

Touring in a Tropic Paradise

1,000 Kilometres on a 14 Foot Catamaran

Oh \$#!+. Dad, did you see that?" I said as convincingly as I could.

"No, what was it?"

"I saw something under both bows only a few feet below us."

We all looked around and concluded that it must have been a reflection. Being out on an open 14 foot catamaran for long hours of the day tends to tamper with one's vision. Then about a minute later one of us spotted it and we knew what it was immediately. A 12 foot tiger shark was swiftly gliding through the water only 15 feet away from us. From then on, until we reached our stop, we were all glued to the centre of the boat with our eyes peeled!!

Hey. Wait on. You don't even know who we are. I'm Jesse Martin and am 14 years old. My brother over there is Beau, he's 12. And that's our Dad, Kon. We're on our 14 foot Caper Cat somewhere near the Howick Group of islands out in the [Great Barrier Reef](#) on the north-east coast of Australia. In the twin hulls of the boat is all the gear necessary for a thousand kilometre journey in some of the best sailing water of the world.

We had no idea of the excitement and adventure that we were in for when we humbly left the small local beach on Alexandra Bay, above Cairns in Queensland. The breeze on that first day was so light that it took us five hours to reach our first stop.



We're on our way at last. Heading off to the middle of nowhere on the Great Barrier Reef, the world's largest and most beautiful marine park.

The next few weeks were like a new school year for me when your Mum buys you new pens and books and all sorts of goodies and you say to yourself that you will do all your homework as hard as you can and try your very best, even in the littlest things such as keeping your books and locker clean, but after a week or so you fall back into the old routine and couldn't be bothered doing everything so perfect as you had thought. Towards the end of our trip we didn't even set up the tent because it was such a bother and we saved a lot of time in the morning by not having to pack it up again. However, we had just started out and we knew we were on the edge of adventure, whatever happened.



Did I tell you that the fish just jump into the boat whenever you get hungry? Not. That's me on the left, Beau holding the fish, Dad holding the camera. We soon learnt about cooking fish.

Cedar Bay was our first stop. It was here that we started learning ever so hard to cook the fish without burning it. We found coconuts and there was a mysterious person who didn't want to know us and disappeared when we

arrived. From there we took a bearing towards Cooktown and with the 35' catamarans in Cedar Bay behind us slowly getting smaller we felt quite proud of our selves. Suddenly we noticed Cooktown parallel to us. Had we gone that far north already? We gybed and flew into Cooktown harbour like nothing you've seen!!

Leaving Cooktown was even worse! We were on a downwind run with the breeze coming down the river. When we passed the shelter of the headland we were greeted abruptly by the sea wind that was hurtling by and we were caught off side. One hull slowly left the water and kept rising until Dad, through the sudden chaos, uncleated the main sheet and the hull splashed back into place. We'd been up on one hull before, so what was the problem here? Well we were in the mouth of a major water system that led to where the notorious salt water crocodile happens to live. This was no place to be invited to breakfast by a crocodile.



Just in case you don't believe about the crocodiles, here's Beau holding our dilly net. A crocodile decided to have a go at it.

Because of the danger of saltwater crocodiles we did not camp on the mainland much. We hopped between islands and coral cays which were safer for camping.

We had been sailing along the coastline bordered by the world famous Daintree Rainforest. Alexandra Bay, where we started the trip, is at the southern end of the Daintree. Its a famous and beautiful part of Australia. We were surprised and disappointed that the rainforest only extends from the Daintree River until a little way past

Cooktown and with that our dreams of sunbaking on rainforest fringed beaches for the whole trip went down the gurgler. I suppose this shows how naive we are about our environment and how close we are to losing one of our nation's prized natural wonders.



This is our camp at Cape Bedford, just north of Cooktown

We continued our way up the coast until Cape Flattery where we took a sharp right and headed into the deep blue yonder. Out to open sea at last. We bumped in to Lizard Island and took a long needed rest for a whole week.

