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Front Cover: Saltaire Charters with a big Blue Spot Trout

FISHING PORT DOUGLAS .COM

By Adam Boone

Welcome to our March report for Fishing Port Douglas Charters in what you could describe as a real Jekyll and Hyde month of weather during February. Howling westerlies for days on end with temperatures up around the 38-40 degree mark without much humidity isn't really the type of weather we associate with the wet season in the Far North. But it was the case for a week or so there during mid-February. Furthermore it was book-ended by a week or so of rainy periods to start and finish off the month just to remind us that we are in the tropics. Thankfully, these quite different stints of weather didn't deter the avid fisher person, or for that fact the piscatorial varieties we target on our charters here out of Port Douglas. We had some really productive trips during February with nice catches of Coral Trout, Nannygai and Trevally out wide, and Mangrove Jack, Javelin Fish and Fingermark up the creeks.

One day that is fresh in my mind as I write, was a Sunday in mid-February. After a great morning charter catching and releasing a heap of big Coral Trout and Mangrove Jack, the afternoon charter saw us head a bit wider with our clients from Russia keen to get into some

reef species and they weren't disappointed with the result. A 9 mile steam left us hanging over top of a sounding that lit up like a Christmas tree, fish stacked on top of each other right across the screen... First drop and a triple hook up of large mouth nannygai around the 50cm mark. Not huge by any means but a bit of fun on the lighter gear we have been using, really bringing meaning to the term "sport fishing". The trend of nannygai couldn't be broken for 20 minutes until a hook up of what seemed like another plate sized nannygai turned into a 20 minute fight. Old mate had got his fish about 10m off the bottom when all of a sudden a screaming of the drag occurred in what is automatically thought to be the 'tax man' taking his share of the goods. However this thing seemed to have hooked up after having his feed and the fight was on... no wire trace, 50lb leader, 5/0 hook. After 4 or 5 circles of the boat the punter was turning to me to ask how to break it off to get rid of this shark when he managed to make enough ground for a 25kg+ Spanish Mackerel to show itself alongside the boat where the hook pulled out.

CONTINUED PAGE Page 12.....



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Exceed Sportfishing

By Jake Wyatt

As things start to quiet down around Port and a lot of places shut down and take holidays, it's the time I get excited about as some great opportunities open up. The last few years I have been lucky enough to partake in remote Barra charters up in Weipa aboard the mighty Amokura. However this year the chance came up to jump on the 54ft Assegai Zulu and head over to PNG and conduct some charters over a 6 week block.

As I am writing this we are currently anchored up in Alotau and waiting for our clients to jump on tomorrow. Looks like we're heading to the Conflict Islands and the Louisiades where we hear the fishing is insane. We have been getting a wide range of gear ready as we don't really know what we are going to come across. The usual species are on the list from GT's, Doggies, Marlin and whatever else we come across. It should be a great experience and should have a great article for you guys next month.

As for the fishing in Port, for us it was a bit hit and miss with the green water following the monumental amount of water we received. We ventured far and wide to find some nice, clean water and put in some serious miles however there wasn't any to find. As it eventuated we didn't need to travel far at all and ended up finding all our red fish on coastal Wonky Holes and the GT's on the closer reefs. Sometimes the best fishing is right under your nose.

My best trip for the month on one particular morning I had one fella onboard and we planned to head south and jig some wrecks in the middle. The wind was not going to

allow us to do so which meant we had to track north. Snapper wreck was on the cards but once we arrived, the current was ripping and un-fishable. This has been the case at times this past month and fishing inside the reef at some locations particularly near the shipping channel has been difficult. So loaded with only my 20lb gear we thought we would hit a few Wonky Holes to see what happened. As it turned out, this was going to be a cracker little session. We passed over the first Wonky with bait all over it according to the sounder. After three drifts we had not baited anything so we moved to the next. First bait down and we started to get that tell tail Nanny bite, a slow suck and a slight tap. As we eased the rods up and slipped the circle hooks in the corner of the mouth, we were on. I have changed around with hooks lately and have found the circles to be fantastic on reef especially for red fishing. Basically you let the rod do the work and let it load up with no need to strike. It is perfect for anglers with not a lot of experience.

We landed 3 cracking Nanny's all around the 8kg range and lost a few to the actual hooks snapping in half. I haven't seen hooks snap like that before and I'm not sure if the hooks were at fault or the fish were simply too big. So all in all the best fishing we found was the closest to shore. I'm sure this will change in the coming month as the rains start to ease as the weeks go by.

