

Right Over The Top

After exploring Australia on land in our 38ft converted Bedford bus for one and a half years, we received a phone call from a long time fishing partner, Ken, asking my husband Steve to fly to Sydney to look at a boat with him.

The 'wish list' for the boat for the proposed long distance trip in remote areas included twin motors for security, a flybridge for navigating reefs and rocks, and the versatility to catch anything from barramundi to marlin, whilst having the convenience of a liveaboard.

Steel Haven was purchased in April 2002, and whilst fit to cruise in local areas, there was a lot of work required before we could take it into remote areas.

Over the next couple of months we installed a 32ltr/hr desalinator, had larger fuel tanks fitted, reconditioned the injectors on the twin 180hp Ford diesels, and focused on the general maintenance in the hope of ensuring a trouble free journey. An inverter was installed to keep the freezer working and limit the use of the generator.

We cruised the Hawksbury River N.S.W. for 3 weeks to iron out any problems, and work out



The remarkable story of a well travelled family from Melbourne who took the 'sea change' concept to heart. They took off on a sea-going fishing adventure of remarkable proportions. Together with their two little kids, and a bunch of friends, Steve & Louise Yeoman fished - and fished - from one side of Australia to another in a voyage of epic proportions. This month, we join them as they steam around the top from Townsville to Darwin, before heading 'down' to the Kimberley.

Story & Most Pics By Louise Yeoman

further requirements, whilst also seeing if we all could live together in a confined area for days on end.

In June we fished and cruised the East Coast for five months, up to Cairns, the Ribbon Reefs, and back to Townsville, where *Steel Haven* rested until the big day: the 'Over the Top' journey.

April 2003

We'd only put the boat onto the slip to give it a wash down, but once she was out of the water, we noticed a problem with the anti-foul. The paint, (which was applied 6 months before), had undergone a serious chemical failure. The hull needed to be sand blasted back to bare metal, and new anti-foul and paint applied. This put us behind a week, but we still had plenty to do onshore.

Our shopping spree for 7 weeks was complete after many trips to the supermarket. Ken always tried to sneak his soft drink and biscuits into the trolley, knowing that we had



Above: Across the very top of the Australian mainland at Cape York - Louise and the kids in a special moment to remember. **Right:** Emmily Rose keeping busy at sea.

limited storage. Our light foods (Salada, cereal, toilet paper) were stored in the flybridge, whilst the heavier canned foods went in the galley, and under berths.

The freezer was packed with bread, a little meat, and lunchtime snacks. We had just enough fresh fruits and vegies to last for the week, but plenty of dehydrated vegetables which offered less weight and better storage.

We packed a camp oven to cook the anticipated mud crab, crayfish and damper on the Islands.

Onboard for the first 6 week leg of the “*Discover yourself treatment to Darwin*” was Steve, Louise Cooper (5 y.o.) and Emmily-Rose (3 y.o.) Yeoman, Ken (boat owner) and Colin (friend).

Steel Haven was launched on 2 May, but a further delay of 4 days waiting for the 30-knot winds to abate, had us anxiously doing final preparations.

Finally, we left Townsville for a 60-mile trip to Orpheus Island and into a Marine Park mooring for the first of many nights offshore.

After a lot of planning and preparation, the tinny tied off the stern,



we were finally about to start fishing and exploring parts of the country we’d been dreaming about since hearing tall tales about remote country fishing, and seeing documentaries by the likes of the Leylands and Malcolm Douglas.

Daybreak. A 50-mile trip up the outside of Hinchinbrook Island and, with a 20 knot tail wind, we aimed to camp in the lee of Dunk Island. Cooper had his first day of seasickness and refused to take anything. I took a Travacalm, which made me feel like a zombie, but at least I was not sick. Fortunately, the sight of Dunk Island coming up on the horizon bucked us

up, and helped made us all feel great again.

Safely anchored on a nearby reef, we tossed our baits in, and had soon hooked up on coral trout, sweet lip, spanish flag, and reef sharks up to 4 feet. It was great to eat fish again.

