

# OUTFITTER *STRATHBURN*

Staffer Tony Pizzata checks out a new Cape York outfitter and comes away most impressed.

This close-up of a monster hairy boar shows what the hunter can expect at Strathburn.



# PROFILE

# SAFARIS

**“Mick and I were almost screaming with excitement.”**

**IT HAD BEEN** several years since I'd last visited Cape York in Queensland's North. In fact, the last property I had visited with good pig numbers had been sold just after that last trip and quite frankly, I'd lost interest, thinking I'd never ever find another hunting block to replace it. But thankfully, that was about to change. As most who have hunted there will know, Cape York is indeed one of Australia's last frontiers and is renowned for its abundance of wildlife, however, not every property from the Gulf to Cape York guarantees good pig numbers. Sure, there's no shortage of good boars up there, but getting onto a property that can consistently satisfy its clients/hunters is no easy task.

Recently I had the pleasure of visiting Strathburn Station, a 250,000-hectare (600,000 acre) cattle property located approximately 550 kilometres north-west of Cairns. Strathburn is in the process of developing a first-class hunting operation, reopening a safari business that ran in previous years for both rifle and bow hunters. Minimal hunting pressure over the past 2-3 years as ownership of the property and cattle herd changed hands, means there are plenty of pigs about. Alisdair Robertson - born and bred in the bush - lives on the property and manages the safari operation, while another full time manager handles the beef side of things. Now back in business, Strathburn



Safaris offers a fully guided experience for those who would like to sample arguably some of the best pig hunting Australia has to offer. Eager to give it a go, I made plans to head up in mid August with my nephew Mick who not only enjoys a bit of trophy hunting himself, but doubles as my camera man and would help me film the whole event for an up and coming DVD.

**Author's 7mm Rem Mag Blaser easily accounted for this top trophy tusker.**



**TOP:** A panorama to make any red-blooded pig hunter's heart race.

**ABOVE:** Author's nephew Mick had great results on many boars with his Blaser, again in 7mm.

After arriving at Cairns Airport, Mick and I picked up our pre-arranged hire vehicle, a dual cab Hilux and began our journey North. Our first stop was Mareeba, about 40 minutes over the range from Cairns and then we drove directly to Musgrave, about 4 hours further North. After a feed and a quick call to our host Alisdair to let him know we were almost there, we continued our final leg of the journey to Strathburn Station, some 2 hours distant. Although the Musgrave Roadhouse is only 68 kilometres to the entrance to Strathburn, their driveway is about 53 kilometres long and hence takes the extra time. For those who prefer to fly from Cairns, Strathburn Station has its own 800 metre, all-weather airstrip alongside the homestead and the mail plane can drop you off and pick up every Thursday, however, we much preferred to enjoy the sights by road. Arriving at the homestead to be greeted by Alasdair, we discussed plans for the following morning's hunt and called it a day.

At 5.30am all hands were back on deck and after a good breakfast, we loaded the vehicle with all we'd need for a

days hunting. The new Land Cruiser "Troopie" was equipped to seat four passengers with plenty of room for everything bar-the-kitchen-sink, so there was no compromise in comfort or space. An esky full of sandwiches, plenty of cold water to battle the heat, knives and a hack saw to bring home the tusks and even a billy for a hot brew at smoko time, were packed for a comfortable and hopefully rewarding day out.

Leaving the house paddock, our first stop was no more than ten minutes down the track, as Alisdair continued to explain the game plan for our first walk. The plan was to drive to each water hole, lagoon or dam and pull up a half kilometre or so distant, then proceed to walk in, with the wind in our favour and hopefully snare an unsuspecting pig or two. Hopping out as quietly as possible, Alisdair checked the breeze with his powder puffer to ensure our approach was with the wind in our favour and we were soon on our way. Glassing at regular intervals, it didn't take long to spot them. There before us lay a small mob of pigs with one large bodied

fellow out in the lagoon seemingly headless. "He's feeding on bulbs and lilies", was Al's explanation, as the big old boar lifted his head for some air. At this point Mick and I were almost screaming with excitement. The rest of the mob was rooting around the edges in the soft earth, however, the old warrior was seemingly away on his own filling his belly with bulbs while cooling off in the water. Quickly setting the camera up, I proceeded to capture the whole event on film while Mick chambered a 7mm Rem. Mag. into his Blaser R93. Sleeping pills were a 162-grain spire point and definitely good medicine for big old boars like this fellow. Slowly, the boar fed his way back into the edge of the lagoon and it wasn't until then we really saw how big a bodied pig this fellow was. Although the tusk were quite visible even while he was in the water, I'd expected a 60 or 70 kg pig, however this guy would tip the scales at around 90kg. As the pig stepped out of the water, Michael dispatched him in his tracks with an instant one shot kill. As the rest of the mob scattered, all three of us rushed over for a look. The boar had nice tusks and was in



