



Sullivan's Travels

By John & Annie Sullivan

April 1st

Magnetic Island to Cooktown, FNQ

Some might say "April Fools Day" to the odd person on this day, but I can't help thinking I'd be fooling myself if I thought that this is as good as it gets.

Every day seems to bring new adventures and great new locations. We are anchored in 'Horseshoe Bay' on the North side of Magnetic Island (19.06.850S – 146.51.200E) just east of Townsville. Again, the view is right out of the travel brochures. We will stay here for 3 days as I'm taking time to do a few repairs and set up my fishing gear. From here on, the fishing gets serious, so the gear has to get the once over and the lures sorted out.

We did the mandatory tour of the island the next day and discovered (for us, anyway) an island paradise. It was hard to believe it is only 3 miles off the mainland.

The next morning, during breakfast, we heard on the radio that an earthquake of some 7 point something on the Richter scale had



occurred about 1000 miles out in the Pacific, and a Tsunami alert had been issued for the Northern East of Australia. They went on to suggest that it would probably hit the Townsville part of the coast in about an hour.

Well, you could have thought someone had said there was free beer on shore, because almost every boat in Horseshoe Bay launched their dinghies, and people started rowing, motoring and some swimming towards the beach. We

packed a few drinks and a camera, and headed off with the rest. Annie wanted to find some high ground, so we climbed up the steep walking path towards the island lookout.

After two hours, we decided it was safe to return to the beach. What we hadn't seen was the tsunami actually did come in three times. An old codger who lives on a houseboat came over to us and said the first wave came in and lifted the water level about 3 feet. Five minutes later, another wave came in, it was about



a foot high and the third about 3 minutes later was about 6 inches high. Hardly noticeable from the top of the hill where we were sitting.

It appears that most of North Queensland has natural tsunami protection with the Barrier Reef offshore.

April 4th.

Reluctantly we leave Magnetic Island bound for the Palm Group of Islands some 35 miles North West. We still have 25 knots of wind but at least it is behind us. Decided to anchor behind 'Yank's Jetty' on Orphious Island (18.38.53S – 146.29.15E) to beat the swell. Being a part of the Palm Group of islands it is a lovely spot surrounded by coral patches and adjacent to a little sandy beach (for Ralf's daily saunter). Some great trevally were teased up just on dark with some enthusiastic lure casting across the coral patches. As we had a freezer full of great fish from the Keppels, we released all of them to fight again another day.

April 7th.

After hearing the weather report (30 knots over Easter) we decide to head off to Zoe Bay on Hinchinbrook Island, and sneak into the creek in the northern corner at high tide

Left Above: Hinchinbrook Island, as seen when anchored off North Zoe Bay - one of the most beautiful parts of Australia. **Below:** Charismatic Cooktown FNQ hasn't changed much over the years, and is the last major stop on the route north to the Lockhart River, and on to T.I.

Editor's Note: *John is 63 years old and has been boating for 50 years. Apart from the many thousands of private hours he has accumulated, he also holds a professional skipper's ticket and has driven fishing and charter boats on and off for 30 years. His love affair with the sea and his undying affection for fishing and boating make his life experiences seem to many an enviable accumulation of adventures. I am sure the continuing stories of his trip - from the Gold Coast Qld to the Kimberley Coast, WA - over the next few months will be followed and enjoyed by all our readers who aspire to make a similar voyage.*

(18.23.02S – 146.19.22E) The creek has a small bar and is very shallow.

Getting into this creek requires a degree of insanity and a lot of nerve, not to mention a lot of experience. The entrance is protected by a wall of coral that spans out from the headland and only stops about 8 metres from the breaking surf on the left side.

To get in without either hitting the coral and destroying the hull, or hitting the sand and grounding in the surf, one has to first wait for a high tide, then line up the channel, and surf in on a wave - and at the last minute, turn across the surf and head into the narrow channel making sure not to venture too far right as the coral is only about 3 feet under the hull.

The reason one does these exciting things is of course to catch

great fish, or at least we had hoped to. We just got in with 1 foot to spare under the boat and later realised that the tides were very low highs. We anchored about a kilometre up the creek in 4 metres and started to fish.

The first fish was a queenfish (in 3 minutes) weighing in at 10 kilo. The next two catches were bronze whaler sharks about 3 foot long. They put up a huge fight until we cut them off. This was followed by a massive stingray about a metre across, and a shovel nose shark that would have topped the scales at 15 kgs. We finished the afternoon's fishing with a nice golden trevally.

The creek looks like it is going to be a fisherman's dream.

April 8th.

Today we have a diurnal tide. For the uninitiated that means the moon and sun are in such a position that there is only one high and one low tide today. The tide has been slowly going out for the last 15 hours and not one bite all day. We will pull some lures in the dinghy this afternoon to see if we can snaffle a few mangrove jacks.

