



Malcolm Douglas

An Australian Legend

1941-2010



When Australians learned that iconic adventurer, conservationist, bushman and film maker, Malcolm Douglas, had been tragically killed in a single car accident on his property in Broome, shockwaves reverberated around the country.

Sixty nine year old Douglas was somehow crushed between his LandCruiser and a tree when the vehicle rolled forward, and took

the life of one of Australia's genuine treasures.

Various theories surrounded the accident, but those who knew him noted that he had a terrible habit of jumping out of the vehicle before it had come to a halt or starting it without actually being inside it. Whatever the reason, however it occurred, the accident brought to an end an

extraordinary life.

Malcolm Douglas is well known to boating and fishing enthusiasts because of the 50 documentaries attributed to him. The great majority were about fishing and boating in his beloved Kimberley and north Western Australia. Few of us have not seen Malcolm Douglas catching a barra in some ochre cliff top country that is the signature of the Kimberley. Millions of Australians grew up with Malcolm Douglas in their lounge rooms, as his documentaries were amongst the most popular family docs ever produced in Australia.

The renowned crocodile farmer was the original crocodile hunter on Australian television long before Steve Irwin made life with the crocodile fashionable. An ardent conservationist, Douglas started life in earnest as a 23 year old crocodile hunter but as the years went on his views changed, and he became a very strong conservationist. This was the motivation for him to set up his crocodile park and the separate crocodile farm in Broome, both of which were designed to dovetail into the promotion of conservation



for crocodiles and also the demonstration of how man could co-exist with creatures of the wild.

There is now some doubt as to whether his crocodile farm or the more tourist oriented park will be able to continue, as Douglas basically poured every cent he ever made through his documentaries, books and endorsements, back into his farm, park and wilderness reserve.

In more recent years, he became more controversial as pressure mounted on the Kimberley district for oil and gas exploration and industrial development.

Douglas was a fierce opponent of these developments, and fought passionately and with great

determination against them, a policy that did not endear him to many of the pro-development people in the north, although he was loved by the aboriginal communities because of these same views.

If he could, Douglas would have left the Kimberley alone for ever more and excluded all such development, but he was also a realist and knew that the world's insatiable appetite for energy and resources would ultimately determine that most of the developments would have to go ahead.

As an exceptional bushman, he also had an affinity with the flora and fauna of the North West, and

as most people are aware, he had worked tirelessly to protect and nurture the bilbies of WA.

More than anything else, I suspect that Malcolm Douglas touched a nerve in every Australian because he was the quintessential Australian "bushy"; a bloke who was more in touch with what even city dwellers recognise is the real Australia and the true identity of our nation.

Malcolm Douglas was a very tall man physically and in reputation, proud of his achievements and willing to give of himself to others without fear or favour, whether they were black, white or brindle, youngsters, teenagers or adults. Malcolm was everybody's friend



and always made himself available for them.

From a personal perspective, I've always envied and admired Malcolm because he was able to put in practice what so many writers and film makers dream of doing – and not only did he do just that, he did a bloody good job of it, too. Very few people understand just how hard it is with low budget crews to produce television images that attract millions of viewers to sit glued to their TV sets in 2010, in the world of Internet, Play Stations, Reality TV and all the other accoutrements of our modern world. Malcolm's TV docs could cut through all these media challenges, and attract whole families to sit and marvel at that lanky, bearded bloke, down in the dust by his campfire, explaining to city folk what makes the bush tick.

What makes Australia unique.

His was an extraordinary achievement, and it was so totally natural, that we all shared the moments with Malcolm, in the

bush, or on the water (in his hugely punished, and seemingly unbreakable Trailcraft 640) as if we were all there with him.

He's gone now, but his documentaries will be viewed over and over again for years to come, as they should.

Hopefully, somebody with the national interest in mind will get hold of the raw footage and cull them down to their core so that they could be put together (for instance) in a set of half a dozen DVD's that should be supplied and seen compulsorily by school children across Australia as part of their curriculum in the future.

Keeping our youngsters in



touch with the essence of Australia, so vividly captured by Malcom Douglas, would be a fitting legacy for a truly iconic Australian.

-PW, F&B