

News from Piping Shrike

Helen McGovern and Mike Fowler

At last sailing season 2005 has begun for *Piping Shrike*. It certainly seemed to take a long time coming this year. If you wish to contact us or whatever it's now time to use our boat email address vhs2218@sailmail.com and not our Yahoo email address.

Helen spent seven great months in Darwin working and being separated time to time from Michael (when he wasn't being a toy boy in Darwin). Michael meanwhile got the hard work on the hull underway or went south to Hobart to work. (We don't want to be too close all the time but just how far from each other can you get!). We finally stopped working for money and started at the end of May on stuff for the sailing season from our Townsville base, where the boat has been since January. It was busy, busy, busy provisioning and doing all those things one should do before going to sea.

Our original plan was to make a slow trip to Cairns and all points in between and then clear Customs for the Louisiade Archipelago. This is off the southeastern tip of Papua New Guinea 580 nm northeast from Townsville. However, most people whom we met in Townsville assured us that the most comfortable passage is from Townsville not Cairns. The trade winds blow pretty constantly from SE-E and the course from Townsville is just a bit broader than from Cairns. So we now intend to get as far as Dunk Island via the Hinchinbrook Channel and return to Townsville for final provisioning of fresh fruit, vegetables and meat, collect our visas and then clear Customs there by the end of July.

Provisioning for this trip means three months worth of food and medicines for us and gifts and tradeable items for the islanders. The Louisiade people trade fruit and fish with suitable items from passing yachts as the people have very few possessions of their own. Consequently the boat is fully laden with dried foods and lentils (for us to eat when the fresh stuff runs out). Michael can't wait to get started on the lentils. The starboard side lounge is full of green Coles bags of clothes, fishing gear, books, pencils, batteries and goodness knows what else for the Louisiadians (we wonder if that is a proper word.)

After a hectic month we departed Townsville for Magnetic Island (a daunting eight miles away and an even more daunting 15 miles to the north end of the island) where we were going to relax for a few days. After a wonderful sail into Horseshoe Bay we dropped anchor to get ready for the first sundowner of this season. Not that easy... the heeling had caused the port water tank to overflow, because we had forgotten to close the feeder from one tank to the other and the inspection hatch seal was not tightened down.

Water was right through one of the food lockers. Michael offered prayers of thanks that the water had not affected the lentils, based on the premise that they may have started growing and produced even more lentils. Canned food labels were wet, many charts were very wet and the carpet was sodden. The next few days were cool; and trying to dry out 100+ charts is not easy.

We motor-sailed from Magnetic to Palm Island, which looked very foreboding on our approach, with low lying clouds and drizzle, but it turned out to be a lovely spot. Going ashore on Palm Island (an Aboriginal community) is out of bounds without a permit, so we anchored out in the bay.

Palm Island to Orpheus next day saw our track take us through the interesting Fantome Passage (separating Fantome Island — an old leper colony island — from Orpheus Island, which is a \$650 pp per night resort. Fantome Passage is quite narrow, with depths decreasing from over 30 metres to just 0.5 metres below us at near low tide (which was when we went through). Michael was up the rungs that go up the side stays looking out for the bommies and directing Helen where to steer. In retrospect the passage would have been better tackled on a rising tide. This took us from the Palm Isle side to the mainland side of Orpheus, past the resort that doesn't welcome any passing yachties at all, and into Pioneer Bay, where we stayed for a couple of days while a strong wind warning was current.

We sighted our first whale pod of the season while sailing up to Pioneer Bay and our first dolphin for ages, as well as a turtle and some flying fish. On Tuesday we left with a strong

wind warning still current to cross over to Lucinda and the Hinchinbrook Channel. The strong wind didn't eventuate and we had to motor to ensure that we made the passage before low tide. Lucinda has a sugar loading jetty that is over three miles long. It took a long time over very shallow water and an outgoing tide to get into the channel proper.

Approaching Hinchinbrook Island from Orpheus reminded us of our first sighting of the west coast of Tassie — dark, foreboding, overcast, drizzling rain, grey sea etc — but Tassie's supposed to look like that! We made our way about eight miles up the channel to the first sheltered bend in the channel (Haycock Island) to be surrounded by mist-shrouded mountains, waterfalls running down their sides, trees everywhere, mangroves, wading birds, jumping fish, mosquitoes, sandflies, no doubt crocodiles... the list of bonus features goes on!

