

Aboard Sengo

November 2015



Sengo, Pancake Creek

Heading South New Places and Experiences

Because our trip north was 'rushed' in order to get to Airlie Beach for its race week in August we didn't get the chance to stop off at a lot of the islands on the way. We have now had the chance to at least explore a few of them as we head south. The sun is rising earlier in the morning and, surprisingly, I am getting used to early starts.

In the wake of a famous swimmer

What a delightful little anchorage
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An evening challenge

These things are sent to try us
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The Narrows

Taking the opportunity while we can
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Circuit Track



Camouflaged wallaby



Monitor Lizard



Lookout over Western Bay



Looking north over Carlisle Is

Brampton Island

1st November 2015

Growing up I remember the most persistent Queensland holiday ads on television in Melbourne were those of the resorts of the tropics - Hayman, Lindeman, Brampton, and to a lesser extent South Molle and Great Keppel. There were images of palm fringed tropical beaches, bright blue skies and for some, bikini clad young woman, accompanied by their buff, six pack, tanned male partners. You can see I took notice.

Brampton Island resort - once labeled as 'the place to go to do nothing' - like many of the other resorts, has closed down and there is a 'keep out, private property' sign stuck to a post just above the beach. The railway line from the jetty to the resort is distorted, only half its sleepers are on the ground, and it is littered with vegetation; plants growing up between the sleepers and dead trees that have fallen over the tracks. From the beach the resort buildings themselves actually look okay but structurally may be a different matter.

The council has granted approval to redevelop the island resort into a 7 Star exclusive resort for around 30 people, which is a bit different

to the 220-person accommodation that it once was. There is some speculation that 7 Star means total exclusivity and that the development is only meant for the owners and employees of United Petroleum, the company that bought the island resort for 5.9 Million in 2010. We shall have to wait and see. Most of the island is national park however, so yachties will still be able to access the walks.

The 'public' jetty looks a little worse for wear, but serviceable, until you actually try to use it. Its link to the island has been destroyed and the structure stands alone, looking, at low tide, like some giant mechanical centipede.

Waking early we enjoyed the morning chorus (we hadn't heard a morning chorus for some time) before moving the boat a little further in towards shore. When we had anchored the previous day, it was swelly and windy, there were more boats around, we were tired and hungry and we stopped where we weren't going to hit the reef. Because we put a fair bit of chain out we discovered we were, relatively speaking, quite close to the boat behind us.



crView south over Carlisle Is



Railway tracks - jetty to resort



Brampton Island resort

We weren't going to collide; it was just that if he wanted to move it was quite possible we were sitting over his anchor.

After breakfast we headed off to the 'public' jetty', and discovering it wasn't attached to the mainland, looked for Plan B. The 'Beach' next to the jetty is all rock (two other dingies were there and right up at the top of the slope) and we were not going to be able to drag our tinnie up over the rocks. So we reverted to Plan C - carefully motoring over the

reef (it was one hour past low tide so we didn't hit anything) and dragged the tinnie up onto beach below the closed resort - below the high tide mark of course. We walked back along the beach to where we could see the walking track and followed the signs from there.

There is a circuit walking track around Brampton Island (8.4 kilometres) with a few side tracks branching off this; to the jetty; the resort; and a couple of bays. One of the tracks is to the beach at Western Bay and we would have used this had we anchored where we were originally going to. A track also branches off the main circuit to two lookouts below Brampton Peak. The guide book I've got said this was a 3.6km return track - which it is - but it is 3.6km from where it branches off, so by the time we'd walked from our tinnie to the top and back again, we had covered more like 6km. It was a hot, humid day and although the exercise was welcome, and the views pleasant, we may have enjoyed it more in cooler weather.

