

From *The Sea Canoeist*, September 1982.

## Townsville to Thursday Island

May 12th - July 20th, 1981

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### PART ONE

Around mid May 1981, Sean Dixon (Sydney), Paul Davis (Hobart) and Tony Phipps (Sydney) set off in canoes to paddle from Townsville to Thursday Island in the Torres Strait along the Semi-Tropical coast of Cape York Peninsula. Dixon in his own Nordkapp, Phipps in a not-too sound commercially produced Nordkapp and Davis in his own, rather long in the tooth North Sea Tourer. All canoes were fitted with rudders and small 1/2 square metre gaff rigged sails.

This is the story of their trip as related by Sean;

An intense, week long session of boat modifications, food and gear packaging, preceded our Townsville departure. We got away at 9.30 am and headed North, bound for the Northern end of Magnetic Island. The boats were low in the water, the main bulk being food rations which we estimated was two months worth - one would be excused for overkill. The going was calm to Magnetic Island, what we think were dugong were seen breaking the water off the Northern Tip. South Easterly breezes were freshening as we set sail northwards, and on crossing to Acheron Island, the patch of water locally known as 'The Paddock', lived up to it's reputation for ragged seas. Paul's cockpit had quite filled with water, Tony's hatches had sprung leaks and I was feeling pretty tired when I discovered several yards of mosquito net previously strapped to the rear deck, trailing behind my boat, we decided to put in at Acheron.

On our approach to Acheron Island, two trawlers appeared out of the mire, one towing the other; the smaller one in tow had been found drifting and deserted, was left on anchor in the lee of the Island, very full of water. Towards dark, and on Paul's deciding to take a closer look, the trawler's bow went skyward and to the bottom she did go, Stern first - what of Omens and Superstitions now?

The wind blew stronger the next day bringing squally rain which was to continue for 8 days. The site of a former Leper Colony, Phantom Island, in the Palm group was our next stop. We landed here in fabulously tropical conditions, warm rain belting down in torrents giving the flat seas a smoky misty primeval character - and soaking us to the skin, a truly delightful experience.

Here a generous mob of army recruits on survey exercise donated an almost full 5 gallon drum of 'dog biscuits', vegemite and curry powder to a worthwhile cause.

The Palm Island aboriginal settlement is restricted for visitors, we passed by, although the lure of its high range and small sheltered beaches was strong. We were later to hear chilling stories of the treatment of Palm Island aborigines, and associated activities including the very profitable grog runs that still occur.

To the lure of Orpheus Island we homed and were greeted by Coastal Wanderers "Tropo Bob" and his mate Karl, anchored in the lee of the Island. We spent the afternoon gathering oysters along the corally beach, and hints and directions to fruit and vegetable sources on every bay, inlet and inland from here to Cairns and beyond from Bob. The following morning we paddled to Zoe Bay on the superbly mountainous Hinchinbrook Island. Paul was struck by the similarity of this coast to that of the South of Tasmania - extensive patches of bare rock, much open high altitude grassland and deep gullies of dense vegetation. Tony and I tried our lures in the creek, one of the few times when lure casting failed to produce something to eat. A short walk took us to the head of the creek and its spectacular waterfall, freshwater bathing was very welcome. Tony and Paul decided that night that to camp under a coconut tree might not be the wisest of things to do, and high winds and heavy rain didn't make the decision any the wiser. It poured and I dived under the fly but spent a sleepless night as water crept over the ground sheet.

Heavy clouds broke the orange dawn light and the sou'-easter was still blowing as we prepared to leave. Our sails gave us good speed as we ran towards the end of Ramsay Bay and then onto the Brook Islands. Rain, wind, mosquitos and sandflies with our midday snack of dried fruit made for a short stop over on Brook Island and just as well for we were later to hear wartime nerve gas tests and radiation experiments had been performed here.

The hilly Family Islands could be seen during breaks in the rain squalls and before long we were paddling past its southern members towards Richards Islands (Bedarra Is.). Hoping we might get some shelter from this tropical drenching we sought out the manager of a resort being constructed on the Island. His answer was an emphatic NO, we were promptly escorted, in the darkness, down the muddy track to our canoes to be certain we left. Shocked by this callous attitude we paddled on to a small cove on the Eastern side of Bedarra, Paul and Tony landed to get permission to camp, soon returning to signal me to the beach with news of a warm welcome.

It was here we met Noel Wood, a fascinating man of around 70 years. He had lived the life of a recluse on his island for 45 years - having travelled overseas thrice to pursue his work as an artist painter, the spell of Bedarra bound him to return. Noel built his house from driftwood and local materials, living out the fancy of a shipwrecked mariner with the island, as it was, to be the sole provider. He subsequently introduced many varieties of exotic tropical fruits and vegetables, not the least of which were the coconut palm and Taro plant, to supplement his early diet of fish and native plants. In all to create for himself the authentic "Tropical Island Paradise".

For three days, in his house surrounded by this immense and luxurious tropical garden, Noel kept us listening eagerly to his vast collection of tales - and it rained continuously.

On the 20th of May, with Noel's many generous offerings, we took our departure, paddling in rain first to Timana Island then Dunk Island where we visited some of Noel's friends; tapestry makers and potters who, although living away from the resort on Dunk Island, sell most of their craftwork to tourists. Noel's influence on their lifestyles was unmistakable - a philosophy in common.

The wind eased as we rounded Dunk Island, rain and cloud shrouded the Resort facility here and we were reminded only in part, of the glaring obtrusion on this subtle and beautiful place. I was feeling crook and was unable to keep pace so we changed course from the South Bannard Group to Murdering Point on the mainland where a good campsite was found. The rain over the past 2 weeks made sure we were to be fireless, so with scroggin and dog biscuits and warm, if a little wet bedding we retired, the drumming rain our comforter.

Calm weather and clear skies saw us leaving for ETTY Bay. An enjoyable paddle with the South Bannards as green dots fringed with gold in a tranquil sea, passing slowly on our right; fresh trevally for lunch, compliments of Tony, and several sightings of large green turtles to stimulate the imagination. It was opposite Lindquist Island we saw the first evidence of the feral pig, a large boar rummaging along the high tide mark.

The infestations of wild pig in most parts of Queensland and New South Wales are a cause of concern both for conservationists and landowners. They pose serious threats to native fauna and some species of flora and provide a network by which sea borne stock diseases will readily transfer to domestic stock - this especially the case along the shores of Cape York.

