



Sullivan's Travels

By John & Annie Sullivan

SIXTH LEG... Darwin Lay-Over

June 9th. We arrive back in Darwin via Woods Inlet where there has been a sighting of a big croc. The rangers had put out a trap to try and catch him. We tracked him down the next day, lying in the sun on the river bank. He was 14 foot long (4.3 metres) and as round as a 44 gallon drum. Unknown to us we had anchored 50 metres from him the night before.

Mark and I looked at each other in horror as we had both used the "outside" loo the night before and never gave it a thought.

We moved through the Cullen Bay Marina lock in the morning and settled back on our berth. It was decided to do a little restocking of the larder so we headed into Darwin.

Sights, sounds and textures of a special place called "Darwin" - starting with gun turrets from W.W.2, anthills in the Litchfield National Park - whilst Annie Sullivan does her bit for the Darwin Cup Day - as boaties do!



The cost of most things up here is about 20% dearer than Queensland. The saving grace is the people are very laid back and congenial and we have made some great friends. There are only 120,000 people in Darwin and it has hardly any traffic problems. The pubs and restaurants are excellent value compared to other states we have eaten in.

One of the unique signs in harbour side restaurants up here is about not feeding the crocs with your dinner scraps, I found it quite funny.

June 10th. I reluctantly put Mark back on a plane for the 'States together with his plethora of photos and memories of the adventures he encountered during his 2 weeks stay in Darwin. One of the funniest things he will take back (apart from the quicksand episode – F&B#141) was the fact that I actually fired a lead sinker out of a slingshot at a croc and made the beast leap about 6 feet in fright. Maybe the Americans will think us Aussies are crazy.

June 22nd. Annie arrived back in Darwin yesterday and Ralf and I enjoyed her company over dinner last night and caught up with all the gossip from down south. We have decided to stay in Darwin for three more weeks as we have the use of a friend's car for that time. We will visit the local tourist things like Kakado and Litchfield Park. It will be a break from boating and fishing and will give us time to recharge and prepare for

Editor's Note: *John is 63 years old and has been boating for 50 years. Apart from the many thousands of private hours he has accumulated, he also holds a professional skipper's ticket and has driven fishing and charter boats on and off for 30 years. His love affair with the sea and his undying affection for fishing and boating make his life experiences seem to many an enviable accumulation of adventures. I am sure the continuing stories of his trip - from the Gold Coast Qld to the Kimberley Coast, WA - over the next few months will be followed and enjoyed by all our readers who aspire to make a similar voyage.*

the Kimberley part of the trip.

June 23rd. Litchfield Park is one of Darwin's great National Parks and was a great day's tour. The ant hills are some of the biggest in the world. You will note Ralf is in the picture. We carted him around all day in a national park and never once realized it was a 'no-no' until a ranger spotted him and told us to remove him from the park, post haste. We were leaving anyway, so it worked out ok.

June 24th. Everybody in town is off to the Darwin Cup Races so we were no exception. Champagne flowed and the wild punting carried on all afternoon. We had a ball.

June 25th. A lot of people don't realize that Darwin was Australia's front line during W.W.2 and was constantly bombed and strafed by the Japanese for months. There were many gun turrets built to defend the town and today they are a tourist item. Many ships were sunk in Darwin Harbour too during this time, and today the wrecks prove to be a great asset to the local fishing as they provide dozens of man made reef structures that are teaming with a great variety of reef fish and pelagics. We were cheeky enough to approach some local fishing charter boats for some gps marks to the best reefs, and were not surprised to have them tell us that it was not in their best interest to tell us.

So the next day we followed a couple of them out of the lock and very covertly logged their marks by radar positioning. This really paid off as Annie and I ended up catching a couple of nice coral trout off one of the marks later that day. Chalk one up for radar, eh?

June 27th. Annie and I decide to go crabbing up the famous Woods Inlet, which is only about 4 miles from Darwin Harbour. It is a river system that runs off into the mangrove wastes west of Darwin and has some of the biggest mud crabs in the north (so they said). We put out our traps and fished the river for the rest of the day to give them a





Top: The sign says it all, doesn't it ?
In the middle is floating crocodile trap,
whilst **(Bottom):** Annie proves she can mix it with boys in the coral trout section!

