



# Sullivan's Travels

By John & Annie Sullivan

## SEVENTH LEG... Off to the Kimberley

**JULY 8th.** The season is changing in the north. The days are getting shorter and decidedly drier, and the only indication that it is mid winter is that the nights seem a little colder than normal.

Our friends from Brisbane have arrived to do the first stint into the Kimberley with us.

After a couple of day's restocking and catching up, we finally leave Cullen Bay Marina. We have now got to prepare for longer distances and rougher weather on occasions, and will need to carry a lot more fuel, so we got the fuel bladder out of the locker and put another 450 litres on board right between the front hatches. The boat handling doesn't change at all with this extra weight.

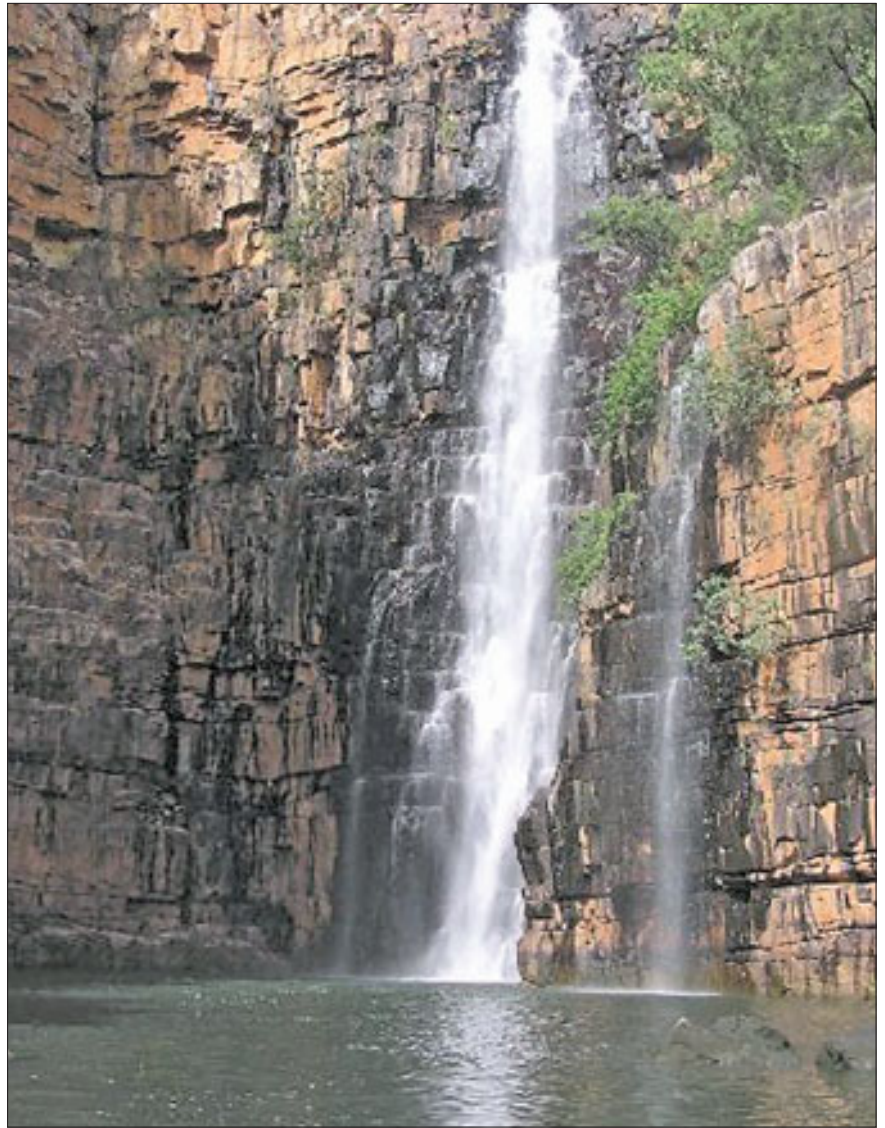
Heading west from Darwin, our first stop is the Peron Islands near the Daly River.