ETTY Beach caravan park provided the necessary Mars Bars and greasy chips, we also heard details of the mini-gale that wiped out much of the sugar cane crop a short way up the coast over the past couple of days, with winds of 70 miles per hour and millions of dollars damage.

Paddling on in calm seas under a clear as clear blue sky, the hills to the west magnificent in the afternoon sun, smoky blue in the distant with a tinge of green silhouetting those closer to the coast. To High Island we made, a steep sided heavily wooded Island with a large coral reef and beach on the East. The soil here is as rich as one could expect of a tropical rain-forest and Paul planted some of Noel's custard apple seeds, in keeping with the traditions of the 'Coasties' in these parts.

A late start the following day put us on Fitzroy Island about 2pm. This Island also has great appeal to tourist enterprise with a resort presently under construction. The steep climb to the lighthouse atop Fitzroy, gave a splendid view of the Islands to the south, bits of the outer reef visible to the East and North with Green Island appearing only as a smear on the ocean 12 miles to the north.

Whilst the weather side of Fitzroy Island, as with all of the high islands seen or visited along our route, is dry and sparsely treed, much bare ground apparent with a steep rocky

relatively inaccessible shoreline, the lee side of the island displays those features typically attributable to lush tropical life, sandy beaches and protected coral reef. The good stand of coconut palms here was welcome as there was an abundance of ripe fruit for the taking.

It was Sunday, so we made it a leisurely paddle across Missionary Bay into Cairns on a calm sea. With a lot of help and good advice from Len Foxcroft and his wife Carol, we changed the rig of our canoes to square sail, sporting about 1 square meter of sail and effectively doubling our previous rig's performance.

Paul and I re-stepped our masts 8" forward of their previous positions allowing for a less cramped paddling style when sail was in use. Carole's experience in sail repairs ensured we had a quality job, well suited to the weeks of continuous use ahead. Ted and Ken Butler loaned us the use of their workshops in Cairns for storage of boats and gear for the minor repairs necessary; we all feel much in debt to these kind people.

Paddling conditions were good for May 28th though we only made it to Double Island (10 miles) before I succumbed to an attack by some sort of bug. We camped here for three days before my temperature broke then made for Port Douglas and the Daintree River. Shallow coral beds extended offshore for quite some distance where it was fascinating to watch the brightly coloured parrot fish and Emperor in the clear water. From our camp just South of the Daintree River, Paul and Tony headed off early to beat the tide run-out in the river; I was still under the effects of the flu so slept in.

Tony continues;

"Mike and Jackie Turner, friends of Noel Woods run the "Crocodile Express", a motorised catamaran built for floating tourists on a leisurely sight seeing trip up and down the river. Mike invited Paul and I aboard for the trip and a midday meal - it was a great change from the staple meals we'd been used to. We saw some beautiful birds the most exciting of which was a Great Billed Heron, also seen were Brahminy Kites, Jabiru, a Sooty Owl, Mangrove Kingfishers, Egrets, White Faced Herons, Rainbow Birds and Ibis, but the most fascinating things of all were the crocodiles. The first was an 18", two year old, then we were treated to the sight of a six footer just at the waters edge, Mike explained that Egrets are a good indicator of a Croc's presence. As we rounded a bend in the river there was a monster on the bank about two hundred yards away, to say he was 18'-20' long is no exaggeration I can assure you. The slide which we examined shortly afterwards was at least 3 1/2 feet across."

We spent five wonderful days on the Daintree River. Mike had lost an outboard motor in the river ten days before we arrived, so the three of us volunteered to search for it, diving with mask and snorkel we were able to cover a fair bit of territory before darkness intervened. I was posted Sentry to scout for Crocs while the others, including Mike, waded and swum in chest deep water during the last of the ebb tide; we had no luck finding the motor and it was only afterwards that Mike told Paul and Tony about the twelve foot croc that had once stalked him near to where they had been diving. We tried the following day with grappling rig. Paul and Tony took turns to dive each time we

hooked something. It may have been Mike's story or just a good nights sleep but they made some particularly powerful exits from the water into the dinghy that day.

Walter Stark, a marine biologist and friend of Tony's father, lives upstream with wife Janice and several friends on a property they're developing into a fruit and vegetable farm. Their sixty foot ship, the El Torito, is anchored close by and serves as a floating laboratory for research and film making. Walter was working on film taken on a recent trip to the Solomon's when we arrived late in the afternoon, he showed us the boats they had designed and were building on the property from F.R.P. and explained it was one of their research financing schemes. We talked with other members of the crew over cups of coffee and listened to enchanting tales of the beautiful Solomon Islands and the little known Louisiade Archipelago.

It was late when we returned to our kayaks laden with gifts of fruit from Janice. It was a beautiful paddle back down the tranquil river along the dense rain forest shoreline but Tony was feeling a little apprehensive, as his log later revealed;

"There was an insecure feeling in my guts being on the river after dark especially with large crocs in the vicinity. On the way down I had paddled over to where I thought I could see a croc on the bank and then saw a sizeable wave disturbance pass about ten feet in front of my bow. Mike later said it could have been nothing but a croc."

The next two days were spent pouring a concrete spillway for Mike's dam and spending a few hours at night spotlighting crocodiles. Mike related the story of an American tourist who was delighted when she spotted a native 'dugout' on the bank. "No madam, that's an aluminium dinghy, all the aborigines use them now. " he calmly explained.

All the rivers in North Queensland have suffered to some degree through the thoughtless actions of the cane industry. The Daintree is no exception and has been badly silted as a result of tree felling and clearing along its banks and the surrounding hills. One local cane spokesman refers to rain forest as 'Scrub' growing on good cane land.

It was time to move on again. We left the Daintree about June the 7th, dragged the heavily laden boats across the big sand bar at the mouth and paddled several miles to Shipwreck Bay, a most beautiful spot covered by rainforest and surrounded by steep hills. Here we met a young family from Port Douglas, schoolteacher Lyle Johnston, wife Judy and their two sons. Over a hot dinner Judy told us of how she'd been stung by a box jelly fish, a deadly predator that senses movement and homes in on the vibrations of it's prey. A sting from its tentacles is most often fatal and doctors were stunned when they saw the extent of Judy's injuries. The box jellyfish leaves a dreadful scar on it's victims from the hundreds of miniature arrow-like barbs it fires into its prey. Judy said the pain was excruciating at first, then she lapsed into a dream like state of semi-consciousness until Lyle got her to the Cooktown Hospital after an 80 mile boat trip through rough seas.