Anyway I hope the seas stay calm and the fish are hungry for you all. You'll read about my PNG adventure next month. ■



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The Dragon's Den

By Steve Adamson

The month of February saw the weather clear up nicely and there were a lot of good sea days on offer. The only downside, and to be expected it coincided with our low season and we only conducted a handful of trips. It was a pity because we continued to rally up the fish on those trips and there was plenty of spoils to share around. It was a pleasure to be on the water.

Aided by conducive conditions we were able to fish most of the time our deepest hangs which produced quality fish. Sometimes the currents were a bit tricky with water pushing strongly to the north in some spots and at other times variable winds swinging from different directions meant we had to continually readjust along the way. It's just part and parcel at fishing at this time of year and we know how to adapt fairly quickly.

As mentioned probably our best fishing occurred in the deeper water mainly between the 30-40m range. The large mouth nannygai were mostly receptive and at times there was a mix of small mouth in amongst them. The usual suspect, the gold spot trevally was also there to provide some extra entertainment. Not to be surprised our best coral trout catches were also in similar depths. Bonus catches for the month included some ripping red emperor, big cobia and solid spanish mackerel on the floating rig.

Not all the spots we scoured held fish and sometimes the sounder indicated there was no one at home. What we normally do is decide on a certain area on any given day and concentrate there. For example we may have half a dozen marks all within close proximity. Some days it was a matter of checking all those marks before life was marked on the final one. Other times you might strike it lucky on the first or second check. What I'm trying to say is at this time of year sometimes it is a matter of having a good look around before finding the honey pot. Locations which produce fish at other times of year won't necessarily hold fish at the moment. It may take a bit longer before you wet a line but there is no use dropping the pick if the sounder indicates it is a vacant block.



To finish off the month we had our annual slipway maintenance program for a week. For once in a blue moon it went to schedule, as previous years have seen us stuck up to an extra week or two on the slip due to weather or delayed parts arriving. There are many reasons why you can end up on the slip for longer than planned and I put it down to simply living in Far Nth Qld - there are a thousand excuses or reasons. I could write a book on the topic after 30yrs of doing this exercise. Anyway the essentials were done including the antifoul of the hull and shaft check for survey purposes, plus other bits and pieces.

We are now raring to go and hopefully the weather is kind enough to operate for the most of March. ■



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Wet Season Plan D

By Heff

Going back several weeks ago the region was inundated with really testing conditions which included copious amounts of rain and associated windy conditions. I got no doubt we all got a dose of 'Going Troppo' symptoms. Local creeks and rivers were full of fresh water, the beaches were trashed with debris and offshore conditions were out of control. When it came to fishing the options had literally dried up. Luckily for us locals we had a Plan D we could fall back on and that was fishing the suburban lakes and ponds in Port Douglas. For several days I found myself stalking these parts, sometimes with friends and in the process learnt quite a bit on how these backwaters operate.

In these waters the dominate species include tarpon, barra, mangrove jack and on the super tides queenfish, barracuda and trevally have been known to swing by the ponds that possess a causeway linked to the Dickson Inlet. I found myself mainly concentrating on the ponds that hold big numbers of tarpon and there's a few barra as well.

I like to target the tarpon because they are visual, meaning they move in schools and you see their dorsal fins and tails breaking the surface. When they are in the mood they will feed freely and you can rack up good numbers of fish (which are then released). They are best fished using a very light spin rod gear or if you are good

enough a fly rod is perfect. I've found the ideal lure size is the equivalent of a 10gm slice or something similar whether it be a soft plastic or clouser fly. The reason being I accidentally hooked a small rainbow perch which is what their main food source will be. The barra will take a bit bigger lure but still they need to be no bigger than a small mullet.

Colour choice is always a point of discussion when fishing the ponds but I believe that anything white, silver or gold will produce more fish. It makes sense because the bait is shiny in colour.

Some of the tarpon filled ponds aren't effected much by the tides and they remind me a bit of the freshwater lakes or lagoons. I find they fish best later in the afternoon. I'm sure though they are more active on different lunar phases than others. The old Almanac chart or a similar App you can easily download on your phone will tell you which days are better to fish.

