



The Whitsunday Challenge

Introducing a fascinating, timely assessment a family had to make about the boat they loved: whether to sell it and upgrade to a new slicker model; keep it, renovate and refurbish what has been an excellent craft - or whether the time had come to move on, altogether. After much debate, a deal was done within the family - and the renovation began. In F&B #160, we learned how "Reel Appeal" was refurbished. In #161, the rig was repositioned in the Whitsundays - and in Part 4, join author/photographer Peter Pedersen as he fulfills his dream: *Cruising the Magic Whitsundays.*

Part 4: Outer Whitsundays

You may think that it would be hard to beat the amazing Whitsunday islands centred around Airlie Beach and Shute Harbour, with all the glistening white beaches and tropical waters, flash resorts and handy shopping centres. In a way, it is true. It really is heaven for the boating enthusiast.

However, just on the fringes of this glitzy area, is the opportunity to really get away from the crowds and enjoy some genuine peace and quiet, the feeling of isolation and most likely some improved catches if you are keen to wet a line. And surprisingly, you do

not have to travel too far at all from Airlie Beach to find these spots.

This article looks at the run north to Bowen and south to Mackay, and highlights some of the fantastic little spots along the way.

North to Bowen

Only a few miles north of Airlie Beach and you'll find that the charter fleet thins out considerably. Understandably so too, as most folk have a very short time to devote to their cruise, and are keen to tick off all the must see locations. This means that those who are lucky enough to have some spare days or weeks can explore a set of very nice bays, islands and inlets on route to Bowen.

Generally, the anchorages are on the mainland, so (for me at least) this means they fall into the category of crocodile country. A brief discussion with a local Ranger put me slightly at ease. His advice was that crocs on the outer islands and even inlets such as Nara and Gulnare were virtually unheard of (but still a possibility). In relation to the coastline where I was about to head - from Airlie to Bowen they were found, but were very rarely seen. Suits me !

It is true you do notice a distinct lack of the crocodile warning signs that are seen all along the coast and waterways in areas further north, but it was certainly possible these critters may be lurking around these mainland locations. They were known to be in good numbers in the Pioneer River not too far south from here, so I chose to adopt the conservative approach and considered myself in croc country on

this trip north, especially as I was visiting as the temperatures were on the increase and crocodiles often become more mobile and territorial in these conditions.

The first notable stopping off point north of Airlie is Woodwark Bay. This is a large and mostly empty location, quite surprising considering how close it is to the big smoke. The holding is good and it is well protected. There seemed to be constant activity in the bay from schools of small mackerel and lots of bird activity. Unfortunately none either came close enough to be enticed by my floating bait, or were all that interested in it if they did swim past. There are a couple of small beaches to stretch the legs, a parks camp ground with long drop dunny and some basic trails across the headland to the bay on the other side.

Like almost all the anchorages heading north, the dreaded evening swell seems to be common, so the trusty stern anchor got a real workout on the trip north. For *Reel Appeal* at least, it made all the difference.

Just around the corner is the large "Double Bay". Not too dissimilar to Woodwark next door, and with the same generally expanded fishing and crabbing opportunities (note part of the bay is a green zone). There are few places to stretch the legs here and if you do - you may find yourself sharing the beach with a family of dingoes, but if you have a suitable tender there is plenty of country to explore, and reef edges and mangrove fringes to run a lure over. Again, you are certainly not going to be crowded out here.

Further north again and not too far



This unlucky trout gobbled down a large bait lazily thrown overboard on a set line - just as the cry "What are we going to have for tea?" had gone out.