After leaving Dunk Island we had a 65 mile run to Fitzroy Island just south of Cairns. Along the way we trolled RMG’s and Halco lures. A spanish mackerel with its distinctive silver sides and darker stripes glittering in the North Queensland sunlight came onto deck, destined for one of Steve’s famous mackerel dishes.

Cooper soon got over his seasickness, and I learned to take only a quarter of a pill. We all seem to have settled in well.

With a 15kt sou'easterly we arrived in Port Douglas the following afternoon to collect Stuart, who joined us for 10 days. We had a quick look around the tropical market, re-fuelled, and resumed our adventure, stopping at Snapper Island for a rocky night's sleep.

While trolling lures, longtail, mack tuna, and spanish mackerel had us all keen to grab the reels.

Steve came down for a break and noticed smoke coming from the engine. An examination found the muffler had exploded, and we had a problem with the cooling system.

Arrival in Cooktown

We had to leave our fun at Bedford Bay, and head 20 km back to Cooktown. Before we headed back though, Colin hooked up to a remora on his fly gear. It was a bit of a sucker to take a fly (*sic!*) but a bit of fun, especially the way it stuck to the bottom of the boat like a fridge magnet. The kids were most impressed.

We arrived in remote Cooktown and all got to have a nice wander around the historical town. A population of 2000, I was surprised the town was so busy. It was interesting reading the history of the town where Captain Cook landed in June 1770.

The Cooktown locals were happy, friendly people. Luckily for us, a local tyre service and garage had 2 impellers that we required in stock, and they were installed successfully by our talented crew. We re-fuelled again, and headed back to Cape Bedford to anchor for the night.

Next day, we arrived in Mermaid Bay for a calm anchorage at picturesque Lizard Island. With a bit of daylight left, we decided to have a snorkel in the turquoise waters. Cooper was having a great time, swimming with the little reef sharks, but Emmily-Rose was not so confident - she stayed away from the sharks, content to watch them from the boat.

Eventually, too many reef sharks came around, and Cooper was finally convinced it was indeed time to come out of the water! Cooper was so excited to swim with the reef shark, saying, "This was awesome.. Oh, Mum, wow! I've never been swimming



Above: Louise with surgeon fish
Below: Skipper - Steve - with a superb red emperor. (Think of the fillets . . !)



with a shark before!" His excitement was priceless.

At about 5.30pm we had a real audience of 8 reef sharks, a 20kg giant trevally, and other species, whizzing about under the boat, fighting for the scraps we were feeding them.

Steve has having a ball in the water filming them, while I was happy to lie on the marlin board with my mask in the water, just watching. Eventually the sharks were getting too friendly, and started to nibble Steve's fins. He decided it was time to retreat too.



Above: Ken with a typical barracuda . .

Below: Whilst Steve secures a big GT.



As the evening got darker, the sharks got bigger, to the stage they were nudging the burley bucket.

Princess Charlotte Bay

A fishful day followed with triple hook ups of mackerel tuna, spanish and stripy mackerel, and barracuda captured while trolling to Howick Island where we stopped for lunch. Continuing onto Berwick Island and I hooked up to a giant trevally, a great fighting sportsfish, with great strength. They don't give in easily, and had me

moving all over the boat. At times, the line went slack, thinking that I could have possibly lost the fish, but hoping he was just swimming towards me, I reeled furiously. I soon called for the gimbal to be put on me to avoid too much bruising, and to relieve some of the pressure on my forearm, trying to keep the rod still. After a lengthy fight, I got the upperhand, and landed a 12kg gimpal trevally. The fish posed for a photo, before we released him back to fight again another day.

Our sunset was delightful, anchored on a reef. Using mack tuna for bait, and keeping the baits just off the bottom to reduce the snags, we caught an amazing array of reef fish, and in good sizes too.

A new day, and a 35 mile trip up the major inshore shipping channel, passing numerous container ships to Pipon Island on the Eastern tip of Princess Charlotte Bay.

Australia was still visible in the distance, where we see the coast lined with many mangroves, and sandy patches dotted along the mainland.

Trolling a good spread of skirted lures, our first sailfish for this trip was tagged and released by Colin. As soon as the sail came up, everyone was well rehearsed on their jobs. Steve drove the boat, Ken was the deckie, I wound in the teaser and other rods, and was camera person, while the kids were the encouraging audience viewing the excitement from their vantage point - sitting out of the way, on the freezer.

