



Sullivan's Travels

By John & Annie Sullivan

The First Leg

February 17th 2007

This is it...we finally set off northward on our first leg. As we pull out of the Coomera River (Gold Coast) and bring the Volvo D3 motors up to 3300 rpm, I start to think about what I may have forgotten to do or pack. I quickly tell myself.. it's too late for that, start concentrating on a course for our first stop, Redcliffe.

The GPS speed climbs to 16 knots and all the gauges look good. I have filled all the tanks, water 400 litres and fuel 1250 litres. The boat seems to handle much better with full water. It must be a balance thing. It actually gives me an extra knot with full water. We cruise up through the inner waterways of Stradbroke Island and into Moreton Bay and get our first taste of rough water, but as I well know it won't be our last. Our arrival at Redcliffe marks the first 60 miles of what will be about a 6,000 miles round trip.

This is where we get an 'official' send off by all our friends and the managing director of Voyager, Derek Appleton, who has turned up to wish us a safe trip. Kisses, hugs, some tears and the streamers aside, we now head seriously north to an adventure of a lifetime.

February 21st.

After a stopover in Mooloolabah to see a friend, we head up to the notorious Wide Bay Bar at the southern entrance to the Great Sandy Straights inside Fraser Island.

We had 3 metres pumping in from the south east and it was ugly on the bar as you would expect. The problem with Wide Bay is when you commit to an entry you are in it for over a mile, with a dog leg left 75 degrees half way in, to avoid a shoal.



I pulled back to about 12 knots to match the speed of the rollers and jumped on the back of the first big swell and rode it in until it started to break.

Once it lost its momentum I then increased speed, caught the next wave that was forming and repeated the process several times until we found ourselves in safer water.

One thing to remember with big motor cats, particularly when fully loaded, they will tend to want to broach when on the front of a wave and being pushed.

The safest method is as I have described above, that is stay on the back of the waves where possible. If, however, the waves catch you up, and sometimes in big seas they may, I recommend (only if you have a gyro compass model) using auto pilot while crossing a bar.

I have used this method many times in big seas. The pilot will sense any change in direction quicker than you and make corrections much faster and more accurately than you can. This also frees your mind so you can adjust your speed to assist the pilot's actions.

February 24th.

The wind is still blowing 25 knots so we are anchored up inside Fraser. I put the new 'AQUALUMA' underwater lights on last night for the first time under anchor and WOW!!,

you would not believe the fish that swarmed up around the boat.

Then the big squid came in to eat the fish so we put out a couple of squid jigs and within 15 minutes had caught a kilo of beautiful fresh calamari.



The way they work is the blue light attracts the zooplankton (tiny invertebrates that float freely throughout the sea) and the baitfish swarm in to eat them and of course the squid and bigger fish arrive to eat them in turn. We are to discover that throughout the trip these lights will supply all our live bait.

I cannot recommend these lights enough. Not only do they look great at night but for any one that fishes they are a must. For all the info on these wonderful new underwater lights go to www.aqualuma.com/



Annie used the washing machine this morning for the first time, and a drain valve stuck open - so it used

250 litres of water to do a wash instead of about 50. I now have the water maker running to replenish the tanks. It's great to be able to do that otherwise we would have to return to port.

One of the most important pieces of equipment when cruising is your water maker. There are some stops up north where you will have to cart your water in jerry cans from shore in the dinghy if you don't have one. We saw some boats doing just that and felt the \$10,000 plus for a desalination plant was worth every penny.

The model we have is a 'Spectra Catalina' and makes 45 litres an hour using 12 volts and only drawing 15 amps. The unit requires virtually no ongoing maintenance other than cleaning the 4 filters periodically, a job which takes about 10 minutes.

February 26th.

Wind, wind and more wind. It never seems to stop so we have decided to cruise up to Wathumba Creek (inside North Fraser Island).

We hooked a 15 kg plus tuna on the way up the island's inside or western shore as we headed for Wathumba. It took a pink pusher high speed lure - great fighters these fish, took 30 minutes to land.

We snuck into the 'creek' on the high with 18 inches to spare under the hull and decided to sit out the

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.

wind.

If you ever want to go into Wathumba (and it is a beautiful little creek) you will need a tide of at least equal to your draft plus, a sunny day and a set of polaroids to pick the winding channel.

