

The Barwon



Tony Pizzata brings his hunting crew on to a property fed by a reliable water supply.

Dave and Vicky run a modest 30,000 acre property just west of Walgett, in northern New South Wales, producing cotton and sorghum. A portion of the area consists of dry land cultivation and some irrigated fields, bordered by a 20km stretch of the Barwon River. The balance is bushland and home to an abundance of native wildlife, feral pigs and

the odd pocket of wild goats.

The drought however, had taken its toll the last two seasons and although the Barwon was flowing, there was insufficient water to irrigate, nor did their other paddocks warrant re cultivating due to a lack of rain.

In good times, when the crops were flourishing, a trip to the Barwon could produce as many as 50 or 60 pigs over a weekend.

Man on bikes



MAIN PIC: Big properties require high mobility help to scope out resident pig strongholds.

BELOW: A big trophy boar springs from his bed after being disturbed by the quads.





The author with his top boar taken dismantled off the quad.

Speaking to Dave at length prior to booking, he mentioned the wildlife had thinned out considerably due to the conditions, but would welcome us if we still wanted to go. Despite all this, I booked a three-day hunt with a couple of mates based on several factors. The first was a constant flow of water through the property, that many other properties in the area didn't have. Secondly, Dave doesn't run any livestock, so the wildlife had no competition at all for what feed there was and last but not least, I needed a break!

Arriving at the property in the early hours of the morning we unloaded our gear and after a quick brew, decided to get a couple of hours sleep before daybreak. The plan was to get up a half-hour before sun up, have a morning hunt and return for breakfast. I'd hunted here before and knew most of the surrounding paddocks and borders. It's not a hard property to hunt as good tracks border most of the fields and the natural bushland forms highways for the wildlife from one cultivation to the next. If the crops were in, simply patrolling the borders of each sewn field would surely produce the goods, but in these conditions, with little or no crop on the ground, a change in strategy was required.

We decided to hunt the bush and only the bush. By "bush" I mean lightly timbered areas with the odd patch of scrub and lignum scattered about. This was where the pigs if any, would be, as the fields were bare. Knowing the pigs had probably watered



LEFT: A view of the accommodation quarters on the property.

RIGHT: A big, tough and mature boar sporting good ivory and a thick covering of encrusted mud in the shoulder region.

during the night, we would leave the river for after lunch.

At about 7am, Clint kicked the Hilux into gear and drove off towards the back paddock, with Frank and I manning a quad bike each. Nearing the first bushline we spread out, forming a line about 100m apart and slowly proceeded forward. Within a couple of hundred metres of our start point Frank's voice came over the two-way. "Pigs," he shouted, as he veered out to his left. With this declaration, the revs of all three vehicles rose dramatically causing a huge cloud of dust, as we converged on the mob like a swarm of bees. There was only four in the mob, a young boar and three sows. The dogs jumped from the vehicle and gave chase to the boar, who had now broken away from the other pigs. Knowing he was as good as captured, Frank and I continued ahead for the rest of the mob and after a chase that lasted close on 400m, we both pulled up, taking a pig each with our rifles.

As all went silent again, we could hear squealing in the distance behind us. By the time Frank and I had each loaded our pigs on the quads, we could see the truck heading our way, with not one but two pigs hanging from the side. As the boys pulled up beside us, Clint proceeded to tell us how they had just secured the boar when the dogs let go and gave chase to another. The second pig they got was a large ginger sow and not one of the pigs we'd originally spotted.



A little further on, yet another mob was encountered and again we worked as a team to bring down another three pigs. Our tally was now seven for less than an hour's hunting and with spirits high we loaded our catch and proceeded further afield.

The bush in this neck of the woods, became quite thick with lignum and low-lying scrub. I knew this was one of the best paddocks on this side of the road for cover and radioed the rest of the team to stay within sight of each other, as pigs were a given in this paddock. The first half kilometre or so was only lightly timbered but gradually materialised into a thick maze of lignum, scrub and fallen trees. Wanting to go through it with my quad to cover all the likely bedding spots, I circled round for a short distance and out of sight

from the rest of the team. It was then that it had to happen. Two enormous boars, one black and one grey, jumped from their beds. What makes matters worse is the fact they ran away from where the other vehicles were, leaving both for me to pursue. Instantly, I squeezed the talk button on the compact UHF and shouted the simple message "Pigs!" to bring the boys over. Dropping the UHF back into the saddlebags of the Polaris, I gave chase and the bike full throttle, almost lifting both front wheels off the ground. Weaving around stumps and ploughing through small patches of scrub and lignum, I caught up with both pigs no more than 20m in front of me. I could see both boars lunging forward at a rate of knots and travelling at full stride. Both were at least 90kg on the hoof and just as I



The team with a swag of pigs back at camp.

contemplated pulling up for a shot, Murphy's law decided to come in to play when the pigs split up and headed in separate directions. "Get over here," I screamed to the boys on the radio in frustration. A quick decision urged me to follow the black boar, as I could see plenty of tusk protruding from the jaw. The grey one may have sported good tusks also, but due to his light grey coat and muzzle, the tusks could have been hidden from view.

