

GO CRUISING

PART 2 OF OUR SERIES ON CRUISING

In our August edition, we took you on a cruise from the ports of Moreton Bay to Bundaberg via Mooloolaba and the Great Sandy Strait, giving you an insight on what to expect.

This month, we continue the series by taking you further up the coast with stops at Lady Musgrave Island, the historic Town of 1770 and Pancake Creek. Jane Chester gives her second installment on Cruising Essentials and we also take a look at marine communications for the trip with a story on Iridium satellite phones. Additionally, we compare two very capable tenders from Zodiac because a good tender is needed if you are to fully enjoy the delights offered by the many cruising anchorages.

Michael Hinde, former Sailing Group Captain from the Moreton Bay Trailer Boat Club gives a wonderful account of a Sunsail Charter in the Whitsundays. We also catch up with our mate Barry Moore, Immediate Past Commodore of the Moreton Bay Boat Club, his lovely wife Jackie and Bosun Ben (their pet pooch) aboard Dragon Lady in the Whitsundays for a wonderful account of their cruising adventures in that part of the world. But for now, let us take you cruising up the Queensland Coast.

It is nice to select a "home" port when cruising - somewhere from which to explore the best anchorages and attractions nearby. If your plan is to cruise the famous Coral Coast - the area from Bundaberg to Mackay - spend some time exploring the beauty of the Curtis Coast and the Bunker Group - a wonderful group of reefs, islands and coral cays located off the coast between Bundaberg and Gladstone. Just remember, when selecting a "home base" always look for a port of call that allows for easy provisioning of your boat, repair facilities, fuel, water and the like.

For this section of coastline and those offshore excursions to the Bunker Group, there is no better place to make your "home base" than the Bundaberg Port Marina.

As reported in our August edition, this ultra-modern marina facility provides every conceivable service a cruising boatie could want. The marina itself is easily accessible because it is just one nautical mile up river from the mouth of the Burnett River and is a great starting point for cruises to the islands or up the coast to the Town of 1770 and Pancake Creek. The marina has a very friendly cruising culture - you will find yachts from all around the world and a good splattering of cruising yachts and power boats from places further south.

WHERE TO NEXT

Having used Bundaberg Port Marina to refuel and re-provision, the choices of "where to next" are, as always, dependent on the weather. Every cruising boatie, at least from southern ports, tries to make

Lady Musgrave a "must-do" destination. Lady Musgrave is a 14 hectare coral cay National Park with good low level tree cover and is located at one end of an extensive fringing reef.

The island is surrounded by a large lagoon with a wide and relatively well marked entrance channel. Although camping and many eco friendly activities are permitted here including diving, swimming and walking, the island has, thankfully, not been disturbed by development.

Being some 50-plus nautical miles offshore from Bundaberg, conditions have to be right for a cruise to this beautiful coral cay. It is for that reason that many cruising boaties prefer to travel north along the



Lady Musgrave Island



coast to the Town of 1770 as 1770 is the closest landfall to Lady Musgrave - approximately 35 nautical miles and presents less of a run back should weather conditions become unfavourable.

But there are still some options on visiting the magnificent islands of the Bunker and Capricorn Groups and the sensible plan is to use a dedicated Charter vessel to "check-out" the islands and reefs before venturing there in your own boat. There are tour operators running regular cruises to Lady Musgrave and Fitzroy, a neighbouring reef well worth visiting.

The advantage, of course, is that these operators know their destinations like the back of their hand and the charter boats servicing both Musgrave and Fitzroy are big, fast and comfortable and even in poor conditions, your safety is in good hands. Don't let this deter you from taking your own boat out to these areas - just make sure you're well prepared.



Round Hill Head

Always:

- check the weather forecast and seven day forecasts - have sufficient food, water and fuel for an extended stay should conditions change and you are forced to stay in the Lagoon at Lady Musgrave until conditions improve;
- let someone know you are going - log in with the local Coast Guard or Volunteer Marine Rescue (VMR);
- make sure you have a good communications system onboard for emergencies;
- have a good offshore medical kit that complies at least to Category 1, but preferably Category 0 – offshore cruising specifications;
- have zoning maps of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park - there are areas which have restrictions and ignorance is no excuse for the law;
- have charts, navigation equipment and an accurate compass as a very minimum for cruising to the Island and surrounding reefs.

If you prefer to cruise along the coast to the Town of 1770, a run of around 50 nautical miles from Bundaberg, a pristine playground awaits. The only problem is the local bar at the entrance to Round Hill

Head Creek. Local knowledge is always a good thing as this bar can be dangerous because it is constantly changing. It is a good move to contact VMR Round Hill Head for a report on conditions on the bar and to log-in when commencing your approach. On our last visit there, at least one of the leads into the creek was well off the channel and it is a relatively narrow and meandering channel at the best of times.

But once over the bar and inside the creek, there are a number of good anchorage spots. Fuel, water, gas and ice are available from Mergards Marina. Although there is no "general store" in 1770 itself, the town has a take-away bottle shop, restaurants and cafes as well as a public phone box for calls to the outside world (bearing in mind that only CDMA phones work there).

Once anchored up the creek, on a rising tide you can penetrate as far as six nautical miles in a dinghy or shallow bottom boat and the anchorage is adjacent to Eurimbula National Park and Bustard Bay - the infamous site where Captain James Cook anchored to repair and re-provision His Majesty's Bark Endeavour in 1770.

Alternatively, continue up the coast to Pancake Creek – a further 15 nautical miles north. Pancake Creek is a favourite spot for cruising boaties. For starters it has no bar entrance and is therefore accessible day or night. The Creek is bounded by beautiful sandy beaches, provides excellent fishing and crystal clear waters - but do beware of the "men in grey flannel suits" as there have been numerous shark sightings here over the years.

Although it means taking a good walk from the anchorage up a fairly unforgiving hill, a visit to the recently restored Bustard Head Lighthouse is always a good adventure. It is no longer an operational lighthouse but was in fact Queensland's first manned lighthouse way back in 1868. Pancake Creek is a good spot to ride out bad

weather or simply to enjoy as an anchorage. Either way, you will not be disappointed.

There are of course many other creeks which join the coastline between Bundaberg and Pancake Creek, including the Kolan River, Baffle Creek, Middle Creek (which actually joins Pancake Creek at its upper reaches) and Jenny Lind Creek. All have bars and are fairly shallow. Baffle Creek is accessible by road and is a very popular holiday area.

But for those with limited time and not wanting to push on to Gladstone and points further north, Pancake Creek makes a good destination and turnaround point for a cruise back to southern ports. Some cruising boaties prefer to simply "Go Cruising" and will continue on until they reach their northern most point and then return to various ports where they spend time on the return voyage. Either way, cruising Queensland's wonderful coastline is what boating is all about. But let us give you a final piece of advice: no doubt, you will meet other cruising boaties on your trip, but it is always safer and much more enjoyable if you cruise "in company".

So when planning your next cruise or your first cruise, see if you can get one or more of your mates to do the trip with you – after all the camaraderie of boating will be enhanced by such an adventure.



Entrance to Pancake Creek at Sunset