The weather was fining up and the next days were clear and sunny with very little wind and still quite hot. We moved up to Cape Tribulation but soon left when trail bikes and

four wheel drives began performing on the beach. Tony caught a small mackerel and we dined well at the mouth of the Bloomfield River, intending to head for Cedar Bay the next day. Instead we took up the invitation of a local fisherman Bill Dowd, and went up the river to spend a few days on his property and visit the falls at the head of the river.

Paul continues;

“The Bloomfield River, tidal for 5 miles, runs its course of 7 miles or so through some very fertile tropical savannah country, a fair percentage of which has been cleared mainly for the establishment of an aboriginal community. There being moves a foot to revive the agricultural sufficiency of the area so as to make the whole community a self supporting one. Although logging still survives here, new industry such as the establishment of an extensive exotic tropical fruit plantation and the development of a fishing resort is taking place.

Roaring Meg is the river responsible for the brilliant cascading falls at the head of the Bloomfield River. The river plunges sixty feet in two major steps into a deep steep cliffed basin and fresh water pool. The atmosphere is alive with a spray-filled blast of cold air charging from the pool below.”

A final repast of Spiced Red Emperor and Sweet Lip along with abundant quantities of tropical passion fruit and we took our leave of the Bloomfield.

On a falling tide on glassy seas we struck out across Weary Bay, and later into zephyrs from the North East. The low coast line stretching away to the north and Rattle Snake Point then Oyster Bay where we stopped to feed on oysters as large as a saucer. They were enormous numerous and very tasty.

Thick rain forest extends down the steep banks to the rocky foreshore on the Western side of the bay, it was surely the most beautiful spot I had seen so far on the trip and was eager to explore it, so jumping into my kayak I continued following the rocky shore towards a long beach. Passing close into the first bay I could see a figure doing what appeared to be callisthenics while holding on to the branch of a tree. I called to him and he waved his hand in the air pointing Northwards saying something I could not make out. Even at a hundred yards he appeared to be a big man very fit with jet black hair. He seemed interested in my kayak and said something about crocodiles, probably a warning, I thought. Anxious to get to Cedar Bay I paddled on, not realising that I had accidentally stumbled across a living legend of the north, Michael Formenco, known to many as Tarzan.

Paul and Tony stopped and talked to Formenco, learning that he'd paddled to New Guinea in a dugout many years before, living off the land along the way. He'd been followed by big salt water crocodiles and had at one stage killed one with a knife for food. Formenco, surviving by the knife and rifle travels light with all of his possessions carried in a sugar bag and lives the style of the natives with no permanent shelter or abode. His strong fit body bears witness to his success.

Tony later said Formenco's mind seemed to wander during their talk, his stories sometimes becoming disjointed as his memory jumped across the years. We learned sometime afterwards that his was a sad story, starting about twenty five years ago in Sydney when he was a brilliant young student and athlete. His father, a school master at one of Sydney's top private schools had apparently been an officer in the Tsar's army before leaving Russia. Michael decided to opt out of the Society he had grown up in and fled to North Queensland a few years after he had left school. He acquired a reputation as the wild man of the North for his exploits.

Unfortunately everyone didn't view his actions as harmless and he was arrested and returned to Sydney after approaching a lonely homestead to ask for salt. In Sydney he was locked up and given shock treatment, which may account for his vagueness today. After his release Michael returned to the land he loved and has wandered the length of Cape York and its off-shore Islands ever since.

When we met Formenco, he had underway, the job of building two more dugouts from massive silky oak trees cut from the dense rain forest at Cedar Bay. He hopes one day, to set off for the Islands to the South East of New Guinea if he can find a crew to help sail his hand made creations. After leaving 'Tarzan' we ran across one of the temporary residents of Cedar Bay, John.

Tony takes up the story;

“We ran into a real dag of a hippie named Oyster Bay John who lived in a hovel up on the hill from the beach. He invited us up for a cup of tea to his shack, however we couldn't stand the stench and moved back down the beach. We all decided to have cocoa after John had opened his tin of tea which was all but crawling. (It was crawling). He reckoned it was OK but we didn't share his confidence.”

When Oyster John had devoured half a bag of our muesli and pronounced it a “taste trip” we left this plump young scavenger and paddled towards the bay proper, sighting a group of people sitting down to a meal at the Southern end of the beach. We approached the several sparsely clad young ladies and asked directions to Cedar Bay Bill's place. We met Cedar Bill the evening before we left for Cooktown and he related some of his experiences to us. He has lived on and off at Cedar Bay for 50 years and at 88 is still sprightly enough to collect his own firewood in a wheel barrow. Originally, he emigrated from Wales after his lungs were “dusted” in the coal mines, taking a prospectors licence and disappearing into the wilds of Cape York for 6 months at a time. Bill found Cedar Bay and settled there when the only visitors were aborigines and the odd passing ship. There is no road into Cedar Bay so all supplies must be carried in or brought by boat from the Bloomfield River. Cedar Bill (we didn't find out his last name) planted most of the 200 or so coconut palms and many of the fruit trees along the beach front. He had few problems until about 10 years ago when many counter-culture people trekked in to populate this new found paradise.

A few of these who could not live of the land like Bill took to cultivating a popular weed and before long what Bill describes as the "Mariana Wars" took place. The heavies

moved in to reap the majority of the crop and shots were exchanged, some coming a bit too close for Bill's liking. After the smoke had cleared the cops descended on the place, several houses were razed and people fled to safer ground. Today, only a few remain and they, like Bill, can all feed themselves from the land. Others, like Oyster John, hang around until their welcome wears out, then disappear back over the ranges.

We stayed with another character at the extreme northern end of Cedar Bay but he too was not suited to the local way of life.

Relying on store bought groceries for his survival, Nick the Greek, was starting to feel the pinch. Having made a bad deal with some weed growers in the mountains in which he traded most of his flour, Nick was in a somewhat depressed mood. Our presence seemed to cheer him up and when Tony caught two good fish from the nearby creek, Nick deemed it the work of the Lord. Nick fished every day but had caught nothing. It hadn't occurred to him, either, that coconuts were quite good to eat. After two nights, however, Nick's self-pitying ravings and prophesies of doom were wearing thin and we decided to move on. With a gift of sugar for Nick, we paddled away from Cedar Bay and towards Cooktown, into what was to prove the toughest part of the trip.

