



Neil Dunstan:

A Whale Of A Time!

The morning had turned out to be nice and calm and the sea conditions were perfect for a quick trip out in the tinnie.

The sun was shining and the tides were reasonably small to give us just the right amount of run for comfortable fishing, so I said to my visiting brother in law, Len, 'How about we get the tinnie out of the shed, and try for some mackerel?' which were starting to be caught in reasonable numbers.

As he is also a keen fisherman he readily agreed, so in twenty minutes we had loaded the Quintrex dory with bait and ice plus some sandwiches, a thermos of coffee and were unloading at the Sarina Beach boat ramp.

The trip out towards Sunken Reef, a reef area about seven n. miles south/east of the inlet was begun in beautiful conditions and we were enjoying the scenery when I spotted what looked like a log about two miles ahead of us. I mentioned to Len that there were



plenty of whales around at the moment and it might be a whale so we had better keep an eye on it.

He was very excited as he had never seen a whale, they don't normally get as far north as Innisfail where he lives. After travelling another mile or so I said that it looked very much like a whale sleeping

“All the while the whale was coming closer and closer to the back of the boat until it was almost touching the transom and it was just sitting there looking at us . . .”

on the surface as it was not moving at all, so we proceeded over to have a look staying the regulation distance away and stopping the motor. At this stage I said to Len that it looked like a juvenile as it

was only about eight metres long and he couldn't believe the size of the thing let alone the twelve metres or so that they can sometimes reach. Then the whale blew through its breathing hole and took a breath and started to dive, so I said I thought that it had spotted us and was about to move away.

We waited a little while to see where it would surface and I mentioned the fact that you could usually tell which way they were swimming by the water swirling on the surface each time the tail swept through its arc, and as we watched it seemed as if it was coming towards us.

I was standing at the back of the boat when all of a sudden the whale came up to the surface about twenty feet behind us and lay there on the surface. Len was nearly having kittens with excitement and I was a bit worried that it was so close, bearing in mind that it was more than twice the size of our boat.

At about this time we suddenly noticed that there were three large tiger sharks swimming around the whale and one of the smaller ones came right up to the boat and starting sniffing around the transom. I was a bit worried as I thought that it was about to take a bite at the outboard leg so I didn't want to start the motor in case it got angry. All the while the whale was coming closer and closer to the back of the boat until it was almost touching the transom and it was just sitting there looking at us.

I decided to start the motor and slowly moved away from it to try and get a safe (and legal) distance away. After travelling about twenty metres the whale started to swim towards us again and soon was right at the back of the boat, so I shut the motor down in case it got damaged by the prop. All the while, the three tiger sharks were circling around about ten metres away from the boat.

After another attempt to put some distance



This is a story about a typical whale who hasn't read the text book on *"Handling Nervous Boaties"* and it does remind us that although we are supposed to stay well away from them, the fact is they are very curious creatures and often "pop up" next to drifting or anchored fishing boats to say 'Hello!' This invariably scares the hell out of the dozey fishos - check how close this one came to Neil's Quinnie before he decided to take off . . . (This could be the reason Neil's hair is now snowy white, and I've lost mine!)





between us and the whale, it came right back and was touching the back of the boat, but by then I wasn't too worried as it did not seem to be in any way aggressive and just wanted to nuzzle up to the rear of the boat.

I then decided to get away from this situation as it could get dangerous if the sharks came any closer to the whale, so I started the motor and slowly moved away, with the whale following like a pet dog.

Once we were a safe distance away I hit the throttle and left the scene quick smart and headed

on towards Sunken Reef where we spent the next couple of hours having a

“. . and slowly moved away, with the whale following like a pet dog. . . ”

great time in wonderful conditions catching a dozen or so nice school mackerel.

On the way home we had a look around the same area to see if the whale was still there but could see no sign of it so assumed it had gone on its

way back to Antarctica.

I wondered about the whole scenario and I reckoned that this was a juvenile whale who had lost contact with its group and was trying to get alongside us as a substitute for its family. Also the presence of three large tiger sharks swimming along with the whale might indicate that the whale was sick or injured and they were waiting to close in on it at the opportune moment which may explain its attempt to get up close and personal with my Quintrex. All in all a very exciting experience which

does not happen every day so with such beautiful weather, a good haul of mackerel and a close encounter with a whale and three tiger sharks, it was a day to be remembered, along with all the other wonderful days I have spent messing around in boats.

*Neil Dunstan
Sarina Beach.*

F&B