

Trip Report

Whitsundays 2014

By Macca

The pod:

Brian & Deb McCarthy, Gary Tischer, Tony Hirst, Marc Pitot, Mark Hessling, James Pitman, Ian & Cathy Narborough.

Day 1

The first day saw us all arriving at the launch site at Shute Harbour nice and early for an 8:00am departure. We had arranged for Scamper to do a water resupply at Whitehaven in a few days time so we dropped off the spare water of 20 litres each, this only cost us a total of \$50. Money well spent, as we were all carrying 20 litres in our kayaks as well as 11 days food.

Miraculously the kayaks all floated, although some with very little freeboard and we made a very quick exit from Shute with the outgoing tide, max speed of 8.5kph was recorded. The first stop on the trip was to be Henning Island some 15km away, the first half was in idyllic conditions giving first time expeditioners in the pod a false impression of what the Whitsunday passage can dish up

As we paddled past South Molle we could see several whales off in the distance, alas we never got close as they made their way south. Around 8km into the crossing Mother Nature reminded us who was in charge! The southeast wind kicked in to a solid 15-20 knots and combined with the ebb tide knocked our speed down to around 3.5km per hour, we averaged 4.5km for the crossing.

On arrival at the campsite we found Gary, Nev & Adrian. Gary had to cancel his other trip and jumped on a bus in Rockhampton to get up to Mackay. Tony and the boys kindly found his kayak and gear, loaded it up late that night and transported it to Mackay where Gary was waiting.

The campsite was quite full with backpackers but thankfully they had partied the night before we arrived so it was a fairly quiet night, apart from the occasional snorers. One of our pod moved his tent during the night in search of more peaceful spot.

Day 2

8:00am had us on the water for the 19 km trip to Whitehaven Beach. We sought refuge just before Fitzalan Passage for Tony to redistribute some things in his cockpit, which were causing him some discomfort. While he was getting sorted Marc unfortunately dropped his knife and had to take a swim in order to retrieve it. Shortly after this we were enjoying the sailing spectacle from some of the yachts

from Hamilton Island, one came in close for a chat, which gave Gary the opportunity to have a bit of a 'race'. Each of the capes provided us with some rather lumpy and often challenging conditions to negotiate. Solway Passage was greeted with some relief as the tide swept us north through the passage at around 9kph. As we exited Solway, Whitehaven stretched out in its glory welcoming us to this magnificent location. After a quick setup we were soon laying around the beach soaking up the atmosphere.

Tony had packed his guitar for the trip; yes I said his guitar albeit a slightly small version. The night was packed with singing and playing from our two very accomplished musicians Tony and Marc. Applause could often be heard from other campers and boaties as these two entertained us.

Day 3

We took a day trip up to Hill Inlet and also took advantage of the SE 15 knot wind to hoist the sails and sprint up. Different story coming home, out came the muscles paddling back into the wind. The afternoon was spent with some rolling practice in the beautiful clear water; it also acted as an afternoon bath. Once again the musical activities continued after dinner on the beach around the campfire in the can.

Day 4

Today was a rest day with people choosing their own activities, some walking, some fishing (outside the green zone) no keepers though. Some of the boys hit the rolling with gusto; some of the offside rolls were very good. Being at the beach for a few days the commercial operators got to know us as did the many yachties that came up to say hello. One of the tour operators fixed us up with cold drinks and ice, what a bonus.

Weather was a bit of a concern for the coming days but thankfully Mother Nature looked like backing off so we decided to stick with our original plans to head up to Hook island & Crayfish Bay on day 5.

Day 5

The weather behaved itself this morning and we made our way up to Crayfish via Tongue Point where we had a brief leg stretch in the shallow water. The weather remained idyllic all the way up to Hook Passage but quickly arced up to 15 to 20 knots SE for the 10 km crossing over to Crayfish Bay. On arrival we were once again camping in paradise sheltered in the bay from the strong SE winds. Nev and Adrian were there as well. We once again gained the weather from the short wave radio with only light SE 10 to 15 knots predicted for the morning to round the Pinnacles on the top of Hook Island. The Pinnacles have a reputation for being a very rough piece of water with some paddlers having to abort and go clockwise around the island or go well out to sea. With that reassuring forecast from the short wave everyone went to bed happy.

Day 6

We had a few light showers during the night and woke to a blustery 15 to 20 SE wind. This prompted a couple of discreet discussions as to whether we would get out on the water around the Pinnacles. When the group saw us packing up our tent the question was answered.

