



From the Chopper on the way in

The team on the floodplain



Tented camp
Right- The camp kitchen



Arnhem Land Hunting Adventure

14th - 20th August 2013
By : Peter Hooymans

Design by Tusky Creek

I had thought about an Arnhem Land tour for quite a few years and after fairly extensive research on tour operators we chose Tropical Safaris. Along with my brother Dave we had booked some 10 months earlier. The season is brief roughly between May and October which means that Peter Lorman's outfit is heavily booked way in advance, which from a customer perspective I thought must be a good sign.

The logistics of getting this camp setup and keeping it supplied with food, fuel and everything else boggles the mind. And at the end of every season before the

heavy rain sets in, the camp is completely dismantled to make way for the Top End Wet, which turns the entire area we hunted into 2m deep floodplain.

Both Dave and myself have done our own self-guided hunting and fishing tours all over the top end over the past 20 years. From Burketown to Kununnurra and everywhere in between with a lot of time spent around Boroloola and the Gulf region. We have had our fair share of remote and spectacular N.T. countryside over the years, we are maybe a bit spoilt in fact, but this was simply something else. We

thought we had a fair idea of what was coming, but what eventuated over the next 5 action packed days absolutely blew our mind and scared the absolute bejesuz out of me more than once (more on the razor grass fright later).

This is seriously wild and dangerous country and one slip up or lack of concentration (especially around water) would see you disappear pretty quickly. Did I say lot's of massive crocodile in every water pool and billabong. My Lord!

And then there's the cranky banteng, buffalo, green ants and wasps to worry about just to keep you on your toes – all the while trucking along in Pete's custom made Yamaha Rhinos at 40km an hour eating dust with low visibility. Within the first hours of arriving at Peter's base camp all of the senses were in overdrive and there was no doubt in your mind this was going to be something different.

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Anyone for duck hunting?



Billabong and Crocs



Billabong at sunset



George with a great boar

We had arranged with Larry from Jayrow Helicopters to drop us in there, instead of enduring an 8-hour drive from Darwin. After driving from Darwin to Jabiru it was a neat 40-minute flight over swamps, floodplains and escarpments before we dropped into a cluster of tall paper barks in absolutely the middle of nowhere. From 500 feet in the chopper you really get the sense of how far you are from any real civilization should anything happen. This is a place to exercise caution and safety.

Pete welcomed us along with his guide from Germany Eric and both of them were larger than life and happy to see us. We were also introduced to our fellow hunters George from Melbourne and Lutz who had flown in from Austria. After a safety briefing by Peter and he takes it very seriously, we were off for a quick shot to sight in the rifles followed by a few cold ones on sunset and then a heap of great stories by Pete and a sit around the dinner table to layout the plan of attack for the next 5 days. I must admit when we arrived I was thinking we just wouldn't be able to get enough done in 5 days. Was I wrong!

Day one, after an early breakfast cooked by Eric (and it's huge), it was in the Rhinos and making our

way about 30klms from camp to a stand of jungle that circled a huge lagoon. The place was absolutely alive with tens of thousands of ducks and Magpie geese intermixed with the tall bright green reeds and huge water lilies.

We parked the bikes and then Pete explained the quieter we move on foot and the more careful we are in our approach the more we will see. In a single line we move through the thick jungle with Peter at the front and Eric as the last man and backup. The first hunter moves directly behind Pete with bolt up but ready to assume position if a hog appears.

I personally found it fascinating to watch Peter almost dance through the thick jungle on the balls of his feet, dodging spider webs, ant nests and low hanging palm branches riddled with sharp thorns. It was like every 20 feet was boobie trapped. Pete was almost silent and it was so invigorating to move along through this pristine country knowing that we were not going to hear a mobile phone or car horn. It was almost a little surreal.

Suddenly Pete stops dead, raises his right hand in a stop signal and everyone absolutely freezes. He

raises his Leica binoculars and scans the scene. What follows is all done in sign language. Pete drawing a log with his hands and then tilting his head to the side and acting out a sleeping position with his eyes closed. He has spotted a big old boar 50m ahead lying up against a tree trunk having a snooze. None of us had any idea or came close to seeing it. Lutz was first up and the two of them move forward while we remain frozen but craning to watch the action.

As they get to 30m and a clear shot path through the jungle the wily old boar smells the danger and breaks cover smashing his way through thickets, Lutz lets fly with the 308 but to no avail. This scene repeats itself for the next two hours with massive boars holed up in this wild jungle testing our skills and nerves. These are big pigs and 10 years or older, so when they crash through it sounds like a Barina is coming through the bush at 60 clicks. It really makes for absolute mayhem.

