



Sullivan's Travels

By John & Annie Sullivan

NINTH Leg **Gove to Cairns.**

28th August.

There is not much to get excited about as a tourist in these parts. Gove is actually the name given to the peninsula that extends out from this corner of East Arnhem Land. The Alcan bauxite mine and alumina refinery is located here at Nhulunbuy on the Gove Peninsula in the east Arnhem Land region of Australia's Northern Territory.

From this remote seaside location Alcan mines bauxite and refines it into alumina which is supplied globally for the creation of aluminium and other products. It seems that most of the town's 2500 residents work for Alcan and apart from the usual small town businesses there is no other industry.

After re supplying the fruit, vegetables and the beer, we decide

to wait the wind out around the corner tucked into a nice little bay opposite Bremer Island.

We got a break in the wind two days later and head off to Groote Island in the Gulf (14.00.00S -136.35.00E) We have decided not to attempt the 380 miles across the gulf from Gove to Cape York non stop, as the weather prediction for the next week is for big 'highs' across Australia which means strong south easterly winds up this way day and night. We would be running directly into 20 - 30 knots of east south east winds for 40 hours and waves of around 2 to 3 metres. The safer (and more comfortable) option is to go around the Gulf via Groote, down to the Pellow Group, on to Mornington Island and down to Karumba. From there we will refuel and head up the inside coast via Weipa to the Cape. Total miles 900 but that's the price of safety. The bonus, of course, is we may get to see a lot of interesting

country on the way.

4th September.

We arrive in Groote Island. We had a bad trip. The wind freshened much earlier from the south not long after we started and forced us eventually to seek shelter in a bay (unsurveyed) just before dark.

When we turned into the bay we were horrified as it was strewn with reef outcrops sticking out of the bay everywhere. There were bombies left, right and centre, and a total depth of only 10 feet in the whole bay. We were faced with the decision to go back out into 3 metres and 30 knots, or continue on into the bay and hope to find a small reef-free spot and drop the anchor for the night.

We elected to venture into the bay and in desperation, to drop the anchor before it got too dark. We had little choice but to choose a spot between two huge reefs. The wind

The wharf at Seisa supports a very active cargo trade servicing the northern tip of Cape York.



Trapped off the beach at Seisa by Parks & Wildlife Rangers, this croc is a salutary reminder about the dangers of swimming in these northern reaches. It was relocated amidst the growing controversy about the rapidly increasing croc population in the North.



and rollers came through all night, while we took turns at anchor watch in case it slipped. It was possibly the worst night's sleep I haven't had this trip.

First light saw us weighing anchor and picking our way out of the mine field of reefs to open sea and on to Groote, still another 50 miles to go. It was at this stage we asked ourselves were we "really having fun". It drains the spirit from you on these occasions, and you start to question the reasons for the whole trip. But after anchoring up in a beautiful little bay in Groote and opening a cold beer, the dramas of the previous night are soon forgotten...hmmmm, now where's my fishing rod!.

6th September.

Groote Island is mainly a mining community, with vast deposits of manganese in the ground. Again, like most of the remote places in the north, almost all the island's community works in the mining and production of this valuable metal. Apart from a pub and general store there was nothing for us to see or explore. They wouldn't even supply

us diesel.

They simply said it was not for sale to visiting boats. We still had enough fuel to get us to Karumba at 8 knots but not enough to do it on the plane at 16 knots. We fished for 3 days waiting yet again for a suitable weather window and met up with Bruce and Juanita, owners of "Wild Card", a 65 foot mackerel fishing boat. They were fabulous people to talk to and after explaining to them

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.

what our trip plans were they offered to help us out with fuel from their own tanks.

We had originally planned to cruise down to Karumba via The Vanderlin group of islands and Mornington where we could buy fuel but Bruce suggested that there would be a couple of days break in the wind and if he gave us some diesel we could head straight across to Weipa and save 500 miles and a lot of travel time. We graciously accepted his generous offer and did just that. The next morning we headed off to Weipa, some 350 miles straight across the Gulf. One of the highlights of the trip across the gulf was passing longitude 138 degrees about one third the way, which meant we had entered Queensland waters once more. This felt strangely good for some reason.

