



## *The last laugh.....New Caledonia GT's*

By Stan Konstantaras – ANSA NSW President

Having fished New Cal last year with a few mates, Marinos and I backed up again last week with newbie Mitch. We took advantage of the Ocean Blue Fishing Adventures ANSA offer and strapped in for the ride of our lives. We fished south of Noumea last year, this year we were fishing the shallow, coral studded lagoons up north of Noumea. La Foa and Bourail were our base camps this time around and David Noble from Ocean Blue Fishing Adventures assured us that this was to be an unforgettable experience. Mitch has the worse case of mal de mer I have ever seen, getting sick in the bathtub so we chose this place because it offered all the fishing inside the lagoon, only wind chop to contend with. Problem was it was shallow, dangerous country, white knuckle and bare fisted brawls with GT's on short leashes, we had seen previous footage and went in with eyes wide open.....

Poppers were purchased at a frenetic rate, cost was not a factor when buying the bright and shiny baubles, new rods purchased as well. Mitch backed up with a new Fisherman GT Game RS to fish 130lb braid, I opted for a new Patriot Design World Combat Black Mafia 77 as a back up to my 130lb rod which was a twin of Mitch's rod. The only difference is that the Mafia was rated to PE12, or 170lb breaking strain. This was a brute of a rod to handle and fish with, no one wanted to have a go with it, but it cast 250gram poppers out of sight. The excess kilos surrounding my girth were ballast when ever I hooked up. My plan was to fish this rod only when I got busted up on 130lb, then the big gun comes out. World Combat, this was war against the GT's.

Fish stop after Etienne Picquel, our guide picked us up from the airport was Quano Surf Camp, about 100km north of Noumea. Here we settled into our bungalow and the plan was to stay here and fish for 3 days before heading further north..



Quano Surf Camp was a great base, all meals provided and some great local and French hospitality and best of all cold beers. Try the beef tongue, a local delicacy that we devoured.

We fished on Etienne's 7m centre console, a great boat for running around on the reef.



First day out and we find fish, 15 – 30kg GTs ambushing our poppers on a regular basis. We all end up with fish between 20 and 31 kgs, with Marinos topping the count with a PB 31kg fish. What blow's our mind is that we are fishing in 2 – 3 meters of water all day and we are all thinking what happens if we find the big ones.....



My GT pups around 20kg and 25kg



**Mitch's first ever GT on day 1, 20kg plus!**



**Marinos with his 31kg GT on day 1 in some tight country**

Day two we find out, we start losing fish after fish in some tight country, not even Frankie our intrepid deckie can retrieve snagged lures or track our braid through the coral and we loose some monster GTs that track and smash our poppers all in plain sight, 130lb is not enough.



We land a more GT's over the next 2 days, but can't crack the 40 keggers we are seeing and losing. Lure losses are adding up, but all we do is smile, hold our backs and massage aching arms.





**Mitch's 27kg fish**

We stop taking pictures of most fish as the less time we handled them the better. Etienne and a few locals are tagging these fish with help from the New Cal Fisheries, so it will be interesting to see if any returns show up in the future. We measure, weigh in a sling, tag and release. No fish is laid on a bare deck; we have padded mats and wet towels ready for each fish. A lot of emphasis is placed on respecting the fish we catch, look after them and return them to the water as quick as possible. Barbless hooks are mandatory. Mitch finishes up with a PB of 36kg and sets a new benchmark.



**Mitch and Frankie with a 36kg fish, check the water and coral country out!**

Next stop is just west of Bourail, a place called La Roche Percee and we stay at Nekweta Surf Camp with our hosts Manu and Stephanie. We loose no time fishing or traveling 70km to our next camp; we do it after fishing and arrive just after dark. The yellowfin steaks and passion fruit sauce are served up minutes after we arrive and I discover a new vice, Desperados, a local premixed French beer with shot of tequila infused into it. Firewater it is renamed. "Why do I have a 8000 Pacific Franc bar bill Manu" I ask, "Firewater" he says and I just nod, geez they tasted good! Nekweta Surf Camp is an amazing, private and at the same time inviting camp. We stay in the traditional Melanesian hut and we get ready to fish in Manu's boat for the next 2 days, a 7.5m banana boat with a new 175hp Suzuki 4 stroke on the back.