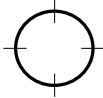
Although August is on the mild side, 3 hours in and I was nearly out of water, it was very hot work pushing through the thick stuff. We all carried backpacks with camelbacks of 3 litres, plus some personal food, lights and spare ammo. And of course, each man carries his own rifle, which if you are behind the leader must be

strictly unloaded for obvious reasons.

This is thick and fast hunting on huge animals at super close range and more than one loaded firearm would just be a recipe for disaster. Peter carries a Glock 10mm as backup for the hunter and it came out of the holster more than once. On multiple occasions 130kg plus mud caked boars with 4-inch tusks just didn't go down from several 30-06 or 308 rounds. These bad boys were tough and some had 2 inches of thick mud that had hardened like concrete. On two occasions shots were taken on boars broadside. We witnessed a puff of dust from the shoulder of the pig, to walk to the scene and find a perfectly mushroomed round that had expanded on the mud and resulted in zero penetration!! I had never seen this before.

I must honestly admit I was wrong about caliber choice and the need for something reasonably large in this country. I had picked up a new Sauer 202 from James at Clayton Firearms a month or so before in 30-06. I had previously spoken with Peter on the phone and I insisted that I had shot a few hundred pigs with

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a 243 without any problems and he said to me “ mate, if you bring a 243 up here you will be staying at camp – its too small,” I could scarcely believe my ears but he was dead right.

Even well placed 30-06 rounds in 150 gn barely got the job done and next time (we have booked for October 2014) I will be using 180gn slugs, such is the

hunting grounds and never uses a spot more than once a year. There is just so much ground here, literally thousands of square kilometres from which to choose and it’s all-thick with monsters.

After 5 hours of walking and stalking on day one we finally circled back to the bikes and Pete suggests we call it an early day as we have a solid hour ride

tell the highlights of the day. At this point Pete let’s us know that each day will get longer and we will be up earlier covering more ground and coming across even bigger mobs. And, with a bit of luck we can cross a deep channel on the bikes that will see us enter fresh floodplain country that hasn’t been hunted for at least 12 months.

Monster pig



Mud caked on the monster - bullet shield!

size and toughness of these pigs.

The ‘shooter’ rotates pretty quickly as pig after pig is spotted and stalked. We came across large mobs of 20, 30 and more just rooting the ground around the soft edges of the lagoons, completely oblivious to our presence. Pete only takes the biggest and meanest boars and everything else is left. He also rotates his

back to camp. We get back to camp absolutely caked in dust and sweat, cobwebs, dirt and mud and love every second! Our order of beer and Bundy cans is ice cold. And they go down about as well as a beer can, like the first cold one after walking 18 holes of golf in 35 degrees! Pete and Eric don’t stop and prepare an awesome dinner and we all have a great laugh and re –



Crossing channels with cros

As luck would have it we make it across that channel. This takes us to another dimension for pig numbers. The landscape is just stunning and I’m juggling cameras in both hands as Dave discovers his inner rally driver and has the Rhino sorted and flying

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Floodplain landscape at sunset



Floodplain landscape at dawn



The Apocalyptic swamp

along the marked tracks, dodging around paper barks as we work our way towards the next area to hunt.

At absolutely first light we were already an hour from camp having risen at 5am. As the mist rose from the plains it was like something you would see in a movie and I imagined this is what the Serengeti must be like. Just massive and very difficult to explain the vastness and beauty. Honestly, the most incredible and spellbinding piece of country I have ever seen.

Not far into this stalk we came across a patch of 6-foot high thick and sharp razor grass. I was shooter. Pete stops and whispers to me faintly "sometimes they sleep in here...be careful you don't step on one." As we wade through the swoosh of spears I suddenly see a huge black shape maybe 10 feet in front of me. Pete starts gesticulating wildly pointing at the ground. At first I thought it must be a black log until it starts grunting and running straight for me. It senses my presence adjusts its trajectory and a 120kg boar brushes me as it grunts off smashing its way before all that is in front of it. I absolutely shat my pants and I was sweating profusely for a good 10 minutes afterwards.

In the following days Pete kindly offered me the opportunity to be first to wade through the razor grass patches and in words not fit for print I politely declined the offer. It was an absolute adrenalin rush but I'm not scared to admit just a bit to close for my liking. I did notice that others present didn't exactly jump to the opportunity either – Of course after the first incident they were all happy to stand by pissing themselves laughing at the scene of a 6'2" 100kg bloke bolting out of long grass swearing like a trouper.

