



Gove House Crocs . .

I have in the past written a number of times about incidents that happened whilst I was working at Gove in the N.T. and one was with my fishing mate Ray.

We had decided to go down the bay in which Gove Harbour is situated, past Drimmie Head and then head east across the shallows to the mouth of a nearby river to set some crab pots, then throw a few lures around for barra. This river was one of the few places where we could be sure of getting a few crabs, as although it had a sandy bottom (like most of the river mouths in this area) which meant that it was not ideal crabbing country, the banks were lined with significant mangrove forests which helped to produce a few crabs.

The trip across the eastern end of this bay was through lots of shallow water and required quite a deal of concentration in the navigation department to progress through the small channels to the main river mouth.

Once inside the mouth I opened up the fifteen hp Yamaha for the trip up the river to our spot. At that time my mate decided to begin

Ebb & Flow

with Neil Dunstan

getting the pots ready for setting and I was watching what he was doing and not paying attention to the driving. When I looked up, I saw that I was heading for a large mangrove tree beside the bank at full speed and was only a few metres from running into it.

Without time to throttle back I just put the motor over to full lock and was able to slide past the tree with the keel scraping along the trunk before we were heading out towards the river proper.

At this point I put the tiller over to straighten up the four metre Quintrex before shutting down the throttle when the force of changing direction allowed the motor to come off the transom and fall in the water. With the motor still going flat out and disappearing below the water I hung on for grim death and refused to let go - which was pretty difficult with the thrust the motor was generating.

After a few seconds the motor stopped due to water entering the carbies and I was left hanging on to it under water but my arm and wrist was so strained that I didn't have the strength to lift it back into the boat and Ray had to help get it back. A quick cleanup and refitting it back on the transom and she started after a dozen or so pulls' which was a great relief as to have no motor out there, five miles from home in the middle of the best population of crocodiles in the district, was something we did not look forward to.

We eventually got home later that day, with a good haul of crabs and a few barra, but I had to rely on Ray to catch them all as I could hardly use my left arm. The

damage was enough to require a trip across to Darwin for surgery to repair my shoulder which took over a year to finally come good, but at least I saved the motor. You have to get your priorities right.

Before I left Gove for the last time, my wife and kids travelled back to our home in Sarina Beach and I had to stay on for another couple of months to finish the projects that I was working on.

I stayed in the house which was allocated to us originally but as there was a shortage of housing, I was asked to move out of the house to Gove House which was the single men's quarters.

The digs were quite ok as we had our own private room and the buildings were in the middle of town in a quite convenient position, but the one disadvantage was the food. Most of the residents were either migrants or from overseas backgrounds as were the cooks, so the food was not the normal food to which Australians were accustomed, and contained heaps of garlic. This was fine for our migrant workers as the food was basically very good, however Ray and I both were not very partial to such food; I think that they even had garlic in the ice cream!

One day we were out on a weekend fishing trip to the Goyder River and on the Saturday night we decided to go up the river to check our traps which we had set for the giant freshwater shrimp. We used them as bait for barra and if we got enough, we ate them too, as they were delicious.

This section of the river was way upstream, well into the fresh water section and there were very

few salt water crocs but plenty of freshies which were pretty well harmless. As we travelled along the bank in the tinnie we spotted a small freshie about a metre long laying on a sandbank and as we approached, he just sat there in the spotlight, so Ray who was well primed with liquid dutch courage dived over the side and grabbed the croc and wrestled him into the boat. He stood up and pushed it into a hessian bag which was in the boat and we decided to take him back with us.

That night back in Gove when we went to the crib room for the evening meal, Ray came trotting in with a bag under his arm and we guessed what was going to happen. After taking our seats he said with a grin, "I will teach these blokes to fill my food up with garlic". With that he let the terrified croc out of the bag and it went scurrying across the room under all the tables where all the guys were having dinner.

All hell broke loose, and the place was evacuated as they all thought it was a saltie not a harmless freshie, and we bolted out of the place and made ourselves scarce.

The wash-up of the incident was that the local police were decidedly unimpressed and tried really hard to find out who were the culprits, but nobody had noticed us let it go and we were able to convince them it wasn't us.

The company which employed us, threatened whoever had perpetrated this evil act would be instantly dismissed, but as we were both preparing to leave Gove it was not too much of a problem. However, I have to admit to being one of the culprits of the great "crocodile in the crib room" incident.

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