It was a real team effort to catch a billfish, and always an exciting moment for everybody, with a bit of the fish belonging to everyone.

I think young Cooper was the most excited saying "Go Colin, go Colin.. lift and wind, Colin!"

The night ended with a celebratory drink and a few songs on the harmonica.

Everyone was getting on well with the routine. Steve was Captain – boss boat driver, and chef, ex-concretor. Ken was Admiral, chief anchorman, garbage disposal unit and schedule maintainer, ex-dairy farmer.

I was boss mum, hygienist, gimbal belt wearer, fish catcher, assistant cook, ex-bank manager. Stuart was a diesel mechanic and dish washerer. Colin was part time boat driver, some times musician, assistant cook, a fitter and

turner, flyfisherman and occasionally cuppa tea person. Cooper and Emmily - Rose are monkey ladder climbers, toy and play-doh distributors and part time students.

We continued working north, trolling to Lagoon Reef for a swim and a snorkel along the fringing coral platforms. Probably the best reef so far this trip, with large clams, and rainbows of corals and fish. A vibrant underwater world was there to explore in areas along the Great Barrier Reef. The reef also provides welcome protection from swells.

Cape Grenville

Monday 19th May, we travelled to Cape Grenville. This was to be the ultimate fishing day for the trip so far for me. We had double and triple hook ups. Scaly and spanish mackerel, tuna, even queenfish while trolling and casting Rapala's and R.M.G lures. The Bay, as big as a football oval, was surrounded by a sandy, mangrove-edged rocky island, lush with coconut trees on all sides. The area was erupting with birds chasing baits.

Chasing the fish, Colin was trying

jump baby!" This was world class fishing.

Steve, tossing a lure with his Calcutta, soon hooked up to something big on his 6kg line. The fish was peeling off the line, and had Steve running all around the boat, really working the gear. The fish soon tired, and after a 20 minute fight, Steve landed a northern blue of 8kg. We worked this area for 3 hours before we had to move on to find an anchorage for the night. We diarised this spot for a definite future return visit.

After travelling through a 40 mile green 'no fish' zone, enough time to catch up on some housework and sleep, we arrived to anchor off Bushy Island. This was to become another hot spot. Whilst cubing on dusk, I cast my bait into the water. The hook found its mark immediately, while I was still letting the line out on a small bait

Below: One of the real pleasures in cruise fishing along the FNQ coast is the opportunity to free dive on the GBR - where fish and coral are spread over hundreds of miles of pristine sea bed.



his fly rod on the front of the boat, while I was using a small bait caster with 6 kilo braid, and a small laser lure. I hooked up to a tealeaf trevally, a queen, a tuna, and barracuda. The ultimate fun was on the queen fish - the queenfish fight, jump, splash and literally thrash about making the water resemble a bubble bath. Catching them on a small casting outfit was unforgettable fun. I could not contain my vocal excitement "yihaa, yahoo,

caster . . . the ratchet screamed, and I was nearly spooled. If I thumbed the line, it would have put a hole in my thumb. You could nearly see smoke. Zzzzzzzzzzzzzzz! I thought I would lose the lot. It turned out to be a 10kg spanish mackerel. When he came up, he was buggered, he'd worked so hard. That had to be the fish of the day. Wow. This got everyone excited. I thought I had better sit back and let the guys get some decent fish as I was

getting a bad name as rod grabber.

Next came a good selection of other species including a good size diamond trevally (a spectacular fish with long wispy fins) caught by Colin. Too soon, the aggressive predators found us again, and gave us some fun on light gear.

Soon we were blessed with the presence of about 70 turtle hatchlings, still with the yolk sacks attached. They came to the marlin board either to eat our burly, or try to escape predators. We all got to have a hold of some of the hatch, fitting easily into the palms of our hands. This was another highlight of the trip - a rare opportunity.

An early start next day, took us to the far northern tip of Cape York. The waters were greener, and the fishing diminished. We passed through the shallow channel between the tip and Eborac Island. It was an exciting time that passed all too quickly as Steve manoeuvred the boat through difficult shallows.

