



Sullivan's Travels

By John & Annie Sullivan

The Fourth Leg - Lizard to Groote, and Onto the Wessels

April 21st. We are still at Lizard Island. We were finding it hard to leave the pristine beaches and aqua blue waters for the long trip north, so we decided to 'conquer' the mountain. You cannot visit Lizard without climbing the mountain that Captain James Cook climbed back in 1770. During his epic voyage he climbed the peak on Lizard Island to chart a course out to sea through the maze of reefs which confronted him. After you scramble up the blazoned trail to the top you are rewarded by one of the most magnificent views of the Barrier Reef, the world famous 'Blue Lagoon' and the island's 24 powdery white beaches.

April 24th. After 4 pleasant days on Lizard we bade farewell to some new yachtie friends, Rudi and Lynette on 'Tiata', and continued on along the shipping channel passing dozens of huge ribbon reefs on our right and the mainland on our left.



One of the most spectacular sites enroute is at Cape Melville, some 50 miles from Lizard Is. It is covered in huge boulders, many bigger than houses and stretches for 20 miles or so. Some say it was the result of a huge glacier moving them along about a zillion years ago.

For 4 days, we island hopped our

way slowly northward. One could pull up at most of these islands and go ashore to explore, pick coconuts or just swim in the aqua blue lagoons, but we mostly wanted to reach the top now. To us, it was like climbing Mount Everest; we wanted to get to the Cape.

One of the many islands we

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stopped at was Morris Island to check out the lone pearl diver gravesite under the only coconut tree on the island. We bought 3 kilo plus of big Gulf prawns off a trawler that was sharing the anchorage with us. \$20 got us almost a bucket full. We passed a lot of commercial shipping on this leg. We had to keep a good lookout all the time as the navigable channel through the reef sometimes is quite narrow when passing a large ship.

April 28th. We made it! Today we stood on the northern most point of mainland Australia...Cape York. We rounded the Cape early this morning from the Escape River, through the Albany Pass. The pass is a narrow strip of fast moving water between Albany Island and the mainland. The tide races through it at around 5 knots and gave us a very fast trip through the 5 miles of deep water. We anchored in the first bay, launched the dinghy and headed ashore to make the final walk to the Cape. Ralf came with us and was delighted to christen the first tree he saw at the top of Australia.

April 29th. We are anchored off Seisia jetty, which is near Bamaga, (10.50.50E-142.21.53E) Bamaga is

Left About: We wanted to include a couple of pics this month to show all my fellow workers back down south it is worth keeping the dream alive!

These touristy photos were taken in Blue Lagoon, Lizard Island. **Below Off** the boulders of stony Melville Island.

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.

the most northern town in Australia. We have a problem. Today we discovered a quantity of oil in the bilge. Upon inspection it was revealed that the oil had somehow found its way into the fresh water cooling system, and the starboard engine is showing similar symptoms with oil in the coolant system as well. It seems extraordinary that both cooling systems seemed to be suffering the same fate at the same time. We have phoned Volvo and are quietly confident that they will solve the problem. Whilst we are contemplating our travel plans, we decide we may as well explore this remote area.

April 30th. Seisia is a small outpost that acts as a terminal for the weekly cargo ship from Cairns that delivers and picks up all the

commerce that runs through the top end. It has a large jetty, a service station, a general store and a resort.

The town of Bamaga is about 10 km south and employs and houses most of the local residents who are Thursday Islanders. We befriended the local charter boat owner Greg who owns and runs "Tropic Paradise" out of Seisia.

A really nice guy, he arranged to get diesel down to the jetty using his tanker which we filled up at the service station. Everyone in Seisia and Bamaga are friendly and seem to want to help. I walked up to a total stranger who was working on the jetty loading a freighter and asked him if I could hitch a ride into Bamaga with one of his trucks and he just threw me the keys to a new \$50,000 4WD and said "Be back with it in 2 hours so I can knock off."

Beer in Bamaga was \$58 a slab, so wanting to keep both my 'arms and legs' I only bought one carton. The big night out in Seisia is Friday night at the Fishing Club. The whole town turns up and is entertained by a native rock band that has to be heard to be believed. We met all the island elders and had a ball.

May 5th. With great anticipation we await the arrival of the mechanic from the Port Douglas Volvo dealers. The lousy airlines would not allow him to carry oils and a large tool box, so he has had to drive the 1000 kilometres by 4WD to carry out the repairs.