## **Part Two**

The South wind that had stayed quiet for so many days had built up during our stay in Cooktown and we launched for Cape Bedford with a 20 knot sou-easter on our beam. Rounding the Cape was a difficult time with breaking waves and a strong back wash from the rocks. After paddling 19 miles we found a good campsite on the lee side of the Cape and enjoyed fresh fish for dinner. The next day would see us attempt the crossing to Lizard Island.

The wind had not abated at all, still blowing at about 20 knots with a decent wind-swell and the occasional breaking wave. It was hitting us on the quarter beam and we decided to use the gaff-rigged storm sails as they are easier to control in strong side winds. We were making good time until half-way out on the hop to Three Islands. I glanced behind to check on Paul and saw his hull pointing skyward. By the time I had reefed the sail and turned he had rolled up but was having problems with a full cockpit of water. We rafted up and waited for Tony before bailing his boat out.

At Three Islands we had a short rest. The wind strength had increased to probably 25 knots as we set off on a short 6-mile paddle to the next camp at Two Islands, about 7 miles out from Cape Flattery. We would rest there and prepare for the big hop to Lizard the next day. Along this stretch of coast the seas were much steeper and it was hard to see each other even at short distances when the sails were up. Without the sails it would have been extremely hard to sight each other and we would have been paddling 'blind'. It was during this leg that Paul and I lost sight of Tony. He was in front of us, bobbing up on a swell every five minutes or so, so we knew his approximate position. Even so, it was getting hard to distinguish his white sail amongst the dozens of breaking waves separating us. Suddenly he was gone. Paul and I rafted up for a few minutes but couldn't sight him. We knew he hadn't paddled out of sight and I wondered if he had capsized and



we had gone past him. It was a daunting thought as we were several miles from the mainland and to back track into that wind would have been hard and dangerous. We decided to keep paddling and hope he was in front of us.

It wasn't long before I picked up his paddle reflecting and caught up to his half submerged kayak. Tony was still paddling but his cockpit was full of water, his sail gone and his expression sour. He had capsized. With water in the cockpit and a gallon or so in his hatches even Tony was finding the going hard and asked for a raft-up to bail out.

Two Islands was a beautiful spot and we set up a good camp after catching some trevally for tea. The wind was still blowing hard and at first light, looking towards Lizard Island, the sea appeared quite rough. Tony and Paul were not too keen at this stage on a paddle of 20 miles through these conditions and decided that Cape Flattery was a better proposition. With the wind behind us it was a quick run to Flattery and on to the sand-mining operation based there. Tony wanted to try and get a radio-phone call through to Sydney as there was a Telecom strike still going on while we were at Cooktown. The mining Company's lease is not hard to spot as there is a gleaming 'mountain' of white silica close to the ship wharf. Some 45,000 tons of mineral sand is stored here, pumped into barges when they dock then shipped to waiting carriers in deeper water offshore.

The manager of the operation was a good fellow and said he would pass on Tony's message as soon as he could get through to Sydney. We left Flattery about 2pm and headed for the Pethebridge Islets, about 20 miles away, arriving just on dark at these coral and mangrove studded reefs. Taking advantage of the winds we packed camp and left early next day, passing Murdock Island on our way to the Cole Group. These are all flat mangrove islands with extensive reef and a sandy beach on their lee shores. Dugong passed us heading south and many big turtles were sighted most taking fright and diving in a flurry of spray when they realised we were nearly on top of them.

I put out a troll line near Morris Island and was hit almost instantly by a large fish. Thinking I had the better side of the argument with 70lb line I applied pressure until the kayak was suddenly dragged sideways. A loop of line wound around a finger and tightened as the fish bore down into the coral. Luckily the line broke before too much damage was done. A quick patch job was done during the lunch break and we headed for the large, bare tower of rock in the distance of - Noble Island.

Noble Island has a rich deposit of Wolfram, a valuable mineral used in the making of heat resisting metals for missiles and military aircraft.

The island appeared to be deserted when we landed but further inspection by Tony and Paul found a caretaker sheltering in a wind blown shack tucked under the cliffs on the exposed southern-side. Colin Williams was an old Barramundi fisherman, among other things, and had taken on the mining job as a more lucrative enterprise. When we arrived he told us his boss had left for Cairns to get supplies, seven weeks previously, and since then he hadn't seen a soul. He was running low on food and was out of tobacco. He was overjoyed when we produced some of our trading tobacco and settled down to yarn about old times after dinner. With my cut finger still aching I listened as Col told how he had

lost one of his fingers in a fishing accident many years before. Fishing from a mackerel boat on outer reef he was feeding out the wire trace when a large trevally struck the bait. The piano wire looped around his finger as the fish dived, dragging him over the side and under. He usually wore gloves but was not doing so on this occasion, and attributes the 'mistake' to saving his life. Before he could drown the tremendous pressure on the wire helped it to sever his finger and he bobbed to the surface, grasping for air. The stunned crew turned the boat around and rescued him.

While we talked the night away the wind blew stronger and next morning Col said "there wouldn't be much change from 30 knots out there". We decided to explore parts of the island, rest up and repair Tony's leaking hatches. The huge feed of fried oysters & clam meat the night before may have contributed to our lethargy. Two fishermen, mates of Colin, turned up the next day and took him off to the mainland. We spent another wind blown night in the old caravan parked on the beach before heading for Cape Melville.

The wind had started to abate and we pushed along to Barrow Point then up to Rocky Point Island, where we found a very good campsite. More fat oysters and a few bream made up dinner and we settled in under the stars for a good night's sleep. There were plenty of wild pigs and cattle roaming here and that afternoon we had sighted a mangy dingo inspecting us from some distance. There were plenty of tracks around the camp site and sometime during the night one of the nocturnal locals decided to use the track leading through our sleeping area. Tony was the first to feel the visitor as it thumped into his back. I sensed a rush of air over me and heard the thump as the beast landed a metre or so from me. It, probably a roo, had bounded along the path and taken fright when it hit Tony's sleeping form, leaping over me and disappearing into the night.

The paddle to Cape Melville was very pleasant with flat seas and the sun shining. We saw dozens of large turtles grazing on the shallow weed beds along this part of the coast and the coral too, was amazing. There is a water hole clearly marked on the rocks at Melville and quite good camp sites along this stretch of coast. The hills run close to the shore and are composed almost entirely of huge granite boulders, many the size of small houses.