We had made it to The Top, the most northern part of mainland Australia. I am so glad to have done it by sea as opposed to the land by 4WD. It was a long way, but we did it in style.

We arrived at Horn Island to re-fuel, and fill the water tank. Our water tank holds 400 litres, hence the water was sparse, and showers were restricted to quick 2 litre jobs. You get wet, turn off the water, lather, then rinse, saving the water to wash your clothes. To wash your clothes, you tread on them like making wine. The kids enjoyed this job, and swirled around like a washing machine. We tried not to rely on the desalinator, just in case, and you do not always know when you can get fresh water. Before we filled the tank, we all

had a good scrub in the shower, washed our hair, and gave our clothes a decent wash.

Anchored for the night we watched the sun set over Thursday Island. We have enjoyed many sunsets and nights spent star gazing in the boat. The skies light up in tremendous pink, purple and orange shades. This was to be the last night for Stuart. We had enjoyed his company, and were sad to see him go.

A water taxi collected us from *Steel Haven* the following morning and dropped us off on Thursday Island for a short excursion, and a trip to the post office to collect 5 bags of schoolwork for Cooper. Cooper was enrolled in Distant Education, and completes his school work by correspondance. Emmily-Rose happily joins in with the classes. We replenished our bread, fruit, purchased souvenirs, and then it was another taxi ride back to *Steel Haven*.

Thursday Island is only 35 kilometres north of Cape York. Although once steeped in the pearling industry, crayfishing is now the main source of income. This remote community is a fascinating destination, rich in WW-2 history, with wartime sites still visible on surrounding islands.

Crossing The Gulf

We had hoped to fish around the Cape for a few days, but with a window of opportunity, and the weather on our side, a decision was made at 4.30pm to cross the Gulf of Carpentaria with a 10 knot ESE helping us. This turned out to be a good move as the weather turned sour, and we could have been stuck on the eastern side for three weeks.

The slog across the Gulf took us 2

full nights (44 hours) with the motors continually running through the short, dumpy waves. We had a cracked injector line, causing a small fuel leak, which Steve managed to fix. The nights were noisy, hot and bumpy. The men were doing driving shifts, with everyone feeling very lethargic.

In the middle of The Gulf (Arafura Sea) we were 170km from any land, and we were closer to PNG than Australia.

We were stopped while Ken was fighting a fish when out of nowhere, without any warning, a Customs plane flew directly above us. They radioed, speaking to Steve to find out about our travels and updated us on a weather report - not that it made any difference in the middle of a sea. It was reassuring to know that these high-tech watchers had located us so far away, and that somebody was looking after us in this landless sea.

We only saw one other boat, in the distance, and discussed at the time 'what an odd shaped vessel' it was. It turned out to be an illegal fishing boat, which was captured, and later towed past us by the Customs ship *Botany Bay* into Nhulunbuy, with a second Indonesian boat in tow.

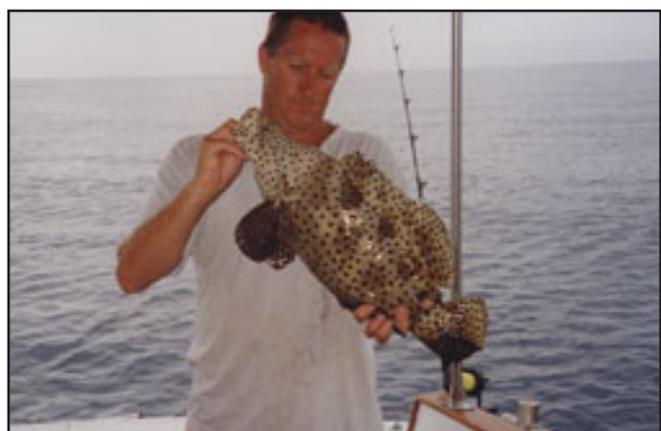
Half way across, in 50 metre, flat-bottomed sea, Colin lost a 50kg black marlin while trolling a skirted lure after a one hour fight. After many jumps, the marlin tail-wrapped itself, which meant the fish would have eventually drowned had we kept the fight going. It was decided that it was best to cut the line. This was a much needed catch to awaken us all.

