

THE BEST 3.5km OF PIG HUNTING ON THE PLANET!

I know, I know. It's a big, bold statement and I have no doubt that there are lots of blokes with lots of their own private hunting heavens, but hear me out and then make your judgement! Text and photography by Bruce Read.

First thing's first. You will need to be ready around September/October no sooner, no later. Australia's best kept pig hunting spot only has a very limited window of opportunity for reasons of weather, water and access. Next you will need to pack your hunting gear. You will need your preferred hunting rifle of choice and ammo. My personal choice is actually two - my synthetic, custom built Weatherby Mark V Ultra Light in .308 calibre (arguably the best all round pig calibre) topped with a beautiful Vari-X Leopold 3-9 scope zeroed in at 150 metres and my trusty Marlin .30-30 lever action with a Simmons Whitetail classic 1.5-5 scope zeroed in at 50 metres. By the way, this was the first time I had used the new ballistic tipped "Leverrevolution" 160 grain .30 calibre ammunition and luckily I spent a couple of hours at the range beforehand because the difference between the "normal"

snub nosed .30 calibre cartridge and the new ballistic tip was a whopping 14cm (high) at 100 metres.

You will need the following essential equipment: two sets of long arm hunting garb, along with a cap and wide brimmed hat. Good quality sunglasses, sunscreen, insect repellent, chaffing cream (don't laugh you will need it), a camel pak, and finally a pair of protective eye goggles preferably one tinted and one clear for on the quad bikes. Anything else the operator has, or you simply won't need.

Now when the time is right you will need to do a bit of travelling. First leg, jump a flight and travel 3,990km give or take from Sydney to Darwin, next in the 4WD for 535kms from Darwin to main camp pretty much smack bang in the middle of Arnhem Land. Half of this leg is on sealed roads and the other half is on a 4WD only bush track. Now from camp one to camp two we travel on Big Bear quad bikes on bush tracks, around 30kms. Camp two, and once again on the Big Bears, we start out early one morning for another 45kms over some of the roughest, pig destroyed landscape I have ever experienced. The end result of our epic



A large hog spotted keeping cool in the heat of the day.

And the winner is.... Troy, with this outstanding quality boar.



Bueno Vista - High on the escarpment looking down on one of the many flood plains



The team, scanning the hunting area from the comfort of their big bear quad bikes.



The Authors trusty 30/30 lever action takes care of business, every time.



4,600km journey brings us to the end of a vast, dried out, flood plain and a little 3.5km long spur with some remaining puddled water. I never said this was going to be easy!

There are a couple of reasons why this is the best 3.5km of pig hunting in the world. Firstly we are in the middle of absolutely nowhere and this is the only remaining water for a zillion miles and even at this time of the year it is bloody hot! Secondly, last year a severe storm ripped through this area and a whole stack of big trees were knocked over, creating a mass of cubby holes and tree root balls for pigs to bed down under. Finally the landscape here is 100% prime pig country. A 3.5km long skinny spur of still water, mud, puddles and reeded areas and on either side a 500 metre wide verge of cool, well shaded paper bark forest, fine dry dusty soil, and grassed areas opening out either side onto wide open plains. Just perfect.

So let the hunting begin. It's time to hoof it and the rules of engagement are simple. We are not here to just blast away at

everything and anything. No sows, no suckers, no immature boars. If it doesn't look like a boar will go 100kg or more, we leave it alone. No dingos (they are considered a sacred totem animal to the local Aboriginal people), and finally we will see a stack of other animals such as water buffalo and wild ponies, but we're here for big boars, so we just watch the other stuff and move on.

Peter, our guide, leads the way and together with Troy, Tony, Ian and myself we are on our way. I kid you not when I tell you that we were not one minute into our walk in down the left hand side of the remaining water and it was on for young and old. I think this is the first place ever where I have seen boars, big boars, assembling in groups. Sometimes 2 or 3 and even up to 6 substantial boars all bedded down or rooting around close together in the mud or in the dry dust at the base of the many fallen trees.