**July 10th.** With the help of 20 knots of East South East trade winds behind us, we comfortably cruised across the top end via the Peron Island group where we did a bit of barra fishing on a mark given to me by a kind local. We managed to catch a couple of 4 foot sharks and some humongous catfish, but alas, no barra.

We headed down into the Daly River where we had managed to arrive during spring tides. One of the biggest challenges up here is the "springs" as they are called. They are during the dark and the full moon which is when the moon and the sun pull in tandem, and cause the surface of the ocean to bulge as the earth rotates, causing some of the biggest rise and falls in the world.

This creates enormous currents and lots of dirty water.

The currents up here can reach 10-12





knots during these times, and create huge whirlpools, eddies and overfalls, and can give any skipper an exciting time.

The Kimberley tides range from around 2 metres in the north to around 13 metres at Derby in the west. That's 40 feet of tide; which makes for interesting anchoring, doesn't it? They are now well documented and one can have all the tidal information for any area at their disposal.

The entrance to the Daly was a disgusting chocolate brown, not unlike cruising in a sea of chocolate, so we decided to mosey upstream a couple of miles to anchor for the night. We chose a spot where a small creek veered off to the left, a perfect spot, we thought, to put out a few pots overnight. After catching some crab bait, that is huge catfish or "baracats" as they are known up here, we loaded the pots and after launching the dinghy, planted them right in the middle of the creek.

Next morning when we awoke, we were literally surrounded by crocodiles. They must have decided that we had what they wanted. Ralf was on the back transom barking his head off. At least he wasn't scared.

The fun part was about to come. We had to retrieve our pots, which by now had 5 crocodiles between them and us. I asked for volunteers and got some unmentionable answers. The question was, are the pots worth it?

The answer was yes, especially if they have crabs, so it came down to Annie and I to brave the situation and get into the dinghy. Having been

around crocs now for months we were getting a little used to them. In most instances they are more frightened of us and this seemed to be the case, as once we started the outboard they simply sunk below the surface. We quickly retrieved the pots, crabs and all.

It was worth it, as we had 6 big bucks to cook for dinner that night.

**July 14th.** Leaving the Daly early we headed off to Cambridge Gulf where we wanted to explore Lacrosse Island some 140 miles away. We steamed for 10 hours with a gentle easterly wind behind and arrived just before dark. We anchored in Turtle Bay out of the tidal stream (approx 4 knots)

**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.



**Left (and successive pages) . . . scenes of rugged grandeur of the Berkely River region. Above: The fuel bladder system extended the Sullivan's range very effectively, whilst their beautifully set-up Voyager 1040's application to long range cruising has been confirmed beyond doubt.**





in 10 metres of water and thought about mud crab for dinner. The next day we went ashore and explored the strange landscapes and walked to one of the few lighthouses in the Kimberley.

**July 16th.** One has to constantly plan ahead in these regions. We had to try and be at the Berkley River entrance at high tide, as we had heard that it was surrounded by shallow sand bars. This meant we had to leave Lacrosse Island around 3.00am in the morning to arrive at the Berkley River (Lat14.349-Long127.781) entrance at high tide at 7.00am, which by then had enough water for 'Catalina' to make her grand entrance. We got in without any problems and proceeded up the river about 5 miles to Casuarina Creek

where we dropped anchor in 20 feet. The tides here are around 18 feet at this time of the month and we made sure we had enough water under us for low tide. We were also out of the current that was running at around 3-4 knots.

I was surprised at the extent of the traffic in the river. There were several private vessels and at least 3 charter boats. I guess after travelling all this way I thought we would be the only boat for miles. One of the more irritating habits of the tourist boats is they feed the crocs so the tourists can take photos of them jumping up. This results in a few floating "handbags" circling the boat after one is anchored. Not very pleasant when all you want to do is sit out on the back swim platform

and have a drink while watching the sun go down.

