

Back at "The Reef" Phil and Muz

Cooktown 21st October -25th October 2013

Day 1)

We strolled down to the Cooktown jetty to be met by a large fleet of game boats rafted up after a solid week fishing the famous "Lizard Island" tournament. They had all offloaded their punters and were awaiting new paying fisherman to arrive and eagerly head back out to "The Reef" as the GBR is affectionately known to hopefully realise the dreams of those mere mortals amongst us of catching a "giant black marlin!"

There to greet us was the big smile of great friend -Cairns legend and skipper Darren (Biggles) Haydon and crew Dean (Deano) Ford and Max Fogarty. (new from the US) Once aboard Tim Deans boat "Calypso", Phil and I began to relax and absorb the enormity of the very situation we had travelled to experience.

Tied up to "Biggs" was Billy Billson in his vessel "Viking", as he waited for 2 young fellows on their first Marlin expedition whom we had the pleasure of a solid previous night's drinking with. Billy jokingly asked if it was us that did "a job" on his boys!

Billy is a larger than life character with a legendary reputation as a great skipper on "the reef" who regularly catches "Big Fish"!

Once all crew were on board, some of the boats slowly made their way out into the nose of strong S/Easterlies. This was always going to be the worst weather day but had nothing on the 30-35 knots we experienced last year for most that 5 day trip!

After about 4 hours of steady travel we arrived between number 4 and 5 ribbon reefs. The crew set the two 130lb rods up with a customary swim plus a skipping bait. Grins all around as everyone on the Calypso were in the "zone" of where marlin fisherman want to be most: On a Game boat, at "the reef" with baits out the back and expectations of a giant mouth with a bill about to scoff those perfectly rigged baits any second!

Phil (fortunately) nominated me to be first on strike, and so it was! After a number of customary bite offs from wahoo and barracuda we headed into the favoured "late bite Time".

Around 4 pm, Biggs screams " Right rigger, right rigger" " Big fish, big fish, ohhhh bloody big fish!!! Somewhere in that time I was strapping into the chair with a screaming 130 between my legs, mouth already dry from the adrenalin rush. The crew as usual had the organised chaos perfectly under control around me. It was my turn to go hard on the winding and get this giant black girl to boat as quick as she and the gear (not to mention the rough conditions) would let me, It was only when she exploded out of the water for the first time we all went "whoooooh" in tune with Biggs upgrading to; "Ohhhhhh F---ing giant fish Muz."

It brings it home pretty quick as you control your obvious excitement that this is the shit you live and talk about!!

Before I continue I will enlighten the uninitiated on what happens at the reef when calling weights of big fish. They have an old saying; "If you don't weigh it, don't say it," so when you

have a fish "estimated" around the magic 1000 pounds the skippers prefer not to call it unless it is exceptionally big -well over the "magic" mark!

Back to the story: The sea was still pretty angry with a lot of it coming into the cockpit filling it at one stage with half a meter of water. I was blinded by the constant drowning of the water pouring over the transom on my lap. The crew had the really hard job of managing the deck and fish at the same time but worked magnificently.

The width of the big fish really excited us all as she grey hounded away from a flat out reversing boat. She carried size all the way to the tail. This was a really big fish! She wouldn't give us a good side angle nor could we get the length as she kept most of her body under the surface.

As Biggs again went for a hard reverse run we could start to see her full body smashing the water charging away from the outstretched hands of Deano trying to get a hand full of leader. Eventually Biggs caught her and Dean took his chance with a quick grab and wrap, this turned her enough to shoot to the side and erupt alongside the boat with an angry leap that gave us for one second the view of a life time!

"She is right up there boys" yelled Biggs amongst all our screams and "yaaa-hooo's etc. It was too rough to entertain gaffing anything today but a beauty all the same.

Then it was time to let her go with a cut of the leader, a quick last pull by Deano then she was gone. Hi Fives all around!

All that in a tick in under 15 minutes measured on the video camera. Unbelievable!

I could finally say I caught a fish around "the mark". What a feeling!!

Day 2)

Phil who kicked my butt last year with the 3 biggest fish of the trip was now up on strike. After some bait catching we headed out to yesterday's ground and were soon rewarded at 2.50pm when a scad was scooped by a 300 pounder. Phil soon had her released with good crew work. It was not over as around 4.00 pm a 400 pounder smashed a scaley allowing me to score my second fish in as many days.

A great day ending with a visit to a mother ship to some old friends of Biggs from Texas who had been coming here since the 60's and spoke a lot about times with "Lee Marvin". Also aboard was Brad Craft from with his boat "Castille".

What a couple of days to start with. This was magic stuff.

Day 3)

Phil, looking for a big one got whacked on a swimming bait again at 2.00 pm with a beautiful 650-700 pounder. Very nice and put on a great show. By now our camera work was working better to start getting some good video shots. Also the weather was actually quite good. (a new experience in itself!!) Again this fish was knocked over in around 15 minutes before being released with plenty of energy left. A great system used by Biggs and his crew aided by some damn good angling by Phil.

