

Reviews

CAPE DIVERSITY

Micah Adams signs up for the Cape Don Experience in the Northern Territory

We were heading off for another day's fly fishing in the waters surrounding Cape Don, on the western tip of the Cobourg Peninsula, north-east of Darwin. Our guide Scott Matthews, informed us on the run out to the fishing area that we would start with deep fly fishing for big Spanish Mackerel on the bottom of the outgoing tide. We would fish in water nearly 30 metres deep with plenty of current at times, and fish schools feeding anywhere from 15 metres down to the bottom. I rigged a 12-weight Loomis rod with a Scientific Anglers Tropicore Express line, a length of 30 lb flourocarbon and six inch Flashy Profile.



When we arrived at the area of deep reef, Scott spent plenty of time searching and positioning the boat over the largest and strongest fish and bait shows on his colour sounder. I anxiously awaited his call to drop the fly in. When it came, I cast a short line then mended the remaining fly line into the water and watched it sink below, counting down for around a minute. I began a fast retrieve straight back up, and almost instantly was slammed by a brute that made my body slap against the gunwale under the strain. With bruised ego and a little shaken by the whole encounter, I retied another Flashy with a short section of single strand wire for our targeted Spaniards. I completed another couple of drifts then got slammed again. This time I pulled with every bit of power in my rod could handle, maintaining enormous drag pressure of between six and seven kilos – we didn't see the tip section of my

rod during the entire fight. Eventually we got the fish beside the boat and Scott tailed it: a mackerel of nearly 30 kilos! We went on to catch more mackerel, along with some sizable GTs off the bottom and big queenfish that swam through above the macks. This was steroid fishing, down and dirty how-hard-can-you-pull-a-flyrod-kind of fishing, and I was loving it.

When the tide began to push in again, the action slowed. More importantly, we were unable to get our flies to them even with the heaviest of high-density heads. I rigged a 9-weight, Scott moved the boat for a matter of minutes and we were up a creek and anchored off a snag, waiting for the tidal surge to really come past. When it did, I cast the ever-effective Gold Bomber fly on an intermediate line above the snag and stripped the fly sharply through the strike zone. Barra! Immediately the chrome-plated acrobat was airborne, mouth and gills wide open, trying to free itself of the furry impostor. It failed to do so, and I was able to admire a beautiful Cape Don barra of around three or four kilos.

Throughout the incoming tide, on the very same snag, we saw small groups of barra and threadfin salmon pass through and take up residence. Things would go quiet for a moment then suddenly we would see four or five nice barras rolling on the surface around the snag. Make a cast up-current, use a sharp retrieve that would 'kick' the Gold Bomber form side to side and we'd be connected to another acrobat. Whilst not the metre-plus barra for which the Territory and its run-off season are famous, these were nice sized fish of 50–70 cm or up to six kilos.

The threadfin were much more inquisitive and difficult to convince to eat the fly. They were the eternal followers without a strike, a real tease. We watched pretty big threadies come out and hover above the fly, using their long whiskers like fingers to decipher the artificial. After possibly a hundred presentations, it was clear that they weren't going to eat flies that day.

On our way back to Cape Don Lodge and its awaiting 'sunset spa', we had a quick throw around the Cape itself for big GTs in the shallows, but instead, found schooling queenfish.

Our day had not been unusual for this location, as I now know after a number of visits. The variety of fishing leads me to suggest that Cape Don should be renamed Cape Diversity! One English fly fisherman managed 42 species in one visit! The Cobourg Peninsula's creeks produce some fantastic barras and salmon and there are plenty of sandy



beaches and cays patrolled by a variety of trevally species and queenfish that are all great fly targets. Schools of perfect fly rod fish frequent most of the gutters, bombies, deeper reefs and current edges. They are hard fighters hankering for a fly to be thrown at them, and the more you hook and catch in a school, the more the others want to be caught: they absolutely love excitement and will always hang around a hooked fish, wanting to be hooked also!

Various species of mackerel, queenies, trevally, long tail tuna and other pelagic speedsters frequent the waters around Cape Don throughout autumn, winter time — you could easily have a day go by in the blink of an eye while chasing these speedsters around the ocean.

Cape Don is unique both as a fishery and as a facility. The feeling of total isolation is the rule, and outside company the exception. You stay in a beautiful big old homestead with wide verandahs all round and huge bedrooms. At the end of a day's fishing you're quickly steered back to the Lodge so you can climb in the spa — a converted water tank — looking over the setting western sun and the Timor and Arafura seas. You're served the day's catch as fresh sashimi, and later enjoy some of the north's best seafood dining. After dinner the lodge owners, staff and guides clear out and allow guests free rein of the homestead and its very popular billiards room. Cape Don is often booked for corporate use with a full house of friends or colleagues, so the privacy offered goes a long way in this situation. There is something for everyone here.

For more information on this award winning eco-tourism retreat phone 08 8979 0030. www.capedon.com ■