We paddled to the Flinders group the same day and planned to rest here for a few days before attempting the crossing of Princess Charlotte Bay. Flinders Island is an enormous Island with a well-sheltered anchorage and fresh water springs. There are aboriginal cave paintings on both Flinders and Stanley Island and also on Clack Island, further offshore. There were two yachts anchored in the channel behind Flinders Island when we arrived and we spent the afternoon drinking tea and yarnning. That night Tony and Paul feasted well on goat but I picked up a bug and was too crook to enjoy it. This was bad luck indeed as next morning most of the meat had been devoured. The sandflies descended on us and took their toll before we decided to move to the lee shore of Stanley Island and prepare for the long crossing.

As luck would have it Tony stumbled upon a bonanza. Paul and I had set off for Stanley to set up camp and were wondering where Tony had got to when he suddenly rounded the point with a big grin on his face. "How would you guys like cold beers and a big feast?"

he said. I thought he was pulling our legs until he told us what had happened. We rounded the point into a stiff breeze and headed for the HMAS Barricade, a navy patrol boat that had just anchored in the lee of Flinders Island. The patrol boat was on its way back to Cairns for a refit and the crew had prepared a celebration for the occasion.

Tony has seen the navy boat drop anchor and paddled over to ask if he could use their radio-phone to send a message back home. The skipper invited all of us to join in their celebration and as soon as we stepped on board cold beers were slapped into our hands and we were invited to partake of the smorgasbord that had been prepared by the cook. We moved in for the kill, to the delight of the cook, and polished off most of the tucker before the others realised the barramundi, crabs and prawns were fast disappearing. Being decent chaps they didn't mind and held off till the cook brought more fried barra wings, steamed bugs and scallop mornay.

Being closer to the table we had the advantage, with this serving disappearing swiftly, too. Stuffed to the gills, we were invited into the mates' rooms for more cans, managed a few then crashed in the rating's mess for the night.

The cook was up at dawn next morning preparing the crew's breakfast and found time to scrounge up some vegetables, coffee and sugar for us. Paul discovered that the second in charge of the boat had attended the same college as he had and we talked with the crew until it was time for the ship to depart. We headed back to Stanley Island for another day's rest before the crossing to Wharton Reef.

This reef is well out from Princess Charlotte Bay and about 20 miles from the mainland. It's the quickest route across this big bay and would give us a good line up the coast to the Lockhart River Mission, our last provisions stop before Thursday Island. Wharton Reef is large in area but very low. It has a 50' signal tower that blinks a red warning to ships that pass close to it at night. In fact, the commercial shipping channel moves in close to the coast at this point, winding its way up a deep channel between the dozens of reefs stretching along this northern coastline.

Thanks to Col Williams, the old barra fisherman, we had a good naval chart to use for the crossing and the next 80 miles or so. Leaving Stanley Island at 4.30am on a compass bearing worked out by Paul, we paddled for 1 1/2 hours before sighting the red light on Wharton. We used cyalume lights strapped to our masts so we would not lose track of each other in the dark. Luckily the sea was calm and we had no problems. We covered the 14 miles to the reef in about 4 hours, climbed the light tower to inspect an osprey's nest on the access ladder, then headed for Eden Reef. I hooked two good fish but lost both next to this reef. We could not camp here as the tide covers it at full water so we took another compass bearing and paddled to Strainer Island. I had a close call on this stretch when a big freighter changed course around a reef and headed straight for me doing about 15 knots. Its bow wave was enormous and I had to paddle hard to stay clear.

We landed on Strainer late in the afternoon after a 34 nautical mile paddle in dead calm seas. It wasn't much of an island, very low with little protection, but would do for the nights camp. Tony caught a trevally and we ate well again.

Caspian terns screeched and wheeled overhead as nightfall came, moving in on the unprotected pelican nests on the eastern side of the island. But the pelicans soon reigned, driving off the raiders, and settling in for the night as a stiff sea wind swept across our small camp. I think it was here that I tried cooking the nightly meal of dried beans in half salt, half fresh water. A disastrous experiment as we drank more than twice the fresh water we would have saved trying to wash down the salty mess.

Next morning dawned clear but the wind hadn't changed, getting a little stronger if anything. Hannah Island was a short hop and its mangrove stands were ringed by a reef of beautiful soft corals like soft rubber. We had our first close-up view of a giant clam in shallow water and saw dozens of large and colourful parrot fish feeding with the tide on top of the reef. After a few mouthfuls of scroggin we set off for Hay Island, another mangrove covered lump of battered coral 12 miles away.

This was another sandy campsite but well protected by mangrove and low trees. Another dull meal of beans and rice was averted when Tony landed a nice size trevally and I speared a big mud crab scuttling along in the shallows only feet from the camp. Cooked in the hot sand beneath the fire's ashes the crab was delightful. Paul had spotted an even bigger crab while wandering through the mangrove but came back empty handed after the spear broke on the creatures tough shell. At first light next day we were woken by splashing fish only a few yards from our swags. The school of trevally had herded thousands of small bait-fish against the shore at peak tide and were systematically eating them, almost beaching themselves in the frenzy of activity. It didn't take long to catch one, and another big blue back crab fell to the shortened spear.

Wind strength was still increasing as we headed towards the coast and the Nesbit River. Half-way across we changed course and paddled towards Cape Sidmouth as the wind would have made it too hard to get back out of the river. A short stop to check for water wasn't encouraging and we headed off again through a maze of exposed coral-heads to find a camp for the night. With sails up to take advantage of the wind we moved rapidly through this shallow obstruction course, leaving some gelcoat behind, and later finding Lowrie Island. It was another poor camping spot and after short deliberation we hoisted the square-sails and made for Night Island.

As luck would have it, there was a very big yacht anchored in the lee of the Island. We first spotted its mast when we were some distance from the Island and weren't sure if it had passed the Island or anchored up for the night. Tony was first to reach the Island and paddled over to say hello to the skipper. Ed Gibbon, an American, invited us all aboard for coffee and soon insisted we stay for dinner which his daughter and the other lady crew member were preparing in the galley. Joan D 111 was a beautiful Alaskan Cedar yacht built more than 20 years ago in Portland, Oregon, and Ed explained that he had refurbished it for an extended world cruise. They had crossed the Pacific and intended

sailing to the Seychelles and then on to Spain. Being a former marine Sergeant, Ed was entitled to free travel on any US Military flight from wherever he happened to be in the world back home.

