

## Woodsie

A story by Alan Knight

Back in '83, Woodsie and me found ourselves washed up in the Northern Territory, working for ABC outback Radio. We had spent an afternoon drinking rum in what passed for a beer garden in a hotel at Pine Creek, a hot and busted gold mining town where the Kakadu Highway peels off from the Stuart heading south to Katherine.

For some reason I still can't remember or understand, we decided to head back to Darwin, via the very long route through the back door to Kakadu National Park. So we piled into my old blue Citroen Club station wagon and headed northeast though the red dust and gathering dusk.

My map told me we crossed three creeks on the way. What it didn't say was that the three creeks had no bridges.

The first creek was easy. I pumped up the hydraulics on the Citroen and plunged on through.

The second was not so easy. It was twice as wide and it was getting dark. We were going fine until the engine and then the car flooded. The cassette player fused out, silencing Jethro Tull in mid Aqualung. My camera bag was floating in the back.

Woodsie had to get out and push. I got the engine going again. The wheels spun, covering him with mud, but he put his shoulder into it and we got out.

"What a bastard," he said "and there's one more creek to go!"

"Indeed", I said, "but that's not the bad bit. The bad bit is that we are now in Kakadu National Park, home to giant, flesh eating, saltwater crocodiles."

"The really bad bit is that its now quite dark, and you are going to have to wade across ahead to see whether there are any deep bits."

I can't say Woodsie was very keen to do this. But we got to the creek and he manfully jumped out. I can see him now in the headlights, tip toeing through the knee deep water, sweeping the way ahead with a dead sapling he had found on the bank. He was about three quarters the way across and going quite well, until a large fish, a Barramundi I think, jumped out of the water behind his back and slapped loudly back into the stream behind him.

I confess that to this day, I have never seen a big man move so fast. I swear he walked on that creek water and was on the other bank in a flash.

I revved up the car and followed him through.

By the time we arrived at the Kakadu motel, the moon was up. Our sporty Hawaiian shirts, shorts and Dunlop sandals were covered in mud. We must have both been still reeking of rum. Woodsie was also a tad wild eyed.

The woman at the motel desk was a typical Territory beauty of the time. She was also wearing shorts; and a singlet, which nicely complimented her shaved head, tattoos and boots. I recall one of her front teeth was missing.

She wouldn't give us a room. We were too dirty, she said. She let us have a tent instead.

"You were bloody lucky to get through that last creek in the dark," she said.

"I know," I said, "You couldn't tell where the deep bits were!"

"No," she said, "for the last week or so, there's been a big three-metre crock hanging around the crossing."

"We've been trying to trap him, But he's too smart!"