There are interpretation boards scattered along the track, a couple with general information and a couple for direction. One such board tells you of black flying foxes

possibly sleeping below you down slope. I have seen black flying foxes sleeping in the trees on South Molle Island but there were none to be seen here. Quite clearly they had some sense in this heat, and found a more sheltered spot. According to the board, these bats are the only natural mammals on the island. Therefore, I'd love to know the story of the wallaby we later disturbed further up the track. How did it get here?

For most of the way to the lookouts we were serenaded by the most beautiful bird song, and we were surprised to find the source was a flock of pied currawongs. The heat kept the wildlife count down but we saw a green tree snake (species unknown), a monitor lizard, a few smaller lizards, (including a rainbow skink), two pheasant coucals, pied currawongs (as noted above), rainbow lorikeets and various other birds from a distance. (including Pelicans flying adjacent Pelican Island). We got back to the tinnie just as it started to rain but it had stopped by the time we got back to Sengo - you think it could have waited 10 more minutes!

The highlight of the evening was watching our first dugongs, which seemed to be feeding between us and the shore.

Newry Islands

2nd – 4th November 2015

2nd November 2015. We were contemplating the lack of wind when we were spurred into moving. We were going to move anyway, but the prospect of sailing across to the Newry Island area looked grim with no wind. It was only when another yacht was about to drop his anchor on top of ours that we thought it was time to go. We got his attention before he did so and he waited and anchored where our anchor had been, between what would have been us and another boat. I just don't get some people. There was a large area to anchor in and we were the only two boats left in the area. Some people are compelled, I think, to sit on top of others.

It was easy to put the sails up, with no wind resisting our movements, and the wind speed only threatened to get above 7 knots True toward the end of the day. A distance that would have normally taken us only a couple of hours to sail, took six. But, lack of wind also meant lack of waves and the ride was exceptionally smooth, allowing me to bake a loaf of bread whilst underway; something I am not usually comfortable

doing. The front door was open for the entire trip and Tiger was quite happy sitting on the cushions in the front cockpit. It still would have been somewhat stifling for him however; the wind was coming from behind us.

We arrived at the anchorage on the west side of Outer Newry Island to discover one boat already there; a small fishing boat called Jessie James. Alan Lucas' guide to 'Cruising the Coral Coast' suggests that fisherman often use this anchorage, so we were not too surprised.

The 3rd November 2015 was hot, and very uncomfortable, although a small breeze occasionally graced us with her presence. I found comfort in the front cockpit for most of the day. Andrew was happy in the back cockpit. The fish had been jumping enthusiastically early in the morning and both of us tried our luck with a rod. Neither lure nor chicken produced results (although I admit the chicken was two-day old cooked chicken already rejected by the cats).

This is a gorgeous little location, nestled between Newry Island and Outer Newry Island. The islands lie about 25 nautical miles north of Mackay, and

approximately parallel west from Brampton Island. The few small fishing boats that trolled through in the morning were not distracting.

Too hot to go exploring we spent the day mostly reading, although I did spend some time just sitting on the back step admiring the view. However, there is almost a sense of loss when you look up and discover that 'your' little bay has been occupied by others. Okay, I admit that we weren't the first here; but I was quite happy sharing with just one vessel. Early afternoon saw the arrival of a power catamaran (with associated periphery and a largish looking dingy that looked like it belonged in the Florida swamps – it had a frame on the back, but not the fans), a pleasure motor cruiser and a smallish sloop. The engine noise for a couple of hours came from the power cat (I could only see the stern), heaven knows what she was doing, but I tried distracting myself with the Brahminy Kites and White-bellied Sea Eagles that were soaring in the thermals above.

