

Bayside Trailable Yacht Club
2011 Fraser Island
Whale Watch Cruise Report
by Kenton & Ann Lillecrapp

Extended cruise to Great Sandy Straits and Frazer Island - September 2011

Boats attending

Silk Department	Anne & Kenton Lillecrapp
Katrina	Sue & Clive Aikman
Spiders Web	Gerald Tate
Ultimate Affair	Shaun Douglas & Emily
Crème Caramel	Leslie & Ian Clapperton
Take it Easy	Joan Rockcliff & Geoff Peplar

The Adventure

Well, we had it all. A very long trip there and back, sunny skies, bags of wind, mystery radio warning, no wind, happy hours on the beach, big waves and whales galore.

The plan was to meet at Tin Can Bay Marina, sail up the Great Sandy Straits over two days to the big marina at Urangan (Hervey Bay) then an all day sail up to Wathumba Inlet at the top of Frazer Island. Spend about five days in the inlet, coming out to cruise with the whales and then sail back to Urangan Boat Harbour and back down the Great Sandy Straits over three days.



One by one we arrived at the marina at Tin Can Bay over a couple of days, launched and found our way to our allotted pens. Tin Can Bay is a very peaceful little fishing village set on a peninsula at the very southern end of the Great Sandy Straits. The marina is new, modern and has excellent facilities. While some of us took a full two days to get organised, Shaun and Emily arrived Wednesday evening and were somehow rigged, fully provisioned and ready to sail off with us at 0900 the next morning.

The forecast was for fine weather with a rising south east wind of about 25 knots. We motored out of the marina, logging on with the Coast Guard as we went and raised sails as soon as we were out of the channel for a fast sail down to the Wide Bay Entrance with a strong wind on the starboard beam. Keeping port and starboard hand marks in sight we sailed on in a strengthening wind, twisting and turning with the channel and finding just how strong the wind had become when the channel changed direction and forced us to sail hard on the wind. It was at this point that we had a great mystery. The group was just entering a more narrow section of the channel near Snout Point in the lead up to Gary's Anchorage where we proposed to spend the night when we heard a quite angry voice on the radio reprimanding: "This is Great Sandy Straits Coast Guard. Victorian Trailable Yachts, you are in a restricted waterway. Move to the right immediately." Those of us who heard the

call were perplexed. It is a vast area and with the exception of one large yacht sailing towards us there was no one else around to see us or call to us. Not only that, we were completely in the right. We never solved that one! We think there may have been other yachts miles away on the other side of the Straits where there are vast military training areas.

We entered the shelter of Gary's Anchorage mid afternoon and dropped anchors in about 5 metres of water and organised our dinghies. There was a long happy hour on Take it Easy with eleven people on board for drinks.

An early start to take advantage of the tide saw us off in very light conditions motor sailing most of the time and concentrating on picking up the channel marks in the distance. The sun was bright and the weather warm and the whole panorama beautiful. Along here the Straits are miles wide, but shallow with sand banks and islands here and there. The channel is wide with marks sometimes a very long way apart and sometimes only on one side. Silk Department leading suddenly noticed the depth dropping rapidly and at the same time the rest of the group sailing off in a completely different direction. We had completely missed one mark and were taking a very shallow short cut!

At about this point the sky darkened and the light became orange. On our right hand on Frazer Island we could see a huge bushfire burning and, according to the radio, heading for Kingfisher Resort. This bushfire was still burning days later.

Near the entrance to the Mary River a beautiful north westerly filled in and we sailed for the next hour up to the bottom end of Big Woody Island where we reluctantly started motors again. Crème Caramel's motor was even more reluctant and refused to start at all, so ended up being towed the final ten miles into Urangan Boat Harbour by Silk Department, arriving just as the sun went down.

Wonderful to have a rest day at the marina with good showers, restaurants and the opportunity to resupply and sort out damage. Silk Department with a broken sail batten and jamming halyard and Creme Caramel's reluctant motor.



Sunday morning dawned fine but with strong north easterlies forecast – right on the nose for our long sail up to the northern end of Frazer Island. A quick briefing and we all headed out for the tricky trip across to Moon Point. A lot of short chop with wind on tide as we motored the first couple of miles and then sails up as we rounded the north cardinal mark and we were on our way. A really exhilarating sail with only a couple of tacks and by half way there we were starting to see whales.

The group arrived off Wathumba Inlet about 1430 with at least an hour to wait before we could enter. We hove-to about a mile offshore

in quite windy conditions, had a cup of tea and enjoyed an endless display of whales playing nearby. At about 1530 Silk Department led the group in through the shallow entrance and around to the anchorage. This is a large tidal inlet which is totally sheltered from the sea and to some extent the wind also. A large part of it dries out at low tide leaving a wide deep channel at the anchorage near the scrub & tree covered sandhills that separate it from the sea. It is a beautiful spot, although I noticed that compared with my last visit here five years ago, there has been considerable silting and the anchorage area has reduced enormously.

