



Tropical Hunting Safaris

Bruce Read puts a Gulf country specialist outfitter to the test.

WINTER WAS FINALLY upon us and that meant one thing, Pig hunting. Pig hunting without sweating to death in sweltering summer heat and humidity. I know that there are a lot of hunters that don't mind or even like (go figure) the whole camping thing and hot and humid conditions. I must say that some home comforts and at least cooler nights to allow for a good rest is an absolute must for me.

Given my predisposition for at least a few basic creature comforts and as I have mentioned in several previous articles my lack (although growing) knowledge of the whole outback hunting deal, I once again started the season with a hunt for information. Given that I had previously hunted up in the Cape (reported in *Bacon Busters Number 10*) I had decided that this time around the Gulf country was the go.

As usual my first stop was our monthly G.H.A.A (Game Hunters Association of Australia) members meeting. I canvassed many of our veteran members and quizzed them on the pros and cons of hunting the Gulf of Carpentaria. The next logical step was as many back issues of *Sporting Shooter* mag that I could lay my hands on and some intensive reading.

It quickly became obvious that a frontrunner for a paid hunt into the Gulf country was an outfitter called *Tropical Hunting Safaris*. I rang the operator, Peter Lorman, on several occasions and even had the good fortune to have him drop into my work to introduce himself and chat about the possibilities. Based on the information

Hunting conditions varied from forested areas to floodplains.



Mobs of 60 or more pigs were not uncommon during the trip.



gathered and the advice I'd been given a booking was made, flights confirmed, deposits paid. Anticipation was high. The hunt was on.

I had previously decided to purchase a second rifle and take my long-time companion, the trusty Marlin .30/30 lever-action, and the new beast. I settled on a .308 Weatherby Ultra Light Mk V and scoped it with a variable 3-9x Leupold.

I was not entirely happy with the feel and look of this kit so I commissioned a local Gold Coast gunsmith to do two things for me. Firstly, he measured me up for a custom composite sniper stock with a bedded action and fully floated barrel. The next thing he did for me was nickel-plated all of the blued metal.

I have said it before and I will say it again: A good hunting buddy is essential for a good hunt. Unfortunately, my usual hunting buddy, Matt, was unable to come this time and I thought I would be doing the hunt solo. I had the good fortune to have been introduced to John, who was a new member to the GHAA. I rang him with the details and he was beside himself with excitement. He had never been to the Gulf country and had only bowled over a couple of local southeast Queensland pigs.

We were ready. Everything was organised.

As I have done with the previous report card I thought it best to continue in the same vein. So let's start with the negatives.

First and foremost is the cost. Any paid guided hunt is not cheap. This time around we had just the two hunters. We flew domestic from Brisbane direct to Darwin. We were picked up by Peter directly from the airport at Darwin so we only had the one night's

accommodation on the return leg. Other than our own personal items, ammo and preferred evening lubrication (booze) everything else was included. This particular excursion was undertaken with just one guide (Peter) and for a full five hunting days at a cost of somewhere in the vicinity of \$5000 all up for the hunt itself. Not cheap but on par with most other outfitters. What you have to pay varies from situation to situation and Peter will be able to offer you an exact quote when you contact him. The experience was well worth the cost and a small group is much more economical than a one-on-one arrangement.

Time, time, time. As always, you need to find the time that best fits with your work and home life. Of course, the outfitter is also trying to juggle bookings and optimise the relatively short hunting window. You need to well and truly juggle time off work, bookings for the outfitter, flights (especially if you fly with frequent flyer points) accommodation etc. All of which needs to be done well in advance. If not you will find yourself with one or more parts of the whole deal not fitting in and causing a complete reshuffle which can be mighty unsettling.

Strong in mind and body. While I recognise that a lot of hunters are hardy and well used to the rigours of the hunt, be advised that when you are paying that sort of cash you want the maximum out of it. The question is can your body keep up with your spirit? The average daily temperature while we were there (September 2001) was 30 degrees Celsius. It was bloody humid even though we were smack bang in the middle of

the dry season but thankfully as soon as the sun dropped so did the temp and humidity.

The "no guarantees" clause. It is in the outfitters best interest to make sure, as best he can, that you knock over the required number of big pigs. But he can not guarantee that you will see anything, let alone that 150kg 30 plus Douglas point monster that you have always dreamed about. The good news is that you are hunting in what is arguably the most heavily populated feral pig country on the continent so the odds are certainly in your favour.

Dust and more bloody dust. Bull dust...all day, every day as fine as flour and it gets into every nook and cranny of your body, rifle and gear. By the end of each day you resemble something approaching the missing link. Trust me when I tell you that a week after the trip I am still washing this fine black dust out of my orifices.

Biting critters. Notwithstanding the normal insect beasties that one would expect to find in the Gulf country two in particular were really nasty. First, the green tree ants. If you happen to brush past a very well camouflaged nest, look out. In a matter of seconds you are covered with a zillion green little biting psychopaths. Actually, these aren't the worst. We only had one encounter with a nest of paper wasps. Tiny black wasps that make their communal nests in dead trees. They get really pissed off if you disturb them and you don't even know it until it is way too late. They swarm, they chase, they sting and they bloody well hurt, leaving a nasty welt for several days. I am sure that I have no need to state the obvious big beastly that you want to keep right away from. Crocodiles. Lots and lots of crocodiles.

