

EAST COAST ADVENTURES ABOARD MARGARITA . . . continued

Youth Trophy winners Rick and Gill Baker sailed their ketch *Margarita* from Sydney to the Whitsundays in 1999. In the second of two parts for SQ, they describe their experiences in Queensland and the return trip to Adelaide.

Part 2. Exploring North Queensland and Returning to Adelaide
Rick and Gillian Baker, *Margarita*

Cruising the Whitsundays



Arriving in the Whitsundays in July, 1999, we had much to learn about cruising among these beautiful islands. Of utmost importance was the selection of anchorages according to the prevailing winds. During the winter months, the SE trades could blow at 20-30 knots for several days, and we found the best shelter in Cid Harbour on Whitsunday Island or Double Bay East on the mainland north of Airlie Beach. Later in the season, northerlies became more frequent, enabling access to beautiful Turtle and Chance Bays on the south side of Whitsunday Island, as well as Plantation Bay on Lindeman Island. Nara and Macona Inlets were fabulous anchorages in these conditions, but could become swelly in SE winds.

At Airlie Beach, we were faced with a crowded anchorage or expensive marina berth if supplies or repairs were needed. Generally we anchored amongst the moored boats, but twice we were caught out by unexpected northerlies blowing in. However, our worst experience occurred after a calm, rainy day, when a 40 knot easterly gale developed at night. Expecting trouble, we had the motor warmed up, so when the anchor suddenly pulled out, we were able to exercise some control to avoid hitting nearby boats. After about three hours it slowly abated, during which time we dragged for about half a mile between moored craft. When we eventually retrieved the anchor in the morning, it had hooked a length of rusty old chain, stopping it from digging in properly.

At the end of each season, *Margarita* was booked into Laguna Quays Marina, on the coast of Repulse Bay, about 30 miles south of Airlie Beach. Although fairly isolated, they had cheaper rates for the cyclone season, when we returned to Adelaide by air or by car. Fortunately, no cyclone affected the area while we were there.



Gillian and Rick enjoy happy times on *Margarita*



Adam Wynn presents the Youth Trophy to Gillian and Rick

Many considerations drew us back to the Whitsundays for nine seasons. Apart from good sailing and beautiful anchorages, we enjoyed snorkelling at Blue Pearl Bay on Hayman Island and visiting beautiful Whitehaven Beach. We walked many tracks on the islands and made it to the top of Whitsunday Peak, with fabulous views over Whitsunday Passage and Hamilton Island. We encountered a variety of wild life, including whales, ospreys, dolphins and dugongs. Oysters were plentiful on the rocks for the taking and we even managed to catch the occasional fish! One year, when conditions were settled, we visited the outer reef and had some great snorkelling at Line Reef.



Margarita waits for a favourable forecast at Southport

On the social side, barbecues on the beach were popular, often followed by a game of boules. A highlight of the season was the annual July 4 party at Double Bay East, when perhaps 20-30 cruising boats gathered for a barbecue, fancy dress parade and thong-throwing competition.

Cruising Further North

Three times we ventured further north to explore the tropical coast. Townsville and Magnetic Island were some 130 nautical miles away and could be achieved in easy day sails. Sailing through the Palm Islands, we entered the Hinchinbrook Channel at Lucinda. Here we found deep channels and mangrove-lined creeks, complete with sandflies and crocodiles, both nasty things that bite! Then on to Dunk Island with its friendly resort, great walking trails and interesting artist colony.

Thirty miles north, Mourilyan Harbour was entered through a narrow gap in the coastal mountains. It was an amazing sight to see a large freighter coming through the gap to load sugar. On the way to Cairns, we stopped at Fitzroy Island and walked a steep trail to find panoramic views over the Coral Sea. Cairns had a lot to offer but the holding in Trinity Inlet was unreliable, so we preferred the friendly Half Moon Bay Marina at Yorkey's Knob, just eight miles north.

The islands and coral cays near Cairns provided some fabulous cruising, although navigating among coral reefs and bommies was nerve-wracking. Our favourite destination was the Low Isles, with their picturesque lighthouse and good snorkelling. Michaelmas Cay had a fascinating bird colony, whose inhabitants screeched all night.