**TOP: Another one bites the dust.**

**ABOVE: The house provided comfortable basic accommodation for hot, tired hunters.**

fine condition and after many photos, Al removed the jaw and it was back to the vehicle and off to the next water hole. Alisdair is a butcher by trade and could certainly wield a knife. In fact the jaw was out in less time than it took us to pack the camera away and grab our daypacks. Walking back to the vehicle Alisdair explained, he'd spent the last ten days on horseback, checking out the many water holes through out many areas of the property and pretty well knew what pigs were where. He said his intentions were to continue to do this through out the hunting season in an effort to take as much guesswork out of the hunt as possible, before clients arrived. This doesn't guarantee however they will be there every time you visit the area, but does give an indication of what frequents the area. Don't forget, many of these water holes are many miles apart, so the pigs are restricted to that area until the

## “Pigs were encountered at nearly every water hole.”

wet season comes and widespread rains give them the opportunity to move to a different area or spread out. This is why I prefer to hunt the hotter months of the season. Sure it may be a little more uncomfortable for those who don't like the heat, but it certainly congregates the pigs around water. For the benefit of those who don't know, pigs don't have sweat glands and particularly in very hot weather, have to water or wallow several times a day to keep their body temperatures down.

To cut a long story short, pigs were encountered at nearly every water hole we visited and by lunch time both Mick and I had secured a couple of boars each. Alisdair asked if we were ready for a bit of lunch and offered to drive to an open area where a small dam he had in mind could be watched from a distance with our binoculars while having a sandwich. Doing just that, we soon had lunch out of the way and were ready to go again, although no pigs had appeared on the dam. With all packed away, Mick and I hopped into the vehicle, while Al said he'd duck behind a tree, for a moment. Returning quite flustered, he asked if one of us would like to step about 20 meters away from the vehicle and dispatch a large boar that was bedded not thirty meters from where we laughed and joked while having lunch. Grabbing the gun and camera we snuck in and there he was, fast asleep under the shade of a scrubby



**Outfitter Alisdair Robertson got the boys into areas with many big boars.**

bush. Setting up, Mick offered me the shot to which I accepted and as the boar lifted his head I put him back to sleep with a 162 grain Hornady spire point. Al motioned to Mick to grab the gun and follow him and sure enough another boar had began his sneaky exit not ten or fifteen meters away, he too was obviously bedded nearby. Mick quickly shouldered the Blaser and the second boar was also dispatched. We couldn't believe our luck, nor the fact we'd made so much noise- so close and neither of the old boars had heard us.

After a few other short walks that afternoon and lots of pigs encountered, we managed another good tusky boar for the day. Although we were seeing lots of pigs, I believe it's important to pass up the younger ones even if they are boars and only take the tusky ones. This in my books is good management ensuring a long-term plan for future hunts. Returning that evening right on dark, a welcome shower, change of clothing and hot meal saw us all ready for an early night. The following three days were of similar occurrence with many pigs encountered and an average of four or five good boars taken per day. In many cases there were multiple boars on the one lagoon or water hole however, as we were carrying only one firearm, just one boar was being dispatched in most cases, as Mick and I had agreed to share filming the trip on video. The terrain on Strathburn Station varied from area to area. We were hunting around mid August, when most of the lagoons and water holes feature an abundance of flowering water lilies and plant life. This in

turn made the surrounds quite picturesque and an absolute oasis for other wildlife which included, wild brumbies, dingoes, scrub bulls and a huge assortment of bird life including the Jabiru, Brolga and more than 134 other recorded sighting of different bird life. Some of these water holes also contain barramundi and Saratoga for those who would prefer to break up the hunting with a spot of fishing. But beware of those species a bit more dangerous such as fresh and saltwater crocodiles and several species of snakes, spiders and lizards.

Strathburn station from what I experienced offers hunters the opportunity to enjoy a great hunting holiday with plenty of tusky boars for trophy hunters. Mick and I accounted for a total of 19 good boars for our four day stay. In addition to rifle shooters, bow hunters are also welcome on Strathburn Station. Alisdair tells me specific bow hunting areas and the odd bait sites can be arranged for those who wish to use a bow. I certainly intend on returning to Strathburn in the very near future and from what I experience, would recommend the hunt as one of the best pig hunting destinations I have had the pleasure of visiting to date. Hunts at Strathburn typically span Thursday to Thursday, in sync with the weekly mail plain. Rates include all meals and accommodation at one of the two homesteads, as well as a full time guide and vehicle. There is a daily "bag limit" but no trophy fees. **For further details see [www.strathburncattlestation.com.au](http://www.strathburncattlestation.com.au) or phone 0414 703 471. ■**