

WHITSUNDAYS 3rd – 8th Sep 2012

Pensioners in Kayaks perform Geriatric Rambo feats at Whitsunday Island Camp.

Submitted by Mike Gaspert

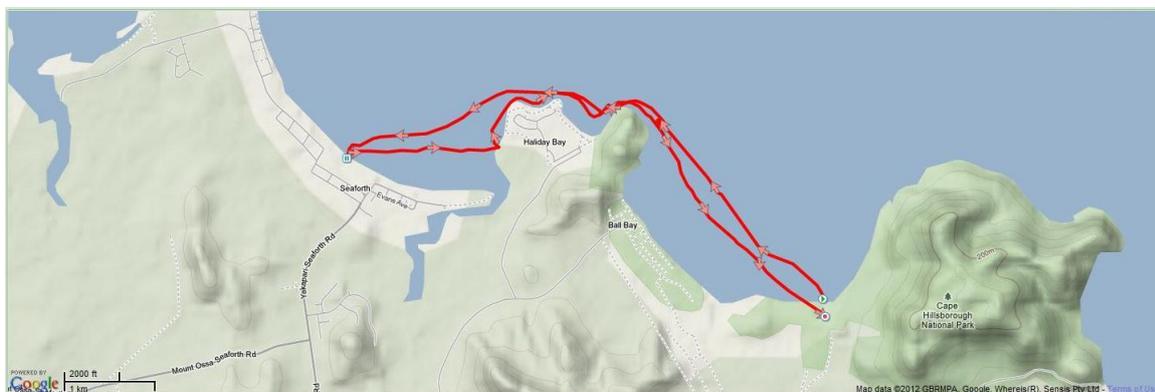
Paddlers: Dave – Camp Coordinator, Anita, Fay and Albert, Umi, Chris, Richard, Neil, Di, David, Jim, Mike and Dawn; Lori and Dennis.

Day 1

Monday 3rd September.

Dave was right; it was a long drive to the Whitsunday's, particularly with the extensive road works and traffic delays along the Bruce Hwy from Gympie to Rockhampton. While we made our own travel arrangements, it turned out that the whole group assembled at Cape Hillsborough just north of MacKay, to camp at Smalley Beach on Sunday night.

On Monday the group paddled from the camp site to Seaforth to have a cup of coffee, about 17 km round trip; a typical "Thursday paddle". The weather was overcast and seas were uncooperative. As we assaulted the beach at Seaforth we had our first "turtle" as the shore breaks challenged the group's beaching techniques. A cup of hot coffee soon calmed the nerves. I would have preferred a shot of rum to boost my "Dutch courage". Some of the novice paddlers suggested they stay at Seaforth and have Dave come back with the trailer to pick them and kayaks up. Dave used his significant man management skills and convinced the group they could paddle into the next bay which would make his pickup trip shorter. Once on the water it was easier to convince the "self-doubters" to continue "one step at a time". While in the bays, close to shore the water was calmer and the group only had to plough into the waves while rounding the points. We progressed slowly back to the camp site, with the final 4 km leg into the waves and head wind while difficult, was made easier as our camp site destination was in sight. All in all we had a good outing and we were particularly elated to be back at the camp site for happy hour, a meal and general morale boosting activities. It rained that night.



GPS track of Monday's paddle; note coast hugging on return leg. (Thanks Richard)

Day 2

Tuesday 4th September.

Left Cape Hillsborough early in the morning and assembled at Shute Harbour between 8 -9 am to pack our kayaks and park vehicles. The kayaks were fully laden with our camping gear, clothes, food and drinks for five days and ample amounts of fresh water. We launched about 11:30 am (High Tide at 12:52) to use tidal assistance to paddle 5 km to Sandy Bay camp site on the Western side of South Molle Island. As we left Shute Harbour and entered the open waters between the main land and South Molle Island, the seas became rough and choppy. Dave tried to maintain a positive outlook and mentioned that it was no rougher than yesterday and the paddle distance was significantly shorter.

As we approached about half way the mood of the group became sombre and the idle chatter between paddlers ceased as we all tried to cope with the difficult conditions. Just as we were struggling, nature put another obstacle in our way. I felt sorry for Dave, our organiser, for his consistent bad luck. A pod of whales between us and our destination obstructed our passage by performing full body breeches. One after another the whales launched their bodies out of the water to crash back down followed by massive splashes and spray of sea water. As we approached they waved their pectoral fins and tail flutes in an awesome display of playfulness and then disappeared. The display distracted our attention and before we realised we were at our destination. Our misgivings about rough water were easily overcome by our thrill of seeing whales on our first day in the Whitsunday.

The rest of the day was taken up with lunch and setting up our tents to let them dry out. The past two days' difficult paddling experience was obviously recounted to our next of kin still at home. A text reply was received to one of our group, chastising her, not to perform geriatric Rambo feats risking life and limb and asked to remind us that we were only pensioners in kayaks!!!

Day 3

Wednesday 5th September.

