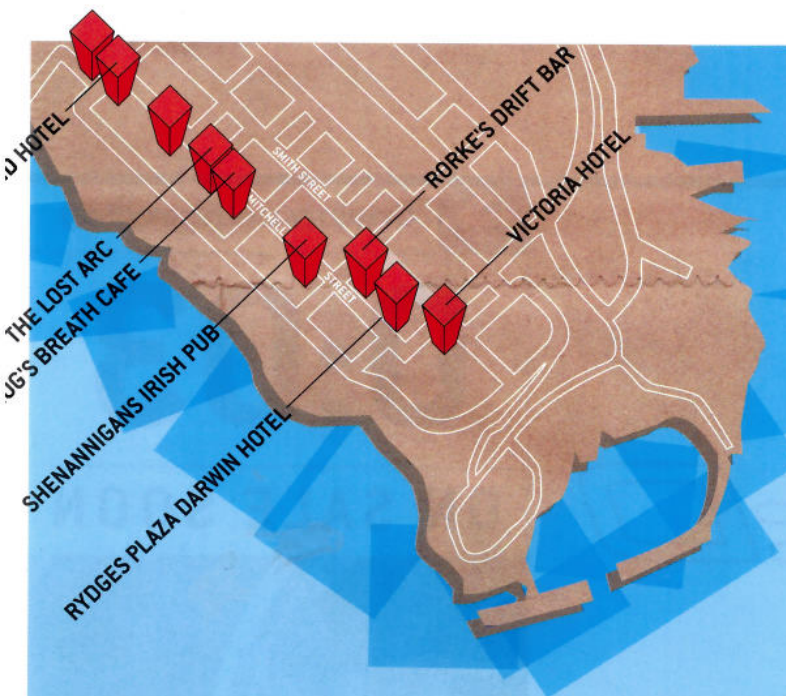


Everyone raced to take the chequered flag



TOP DROP

IVAN SMITH beers up and falls flat in Darwin

Photos > Mick Richards

FROM the air, Darwin looks small and dark, unless you fly in during the day, when it looks small and light. Appearances can be deceiving, but not in this case. Darwin is small and light (or dark), and from ground-level you can see that all the places to drink are conveniently close together. The only confusing issue is that some time during Saturday night, I say the following sentence into my tape recorder: "Over there is a humanumana."

8.40pm

Lizards Outdoor Bar & Grill, Top End Hotel, cnr Daly and Mitchell Sts
LIZARDS has gone heavily for the outback feel, with corrugated iron nailed to the bar, the end of which is made up of gigantic rocks. At the end of the room is a big screen showing rugby union, and a smaller one showing AFL. I ask a big local called John which one he's watching. "Ah, a little bit of both, mate." "Darwin's really relaxed," says his girlfriend Caroline, a Pom. "Everyone's friendly."

There isn't much happening here, though. Just a lot of relaxed, friendly people, either watching two sports at once, or eating large pieces of meat in the dining area.

9pm

Mitchell St
EVEN at 9pm, Darwin is very warm. Mitchell St is filled with chilled-out relaxed couples. The only people who aren't relaxed are the busker, frantically strumming his guitar; and me, worried how "off" this town is going to "go".

I pass the Raffles Bar in the Carlton Hotel, where two people are on a stage, playing to three people at a table.

9.10pm

Hog's Breath Café, 85 Mitchell St
I QUICKLY realise this is a café, not a bar. I leave.

9.11pm

Shenannigans Irish Pub, 69 Mitchell St
UNLIKE most such people with a licence to savage you, the doorman is not fake-friendly: he really is friendly. He is nice enough to tell me to come back in an hour when someone's inside. "Everyone's having dinner at the moment," he says.

9.13pm

Rorke's Drift Bar/Café, 46 Mitchell St
THE big beer garden to the side is full of people... eating dinner. This piece is turning out to be "Going Out For a Nice Meal in Darwin".