As mentioned I find the fish (tarpon in this case) start to get active around late afternoon and their movement patterns are very intriguing. If you study them they are very distinctive and calculated. There are absolutely similarities to a school of tuna or even permit which I've witnessed in the Gulf, and they act as a single unit even though there are many.

When it comes to feeding time the tarpon gather together and start to circle the pond as one, usually in a bigger circle. Once they have honed in on a bait school that circle becomes smaller and smaller. There is no question that some of the school drops down in depth and the others stay on the surface. As they noose tightens the allocated fish below push or force the bait to the surface. When its time to go it's attack from all sides and from beneath.



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The tarpon ambush in tandem and create a washing machine effect with fish jumping and attacking from all angles and bait fish get sprayed in all directions. It is visually stimulating and that is the moment when an instant hook up is almost guaranteed if your lure/ fly is amongst the commotion. Of course you can catch them outside of this last minute central chaos but the fish need to be in that hunting/ stalking mentality. These bursts of attack tend to last 15 - 20 seconds and then it goes quiet as the bait school has been scattered.

What happens then is it takes a little while for the school to regroup, including both the tarpon and the bait fish themselves. Soon enough you'll see the tarpon pop up on the surface as one and the process starts again. When they are hellbent on feeding the next ambush from a particular school can be only 5-10 minutes away. On some ponds there maybe up to half a dozen notable tarpon schools on the move at the one time.

In a time of need when the conditions are challenging wherever you look, the suburban ponds are a great fishing release or fix and you can have a ball. I must say though, being a land based style of fishing I can't stress enough to be croc wise. Keep your distance from the water. Whilst fishing on one occasion I noticed a resident croc, easily 2.5m sitting on the surface in the middle of one of these ponds. I thought it was a bit odd but there was a reason in place. It was waiting for a school of fish to pass by having worked out their movement pattern. At the moment of truth it launched with incredible raw power into the school of fish. It was simply violent and very loud with a

massive wave of water being dispersed everywhere. It did a 360 degree turn as if on a 20 cent coin to finally nail the sucker and all in milliseconds. I've never seen a croc attack anything in the wild before and it was purely frightening at the speed of it all. If that was you on the side of the bank you would not stand a chance, you wouldn't even know what hit you. Anyway with my jaw on the floor, the croc was successful with its precision attack as it swam towards the bank with a fish in its iron clad mouth. It caused such a raucous that the fishing literally shut down following this as the tarpon schools disappeared never to return to the surface that afternoon. ■



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Wet Season Weekends

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The recent heavy rainfall has caused a stir amongst some of the local animal species in and out of the waterways. As it poured down with rain over one of my weekends off and with it being a little too wet to fish comfortably, I headed west pig hunting and adventuring in search for some cool animal species. It was still quite wet from previous rainfall, but it seemed to bring the animals out of hiding with a little help from the full moon. Some cool lizard species such as blue tongue skinks and frill necked lizards were awesome to see and help off the road along with turtles and snakes. The overnight trip produced 9 pigs and some awesome critters, but it was time to head back to the wet reality of Port Douglas. As we were driving back through Julatten, I spotted an animal on the highway that appeared to be hit by a car. We quickly turned around to realise that this animal wasn't hurt at all, it was clearly abandoned and lost. I hopped out of the car and put my

leg next to it and within seconds this juvenile Striped Possum climbed up my jeans looking for assistance. With no sign of its mother I opened the top pocket of my shirt and helped it inside where it curled up into a ball and slept for the ride home. Wildlife carers took the orphaned Striped Possum to care for and plan to release it when it is independent enough to fend for itself.

Back to the Fishing

High precipitation also seems to activate the prawns, with large numbers of leader prawns, banana prawns and their jelly prawn offspring pushing up in to the shallows of local beaches and river systems. The rain hasn't only got the prawns on the move but has also pushed the bigger size barramundi down the river systems towards the salt, along beaches and headlands to feed and breed. With this in mind, I launched the tinny in search of some quality sport fish on the mudflats



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between Port Douglas and Cooya Beach. After landing a few small trevally, the rain seemed to worsen and the windy weather quickly turned me around to retreat for cover.

