



Whitsundays 2012

14 Days of Sea Kayaking around the Whitsundays





MARTY

PartyMarty is a paddler from FNQ who joined us for the first part of our trip before having to return home early due to some unforeseen business complications.

Marty paddles an Epic with a wing and a very high angle stroke with a background in white water paddling.

He came close to losing his boat on the first crossing, but with a bit of duct tape, got him successfully through the rest of the crossings.



SCAMPER

Organised a food/wine drop at Crayfish Beach (\$50 for everyone) and for \$80, was able to get Marty back to Shute Harbour. The scamper can pick-up/drop you and your kayak at any of the campsites in the Whitsundays. If they are planning to go to the site you want on the day you want, the rates are cheaper.



PHIL

Raider 1 can't show you his face because he paddles a SRX.

This boat is the packhorse. Even overloaded with Phil's amazing array of everything you ever wanted and didn't want on a camping trip, it still has inches of freeboard to go.

Phil is famous for bringing the most useless bit of kit to the coral beaches of the Whitsundays – a kayak wheel set.



GAVIN

Grey Raider doesn't show his face often because he is a Kiwi...and a Taran Paddler. I don't know if this is a common trait with Taran Paddlers, but he placed his mark everywhere he went by leaving Taran gelcoat on the rocks. Go figure!





GARY

Hunter 1 is a fellow skeg boat paddler. It was great to have Gary on the trip as he took all the pressure off me to provide fish for the hungry hordes.

Not only skilled in the art of fish hunting, but also in seafood preparation – taking on the role of consultative chef for the preparation of battered oysters!



APRIL

Shark Bait 2. April gets to carry around the dead and not so dead fish that are speared. April also paddles a small pink cockroach when she isn't defending the catch from sharks.





PAUL

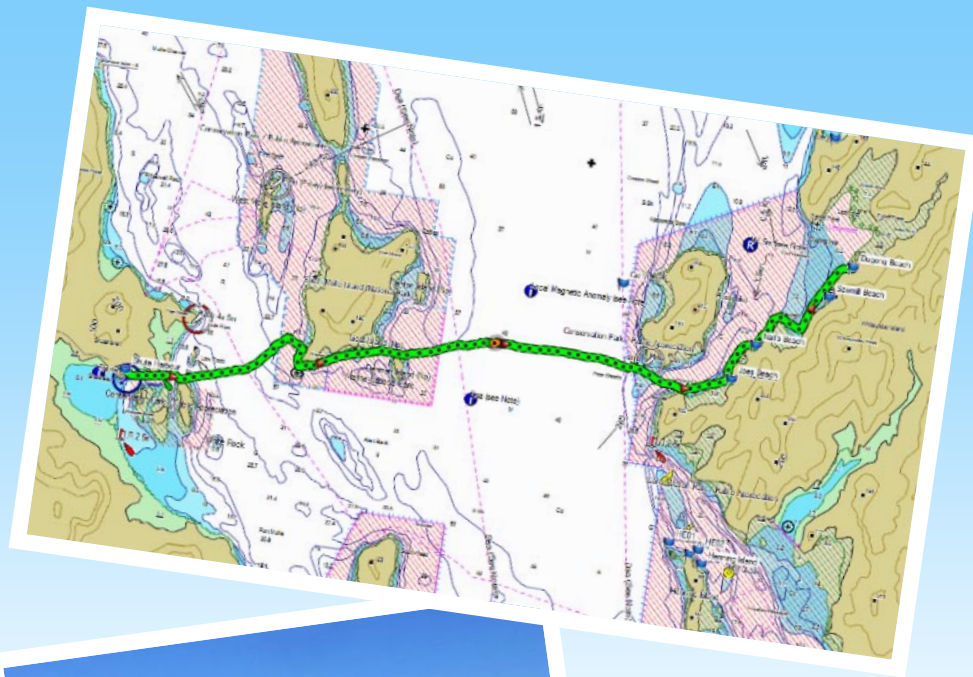
Shark Bait – paddles a Nordkapp and carries a large knife to address any skeg V rudder disputes with a secondary purpose of opening coconuts.

Hint: The National Parks people have determined that Coconut Palms are not native so are cutting them all down even though the traditional owners have been consuming them for eons. Finding a coconut palm tree is as hard as finding an open resort!