Finally, after another lumpy day, with the kids and I laying low, we finally saw land, and knew that soon the motors would be turned off, and we

Cooper, with his best coral trout



Steve with a barra cod and . . .





Left: Like any voyage of this magnitude, it was not without its rough moments. Some of the heaviest seas were experienced after they left Thursday Island (just west of the tip of Cape York), bound for Nhulunbuy, right across on the other side of the Gulf of Carpentaria - a distance of some 340 nautical miles.

would have some quiet time. It also means that we will be able to talk instead of yell at each other. Bliss! Tranquillity! We finally shelter, drop anchor, and just relish the peace, a nice coffee, and a shower. It was a long trip.

In the distance, we could see a big smoke chimney. This was from the process plant that produces bauxite in the township of Nhulunbuy. The town was established in the remote eastern corner of Arnhem Land, solely to support the mining.

At daybreak, after a great night's rest, we motored over past the big loading wharves and ships, into the harbour. Nhulunbuy was once called Gove before it became Aboriginal land.

We motored past seven illegal vessels that were distinguished by the yellow flags and markers surrounding the boats, and also by their unique designs. Also present in the harbour was another Customs boat from Roebuck Bay. The previous week, 24 illegal vessels were captured in 8 days, and had since been escorted to Darwin.

We untied the tinny, and ran across to the mainland. Steve spoke to a family to ask for directions and advice, as we were still 15km from the township. These people had just been to one of the islands for breakfast, and were pulling their tinny out of the water.

This beautiful family, Lynn, Fay and Yvette, kindly took us under their wing for the day. With us all loaded into their jeep, we went back to their house with a guided tour along the way. They kindly let us use their washing machine, offered us showers, a swim at the local pool, coffee, food, a play in the playground for the kids and the hospitality which you would give to your own family. We were so interested to sit and listen to their stories about the town, and they were just as interested in ours. We were more than happy to sit, drink coffee and talk. They even gave us an ice cream, another luxury we had gone without!

The kids were rapt to watch Shrek

before having a play at the playground, as they don't get TV or video on *Steel Haven*.

We re-fueled at 85 cents – the cheapest fuel, because it was subsidised by the Nabalco plant. It turned out to be a wonderful, educational day. Days like this, reflecting the friendliness and warmth of the true Aussie spirit of friendship and care, will remain with us forever.

May 27th. We left Nhulunby with the tinny in tow, out through the Bromby Island, and anchored on the N.W side of the English Company Islands. Coral trout, G.T's, mackerel and queenfish were fighting furiously and then chaos, when our fish captures started being chewed by the marauding packs of sharks - great viewing from the tinny!

After another beautiful sunrise, we headed to the infamous Wessell Island, and went through the 'Hole in the Wall'. The entrance was 40m wide, and the passageway, 2km long. The tides surge through. We went through the gap in neutral gear at about 7 knots. We wanted to slow down to capture some good photos, but the brakes would not work!

Once settled, Steve took the kids to an uninhabited beach for some R&R, a kick of the footy, a swim and a play, staying vigilant as there are many

... again, this time with a diamond trevally



Steve with dinner! Seriously, the number of fish species captured en-route was simply unbelievable.

sharks around. We'd had 8 feet sharks nudging the burly bucket, as soon as we arrived. We later managed to capture great underwater footage of these harmless nurse sharks.

It was not worth dropping a bait here as the sharks just smashed our gear, and got to the fish before you could get it into the boat. The area was thick shark territory.

The winds reached 30 knots overnight, and with too many sharks to hanging around The Wessells, we continued to Refuge Bay in Elcho Island. A beautiful lush green tropical island, with sandy beaches and red bluffs. The island is inhabited by Aborigines and out of bounds for us. To access this area, we had to pass Stretton Strait which was worse than the 'Hole in the Wall'. We were surrounded by whirlpool tides, and had to rev the motors to 1800r.p.m (normally cruises at 1100 revs) whilst manoeuvring around to find the deepest passage. At times, it got as shallow as 3.0 metres. A difficult time for our skipper, who handled the conditions like a pro.

