



Keppel Bay Trip Report (June 2003)

Article Alan Thompson, photographs Cindy Thompson

*left: Great Keppel seen from Tanby Point, north of Emu Park.
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THE PLAN

Day 1: Saturday 21 June 2003

Depart Fisherman's Beach - Emu Park to Humpy Island - Toilets, bore water for washing & drinking water available. A beautiful beach encompasses the NW side of the island with fringing coral reefs, good snorkeling & fishing. Camp for 2 nights. Distance: 8 nm/14.4 klm. HW-15.07pm 2.98 LW 8.56am 1.23m

Day 2: Sunday 22 June 2003

Explore Humpy Island. The island is largely grassy with stunted heath & grassland. About 1 kilometre north of Humpy is Halfway Island. Coral reefs stretch between the two islands and the reef to the eastern side of Halfway Island is zoned "B" that is, no fishing or collecting allowed. Also explore the south eastern side of Great Keppel Island. LW 9.50am 1.23m HW 16.15pm 3.07m

Day 3: Monday 23 June 2003

Depart Humpy Island for Middle Island. Depending on the weather, either via the SE side of Great Keppel - Distance 8nm/14.4klm or the NW route - Distance 4nm/7.2klm. Camp for three nights on Middle Island. The island is sheltered from the S.E. winds and covered in heath and shrubland, there are no developed camping areas and camping is restricted to the beaches on both sides of the island. This island is also zoned "B" that is, no fishing or collecting within 500 metres. Snorkeling is recommended, as fish life is more diverse and abundant than any other fringing reef in the Keppels. Olive Point on the eastern side of the island is well known for the olive sea snakes that inhabit the area. LW 10.44am 1.18m HW 17.15 3.25m .

Day 4: Tuesday 24 June 2003

Explore Middle, Miall & Great Keppel Islands. 1.5 klm to the north of Middle Island is Miall Island, which is similar to Middle in size and character, fringing reef on the S.E & Northern sides of the island. Allows good snorkeling. Great Keppel Island is one kilometre to the east of Middle Island and contains a resort with all facilities available, for those who feel like walking there are several established walking tracks. LW 11.30am 1.10m HW 18.07pm 3.45m

Day 5: Wednesday 25 June 2003

Continue to explore or rest/fish. HW 6.12am 3.16m LW 12.13pm 1.02m

Day 6: Thursday 26 June 2003

Paddle from Middle Island to North Keppel Island and camp 2 nights. Distance: 6.5nm/11.7klm. North Keppel is the largest in the group with nine beaches, rugged cliffs, steep grass clad hills, windswept shrublands, woodland and palm groves caters for a range of activities. The camp ground at Considine beach has composting toilets and bush showers & bore water for washing only. Drinking water must be supplied. Sandflies and mozzies can be a problem as well as possums around the campsite, so, secure your food. From the camp site a gently sloped walking track winds 2klm through a variety of woodland types to Mazie bay, once an aboriginal campsite. Spectacular views of the islands and coast are available from the hilltops on the eastern side of the island. HW 6.59am 3.15m LW 12.51pm .95m



Day 7: Friday 27 June 2003

Explore Island and surrounds. HW 7.42am 3.15m LW 1300pm .65m

Day 8: Saturday 28 June 2003

Paddle from North Keppel to Conical/Pleasant Island. Distance: 1nm/1.8klm. Camp 1 night. Conical is roughly cone shaped and slopes steeply up to 30m and is covered in Heath. A sandy beach on the eastern shore compliments the rugged rocky platforms and tumbled boulders on the more exposed northern and western sides. The only facilities provided are picnic tables, it is however one of the best campsites in the Keppel group. HW 8.20am 3.13m LW 14.02 .86m

Day 9: Sunday 29 June 2003

Paddle from Conical to Rossllyn Bay. Distance: 7.3nm/13klm HW 6.57am 3.12m LW 14.38pm .84m

THE TRIP (photo above: departure Fisherman's Beach, Emu Park)

DAY 1.

With the sea absolutely flat and glassed out, we left Fishermans Beach at 8.40am for a slow paddle to Pelican Island.. Where Ian T and Andy swapped seats in the Roscoe double on loan from Alan R, we continue on to Humpy and after a slow paddle arrived around 11am and paddled over a large school of baitfish close to the beach, the same school of baitfish seem to have been in the same place on the last few visits.

