



# Sullivan's Travels

By John & Annie Sullivan

## Eighth Leg: Kimberley Back To Darwin

**July 21st.** After a few great days in the Berkley River we head further west another 40 miles and go into the King George River. (13.57.10s-127.19.40e).

The entrance to this river is much easier compared to the Berkley. We had no trouble at all cruising into the entrance. In fact the anchorages inside were fabulous, great scenery and out of the wind.

We had heard about the great twin water falls up this river and wanted to see them for ourselves.

The next day we casually cruised our way up to an intersection that invited us to choose left or right. We anchored *Catalina* for the day, launching the dinghy and decided to head left for about half a mile to the

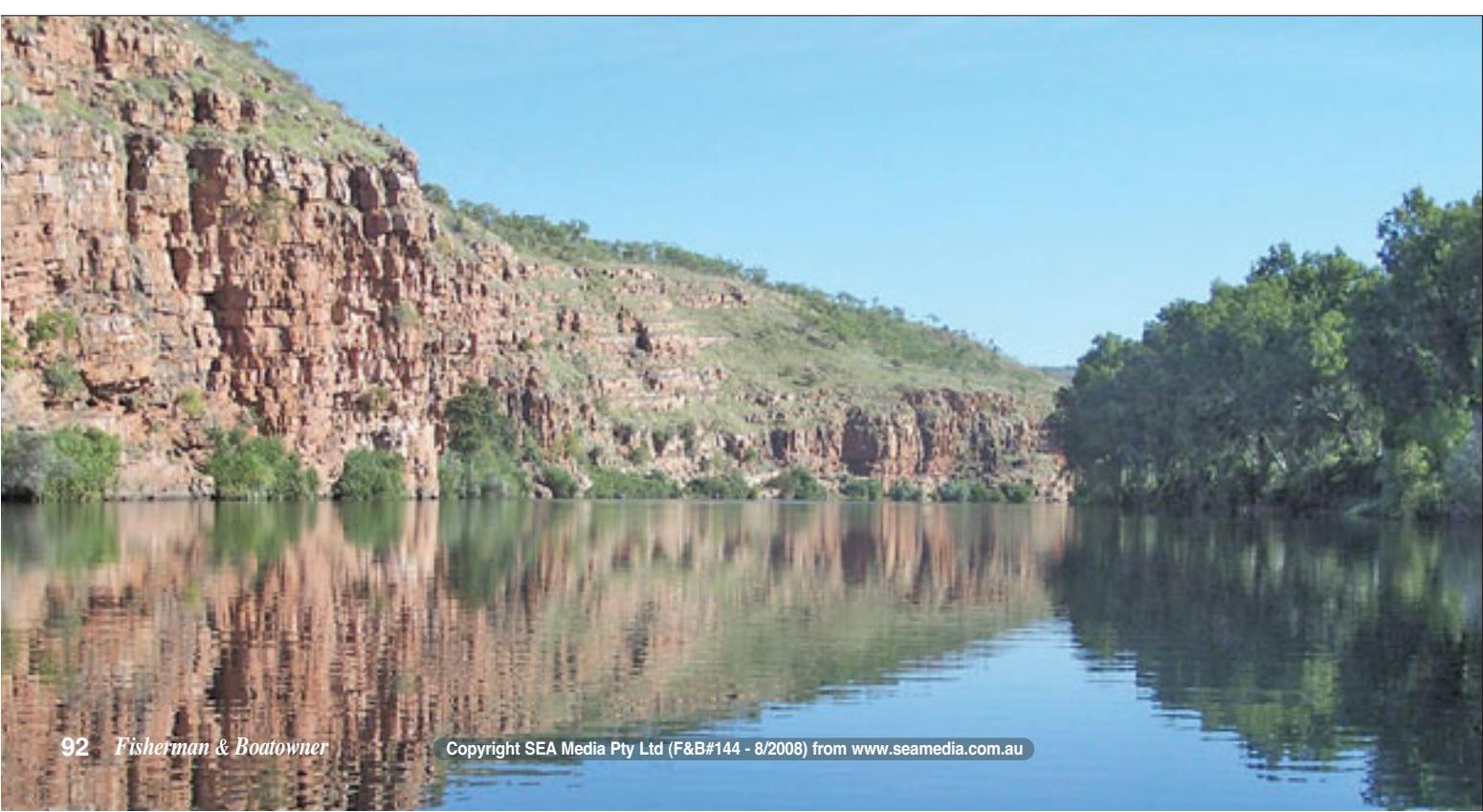
end where there was a beautiful high waterfall. The dry hadn't totally robbed it of water yet and the falling water gave off a mist that reflected a dozen rainbows. We decided against climbing the cliffs as they looked too dangerous.

