

Crème Caramel & Sea Goose

at

Fraser Island Whale Watch Cruise

Story and Photographs by Ian & Lesley Clapperton

Some photographs added by Edwin & Helen Flynn

Crème Caramel and Sea Goose, Hervey Bay Cruising with the Whales - 2003

Any of you who read Small Yacht Cruising Emagazine, the online magazine by Garry Beattie or look at The Trailer Sailer Place (also on the web) will have heard of the now annual whale-watching cruise from Hervey Bay. The 2003 cruise sounded so good and the photos we saw were so spectacular that we decided to join the cruise.

We registered our interest some months before and were put on the "possible" list as it was a little too far in the future for us to make our intentions definite at that stage. From then on we received more and more information and saw lists of who was planning to participate. Soon we could see that there were well over thirty boats hoping to join the cruise- most were trailer sailers but some keelboats and a powerboat. Due to other commitments, I was a little late getting the boat ready and this nearly put paid to the whole trip.

It's a long way to Hervey Bay from Frankston and it took us three and a half days before we reached Bundaberg. Our intention was to make the most of the trip and start from Burnett Heads with some of the locals, stopping overnight at Burrum Heads before sailing further south to meet the main group at Urangan Boat Harbour.

They say plans are meant to be broken- and ours certainly were. While in a caravan park at Burnett Heads, we learned that there were now only to be two other boats leaving from there and one was now without a crew for that leg. Not only that, but southerly winds were forecast that would have made for an uncomfortable start to the adventure. The decision was made- we would all take our boats to Urangan by road. Having plenty of time at this stage, we called in at Burrum Heads and stayed the night in a very busy caravan park. We didn't think we had missed much by not arriving there by sea.

On arriving at the Urangan Boat Harbour the next morning, we found a brand new marina called the Fisherman's Wharf Marina which wasn't really finished but had plenty of room for us and was very friendly. The marina also had a large and convenient (but not exactly cheap) storage area for the cars and trailers. Trailer sailers of all shapes and sizes began to appear at the adjacent boat ramp. Every one we spoke to was also on the whale-watching cruise with us.

That night, (a Saturday) arrangements had been made for us all to dine at the Hervey Bay Boat Club. There were over seventy people there just from our party and the "all you could eat" meal was both cheap and impressive.

Next morning, all the boats set off on a non-stop sail all the way to Wathumba Creek, more than thirty miles away. It was a long slow trip requiring the iron spinnaker nearly all the way. With no wind and a very annoying slop to contend with, we heard that one skipper had become incapacitated by the dreaded mal de mere but another boat crew went to assist.

Wathumba Creek is near the top of Fraser Island (on the inside or west) and cannot be entered at low tide. Once inside,

Sea Goose at Hervey Bay. Photo by Ian Clapperton



Bendigo, and other musicians including a clarinet player from Frankston! Singing and partying continued quite late until a few spots of rain had everyone scurrying back to their craft.

During the next few days, we ventured out to meet the whales. We saw them each day and observed all their various activities such as breaching, tail slapping, fin waving etc. Unfortunately, we were never in quite the right place at the

Below: Photo by Helen Flynn showing the Wathumba Creek Inlet
Taken during our whale watch cruise 2008



it is a perfect spot- safe in all winds, no rocks or coral, no weed, clean sandy beach and plenty of space for the thirty-eight or so boats to either dry out or swing at anchor. There was one powerboat in the party but it was a very special craft. This boat, now beautifully restored, had been built during the second world war for servicing flying boats and has been in the same family ever since. The owner, who is in the boat building industry, had brought the boat from the Brisbane area by sea with his young son as crew. Three boats came from Bendigo- a Seabita, a Castle 550 and another larger TS. Others came from SA and NSW although most hailed from Queensland. There were many classy yachts such as a Van de Stad 30, Farr B30, Austral Clubman, Magregor 26M and Magnums. Two or three keelboats turned up but had to anchor outside due to the shallow channel.

On the evening of our arrival, a campfire was lit using firewood brought on the boats from the mainland. There were three guitarists present, one a real virtuoso from

Photo by Helen Flynn taken during Fraser Island Whale Cruise



right time to get really spectacular photos as we had hoped. We didn't make it to the lighthouse at the top of the island and the day we were to leave the creek it was a little too late for the tide and most of the boats had to stay another day. Another day in paradise?

We had a pleasant sail back to Urangan although it was originally planned to have an overnight stop at a place called Coongul Creek. On the way, we heard that one of the boats had engine trouble and then its radio played up. It was eventually towed back to the marina by one of the other boats on the cruise.

Several boats had launched at Tin Can Bay and were to sail back there, starting the next day. We decided to join them and set sail for a stopover at Kingfisher Bay resort. The anchorage there is not well protected but we were able to dry out and have a quiet night. The resort is boaty friendly with free showers available, restaurants and shops.

The next day we all went to Gary's Anchorage, notorious for its sandflies. Here we had another party on the beach in the evening, complete with campfire, more live music and a number of visitors from other boats including some newly weds and a couple who had bought a huge cruiser in Thailand and had cruised it back to Australia.

From Gary's Anchorage we sailed to Tin Can Bay and stayed the night in the marina there. We said goodbye to the others who were pulling out and the next day we went to Pelican Bay, which is just to the south of Fraser Island. We found a float hole right next to a camping ground and went ashore to view the antics of the 4WDers who catch landing craft from here to get to the island.

We called in at Gary's Anchorage again on the way back but we then had to shelter there all the next day due to very strong winds. When we did get going again, we made our way to the Susan River and then the next day to Kingfisher Bay, carefully following all the marks as we picked our way between the extensive shallows. It pays to be aware of the tides in this area as they come in from both ends of Fraser Island so it's possible to have the tide against you all day or with you all day. At the resort we had hot showers, enjoyed a meal in a restaurant and bought fresh bread from the bakery.



Photo by Ian Claperton taken during Fraser Island Whale Cruise

Instead of sailing straight back to Urangan (well, never straight in the Great Sandy Straits), I persuaded the first mate that we should spend the night at Moon Point as it looked very inviting in the guide books. So we set off, passing to the west of Little Woody Island but trying to miss the vast shallow areas to the east. Approaching Moon Point, it became obvious that the chart, originating from 1863, no longer showed the entrance with sufficient accuracy. With the keel almost right up, we motored close to shore but even then we could not see an entrance to the hole where we had hoped to anchor for the night. We concluded that the tide was too low and with the sun rapidly sinking, decided to head back to the marina at Urangan. We let the VMR know of our change of plan and just managed to log off with them before they closed down for the night. There is excellent coverage from the voluntary organizations up there.

Visiting a relative on Bribie Island on the way home extended our holiday even more and we were away for a total of four weeks. The Hervey Bay area offers a cruising area with a great deal of variety- from sheltered cruising comparable to our Lakes- to more open adventuring right to the top of Fraser Island- or even up to 1770 for the very brave. In season, the whales are an added bonus.

Ian and Lesley (Crème Caramel)