It is a glorious sunny day, no wind and the crystal clear waters are lapping on the golden sands of the beach. We set up camp under the she-oaks with the resident food thieving crows (well remembered from previous trips). After setting up camp we went for a swim, the water was cool but refreshing.

After lunch, Cindy had a nap (actually she was on crow watching duty) and the rest of us walked around the island enjoying the views and spotting several sea eagles. On returning to camp we again had a swim and a snorkel, followed by a shower and afternoon tea (a glass of red wine). The end of a marvelous day was marked by a spectacular sunset over the mainland.

DAY 2. We awoke to another sunny day with a 5-10kn south easter with a .5-1 metre swell.

The wind was whispering through the she-oaks but it soon abated, Cindy and I decided to try a bit of fishing so we paddled around to the eastern side of the island, it was too windy for us to find a sheltered spot, so we came back inside and drifted across the channel and past the western side of Halfway Isl. We had some bites but no success.

We then paddled over to the south western side of Humpy and drifted back to the beach, a couple of blue tooth were interested in our baits, but once again, no hook ups. We had a tremendous view of a school of baitfish directly below us, there were thousands of them, the sea was dark for an area of around 20 square metres and the coral was spectacular viewing as well.



Meanwhile, Ian T & Andy in the double and Alan R in the single Greenlander circumnavigated Humpy and then across to Halfway Is. Ian E and Mark went in the opposite direction, paddling and sailing across to Monkey Point on Great Keppel and returning via Long Beach, Clam Bay and Halfway Island.

They landed several times to examine the Aboriginal Midden at Monkey beach and a small cove along the way which was littered with the flotsam and jetsom of human habitation. These surf landing practices were completed without any dramas.

While training, doing eskimo rolls around midday we noticed an absolute superb halo that had taken up over half the sky around the sun, apparently a harbinger of inclement weather. Also seen was a rainbow in the clouds, apparently indicating moisture or ice crystals.

Halfway Island (near) and Humpy Island seen from Long Beach, Great Keppel Island. Image: W. Strong



DAY 3. Overcast, 10-15 kn South westerly, 1-1.5 metre swells, sloppy conditions.

We left Humpy around 8.30am and had an exciting trip out past Halfway Isl. As the wind and the tide and the currents combined the make the waves a little more "elevated" than normal. We continued along the eastern side of Great Keppel, past Red beach to a small beach just before Wreck Beach, chosen especially for its difficult dumping waves. Morning tea! Back out through the surf and continue on around the island to Middle Island. About 2klms out from Middle Island a race developed between the 2 doubles, Alan T & Cindy in one and Ian T & Andy in the other. By the time we landed on the beach we were all exhausted from the effort. Too exhausted to notice that we were in the wrong place, the fact that there was no National Parks sign welcoming us to Middle Island should have alerted us, but we proceeded to set up camp, had lunch quickly followed by wine and snacks on the beach enjoying the view of the mainland to Corio bay and North Keppel.

Andy made a circumnavigation of the island by foot and mark paddled to Great Keppel for supplies (wine & snacks), we continued happy hour for several hours through another spectacular sunset that illuminated Great Keppel and seemed to carry on for hours. There were several sore heads the next morning..

DAY 4. Overcast South Easterley 10-15 knots, .5 metre swell, sloppy conditions.

Due to yesterdays navigational error, we found ourselves camped in the teeth of a south easterly gaining in intensity. It was decided to relocate the camp to the next beach (where we were supposed to be anyway) because it was more sheltered. Once camp was re-established, we decided to go to Great Keppel for lunch. It was an uneventful paddle across, if not a bit wave piercing as we headed into the wind and the choppy seas. We had a brief look around and headed back under sail.

Middle Island (near) and North Keppel from Putney Beach, west side of Great Keppel. Image: W. Strong



The mother ship (Natureline Mermaid Double) was under full sail (2) and flying along when we picked up a hitchiker - Mark rafted up and we sailed back to camp, Mark thoroughly enjoying his free ride. As the weather closed in, we all crawled into our tents to hibernate, Unfortunately the rain did not let up all night.

