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Peter Last and Peta Last, with Dimity and Verity Harries. On her marriage, Peta became Peta Harries, wife of David. She and Peter are second cousins, both being descendants of Henry Last, who was born in Suffolk in 1845. (RSAYS)

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East Coast Cruising Made Easy



Peter and Beth Miller

What is the first thing to do when experienced dinghy sailors want to venture further afield to visit our beautiful coastal waters? What we did was to gather (and largely follow) advice from those who have gone before. After fifteen years in dinghies and twelve in a 20 ft trailer-sailer, we wanted something bigger for the open ocean. Consequently we set about building *Pyewacket*, a 30 ft glass-fibre masthead sloop, with auxiliary power and all the aids and gadgets for coastal navigation.

This took three years, and after retirement and overseas travel were behind us, we got serious about cruising. As dinghy sailors who like to be back on firm ground after a few hours afloat, probably the best advice came from one of the Squadron icons of the cruising scene, Ion Ullett. In one of those enjoyable marina conversations which seem to happen at the Squadron, Ion asked what we were planning to do. When we said we wanted to take *Pyewacket* to the Whitsundays, he immediately suggested that we should transport the boat to Sydney by road. After some brief moments of careful consideration, he amended the original statement to, 'No! On second thoughts, ship it straight to Brisbane, because it's not a lot of fun sailing between Sydney and there.' So it was to be!

For the benefit of those who have built-in trepidation and a highly developed desire to sleep at night in a bed (bunk) which moves up and down as little as possible, but would still like to visit exotic places and rub shoulders with the friendlies who have opted for a simpler and alternative life style, we will provide some of the technical details of our trip. We will, however, leave out all the fun parts like beautiful sunsets, long happy hours, beach parties, exciting bashes to windward and fast reaches. All of these and more you can discover for yourself if you do anything like what we did.

Pyewacket was purpose-built for such a trip. By departure date she would be three years old, which meant that all systems were run in and tested. We carefully followed the advice of current Vice-Commodore Ian Moncrieff to ensure that the boat was as near as possible 'finished' at launching. Ian maintained that marina time was six times longer than home workshop time. The ship left Adelaide with 440 hours on the clock, and all rigging and sails were as new. The eutectic refrigeration driven from the engine worked reliably. Safety equipment was brought as near as practical to Category Two.

Financially much is involved in transportation over several thousand kilometres, so if the only aim is a relatively brief visit to the Whitsundays, bare-boat hiring may be a better (and cheaper) option. Trailer-sailers have some advantages once in the Whitsundays, being able to use anchorages not accessible to keelboats, but it would be wise to consider carefully the conditions and daily mileages required for a long coastal cruise in a trailer-sailer.

We decided to follow Ion Ullett's advice to haul out in late April and re-launch in Brisbane; sail to the Whitsundays; spend six months on the water; and truck the boat home from Airlie Beach in late October or when we got sick of it, if that came first. This should give us the best weather, with the famous south-easterlies providing a downhill ride all the way up the Queensland coast.

Dropping the mast at RSAYS marks the last action of the exercise which is free of charge. From here on Members embarking on a similar venture will gain a real appreciation of the facilities available to us at our home club and which perhaps we take too much for granted.

We spent considerable time packing the boat for transport, including stripping the headsail furler and pulling the halliards to the masthead. When you see how some boats are packed for road transport, you will understand why insurance for this part of the venture can cost as much as a year sitting in the water. Care at this time will save a lot of work at the destination and depreciation of the boat.

Jim Theodore of Port River Marine advised us to make sure that everything to be carried inside the cabin was tied down and all cupboards were taped to prevent accidental opening. We did all this, except the cutlery drawer. This had a locking device which works fine in a seaway, but was not up to the job on the road. The drawer came out and bounced its contents off the door of our beautiful teak-faced front-opening fridge to end on the cabin sole.

Jim loaded *Pyewacket* on to the modified trailer used by Johns Transport of Goolwa, and we set off for Brisbane in our camper.

