

THREE MEN IN THEIR KAYAKS.

Terry, Martin and Dave circumnavigate Whitsunday Island. 21st June - 25th June 2010.

While Terry M'Garry, Martin Dale and I pack up our camp in the pre dawn gloom, the tide has crept across the coral flats to fill Peter Bay and to gently lift our loaded kayaks off the sand. Just a hint of light in the eastern sky as we paddle across the calm bay, our paddles creating pools of phosphorescence as we follow the coast north. The sea turns to the colour of molten lead in the early light and the paddling becomes a little more challenging as we round the first headland and approach the north end of Whitsunday Island. Our spirits lift and the friendly chat increases as we round the top and the sun lifts above the horizon to bath us and the spectacular cliffs in crimson.

Martin and Terry paddle in close to the cliffs, occasionally disappearing behind isolated rocks, enjoying the lift and wash as the waves reflect off the shore. More cautious, I stay a little wide, intent on reaching our immediate objective, Hook Passage. The passage is the cause of our predawn start as we need to pass through the narrow passage with its whirlpools and steep waves when it is in its most benevolent mood! Our timing is good and we are swept south through the passage on the last of the rising tide into the tranquil water on the sheltered side of Whitsunday Island. The morning sun is yet to climb above the pine clad peaks as we beach our boats in a spectacular little tropical bay for a well earned breakfast.

As members of the Sunshine Coast Seniors Recreational Kayak Club, we three have paddled together often. Across the Noosa bar and around to the national park bays is a local favourite. Due to insurance concerns, these more adventurous paddles are not club activities although club members offer their support and interest. A few days whale watching in Hervey Bay and an excursion to paddle New Zealand's Nelson Bay and northern rivers is planned for the near future.

Breakfast over we paddle very leisurely south along the shore line, in 'kayaker heaven' as Terry described it. His opinion is that in more than 20 years of serious paddling in both Australia and New Zealand it gets no better than this! We wind our way south, in and out of small bays, around and through underwater rock gardens embellished with glimpses of fish darting from our path and many large stingrays lumbering from the sandy bottom. The deeper bays hide magical mangroves. Supported on a graceful lattice of brilliant red legs they glisten in the morning sun, their perfect reflections mirrored in the crystal clear water. We are not in a hurry for this is the Mecca of sea kayaking in Australia and we are experiencing it at its splendid best on this perfect June morning. Lunch at sawmill beach is a slab of my wife's fruit cake. Something of a tradition on our outdoor trips, it is loaded with energy and more than a drop of Bundy rum. We make our camp at Joe's beach in plenty of time to set up camp and to take an exploratory walk around the bay. We agree that tokays 25k paddle has been exceptionally satisfying.

Our first day from Shute Harbour had been somewhat different as we punched into a strong S.E. breeze with much white water over the boats. We were very pleased to make our camp site at Henning Island by mid afternoon. There we were intrigued by the green ant nests in the shrubs. Ants swarmed out to defend their territory when we disturbed them while setting up our tents. Not far away the stone curlews sat 'stone' still as we approached, quite confident that we could not see them. For our rude intrusion they took their revenge by regaling us with their mournful cries throughout the night. Day two was also demanding as we made our way around the southern end of Whitsunday Island, exposed to the predominant S.E. wind and waves. The sea increased as we approached Solway Passage and it was with considerable relief that we passed through on the last of the north setting tide and into the placid shelter of Whitehaven Beach. What a contrast to our past few hours! Warm sun, hardly a ripple



on the water, boats at anchor. Whitehaven is a world renowned destination for the backpackers set, so it was a bit busy until they suddenly departed and left we three to the solitude of the beach and the company of the resident curlews and goannas. Day three was a leisurely paddle north along the eastern side of the island, detouring into Hill inlet for coffee and fruit cake. On past the multitude of day trippers at Tongue Point, in and out of many bays and eventually to the camp at Peter Bay. We removed a few trees smashed by the cyclone that had hammered the Islands recently, then enjoyed a much needed 'bath' in a rock pool in the creek behind camp. Pleased to say ,we found no crocs in the creek. As the coconut palms had been destroyed by the cyclone we took the opportunity to plant a sprouting nut in a choice spot beside the camp table. Reason enough to return one day.

Today is the last of our (110k) five day paddle around Whitsunday Island. For the last time we pack our kayaks and then depart Joe's Beach at the much more civilised time of 7am. No punching into a head wind on the 13k crossing to Shute Harbour, just a perfect paddle in great conditions at the top of the tide.

Back at our departure point, we all agree that we will return next winter to explore new areas of this kayaking wonderland.

Dave Pass.