DAY 5. Cloudy, scattered showers, South Easterly 10-15 knots

More wind, more rain, camping is such fun. A couple of quick phone calls confirmed it, the weather was only going to get worse, back to the tent for more reading. All day was spent in the tent apart from periodic exits for nature calls or to check on the weather (still wet & wild, up to 25 knots now).

DAY 6. Overcast, North Westerly, 10-15knots, .5-1metre swells, seas lumpy

Up early and paddled to Great Keppel, Mark and Ian E via the eastern side of the island and the rest on the eastern side, sheltered from the wind. It absolutely poured down with rain. Cold wet and miserable, we all decided to have another hot breakfast of toasted bacon and egg sandwiches. Mark put his boat on the barge and headed home (work commitments).

We were of a mind to join him, but we checked with the weather bureau and the forecast is good, much to everyone's surprise and disbelief, so off we went to North Keppel. We paddle past Middle and Miall Islands and turn right and headed for North Keppel, the sun is out, the wind has swung around to the south west at around 5-10 knots, not enough to sail unaided.



left: lumpy seas and cloudy skies day 6

The second half of the day was superb, virtually no breeze at all, but there was some large ground swells of around 2 metres coming through on our starboard side. We knew the swells were at least 2 metres as Ian cannot see the top of our masts when we were both in a trough.

Suddenly, near Sloping Island, a couple of dolphins are spotted a few metres to starboard and cross just in front of us. They then turn right and follow Ian T and Andy who were slightly ahead of us. Just as suddenly a westerly wind springs up and we are able to sail to tonight's camp site at Considine Bay.

We arrive at around 1.30pm and set up camp. Already, we are impressed with North Keppel, just from paddling along the western side. The vegetation is so varied and the camping facilities enhance that opinion. We can't wait to explore. After dinner we spent an educational hour on the beach looking at the lights on the mainland trying to pick out the local landmarks.

DAY 7. Perfect weather again

After breakfast we went for a walk to Mazie Bay along a well defined walking trail, the diversity of the vegetation ranging from various grasses, Grevilleas, Acacias and Eucalyptus with their smooth grey trunks marked by possum scratchings. There was even an example of a *Planchorisa Careya* (Cocky apple tree) which the natives used as a fish poison. All the while there was palms growing trackside until within site of Mazie Bay the track traversed through an extensive stand of them.

The track finally emerges from the forest of palms onto a plain of spinefex grass which borders the bay itself (magnificent). All of us except for Ian E who is not a noted rock-hopper walked back via the coast, we observed a large sea eagles nest with a pair of resident eagles. It appeared as if there were a couple of young in the nest, so we gave it a wide berth and continued our walk enjoying the magnificent scenery.

On returning to camp Ian T and Alan R were practising eskimo rolling again and while paddling about they observed and paddled alongside a dugong, which soon left them behind. That night, the pests that Considine Bay is famous for applied their influences, possums and sandflies were both present in plague proportions.

DAY 8. Sunny, light southeasterly to 5 knots, flat seas.

Up early, some of us paddle around North Keppel. The eastern side of the island is quite dramatic with sheer cliffs plunging straight into deep blue water. We trolled a lure, but once again, no bites. We continue on to Pumpkin Passage, where Andy snorkelled and looked at the coral, which was absolutely tremendous. We also saw a couple of Garfish tailwalking, obviously being pursued by something a bit larger, we also saw a couple of large Bluetooth. We continued on to Conical Island, where we met the others and had lunch and a walk around, it is a lovely spot with a great campsite (no sandflies). After a rest, we paddled back to North Keppel, where another kayaker has arrived, Bob, from North America. He tells us that he has paddled from Humpy today and left Emu Park a few days ago.



Humpy Beach looking nor'west to Great Keppel



left: day 8 calm weather

DAY 9. Sunny, sea flat, no wind.

We pack up and head for home around 8.30am, Alex & Pauline and Ian E left slightly before us. After paddling for around 2 klm, Alan R was having trouble paddling as he had hurt his ribs the day before during rolling practice, so we hitched up the tow ropes to the two doubles and towed him most of the way back. It was a hot hard paddle and about 2 klms from Cooee Bay (our destination) Alan indicated that he would be right to paddle the rest of the way unaided (thank goodness).

On arrival, we unpacked, loaded our boats, had refreshments and made our way home.