On 4th November we travelled in the wake of great swimmers (well not



From picnic area Newry Island



Fisheries patrol boat



Circuit walk, Newry Island



Track to Sunset Beach



From picnic area Newry Island



From Sunset Beach



Track across Outer Newry

really, we'd have had to potentially contend with crocodiles) and visited Newry Island. Newry Island is part of the Newry Islands National Parks group and lies between the much larger Rabbit Island and the slightly smaller Outer Newry Island. We took our tinnie across to the picnic area adjacent the campground on the eastern side of the island and followed the circuit track of 1.8 kilometres that takes you through mostly dry forest with a dominant understory of *Xanthoria* species (grass trees). Bird calls were common near the start of the track but further along, up the slope, bird calls were few; I guess the stifling heat with no breeze kept them elsewhere. On a side track to

Sunset Beach on the south west corner of the island (Sunset Beach has a toilet but no picnic tables) there is a thick section of rainforest; where there was a plethora of bird calls – even though it was the middle of the day – but rarely were any birds seen; the Emperor Pigeon and Pheasant Coucal accidental disturbances from the ground adjacent the track.

Newry Island had a coconut plantation up until 1934 and several lessees that ran a resort from 1934 until it reverted wholly to National Park status in 2001. The 'most famous' regular visitor was Annette Kellerman (Australian swimmer and actress

and subject of the film, Million Dollar Mermaid (Google her – the Wikipedea link is worth a read)) who was the sister in-law of one of the lessees. The resort was small; a few huts housing from two to five people, a boathouse and a few extra buildings. Some of part of the buildings have been preserved (and some fenced) to show you part of the islands' historic past.

My assumption of the power cat being the home of loud fishing blokes on holiday was gazumped when the wind changed slightly and I managed to see the boat side on. It turns out she is a fisheries patrol vessel and the two lads who

occupied her came over with their 'Florida' vessel to have a chat. Yes, we had our flares in date; yes, we knew which fishing zone we were in; no, I didn't know that if I was travelling outside 'calm waters' more than half a nautical mile I had to carry flares; and yes, I had caught a fish (the night before on fresh chicken, (and the first decent one since September 2014)) but we released it as we didn't know what our legal limit length for trevally was (turns out to be none) and we were in the middle of cooking dinner and had no time to deal with it. The 'boys' were down from Airlie Beach. What a job!

Just after our visit from the patrol boys we took a quick visit to Outer Newry Island where there is a track that goes directly across the middle of the island. The access is through the mangroves with a rocky entrance and there is little room to move your dinghy out of the way for others. A fisherman's hut, not far above the access point, is available for hire. There was evidence of a camp fire outside it despite the signs asking for no camp fires.



View from fisherman's hut

Keswick Island

5th-6th November 2015

5th November 2015. Although a sail with the tide is preferable and the best time was going to be on a flooding tide starting at around 1pm, our intention of starting today's trip to Keswick Island a little earlier to allow for wind and tide variations was delayed and we didn't leave until 1pm anyway. We enjoyed a rapid (if not slightly lumpy to start with) sail across, averaging about 8 knots. Fortunately we arrived not too late to be able to spot reef and settled into the available nook at Victor Bay (after pirouetting around and retrieving my cap which had blown off my head and into the water).

6th November 2015. The clouds and impending storm in the morning didn't seem conducive to a snorkel but then again they didn't seem conducive to a sail either. We did wait around for low tide in the afternoon and by that time the clouds and rain had disappeared and the sun had come out. The coral in Victor Bay was not spectacular, (not what we saw of it anyway), mostly greens and whites, and only a few brightly coloured fish – although there were many non-descript camouflaged species. We saw several nudibranchs; beautiful and flowing in their movement, and I came to realise the 'sea cucumber's I had seen last month may only be the old remains of these flowing snail like creatures. When we emerged from the water three other boats had anchored in the bay; two yachts and a powerboat.

Jumping south

Keswick Is to Noel Island

7th November 2015. I woke at 5.15am and whilst the sun wasn't high in the sky, it was up. One of the yachts that arrived yesterday afternoon was leaving. 'Good on em,' I thought and I turned over and went back to sleep. At 6.00am, as per usual, I was woken up by a 'hungry' cat and noticed the second yacht was also leaving. Both headed south. By the time we pulled our anchor up at 7.15am we realised there was little wind and it was going to be a slow day.