Heading north past the Daintree, we stopped at the Hope Isles and Cape Flattery before arriving at Lizard Island, our furthest northerly point. Lizard is a fascinating place. The anchorage at Watson's Bay is secure, but subject to 20-30 knot winds during trade wind events, which is most of the time! However, we were able to swim off the boat and snorkel over the nearby reef complete with giant clams and a myriad of fish. On the southern side of the island lies the beautiful Blue Lagoon, in which we swam several times. We visited the nearby research station by dinghy, disturbing a number of turtles which scuttled away in the shallow water.

We climbed to the top of Cook's Look, the highest point on the island. Here, Captain Cook and his crew sought to find a way through the Great Barrier Reef after repairing their ship in the Endeavour River. What a magnificent vista, one can see all the reefs and channels for miles around. But our very best experience was to snorkel at the Cod Hole on the outer reef. Here, we looked down 20m in crystal clear water on a ring of scuba divers hand-feeding black-and-white spotted potato cod about 2m long. Great schools of fish swam in the channels of the reef, beyond which the water depth plummeted to over 2000m. On the way back to Watson's Bay we even caught a large Spanish mackerel.

In all, we spent six weeks at Lizard. It was a wonderful social time, with many boats in the anchorage and barbecues or happy hours held regularly on the beach. Running low on provisions, we had to motor-sail into a consistent 15-20 knot SE wind back to Cairns. On our way back to the Whitsundays, northerly conditions enabled us to visit beautiful Zoe Bay, on the outer and usually exposed side of Hinchinbrook Island. Here, the majestic scenery resembled that of French Polynesia.

Return to Adelaide

Our departure from the Whitsundays in September 2007 followed extensive maintenance. We had northerly winds all the way to Bundaberg where we enjoyed the shelter of the marina while thunderstorms and a front came through. We nervously transited the shallow Great Sandy Straits behind Fraser Island and crossed the Wide Bay Bar in ideal conditions. Heading into Mooloolaba, we encountered a pod of whales which required urgent evasive action. We transited Moreton Bay to Manly, where we picked up friends Sue and Norman to help with navigation through the shallow Broadwater to Southport. Here, the weather turned against

us when the drought broke with violent thunderstorms and copious rain. While we waited for three weeks, we met up with friends Rolf and Kathy, who decided to come with us to Sydney.

When conditions improved, we sailed overnight to Coffs Harbour, then left for Port Stephens the following day. Here, we waited for a bit of unfriendly weather to pass, then headed for Broken Bay for a couple of days. We arrived back at Cammeray Marina which we had left eight years earlier, finding nothing had changed!



Beautiful Hill Inlet lies at the northern end of Whitehaven Beach

We departed Sydney in March 2008, hoping to pick up an easterly flow from a high over Tasmania. On board were friends Ran, Glen and Tommy. Passing through Sydney Heads we encountered 20 knot headwinds with a 3m swell and 2m chop on top. Not very pleasant as we plunged against it down to Port Hacking. However, the following day we had a good sail to Jervis Bay and relaxed for a day in this scenic area before heading to Eden. Another lovely place to explore, but we needed to push on through Bass Strait while conditions were calm. So calm, we motor-sailed most of the way to Refuge Cove on Wilson's Promontory.

After two days at Refuge, we headed for Portland. During the night, swells from the Southern Ocean caused the sails to slat and we tore the luff of the main. Tommy said "I know a fellow in Portland who will help. His name is Ted!" So after nearly 15 years we were back in Portland looking for Ted! He was a great help again, but we decided to push on home with the third reef in the main.

Leaving Portland, we encountered hundreds of craypots which required a constant lookout. At night we headed out to the 1000m contour to avoid them. Two days later, we entered Backstairs Passage just as the 14-day heatwave in Adelaide broke. We surged up the Gulf with a strong following wind to arrive at our berth at the Squadron just before sunset, where a welcoming committee of family and friends awaited.

So *Margarita* is home again, after nearly 15 years. Our base is now Adelaide and we look forward to exploring the cruising grounds of South Australia.



Tahiti? No, beautiful Zoe Bay on Hinchinbrook Island