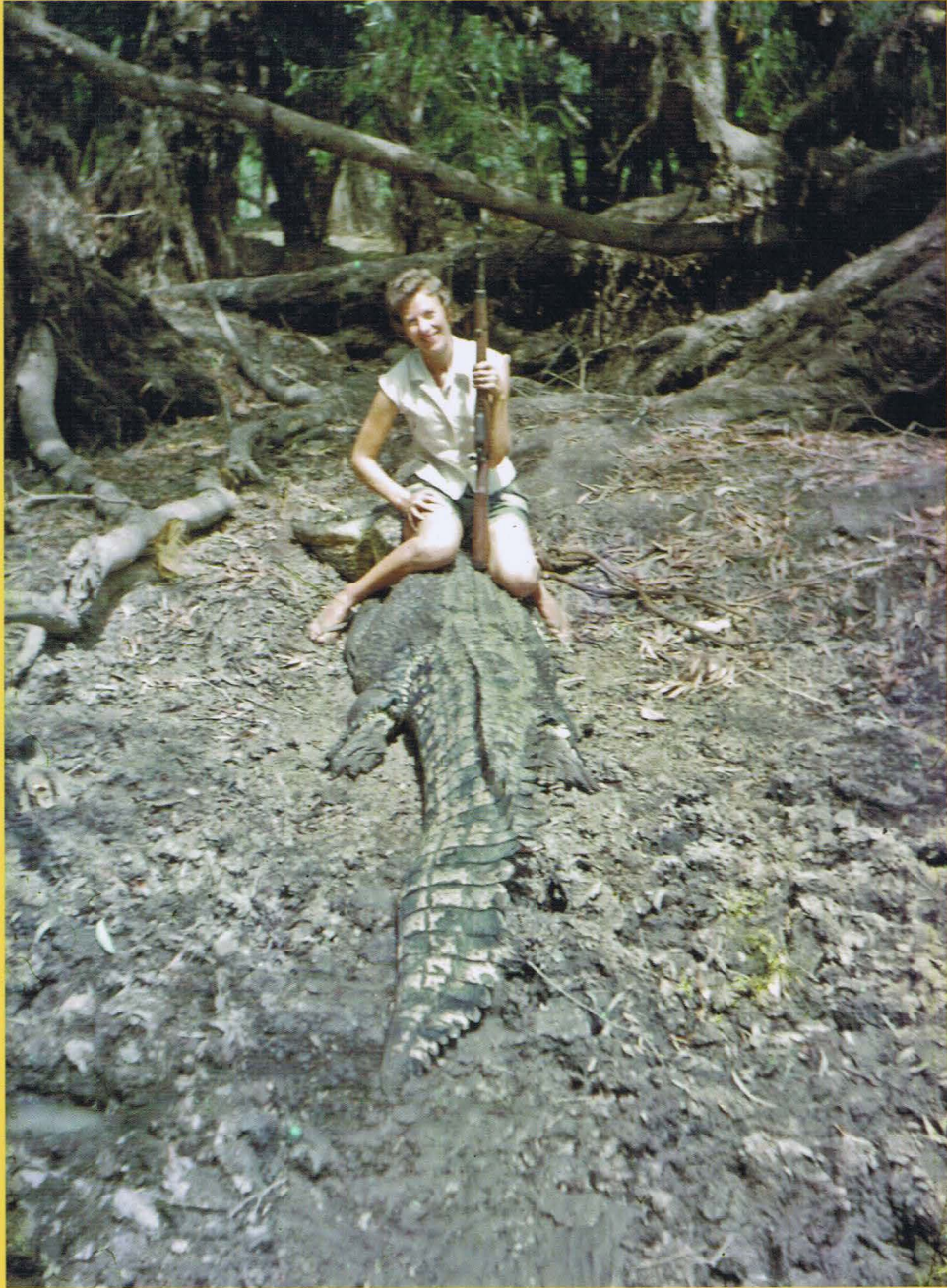


An English Rose in Kakadu

The autobiography of Judy Opitz



Her life journey from English manor
to Northern Territory frontier

In 1960 June Rowley visited Allan Stewart's remote Nourlangie Safari Camp, where buffalo and crocodiles were hunted. Enchanted by the scenery, and meeting Tom Opitz, who called her "Judy," she stayed and worked there two years. In 1964 Judy and Tom married and set up their own Trading Post in the region, at a place they named Cooinda, on the remote Jim Jim Creek crossing on a bush track in Western Arnhem Land.