There were two options for heading south with the wind angle – angle wide and east, as if we were heading to the Percy Islands (our aim was Curlew Island) and then head back again on the corresponding tack, or, as we did, head west-ish, toward land, tack just above the limits of Port Mackay and then manoeuvre our way around the outer anchoring field. This way proved to be quite slow and the only positive out of it was that we caught our first trolling fish; a reasonable-sized mackerel destined for grilled fish and chips – although we need to catch more fish to cover the cost of the rod!



It was somewhere north of Prudhoe Island when we came to the conclusion that we probably weren't going to make our original destination in good time – we would have been arriving in the dark. So, looking at the charts and consulting our guides, we decided to head for Digby Island instead, not quite as far south as Curlew and a bit closer to our current trajectory. This was around 11am. So Plan B was enacted, I was able to turn a little closer to the wind and off we sailed. Just after lunch the wind started to pick up and whilst Andrew was downstairs organising dinner I suddenly discovered we were doing 9 knots. Was this enough to make up for the lost time of the morning? According to how the crow/shearwater/albatross flies – Digby was 17 nm away – but Curlew was only 20. I was in a position to change direction slightly and head for our original destination. The only downside of this was we would lose some speed but as we were doing a fair stroke of knots anyway, I thought a slight speed reduction could be coped with. Sometime later, however, the wind strength started to drop, and with the wider angle, our estimated time to Curlew Island again looked out of reach. Another considered decision had us change angle again, slip between two islands and around the outside of the Beverly Group and come up into the small bay on the south side of Digby.

It was already occupied! By a local fishing boat. The bay is not big and in order to give enough swinging room and be protected by what we thought were going to be northerly winds, we were required to move in a little further. This bay is not marked in our books and I am sorry to say we scraped the anchor over the back of the fringing reef before we got a hold – a wild jolt that made us wonder what fun we were going to have the next morning getting it up. The view out to sea

from the boat showed choppy waves coming around the corner, and....a thunderstorm to our south-east - in the direction of the Percy Islands. The waves were heading towards us from the south-east. The winds were supposed to be north to north-east. If we swung around ... where was that reef? Suddenly we realised the fishing boat was gone. The storm was getting closer. It looked ominous. It was almost dark. We made the decision to move.

Now the issue was where were we going to go. Curlew Island was too far away. The advice for the anchorage in the north of Digby Island was for anchoring in calm winds only (and it was exposed to the north). The wind was flying around in all directions and the edge of the thunderstorm had reached us – it was starting to rain. Fortunately the anchor came up without too much hassle and we bounced around the corner to the western side of Noel Island. Noel Island has a bay that is a sweeping arc facing west. In theory this should give some wind protection from both north-east and south-east winds. North to northwest would be dubious but there are three small islands in this direction from the centre of the bay.

The bay shoals quite dramatically however and it is preferable to know where you are when you anchor. We couldn't see a thing. The Dolphin torch wasn't strong enough to light up the island adequately and the only indication of where we were in the scheme of things (remember the wind is blowing us from all directions and therefore pushing us around a bit) was the flashes of lightening lighting up the horizon from all sides; the back of the island as well as from the mainland behind us. The first attempt at putting the anchor down failed and we set on the second go. After a big sigh - it was now after 7pm - it was time for a cup of tea... and dinner! (which was some gorgeous lamb shanks that had been cooking for some hours in the thermal cooker).

Some time later, after I'd had a snooze, the swell and the waves came in. The wind was now from the north-west and the waves would have knocked things from the shelves had we not had everything battened down. My back muscles were sore just from trying to stay in the one position on the bed. We decided, under the circumstances it might be prudent to put more chain out. So in the dark, the rain

and the swell we (I) extended our chain, and therefore our peace of mind. Until...