Departed the camp at low tide at 8:30 am to paddle south (anticlockwise) around South Molle Island. Skirted the southern tip and paddled along the south side of the island keeping relatively close to shore where the water was calmer. We reached Denman Island but decided not to get out. From here it was a pleasant paddle; wind assisted, to our next destination Planton Island. The SE wind was consistent and those with sails appreciated the assistance. For one paddler, the assistance was overwhelming and blew him past Planton Island and out of sight. Dave was not a happy camper.

Mike Gaspert.

Our group, less one, stopped for a leg stretch and cuppa on Planton Island. The camp site there was nicely nestled in trees and could take four campers in seclusion. Some of us took a mental note that it would be nice to book the site sometime in the future for an idyllic secluded romantic getaway.

From there we continued our paddle up the east side past the South Molle Resort to stop at the eastern side of Paddle Bay camp site where we were reunited with the 'BOLTER'. Out of curiosity, the group walked to the resort and in search of a resupply of fresh water. The resort was well past its prime and looked very rundown. Cliental consisted of back packers and they all looked so young. We were willing to help the local economy but the café lounge and bar were closed. All the garden taps used recycled water which was not potable. Hence, we took the opportunity to refresh ourselves by taking full showers and refilling our water bottles at the same time. Refreshed and water bottles full, we departed and walked the two or three km back to the kayaks. By this time the water was approaching high tide and we traversed the causeway which connects South Molle with Mid Molle Islands at low tide. With water only ankle deep we sedately crossed the causeway and continued our paddle, returning to Sandy Bay for a late lunch.

Day 4

Thursday, 6th September.

Left the camp site late morning to visit Daydream Island. Paddled north against the tide to Cockatoo Beach camp site at the southern end of North Molle Island where we stopped for a leg stretch. The camp site was occupied by a group of teenage girls from a Tasmanian Girls' School led by a couple of teachers, all using hired double kayaks. The school conducts this adventure for a small group of girls once every two years.

After our stop, we crossed to Daydream Island landing on the resort beach beside the well-presented statues of three life-sized mermaids resting on rocks. We entered the resort and found our way to the reception area and café bar where we purchased morning tea. While sitting in the garden we were invited to look at the aquarium which contained sting rays, several types of sharks including the black fin tipped shark and other exotic reef fish. The guide also took the time to show us some shark eggs which looked like leather sacks with embryos inside. She said they had to relocate the eggs as the mother shark would eat the babies once they were hatched. On our way back to the kayaks we encountered a couple of Curlews with two baby birds. While one Curlew hissed the other birds stood still in the "you cannot see me mode" allowing us to take ample close-up photos of the Curlew family.

After departing the beach we paddled down the western side of the island and beached again on the southern tip of Daydream Island, in the retail section of the resort. There we frequented the Bakery for lunch having hot pies, coffee and cake. Some took advantage of the facilities to have another

shower, while others decided to stop by the pool and relax. It was a pleasant day out to partake of the full resort experience without staying at a resort.

Mid-afternoon we sadly left Daydream Island and crossed back to Sandy Bay campsite.

Day 5

Friday 7th September.

We awoke to a glorious day, clear skies, no wind and the water was like a mirror. Started our paddle adventure about 9 am and paddled north. As we progressed a whale was sighted with the classical water spout. Dave and Albert left the group and paddled to the middle of the channel half way between South Molle and Daydream Islands to get a closer look. As they approached the whale sounded. The rest of the group continued our journey a little disappointed that we could not see more of the whale. A little while later the whale reappeared directly in front of the group, heading in the same direction as us. We picked up the pace and followed the whale as it porpoised exhibiting its' tail flute, first jet black as it came out of the water and then showing us the white underside. A wide white wine glass shape slowly disappearing into the water. This display continued several times punctuated with the occasional water spout as the whale exhaled. Sadly the whale continued its journey northward on the western side of North Molle island and we had to veer right and take the channel between North and Mid Molle Islands.

After traversing the channel we headed north along the eastern side of the island to stop for morning tea on a coral beach. We continued with a lazy paddle wandering in and out around the rocks taking in the scenery and coral outcrops. Dave was particularly pleased to see the novice paddlers enjoying the paddle beside the towering cliffs, gliding along without effort. The group rounded the north tip of the island and continued our way south taking in the scenery and the view of Daydream Island way in the distance. The water was clear and numerous sightings of turtles were made. In one incident a leather back turtle surfaced about two meters from the bow of Dennis' kayak. It was huge, about the size of his cockpit with a head like a man's clenched fist. It disappeared as fast as it appeared, just before Dennis glided over the spot. We enjoyed the encounter; unfortunately Dennis' view was obstructed by his kayak. Because there are limited options for landing on North Molle Island, we continued our leisurely paddle to Paddle Bay camp site for lunch and a swim.

