

# The *Magic* of Arnhem Land



by Alex Julius

***In a joint venture with the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation in Maningrida, AJ and well-known professional fishing guide, his mate Lindsay Mutimer, have joined forces to operate an upmarket fishing lodge in Arnhem Land. According to AJ, it was never planned, but sort of just happened.***

I never really intended to get into fishing tourism as a full-on owner/operator. Our core business has always been fishing media, mainly magazines, and for that matter, mainly NAFA. A few years ago, Christine and I started Hotspot Fishing Tours, a fishing tour booking company,

***Above left: These two mighty barra (91 cm and 90 cm) were part of an amazing run of nine barra in the 90s in eight consecutive trolls. Pictured are Elton Stone and Max Sydney. The lures are Classic 120s.***

***Left: Head Guide and Arnhemland Barramundi Nature Lodge Manager, Lindsay Mutimer, nets a 96 cm fish for Stuart Sillar.***

***Top: Maningrida turtle hunters.***

primarily because I was constantly being asked to advise people on which fishing guide, which remote fishing camp or which mothership they should book for their sportfishing holiday. It reached the stage that my office was doing this so much that we thought we may as well turn it into a business.

Making the quantum leap to start up a major upmarket fishing tourist operation was, in the end, quite an easy decision. I'd shared a beer or two over the years with people who work for the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation (BAC), which is a highly-successful Aboriginal enterprise in Maningrida at the top of Arnhem Land.

Late last year they sought my advice on setting up their own guided fishing operation. We had a meeting and then blow me down if they didn't come back a couple of weeks later and offer me the opportunity to enter into a joint venture with BAC to conduct exclusive sportfishing tours in this incredibly-remote region. My immediate response was: "Sure, but only if my mate Lindsay Mutimer is interested in getting involved and managing the fishing side."

For a long time I have regarded Lindsay as the most professional fishing guide in the Territory. He and his wife Karen have operated Top End Barra Fishing for 12 years or more. Clients we have placed with them have always caught fish and have had nothing but praise for Lindsay.

Without going into it too much further, Lindsay grasped the opportunity with both hands and Arnhemland Barramundi Nature Lodge was born.



## The First Group

Quite simply, in May 2004, the first group to the exclusive new Arnhemland Barramundi Nature Lodge blitzed it. Although I won't normally be guiding, I did so on this inaugural trip because it involved friends from northern NSW whom I look after every year. My old mate Elton Stone always organises the trip and, as soon as he heard about the Lodge, he wanted to book the first group in and give us a good start.

Guiding Stony and the boys gave me a chance to look around and try a few things. I'd fished most of the five rivers in this remote area before, but my knowledge base hardly scratched the surface. There was so much more to discover.

On the second-last day, I had Elton, Paul Starky and Max Sidney aboard, and I was tearing up one of our rivers when I came across a deep submerged rockbar that I later found out had never been fished before. There were some nice ledges and bumps on the Lowrance, so I pulled up on spec and had the blokes chuck their lures out for an investigatory troll.

No kidding, I couldn't have trolled more than 10 m when Max said: "I got a strike!"

"Yeah, sure you did; can't have been a fish, you must have hit the bottom," Elton replied.

"I got another hit, I'm on!" Max exclaimed, almost before Elton had finished paying him out.

He was on all right, because out of the water behind the boat speared a metre-long barra.

Unluckily, the lure pulled out, but it was the start of something amazing.

In the next few hours, we must have hooked 25 fish. These were all big barra – nearly every one of them in the 90s – and they climbed all over our Classic lures, fighting like crazy once hooked. By the end of the session, the blokes had landed 14 from 86 to 98 cm, each fish 10-15 minutes to land. This included an incredible 8 trolls of 120 metres for 9 barra in the 90s. One was a double of 91 & 90 in the net.

I called in Lindsay and the other guide, Geoff Brown, so their anglers could get a piece of the action, and they sure did.

We fished it for two half-day sessions, landing 38 barra between 85 and 110 cm, obviously losing plenty of others. Of the 38, 32 were in the 90s, and both days we left them biting.

Elton reckoned it was the best barra fishing for big fish that he had ever experienced.

When I got back to Darwin, I emailed a few



*Above: Christine Julius slipped on a Killalure Barra Bait deep-diver before bagging her best-ever barra at 92 cm, fishing the remote waterways available exclusively to Lodge guests. These include five tidal rivers, Liverpool, Tomkinson, Cadell, Blyth and Goomadeer.*

*Top: Why is no one watching this thrashing, airborne, metre-long barra except the angler, Elton Stone? Because there's a 110 cm barra crashing about on the other side of the boat, that's why.*



people about the trip, including Geoff Guest who has been a Hotspot client for a few years. Little did I know that, while I was emailing him, he was up at the Lodge having a ball. Ironically, when he returned home to Melbourne, he read my email and replied as follows:

*Hi Alex*

*If you thought that this was good fishing how about the trip on Friday 15 May. We had six anglers, two with each of Lindsay, Geoff and Dean.*

*In about five hours we picked up 33 barra at AJ's Rockbar. The smallest was 79, the largest 99 cm. My five were 88, 91, 92, 92, & 96. A couple over a metre were dropped.*

*I'll be back to "The Lodge".*

*Cheers*

*Geoff Guest  
Melbourne*

Postscript: two more groups which have visited Arnhemland Barramundi Nature Lodge prior to publication also caught big numbers of big barra. The last group caught more than 30 fish in the 90s and are still raving about it.



*This page clockwise from top right:*

*Glen Booth caught this big Liverpool River threadfin salmon whilst fishing for barra at the mouth of a small creek.*

*Mangrove jack and all the usual estuarine species abound. Bob Stanton, legendary golfer of the '60s and '70s, is a regular visitor.*

*Amongst the several trevally species available along the coast and out on the islands, the golden trevally is the most prolific, often encountered tailing and feeding along the beaches. No arguments from Paul Starky.*

*Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation (BAC) has several successful projects on the go. One is the Maningrida Arts and Culture Centre. The works of several prize-winning Aboriginal artists are on display and sale at this intriguing gallery.*

*Another BAC project is its Crocodile Hatching Program. Wild eggs are harvested and brought back to the Maningrida hatchery for incubation. Victor Rostrum is Head Ranger.*

*The Lodge has four spacious cabins with full-width ensuites. Accommodation is up to triple share.*

*Inside the Lodge, it's hard to believe that you're in such a remote part of Australia.*

*The Lodge, which is 20 km from the community of Maningrida, looks over the spectacular Tomkinson River Valley.*

*Opposite page clockwise from top left:*

*The first group to visit Arnhemland Barramundi Nature Lodge with some of their memorable fish: Brian Pidcock (82 cm); Neil Hoolihan (97 cm); Erwin Richter (84 cm); Max Sydney (99 cm); Paul Starky (92 cm); Glen Stotter (110 cm); Stuart Sillar (104 cm); Elton Stone (1 metre).*



## Information on Arnhemland Barramundi Nature Lodge

You'll find more information on the Lodge by logging onto either [www.hotspot.com.au](http://www.hotspot.com.au) or [www.barralodge.com.au](http://www.barralodge.com.au).  
Email: [barralodge@hotspot.com.au](mailto:barralodge@hotspot.com.au)  
Phone 08 89831544 Fax 08 8983 1914.  
One-3 day eco tours are also available and can be taken while your partner is fishing.