9th September.

We had traveled for almost 20 hours at 15 knots across the Gulf of Carpentaria when we were hit by a violent thunder storm some 50 miles before Weipa. I could see it coming on the radar but there was nothing we could do but batten down. Up till

The bauxite plant at Gove in the NT



then we had a good sea with only about 10 knots on the port quarter and about half a metre of sea; during and after the storm we ended up with 25 knots and 2.5 metres of sea for the rest of the trip. I had to tack south to put about 40 degrees on the waves for safety and comfort. These big cats don't mind a head sea up to about 1.5 metres but after that you have to wind on some angle and slow down to alleviate the thumping and pounding. So we tacked for another 5 hours and ended up down near Cape Keirwere some 80 miles off course down from Weipa. We worked our way up to Weipa under the protection of the shore. Weipa never looked so good to us when we finally arrived, although it has very little for the tourist except the fishing. I managed to catch a nice little black king just off the fuel jetty which was convenient, as we had just eaten our last barra fillets the night before.

We refueled the next day and headed north via an overnighter at Port Musgrave and onto Seisia.

11th September.

We are now in Seisia again and only 30 miles from the Cape and the east coast. This is one of my favourite places in the top end. It's a great stopover for any boat traveler doing the run across the top. Unfortunately you cannot get fuel until the mother ship comes in to the wharf. It does the Gulf rounds every fortnight.

12th September.

The next day we awoke to shouting and screaming. It looked like the whole town had turned out to see the huge croc they had trapped about 200 metres from the boat

ramp. They (the Parks and Wildlife boys) had put a trap out after witnesses had seen a 5 metre croc take a dog off the beach two days before. This was preceded apparently by two other dogs taken from the same beach over the last month.

The scary thing is that kids play on the beach every day. It makes a great argument for bringing back croc shooting. Just think how cheap women's hand bags and shoes would become if they did!

One thing we had wanted to experience on this adventure but until now hadn't gotten the chance was to try some turtle eggs. Apparently they are protected unless you are of an indigenous background. Well, we were talking to some local natives and they had just raided a nest and kindly offered us half a dozen fresh eggs. Well, we cooked 'em according to the native recipe, and after one taste, I almost threw up. Annie pulled a real strange face and tossed hers overboard. They were vile. I can understand now why mother turtle crawls up the beach late at night and buries them - they should stay there, if you ask my opinion!

15th September.

Aloha Seisia, sadly for the last time. We love the place, with its friendly people and beautiful beaches, and the coconut palms swaying in the breeze. We couldn't however come this far without visiting Possession Island as we passed it on our way around to the Cape. 10.43.36 S- 142.23.49E This island is part of the Torres Strait Islands situated between Thursday Island and Cape York. It was named

Possession Island by Captain Cook when he landed there on 22nd August 1770 to formally take possession, in the name of King George III, of all the lands along the east coast of Australia which he had surveyed. We took the dinghy ashore and visited the monument at the spot where he raised the flag.

After that we virtually steamed non stop down the east coast traveling day and night to reach Cairns 3 days later. We limped into Cairns with the smell of an oily rag for fuel. A well earned rest in Cairns saw us hire a car for 3 days and do some sight seeing. We then fueled up and decided we would head slowly down to Hinchinbrook Island and sneak into Zoe Creek for some more Barra fishing, as we'd caught a heap in there, on the way up.

19th September.

To our surprise the wind has begun to drop off each day and it looks like the season has changed with variable light winds the order of the day. This is the time of the year through to December that makes cruising these east coast waters very enjoyable. We set off south to Hinchinbrook at a leisurely 7 knots on auto pilot with both game poles out armed with two mackerel lures. We weren't in any hurry. This was all about the journey home now, and somehow we didn't want it to end.

(Next month: We sadly complete our journey and return to reality. We reflect on the highs and the lows of such a trip and offer some advice to any one contemplating something similar.)

F&B