At about midnight, after another couple of hours of trying to snooze – Andrew was on watch – Andrew tells me the wind has swung around to the west (that definitely wasn't predicted and we are definitely not protected from it) and we now have 1.5 meters of water under our keel. Not enough. The easiest solution to this was to pull some of the chain back in and hopefully pull us back out into slightly deeper water. Simple. Not really. It was still raining; the wind was still pushing us around (we recorded just over 20 knots but we know Hay Point had 40 knots at one stage in the storm and 43 knots was noted at Island Head Creek), and I now discover that my down button won't work on the electric winch. So, in the dark, in the rain, in the wind, in the swell and by torchlight, we are now trying to work out how to lower the chain manually – without it all coming out. Fortunately, when we finished this little exercise, the wind had died down to around 8 knots, Andrew finally came to bed and we both went to sleep!

Noel Is to Marble Is

8th November 2015

We had a slightly later start today; 8.15am. The anchor took a little more time to winch up because of the trouble with the down mechanism (occasionally I need to put more chain out to clear the anchor well whilst I am bringing the anchor up) and when we finally left there was no wind....well nothing we could sail to.. so we ended up motoring down to the Duke Islands Group. For the entire trip the wind speed indicator flipped between 0.5 and 2.3 knots. It was only when we were coming into anchor at Marble Island that the wind speed got to something around 7 knots. For most of the trip the water was glassy and mostly almost flat.

Just north of the Duke Group, I noticed what looked like an almost imperceptible film on the water as we travelled along; almost like a very faint oil slick. As we got further south the film changed to look like the water was covered in sporadic patches of dust and then, just as we got north of the Duke Island Group, there were patches of muddy water in the tide line. My guess is that this is a remnant of the storms of the



night

Marble Island to Island Head Creek

9th November 2015

What a contrast! From Yesterday's blue sky and flat water we'd woken up today to the remnants of the overnight thunderstorms and thick grey clouds. It was starting to rain when we lifted the anchor, with a large current swell, and we headed out into the grey. The steaming lights went on sporadically for the first couple of hours (which means we were alternating between sailing and motoring for that time) and then the wind came up. Unfortunately it came up mainly in the direction we wanted to go. So we travelled 44 nautical miles to get us a distance of 31 nautical miles. Our original destination was Port Clinton as we hadn't been there yet and it would have put us a bit closer to Rosslyn Bay. However with wind strength and angle, and as we got out to sea north east of Cape Townsend, it got a bit too lumpy for comfort and we reassessed. (I had promised Tiger only a slightly lumpy ride but after the spice container fell onto the floor and smashed the rosemary bottle I

guess he knew I was wrong). Island Head Creek was closer so we made that our destination. It was just as well as we didn't get the anchor down until ten minutes before 6pm. There were military exercises going on and the anchorages were originally going to be closed at this time but thanks to some persistent lobbying by a few avid sailors (a couple of whom we've met) the anchorages of Port Clinton, Pearl Bay and Island Head Creek were opened back up. We went back down to the bottom anchorage. When we entered the creek there were already several boats there but only in the northern anchorages, there was no one down the end. It was serene. I wonder whether the other boats were too worried about coming in so far. When they announced that the anchorages were open, they didn't say to what extent so we assumed we were in an okay spot.

The things you do to take a photograph! Even getting bitten by sandflies? I thought it justified at the time. The little 'buggers' had made themselves known in the short time I was putting the anchor down, but with the sunset a short time later and no boats to block the view, I had to get out and take it.



Sunset Island Head Creek

We spent a couple of days at Island Head Creek waiting for the weather to turn. As usual the time was filled with domestics; cleaning, sorting, polishing. We spent a good amount of this time 'inside' and our covers kept 'most' of the midges out. Andrew's big win was working out how to fix the 'down' button on the electric anchor winch.