We were told that there were ropes to hang onto as one climbs but we couldn't see any. I could guess the view from the top would have been awesome. We returned to the boat and after a cool drink we flicked a few lures around looking for some 'Jacks'. In this part of the world a tidal phenomena called the 'diurnals' occurs every month about a week after the neap tides and lasts for about 10 days.

These tides only occur once a day, that is it goes out for about 12 hours and then comes back in for about the same time. I started to think that the diurnal tides effect fish feeding times adversely as we almost never caught fish during these tides.

**JULY 22nd.** Morning found us heading up the right hand branch of the river towards huge rock cliffs resembling an amphitheatre only to find the falls had almost dried. As it was well into the dry season I guess it was to be expected. We camped just down from the falls for a day to explore the region and did some great walks. After a strenuous climb up to the top of the falls we encountered some beautiful rock pools and as the daytime temperature was around 22 degrees we all had a swim.

**JULY 23rd** The fishing was not up to expectations. We had only caught a few small Trevally and some undersize 'Jacks' so we decided to reluctantly head back to Cambridge Gulf and down to Wyndham to drop our friends off so they could continue on their way. We have decided not to attempt the circumnavigation due to the incredible bad weather on the



west coast of Australia over the last few months. The swells have been constantly up around the 5 to 7 metres and the winds are constantly blowing from the South east. It has been the roughest seas on the coast for years. So we will go home a different way and see a lot of new places on the way. We had been speaking to a pro fisherman a couple of days ago and he said that the west coast was the roughest he had encountered for years. He said that if we were heading down that way we would be in for a rough trip.

**JULY 24th.** After steaming for 6 hours we arrived in Cambridge Gulf. The run up to Wyndham from the entrance is about 40 miles through muddy crocodile infested water. The tides here range upwards to 8.5 meters, that's 28 feet in the old measurement, and the currents are equally as big. We struck an outgoing tide and the current was running against us at around 5 knots. We decided to take advantage of the huge tides and put *Catalina* on a mud/sand bank for the last 2 hours

of runout and give the bottom a clean and check while waiting for it to turn, otherwise we would be wasting a lot of diesel pushing into the current. The advantage of protected rudders and props means we can sit safely on the bottom.

So with the 4 of us scrubbing and scraping we had the bottom cleaned within 2 hours. Unnoticed by all of us a huge 5 metre croc was watching us from about 30 metres away during the whole episode. By mid afternoon we had started to float again, so we ran the 40 miles in two and a bit hours with the last 10 miles helped by a 5 knot current behind us. I would have to say that the most desolate and depressing port I have ever been in would be Wyndham. We dropped our friends off and anchored out for the night surrounded again by crocodiles to await the morning tide.

**JULY 25th.** By 10.00am in the morning we had an outgoing tide so we had an easy run out to Joseph Bonaparte Gulf which the locals have nicknamed the "Blownapart" gulf

**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.

because of the usual windy conditions that prevail. I entered a way point into the GPS some 190 miles away which was Charles Point, only 10 miles out from Darwin, and set the throttles at 3200rpm and headed off at a comfortable 16 knots. I estimated we would be at Cullen Bay Marina Darwin by 1.00am in the morning, a nice 12 hour night cruise





*“ . . . A rubber dinghy is no match for one of these monsters. Up here, the locals call them ‘teething rings’ for crocodiles. . . ”*

assisted by radar.