A good six hours of walking later, we find our way back to the bikes. Within 5 minutes, on the tailgate of the Rhino, Eric has prepared a ripper lunch of cold cuts, salad and bread, biscuits, dip, water and soft drinks. Silence prevails as hungry hunters devour everything in site. We are parked under a wonderful stand of shady paper barks and one by one as the carbs kick in each hunter finds a nice little resting place on the soft ground with rolled jackets for pillows and before you know it half a dozen blokes are all having a snooze. Some snoring! Thanks George! The serenity

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More of the monster pig - they were all like this

Dave with a great boar



was hard to beat. Rejuvenated after our power nap Pete explains we will head back to camp a different way (its about 70kms on the bike) and with 3 hours of daylight remaining we will take a look at some wide open country he hasn't been over for two years.

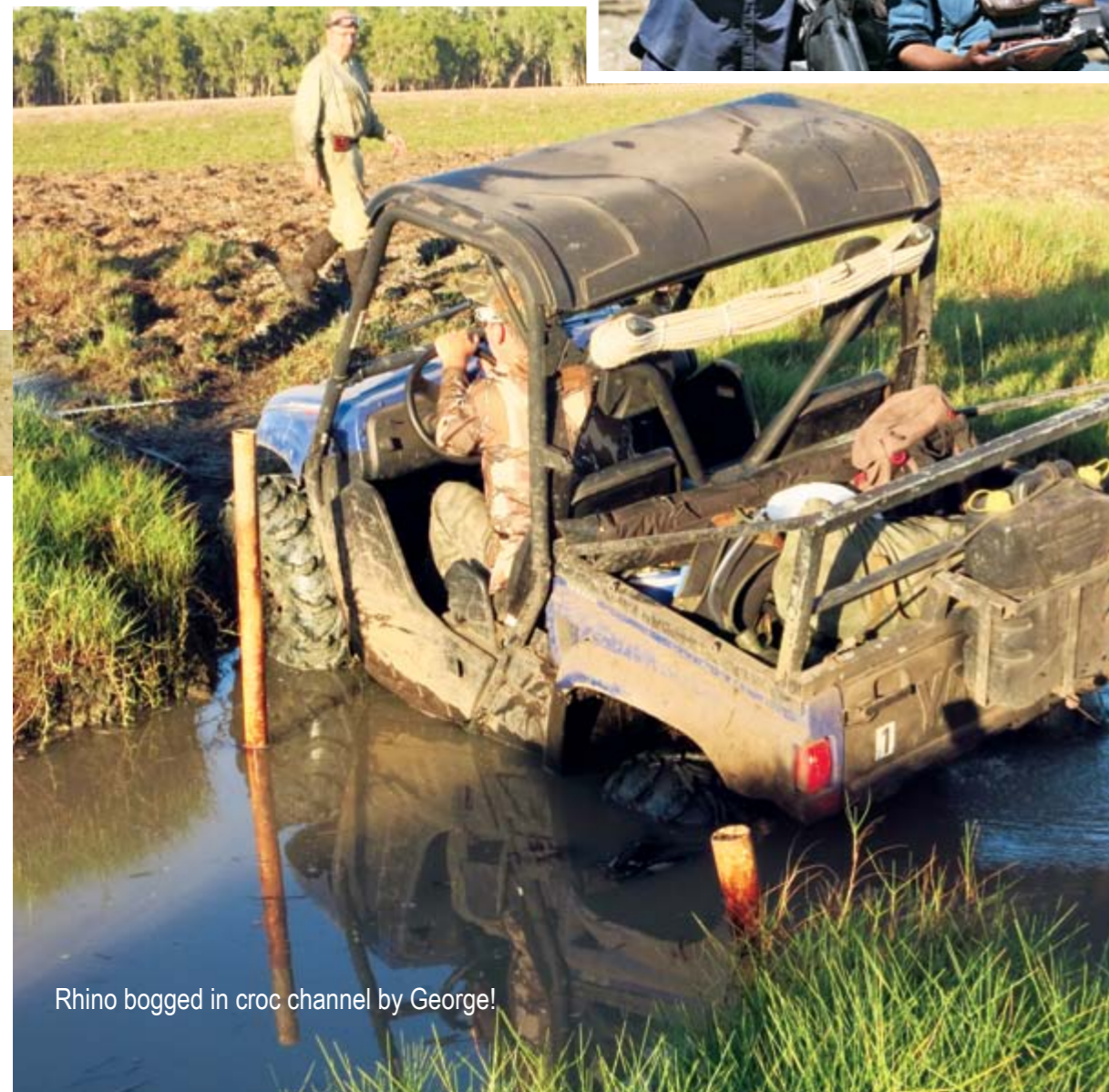
On the way back we see Dingoes, Brumbies, Buffalo and Crocodiles. As the sun sets the mosquitoes on the floodplains are in plague so we keep moving towards our goal in the dark. Using some high-powered LED torches we spot mobs of pigs to the sides and running across our track, but after a 14-hour day and 30 large pigs in the bag we all shrug our shoulders, too tired to chase and keep going.