Here we are at Lizard Island. Lots of boats make it this far, not many go further north. We went right to the top of Australia. Lizard Island is home to some of the best black marlin fishing in the world, as well as being the greatest diving place ever.



Beau is sleeping on the boat.

The Lizard Island Resort costs more than \$1,000 per day. Sleeping on the boat is cheaper but you have to cook for yourself.

While diving off Lizard Island a fishing boat pulled up and dropped down a line. My brother, stuck his head in the

water to check the visibility and came up saying that he saw a big tail shoot off when he disturbed the surface. Thinking nothing of what might be attached to the tail we jumped in and wandered around snorkelling. About five minutes later I lifted my head out of the water and Beau did as well only to catch the last words of a conversation between Dad and the fishing boat. ".....tiger shark took our fish" That was all I had to hear and we stuck our heads back in the water and swam faster than Keiran Perkins (probably because we had fins on) towards the boat. In record time cleared the gun'l. We probably scared the shark to the other side of the Island in doing so.



View from above. Beautiful water, a never ending supply of fresh fish, and no school. What could be better? That's Beau on the left, me on the right.



This is Beau. I am over on the left of the picture further away from the camera, speargun at the ready.

After we had spent a pleasant and quiet week at Lizard Island, we followed a bearing to the Howick group. It was on this leg of the journey that we had our close encounter with the with the big munchy under the bows of the catamaran. The sea looks peaceful on the surface,

but below us were things we didn't want to know about.



That's not a knife, this is a knife!

Dad always wanted to be like Crocodile Dundee, this little shark is as close as he got on this trip. Come over for dinner and you will see a man eating shark.



Drying out the stuff in the boat. You can see the lid off the hull locker on this side. We had lots of room in there, as long as you like eating rice.

From the Howick group we sailed north west to the start of Bathurst Bay with another week's stay on the Flinders Islands which had fresh rain water supplied by two large water tanks. There we saw aboriginal paintings of dugong, crocodile and stingrays, as well as paintings of the 1800s sailing ships that brought the first fleet and their followers.



This is some of the

Aboriginal rock painting that we saw at the Owen Channel near the Flinders Island Group. There are pictures of turtles, fish, dugongs, &There was no way we could tell how old the paintings were. Some of them must be very ancient.

From here we took the long plunge across Princess Charlotte Bay which was one of the times we were over 50 kilometres off shore. Our stop, Pelican Island out in the middle of nowhere. We were a bit worried about sleeping on the small open cays being so vulnerable to anything that was around. Someone told us to set a boundary of string around the camp with cans threaded on it and if a croc came close and rattled them that a torch beam in their eyes would scare them off. The only problem was, we never had any cans.



Looks like clear weather out there, but something is coming up that is making me look a bit worried.



Then the weather hit. Suddenly it was getting rough, and there was Dad taking pictures. We thought he was supposed to be steering!!



But mostly the sailing was calm and peaceful over flat water among beautiful islands and coral cays.



Fish for dinner tonight...

Heading north again, Beau, my brother, fell asleep and rolled over the side only to be rudely awakened by the cooling sensation of the water and getting dragged along with his foot stuck in the rudder!! After a long day sailing we got to Morris Island, which we recognised by the 18metre coconut tree growing there all alone. We cooked our usual dinner, rice with fish. For breakfast we had any left overs. We must have been out on the water for quite a while by now, as even uncooked rolled oats with water had made it's way into our recipe book!



And another night... More fish for dinner

That night around the fire I saw something crawling towards the light and, taking a closer look, I realised what it was. I grabbed the torch and swung around to be

confronted by 150–250 baby loggerhead turtles. Instead of going to the reflection of the moon on the water, they were making their way into our fire and committing suicide. We couldn't let this happen so we all had a ball collecting them up and returning them to the sea. The cute little critters!!



This sure looks like hard work. Soon I suppose we'll have to go fishing.

The Aboriginal community at Lockhart River, was the next major stop. And, yes, you guessed it, we stayed for a week. This time we could rebuild our bodies with scrumptious food from the supermarket.