We left Haycock Island for Gayundah Creek seven miles away, a beautiful sail at about three knots along this remarkable island. Having anchored in the creek, we did a bit of

exploration in the dinghy until we ran out of water. Next day the exploration was more successful on a higher tide, and we were up a creek without a radio/phone etc, but we did have a paddle. It was so isolated and unspoiled that one wonders if time passes in such a place. Looking up the creek we could see Mount Bowen and The Thumb. Their peaks, covered regularly by clouds, rain and mist, can look daunting one minute and beautiful the next. Sitting in complete isolation in the creek the tranquility of dusk broken only by the snapping claws of what must be particularly big shrimps, roosting birds and the splashes of fish jumping. The isolation of the place does not give such a daunting feeling as Port Davey (in Tassie) did, but the similarities between the two places are quite remarkable.

From Gayundah Creek we motor-sailed to Port Hinchinbrook Marina, which is quite an oasis after the isolation of the channel area. The marina has lovely views back to the mountainous Hinchinbrook Island, good facilities and only a short walk into Cardwell to stock up on a few supplies. With the facilities

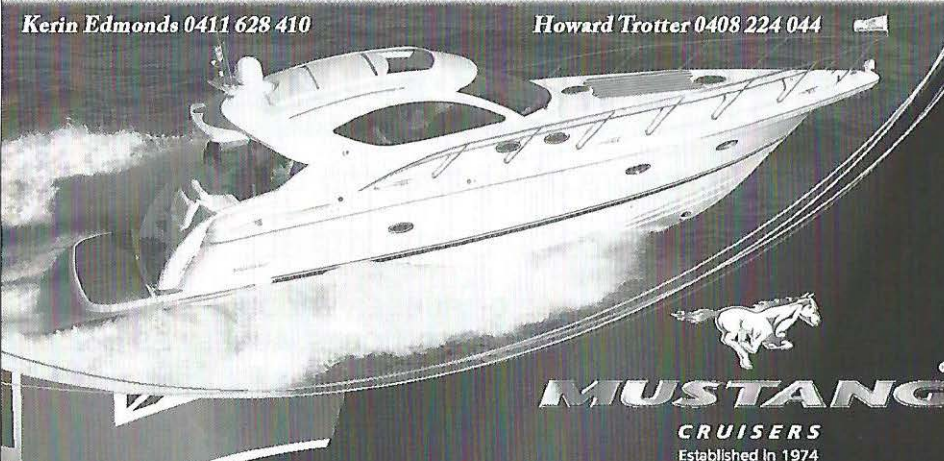
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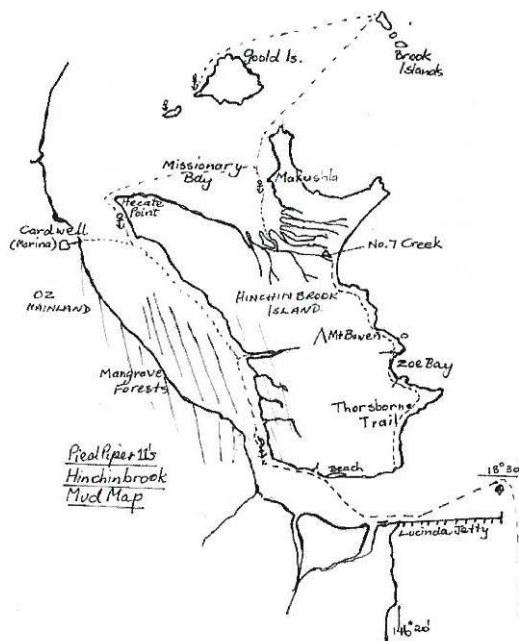
available, access to Hinchinbrook and Dunk Islands, and with Cairns only a short sail away it is a great location.

[I hope you have it on file. Otherwise it will need editing to remove the text I have copied.]