NEV

Red Cockroach broke his maximum distance day paddle record with a 52km day paddle on this trip. He also broke his pump and his rudder. Yes, a broken rudder – requiring shore leave to fix (less than a minute but sufficient time for skeg paddlers to point score)!





SHUTE HARBOUR TO DUGONG BEACH (21KM)

After watching the perfect weather for the past week, the day to leave turned on a 25 knot SEly blow which was going to stay around for a few days.

We changed our original plan to suit the conditions and decided to push across the face of the wind and camp in Cid Harbour rather than push directly into the SEly and camp on Henning Island.

There were a few votes for heading North West as we watched 1.5-2 Meters of ground swell push in that direction.

We stopped on the South West side of South Molle Island (now known as Marty's Beach) where we had to empty the rear hatch on Marty's Epic which had filled up with water .

Note that the tide can run up to 4 knots at peak flow through this channel (Look closely at the GPS plot and you will see the result of having to tow a sinking boat).





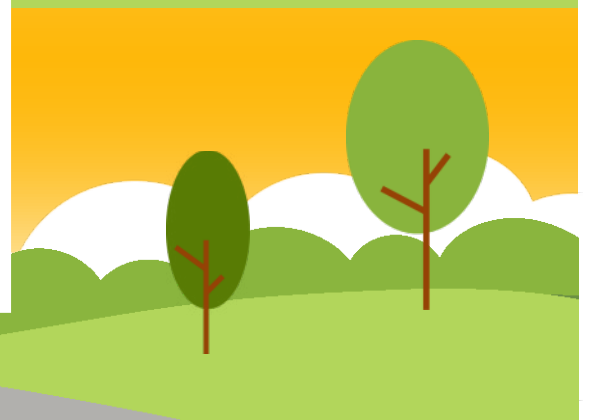
DENMAN ISLAND

A short paddle around the southern end of South Molle Island and then had another break on Denman Island before crossing the Whitsunday Passage.

Denman Island has a small campsite with a long drop toilet and is an easy jump to Shute Harbour.

The beach is northwards facing and therefore protected from the South and East.

We took the opportunity to double check the water ingress into the rear hatch of the Epic and to duct tape the rear hatch down for the next crossing.





WHITSUNDAY PASSAGE

This passage flows around 2 knots at peak flow and is capable of getting over two meters of swell running with the right conditions.

The water had some texture to it with 25 knots blowing off the starboard bow as we ploughed our way across to the protected waters of Cid Harbour and into Joe's Beach campsite for a break.

A whale came up for a brief visit before disappearing into the calm of the deep blue ocean on this crossing.

A great teaser for the 14 days ahead.



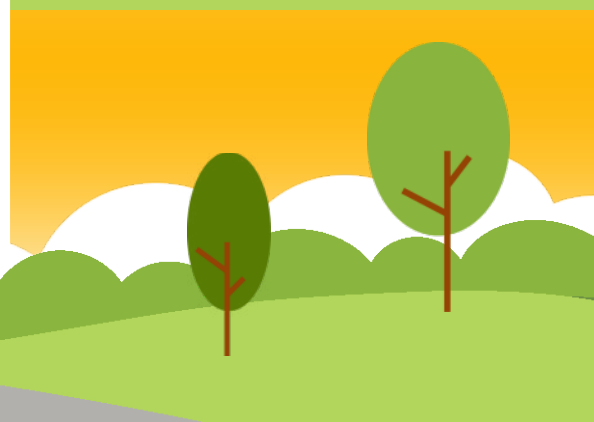


DUGONG BEACH

Home of the “GIANT” White Tailed Rat, a resident of the rain forests of tropical North Queensland. If you like furry animals visiting in the night, this is the campsite for you.

Don't let the picture of the cute furry creature fool you. This beast weighs in at around 1kg and is the size of a small cat – similar in size to a ferret.

The campsite itself is well appointed with covered eating areas, long drop toilets, tables and well defined camp sites. You can walk/climb to the Whitsunday Peak from this campsite.





DUGONG BEACH TO CURLEW BEACH VIA NARA INLET (23KM)

A change of plan for today was brought about by Rangers turning up with a range of noisy equipment to do track maintenance. After a quick consultation with the crew and a weather check for the next few days, we decided to head north and camp at Curlew Beach and visit Nara Inlet on the way.