Our days were spent swinging in the hammocks and playing with the Aboriginal children that lived on the beach. During the day the women would go to the waters edge during low tide and fish for a few hours. They would come back with enough fish to feed the whole family. Their huts were no more than a frame made of poles with a corrugated tin roof and portable sides that were put up when it got windy. On the ground they had foam mattresses which they slept on.

After our week we were glad to get going again and took off for Portland Roads. This was a small town of about 6–7 houses of white residents. It is a stop where sailors can refill their water tanks. From here we even phoned home. We motored out to a prawn trawler and asked for a few prawns. We were given a whole bag full and asked two men on a 32' Manitou, the two we had seen at Flinders Islands, to help us devour them. We sat around the fire disarming the crustaceans and discarding their armour in the fire.

We were invited back to their yacht for some dessert after dinner and by the time we left it was dark. It was

about a 100 meters to the shore and we sailed off trying to adjust our eyes to the little flame marking our camp. "Hey dad. A kid told me today that there is a four meter croc that lives" around here. We'd better move the camp back from the water a bit."

" Really ? In that case we'd better..." CRUNCH!
" Beau, Jess. Move up the front " Dad said in great anxiety. This wasn't a time to say please. "We've got to get the rudders off the bottom!" The boat came to a grinding halt as the fibre glass boat wedged itself upon a coral shelf.
" What now?" Someone murmured.
I kept my eye on the water as Dad leaned over to set the little outboard motor into life and tore our belly out, or at least that's what it felt like, until we reached the freedom of deep water and a long way round back to camp.



Here we are stuck on a reef. The water can be shallow, depending on the tide, and it is easy to get stuck. Trouble is, that coral is hard and sharp and the boat can get damaged.



And this is the result. We had to take the mast down and turn the boat upside down, then start filling the gaps with repair resin. I'm holding the gap open while Dad stuffs the goop inside.

Forbes Island, we discovered, was like a mini Lizard Island with a precious sheltered bay, a hill with a bit of height to stop the wind and an old coconut plantation.

With the reef only meters from the shore and water like on the advertising billboards. It would have been nice to stay for longer except we only had half a litre of water left and were forced to move on to the Olive River where we had heard of some hermits who would be more than happy to fill our bottles up.



This is Forbes Island. Another of Australia's tropic paradise islands. It needs a fresh water supply.

With friendly advice from Heather and Hugo (the hermits) we set our heading for Haggerstone Island which is an easy half day sail. We were greeted here by the friendly workers of the resort who invited us along for dinner so we could tell them about our adventure. There were 6 guests, the two workers and the owners who had a three year old baby boy. That night we had bread, prawns, salad and numerous cans of Coke.

The subject that my Dad was a builder came up. So was Roy, the owner, and they were even familiar with each other's work and Anna, Roy's wife, worked as a cook where Dad used to live. This opened up the opportunity for Dad to help Roy with the work which was burdening him down. We stayed there for a week, with great pleasure might I add, and learnt how to look for and catch crayfish.



Getting stuff from the boat at sunset. They sure know how to turn on the evening

lights up this way.

With only 120 miles to our destination we knocked it over with a record speed of two days even with stopping off at a Japanese Pearl farm. We also spotted our second crocodile on the trip. This last leg of the journey took us through the Albany Passage which runs across the tip of Cape York. We had been told there was a one metre difference where the current that comes up the east coast of Queensland meets the water of the Arafura Sea coming from the west. This didn't effect us as we only drew 1 foot of water and skimmed right over the top.

We had come, at last, to the very top of Australia. Now all we had to do was find the real Cape York, something like finding the real North Pole. Where is that marker post?

"There it is !"

"No it's not, that's it. Or maybe that's it."

When we found the sign which marks that actual point of Cape York we got a photo and rounded the tip. We had made it to the top, now where to?



The tip of Cape York at last!

The sign says:

**YOU ARE STANDING AT
THE NORTHERNMOST POINT
OF THE AUSTRALIAN
CONTINENT**



and head for home.

Time to unload the boat