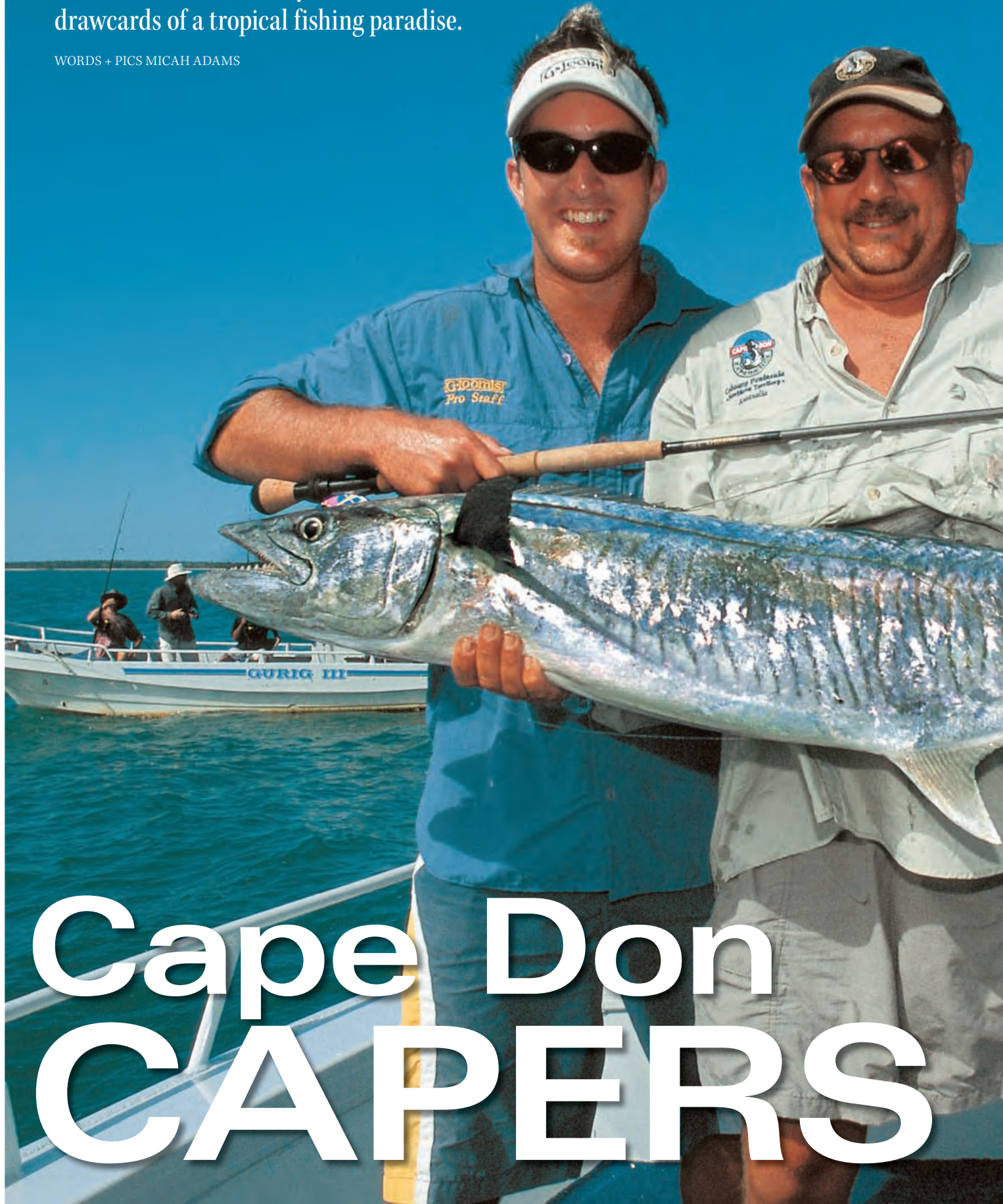


Cape Don, on the tip of the Coburg Peninsula in the Northern Territory, boasts all the drawcards of a tropical fishing paradise.

