

Pelorus Island Trip Report

In the wee hours of Saturday morning, Ian, Robyn, Tony, and I met Vince at the South Townsville public jetty and loaded up his boat with toys and provisions for a Pelorus Island camping and diving weekend.

The weather looked like it could be a little rough for the trip up, but the forecast was perfect for the trip home. By 6:30am we were cruising along the Ross Creek, expecting to meet Garry and Joanne on the Island around lunch time. Twenty four hours earlier, Jeff, Susie, Kadell, and Susie's parents had left Lucinda, but had to turn around and come back due to large waves and driving rain.

We encountered some lumpy water in between Cleveland Bay and the Palm Group, but beyond the southern end of Palm Island, we had smooth sailing, and Ian tried his hand with some of the local Mackerel.

We reached Pelorus at about 1pm and were surprised to find that we had arrived only just after Garry and Joanne. Garry had an eventful

morning with his trailer, but made a safe and comfortable trip over to the island.

After unloading both boats, 'Camp NQUEC' was assembled, and we spent some time exploring our surrounds, as this was the first time most of us had seen the island this year, and wow - there has been some changes.

The most noticeable change can be seen in the vegetation at the upper edge of the beach. T.C Yasi gave a lot of the trees a good shake up, and the creek behind the area that we usually select for our communal site is now covered in a nice layer of sand, instead of the usual decomposing leaf litter.

Huge flows of water appear to have run from the southern creek, heaping up the sand in front of the creek. This freshly deposited coral and sand creates prime water front real-estate during the high tide, which Garry took full advantage of during the erection of his Taj Mahal camp site.

The area where we usually set up the club compressor is now barely recognisable due to the volume of

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sand that has been shifted, exposing a mass of tree roots.

We also found plenty of plastic flotsam deposited up and down the beach, and Robyn and I did our little bit for nature, by picking up two and half garbage bags of rubbish!

That afternoon Garry and I tried out our new toys - a regulator and 20m of hose attached to a SCUBA first stage valve and cylinder. This allows us to essentially dive free of the burden of a cylinder and BCD, and proved to be a lot of fun in shallow water. Vince followed me around just off the beach in his little tender, and I found a bommie housing a few small coral reef fish and a crayfish in about 5m of water.

The wind picked up in the evening, and we decided not to do a night dive, but instead we stoked up a large fire, cooked up a storm, and had a couple of drinks.

The next day also began a little breezy, so we built a second fire in the bottom of the creek directly behind the camp which gave us protection from the wind.

Sunday morning was spent exploring our surroundings and collecting more firewood, and I was amazed to

find two ripe capsicums growing on a plant just beyond the top of the beach. In this area, Ian and I also found a pumpkin plant, some kind of passion fruit vine, and two tomato plants each carrying around a dozen ripe and juicy cherry tomatoes. This is the first time I've been able to make up a salad sourced purely from the island, and I assume these plants have grown from the discarded seeds left by previous campers.

Another new toy tested out on the trip was Garry's inflatable kayak, called a 'Dive Yak'. Garry used it to move between his boat and the beach, and also as a platform from which to test his new 20m dive hose. At times the wind had a strong influence on the Dive Yak, and the group keenly observed operators of the craft in anticipation of filming any 'Russell Coight' type moments. I learnt how not to climb aboard the vessel; although it seems no one had a camera handy enough to record my unplanned exit!

On Sunday afternoon we assembled on the rear deck of Vince's boat and swam to the R.A.D. mooring for a dive along the northern fringing reef wall. We found the manakin named 'Judas' at the base of the mooring in 22m and found him to be

covered in a lot more marine growth compared to last year. He is now also sporting a wrist mounted compass and a flag pole complete with a banner to keep him company.

After coming back up the steep sand slope towards the beach, we turned left and moved along the reef wall to the northern point. The structure, colour, and fish life here is really quite impressive for fringing reef. Between us we saw a Port Jackson Shark, a Barramundi Cod, a baby Lion Fish, a Stone Fish, a giant Bat Fish, and Joanne's favourite critter - a really colourful Nudibranch! We also found two Painted Crayfish which were sharing the same hole.

Garry and I then found a large anchor, complete with 2m of polished stainless steel chain which I picked up to give to Vince to use for his tenders. We almost reached the point before we finished up, and Vince took us back to his big boat using Garry's Dive Yak as a tow platform. Apparently, throughout our dive we were being followed by a strange black dorsal fin! From Vince's description, it seemed like we had a Manta Ray in the bay playing near the surface, and we later found out through R.A.D. that their group had seen several large Mantas around the island.

This dive also gave Ian and I a chance to use his secondary regulator with an extra long 2.1m hose in a practice buddy breathing scenario. The length of the hose made breathing off the same SCUBA unit incredibly easy, and at times I even forgot that I was tethered to another diver. We hardly made a dent in the air held by his twin tank set up, and Ian can now provide divers with an underwater air-station capability!

After filling our tanks we headed back to shore to begin the all important task of lightening our eskies of their weight for our departure on Monday. The reconditioned NQUEC hot plate has been restored to its former glory, and performed brilliantly cooking up plenty of sausages and steaks for the group. We also decided that we should put a long handled shovel on the club's shopping list.

The next morning Tony, Garry, and I wanted to have a quick look at the condition of the southern fringing reef, and we did a drift dive from Garry's boat with Vince and his tender in support. The coral here seemed damaged and lacking its usual colour. The better diving now seems to be off the northern end of the beach.

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Despite this, we found some familiar sites such as the old experiment which resembles staked-up bread crates, and although we didn't venture far enough along the wall to find the really big black tree coral, we did find quite a few smaller fans and white sea whips.

Shortly after the dive we helped Garry and Joanne leave, and by 1pm we had disassembled camp and were ready to head home. All through the week end we had been checking the forecast, and although the prediction seemed inaccurate for the first part of our trip, the forecast of only very light breeze on Monday proved spot-on. We had a beautiful trip home over water which had not quite glassed over, but was very close to it.

As we moved past Havannah Island, we surveyed the beach and found a great little spot which appeared very worthy of a future club trip. Herald Island also looked very promising, which left us with a couple of really good ideas for future trips.

Unfortunately for Jeff and his crew, the weather prevented them from making it across to Pelorus, but they were still able to spend

the weekend camping on Garden Island, near Goold Island.

In summary, I'd like to thank Vince for transporting us up to Pelorus and taking us home, and for ferrying the group around between dives in his tinny.

I'd also like to thank Garry for taking Joanne over and back, and for providing Tony and I with a dive from his boat.

Another successful trip and I'm already looking forward to the next NQUEC outing!

Simon Penprase