



ET'S Escapades

Andrew Ettingshausen

S mouldering volcanoes, untouched waterways, adrenalin-charged fish and generous people who treat you like a king. How can you go wrong? I've decided to kick off this first write-up for Niugini Blue with a few tales about my most exotic escape – the island of New Britain, right here in Papua New Guinea.

From the moment we flew in over the rim of an active volcano, I knew this was no ordinary fishing adventure. After clearing customs, I emerged from the airport and was instantly mobbed by autograph hunters. Not fishos - but passionate rugby league fans who still remember me from my footy days with the Cronulla Sharks, Blues and Kangaroos.

It's great to see how rampant the rugby league fans are in this remote pocket of wilderness. Would you believe we even met one young bloke named "ET", after yours truly? Mind you, there were some mini Mal Meningas, and pre-pubescent Wallie Lewises running around too. I guess the next generation will be filled with baby Joeys and little Lockyers.

Leaving Port Moresby, we flew to West New Britain Province and based

ourselves at Baia Sportfishing Lodge in Open Bay. I'd brought along a big troupe of fishing mates, including my little brother, Mick, and Aussie rock singer, Jon Stevens. We were chasing PNG's dream double - the Black Bass and Spot-tail Bass.

Riccard Reimann set up Baia Sport Fishing Lodge a couple of years ago to help international fishos access these amazing waterways, and I tell you, it was the most luxurious fishing camp I'd ever stayed in. Absolutely five stars all the way. The lodge sat right next to the tiny village of Baia, which only has a population of about 150 people.

This was an incredibly untamed part of Papua New Guinea, and the waterways there in the west remained pretty much unspoilt. Most of the time the only people lucky enough to fish these waters were the local families who relied on the rivers for survival. I felt pretty privileged just to be there.

There are six different river systems within half an hour of the lodge, so during our visit we were pretty spoilt for choice.

Once we hit the water, the journey itself was just breathtaking. Riccard uses custom-built 6.7m fibre-glass centre console sport-fishing boats - a dream to





fish in upriver or offshore. From these boats, Mt Uluvun loomed above us, a smouldering volcano that was well and truly active. The last minor eruption was in 1984, but it was rated as one of the most dangerous volcanoes on the planet. And we were staying right below it. Talk about a fishing hotspot!

We travelled into the eastern part of New Britain to the Torio River, one of the most productive in the region.

The natural beauty of these river systems was just astounding. The birdlife was so noisy that we could hardly hear ourselves speak, lush palm and fern forests crowded the banks to create an impenetrable wall of green, and there were butterflies as big as your hand.

By this stage, I was hoping the fish life would be just as abundant. Black and Spot-tailed Bass are unique to Papua New Guinea, and they are awesome predators that just crash-tackle your lures. We decided to cast surface poppers right into the banks and snags and hope for a few strikes.

We soon realised, that was being a bit pessimistic!

The boys hooked up all over the place to beautiful big Black Bass and some healthy spotties. These species are related to the Mangrove Jack and Fingermark, so as you can imagine, they fight like terriers.

I have fished with Riccard on a couple of trips now and the last trip saw me battle a spot-tail of 18 kilos to the boat. On this trip, I was hoping for another round with a monster like that one, but the big ones eluded me and my good friend John Dunphy, who runs Shimano in Australia, managed our biggest of around 30 pounds.

PNG's big bad bass are great to



battle, but on this trip we also wanted to test the blue water scene. As we made our way along the coast, we came across a school of feeding Yellowfin Tuna. Fish in the 30 to 50 kilo mark were crashing baitfish as we cruised in to have a cast.

My large Halco Roosta Popper was thrown through the air by a big fish

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that didn't quite hook-up on my first retrieve. My heart was heading into overdrive as my second cast saw the popper almost make it back to the boat before an airborne 'fin crashed down to devour it only metres away.

It was a tough fight, but after several powerful dives and the famous tuna explosive runs, we brought her in and estimated it at around 30 odd kilos. It was my first 'popper-caught' Yellowfin and a great way to start our blue water adventure. Later we headed out to the reefs where we caught Red Bass, Giant Trevally and Bluefin Trevally on surface lures, all of which fought hard.

I have already locked in my next escape to PNG to track down the famous Dogtooth Tuna, and I can't wait to tell you all about it! ■

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Catch 'Escape with ET', Saturday afternoons on EMTV.

Clockwise from below left: John Dunphy and his 30lb Spot-tail. ET with a Giant Trevally. Nice Yellowfin, caught on a popper! ET with Baia Resort owner, Riccard Reimann.