After a splendid meal of dumplings, stew, canned fruit and biscuits we said goodbye and set up camp for the night on a sandy clearing between the mangroves. From the kayaks we pulled a trevally and big mangrove crab and tossed them on the fire for a late supper. (Note: It is imperative that mud crabs be completely immobilised before transport in one's kayak cockpit).

The South-East wind had strengthened overnight and we knew that a big high pressure system must have been building in the Tasman Sea far to the south. The old timers we had met along the way had warned us of the unceasing strength of the Trade Winds that blew stronger and stronger the further north one ventured. Today was no exception and we literally flew the 13 nm to 2nd Red Rocky Point, the site of one of the saddest episodes in Queensland's aboriginal history. Tucked inside the point and protected by a sizeable hill is a small pocket of rainforest held sacred by the local aborigines. It is not hard to understand why this place is so revered when the history of the old Lockhart River Mission is revealed.

Established in the first quarter of this century on the small rainforest site, the Mission grew in size until one fateful year in the mid-forties. This is when an epidemic, probably influenza struck the isolated settlement. The aborigines had no resistance to the disease and there were no modern drugs to help them. Some 500 men women and children died that year. The strength of the Lockhart River tribes suffered in this tragedy and about twenty years later, in the late sixties, the mission was abandoned and the remaining aborigines re-settled on a new site near the Iron Range Airfield.

After a quick look around the old site and a lunch of fresh coconuts and fish, we decided to push on and see if we could find the new mission site in Lloyd Bay, beyond Cape Direction. Black clouds were moving swiftly in from the south again with another squall looming closer but it was only eight miles or so to the Cape. The wind, however, was almost a 'beam', and as I hoisted the square-sail the kayak was almost flipped over. The strengthening wind kept the kayak heeled so far over it was impossible to paddle and for nearly seven miles I just held a wide brace with the paddle into the wind as the sail tried to touch the water. This area is studded with shallow reef which just breaks the surface at low tide. The chocolate-brown water hid the coral heads until the last second, the kayak striking then riding up and over them with its momentum. No structural damage was suffered but I noticed that Paul, still some distance behind, had moved wider off-shore in his lighter build kayak.

There is a very sheltered camp site just inside Cape Direction with a few small shelters put up by the aborigines. The queen fish caught that morning was sliced up, half going into the stew pot and the rest cut into cocktails and fried in the last of the oil. The recipe for the stew turned out to be a major discovery with the addition of a packet of cheese and leek soup mix. It gave the

fish a splendid flavour but to our later disappointment was the only one of its kind among the dozens we had packed.

From Cape Direction we moved into Lloyd Bay, stopping at an abandoned coconut plantation at Orchid Point. This big expanse of water is very shallow and as we paddled on towards a large island in the distance the wind waves jumped at us from all directions. The maps we were using were old topographical editions (1:250,000) and relied on aerial photography taken in 1958. These maps don't show the site of the new Lockhart River Mission and it took us some time before we sighted a faint scar on the shoreline that we knew would be a road leading to the beach. Broken Reef and boulders guard the approach to the Mission's stone jetty and after weaving our way through this landed on the sandy beach about 150 yards below the high watermark. As we carried the heavily laden boats to safety I noticed a line of bright steel along the top of the landing jetty. I wandered over later and was amazed to see dozens of gleaming beer kegs (empty) in ordered array like sentinels awaiting an intruder.

There was little activity on the beach, only a few aboriginal women and their children fishing. Soon after we landed a four wheel drive came down the gravel road, and a curious white school teacher and his family asked where we had come from. After organising our gear and changing into dry clothes we hitched a ride into the main settlement, and approached the manager and his assistant to ask if we could camp on the beach for a few days. This would be all right, he said, if the senior aboriginal leader of the community also gave his consent. We were welcome to shop at the store and use the postal facilities.

After three ice-creams each and a loaf of bread with margarine and cheese we went back to the boats to set up camp in an old shed by the beach and readied ourselves for the "coming of the light" festivities in the community canteen that night. Many of the people in the community are descended from the Torres Strait Islanders and this is reflected in their somewhat different dancing style with drums and grass skirts. There is a revival in the 400 strong community to bring back the old culture that has been neglected for many years. The long initiation ceremonies of the young men were taking place while we were at Lockhart and we were lucky enough to witness the Bura Bura part of the ritual late one night. Spirit figures weaved in and out of the firelight as the old men chanted and beat the drums in hypnotic waves that eventually sent Paul and Tony to sleep. The young men carried out the time old movements of the ritual long into the chilly night and would follow the old men's tuition for many more months until their manhood status was reached.

Canteen night, which happens three times a week at Lockhart, was something of a surprise. Four 18 gallon kegs are allocated on each night and the beer is served in large jugs with a 1 1/2 hour time limit on sales. About a hundred people attend the canteen evenings and most nights the allocation is accounted for before the cash register is shut down. These evenings can become a bit rowdy with some hot heads making trouble, but generally everybody is out to enjoy the singing and dancing. Some of the older women become quite amorous after a few drinks and one night several of them started fighting

over the three of us. Being gentleman I introduced two of the ladies who had homed in on me, to Paul. His long red hair must have appealed to them for they quickly grabbed an arm each and started pulling, in a tug of war for possession. Turning from his horrified look I vanished into the night, glancing as I left at Tony who was still in battle in another corner.

After six days at Lockhart, three more than we intended to stay, we set off into strong south east winds, for the short hop to Restoration Island. This small and rocky clump of land just half mile off-shore is noted in history books as the place where Captain Bligh and his boat load of outcasts landed after the Bounty mutiny. Our maps put Bligh's boat entrance through the reef 18 miles off Cape Direction, and dated 1780. Bligh and his handful of loyal crew stayed on Restoration Island to gather strength after their long haul across the Pacific, then continued their epic journey to Timor. The caretakers on the island said the Melbourne owners plan to open a resort there sometime in the future.

Our next camp was Portland Rds, the last place we knew of that was settled before the pearling farm on Turtle Head Island, some one hundred miles further north. We met Ross Pope and his wife Nita, a retired couple and one of the few resident families at this little spot. Ross and his sons had explored most of this coastline and were able to tell us where to get water. The Pascoe River was only ten miles away and we heard it was a good spot to try for a barramundi. With the threat of more rain and no sign of the winds easing we decided to spend a few days exploring the river, hoping that the weather would abate and give us a chance to paddle to Forbes Island, fifteen miles off-shore.