NARA INLET

We enjoyed a stiff 20+ knot breeze on the run into Nara Inlet where a whale and its calf were putting on a show. No time for cameras as even the packhorse (SRX) was hitting speeds of 21.4km/hr on the run into Nara.

The Aboriginal Cave paintings are worth a quick visit, though if you look up on the cliffs on the south side of the inlet you may see cave paintings and could save you the paddle up to the end of the inlet.

If you stop to talk to every boatie in the inlet, you might not make it to the cave paintings, however ignoring them all would seem a bit rude!





CURLEW BEACH

Yes, there are curlews at Curlew Beach, and every other beach in the Whitsundays!

Curlew Beach is tucked inside Macona Inlet on the northern side of the inlet. It is set on a Sandy Beach with mid-tide access.

There is a long drop toilet and two tables so is able to accommodate a group of six easily, with further campsites available along the beach front if required.

Phone access is available, and as a rule of thumb anywhere you can see Shute Harbour, Hamilton Island or Airlie Beach will enable some sort of phone access.

You will not have phone access on the Eastern side of Hook or Whitsunday Islands or the Northern side of Hook Island.

Obscurely enough, you can get phone access from the western side of Deloraine Island.





MACONA INLET

Oysters! If you like oysters, the northern side of this inlet was covered in oysters which were accessible at low tide.

After having our fill of natural oysters, we decided after much deliberation to batter and fry the remainder.

This quickly became a delicacy for the hungry hordes.

The visibility for water based activities in the inlet was poor due to the sand/mud bottom at the top end of the inlet.

Our activities were limited to gathering, so that is what we did for a couple of days as we waited for the wind to abate and for a couple of members to recover from various ailments including a case of Bali belly.





CURLEW BEACH TO CRAYFISH BEACH (15KM)

The winds abated to 10-15 knots so the plan changed to arrive at Crayfish Beach one day early and to resupply our water at Hook Island Resort.

The Hook Island Resort is currently shut due to boat repairs. I had sought permission prior to the trip to resupply our water from the water tanks on the right hand side of the resort.

When the resort is open (I use the term resort very loosely), it is worthwhile stopping in for a cold drink and a cooked meal.

At the mouth of the Hook Island Passage, an outgoing tide and an easterly swell gets a great tidal race going at full flood. We had a play just as the tide started to turn before enjoying the scenery of the east coast of Hook Island on the way to Crayfish.





CRAYFISH BEACH

Crayfish beach was the gem of all the campsites we had visited in our previous visits to the Whitsundays.

It is nestled into the southern side of Mackerel Bay, completely hidden and protected from any winds from the South, East or West.

You can't see this beach from the headland and have to paddle around the corner into Mackerel Bay before this tropical paradise comes into view.

There are fringing reefs that follow the bay around which have drop offs into 15-20 meters of water.

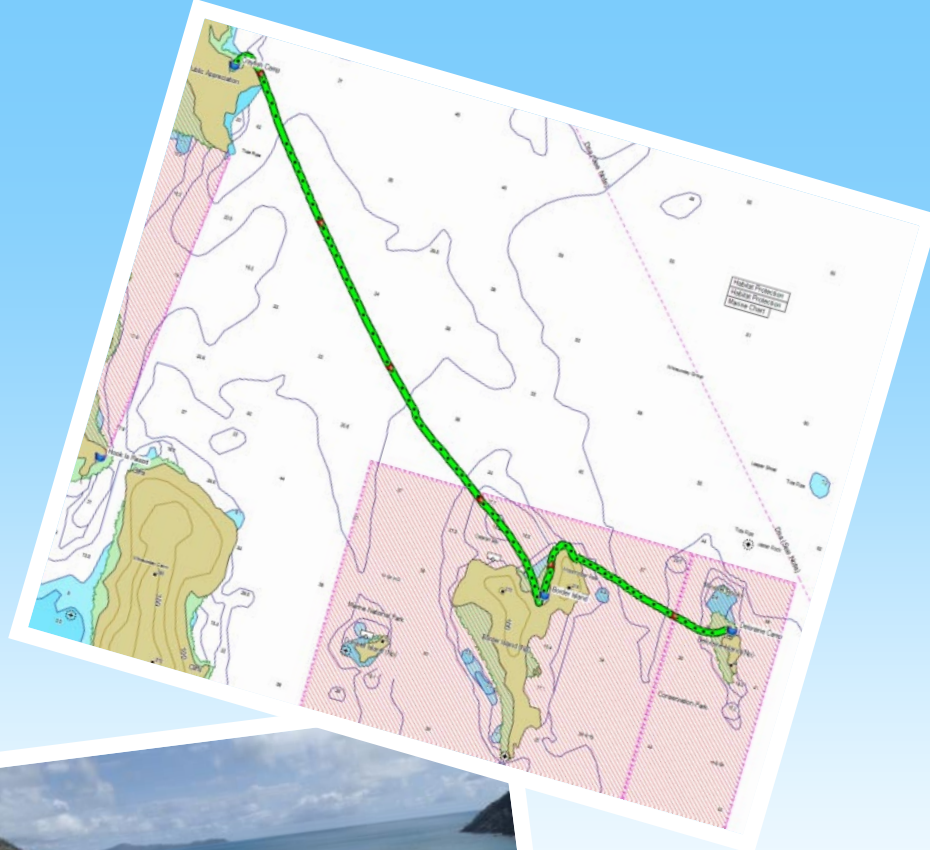
There is a tidal creek in southern corner of the bay which holds various fish, with the larger fish keeping hidden in the deep water.