**AUGUST 2nd.** Life is never dull in Cullen Bay Marina. We have made quite a few great friends and formed a unique community of fellow boaters, all of whom seem to be waiting for the trade winds to abate and the favourable westerly's start so they can all head back to the East coast. Most have been doing what we have, some for a lot longer, and some that just follow the seasons from east to west every year. But the one things we all have in common is our love of boats and the footloose and free style of life that it offers, and many a great night sitting around a galley table was enjoyed having a drink and telling each other stories. Then the mood was shattered when the marina decided to "evict" all of us "live aboards". The excuse...we had overstayed the maximum period according to the body Corp. and were all given two weeks notice to go.

It actually didn't bother us as much as we were planning on steaming

around that time anyway as we weren't going to wait for the trade winds to abate, but for the sailors it was an unfair decision.

Anyway we all got together and decided to have an "Eviction" party the last week and our boat was chosen as the party boat. Annie and I said we would put on a BBQ and it was all organised for the last day in the marina.

**AUGUST 13th.** The Marina has quite a large stock of huge Barramundi that have come through the lock at some stage and have not found their way out. Every night if we put our underwater Aqualuma lights on these huge Barra start circling under the boat. Well there is a big sign up that says "No Fishing" so up till now these critters have been safe. So, I said to Annie that I thought some Barra fillets would go over well on the barbe tomorrow night, and she said she would do the salad. Later that night I put on a "rattler" lure (barra love them) and flicked it out past this big fellow and wound

like crazy. All of a sudden hell breaks loose behind the boat and I'm hooked up. I reckon you could hear the reel screaming up at the marina office but not to be put off I start playing this big, juicy, illegal barra. About 3 minutes go by and lots of giving and taking and finally ...man one, Barra zero. Of course I released him back to the wild (*you all believe that don't you??*)

By the way, the BBQ was a great success!!

**AUGUST 15th.** We finally leave Darwin and head across the top of Arnhem Land towards Gove. To avoid as much open sea as possible (the trade winds blow 20 knots from the east every day) we decide to run the gauntlet of keeping close to the coast line so we can duck into headlands and creeks at night to find comfort and protection from the winds. It was not an easy choice as most of the top end has not been adequately surveyed, especially the headlands and creeks. The constant worry of hidden klonkers and

bombies just under the water is with you every moment. Our charts are pretty much useless as far as depths and hazards are concerned. But with constant care and a lot of 'slowly does it' we managed to escape damage. We discovered some great bays and beaches and found some fabulous fishing spots, in some cases possibly where no white man has ever trodden I would guess.

**AUGUST 21st.**

Early this morning we came across a massive amount of bait working the surface so I slowed to 6 knots and threw out the mackerel lures. Within 5 minutes we had a magnificent 15 kilo Spanish. We started to run a little short of fuel due to some bad weather that required us to run for a few hours at cruise speed, so we called into the Aboriginal settlement at Galiwinku (12.03.20S – 135.33.48E) on Elcho Island, bought 200 litres of diesel and carted it out to the boat in jerry cans. This was mainly as a precaution in case we struck bad weather again. The Cadell Straights along this island are extremely beautiful and provided some great fishing.

We trolled the small creeks off the Straights in the dinghy one afternoon and got chased by a 4 metre croc which we disturbed on the shoreline. He actually swam after the dinghy for a good hundred yards before we decided to open the throttle right up and hightail it. A rubber dinghy is no match for one of these monsters. Up here the locals call them 'teething rings' for crocodiles.

**AUGUST 25th.** Finally we arrived in Gove, anchored up near the boat club and hitched a ride into Nullanbuy (the only town in the area) to replenish our supplies.

*(Next Issue: We take on the Gulf of Carpentaria again via Groote Island and Weipa on our way back to the East Coast.)*

F&B