The Pascoe is a beautiful little river but its entrance is guarded by shoals and shallow reef. We didn't expect to see any other boats on the river. There is a good campsite on the northern bank just inside the entrance and we pitched our fly well up from the water line to lower the risk of a croc attack. We had heard there were some big buggers in this river and didn't feel like taking chances; two large fires were lit one either side of the fly. The fishing was good and we soon had a fresh meal, but heavy clouds started to roll in bringing short rain squalls.

Next morning we were to get an early start up river to collect fresh water and do a bit more fishing, but a fresh five pound tin of brown flour that we had swapped with Ross Pope got the better of us. Paul and Tony rolled flat japaties and cooked them over the coals, smothering each with jam and tinned butter as it was pulled from the heat. More small trevally were grilled and eaten while the flat breads cooked. By lunch time we were quite full and went down to the boats to strip out some gear for the paddle up river.

Norm Odgaard, a stocky professional fisherman pulled up in his small tin dinghy and invited us back to his big boat for afternoon tea. He explained that he had pulled into the Pascoe to escape the bad weather and give his wife a chance to catch up on the washing, he said there was good fresh water in a little creek only 1 1/2 miles away. We paddled up Tin Creek and soon found fresh water to fill our wine cask water carriers. Norm's boat was a 31 foot mackerel trawling rig that towed an 18 foot fibre glass dory and carried a five thousand pound freezer and chilling brine tank. He built the entire boat

himself and travels from his base in Port Douglas up Cape York in search of the prized mackerel. His wife Heinie invited us on board for chocolate cake and watermelon and we were very impressed by the interior comfort of this fishing craft. Their baby daughter was asleep in the forward cabin.

On our way back to camp we stopped at a rocky out-crop on the bank and cast lures towards the snags. I quickly hooked a 7 lb trevally and as it was gaffed Tony had a strike from a better fish. After a short struggle he saw an 8 lb Barramundi circling under his kayak. We were wrapped in this success and paddled back quickly to camp in anticipation of another good feed. Norm dropped by later and we yarned and told jokes while the barra cooked on the coals. We finally finished eating about 11.30 pm, the rain falling intermittently all evening but the smell of the fish had kept us around the fire. By now a sizeable heap of fishbones was building up near the camp and dingoes could be heard downwind.

After another substantial breakfast Tony and I paddled upstream in search of bigger fish, trolling close to the mangroves and then along the earth banks lined with the strange mangrove palm. A scrubber bull almost scared me out of the cockpit as he crashed off into the bush. We kept our eyes peeled for crocs and carried our powerheads under the front deck cords. One fish kept me occupied for 15 minutes until the line broke and just on dark Tony hooked and landed a 15 lb barramundi. That night was truly a dinner to remember. We had paddled well into the flowing fresh water of the Pascoe but with no sign of the weather improving decided to head north again, abandoning our idea about a trip out to Forbes Island.

After a brief stop at 1st Stony Point to boil the billy we by-passed Temple Bay and the Olive River and landed on a small island in the Piper Group. Next day was a 14 mile paddle to Haggerstone Island in stiff winds but at least the rain had cleared.

About half way across I glanced to the South and saw a huge ship bearing down on us. No way would they have seen us so we paddled like fury to get well clear. Closer to Haggerstone we decided to take a short cut across a huge shallow reef but found the tide was falling fast and had to get off quickly or be trapped. Dozens of small reef sharks swam with their tails out of the water as the fast tide disturbed food on the bottom.

Haggerstone is a large Island and was once a coconut plantation. We collected many good eating nuts, and Paul climbed a small tree for some green drinking nuts. This was a beautiful camp-spot with sheltered flat ground and an excellent fringing reef for diving and exploring.

We made another stop on the mainland at Cape Grenville to look for water but found the small hole dry and dug up by wild pigs. Many schools of big fish were sighted very close in shore here. We were only about 60 miles from Turtle Head Island and decided to push on and make the pearling farm in two days. Tony climbed high onto the rocks at Sunday Island and sighted Bird Island some 12 miles away. It was a very low mangrove island and couldn't be seen from water level so Paul took a compass bearing and we made good



time in the strong wind. The swell was bigger up here and the kayaks took off on long runs many times.

Bird Island is another good camping spot and is renowned for its big mud crabs. The wind was still increasing so we set off to make a few more miles before nightfall, landing on MacArthur Island. Both Paul and Tony's kayaks had been taking water but it was getting too dark to work on them. We had set up camp and were just about to head back to the gear after pulling the boats onto safe ground when I glanced up and saw flames all around our gear. The strong winds had fanned the fire onto the surrounding dry grass. We raced back just in time to stop the fire from burning us out. Early next morning the kayaks were glassed up and quickly cooked over a fire to set off the resin. The only tree on this small island held a large ospreys nest with chicks and we photographed these before leaving for Orford Ness, 25 miles away on the mainland.

The wind was still blowing its usual 25 knots or so but we quickly noticed that this stretch of the ocean was rougher than usual. The maps showed that we were crossing a mud bottom between six and ten fathoms deep, with the outer reefs widely spaced allowing the ocean swells to partly reform. This combination of strong winds shallow bottom and swell increased the short, steep nature of the seas.

Waves started to break on us and we were forced to brace several times to stop a capsize. We stopped at Hannibal Island for scroggin and a look around then left for a rocky point in the distance called False Orford Ness.

A squall was moving in on us with dark clouds and rain to the south. The three of us were within thirty metres of each other and making good time but the wind was getting much stronger. The kayaks were ripping through the steep waves and plunging into the next swell, sometimes submerging us to the armpits in foaming water. The square sails were strained to the limits and I could see mine starting to tear along the lower yard but couldn't let go of the paddle to reef it.

Tony and I were close together and not more than a few miles off shore while Paul was moving along a bit further to windward. We must have been making about 6 knots with occasional faster spurts. I picked up a swell and shot past Tony on a fast and very long ride that eventually carried me hundreds of yards ahead. After I passed Tony I glanced back to see if he had caught the waves but his sail had disappeared. I knew immediately that he had capsized.

The big wave and powerful wind drove me further forward before I was able to stop the kayak and reef the sail. I had seen

Paul's sail about 100 yards behind me moments before but when I turned the kayak around he had disappeared also. The wind was blowing so hard by this time that I couldn't paddle directly back into it. There was no sign of a sail or up-turned kayak so I angled my boat diagonally across the wind and hoped I would intercept one or both of them. The waves were so steep by this time it would have been hard to see a capsized kayak even 30 yards away.