Each Wet Season saw the closure of the track due to annual flooding, so in 1968, they expanded their services with a rudimentary motel built on higher ground six kilometres away, close to Yellow Waters billabong. Today, the Cooinda Motel is an integral part of many visitors' stay in what is now Kakadu National Park.

This is the autobiography of Judy Opitz, born June Rowley in 1924 in England, who worked with World War Two pilots during the 1940s, acted on stage in the 1950s, travelled to Turkey and Persia (now Iran) in 1957, migrated to Australia in 1958, and later fell in love with the remoteness of the Kakadu Region, living there fifteen years. In later life, Judy gained a degree at 72 years and a doctorate at 84 years old from Charles Darwin University.



Receiving her
Doctorate at
the Darwin
Convention
Centre, aged 84.
2008

ISBN 978-0-9775035-5-1



An English Rose in Kakadu

Judy Opitz



*Judy Opitz (born June Rowley) the photographer,
c. 1950.*

Edited and published by David M. Welch 2009



Contents

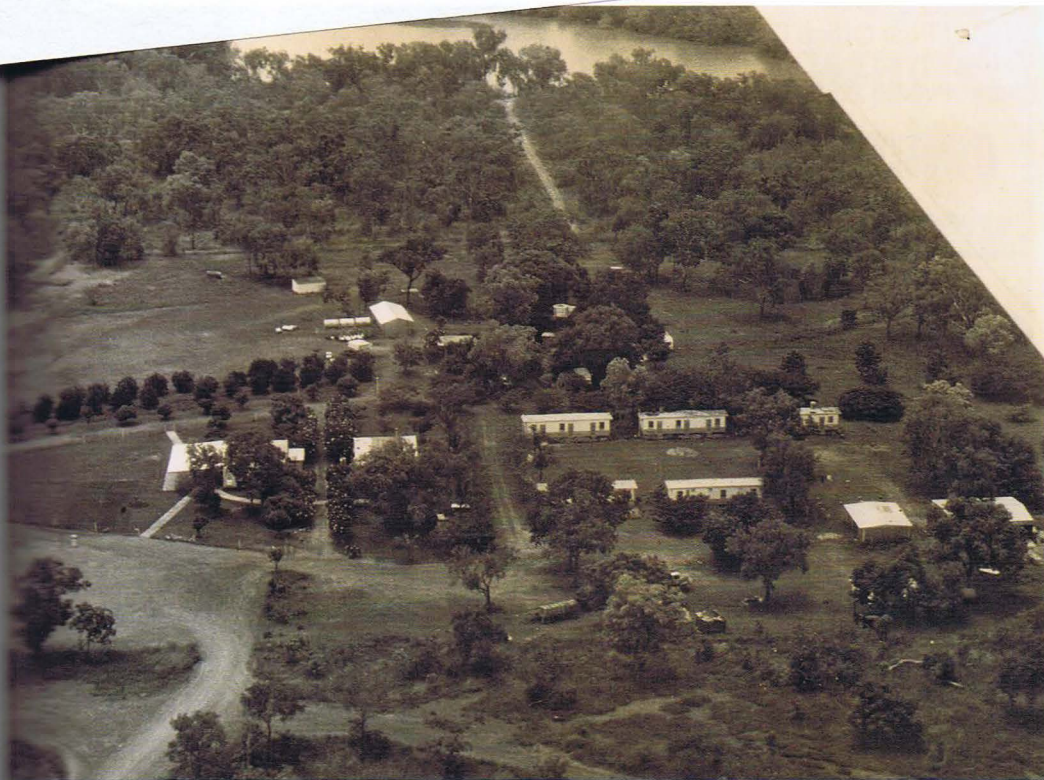
<i>1960s Mud Map of the Jim Jim area</i>		vi
<i>Introduction – Peter Forrest</i>		vii
 <i>Part One – Towards a Dream</i>		
One	The Journey to Kakadu Begins	1
Two	On Safari in Western Arnhem Land	13
Three	Towards a Yellow Waters Dream	45
Four	Setting up Shop at Cooinda	59
Five	In the Motel Game – Jim Jim Motel	79
 <i>Part Two – Pommie Beginnings</i>		
Six	Birthtime for Bonzo – London	99
Seven	The Formative Years in England	104
Eight	WAAFLing on – Wartime Service with Mosquito Pathfinders	112
Nine	Civvy Street and Stage Life	127
Ten	Bus Ride to India	148
Eleven	Through Turkey	161
Twelve	Through Persia	171
Thirteen	Through Pakistan to India	184
 <i>Part Three – Back to the Bush</i>		
Fourteen	A Little Reminiscing	197
Fifteen	Where Do We Go from Here?	204
Sixteen	End of the Fairy Story – Tom's Death	218
Seventeen	Life Begins Again	235
Eighteen	Uni. Student – Studying the Aboriginal Past	245
Nineteen	Post Grad. Student and Whither Away? – To the Stars!	252
<i>Acknowledgments</i>		263