Sunday 1st June. A new day, new month, and a new me. It rained heavily during the night, so we were able to collect 2 large bins of fresh water. Bliss. I wish it would rain every night. The boys went fishing, and I had a long, refreshing, much needed bath. I got to wash my hair and dous myself with fresh water. *Ahhhhh.*

On the move again, and a double hook up and we captured 2 cobia (another species to add to the list) and saw us at Mjrungga Island.

We went ashore to explore the Island, and while burning off some of our rubbish, kept an extra vigil due to the name of the Island's group - the Crocodile Islands. We climbed the sand dunes to view some large sand craters, with a few pandama trees scattered amongst salt bushes. Big insects have been a regular sight in the North, and today we saw about 40 monster dragon flies.

Flocks of excited birds diving and whizzing in the distance saw us racing back to the boat to get the fishing gear. This turned out to be a successful move. The queenfish were going ballistic, providing an excellent display of aerial action with most hook ups.

Steve caught his first ever queenfish with his first cast at the bait boil. Three

queenfish later, Steve kindly returned to give me a go. *Yihaa...* I caught 2 queenfish, and then I could not hook up any more. The fish were grabbing my lure, but I could not hook up.

Ken looked puzzled "*Are you on?*" he asked. I said "*Yes, no . . . Yes! No, yes, no . . .*" When I got back to the boat, I realised that my treble hook was missing. Ken did not want me outfishing him, so he removed it while taking off one of my fish. Bugger! Anyway, all up, 2 hours work for 11 queenfish. It does not get much better than this.

The fishing was fantastic, but the mozzies were the worst we had encountered so far. The fly screens and coils were no help, the determined buggers managed to find a way to get in. I must have killed 40 blood filled suckers in the boat. The paint was starting to look red, not white.

You know the scenario; you think



you've got them all, you lie down, then *Z Z Z Z zzz zzzzzz* around your head. This occurred half a dozen times. Up, down, up, down. I was not happy. Eventually we closed everything up and melted in the resultant 'sauna'.

We gotta get out of this place... We moved from a mozzie thick area to a crocodile thick area. On arrival, a big splash in the distance had the guys jumping into the tinny. Within 10 minutes, they caught 2 G.T's. Too many crocs though, so we continued onto a sandy, rocky island just off Cape Stewart. Along the way, I caught my biggest queenfish (9kg) for the trip, trolling a Dancing Queen lure.

The island of Cape Stewart was fantastic, and very interesting to explore. It was thickly covered with a great assortment of popular shells, including cowry, cone, bailer, razor, pearl, spirals clams. The tide was out, so we got to frolic in the knee deep rock pools, and explore more of this idyllic island. We found further fresh turtle laying sites.

These were a regular sighting, as this was the turtles' laying time. Only the female sea turtle leaves the water, and only to lay her eggs. She will lay and bury about 150 soft eggs above the high tide line. The sun's heat will hatch them. These green sea turtles are an endangered species, close to extinction because they are easy prey to turtle hunters, crocodiles, goannas, diminishing shorelines, fishing trawlers and natural predators of the sea. We were also fortunate to find two terns' eggs laid in a sandy hollow. A

Special moments . . . having children on board on a long coastal voyage like this obviously increases the parent's responsibilities. But offsetting the extra work are all the priceless moments - like watching the turtle hatchlings making their way down to the sea - will live not only with the youngsters forever, but also with Mum and Dad.

wonderful family fun-filled day was enjoyed on this island.

Not a very good night's sleep again, due to dumpy waves, and a lot of boat swinging. It was hard to find a good anchorage. Usually the night starts

well, and then the tide changes. We are all very tired, and try to have a nap during the day to catch up on some sleep. I find it the hardest to have a nap with the kids sitting on my head, opening my eyes, talking to me, or needing something.

At this point we were 300km east of Darwin, so we got on the move again, heading closer to the mainland.

When were motoring, Cooper completed his school work, and the two children play happily together with one of their many recycled toys. They love crafts, and kept busy making fire engines, roads, bridges, rockets, doll beds (etc) out of our empty food cartons.