Well, Phil was getting closer to me with that fish so I was hoping for a good'un this time.

Nobody saw what was coming next!

5.15pm, The familiar " blood curdling" scream from above..... Left rigger! Left rigger!
Massive, massive, ohhhhh shit! A giant! As I reached the reel letting the big girl take some free spool and hopefully get the 10 pound tuna down its throat. Biggs calls, push the drag up to 15, ok ok more 20. Yep I think you got her as string was peeling out at a rate of knots. Go to the chair Muz, so trying to focus I gave a big heave, lifted and walked the rod over as quick as my old legs would let me! Well practised we were clipped in and winding pretty quick but well past the top shot so a bit of work to do.

Her massive head and bill came out at some stage to clarify Biggs first impression.

It was a vision that had all of us thinking, this is a gaff fish! We had another couple of looks when Biggs said: "If ever there was a fish to stick this is it". Then the order came to the 2 crew. "Get the gaffs down boys" "Phil can you help? The contrast was amazing, young Deano's eyes lit up as he found another gear! While young Max had the look of terror on his pale face wondering what the hell have I signed up for here! No doubt excited as well.

Biggs trained eyes of seeing and weighing more big fish than most then hesitated saying wait a minute I'm not sure, give me another look, then the massive head and body gave us an inline look down the spine and Biggs declared "no hold off boys she is not wide enough" Understandably we were looking for something that looked way over 1000 pounds to gaff. This fish lived another day due to a very experienced skipper judging she just wasn't going to get well into 4 figures! A great call.

We were all ecstatic, 2 giants in 3 days, how good was this?

It is safe to declare that this "insane" fishing would not happen anywhere else in the world! For years and years the GBR has produced fishing like this.

Biggs red wine supply was getting hammered on anchor, let me tell you. He was pretty worried he would run out, but hey we had just "a little" bit to celebrate, didn't we? Problem solved we found a hidden stash of Owner Tim Deans! (I'm sure he would understand.....!)

Day 4)

In the morning, we drove over to Bobby Jones "Iceman" boat, to have a chat with legendary Peter B Wright. Peter not only was involved with the current Australian Black Marlin record of a mere 1442 pounds in 1973. (The cast is in the Cock and Bull tavern - Cairns) He also weighed more thousand pound fish than most in history and has written for "Marlin Magazine" for a lifetime. We were truly amongst "Marlin Royalty" at "the reef" this trip. (Peter B. also once skippered 40 ft Woodnut "Balek 3" now owned by local Peter Berryman).

Back to fishing: The first calm day I experienced in 4 visits to the GBR over nearly 20 days, also the first fish- less day after 9 in a row with Biggs. Those first 8 days netted 15 black Marlin including 2x 600 plus pounders, 2x 800 plus pounders and 2 around the "mark". How good was Biggs skippering going here?

Day 5)

Our last day, also nice weather. The "Bite" was still on as amongst 12 boats we pulled out 2 more captures both around 400 pounds and raised 2 more fish. One was another giant... Phil was on strike too.... licking his lips. This surely wasn't going to be Phil catching the "Gaff" fish at the death knock?? Hooley Dooley... She came up on the little queeny, swam alongside it, looked at it in the eye!..... Then got spooked by another smaller Marlin coming in behind. Much to the disgust of all on board that was it, she disappeared and time ran out. Biggs took 5 minutes to stop cussing and stamping his foot but sadly it was time to leave the reef!

Still smiles and handshakes all around bringing to an end the best Marlin fishing experience one can ever imagine in my 20 years at this game. We met some legends of the game and some angry giant black beauties. 7 Marlin with 2 around the "mark" Far more than Phil or I could have written on any wish list! I was also honoured to be fishing in the same water as legendary boat "Pannawonica" on day 3. Over 40 years old and looking immaculate. Her skipper Sir Garrick Agnew and crew weighed 2 of the 3 biggest ever marlin weighed in Australia.

A big thanks to the best credentialed skipper and nicest bloke on the reef... Darren (Biggles) Haydon, Deano Boyd, a terrific young deckie with an amazing work ethic and deck skills, (best toasty maker), Max Fogarty who seen his first giant marlin and gave good tips for broadbill fishing, Tim Dean, for supplying the boat Calypso. Also to Phil for not catching one bigger than me this year. Very generous mate!

Enjoy the video footage coming and pictures attached. I hope the readers of this blog take up the opportunity as we have to enjoy the most insane fishing you will find anywhere in the world. These skippers and crew are the best in the world without doubt. Don't leave your run over there too late.

A good place to start would be contacting someone like Biggles. His URL is below.

www.downundermarlincharters.com

I just love this shit!!!!

Muzza