For a couple of days the wind blew very hard from the north west, preventing any thought of leaving the inlet, and we were very content to be safely anchored, exploring the inlet in our dinghies, fishing, enjoying happy hour and sunset from the trees at the edge of the beach and generally meeting and talking to other yachties there. On one of these very windy evenings we were just leaving our dinghies to walk over to the beach for happy hour when two Careel 18s arrived in the inlet, racing through the anchorage under motor and being pushed hard by the 25 knot wind and the incoming tide. One of them just missed Katrina, then turned up wind, seemingly under control again. Reaching Silk Department he turned directly across her bow and was immediately flung up against her anchor rope by the wind and tide. He ran straight over the anchor rope with the motor running and then raced straight down wind and hard into the side of Katrina just as Clive and Sue were readying for happy hour. There was a lot of shouting and the two offenders continued on their way further down the inlet.

At about this point Ian and Leslie on Creme Cramel discovered that their keel winch had failed. This was OK in the inlet as the keel was almost in the fully up position, but it meant that once they left the inlet and put the keel down there was no way to bring it back up again and therefore no way of coming back into the inlet.

Wednesday dawned fine and sunny with a gentle breeze, so some of us ventured out to see the whales. And what a time we had. We saw many, many whales, but the best experience was having a huge whale come slowly up behind Silk Department as we sailed along at a bit over 5 knots. For about ten minutes it kept station with us about 3 metres behind our dinghy, coming up & blowing

Whale following Silk Department - Photo Kenton Lillicrapp



and then diving again time after time. At one point it came right up parallel to the boat and then rolled over showing its big white tummy almost directly underneath the boat and only about a metre below the keel. It was certainly a lot longer than the boat. It was a shame to spoil his fun, but we had to re enter the inlet before the tide fell any further or else stay out there for another six hours or so, so we left him to it.

Thursday's forecast was for another strong wind warning with north west winds up to 30 knots. At 0600 the sky was overcast and the wind building. At 0700 Take it Easy had dragged her anchor and ended up in the bushes. Three very big catamarans came in to take shelter and an even bigger blue one headed out. As he passed us I called out "Very windy out there today" and the skipper called back "We hope so!" Well, we weren't going anywhere.



**Ultimate affair in rough seas.
Photo by Ian Clapperton**

With a forecast that suggested a south west change the next morning and then worse to come for the next few days. We decided that we must get out of the inlet for our return trip as early as the tide would allow in the morning.

At 0400 the north westerly dropped and at 0800 we motored for the entrance. The waves coming in from the north west into the still very shallow entrance after a couple of days of strong winds made it like motoring through a washing machine for about a mile. Shaun and Emily in the Ultimate looked as though they were bouncing up and down in one spot!

One by one we all reached the relative safety of the deeper water and raised sails for the long trip back to Urangan. Unfortunately in this process, Creme Caramel put a large rip in its mainsail and from then on had to sail with a double reef. With the wind fairly strong and from the south west we found that we had to tack all the way down the coast of Frazer Island until finally, a few miles before Moon Point the wind died out and we motored the rest of the way arriving at the marina in the late afternoon. Hot showers and a meal at the Boat Club were a very welcome change for us. We were becoming quite used to having strong winds every

Below, Crème Caramel's Main was ripped. Photo By Ian Clapperton



day, but the forecast for Friday was particularly daunting with westerlies of up to 30 knots forecast for around midday. A quick briefing and then five boats set

Below, Spiders Web in rough seas - Photo by Kenton Lillicrapp



off at 0730 leaving Creme Caramel behind to sort out its keel winch problem. We bounced our way out to the north cardinal mark raising sails as we went, then entered the Great Sandy Straits between Big Woody Island and Frazer Island with a good wind on our beam. An hour later with the wind getting stronger Silk Department put a reef in the main, while Spiders Web reported by

radio that she had been knocked flat in a sudden squall. We were racing along now and just as we

reached the Mary River entrance we received the full force of the 30 knot westerly that had been forecast. Boats lay over and sails flogged and one by one we each dropped sails and started motors.

All was well under motor until we reached the area called Ungowa where the channel moves in very close to Frazer Island and then turns south west for four miles so that we were motoring almost directly into the screaming westerly and also contending with the short steep waves produced by the wind on tide effect. This time it wasn't just Shaun in the Ultimate who felt as if he was going up and down on the spot. We were all bashing and crashing our way under, over and through the waves and getting a good soaking as we went.

An hour or so later we entered the longed for shelter of Gary's Anchorage and dropped anchor in relative peace. Silk Department settled in for a very pleasant afternoon listening to the AFL grand final. With the wind so strong, even there in the anchorage, none of us felt like making boat visits in our dinghies.

Once again the forecast was a concern to us. There was a strong wind warning but things looked even worse for the next three days. A group decision was made to leave and we got away about 1130 to take advantage of the outgoing tide all the way to the Wide Bay Entrance. The wind was fairly strong, but in the right direction to give us a really good sail for most of the day, only needing to drop sails and motor up the final eight miles from the Wide Bay Entrance to Tin Can Bay. We motored up the Tin Can Bay channel next to the village with the setting sun making the water sparkle for the end of our cruise.

Good company, good sailing and a great adventure.

Kenton (Silk Department)
Cruise Coordinator