We hit camp at 9pm and Pete prepares 800-gram steaks and salad for each man. I'm so tired I'm slurring my words and nodding off, but it has been a day to remember. We hit the hay at midnight and before I know it still in the dark Pete is hollering for us to get our bums out of the sack for a 5am start on

our second last day.

The morning air this time of year is still crisp and once moving in the Rhinos, with the cool air smacking you in the face you are absolutely awake. At another massive breakfast sitting Pete declares this will be our biggest day, so be ready and take enough ammo. I must admit at this point, I was silently thinking to

Glassing the landscape



Rhino bogged in croc channel by George!



Left Peter and Dave with Buffalo measuring 104 SCI points

myself; surely it can't get better than yesterday. But it did.

We head out on an 180km round trek that will be yet another 16 hour adventure. We approach the floodplains right on dawn and as the mist rises, Pete is constantly standing up on his bike pegs glassing the landscape. We see black blob after black blob far in the distance. Once a large boar is seen we are off as fast as we dare across a kilometer of floodplain. The chase is on and the boar knows he is the target. Sometimes we get them right before the tree line and other times it's a full round up on the bike, as there is multiple large boars running in all directions. By 9 am we had at least a dozen 100kg plus boars all with great tusks.

We stop for a break and get close to some buffalo for some photos and then a dingo slinks in around starts circling, sniffing the air to work out what we are. We keep moving and cross an extremely hazardous channel with deep tidal water and large crocodiles.

Unfortunately for poor old George his Rhino slips off the tracks hidden underwater and all hell breaks loose. Nobody wants to get into the water to push out the Rhino but with snatch strap quickly attached and three of us thigh deep we could have lifted a truck; such was the desire to get the hell out of that channel.

As we pull up at a stand of shade I notice Pete glassing the scene about 150m ahead and we see a large bodied buffalo eyeing us off. Dave leaps to the binoculars and asks Pete if there's any chance he can take it. Pete explains; as we don't have a large caliber Dave must head shoot it with military ammo (FMJ). Pete pulls his custom made heavy barrel from his bike scabbard and using the backpack as a rest Dave nails the buffalo on the button and it's lights out. We do a photo shoot and take the head. Eric the guide gets the job of carting the head for the rest of the day on the back of his bike!

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By late morning we reach our destination and Pete cannot remember the last time it was hunted but it was ages ago he assures us. As we commence, the scenery becomes Jurassic like and this stretch of country I can only describe as some sort of apocalyptic swamp. The pools have dried leaving a stinking and rotting several thousand acres of sticky black mud littered with hundreds of pig wallows, thick jungle, razor grass and palms.

As we stalk our way through this country the shooter is rotating every few minutes. For 6 hours we could not walk more than 50m without either a huge boar or large mob straight in our path. When the wind played favour we could stalk to 20 feet and take our pick of two or three 120kg bad boys. Of course on the first shot absolute pandemonium eventuated as every time there were a dozen other huge hogs we couldn't see but nearby. As the shot rung out on several occasions there would be 50+ pigs running in all directions – it was insane. We all bagged at least a dozen large boars each and by the end we were exhausted, but all had smiles ear to ear.

On the 100klm ride back we stopped on a massive floodplain to watch the sunset before resuming the long track back to camp. Dave and I chatted the whole way over the roar of the Rhino and it was story after story of the day's events. I have never seen that many huge pigs concentrated in one small location.

After a warm shower we have a good celebration

and with the music blaring there is a bit of air guitar before an all time sleep. The next morning we take it easy and pack our gear to head back to the main camp. Some of us light a fire and boil some excellent tusks.

Right on time we hear the chopper approaching at 11am and after a quick pack, backslap and handshake we board. Nathan, our trusty Pilot from Jayrow has the Bell winding up to full tilt and as we try for take off I can feel we are a little too heavy he then comes back and bounces the heli again at the same time calmly explains to us in the headsets “we are a bit heavy today boys....I'm going to need to bounce us up” OH cool...sure...yep bounce us up that would be just awesome...exactly what I was thinking – Not! One bounce, then two, three and we get a slight bit of elevation and then a fourth aggressive bounce sees air under the blades and we gain sufficient elevation to literally clear the treetops and with nose down to gain forward speed and then elevate again we are off. I really didn't need that after 5 action and adrenaline packed days. But Nigel the pilot had a chuckle and said in a welsh accent “mate ..Don't worry I do it all the time”

We drive back to Darwin in around 4 hours and survey our dusty and muddy gear before boarding our flights to head home. We have already booked for 2014 except this time we are going in October, which is magpie geese season, and add Barra fishing too! Put this one on the bucket list.



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