Island Head Creek to Great Keppel Island

13th November 2015

Friday the 13th – and a Mayday call... Fortunately it wasn't ours! We were motoring south. Whilst the apparent wind speed was in the 8's or 9's, the True wind speed was mostly less than 6 knots (we need 7 generally to even sail at 5 knots), and coming from precisely the wrong direction – the direction in which we wanted to go..

I only half heard it. And then realised what it was. The Mayday protocol had gone out the door (window/hatch/porthole) but then again the boat in question was taking on water and the skipper probably had other things on his mind. Eventually he called over the radio that the manifold in the engine was on fire. By this time Andrew had called him to say we were on our way from the west. But as it turned out the rescue helicopter turned up and coordinated the scene from there. As there were two other small power boats on scene, one catamaran behind us was told he could stand down so we did too. A motor-sailor however kept going toward the victim and from the discussion over the radio it seems they rafted up to the vessel in distress and helped with an extra emergency bilge pump. We couldn't have helped them with that. The rescue boat was on its way and eventually shadowed the stricken boat back to harbour, it having clearly got out of the major difficulty. We assume they got into Rosslyn Bay safely.

It was about this time (around 1pm) that the wind picked up and we actually put our sails up. We got 4.5 hours sailing in before we ended up anchoring off Long Beach, on the south side of Great Keppel Island.

Great Keppel Island

14th November 2015

On a typically hot morning we walked from Long Beach along old dirt road tracks across the island the old resort area before heading to the Happy Valley Resort for a cool drink. After sitting at a bar stool and wine barrel table, we discovered that moving onto some bright green plastic garden chairs in the shade in the front of the beach bar was far more comfortable and a good place to watch the world from. Visitors with small power boats were amusing, often backing into the beach to let off passengers before heading further out to anchor for the outgoing tide - the skippers then having to swim to shore. We ordered lunch early – which was just as well as there were a lot of tourists who had come across on the ferry. A local business owner told us of an alternative way home – and despite the lapsing of four hours and it being later in the day, it was actually cooler at 1.30pm than 9.30am when we'd started. I don't think the return track was as steep either. Getting back onto Long Beach presented a surprise. Clearly the northerly wind had come in; there had been three boats in the bay when we started our walk (including Sengo) - there were now around twenty. Help from passers by made it easier to drag the tinnie to the line of the outgoing tide and a quick dip in the lovely cool and refreshing waters was just the ticket. A quick tidy up back at Sengo was needed before before the owners of *Free Spirit* arrived for sundowners.



Walk from Long Beach



Walk from Long Beach



Feral Goat



Ferry - Fisherman's Beach



Sunrise Long Beach



Sunrise Long Beach

Rosslyn Bay Marina

15th – 22nd November 2015

We had an early start with the anchor up at 6.00am and arrival at the marina at Rosslyn Bay at around 7.45am. According to the wind predictions on bom.gov.au, this time was going to be the only opportunity to get into the marina with minimal winds for some days. Fortunately for us, *Free Spirit* was also coming into the marina, its pen was approximately opposite ours and the owners were on the dock to help us (along with the owner of another catamaran) when we arrived. Tied up, we had a relaxing coffee and cake before domestics (washing) and a slap-up dinner at the restaurant at the marina. We had heard good things about this restaurant but the report was the steak wasn't as good as it was a year ago and the vegetarian meal they came up with for one of us was undercooked and embarrassingly small for an entrée let alone a main meal. Most of the rest of the offering was not too bad. The entertainment came in the form of a massive thunderstorm. Our table was under the verandah and the cacophony the rain made as it hit the roof would put

a rock band to shame - sheets of water pouring down over the corrugated roof provided an impromptu waterfall.

On Monday 16th November we shared a rental car and took a trip to Rockhampton to do some shopping. Our most successful purchase was a manual coffee grinder so the coffee crisis may be finally over! I got a couple of items from the reject shop for the cats (they can have them for Christmas) and we restocked on drinks. I also discovered it is not so easy to buy an updated Scrabble dictionary – do you want the one that doesn't have any specifications on it, the one with specifications for 7 letter words or the one with specifications for 9 letter words?