It is only 3km from Crayfish to the Pinnacles however this morning the ocean was very confused with around 1.5 metre of swell and 1.5 metre seas on top and a lot of rebound just for fun. There was not much discussion from the group apart from the whales ahoy for a distant sighting. We did think we had a whale closer slapping its tail, but that turned out to be a bombe. The plan for the rounding of the Pinnacles this morning was to go wide given the conditions, however when we got close it was obviously much better conditions in close to the light house. The group confidently and skilfully followed us through the narrow rock garden into the calm sheltered bay, accompanied by lots of yahoos and yippees. Glad to have a pod of solid Grade 2 paddlers on this trip, the Whitsundays is not a place for the unskilled in conditions such as this.

We had a nice morning tea on a coral beach just inside the Pinnacles and then followed the picturesque coastline for 3km to our campsite at Maureen's Cove. There is a steep coral beach to negotiate to get to the campsite but well worth the effort. The afternoon was spent exploring the cove both underwater and up the valley to view the butterflies.

As I write today's update we are sitting around the campfire in a can looking at another fantastic sunset and the sky lighting up with stars, there is no moon so the night sky is amazing.

Day 7

Today was one of those picture perfect days in the Whitsundays; some of the crew took advantage of the lay day and had a sleep in. Around 10:00am we jumped in the boats and paddled around into Manta Ray Bay to enjoy some snorkelling. The water clarity was amazing with lots of coral and fish of many types and sizes. Of course with kayakers having some clear water it was the ideal opportunity to spend some time upside down in the kayaks and practice the rolls. Gary and James got some great underwater footage of the guys rolling. Today we found out just how clever the crows are, Gary has photographic evidence that the crows ate through the handles of a bag he had hanging in a tree so that the bag would drop, they then opened up the zipper and got into his cooler bag. We had heard of this feat by the crows from other paddlers but did not believe it until we had experienced it first hand.

The afternoon was spent snorkelling back in Maureen's Cove and watching whales pass by on their way south, ever hopeful that on our way down to Macona Inlet tomorrow we will encounter some on the water.

Day 8

The plan for today was to paddle around to Curlew Beach in Macona Inlet around 20km away. The conditions on the water were unbelievable as the ocean just glassed out as we made our way down the west coast of Hook Island. As we rounded the

southern tip we were treated to a display of breaching whales, unfortunately approx 3km away.

After a brief leg stretch and discussion it was decided to make the jump over to Dugong Beach a day early and take advantage of the great conditions. It was a 12km crossing that will be burnt in our memory banks for a long time, the stillness of the air and the colours of the glass like ocean were unforgettable.

The campsite at Dugong was very well set up with designated sites, tables and even shelters. It was such a good site that all sorts of creatures live there, rats, wallabies, crows, goanna and who knows what else was rummaging through our gear through the night. We were fortunate that the site was empty when we arrived so we spread out around the campsite and raised the QSKC banner.

Day 9

Being a day early proved to be a good decision as the wind arced up during the night and it would have been a slog over from Curlew today in 20knots of SE wind if we had stuck with our original plans.

After breakfast we were off for the walk up to the top of Whitsunday peak, it took us just over an hour but was well worth the walk; the views north and south were breathtaking. On our return to camp some of the guys found their rubbish bags had been found by the critters and distributed around the campsite. The rest of the day was spent laying around relaxing, fishing or an ideal opportunity to hone their rolling skills in warm clear water. The "Ticket to the Moon" hammocks that we had bought just prior to this trip were fantastic and no doubt a few more of the group will add them to their kit upon their return.

Marc caught a small mackerel, which he and Mark enjoyed for dinner, wondering what might have been if the next much larger one that he hooked had not gotten away. Not to be outdone Tony also caught a small Sweetlip later that night which he elected to let go.

Day 10

Today was spent relaxing around camp and trying to keep warm as well as fishing. Believe it or not it was quite cool and it took till after lunch for people to get in the water (Mark & Tony that is). The boys put on the final musical for the trip tonight and it was truly memorable, and yes I did see a rock wallaby tonight (a whole beach full in fact).

Day 11

8:00am had us on the water for the 20km return trip to Shute Harbour, the weatherman got it wrong as they often do up here. We had a solid 15knot SE for the crossing to South Molle where we took a leg stretch and some morning tea at the northern campground. As we looked back across the passage we had just paddled we could see several whales breaching and tail slapping, we were just 30 minutes too early.

The South Molle resort is long closed and the back packers we met said that they were warned off by security when having a look.

Ron Hurst was waiting at Shute Harbour as we arrived and took some photos as the boys lived up to the club tradition and knocked out the obligatory roll at the end of a club trip.

Gary made an early departure to head back to Brisbane but the rest of us spent the night at Airlie Cove Resort and Van Park where the hot showers were most welcome. Dinner at the Sportsmans Club where everyone could fulfil their cravings was a great way to finish the trip before we all went our separate ways to make our way home.

A truly memorable trip in an idyllic location.