You can spear fish in this area, and the fish have been put on warning. Persistence will see you get a feed but you want to be on your game!

Currents are strong and visibility was around 15 meters.







CRAYFISH BEACH TO DELORAINE ISLAND (17KM)

The wind was dropping with a high moving into the southern states giving us light and variable winds for the next week or so. This gave us the opportunity to make our way over to Deloraine Island, via Border Island and Cateran Bay.

Crayfish Beach soon moved into second place as a destination as we paddled into Deloraine Island, a rarely visited island on the far Eastern side of the Whitsundays.

The tides rip around this area of the Whitsundays causing overfalls and rough water so plan your trip to this destination carefully – paddling against 4 knots of tide in this area is not recommended.

The eastern side of Border Island and Deloraine Island are rock hopping heaven, enabling you to paddle right beside the cliff face and around the structures created by wind and wave action.





BORDER ISLAND – CATERAN BAY

This bay is completely protected from the South East and is a haven for Boaties. This is the furthest that the charter boats can go and is an overnight option if you get caught in an easterly blow – noting that it is not an official campsite.

The eastern side of this island offered some of the best Cliffside paddling that Queensland has to offer.

Look closely at the bottom photo (left) and you will see Gary in his kayak being dwarfed by this overhang.

The jump to Deloraine Island from Border Island is around 4kms.