I paddled for about a mile before sighting what looked like two figures standing on the big beach to the south of False Orford Ness. I headed for shore but plunged into a sand-bank and flipped over while trying to surf in. After swimming the kayak through the surf to shore I raced down the beach only to find that my sighting of figures were the branches of a big tree sticking up through the sand.

Tony's diary takes up the story:

"Coming around False Orford Ness I got hit by a huge wave and when I broached into it my paddle shaft snapped. The sail was up and I couldn't roll and trying to assemble my spare paddle in those conditions would have been crazy. So I decided to swim for it towing the boat.

I donned a pair of plastic sandals and my diving fins and headed for the lee side of the headland. I'm not sure how long it took me but I was pretty cold by the end of it. I finally got ashore and made a good camp with plenty of light to spare. All I'd managed to save from behind my seat was the two water bags I was carrying and my diving mask. During the struggle with the broken paddle and trying to get out of the capsized boat the combing around the front half of my seat busted off, just barely hanging on by a few glass fibres. The winds were gusting well over 30knots."

With no sign of the others on the south side of the headland I decided to scout as far north as I could before dark. It was getting quite cold by the time I reached the top of the cliff and I was cursing that my flares had been lost earlier on in the trip. It was almost dark when I blundered into a family of feeding pigs. I couldn't see the boar but the female was big enough. I couldn't tell what lay ahead so decided to head back and make camp. It was impossible to light a fire on the wind-swept beach so I dug in behind a big log and pulled the bivvy-bag over my head. I was using the kayak for a wind break but this didn't stop cascades of sand pouring all over me and into a cold scroggin' dinner. I was now certain that Paul must have found Tony and they had landed beyond the headland.

After trying five times to break out of the surf and paddle north I gave up and dragged the kayak back above high water mark. It was still early as I pulled out my thongs, knife and rifle and jogged off to cut over the headland to the next beach. After firing off a couple of shots I sighted Tony's red kayak leaning up against a tree in the lee of the headland. He was not much more than a mile from where I slept.

Tony had gone off into the bush but soon emerged and ran down the beach to meet me. We were jubilant to see each other and he asked me if Paul was coming along. I looked at him in disbelief and said I hadn't seen any sign of Paul. With little delay I moved off at a trot down the beach and around the next small headland, certain by this time that Paul must have camped there. Nothing. It had been a big tide and there was no sign of him at all. I kept on moving and found half of Tony's paddle washed up and some of his other gear. Seven miles later at the edge of Orford Bay I stopped and looked north but still no sign of anyone. After so many weeks paddling my legs were not used to hard walking and it was a long trip back to meet Tony. He had been watching out to sea for sign of a

sail or flashing paddle but had seen nothing. After a sleepless night Tony headed off at dawn along the beach to scout further afield,

He returned in the afternoon with some more of his gear and the other half of his paddle. He hadn't found Paul but produced a small tin that had contained some watery sugar. Paul had been carrying this sugar tin in his hatch.

Things looked grim indeed but Tony still thought Paul had landed further up the coast. We just couldn't figure out why he would have gone so far ahead and I was baffled by the appearance of his sugar tin. We decided the only thing to do was head for Turtle Head Island early next morning and radio for a search if we didn't find him. We covered 20 miles to Furze Point in 4 hours then had a short rest before covering the next 9 miles to Turtle Head. We would make the radio office before closing time but when we rounded the last point and saw the island Tony's sharp eyes spotted a figure on the island's rocky headland. It was Paul.

After a joyous reunion on the beach Paul produced some fresh tucker and we gorged ourselves. He told us that he had been capsized as he tried to turn around to help Tony and eventually landed not very far up the coast from us. Thinking that we were ahead of him after seeing what he thought were sails in the distance he paddled on to Turtle Head Island and waited, sure that Tony and I were together. He had thrown away his sugar tin at his first camp and the high tide had covered any signs of his presence.

The pearling farm is run by 10 Japanese and there are 15 Torres Strait Islanders doing the labouring. It is a big and profitable concern and strangers are not too welcome, though we were tolerated for a couple of days. The company has sixty rafts anchored in the Escape River a short distance away with each raft holding 3,200 oysters that have been implanted to produce a cultured pearl. Guards are mounted on the rafts at night ever since some thieves knocked off a fortune in pearls some years ago. It takes two to three years for the oysters to produce a good pearl once the delicate operation of implanting a small piece of hard plastic is finished. The oyster coats this 'irritant' with layers of nacre to produce the pearl. A very good round pearl can bring many thousands of dollars and is nearly impossible to pick from a wild pearl.

It was Saturday 18th July and we decided to make the short hop to Cape York, the northern tip of Australia. Paul had befriended the Island cook, a very large gent named Munga, and we were allowed to sit in at the labourer's breakfast tables. As far as I can remember Munga didn't say anything at all, just grunted.

His speciality was boiled rice and tinned bully beef and after seeing Munga's majestic frame you can understand why nobody complained. He also carried around a large cleaver to chop the toast.

Albany Pass has a reputation for fast tides but when we approached it at 5pm the current was slack and we moved through easily. We passed the abandoned Somerset settlement and another pearl farm on the lee of Albany Island and headed on for the Cape. It was

almost dark when we rounded the top of Australia at 6.50pm, nearly 800 miles from our starting point.

We camped that night in the tourist park just up from where we landed and Paul cooked up a massive damper in a borrowed camp-oven. It was a special variety containing parmesan cheese, and must have weighed several pounds. The campers had a taste then politely declined our fistful's of damper. We ate their left-over stew and cold scones, too. Next morning we met the local policeman, an 18 stone replica of an Alabama sheriff who carried a pistol in his shorts and a stubby in his hand. Bare chested and wearing his badge of office on his crumpled hat, he was a man known up the Cape for a low degree of racial tolerance. We later heard he had been stationed at Bamaga because it was as far as the force could send him.

We also learned that there is to be a large tourist resort planned for the very top of Cape York. Work has already started after the Queensland Government sold the land to Bush Pilots for a nominal sum. The hop to Thursday Island wasn't a long one but we had been told the tides were fast and tricky. We studied the tide tables but somehow got caught in a 5 1/2 knot current, running towards the Gulf of Carpentaria. Some vigorous paddling took us cross current to another channel where we made a ferry glide to Little Woody Island to camp. Next morning the tide was slack and it was an easy paddle past the huge Prince of Wales Island to Thursday Island.

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