Tony was at point as Peter pulled our little procession to a halt about 60 or so meters from a handful of very large ominous shapes bedded down and milling around a huge root ball of a fallen

A small mob of pigs out on a flood plain. Mobs like this are everywhere.



*Tony with a beautifully conditioned,
magnificent boar.*



*Troy with "yet another" bloody
big boar. Will he ever let the
rest of us have a go ?*



And Ian says "will you have a look at the size of this big fella"!



over tree. We all watched in awe as it became apparent that this little gathering was not mum and last season's batch of young ones but four very sizable boars relaxing and settling in for the day. Tony takes his time, lines up the biggest fella he could see and nails him with a single shot right where it counts. Pigs scatter in all directions but we don't care, the first big 100kg-plus boar of the day was down and Tony is just beside himself with excitement looking at the size and condition of the biggest pig he had every bought down.

That first bit of action set the tone for the rest of the day, and oh what a day it was. It seemed that nothing was as you would normally expect on a normal hunting day. I know that anywhere else, knock over a pig and every critter for the next kilometre or two runs off at a rapid rate. Well not in this little piece of hunting heaven. Following the obligatory slaps on the back and 147 photos, Tony's Dad, Ian was next up as we moved a little deeper down the spur.

Not 20 metres later we pull up again as Peter points out a good sized lone boar to Ian. There he was just trundling along, minding his own business with not a care in the world. A bit of repositioning, a quick lean on the first available sapling, a smidgin of lead as this big guy was on the move, a squeeze of the trigger and big boar number two for the day dropped to the ground. The condition of these boars was remarkable. Big, solid, clean pigs with better than average ivory. So this time around, slaps on the back, 189 photos and the ivory just had to come out of Ian's biggest ever pig to date.

We continued on like this all morning. Our procession stopped and started, zig and zagged further and further down the spur. The joke of the day soon became Peter saying next, next, next with each of us taking turns at the pointy end and one after another

knocking down pig after pig!

Having hunted Arnhem Land on many occasions I have had the amazing experience of watching a mob of pigs do their thing on several occasions. Just standing there quietly, watching, and trying to get a better understanding of our quarry. Normally you might get the opportunity to do that once in a blue moon. Not here. Time after time we stopped, quietly sat on a fallen log or tree and watched as 50-strong mobs of pigs slowly moved towards us, around us, past us, sometimes literally only metres away. Fascinating to watch wild pigs so close up. Also fascinating to see their noses go up, the alarm bell grunts go out and 50 pigs simultaneously bolt in all directions. I have no doubt that on most occasions they had no idea who or what the potential threat was, just there was a threat and it was time to beat it out of there.

Interesting what pigs do sometimes when confronted with a flight or fight scenario. Peter and Troy were at point as we started down a slight slope and came across a big, flat mud wallow. Nothing really that interesting until it became apparent that right in the middle and just about invisible was a pig. She (we found out later on) was completely covered in mud and were it not for the beady pair of blinking eyes and twitching ears we may well have walked with in metres of her without so much as a second glance. In Indian file we stood there, us watching her and she watching us, both waiting to see who did what first.

You could just see the tension in her body and the nervous anticipation. The whispered word was passed down that we would back away slowly and see what was this pig's programme. She was either stuck, sick, dying, wounded or... none of the above, she was just playing possum, because as we took our first backward step this pig launched herself out of the mud wallow and with a Kamikaze snort bolted, full tilt, straight for Peter and Troy. If it wasn't so serious it would have been comical. Both

Troy, with another hefty boar in amongst the downed trees.



Peter's and Troy's simultaneous and instantaneous reaction was the same. In unison, like a well choreographed duet, Troy lifted his .308 and Peter his gun (which he studiously had at the ready), and they both fired at point blank range, stopping this pig dead in its tracks not 3 metres from the rest of us stunned mullets. Peter and Troy's instant reaction is testimony to their years of hunting experience, knowledge and being prepared. The pig had just had enough and obviously decided to fly and fight at the same time. As for the rest of us plebs, well we were still wondering what the hell happened.