They made "fish" out of freezer bags, pretend to cook with collected food scraps, make stories with playdoh, listen to story tapes, read countless books, and fill the days in happily. They love to swim in a big fish bin, or paint with water on the deck. In rough seas, they love to go down into the V-berth and jump around like in a jumping castle. When the seas are too big, and items are flying around the boat, the kids lie down under the table, out of harm's way.

Midway across Arnhem Land, Steve and I had another double hook up of cobia (my first cobia) on our continued journey, and before long, we were anchored and fishing up a river. More crocodiles were sighted, and kingfishers enhanced the scenery of the mangrove lined creeks. We caught some threadfin salmon while casting spearheads in areas where the new tidal areas meet the murky waters. Steve and I also caught a giant herring each of 60cm - another new species for our growing list of species captured.

Once again, a Customs plane flew over us for a check.

A new morning, and it must have been our calmest day so far. We had a 50 mile troll to Goulbourn Island. Along the way, our swimming lures were hit, and Steve thought he spotted a sailfish having a look at the lures. The area is not well known for billfish.

We quickly changed to skirted lures. Sure enough, within 15 minutes, a sailfish was stalking our lures. I went to get my video camera when Ken yelled to me "Lou, put your gimbal on!"

It was action stations again. Steve and Ken were tempting the sail with the toss and retrieval method, trying to

excite the fish.

Next I heard Ken say "We're ON here Lou, full throttle Colin, Steve you take over and drive." I grabbed the rod, Col went full revs, and I was hooked up onto my nemesis fish, the sailfish. At first I doubted my strength. Steve was chasing the fish, and I had to wind, wind, wind flat out to reel in the slack, and keep a tight line. My arm muscles wanted to seize. I was thinking, I hope this was not a long 2 hour fight like my marlin . . . Yes, I had retrieved some line, and now she was going deep again. I get to give my arm a rest while she peels more line. I hang on and keep a tight line, retrieving when I can. Then I see the line rising. Yahoo, she jumps, once, twice. "Go baby!". Time to wind again. I start to feel very excited.



The fish begins to tire after the jumps. "I CAN do this" I thought with gritted teeth, "I'm not giving up now!"

The sail came closer, and jumped a few more times, right beside the boat. Then we had her. Ken traced the sail, and with Steve's help, they brought it into the boat for some photos. Yahoo, I had conquered my first sailfish. Hi-5's all around, much jubilation. My arms were tingling. I loved the sail. Her sail was smooth and silky like satin. Her skin rough like sandpaper

A wonderful moment, and another goal fulfilled. A quick photo, and we swam her alongside, holding onto the bill, swimming forward until we could

feel she was ready to kick off, and strong enough to go it alone. WOW!! Fancy that. Getting a sailfish in these waters. The Arafura Sea, North Arnhem Land. We guessed about 6 ft long, 30kg on 10kg line.

Cooper said "Wow! Mum, how good was that? Beautiful. Just beautiful. Did you see the sail? It was like gold. Good job Mum!"

That afternoon was a further adventure. We arrived on Nth Goulbourn Island. Clear calm waters,

Below: Gee - you can sure tell these youngsters are suffering from the effects of their long coastal voyage and all that fresh coral trout . . .!! (On some legs, water was a bit short, so cooling down and bathtime had to be combined).

Too many sandflies discouraged us from hanging around, so we headed back to *Steel Haven* to sit and ponder the day.

Ken, peering into the water suddenly yelled "*What was that? Queenfish - right under the boat!*" Then chaos. We all grabbed our gear for some piscatorial dancing with the rods. We all weave in and out, casting lures, fly rods, getting tangled. Steve was soon hooked up. He jumped in the tinny to chase the fish. I was told to sit down out of the way. I had caught my fish for the day. (As if I listened when there were plenty of fish for everyone.) We had a lot of fun with G.T.'s and queen fish caught. A lovely sunset followed, so we were soon celebrating with a bottle of red, while watching playful dolphins in the distance. Bliss. We don't want this to end.

I had a restless night, with thoughts of my fantastic day going through my mind. We continue on to the Croker group of Island. I am allowed to fish again today. We jumped in the tinny to trawl over bombies. Every 2nd cast, we had a follow up of fish in this awesome environment. We caught long toms, G.T.'s, golden spot, and sharks galore with baits. I also caught a wolf herring of 80cm. I would not like to get in its way. Those teeth look potentially damaging.