The tide turn was mid-afternoon, so I decided not to waste the day and attempt some land-based fishing where the fresh water from drains and cane paddocks was running into the salt water river. A few hours of fishing with slow sinking prawns and plastics I decided to switch up the game and turn to a surface lure as it was starting to get dark. I could hear the constant thud of fish feeding on the surface, so I rigged my 4" Zman Hard Leg Frog with a weedless size 4/0 non-waited ChinlockZ with a loop knot and casted away. Just on dark, third cast in, over the dirty run in drain water, slowly winding with my rod tip high, I hooked a ripper barra. I landed him after a good 5-minute fight and from there the fish kept coming. The bite period lasted half an hour with 4 fish over 65cm. It was clear the fish were feeding on prawns that made their way up the river as one barra had the



feelers of a prawn hanging out of its throat. The pouring rain seemed to favour the surface lure as the dirtiness of the water must've made it difficult for the fish to feed deep. I was wrapped, another successful day on the fish. ■

EYE ON THE REEF UPDATE - 4/3/19

Summary points:

As we move from the end of summer, there's been no significant coral bleaching on the Reef.


River levels throughout the catchment are reduced to below flood level, however salinity levels are still reduced in the region between Princess Charlotte Bay and Mackay.

The recent flood plumes are still being


assessed. Incoming reports have indicated some signs of localised coral mortality on some inshore reefs as a result of lowered salinity levels.


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Turbulent Times in the Tropics

By 'Sharky' Shane Down

It goes without saying we have had a very different summer this time around with December being the wettest on record and the winds were out of control. It set the scene for something different. We then saw soaring temperatures early January then was followed up by more torrential rain later in the month. My rain gauge in Nautilus St. Port Douglas gathered 404mm in a 12 hour period. The poor old Daintree received twice this amount in the one hit and blew all flooding records out the door. This flood washed over 100 cows away down the river and they ended up on Wonga Beach, Kimberley Beach and Snapper Island. This ex-Cyclone Owen system then departed our area and wreaked havoc further south especially around Townsville some 500km away. Their main dam filled to 289% before they fully opened the flood gates. I wasn't aware a dam could surpass 100% capacity. Naturally this saw a lot of water enter the ocean from down south. Wind the clock forward to late February and with inshore currents raging north we started to see the effects of the Townsville downpour up here. As I work for a living on the water I was seeing massive logs, grass beds, Lily pads and general debris streaming northward and the majority of it would have come from the Ross River in Townsville. You really had to have your wits about you because the most dangerous objects were the partially submerged logs, some the size of a big tree trunk. If hit they would do some major damage to any boat, including the dive boat I skipper. Any sized log hit at speed has the ability to even rip clean an outboard right off the back of a

smaller boat. For these very reasons once the rains start for the wet season I will not go night fishing because you simply can't see these dangerous mines.

There is another good reason not to go night fishing at this time of year and that is because of super rain cells which brew up in a heartbeat and come out of nowhere. We had one of these in early February and it ripped through Cairns at frightening speed. Skipper Damian Collete of Saltaire Charters had his backyard fence ripped down and it had survived to this point many a cyclone over the years. Consequently this system was upon Port Douglas with little warning and gusts to 60 knots were recorded at various places. It was associated with water spouts, torrential rain and hair raising electrical activity. Now I've been caught up in these type of storms in the big dive boat and that is hairy enough. I'd hate imagine how you would fair in a trailer boat - not well I'd imagine.

At this time of year you have to be forever watching your radar reports and looking over your shoulder on the horizon for any build up of a storm. Again you can't look over your shoulder at night and thus why I don't night fish at this time of year. It has been a turbulent wet season to date so take heed when hitting the water and keep your eyes open at all times.

Anyway I'm in the happy process of preparing for my annual Karumba trip which seems to get better and better every year. From what I'm hearing the main Norman River is subsiding nicely and I hope the region doesn't cop anymore major rain. ■

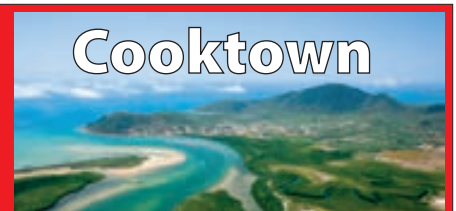


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Reel Cooking

with Mick Hart



Coconut Emperor with Bang Bang Sauce

Ingredients

- 1/2 kg of any white flesh reef fish
- 2 cups of shredded coconut
- 1 cup of desiccated coconut
- 1 cup plain flour
- 2 eggs
- Splash of milk
- Veg oil for frying

For Sauce

- 1 cup of mayo
- 4 tbsp of sweet chilli
- 1 tbsp of sriracha



Method

Clean fillets, debone and remove bloodline. Slice into finger size pieces.