It would be hard to beat the Royal Queensland Yacht Squadron as a base to prepare a boat for a trip north. The staff, led by marina manager Bruce Bell, were most helpful. We arrived a few days before the boat, and as we wished to sleep in the camper, Bruce directed us to a pole in the middle of the hard-standing area. This had a 240 volt outlet and there was water nearby, so we had all we needed to sustain the comforts of life as we know it. Due in no small part to the social life of the marina, it was a couple of weeks before we moved aboard *Pyewacket*.

RQYS occupies part of Manly Boat Harbour, which houses four clubs and some 1,400 marina berths. It is said to be the largest in the Southern Hemisphere. [How often to do we hear a provincial boast like that? How does it compare with the huge development in Auckland, and who knows what there may be in South America and South Africa? — Ed.] RQYS has 2,500

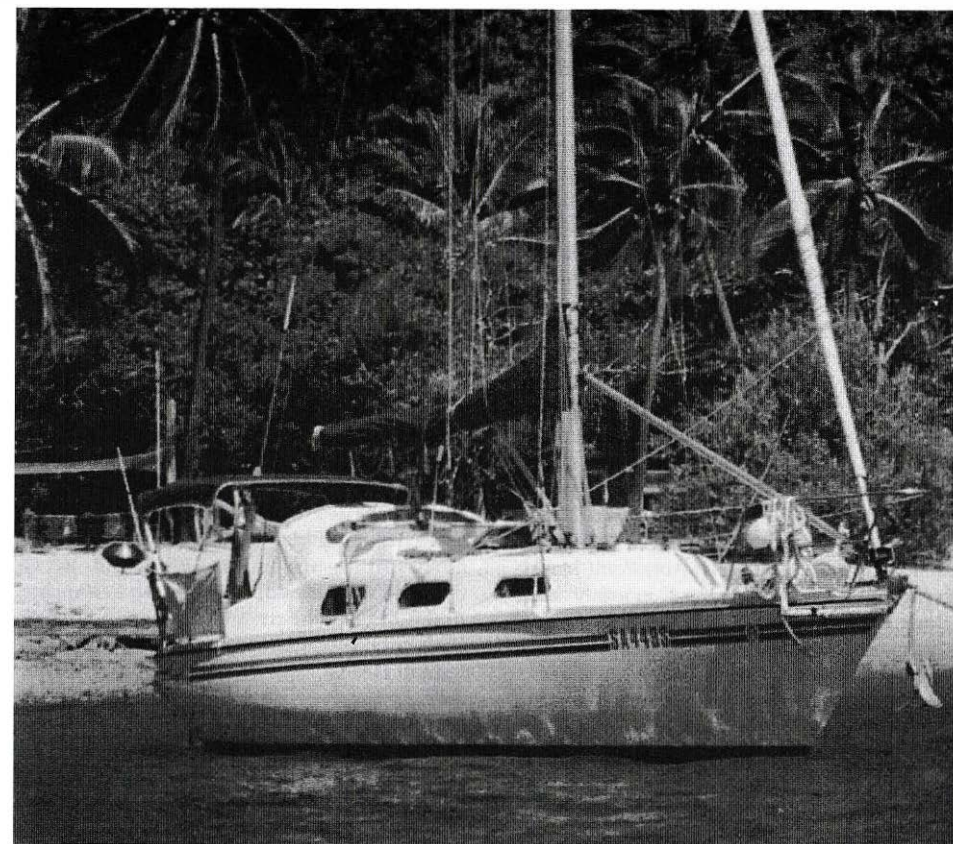
members and 474 marina berths, and with 17 acres of land has facilities for a large fleet on hard-standing. The marina was commenced in 1981 and has proceeded in five stages. The club is proud of its royal status, as shown by the crowns prefixing the boards allocating parking spaces to flag officers. There is a travel lift, but we had to hire a mobile crane to raise the mast.

By mid-May we were ready for the trip north. Some 64 boats are regular commuters, not including those who 'blow in' like us. The owners of the three shops carrying yacht fittings which are across the road from the boat harbour were on the wharf wringing their hands as we sailed out, because their turnover would never be the same. *Pyewacket* was at last completed to the satisfaction of the skipper and crew.