WORDS + PICS MICAH ADAMS



Cape Don CAPERS



Micah Adams looks absolutely pumped with this 60lb Spaniard on fly—a very tough capture indeed.

After flying in a small, twin-engine aircraft some 200 km north-east of Darwin, across scattered islands and bays, our destination was in sight. Cape Don and its famous lighthouse, on the tip of the Coburg Peninsula, was directly below as we circled before landing on a typical bush runway. Once there, we were greeted by our guides waiting in Jeeps with cold beers and cool face washers—a nice touch, I thought.

As we drove towards the homestead my guide-to-be, Scott Mathews, told me the fishing had been pretty good and we had great building tides. Spanish mackerel, GTs and queenies were on patrol in the area.

Cape Don owners John and Kate Kerr welcome us to our home for the next four nights and show us around. Here I was introduced to my haven for the trip—a 12-person spa. The spa was made even grander by the addition of several small eskies around its perimeter filled with ice, beer and scotch. After a day's flying or slugging it out with big tropical speedsters, there is nothing better than comparing fishy tales with your mates in the spa as you watch the setting sun burn up the watery horizon to the west.

After a fine dinner we were split into groups and allocated spots on the four custom-built boats. With me are friends Dave Grossberg and Greg Taylor. Somehow we get labelled the A team...God knows why?

The next morning is an ideal one with little wind. Scott took us out to an area of reef where he and his good mate Jason have had plenty of success jigging plastics down deep for GTs and thumper mackerel. Using the sounders, the boys put a lot of effort in positioning the boat right on top of intense schools of baitfish and larger predators. Dave and Greg dropped six-inch stick bait plastics on ultra heavy TT jig heads while I counted down my sinking fly line.

Before the tide slowed on dead low, the guys and their plastics were extremely successful—hooking several big Spanish mackerel, giant trevally

and queenfish as soon as their jigs hit the bottom. If there were fish schooling in mid-water, the jig would be taken on the drop. The plastics were running hot.

The fly on the other hand was struggling. It would take my sinking fly line too long to reach the 30-metre mark with the current in full swing. I occasionally snared a fish from mid-water, but until the tide slowed, I was given a touch-up by the plastics.

Dave was first to get a fish in the boat. It was a nice GT of around 8 kg that took some pulling when hooked close to home. Then came the mackerel bite, which produced another four big fish, all 20-25 kg and all on the plastics down deep. These were certainly big Spaniards and on spin gear were a real handful. Dave and Greg had their work cut out for them landing these fish, especially with the ever-present threat of sharks. Finally, I hooked what was most likely a big GT on the fly. After some serious line burn on the fingers, I won the battle

to lift him from the bottom. Once I had the fish on the reel and into mid-water, I thought I might win the battle. But no. GTs being the fish they are, it was soon over. Under immense rod and drag pressure, the fish screamed off one more time and made it home.

I hooked a mackerel close to the boat soon after. It was a solid hook-up. The fish ran 10 metres and pulled the hook. It wasn't going to be my day...

A school of metre-long queenies passed through (at last!) and we all hooked up. (Yes, I actually landed one!)

All this action came leading up to and on the turn of the low tide. As the tide started to push in again, the fishing slowed and the fish disappeared from the sounder screen. It was time for lunch.

Jason's boat of Sparky, Ian and Avron Grossberg (also known as the B team!) met us on the beach for a well-earned swim and some sustenance. The afternoon's tides weren't crash hot so we did a little exploring up a creek and on another patch of reef with little



We even got the odd trevally up to the boat for a quick pic.

I had a fantastic time catching these tough and often rare little blighters...



Believe it or not, these were typical sized Spaniards! Greg and Dave hoist another quality fish up for the camera.



success. That spa was calling us loudly so we returned to base.

The conditions the next morning were similar to the first. And with the deep reef action so good the morning before, we had to return. The boys were hooking fish as soon as their lures hit the bottom; the tide was too strong for me to get down to the fish showing on the sounder in time. When the tide slowed I did hook-up to something very serious and a 15-minute, intense battle began. (I was running around 5-6 kg of drag through my 12-weight Loomis.) The fight was down deep and it was a battle of strength with some powerful runs. Eventually, a Spanish mackerel of about 25 kg was boated and there was yahooping for all concerned.