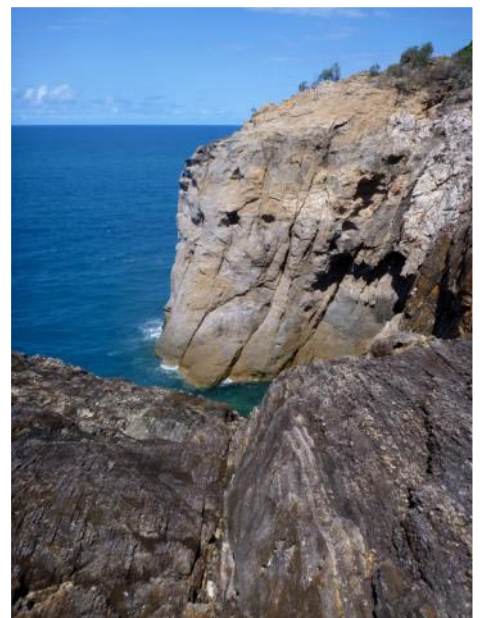


DELORAINE ISLAND

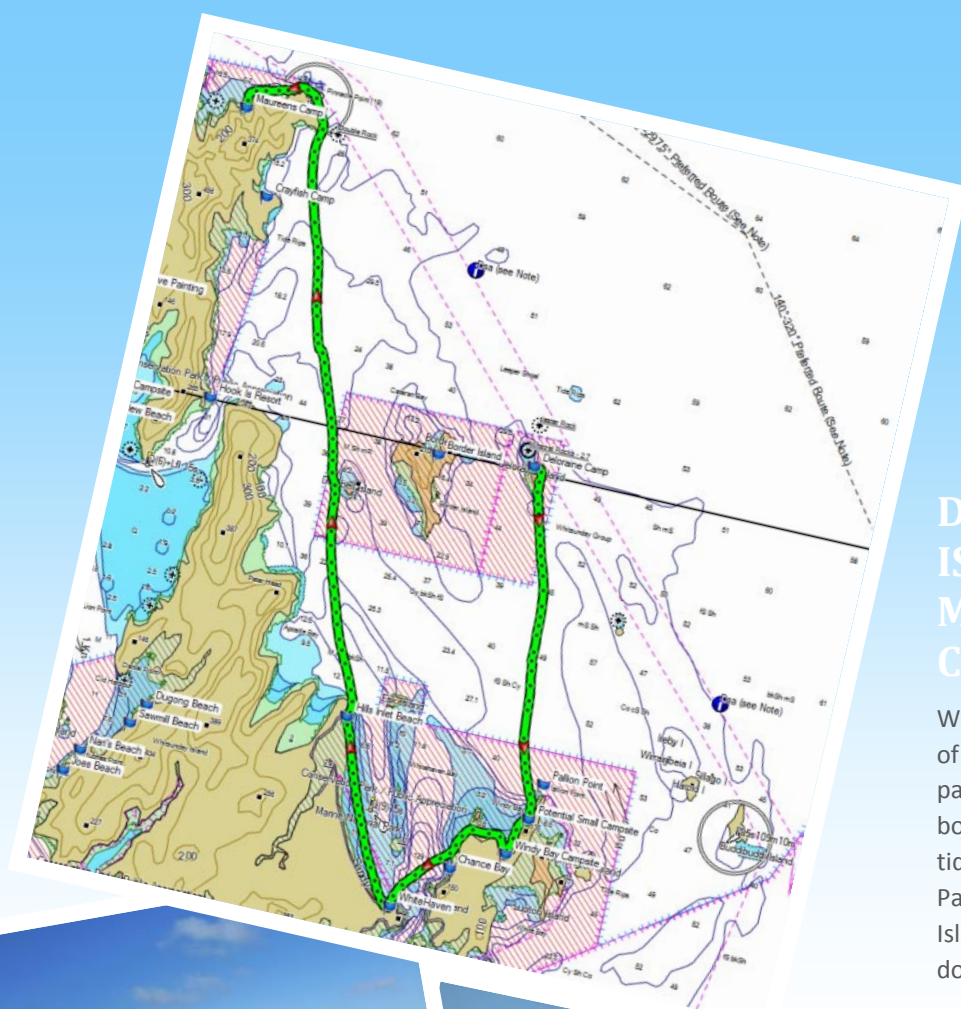
This jumped to number one place to visit in the Whitsundays. It is the jewel in the Whitsunday crown that offers everything the reclusive sea kayaker needs, including abundant fish life, crayfish and zoned to allow spear fishing.

Beware the currents in this area. The tides rip around various underwater obstructions and overfalls appear with wind against tide.

Watch your line of transit closely as the tidal pull can very quickly put you where you hadn't planned to be – the tides run around 4 knots in this area.







DELORAINE ISLAND TO MAUREENS COVE (52KM)

We decided to take advantage of the perfect weather for paddling and tick a lot of boxes. Using the incoming tide we paddled towards Pallion Point on Haslewood Island, before making our way down the coast to Windy Bay.

From Windy Bay (a very sheltered campsite), we made our way down past Chalkies Beach and across to Whitehaven.

At Whitehaven we purchased some drinks from one of the tour boats before heading up to Hills Inlet for lunch.

The afternoon paddle took us past Peter Bay, Dumbell Island and then up the coast of the Hook Island to the Pinnacles and then around to Maureen's Cove.

We hit the Pinnacles at mid tide for some fun textured water as the streams of outgoing tide from the west and east meet at this point.





HASELWOOD ISLAND

We made the decision to skip Harold and Edward Islands so we could get up to Maureen's Cove and settle in for a few days rather than do over-nighters at various locations.

We set our targets on Pallion Point and headed along the northern side of Haslewood Island, stopping on the beach at Windy Bay before continuing down past Chalkies beach to Whitehaven.

Windy Bay and Chalkies are worth visiting, leaving Whitehaven and the midges to the tourists. Windy Bay would make a great campsite, though no amenities.





WHITSUNDAY ISLAND – WHITEHAVEN & HILLS INLET

Whitehaven is a beautiful part of the world and definitely worth a visit. Move on quickly if you like your peace and tranquility and don't like small bitey things and your campsite being overrun by rats, crows, goannas, etc.