April 9th.

Pulled lures for miles yesterday...zilch fish. I figured it must be the diurnal tides that put them off the bite. However, last night when we put the 'Aqualuma' lights on, we attracted (as usual) swarms of bait fish which started to get stalked and picked off by a mob of huge barramundi. We could see them circling the bait fish on the perimeter and lunging totally out of





Bit of cross action here! **Left:** We admire Annie's first barra - whilst **Below:** JS fires back with a brace of barra, just to ensure he maintains the bragging rights! (After all, he is a bloke, eh?) Mark you, it was Annie who worked out the technique . .



the water with huge mouth open and landing with a massive splash and obviously a mouth full of hardy heads.

Well, we threw live bait at them, we threw dead baits, we tried everything except dynamite. We could not get a hook up, so we went to bed tired and disappointed.

April 10th.

Wind still blowing at 25 knots plus and constant rain. We have a magnificent view of the spectacular mountains on Hinchinbrook. They are so high they generate their own

weather, hence it seems to rain constantly whilst the clouds and mist waft across the hills. We explore the creek during the day but don't fish until late afternoon when we started to pull a few golden travelly as the sun sets.

Then we put on the lights again and yes... the barra were back in force. We tried some live gar that I caught in the bait net earlier to no avail. To digress a little, with the 'Aqualuma' lights I can throw a bait net and get literally dozens of livies anytime; they are a 'must have' for any fishing boat that wants to use

live bait.

Anyway, back to the barra. About this time Annie was getting frustrated that the big barras wouldn't touch her livies, so she started to cast it right out, winding it back in as fast as she could.

Well, bugger me, she gets a hook up and he's a beauty. Three minutes of acrobatics and thrashing about and we have a 10 kilo barra in the boat. Not to let a woman out fish me, I quickly fitted a poppa lure onto the double and flicked it right out past the lights. I had hardly started to retrieve it when all hell broke loose and I was fishing.

These barra can jump 6 feet out of the water when they get angry, and he was angry. They are a spectacular fighting fish and give an angler a great challenge on light gear. With another one on board we decided that was enough fresh fish for us, but I had to catch a couple more while they were on, and planned to release them afterwards. I did catch a couple more, but unfortunately one of them swallowed the lure and upon extracting it he was mortally wounded so he became an addition to the freezer supplies. All fish weighed in around 9 kilo each, that's 20 lbs in the old scale,

“Lizard Island is Paradise . . . best snorkelling I have ever done . . . “



not bad for a night's effort...60 lbs of fresh barra!! No prizes for guessing what I'm having for dinner tonight, and tomorrow night, and the night after.

April 11th.

We steamed out of the creek at 6.30 am this morning to catch the tide and headed up to Dunk Island for the day. (17.56.01S – 146.08.14E) We are anchored off the resort at the moment just watching the dolphins play around the boat. Tomorrow we should continue on to Cairns (80 miles away) if the wind drops a little.

April 12th.

Headed up towards Cairns as predicted in 20 knots (getting used to this wind now) and decided enroute to bypass Cairns for a friendlier port of call...Yorkeys Knob Boat Club (16.48.08S. – 145.43.01 E) which is 8 miles further north but away from the hustle and bustle of Cairns and it's tourist environment. The club is very friendly and the girls in the office were

sweethearts. They fell in love with Ralf and wanted to keep him. We spent a lovely few days here doing the tourist thing. We hired a car and zipped around to all the usual spots to see what changes have occurred since the last time we were here some 5 years ago. Then some regrouping and re-stocking before heading off to the Low Isles.

April 17th.

We traveled through to the Low Isles and did some snorkeling but were disappointed, as the water was too dirty. It was at the Low Isles reef where the late Steve Irwin met his untimely death. We continued on to

the Hope Isles for a day but didn't get excited, as the anchorage was very rolley all night so we decided to head for Cooktown and top off the fuel. There will be no more fuel stops now until we reach Cape York, some 500 miles north. That afternoon we steamed out to Lizard Island (14.13.35S –145.26.53E) to spend a few days exploring this wonderful island and it's surrounding reefs. We anchored up on the edge of the 'Clam garden' in the harbour.

Lizard is a paradise. Best snorkelling I have ever done. This area is home to hundreds of huge clams some as wide as a metre and a half. They are just there under

water with their mouths open just filtering anything that might swim their way. You could look right down their throat and see what they had eaten for breakfast.

(Next issue we round the top of Australia and encounter some mechanical trouble in one of the most remote parts of this country. We then take on the mighty Gulf of Carpentaria.)

F&B



The Sullivan's Voyager 1050 powered catamaran en-route from the Gold Coast to the Kimberley in Nor'west WA