The boys were also catching

Spaniards and the odd GT when the whaler sharks moved in. They molested one of our GTs and we managed to land one of the sharks before a school of queenfish moved into the area.

One poor, innocent queenie got more than he bargained for when, as he approached the boat, he shot out of the water. At the time, Dave was bending over to pick up the net and the queenie flew right into him—bummer! That fish got more than he deserved—releasing him was the least we could do.

It was lunchtime again on the beach and this was eaten while we rested in the cool water. We visited a shallower reef after lunch and managed a few coral trout and other reefy allsorts.

On the way home we went looking

for big, resident GTs on the cape, right in front of the Cape Don homestead. This was an amazing piece of confused water and currents; the union of the Arafura and Timor seas. There were whirlpools and turbulent water everywhere. The boys on Brett's boat fared better during the afternoon, finding a school of GTs and queenies that were on the boil for an hour. They caught and released nearly 20 solid fish on the plastics and had an absolute ball doing so. When we arrived back at the creek where the boats are moored, a school of small giant, diamond, tealeaf and pennant trevally were feeding. I had a fantastic time catching these tough and often rare little blighters on a lighter fly fishing outfit.

On our third day we all decided



to target barra and threadfin in the creeks. Jason's crew shared the one creek with us and the fishing was pretty good. Within minutes of setting the anchor we were onto fish—mostly barras in the 50-60 cm range but also some good threadfin salmon. Threadies are a nightmare in tight confines. They combine strength with speed well in these small creeks. Scott tied a collection of his new spun-wool flies named 'Furballs' the night before and they worked a treat on the barras (although like many fly fishing situations, solid hook-ups were a little

more difficult than with the lures).

After a while and a few fish, we headed up river to join Jason and the boys who had also landed some serious threadies and barra. Avron had just released an 80 cm barra, which was a great fish for the area. In the light rain, the boys seemed to be having an absolute ball. By the end of the trip, a more accurate name for the two boats could have been team Onafly and team Flying High!

Both boats worked the same drain for a while with a few more barra encounters and then we both headed

back down to the drain we first fished. The fish were on again and we both caught more barras and threadies including one good threadfin that we had to wrestle from a snag for Greg. I also managed to land a decent barra from the drain that went 74 cm. All in all, after three hours fishing the two drains we released a dozen or so barra each and lost as many. There were also some estuary cod among the blue and threadfin salmon.

The guys with Brett in the next creek did even better, releasing some 35 barramundi and threadies during



ABOVE: A triple hook-up on board *Gurig III*.
LEFT: Dave Grossberg battled this nice threadie from the snags.
BELOW: The author gets another mackerel on the fly using the deep fly method.
OPPOSITE PAGE: A solid barra puts a smile on the authors face.



the run out tide.

On our forth and final day we could only fish until lunch before meeting our return flight back to Darwin. We all decided go after the pelagics on the reef one last time. They showed up on cue and we landed plenty more on plastics, plus I got another Spaniard on fly. There was more shark mayhem and the odd queenie school as well.

The fish of the trip was caught next to us. Ian Grossberg on team 'Flying High' hooked up to a massive mackerel that took over 20 minutes to subdue. When finally beaten and boatside,

Jason couldn't net the fish or wrap his fingers around its tail wrist, it would have weighed around 35 kg!

Some of the guys had set out with Brett to catch mud crabs for lunch and in the process had also found a hot barra bite. We all met on the beach along with the local children who made a fire. We cooked and ate fresh crabs in a pristine environment—a fitting way to end a great escape at Cape Don.

I found the Cape Don experience to be a very pleasant one. The guides and their boats are first class and they

are both experienced and skillful. The facility and accommodation were fantastic with comfy beds, large open living, a pool table and, of course, (everyone's favourite) the spa. What I really liked about the homestead was that after dinner all the staff cleared out, allowing the guests free reign to enjoy themselves.

The fishing during my four-day stay in May was pretty good—especially for pelagics. Apparently it gets even better from September to November, so I guess I'll have to return to check it out for myself. ■