The rest of the week was spent doing more washing, a couple of trips into Yeppoon for shopping and picking up bits and pieces (and cat food), and Andrew managed to be winch man for one boat owner who ended up going up his mast to fix up a headsail issue. We met some new boat owners and reacquainted ourselves with some old friends. The only 'exercise' was a short walk to the Double Head lookouts one afternoon before drinks at the nearby clubhouse of the Capricornia Cruising Yacht Club.



Sengo, Keppel Bay Marina



View of Rosslyn Bay Boat Harbour

North Keppel Island

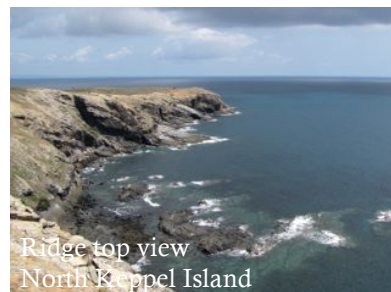
23rd November 2015

Plan A was to head south from Rosslyn Bay Harbour and motor up the Fitzroy River to Rockhampton for a look-see before heading through The Narrows. Plan B, after being talked out of the Fitzroy (this time) was to head over to Great Keppel Island for a day then head south through The Narrows. Plan C ended up being a trip north to North Keppel Island for a day, to walk the circuit track of 7.8 kilometers, before heading south.

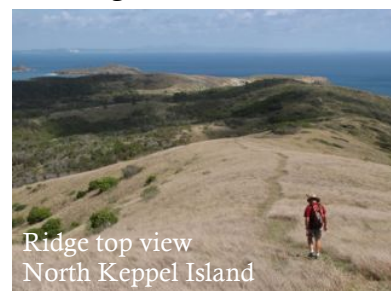
Of course the ideal time in which to take the dingy across to the beach to start any walk is where the bottom of the tide comes in whilst we are walking and hence we can time it so the tide is at the same spot when

we come back. Unfortunately, the bottom of the tide for this day would be at 1pm, which would have meant walking in the middle of the day. The top of the tide was at 7am and I wasn't starting a walk at 5.30am. We actually started at 8am and by the time we got back to the beach there was quite a distance between the dingy and the water.

The day was hot and humid, and there were some exposed sections of the track. Surprisingly, despite the up (although we did come down the steepest bit) I felt reasonably pleased with the way I coped with the heat. I was however a bit edgy toward the very end of



the walk, and very much looking forward to a cool-down swim. There are three walks on North Keppel island and of course we did the longest, but this took us



to two official lookouts and some ridge top views in between. The vegetation seems to be predominantly dry forest, some areas have thick mixed understory, some have little understory and then there are the extremes of mangroves in the creek and grasslands on the ridge. Of particular interest was the coconut apple; a plant that flowers at night; scientists believing it may have evolved alongside nocturnal feeders such as bats.

The Narrows

24th – 25th November 2015

Dirty olive green water greeted us around 7 nautical miles out from the Sea Hill Lighthouse. This is the delta area of many waterways, including the mouth of the Fitzroy River, before they run into Keppel Bay. The particular waterway we wanted was the one that runs between Curtis Island and the mainland, and dries out in the middle on low tide; otherwise known as The Narrows.

The waterway channel that becomes The Narrows is extensively lined with mangroves so that any hills adjacent them sit somewhere in the background and photographs don't do the area justice. There was one other yacht at the bottom end of the navigable (non tidal dependent) section when we arrived and we anchored a little upstream from it before planning the next day

The earliest we could possibly leave before hitting bottom was 6.30am. This would put us over the shallowest area with enough water below our keels at around 7.30am. After managing to pull the anchor up at 0645 we started on our way. The occupants of the



The Narrows

other boat came out to greet us however, and suggested that we would be timing it to be pushing into tide at the other end. We knew the tides met in The Narrows but as this person had been travelling this section since 1981, and as he wasn't pulling up anchor until 815am, we decided that it would be prudent to follow his lead. We put our anchor down again and put the kettle on.