He arrived mid afternoon and immediately started on the motors. You cannot imagine the mess in the





engine rooms with oil everywhere. He worked tirelessly until dark and was back on Sunday and worked all day to finish. The motors had to be flushed out several times to rid the cooling system with oil. I must say Volvo were absolutely great with their backup and assistance in getting everything organized as quickly as possible. Thank you to Auke Brinsma (Volvo GM) for his personal attention.

May 7th. With both engines fitted with new oil coolers we do a day's test run across to Thursday Island and back. Everything seems to be normal again. We didn't go ashore at Thursday Island because it is regarded as 'overseas' and you need Customs clearance. They will take all your fruit and vegetables and quarantine your dog if you have one. It is such a pain we didn't bother. Besides, diesel is \$2.20 a litre as opposed to \$1.60 at Seisia.

May 8th. With our confidence restored we set out to conquer the Gulf of Carpentaria. It is 350 nm (almost 400 miles) from Seisia to Gove with nothing in between. If one

was to break down half way it would be a 200 mile tow, (if you could get one) and that's not a pleasant thought. We travelled non-stop for 40 hours at 9 knots taking 4 hour shifts at the helm. We use around 12 litres an hour at this speed, and these Voyagers just love these conditions.

Again the south east trade winds assist our trip by providing an average of 20 knots behind us all the way. This also gives rise to a following sea of some 2 metres which pushes the boat from 6 knots to 12 knots and back for 40 hours, averaging our 9 knots. This motion proves to be so relaxing that it is hard to stop falling asleep when on watch. The Voyager and motors performed faultlessly and we arrived safely at Gove (12.11.45s – 136.42.22e) on Thursday morning albeit very tired.

Gove is an industrial outpost with a huge bauxite processing operation that employs almost the entire town. We are anchored just off the Yacht Club, which strangely enough doesn't have a marina, everyone just anchors in the bay where you can and dinghies into the crocodile

Well, we made it - this is the very tip of mainland Australia, and the Cape York Peninsular.

infested beach.

May 13th. After 3 days in Gove we have to wash the boat down. The Bauxite plant spews red dust out across the harbour 24/7 and it settles on everything. Thank goodness for water makers (desalination plants). We are always able to wash down with fresh water anytime we wish. Our Yacht friends, Lyn and Rudi turn up the next day from Seisia after sailing across the gulf so we joined them for a sundowner that evening. Fishing in the Harbour is good if you like catching sharks. There seems to be hundreds of small sharks of varying species everywhere in the bay. We tested our gear a few times but one gets tired of fighting these monsters after a while.

May 14th. This morning we decide to steam out and take on the Arafura Sea and head off to Darwin. A nice 420 Nautical mile run that we plan to stretch over 8 to 10 days and do a



Above: Kids in Seisa were like the adults - a very friendly, happy and helpful bunch of people. Below: Back in service again, the Voyager anchored off Seisa, preparing to go to Groote Eylandt.



little fishing on the way. Just as we leave harbour a wild storm hits us with gusts of 50 knots plus and blinding rain. We decide for safety sake to return to port until it blows over. An hour later we are off again and heading to the 'Wessels'. These are a group of islands that stretch from the mainland outwards into the Arafura some 90 miles forming a barrier for large ships.

The exception is a passage called "The Hole In The Wall" or more correctly, the 'Gugary Rip', which is about 40 miles from Gove. We had to gauge the tide right to go through the 'hole' as the current can run during springs at around 10 knots. It is a wild ride for about 3 miles. With the boat speed showing 15 knots and the GPS speed showing 23 knots, we screamed through in what seemed like only minutes. It had good depth and is about 100 metres wide and is perfectly safe if you stay in the middle.

The Wessel Islands also have some great anchorages and beautiful landscapes. The fishing is to die for if you want coral trout, reds or pelagics. It is too far for the locals to fish on day trips so it is still pristine and plentiful.

May 17th. After 2 days exploring the Wessels we steam all night and through the next day reaching Grant Island some 200 miles west. We decided to skip the inland coastal river route because our charts of the coastal area right across Arnhem land were saying they were not adequately surveyed and the area is ridden with nasty reef and bombies. Navigation in this part of the north is for local knowledge only. We arrived at Grant (11.09.730s -132.52.450e) and immediately upon dropping the anchor we were surrounded by 3 of the biggest crocodiles we had encountered so far.

(Next issue we come face to face with 5 metre crocs, and we finally make Darwin and enter Cullen Bay through a lock which is an adventure in itself.

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