Mix egg and milk in a bowl. Mix coconuts together in another bowl and put flour on a plate.

Dust fish in flour dip in egg and coat in coconut.

Heat oil in a large pot to 170c and fry all pieces of fish until golden, drain on kitchen paper.

Mix all ingredients for sauce well and serve as a dip for the fish.



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FISHING PORT DOUGLAS Cont ...

With what was a prompt reach with the gaff the Mackie was quickly hooked and brought into the boat. It was the closest of shaves to losing a trophy sized fish.

Now, something I generally do when preparing fish to be put on ice is check the stomach contents of the fish to see what they've been feeding on. Sure enough after a close inspection of this 'Mackie', I pulled out a nannygai maybe a day or two old that would have been no smaller than 30cm long!! This guy knew where he could get an easy feed, and now he was our client's easy feed.

While we're on the subject of stomach contents and nannygai... I had a rather bizarre moment on a charter a couple of weeks ago. We were using some 6" Berkley Gulp soft plastics on a local wreck when after a decent hit, I've pulled up a jig head with only about 1 inch of the soft plastic left on it. Thinking that some toothy critter had given it a bit of a nudge I thought nothing of it and re-rigged and continued on. Two days later and we visited the same wreck with some clients, one of them hooked up and brought in a nice size nannygai for that area of approximately 45cm. Upon bringing it into the boat, it regurgitated the bait from the hook it was caught on but that's not all that came up. The remaining 5 inches of the soft plastic I had been using the 2 days before hit the deck!! The mystery remains and we'll never know whether this fish was the one who smashed the 'Gulp' lure originally or if something else with a few more teeth had done the damage and this

'Nanny' was just taking the chance to clean it up off the bottom.

Those of you who follow our Facebook: www.facebook.com/fishingportdouglascharters will know about the Christmas competition we ran last year giving 1 person and a friend the chance to win 3 nights' accommodation and 2 full days fishing for the weekend of the 9th and 10th of February. Unfortunately due to health reasons our winner Stan Nowak wasn't able to come up from South Australia to claim his prize at that time. He was admitted to hospital with ongoing cancer issues right at the last minute of his trip. However we have talked with Stan and wish him all the best and hope he can make it up to claim his prize in the near future.

Talking of Facebook and the like, we have been running a promotion for the months of February and March for our local brigade of followers - come with us on a Half or Full Day River Creek/Coastal Charter with us and receive our locals only discount!

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Happy Fishing ■



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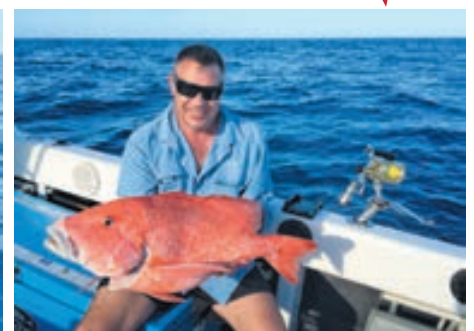
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Forgotten Birthday - By Heff

It must be said as you tend to get older you tend to celebrate Birthdays less and less - well that is the case for me ...

It recently dawned on me that the Line Birthday of 20yrs running occurred back at the start of the year - est. Dec 1999. Without going through the record books I would lay a bet that it is by far the oldest running magazine in Far Nth Qld. 12 editions per year x 20 years and free of cost to our loyal readers is something I'm very, very proud of. To our local advertisers, some of which have been there since day dot and our extremely valued contributors I applaud you. From central Cairns all the way to Cooktown and in between there are a lot of loyal readers. Furthermore via a fishingportdouglas.com.au our simple free downloads of the entire magazine have gone through the roof in the last year. There is a lot of exposure out there now and many, many interstate and overseas followers tap in every month for their taste of fishing in the tropics. Here's a Happy 20th Birthday to all involved - Cheers Heff

Barotrauma - By Adam Boone

If you're familiar with Scuba Diving, you'll know about the "bends" or decompression sickness - caused by a rapid depressurisation, forming bubbles (mainly nitrogen) in the body which can lead to severe sickness and even death! Well humans aren't the only ones to suffer from rapid decompression.. the fish we catch are also susceptible to these causes. How many times have you caught a fish from deeper water (>10m) and once

brought to the surface and onto the deck you notice its stomach has pushed out its mouth or its eyes are protruding a bit more than what you think they should, or their stomach area looks a bit inflated? Then sometimes when you go to throw them back they just float away with the current. These are just some of the recognisable symptoms of a fish with Barotrauma.. unfortunately the rate of mortality of fish with barotrauma can be extremely high, depending on species and the depth they are caught in. However, there are some things you can do to give your catch the best chance of survival upon release.