Lots of things can kill you in Arnhem Land so it pays to keep your wits about you. It is generally those things that you don't see that can and will cause you the most grief. A case in point was on the return leg of this spur we were hunting. We had been on the march and adrenalin driven for hours as we came across a small basket ball court sized billabong covered with swamp weeds and fallen trees. Nothing really notable other than Peter did happen to mention not to go too close to the edge as he was aware of the possibility that a large croc lived somewhere in this area. Now I'm no fearless hero but after hunting Arnhem Land for plenty of years, seeing crocs is nothing new. The bloody things are everywhere. So

with a grain of salt and a nod of yeah, yeah, we immediately got back to the business of knocking over pigs. Only a couple of metres on and into view came a good sized boar and it was my turn at point. Up came the barrel of my Weatherby, cycle, steady, fire and all bloody hell broke loose.

The loud report had sent, what was easily, a huge 5 metre croc into action. Unbeknown to all of us, this enormous croc was lying in a foot or two of water perfectly camouflaged amongst the reeds and fallen tree trunks. It launched itself airwards, pirouetted, came crashing back down into the water and took off like greased lightning the other way! Given we were several metres higher on an embankment we were never in any mortal danger, but I tell you what! This was one big crocodile and just the thought that he was there watching us and we didn't even know it, is enough for me to have a whole new respect for old man croc. Moral of the story! If you are in Arnhem Land

One of the many, many dried and burnt flood plains crossed with the quad bikes to get to our preferred hunting grounds.





The author is pleased with proceedings, after dropping another quality boar.

and there is water, there will more than likely be a croc watching you.

On one of our numerous little rest stops we had pulled up in a bit of a clearing with fabulous view of a hundred or so metres down the spur. Ian had just dropped another boar and we were all hassling him, as the rule was if you can't get to it (once you shoot it) then don't pull the trigger! Anyway, Peter whispered to everyone to keep quiet. Low and behold, just at the extreme end of the area we were scanning comes a small herd of massive water buffalo. Like huge grey ghosts a half a dozen of these incredible creatures slowly make their way in our direction. We all sat there in silence and watched as the buffalo seemed to appear and disappear as they ponderously moved through the wetland area. At some point in time the biggest member of the family stuck his nose high in the air, bellowed, swung a mighty rack of horns from side to side and they were gone.

We were nearing the end of the day's hunt and I had just shot what I thought was a sizable boar. It turned out to be a great,

big fat girly pig! While we were all checking her out Troy spied some movement a ways further down the area we were in. He went into stealth mode and spent the next 15 minutes stalking in on something. From our vantage point we couldn't see a thing so we decided to rest up and let him do his thing. Finally the report of his .308 was heard. We all jumped up and headed toward his general direction. There he was with a grin from ear to ear and down next to him was what was clearly the biggest pig of the day by far. More over it had a perfect and enormous set of choppers. The bottom set came out with all due care and attention. Later that night they got boiled out of the jaws, cleaned up and were measured up at a very tidy 33+ Douglas points. He does it to me every year!

Anyway the upshot of this particular day in this particular piece of hunting heaven was we were all totally exhausted and could barely walk (hence the need for chaffing cream) We had been dropping pigs all day and if I had to put a number on it I reckon we would have seen well over 600 pigs just in that 3.5km spur. Not withstanding a couple of mishaps, we shot nothing but 100kg plus boars and ran out of energy and daylight well before we ran out of pigs. We saw water buffalo, ponies, dingos, croc and a zillion birds and miscellaneous critters. Outstanding day, outstanding hunting buddies and a truly outstanding 3.5km of hunting heaven! The rest of the week was spent hunting each day in other amazing areas, pulling ridiculously large barramundi out of a ridiculously small tidal inlet, checking out "zillion" year old Aboriginal art and generally enjoying what was a must do, once in a life time, trip for any hunter that is keen on pigs. All up we spent a day going in, a day coming out and five full days of hunting/fishing. The camp, the food, the quad bikes, the safari guide, who has hunted his entire life in the Northern Territory were all outstanding.

Check it out at www.tropicalsafaris.com.au or phone Peter Lorman directly on 0407 607687



The author, who is not that mad keen on fishing, reckons this one will do!