We start fishing new grounds, heading north into more remote country.....we land fish, 20, 25, 28kg, a mile of 16 – 20kg fish as well, but cannot stop the big fish. Marinos loses a fish around 40kg when his 200lb leader breaks into the fight, I loose a 40kg fish when my knots pull on the 200lb leader, we get snagged by big fish, double hookups and 4 – 5 GT's ambushing lures, our eyes hang out of our heads, our lure looses now total \$1000, Mitch snaps his \$1400 rod, Marinos breaks the tip of a \$1000 rod and its looking like a bad first day up north. We all just mumble and sit numb, what a TOP day, Desperados time!



The GTs love the shallow, bommie studded areas, get one away from the bommie's and he is yours. More diving happens to dig up buried lures. Marinos and I hook up together in rough country, I am now fishing 170lb on the Mafia and Mitch has borrowed my Fisherman since snapping his. I cringe whenever he hooks up, my orange monster is a collector's item and I want it back, 170lb hurts. I want to go back to 130lb.....

Marinos has a 40 kegger on going one way, I have a fish bigger pulling 170lb off my reel heading the other way, the poor skipper does not know what to do. We loose both. To give you an idea of the power of 170lb and the wicked rod, a 25kg GT pulls no line off the Stella, I just crank them to the boat! When they take line, we know they are big fish.

Now we start losing Coral Trout as well, fish over 15kg and in excess of 25kg start hitting the poppers. This one weighed 18kg and was manageable.



We break for lunch, and then back to war.



By now the boys are stirring me, they have joined the 30kg plus club and my 10 fish don't count. I text my voodoo man in Australia and he weaves his magic. Out from behind a bommie a small emperor appears to look at my popper chugging past, a GT explodes eating the emperor and eating my popper at the same time. ½ an emperor floats past as the 170lb sings and we start the chase to keep the GT out of the bommie's. I am now using 300lb leaders so I am in with a chance. The rest is history, 40 – 41kg on the scales, tagged and returned. A great effort by all, and I think I have the last laugh and finally have these GT's wired. Use 170lb main line 300lb leaders, 120kg of ballast and a rod that doesn't bend.

The lure is destined to go on the wall, "Gold finger" a 250gram red/gold Hammerhead from Japan, rare as hens teeth, however next fish is bigger and takes Gold finger home.....they have the last laugh!





**The last shot of Goldfinger ever taken...**

By our standards it's hard to imagine bigger fish charging and hitting the poppers, but its mind blowing to see. It happens in slow motion. Landing them is a bigger problem.

On the last day we raise 20 fish, loose a few, land a few and have the pleasure of reaching the limits of our travels in a place Manu calls the GT freeway, The GTs come in from the channel and work there way to the mangroves and hunt in the dirty water. Manu begs us to cast, he guarantees us more GT's. By now Marinos and I have retired, no more casts from us, we just sit back and smile. Etienne has been invited to cast and he and Mitch raise a pack of crazy GTs, 6 fish chase the lure, he pulls hook 3 times and hooks up again straight away, they are meters from the boat going crazy, we all laugh our heads off. This is about as far north as we go, we head back in 60cm of water for 30 km at 40 knots, exhilarating stuff.

Next November we are coming back and basing ourselves at another beach camp Manu owns, 5 minutes from this GT Freeway, and going further north into uncharted waters.....now I am looking for a 250lb rod and a new back.

Our hosts were all magnificent, the food was great, the local knowledge and traditions the guys shared were a bonus as well, the trip was about as well planned as a grumpy Aussie could want. No complaints from anyone, only smiles.

Finally many thanks to the boys at Ocean Blue Fishing Adventures (David, Anthony and Rowan), Quano and Nkweta Surf Camps. Many thanks also to Etienne our super guide and our skippers and crew Manu and Frankie. Also a big thank you to Stephanie our hostess at Nkweta, who one

night cooked a steak for Mitch that needed its own plate, it did not fit on the same plate as his side dishes of salad and pumpkin.



Manu and Etienne



Time to leave a place I dubbed "King Kong Island" since it rained and blew almost everyday and the hills were shrouded in cloud - what a beautiful place.