Quad bikes. Be advised that four wheels are not always as stable as one might think. While quads are definitely the way to go to get you from point A to point B, they can chuck you off real quick if you happen to mount a small unseen termite mound or find yourself airborne across a rut or an old pig wallow. You must watch the ground and keep your wits about you at all times. Loss of concentration can be very dangerous especially considering that you are literally in the middle of nowhere. And by the way, if you're not accustomed to riding these monsters then get ready for a very sore arse.

Now for the positives.

Organised, very, very organised. This outfitter does not leave much to chance. He was there on time at the airport to pick us up. His transfer vehicle was a quality Land Cruiser with all of the whistles and bells which was a good thing because we had a six-hour drive (75km of which was on a rough bush track) to get to the camp. Peter clearly caters for you, the client, making sure in advance of any special requirements you may have.

Your money buys you a likeable chap with several decades of hunting experience and one of the few outfitters that has a hunting concession with the Arnhem Land aboriginal people. The base camp is a well constructed



The author with his kill and trusty Marlin lever-action in .30/30.



John with a big boar taken in excellent hunting country.

bungalow with generated power, mozzie screens, proper beds and even clean sheets, gas kitchen and a solar hot water shower. To start we were both presented with a well-maintained quad bike (Yamaha Big Bear 4WD 400s and a sometimes temperamental Suzuki 300 4WD King Quad). These quads were very well set up with lots of clever accessories to carry all of your kit in relative safety.

According to my GPS we trekked and hunted on foot for more than 60km over the five days. While actually hunting, Peter videoed all of the action wherever possible as well as all of us taking stills. Shoot the pig with a camera or with a rifle? Hmmm, tough call.

We were sent a copy of the video, which was about three hours of highlights, a couple of weeks after the hunt.

We were told up front that there was no trophy fees for boars but by the same token we could not just go in and blast the crap out of everything that was black, had four legs and moved. Careful selection of the biggest boar (where possible) was the go, with John and myself taking turns at the pointy end.

Base camp, complete with all the mod cons.

Peter was also well set up with each day very well planned out both with regard to the hunt and the daily provisions that would be required. Each morning the quads were packed with food, water, spares. They were checked over, fuelled up and ready to be your workhorse.

Each night when you returned to the camp, dinner was organised while you tried as best you could to wash off the day's dust. Dinner

The system seemed to work very well with both of us averaging a monotonously regular five trophy size boars a day. If I had to guess at the total number of pigs that we saw, watched, photographed it would run into the high hundreds with some mobs of sows and immature boars numbering 60 or more.

We had, over the course of the five days, a varied selection of styles of hunting from long distance open plains style to a variety of swamps, billabongs, forests, beaches where keen eyesight and fast reactions were the name of the game. I suppose this was one of the best things about the hunt. Stacks of pigs and lots of different terrain to keep you interested. I should also mention that we spent one morning doing some obligatory barra fishing in a picture postcard billabong and managed to

was nearly a silver service affair. How's this for a menu: beef stroganoff, steak and salad, spaghetti bolognese, fresh barra with rice and salad and apricot chicken. I reckon this bloke was a chef in a former life. Lunch was normally a picnic affair under the shade of a big tree and breakfast was as you preferred, hot or cold.

When it came to the daily excursions, Peter always led the procession (taking us to different locations each day). Over the course of the five days we travelled more than 400km on the quads and through some of the most beautiful country I have ever seen. Open plains, paperbark swamps, semi rainforest, escarpment country, grasslands.



One shot, one kill, one seriously big boar, proving that the .308 Weatherby is very potent on large pigs.

land a half dozen very nice sized barra.

As always, I am constantly amazed at the incredible eyesight these blokes have. On more than one occasion our little procession was bought to an abrupt halt as Peter pointed out a pair of twitching pig ears, swishing tail or shadow variation in the trees while we stood there straining our eye balls to find the quarry.

Rating the hunt. The total confirmed kills for this hunt was 54 pigs and six barra between the two of us. The biggest ivory (estimated at 28 plus Douglas points) and the biggest overall pig (estimated at 120kg) and the biggest barra (buggered if I know the weight) all went to John and don't you just hate getting out done on all fronts by a bloody novice. I took out the distance shot with a ranged 288m one-shot kill.

We saw lots of wild brumbies, dingoes and a zillion wildfowl. Most days we departed camp around 9am (none of this up before sunrise stuff for us) and were coming home in the dark and let me tell you that's no mean feat. We (that is, John and I) got quad bogged several times which Peter found particularly amusing, because getting unbogged usually meant us getting very, very muddy.

Our guide had two choice weapons. His rifle, which rarely saw the light of day, was a custom built .308 Ruger using a Madco competition barrel and firing handloaded ammo. This very nice rifle was topped with a 4-12x variable Leupold scope. Very heavy compared to our rigs but unbelievably accurate. For safety's sake Peter also carried a 10mm Glock handgun.

So the final score is a strong nine out of 10 for Tropical Hunting Safaris as long as you don't mind being totally organised. My suggestion to those more experienced hunters is that you make your preferences known to Peter in advance so as you totally enjoy what you want to do.

For more information, contact Peter Lorman on 0407 607 687.

