first is the use of Fireline. This is expensive but its sensitive feel and responsiveness means fewer lures lost to snags and bust-offs. Last year I lost most of my lures (about 20) one way or another — this year I lost only two.

The second was the use of soft plastic lures (squidgies). They are deadly on GTs as well as queenies and barracuda. I have also found them excellent when fishing for flathead on the east coast.

These valuable fishing tips and tackle selection advice came from the very helpful staff at Charlton's Tackle 'N' Bait. They can be contacted on Ph: 07 3818 1677.

HOOFFNOTE: We run an in-house fishing competition to give the trip a competitive edge and hone our debating skills with the judge. The winner places the entire pot on a racehorse of his choice with the possible dividend split among the whole group. Suffice to say that the great West Australian galloper Northerly provided us with a tidy dividend as it romped home with the Caulfield Cup! 🏆