

News from Piping Shrike

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We're just getting around to replying to a thousand e-mails — they all build up a bit because, as you know, we tend to be too busy sailing/working/socialising (or is it just being pretty slack!)

We have to admit to not having kept up our diligent recording of our trip as we did on the way to Tassie and back to the mainland. A diary and a 'travelogue-type' document have been kept but, to be honest, what we have done up the east coast (although highly enjoyable) has probably been recorded a thousand times with only the dates and sea conditions varying. Maybe our slant on the subject is different, but we don't consider the east coast happenings as being of much literary merit.

Date for resuming our sailing travels will be, we hope, sometime in May or thereabouts. We're not sure of destination, but have allowed for Louisiades or Cairns, or somewhere else, or Darwin, or Magnetic Island or ...

There's a bit of a gap from Eden to Mackay in this update but we got there very comfortably (and quite slowly — as is our wish). Just briefly — we had a wonderful time from Mackay to Bowen assisted by the socialising, drinking, eating, wonderful sailing, perfect islands etc — getting there over a period of quite a few weeks and many islands. Then on to the Whitsundays and a few days in Airlie Beach.

Michael did some work in Airlie for a boat-based book publisher, then we sailed on to Bowen to park the boat at the NQCYC so he could go to Hobart for three weeks of work. Helen meanwhile became quite the social butterfly and party-girl with the many acquaintances we had met on the way up the coast. Michael got back from Hobart just in time to see Helen off to Darwin for her work. That would take us up to December.

After a couple of weeks fiddling, tidying and fixing up the boat, Michael joined Helen in Darwin as her toy-boy. Yep — he was a kept-man for about a month or two. Hard life though — you know being on call for Helen's coffee breaks during the day and preparing sundowner drinks (can't drop

that habit) and tea etc. Helen's company put us up in the Palm City Resort, in a fully self-contained separate unit with a pool just outside the door. Then they moved us to the company house at Parap (probably worth about a million or so). It was 'huge', with spa in the main ensuite, fully air-conditioned, pool, etc. A pretty good time was had there; we even bumped into Richard and Carol Smith in the local newsagent. Darwin was bloody hot though! When we got back to Bowen a couple of weeks before Christmas it seemed positively cold (for a while at least).

Then it was down to Launceston, where we remembered what cold really was. We went at short notice a week before Christmas as Michael's Mum wasn't well. As it turned out she was a lot worse than expected and an operation was not an option. Unfortunately she passed away on 18 December. At least she did not suffer long, if at all, but it was still all too sudden. As a result we spent Christmas day on a plane from Launceston to Bowen. We were amongst very few people to get up on the day after Christmas fit, hungry and thirsty. After a bowl of tom-yum soup in Melbourne airport and a hurried hamburger (good one though) in Proserpine, it was finally back to the boat. You can't imagine how much activity there was in the main street of Proserpine on Christmas day evening — one car and a woman with a dog. New Year's Eve was spent up the main street of Bowen at the town street party. It was a great night — the entire street was licensed, with bands, eating, dancing etc. A heart-warming family/social evening — reminded us of bygone times.

The tsunami was a dreadful thing. We met a couple in Bundaberg last year, Chris and John Auley from *Fantasy II*, who were planning their trip up through Malaysia. We exchanged charts etc — to mutual benefit — and also helped them with their electronic charting programs. They are also friends of Mike and Faye Harmon (Squadron Members) whom they had met on the east coast a couple of years ago too. Unfortunately, we saw their names in the paper listed as missing and haven't been able to find what the outcome of this was. We haven't heard of any others yet, but we can more realistically equate to acquaintances missing than to the incomprehensible numbers of reported dead.

Helen went back to Darwin in January for the continuation of her work and will be there till Easter. On the same day Michael went down to Kinka Beach (near Yeppoon and Rockhampton) to help his Dad move into a retirement village in Bowen. His caravan living was getting a bit too much for him. It was a pretty busy trip ... solving his hearing problems with phones (he's almost totally deaf) by getting a phone/fax machine so he can send and receive faxes. Whoever said a sailing and semi-retired life was not a busy lifestyle was sadly mistaken.

Now to the sailing scene. With a tropical cyclone hanging off the coast, SE gale and strong wind warnings out for the entire Queensland coast and rising seas, we thought it would be a good time to sail to from Bowen to Townsville. So we did just that, however we did feel that the conditions would not reach the projections as there had been some moderation the previous pm and overnight. After motoring for a short while because of lack of wind, we managed to sail the rest of the way to Cape Upstart in winds of 18-25 knots with only a little squall of 30 knots. After anchoring behind Cape Upstart in lovely flat conditions for about an hour, a buller arrived over the Cape and we had consistent 30-40 knot winds until about 0200.

Sleep was interrupted twice by the GPS anchor alarm. We hadn't moved, but felt that something bad was happening in the military world, as the GPS showed us to be more than half of a mile out of position for several minutes at a time. The winds subsided through the rest of the night till the morning (0500), when there was almost nothing. We left at 0530 with gale and strong wind

warnings again, but we motored in almost dead calm conditions. The forecast was altered later in the day to moderate SE winds and moderate seas. We managed to sail all the way (70 nautical miles) to Townsville, arriving at about 1730.

We put *Piping Shrike* up on the slip in Townsville with a crane to lift us and put us on the hard. It was a bit strange seeing 12.5 tons of boat hanging 30 feet up in the air (one of those times when you do appreciate insurance). The surveyor, Bruce, a friend of John and Annie of *Gumblossom*, checked out the hull and advised us that the bubbles were of little consequence (fairing bubbles only) and considering the thickness of her hull would not be a matter of concern in our lifetime — and certainly not worth spending the money on a total replacement of the bottom. Having another surveyor give us the same opinion as he was walking though the slipyard was further good news. Now that we have spent the time poking and cutting out most of the bubbles it would seem that the prognosis was correct. The boat will be on the hard until about the end of May (we think) when we get back from working in Darwin and Hobart (topping up the kitty for next year's trip) and Perth (for a late Christmas with family).

That's it at the moment. Michael should be heading up to Darwin next week (12th Feb) for a couple of weeks toy-boying again — a job he can recommend to all (well, the blokes at least). Hope all's well with everyone at the Squadron.

[In a disappointing twist for Michael he got a work call from Hobart, so instead of Darwin for play, it is Hobart for work on 13 Feb. Ah well! — on one day destined to be a toy-boy in Darwin, on the next a worker in Hobart ... must be some justice there somewhere.]

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