It is said that sailing up the Queensland coast is no problem, because it is all 'day hopping' and you can see most of the islands from your last departure point. What they do not tell you is that at that time of the year (winter) the days are remarkably short and tropical twilight does not exist. It is blackout time at 1715 hours, after which it is all over until 0600. A good friend says that 90% of navigation is having been there before, but that didn't apply to us, so we had to be sure to arrive at the destination and be anchored before 1700, and preferably 1600.

A 30 ft yacht can cruise comfortably at six knots, a speed easily achieved under sail by larger boats, whose skippers are the ones who speak of 'day hopping'. When you wait for perfect conditions for a particular leg, light power assistance is often required. The sums are simple. If the target is 60 miles away, a ten hour day is called for, and you must allow for adverse tide and similar delays. Hence you add a couple of hours, which means leaving before daylight. As you arrived at the anchorage the previous afternoon in daylight, you know the way out and can safely leave in the dark.

The weather we encountered is best described as 'good'. We didn't sail if it wasn't, or there was a risk of discomfort or danger. Talking to the regulars, the weather for 'our year' [1997] was 'unusual'/'not usually like this'/'last year was real beaut'/'we're going home, this weather's so lousy!' We call this 'National Championship



Pyewacket tied to palm trees at Palm Beach Hideaway. (Beth & Peter Miller)

weather'. This is when you get to the venue and the wind is blowing so hard the seagulls won't take off and the locals say, 'Gee, this is most unusual! It never blows so hard at this time of the year.'

Marinas always produce weather experts. Those in Queensland claimed that a high pressure system centred over Adelaide will result in poor sailing conditions in Queensland three days later. It appears that the highs must pass over Alice Springs to bring good weather. Once we admitted we came from Adelaide, we were blamed for the poor weather we experienced. El Niño also shared the blame! Weather forecasting was excellent, allowing us to complete the whole trip in perfect conditions. Most days we had a light wind over the transom, and more often than not we motored

to keep the average up. It was no trouble to let the diesel do the work at a dollar an hour, and we must charge batteries and bring the fridge down somehow!

The radio coverage on VHF is complete, and the operators are all as good as our Gary Holder at Seaford. The Telstra Seaphone service is also complete, with two forecasts a day. There seems no necessity for HF on this part of the coast. The 27 mHz is monitored but is virtually unused. Even so, we used it to talk to *Finesse*, as Mike and Faye were sailing the coast during the same period. On 27.96 mHz we could talk on low power and not upset anyone.

For ground tackle we conformed to the locals and fitted a CQR type plough anchor with 120 ft of chain, and we carried another 100 ft of spare

chain. This worked fine up the coast, but in the Whitsundays we anchored in some places in 50 ft or more, so after much agonising we cut the spare chain to add another 60 ft to make 180 ft readily available. This was as much as *Pyewacket* could carry in the anchor locker, and with our trusty Admiralty pick carried in the 'South Australian' position we were well covered, and for once *Pyewacket* was down on her lines.

Enough mooring lines must be carried to cater for the variations in configuration of marina designs which we found. Those with spliced eyes are helpful, but one end should be left unspliced. Nobody seems to bother with an off-side spring, and in some double berths there isn't any room for one. We were amazed to see yachts in all marinas tied up with lines we would consider doubtful for a dinghy.

Marina fees creep up as you go north. They start at \$14 a day and reach \$25 at Able Point Marina in Airlie Beach. Weekly and monthly rates reduce the amount considerably. At Laguna Quays we had the full run of the facilities of the five-star resort for a marina fee of \$120 a week.