A horseman visits our store.

East Alligator River and of her Land Rover plunging down the sandy embankment into the incoming tidal bore. The vehicle had to be winched across by block and tackle and a great deal of time spent thereafter trying to jumpstart the vehicle. She said it never seemed to be the same after its dunking in the salty river. Carmel included such light-hearted tales in her otherwise more serious book *Digging for Darkness*.

I was, of course, totally captivated by her chosen profession. For two pence I would have volunteered to work on her excavations in any lowly capacity if I could have been the slightest use, or, more to the point, if I didn't have a store to run. I'd always had a romantic hankering to do something in archaeology, but without tertiary qualifications I'd hardly stand a chance in gaining entry to such a profession. All I really knew about archaeology was along the classic lines of Schliemann's discovery of Troy or the Minoan finds of Sir Arthur Evans, or Harold Carter and the Tomb of King Tutankhamun. Listening to Carmel I began to understand that Australia also had a valuable and different kind of archaeology to offer. She told me the prehistory of Australia was just beginning to emerge. Little had previously been known about where the first Australians came from, what they looked like, how they reached Australia, what routes they took once they reached land or what their impact on this huge unpeopled land may have been. A handful of radiocarbon dates suggested that people had come to Australia about 10,000 years ago, but Carmel was curious to learn if this date could be pushed back. By excavating rock shelters in Western Arnhem Land she certainly succeeded. She was to win fame with her discovery of edge ground axes over 20,000 years old. Before her discovery, the technique of edge grinding was a technology which was believed not to have developed until many thousands of years later, when such



Casinda Motel, 1973. The pub demountable is at the left, the kitchen and dining section is left of centre, and the accommodation units are at the right. The track at the top of the photo leads to Home Billabong.

couples who discovered they didn't care for bush life and the rather spartan amenities and left in a hurry, we finally found an ideal pair – or so we thought. They didn't mind roughing it, appeared to be reliable, willing to stay open any hour and, according to reports which filtered back to us, cheerful and helpful with the customers. In spite of this admirable devotion to duty, however, the takings didn't seem consistent with the trade evidently taking place. Yet checks never revealed any discrepancies between takings and stock. And no wonder! Only a negligible amount of our stock was being sold and the clever couple, who no doubt were chortling all the way to the bank at our expense in not realising the possibilities for such duplicity, were bringing in their own stock and selling it through our store. When they were dismissed we decided to close the store and concentrate solely on the motel.

We were also in contact with the relevant Department with regard to the availability of a site on the new road that was now called the Arnhem Highway. We had plans for a Wayside Inn type of business on the area we had already walked over on our Miner's Night the previous year. But it transpired that any lease the Department decided would be granted, had to be put up for auction. When, in October, 1973, we heard on the grapevine that a lease had been granted privately without going up for auction, we wrote with some indignation to Doug Anthony, the leader of the Australian Country