At 8.15am we pulled the anchor up again and were on our way. The chart plotter and guide had similar depth level schematics but we tailed the other boat as much as we could (from a suitable distance back, of course). It was, as they'd said, pretty easy, provided you followed

the marks. The area is popular with fisherman and there were several cars with boat trailers at the boat ramp at Ramsay's crossing. All fishing boats we saw had high metal sides – this is croc country after all. The famous Cattle Crossing is just south of Ramsay's Crossing and you pass quite close to the bank here. It is apparently soon to have a bridge over it so this trip won't be possible for us in the future. It was here that we thought we saw a couple of dugongs, arising



Cattle Crossing, The Narrows



Motoring through The Narrows

out of the muddy waters. Further down, toward the industrialised northern edges of Gladstone, we also saw dolphins. You could see Gladstone coming. First it was a burst of flame above the mountaintops, and then smoke from smoke stacks (as opposed to smoke from the fires burning along the coast). Coming toward the city itself were industrialised wharfs with loaded and unloaded ships, piles of coal, and ferries without AIS. We didn't head into the marina, we kept going.

The Narrows would be great bird watching territory; if you had the patience to avoid the sand-flies (and possible crocodiles). Our bird list was small; a Wedge-tailed eagle, a White-bellied sea eagle, a Brahminy kite, a few terns and a couple of Pelicans.

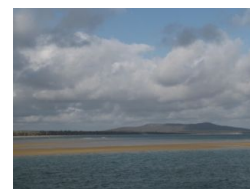
Just south of the southernmost wharf, after the river entrance to town, we finally turned the motors off and had a lovely five hour sail to Pancake Creek. Surprisingly it was occupied by only four other boats – it

was packed last time we were here in July – but I guess at this stage in the year most people were riding the northerlies as far south as they can get.

The midge bite count for the day added itches to the bites of the night before and my extremities reacted with large welts. The surprise of the day, however, was the bite from the march fly, who managed to nip at my collar bone as I was distracted lifting the anchor.

At Pancake Creek.

The predicted winds were northerly for a few days and whilst most days were 10-15 knots, one day was predicted to be up to 20 knots, so this, matched with spring tides delayed our trip to Lady Musgrave Island. During this time we were occupied with the usual domestics, an exploration of some of the mangroves, a fair bit of reading, and, importantly, discussion of planning the next 'sailing season.' At this stage we have decided that next year we will start our first circumnavigation of the continent. The details are yet to be worked out but a bit of preparation now has to be scheduled in Brisbane to make all this happen.



Pancake Creek to Lady Musgrave Island

30th November 2015

With the main spring tides gone and still a few days of mild northerlies predicted we started our 38 nautical mile trip across to Lady Musgrave Island by lifting the anchor just before 7am. We'd been up since 5.30am and every other yacht in the creek had left.

A couple of zig-zags after exiting the creek and we got the right line for Lady Musgrave. And the sail was delightful. The apparent wind strength didn't get above 11 knots but we averaged around the 6-7 knot mark and arrived half way through a dropping tide. Inspired by other Leopard Catamaran owners who came over to say hello in their kayak, we decided we'd take our poor neglected yellow tequila kayak off the deck and take her for a snorkel. An orange buoy is located next to the reef not far from where we anchored (but too far to comfortably swim

across to) and we tied the kayak up to this. Getting back on after the snorkel was an interesting education but not too difficult. Of course, my waterproof camera had spat the dummy and was out of action, which was a pity as this was the clearest reef I'd snorkeled at, seeing many new species that I knew I wouldn't be able to isolate in the guide when we got back. Sundowners with the owners of the other Leopard finished off a lovely day.



Mooring buoy near reef



Not content with her water, Cilla just has to try my tea!