The next day we proceeded up the river to explore the head. On the way up we encountered a large whirlpool. The currents being diverted by large underwater objects such as rock ledges, outcrops and merging currents form these aquatic phenomena. If you enter one of these larger ones on the wrong side they can turn your boat totally around in an instant, which is quite disconcerting.

The method I developed was to enter them on the right hand side, as whirlpools in the southern hemisphere always run clockwise so the boat enters it head on, which has little effect on changing the vessel's direction, but does slow the boat quite dramatically.

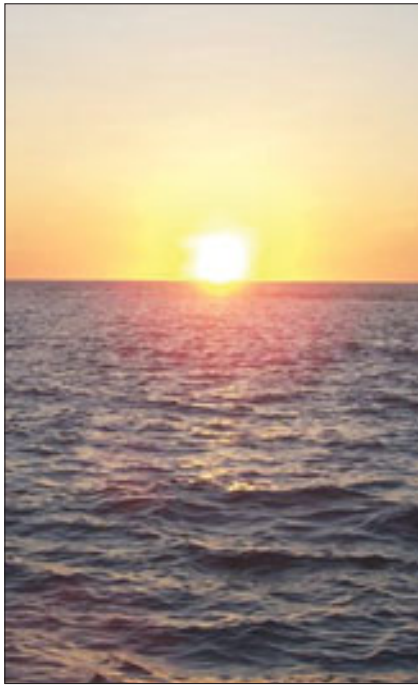
Another scary but interesting event is the overfall. This is a mid stream waterfall which would indicate to most people that an immediate large object would be just under the water and the boat would hit it if one proceeded. In most (but not all) cases, it is caused by an underwater shelf many metres down rising from the bottom suddenly, but still could be 5-10 metres deep, and the big currents cause a pressure wave to rise to the surface creating an overfall. But beware; sometimes it can be a solid rock wall just under the surface.

We continued travelling further up the Berkeley, where the river narrows into a spectacular gorge with sheer cliffs each side. Further along this reach on the western side, is a magnificent amphitheatre with a high waterfall cascading onto a flat rocky ledge.

A rough scramble over boulders leads to the top of the amphitheatre falls where panoramic views can be had of the river below. The creek upstream of the falls has some fresh water swimming holes, free of crocs. Most of the fresh water holes up these rivers are well above tidal level and are mostly croc free. It does pay though to keep an eye out. In our case we had Ralf on guard duty so we all felt much safer for that. He can smell a croc a mile away.

We enjoyed a pleasant swim, and relaxed for a few hours before deciding to return to the boat and flick a few barra lures around. We took the dinghy about a mile upstream to explore the head and came to a rock bar, which is where the fresh water meets the salt. This was as far as we could go.





**July 18th.** We travelled back down the river looking for some good spots to try for the Berkley's renowned 'Jacks'.

These mangrove lovers have been caught here weighing over 2 kg on occasion. The only bait we had left was blocks of tuna, so I suggested we defrost some chicken breasts. We anchored up on a bend that is fringed with thick mangroves and threw some lines over with strips of chicken. Well, the 'secret bait' really worked out! We caught 5 nice 'Jacks' within an hour on the chook, with an average weight around 1.5 kg. Annie suggested fresh fish for dinner again as the freezers



were still full, so at the risk of starting to grow gills and form scales, I happily agreed.

**July 19th.** We awoke to a strong wind blowing. It seemed to be coming from the south-east and could have been around 25 knots. We were going to leave the Berkley today and steam across to the King George River, but when we reached the entrance we noticed the waves were crashing onto the sand bars out from the entrance. This would make it very uncomfortable to exit today.

We decided to spend the rest of the day in a little creek just inside the

entrance.

This turned out to be a bonus as we took the dinghy up the creek and found a beautiful little lagoon, which would normally have a small waterfall in the wet. We climbed up the rock walls and bathed in some magnificent rock pools that were so clear, I suspect they were spring fed. If the rest of the Kimberley is as splendid as our first encounter, then we can't wait to see some more.

*(Next issue we steam over to the mighty King George River and continue our discoveries)*

**F&B**