Venting would have to be the most common method I've noticed here in FNQ.. where a sharp instrument is inserted just behind the pectoral fin to help release the build up of gas inside the fish's swim bladder.

Another popular method (and any of our readers from Western Australia will know about it) is a release weight (pictured) and is basically a lump of lead about 500g with a large barbless hook attached. The hook is put through the bottom jaw of the fish and dropped back over the side in a free fall to the bottom, where a swift jig of the weight removes the hook from the jaw and the fish is back at the depth it was caught. The thinking behind it is that the fish is dropped back down to depth so quickly that any gasses built up in the swim bladder are squeezed out by the rapid increase of pressure with depth as it nears the bottom, therefore preventing floating. So effective is this method that in Western Australia it is actually law to have a release weight on the boat whenever fishing for

demersal species for release of undersize fish.

A method that I adopt and encourage our clients to do when out fishing with us, is when you hook up to something, within the first 5 seconds or so you know if a fish is going to be decent enough and as such fight it accordingly and do what you can to land that fish. But, when we hook something and it doesn't feel all that big or may have a hunch it is something undersize.. what's the point in skull dragging it to the surface and increasing the chance of barotrauma.. take your time, and bring it up slowly. Now, I know some of you are probably thinking "yeah but what about the chance of sharks when you bring it up slower". And that's a call you can make yourself if you know there are sharks around. Either way the fish is probably going to be in a bit of strife.

If you're after any more information about barotrauma, the fish species it affects, what other methods is there to help decrease the chances and the visible symptoms, jump on the web and it is full of information. Fisheries organisations in each state have published a lot of research on the subject, some with videos of case studies such as the NT have done with Fingermark - a popular catch here in FNQ as well.



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Myths of the Dingo with Bruce Belcher



For Christmas 2018 I was given a book titled "The Dogs that made Australia", by Guy Hull. It opens by describing the history of dingos and the aboriginal people. This book dismisses some of the myths about our history and some misconceptions that we took for granted. I've not personally seen a dingo in the Daintree, but I'm aware that this is an ideal habitat.

The author tells us that aboriginal people arrived in Australia about 60,000 years ago through land bridges from Asia when the sea level was much lower than now.

The dingo's origins were from the Eurasian wolf, which gradually became domesticated through cave people and it spread. This movement reached southern Asia about 10,000 years ago. We're told that Asian travellers, the Lapita, moved eastward to populate Polynesia and had the descendants of the wolf with them. By then they had lost their thicker fur and developed the short

and tan fur to suit southern regions. Obviously, the Lapita must have interacted with aborigines on some of their voyages that ventured to the northern shorelines of Australia. It was then that the dingo was introduced to the aborigines.

In modern times we hear that James Cook brought them here. We're also led to believe that the dingo was a valuable hunting companion for aborigines. This author dispels this about Cook and he explains the relationship with dingos and aborigines.

Aborigines had lived in Australia for 55,000 years before being introduced to dingos. They didn't need them and apparently found them to be a hindrance to hunting parties, after all, the dingo would only have been interested in hunting for itself. So, it's more likely that young dingo puppies were only useful as pets for children. When the dingo matured, it had a need to go bush as it was no longer interested in people. The author further explains that the dingo originated from the wolf as they both howl at night. Another point is that the dingo is monogamous and

have families whereas domestic dogs are polygamous.

The dingo was a disaster for Australian wildlife. Animals like the Thylacine (Tasmanian Tiger) and the Tasmanian Devil roamed the Australian mainland and before long were exterminated by the dingo. They survived in Tasmania as the dingo couldn't reach there.

Although I've not seen dingos in the Daintree area, I'm told that they're here and I'm sure that the aboriginal people, The Kuku Yalanji, will have shared lives with the dingo but not in the way we understood. See you next month.



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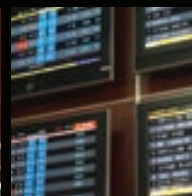
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