On our return to Sandy Bay we found the school girls setting up camp next to us at the site. This was their last night kayaking and they were also returning to Shute Harbour tomorrow. The afternoon was warm and balmy. Some decided to snorkel in the clear water to look at the coral while others put on their walking shoes to take advantage of the 12 km of walking tracks accessible from Sandy Bay and

trekked to Spion Kop lookout which gave a perfect view of Hook, Whitsunday and Hamilton Islands and surrounding islandscape.

Being the last night on the island we had an extended happy hour and Dawn was asked to present awards:

Di received the "Turtle" award with **Neil** getting an honourable mention;

Richard unanimously received the large "Bolt" award for leaving the group; with smaller "Bolt" awards given to **Albert** and **Lorri** for leaving their partners behind.

Chris got the "Clothes Peg" for snoring;

David got a "Blow Horn" for being the quietest member of the group

Neil received the "Whopper" award for telling the biggest stories (why let the facts get in the way of a good tale);

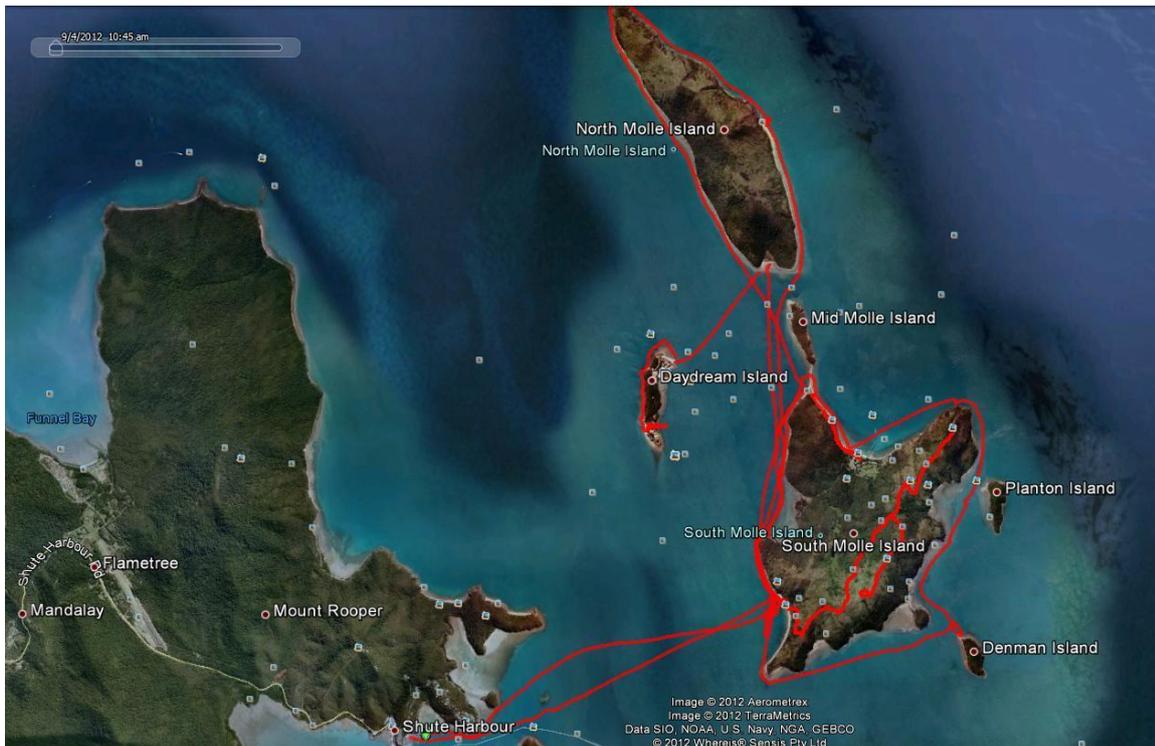
Richard, Jim and **Umi** each received a "Small Sailing Boat" in recognition of their sailing skills with their kayaks;

Anita got a "Bikini Doll" just for being Anita;

Lorri and **Dennis** received a "Fly Veil" each, seeing they come from WA where the flies are worse than in Western Qld.

Fay received "The Princess Award". She was overheard saying, she would not leave the beach after several tree snakes had been sighted.

The baby soother, being the dummy spit award was not allocated; and that says it all for this dynamic fun loving group of pensioners in kayaks.



Whitsunday Paddle GPS Tracks

(Thanks Richard)

(Note GPS got water logged after dip in pool at Daydream, hence missing leg to Sandy Bay!!)

Day 6

Saturday 8th September.

Another clear day with a slight SE breeze. We packed the kayaks and departed by 9:30 am to take advantage of a slack tide for return to Shute Harbor just a short 5 km journey.

Collected the cars, washed boats, and while unloading we met the school girls again taking their gear to a self-sail hire catamaran for a week's sailing!! How come my school days were not like that?? Drove to Airlie Beach for coffee and brunch. We all thanked Dave for his leadership and doing all the organising for this fantastic trip. As pensioners in kayaks, we all look forward to our next Rambo adventure in the Whitsunday National Park.

Mike Gaspert.