Cutting away from the grey pig I gained ground on the black boar. I remember thinking to myself, "All I need now is to hit a fenceline and loose this one". I could see a reasonable clearing ahead and anticipated taking a shot there if the pig stayed on the course he was heading. Giving the quad a little more throttle, I got to within 8 or 10m of the pig and came to an abrupt halt, drawing my .270 as I dismounted. As I dropped to one knee and lifted the rifle, the boar had now covered another 30 or so meters, putting him a good 40m ahead. Following him in the scope I waited for him to clear a bush and then gently squeezed the trigger. The 130gn Hornady hit the boar solidly, causing a cloud of dust and mud to explode from his shoulder armour. This caused the boar to slow down to a trot, but hadn't knocked him down. I remember watching him for what seemed an eternity, waiting for him to collapse, but the pig kept on trotting away. Mounting up again, I chased for a second time and caught up to within a few meters, when the pig stopped and faced me. Dropping his head down as if to smell the earth, I knew he was preparing to charge what he couldn't get away from. As I braked to a complete halt, again I drew the .270 and finished the big brute off before he had time to take a step forward. The whole event had taken place in a matter of minutes, but had pumped my adrenaline to the maximum level.

Dropping my rifle back into its scabbard, I signalled the boys and they eventually found me. A close look at the boar revealed about 9cm of tusk protruding from the jaw, with very heavy bases.

After lots of photos and some video, we loaded the boar on top of the dog crate to ensure the tusks and cape weren't damaged in transit. The decision was made to scout the remainder of the paddock thoroughly, in case the grey boar had decided to hold up somewhere, but a thorough search revealed no sign of it.

With eight pigs on board in less than 90 minutes we decided to head back for breakfast. Reaching a lightly timbered paddock about 2km from camp, we decided to split up and head back through it in different directions, eventually meeting at the last gate to home. A few minutes later, Frank had obviously connected, as several shots were heard ringing out through the scrub. Looking in the direction of where the shots came from, I suddenly saw a mob of about eight or nine pigs heading along a fenceline. Immediately I radioed Clint, who was just ahead of me. He'd seen them as well.

Quad bikes are a valuable asset when hunting large expanses such as these, particularly in flat, open country. Swinging in towards the mob, I quickly gained ground and in no time had lined up the first pig. To cut a long story short, I managed three pigs from four shells in my Winchester Model 70, allowing Clint and my son, Michael, to chase the rest. Shortly after I could hear more squealing in the distance, but decided to sit and wait for their return. Frank turned up within minutes with a young boar onboard his quad and Clint came in with a large spotted sow Michael had secured with the dogs. Loading all the pigs on the 4WD, we counted 13 pigs including my trophy boar.

Heading back to camp, we ran into Dave

the property owner, who was on his way over to ensure we had arrived safely the night before. After catching up, we drove straight to camp for a late but well-earned breakfast. Preparing some lunch and a thermos of coffee to last us till nightfall, we headed for the river. This part of the property can become quite tricky to negotiate by 4WD, as there's lots of fallen timber, with the river banks dropping away rather sharply down to the water.

Splitting up, Frank and I scouted along the top of the banks by quad bike. As we all carried radios, keeping in contact wouldn't be a problem. I was first to spot a mob of pigs and signalled Frank to go round them. The mob headed straight for the cover that surrounded both sides of the riverbank. Through the corner of my eye I could see Frank heading off in a different direction. Unfortunately, the pigs made it to cover and I could go no further. All the commotion flushed a large mob of goats from the scrub, but as there were no big billies among them, I let them go.

Ten minutes passed before I finally made contact with Frank again, who was hot on the heels of two boars, but they too had made their escape, crossing the river and into thick scrub on the other side before he could take a shot. The boys in the Hilux, however, had also stumbled onto a mob and managed to secure another two pigs.

By early afternoon we decided to have lunch down by the river and do a little fishing. This part of the Barwon offers good fishing for a host of freshwater species including Murray cod and yellow belly. Not being real fishermen, Michael and I only managed a couple of carp, but they were fun to catch. An hour or so before dark, we knew the pigs would be on the move again and decided to hunt our way back to camp. Clint managed to catch up with a nice boar, while Frank, Michael and I accounted for four more pigs between us before dark.

Over the following two days we managed to shoot another 20 or so pigs, bringing the total to around 40 for the three days. It was surely our best tally for this property to date.

Dave and Vicky of Big Wave Hunting allow hunters on at any time of the year to help keep pig numbers down, particularly during crop season when they become a real menace. Walgett is an 8-9 hour drive from Sydney, with bitumen road access to the property. Camp consists of separate shearer's quarters, or a separate bungalow Dave has just upgraded as a family sleeping quarters. There is also a large separate eat-in kitchen with fridge and freezer for the storage of perishables or in our case, one large trophy boar head. Electricity and hot water is a welcome addition. A gas barbecue is also in camp, with an open fire area outside to set the mood at night. You will need however, to take your own cutlery and cooking utensils. ●

For further details, contact Dave between 6am and 6pm on 0428 281 092 or (02) 6828 1092.