

## KEPPEL ISLANDS DISCOVERY

July 2012.

General Douglas MacArthur said it in 1942 and we said it at the completion of this reconnoitre trip to the Keppel Islands. "I will return".

Early Sunday morning, July 1<sup>st</sup>, a group of 7 club members, Martin Dale, Sue Alcock, Anita Coulthurst, George Reeman, Dave Edwards, Albert Jensen and myself, drove north to Rockhampton and onto Mulambin Beach, opposite Great Keppel Island (GKI). Arriving late afternoon to set up our tents, we noted that the ocean across the road was perfect. Not a ripple and not a cloud in sight.

George and I drove to nearby Rosslyn Bay to register with the Coast Guard, obtain the forecast and check out the launching prospects for an early morning paddle across the bay, 15klm to GKI.

Unbelievably, the forecast was for a strong wind warning! A 25knot southerly, building through the morning.



## Day 1:

An early morning check with the coast guard confirmed that the local "tinnies" had already been turning back as it was too rough out there. The "Freedom Fast Cats" were just next door and we and our 7 kayaks were soon stashed aboard and on our way across the bay. We provided considerable interest to both locals and tourists as we sorted and loaded our gear on the windy beach and then paddled south to see if we could safely make the camp site on Humpy Island. Once past the shelter of GKI our paddle skills were put to the test as we rounded Monkey Point and entered the 3klm wide channel with a 20+knot wind on the nose. Only the top of the front paddler's hat visible in the troughs with short waves coming from various directions. A loaded kayak is a wonderful thing!

All safely on Humpy, we reflected on a great, if a little challenging paddle.

Humpy is a perfect camp site. A sandy beach, even at low tide. Good shade, grass, toilets, water and a cold shower for those game enough. The wind was cold!

By dark, the wind had dropped out and we had hopes of the perfect paddle back past GKI to middle and Miall Islands tomorrow. Alas the wind rattled our tents through the night and the forecast, via VHF radio, confirmed that we were in for another rough crossing to and around Monkey Point.



## Day 2:

It was even more challenging as the kayaks tend to be pushed around by the following sea so we were all pleased and cold to make "Long Beach", and a beach landing without mishap. The sea around nearby Monkey Point looked rather nasty so we walked over the causeway to the sheltered beach around the point and considered a portage. Although Anita had had no difficulty in handling the rough conditions, she chose this opportunity and we carried her boat across. We others, gave the rocks a wide berth and enjoyed a wild ride first into the sea, then broadside for a bit, then down wind and into shelter. Then a pleasant paddle in sheltered water up past our landing place of yesterday and around to the north facing beach on GKI. Warm and sunny we indulged in a well-earned smoko and chatted to a Canberra couple who had brought their double kayak with them but lacked the experience and confidence to tackle the choppy conditions. They joined us for a while as we paddled further north to Middle Island. The southerly wind was still brisk, but this long white beach was sheltered and we enjoyed a swim in clear tropical waters, set our tents scattered along the shoreline, walked to the hill top to view Pumpkin, Sloping and North Keppel islands to the north, the mainland to the west and GKI to the south. All this and still not a cloud to be seen. The wind was dropping and our bay had not a ripple as the sun set over North Keppel Island. The conditions looked good for a paddle around Miall, Pumpkin and North Keppel tomorrow.



### Day 3:

Wednesday morning and the southerly wind is whipping the sand along the beach. Our boats and any exposed gear are powdered in sand. No island hopping today. But here is the best aspect of GKI. There are always some interesting sheltered areas. We loaded our gear and paddled south toward GKI. The east facing bay on Middle, our camp site, was calm. However, once around the rocky point, watched by a disdainful osprey on its nest, we were heading on into the full force of the southerly wind at well over 20knots. Not good and I certainly had my doubts as we plunged into the 1klm crossing, But again, it is surprising just how stable a loaded kayak is. With the lead paddler totally disappearing into the troughs, we were soon across and into the shelter of GKI. An enjoyable morning idling along the shoreline to Svendsen's Beach. Smoko at the creek mouth then into the delightful creek and up to the now deserted sheep station. Yes GKI was once a sheep station. No sheep now but still quite a few feral goats.

In ideal conditions, we returned to GKI to organise our camp in the backpacker style resort. Our host was Geoffrey and he made us most welcome. He drove the old 4x4 ute onto the beach and left it with us to organise our gear at our leisure and even brought clean real pillows for us to sleep on! This resort is rather "run down" but the showers were hot, if one used the ladies, and the young backpacker staff very helpful and they brought out "pudding" for guests after the evening meal. Bread and butter pudding the first night and rich chocolate pudding the second night. A great treat after a few days of camp food.

Tonight is a bit special. STATE OF ORIGIN, the decider at Lang Park and it is no coincidence that we are here on GKI tonight. The only TV is at the neighbouring resort, "Keppel Haven", and Jo the manager is threatening us with a "chick flick"!! We front up at Jo's for dinner and she rewards us with footy on the big screen. A close game but according to our crew, the right team won.



## Day 4:

Thursday morning and the southerly winds are persisting, but this is of no concern. Anita and Dave E decide to have a walking day over the many tracks on the island and the other 5 paddle the sheltered side of GKI.

From Putney Beach, past Leek's and Svendsen's Beach for smoko at lovely Butterfish Bay, then along below the cliffs to finish at Big Peninsular. Beyond this point the southerly winds were whipping up big and dangerous seas. A casual paddle back in warm sunshine for our last night, again at the backpackers' camp.



## Day 5:

Friday morning and the wind is still around 20knots so no thought of paddling back across the bay. "Freedom Fast Cats" again went out of their way to accommodate our boats. As there were few passengers returning to the mainland on the early boat, they moved all passengers to the upper deck and we placed our boats across the seat backs where they sat very comfortably for the half hour trip.

## Summary:

So ended a very enjoyable and successful reconnoitre.

The wind was generally too strong, but this emphasised the paddling alternatives of this area.

Even with those conditions a safe and interesting camp can be organised. An added bonus is that all of the areas we visited had wide sandy beaches, no rock, coral or mud.

We gained good information regarding transporting our kayaks to GKI. We have the offer of ideal cabin accommodation at Keppel Haven.

We know that there is beach and island walking for those who choose to not paddle on any day.

There are good meals and drinks available at reasonable prices.

We considered it an ideal destination for our group.

It is now over to the club committee to decide if and when a camp can be organised.

Regards to all,

**Dave Pass.**

12/07/12