Charts by Queensland Transport are a better proposition than the AUS charts, as well as being considerably cheaper. Our charts were complemented by five books. The official *Tide Tables & Boating Safety Guide* (1997), published by Queensland Transport, had virtually everything we needed, including a listing, description and meaning of all buoys, beacons and marks. For the average SA yachting this is essential, as we see only a small number of these navigational aids. Tides take on a new dimension as you reach the Mackay area, where five metres is not unusual. *Brownie's Beacon to Beacon* [Coast Watch Publications, ISBN 0-646-25651-3] is a good book to carry if you intend to go south from Brisbane to Southport and the Gold Coast. The Moreton Bay area is not in the least like our gulfs, and in some places local knowledge would help, because although *Brownie's Beacon to Beacon* is helpful in picking channels, he does not give depths.

Cruising the Coral Coast by Alan Lucas [Alan Lucas Cruising Guides ISBN 0-646-27858-4] is a must, as is Noel Patrick's *Curtis Coast*. [Published by the author's daughter, LM Kornbrekke ISBN 1-86252-

737-7]. Of course, once in the Whitsundays *100 Magic Miles of the Great Barrier Reef (The Whitsunday Islands)* by David Colfell [Windward Publications ISBN 0-9590830-8-1] is the bible for every boat in the area.

Stocking the galley presents no problem, as there are ample opportunities for supermarket shopping. Vacuum packed meat is readily available, and we bought no more than was required for 21 days. We were doubtful of the safety of carrying it longer, in spite of what some people claimed.

The marinas and anchorages we used were —

Royal Queensland Yacht Squadron	Marina
Bribie Island,	
Pumice Stone Passage South	Anchor
Mooloolaba	Marina
Wide Bay — off Eight Mile Rocks	Anchor
Garry's Anchorage	
(behind Fraser Island)	Anchor
Kingfisher Bay Resort	Anchor
Urran Boat Harbour	Marina
Burnett Heads	Anchor
Pancake Creek	Anchor
Gladstone	Marina

Getting out of Gladstone offers three interesting options. In company with *Finesse*, we doubled back south to use the East Channel and spent a night anchored behind Gatcombe Head on the south end of Facing Island.

Hummocky Island	Anchor
Rosslyn Bay (Yeppoon)	Marina
North Keppel Island	Anchor
Island Head Creek	Anchor
Hexham Island	Anchor
North-east Percy Island	Anchor
Digby Island	Anchor
Mackay Harbour	Piles
Port Newry	Anchor
Laguna Quays	Marina
Shaw Island, Burning Point	Anchor
Whitsunday Island, Cid Harbour	Anchor
Airlie Beach, Able Point Marina	Marina

From this point we lazily cruised the islands, using Able Point Marina as a base. For transport we leap-frogged the vehicle up the coast, and we know that others used the same system.

There is a new travel lift at Hawkes Bay Boat Yard and we again hired a crane to lower the mast. For the trip home we hired National Boat Freighters.

What would we do differently if we were to go again? Possibly we would spend more time in places like Pancake Creek and Island Head Creek. We missed Lady Musgrave Island, Pearl Bay and Port Clinton.

There are some things to watch. If you go into Mackay Harbour, carry a couple of the big O rings that plumbers use or an old car inner tube as a shock absorber on the bow line. This harbour has the unique design problem of a swell moving through, especially at high tide. At such times there is a two-foot break on the little beach next to the launching ramp inside the breakwater.

The only bar to cross is the celebrated Wide Bay Bar at the south end of Fraser Island. In Mooloolaba call into the Coast Guard to get the latest coordinates for the crossing, which is best done in the morning on a rising tide and in good

weather. If you pick the wrong day, you could have as much fun as going over Niagara Falls in a barrel.

Insurance cost 0.8% of boat valuation

Transport expenses were —

	\$
Travel lift, Port Adelaide	150
Hire of gurney	30
Road to Brisbane	2,200
Travel lift, RQYS	125
Crane hire	120
Travel lift, Airlie Beach	135
Crane hire	50
Road to Port Adelaide	3,500
Total	6,310

Regarding Ion Ullett's advice to miss the part from Sydney to Brisbane, the accounts of experiences of some of those who travelled that part of the coast made us glad that we started from Brisbane. There were boats with crews not looking forward to the return trip and several others booked for road transport home. SQ

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