At the top end of Whitehaven is the beautiful Hills Inlet – again another tourist Mecca so get your obligatory photos and move on. Esk Island is just off the coast and has great coral for snorkeling and no tourists!

We were all feeling pretty good so made the call to push on to Maureen's Cove, making a bee-line for Dumbbell Island and the Pinnacles.



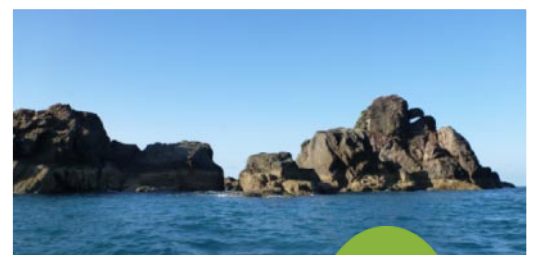


HOOK ISLAND – PINNACLES

The tides meet at this point and it is recommended that you paddle through this area at slack water. It is a lot of fun when you do this at full-flood! The water is jumping out of itself and you hit this washing machine going at around 9-10km/hr and the fun begins.

The northern side of Hook Island is beautiful with cliffs plunging 30 meters down into the deep blue ocean. You paddle over fringing reefs and large bommies.

A tidal race forms at the log piles with eddies and overfalls. We were sharing the surf zone with a mackerel shark which was darting in and out of the boats.







HOOK ISLAND – MAUREEN'S COVE

Maureen's cove is a beautiful cove nestled in the northern end of Hook Island, protected from all winds except a northerly.

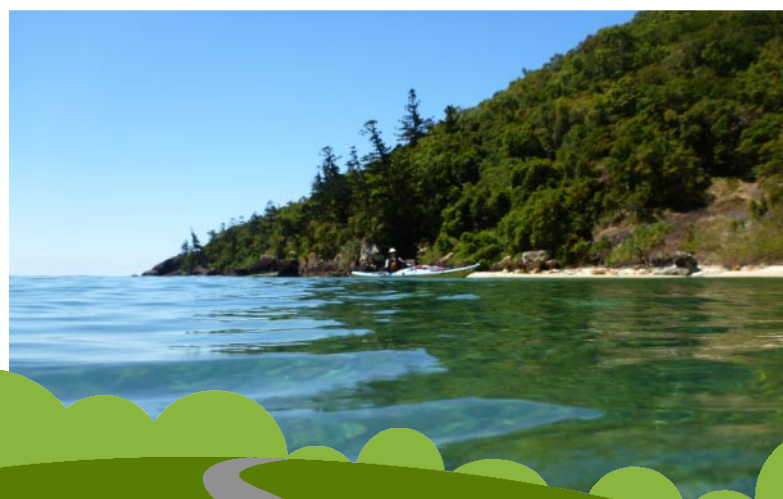
There is some good coral directly in front of the campsite with good fish life.

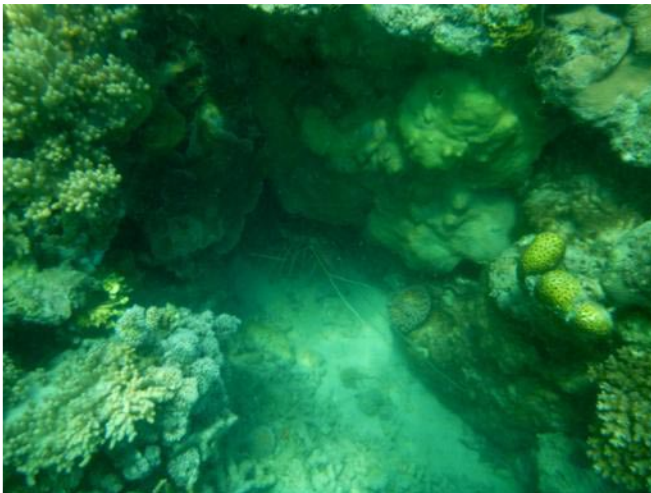
The campsite itself is set on a coral bank with a long drop toilet and a table. The campsite is a favourite site for sea kayaking tour groups and is often frequented by the Scamper.

It is set in a beautiful part of Hook Island, central to exploring the top end of the Whitsundays.

The tourist operators feed the fish in Manta-ray Bay so it is worthwhile going for a snorkel whilst this is on as you will be able to swim amongst some large GT's and Maori Wrasse.