When inside, there is a 6 metre hole big enough to anchor 5 boats. The bream in Wathumba are right out of Jurassic Park; we hooked 3 in one session, over a kilo plus. No muddies hit the pot, but we had time on our side.

One of the best parts of the day is having a 'sundowner' on the front deck doing just that watching



the sun go down.

March 3rd.

A big low up in the far north looks threatening, so we decided to go further north, running up to Bustard Head and into Pancake Creek.

It is an all weather creek should the low in the Coral Sea turn into a Cyclone and come down this way. Did the 100 nautical miles in a little over 6 hours, with a 3 metre swell behind us. Should be in here for a few days at least. Still no mobile and only very slow and random wireless internet. We pump some yabbies and try our luck off the sand banks.

On the turn of the tide we manage to catch a lovely feed of big, fat

One of the greatest advantages of the Voyager 1040 Cat in cruising mode is that it can 'take to the ground' so easily and safely.



whiting. Being spoilt most of my life being able to catch plenty of great table fish such as snapper, bream, cod, pearl perch, coral trout, etc. I found the under rated whiting to be a pleasant change. I filleted them and Annie did them in a light beer batter cooked in peanut oil...yum, they were delicious.

March 7th.

On the road again we head up to Gladstone Harbour to go through the Narrows. For those of you who haven't been through to Keppel Bay via the Narrows, it is a treat. Twenty four miles of scenic inland waterways formed by Curtis Island on the east, and the mainland on the west. It winds its way up to Keppel Bay via some beautiful creeks and anchorages.

We chose Pacific Creek, which is at the northern end, to anchor for the night. The only problem is in summer, you will get eaten by sandflies.



By next day the sandflies had inflicted almost mortal bites to my arms and legs. The red bite marks all over my body resembled a case of mutant chicken pox.

I had an allergic reaction and needed a doctor real quick, before I personally amputated both my legs to stop the itching. We headed off to Rosslyn Bay Marina at Yeppoon in a 3 metre following sea. I've got to say it again, these Voyager Catamarans just love these conditions.

I plotted a course from Curtis Island to Yeppoon (about 23 nautical miles) and punched it in to the auto pilot, then sat back and read a book for an hour and a half. *(Before you say anything, I was looking out for*



other boats).

Anyway, one hardly notices that the seas were quite unfriendly and with 25 knots of S.E. We should have been uncomfortable, but no . . . she just loped along and held a perfect course and I never even spilt my diet coke.

We found a Doctor in Yeppoon and a few prescriptions later (anti-histamines, buckets of Cortisone cream and one bottle of Jim Beam *(ok, the doctor didn't prescribe the latter, but I'm sure it helped)* and I was soon on my way to recovery.

The next day we planned to go out to Great Keppel to find a western anchorage out of the wind, and have 3 days of R and R and a spot of diving.

An interesting observation: the S.E. trade winds and following seas have given us an average of 36 litres an hour all up, with a cruising speed of 16.3 knots average. Not bad for about 9 ton of boat. Compare that with a similar size mono if you would.

March 8th.

We found a great little lagoon tucked away on the western side of Great Keppel, (23.10.06S – 150.57.20E), so we snuck in on high tide and anchored up for the night.

I had calculated that the lagoon would dry at low tide so we could

check the props and clean the scum off the bottom. The Voyager is ok to sit on the bottom with its hull designed to protect props and rudders.

March 10th.

The wind dropped off finally so we moved over to the South side of the island to do a spot of fishing.

A local friend of ours, Graham Scott came out on his boat and showed us his secret spot. Well, show us he did, but I am sworn to secrecy - and the spot he took us too was HOT. Within 30 minutes we had caught 50 kilo of good reef fish. I was pulled into the reef and busted off three times until I grabbed the 'Ugly Stick' with its 15kg mono on a Shimano 30W-2 speed and in quick succession landed a 10 kg slimy Cod (estuary cod) and a whopping 9 kilo (82cm) coral trout.

We could have caught a dozen more but we had a great feed so we went back to our anchorage to celebrate with a Chardy and a cold beer.

(Next issue the Sullivans head off to The Percy Group and up to the Whitsundays; get caught in a gale with 6 metre seas - and are mighty glad they have a Voyager cat - don't miss it - ED)

F&B