Next day was a short but rough troll to Oxley Island. We went fossicking in the sand dunes and found nautilus shells, clams, seven thorns, bailers, and other beautiful shells. Steve also stumbled upon a 10 foot crocodile which was resting in the shade of the tree. He came within 40 feet from it. Steve froze, and the croc darted into the water. Further along, Ken and Steve found a turtle who was looking ill. She had obviously had trouble laying eggs during the night. She had dug 6 holes, and was exhausted. They both carried her back to the water to escape the heat, and have a feed.

We had some excitement on the beach with queenies, and trevally captured on lures and fly. Colin is a regular to Tasmania's trout streams with his fly outfit, but salt water flyfishing was new to him. He has been successful with the pelagics using his 8 weight outfit with sinking line. It was fitted with a 7kg tippet, and a 24kg shock tippet. His favourable fly has been a blue and white glass minnow, with a tuft of red to represent

SPECIFICATIONS



BOAT

*40ft Kristofferson steel hull
Built 1980
2 x 180 hp Ford twin diesels
400 litre water and 35lt/hr desalinator
1350 litre fuel tank
150 litre petrol tank (also extra 400 litre drums)
5 kVa generator,
2 x 60 watt solar panels
2 house and 2 start batteries
3 x 200 inverter powered by 160 amp alternator*

ELECTRONICS

*Radar
GPS – plotter x 2
Depth sounder x 2
VHF radio x 2
27 MHz
UHF
Full navigational charts – for back up
Satellite phone for emergency only.*

LOGISTICS

*Top speed 10 knots – cruises at 7-8 knots
Townsville to Darwin – 1754 nautical miles for 3132 litre fuel
Darwin to Broome – 1210 nautical miles for 1944 litres fuel
Food consumption – too much*

DANGERS

*Weather – prevailing winds – cyclone season (Nov-Apr)
Obstacles: reefs, rocks, sand bars, whales, other vessels
Tidal movement – a potential hazard for ocean and river systems.
Wildlife – sharks, crocodiles, tropical jellyfish, cone shells, blue ringed octopus, stone fish
Heat up to 40°C
Living with friends for too long*

the gills.

A 40 - 50 knot wind at night meant another sleepless night, and felt like a mini cyclone. The following day was also uncomfortable, with a 2.0 m swell and 25 knot wind to Croker Island and for no fish - yes, no fish! Once in the protection of Croker Island, I managed to catch a good 10kg G.T, while the boys each managed a good 7kg queenfish. These were to be our last fish for this leg of the trip.

With all the wind, the water turned a murky green, and the fish went off the bite. It was time to open up the can of baked beans.

Persistent winds, and heavy ocean swells, made the conditions uncomfortable, so we continued to Cape Don looking for shelter. Along the way we stopped at Sandy Island. There were over 400 terns with chicks running all over the beach and sand dunes. A lone pine tree was a great haven for the eagles to spot their prey. As we were exploring the island, we felt like we were walking under a thick dark cloud, there were so many birds.

The forecast for the following 3 days was for 30 knot winds, up to 3.0 m waves, abating in the evening. We decided we had better travel in the night or Col would miss his flight.

This turned out to be a great decision. We had the calmest, most beautiful romantic, mystical night travelling the 10 hours to Darwin with the current on our side. It was a full moon, with a few clouds. The moon's reflection shone on the flat smooth sea. Nobody wanted to sleep. Maybe a bit of sadness that this leg would soon be over, or excitement at reaching Darwin. We arrived in Darwin at 3am, and finally went to bed.

Saturday 14th June, we entered the Cullen Bay Marina Loch system, and tied up to a pontoon. Terra Firma. We had travelled 1710 nautical miles since leaving Townsville. Now the cleaning, fixing, shopping, and boat service, all begin again, preparing for the next leg in 2 weeks time.

It was nice to be back on land, but I can't wait to get to the Kimberleys . . .

Join us again next month as Louise and the team continue on to Broome via the Kimberley coast. If you have ever wondered why people speak of the Kimberley with genuine awe, don't miss this excellent 'hands-on' report.

F&B