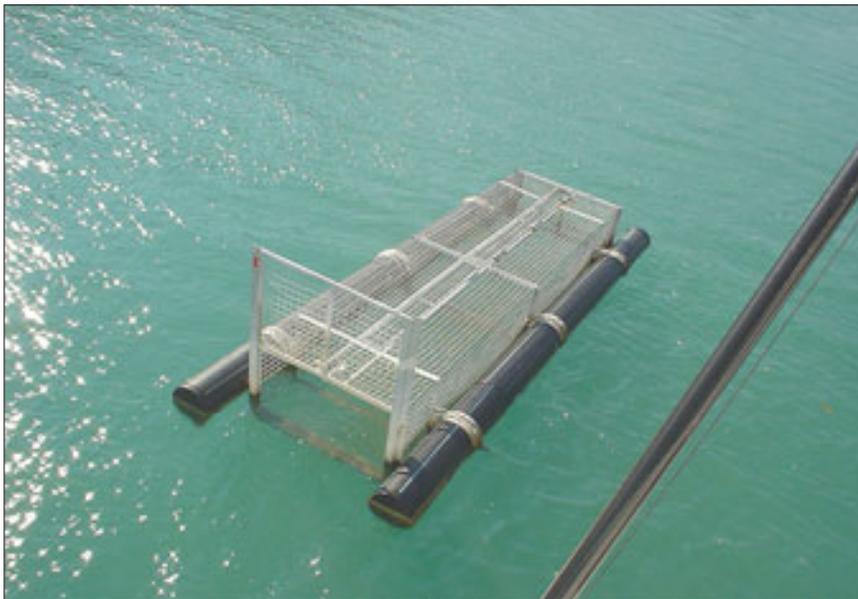
chance to work. Well, work they did. We caught 7 big males that would make a fish monger brag. We ate so much crab the next few days that we both started to walk sideways.

June 29th. An unexpected bit of excitement came our way when the Baz Luhrmann, the famous film director, walked up to our boat at the marina and started to talk to Annie. He asked her about boating in general and said he was here to make a movie called "Australia" starring Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman and of course our other great Aussie icon, Brian Brown.. The reason he was on the marina soon revealed itself, it was to check out the old pearl lugger "Anniki" which was to play a big part in the movie, with Hugh Jackman as skipper, and Nicole Kidman as a passenger.

The boat was tied up next to ours for the whole duration of refurbishment. They spent about \$100,000 converting it to the original condition of a pearl lugger at about the time of the war in 1944. They had dozens of people working on it every day to make it look authentic, right down to the gaff rigged sails.

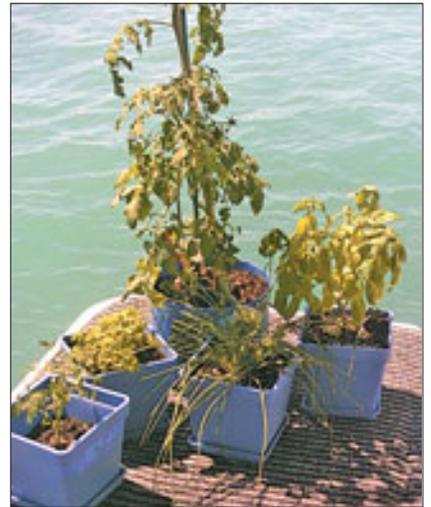
To top off the celebrity thing, we went to the popular Mindell markets next night and who should be standing next to Annie at the oyster bar ... Yes, you guessed, it was Nicole Kidman and she said to Annie, "Are these local oysters". Upon which Annie said "I think so". Annie turned to me and said "That was Nicole Kidman!". Being a normal male I said "So what?". But really, I was thinking "Damn, why didn't Nic ask me?"

June 30th. A must-see if you're in Darwin, is the old labour prison. It has so much history and folk lore that makes it worth the effort. We got to see the original "hanging" room where they actually hung the bad guys. It was a bit gruesome when you actually see the lever that they pulled to drop away the floor under the unfortunate inmate who had the rope around his neck.





Above: John Sullivan with a beaut 9kg coral trout hooked off the Darwin wrecks. **Below:** Hope you've been a good boy, JS - 'coz Annie's got her finger on the Hangman's Trap Door lever . . .



July 1st. Today we have decided to replant our herb garden. On board we have had access to fresh oregano, parsley, rosemary, chives and cherry tomatoes, but the salt spray has played havoc with their health. The leaves have started to wilt so it is time to replace the lot with fresh plants. It has always been handy to just walk outside and pick fresh herbs, but the salty environment takes its toll on any plants on board.

July 2nd. I am starting to think about preparing the boat for the long sections that we will encounter when we venture into the Kimberley. I had a special fuel bladder made before I left that would hold an additional 450 litres of diesel. I had decided to carry it on the front of the boat between the cabin hatches and the anchor lockers.

It was manufactured by a company that makes them for the military so we were guaranteed it would be tough enough to handle the bad weather. Apparently they drop them from aeroplanes into the war zones full of fuel so I guess they must be tough.

July 5th. Our friends Lee and Dee finally arrive from Brisbane. They have planned to do the first stint into the Kimberley with us over the next two weeks. We all start to get excited about the prospects of actually exploring the Kimberley and experiencing the splendour of this vast wilderness.

(Next issue: We head off to the Kimberley and whatever awaits us)

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