Definitely worth a few nights at this end of the Whitsundays – Number 3 on our must do list.







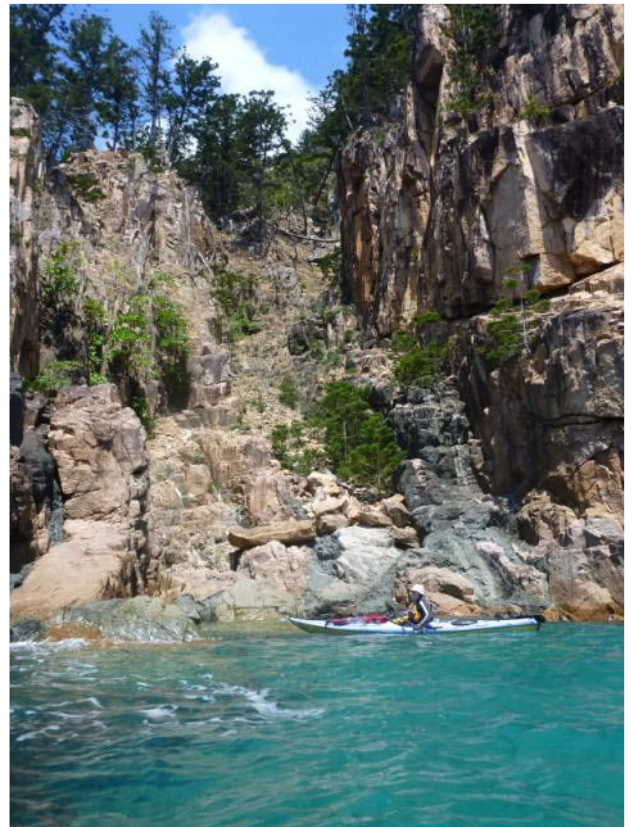
HAYMAN ISLAND CIRCUMNAV (22KM)

Hayman Island is an excellent sea kayaking destination. A circumnavigation will give you some great rock hopping opportunities as well as good snorkeling/free diving around Blue Pearl Bay.

You can land on the beaches without the resort police evicting you, but there are signs on the tracks limiting your bush walking forays.

We took the opportunity to visit Arkhurst Island, Langford Island and Black Island on the way back to Maureen's Cove







MAUREENS COVE TO HENNING ISLAND (43KM)

We decided to take a run down to Henning Island for the last night so we could ease ourselves back into civilization by a short visit to Hamilton Island for a shower and some fresh food.

We took off relatively early for this trip and enjoyed the early morning glass as we paddled over the coral around Steens Beach on the North West corner of Hook Island.

This was a magic paddle and we took the time to smell the roses for the first hour or so before the tide started to turn.

A whale mother and calf turned on an amazing display as we took a line for Cid Harbour from Nara Inlet.

After half an hour of breaching, tail slapping and fluke waving, we headed off for a break on Cid Island before paddling into Henning, setting up camp with some of the team heading over to Hamilton Island.





HENNING ISLAND TO SHUTE HARBOUR (22KM)

We had a lazy start from Henning as Shute Harbour is around 15km in a straight line and we had accommodation booked in Airlie Beach for tonight.

We had been woken by whales in the night and as we were packing our kayaks on the beach, the whales swam past again around 50 meters from shore – a nice good bye on our last day.

The tides weren't perfect so we paddled up to Cid Harbour and crossed Whitsunday Passage heading towards the top end of South Molle Island.

We had lunch on Planton Island before paddling past the closed resort on South Molle Island and making our way into Shute Harbour with the making tide.





Things that worked really well:

1. Aeropress – Coffee Maker
2. Single Side Band (SSB) Short Wave Radio
3. Power Monkey Extreme (Solar Panel/Charger)
4. Small Machette (Coconut extraction – but had various uses)
5. Speargun
6. Happy Camper – Lamb Shanks!

Notes:

By the end of September the Whitsundays have started to heat up and the March Flies are getting very active. Speaking with the Guides we met on this trip, this was their last trip of the year until things cooled off next year and the bugs settled down.

Credits:

Photos by Paul, Gary, Nev and Phil. Trip report by Paul.

Thanks:

My personal thanks to all who came on this trip and helped make it one of the best trips I've been on. I look forward to the next installment so bring on 2013.