After spending two days at Missionary Bay on Hinchinbrook Island doing rain forest walks to Cape Richards, we've moved to Creek No 7, where we will stay until the current gale and strong wind warnings predicted for tomorrow (Wednesday 19 July) and the rest of the week have passed. The strong winds will keep the sandflies and mosquitoes away (so we are told). Being in the creek is not such a bad thing, as we have access to the boardwalk leading to the world renowned Thornsborne Trail. (Ignorance on our part meant we had never heard of it!). The trail takes roughly three days to complete and is limited to 40 walkers in groups of six, who are required to be self-sufficient.

For those of you who follow our route: once we clear customs for the Louisiades (early August) we'll try to keep the anticipated five day sail progress updated on www.pangolin.co.nz. You will find us under 'boat reports' and then scroll through the list for our call sign VHS 2218.

PS. If you are interested in the Hinchinbrook area, a free brochure titled *Marine Wonders of Hinchinbrook* published by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is available from the towns around Hinchinbrook Island, including Cardwell and the Port Hinchinbrook Marina.



The Moncrieff sketch map of Hinchinbrook Island and Channel (Squadron Quarterly December 2003: 41).

Also any RSAYS friends who have received this can find out a great deal of information from an article written by Ian and Di Moncrieff published in *Squadron Quarterly*, December 2003.

In a postscript E-mail Di reports that Helen and Mike had three pre-loved Squadron sails in the *Piping Shrike* lockers destined for sailing canoe rigs to help the people of the Louisiades. SQ

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Some News from Epsilon

Michael Tromp

These are some extracts from an E-mail from Michael Tromp on the recent voyage of *Epsilon* from Auckland to Brisbane. They had a good time in and around Auckland and had planned to leave in June and sail further east out into the Pacific for six months. Because of some matters relating to obtaining residency in Australia for one of them, they were obliged to return prematurely to this country.

'Four of us left from Opua on the 12 May bound for Brisbane. Unfortunately sailing offshore and time commitments don't go hand in hand. It was therefore a tough decision to leave with a deep low just off Brisbane, right in our path. We had figured by the time we got there it would slip down to the south. It sort of did, but this gave us strong head winds for the first 3-4 days and lots of rain as we passed through an associated trough of low pressure. We sailed almost 100 miles north of our course trying to get better weather. This meant we would miss out on a stop at Middleton Reef, which was disappointing.

'Just as the first low slipped down towards NZ, a second one formed right in our path. We again headed north, but on the next forecast we heard it was also heading east-north-east, so gave up and headed straight for Brisbane and just prepared ourselves for the worst. The wind freshened over night to 40-50 knots and with gusts hitting 60 we dropped all sail, including the mainsail which already had 4 reefs in it. We carried on under bare poles at 4-6 knots on a broad reach. Occasionally I would bear away to pick up speed or avoid a wave and we would speed up, hitting 9 knots at one stage. Not bad with no sail!

'As dawn arrived the wind quickly dropped to 10 knots and we were left floundering around with no wind and a large confused sea. We soon realized we were in the eye of the low. It was perfect blue sky above with a solid dark cloud around us on all horizons. It was an amazing experience. We motored for an hour and carried out a few sail repairs. About five slides had broken free from the mainsail during the previous night.



Epsilon in the 1999 Sydney-Hobart Race
(Photograph by Richard Bennett).

'As expected, the wind returned as strong as before from the opposite direction at a solid 45 knots with gusts up in the 60s, again accompanied by torrential rain. We carried on under bare poles all morning until by noon it had moderated enough for a tiny bit of headsail. The waves were big, but we managed to avoid the angry ones and only really had one lie us over and deposit itself over us and in the cockpit. By late evening we had full sail and it was all over. The last few days were a mixture of rain squalls, calms and good sailing.

'Unfortunately, due to our starter motor burning out, we had no engine for the last few days, but thankfully the wind held. It died as we sailed into Moreton Bay and headed for Manly marina. The last few metres we were paddling until towed by some friendly yachties in their dinghy.

Customs gave us the biggest search I have ever seen, with three guys and a sniffer dog. They spent a good hour going over the whole boat, including looking inside the water tanks with a miniature camera! They were generally friendly, but I found one of them quite intimidating. He asked several questions about where my 'secret hiding spots' were and kept on saying, 'Come on, everyone has them.' They found nothing...

'Our address is c/o SYC Marina, Macarthur Parade, Main Beach. 4217 Qld. SQ