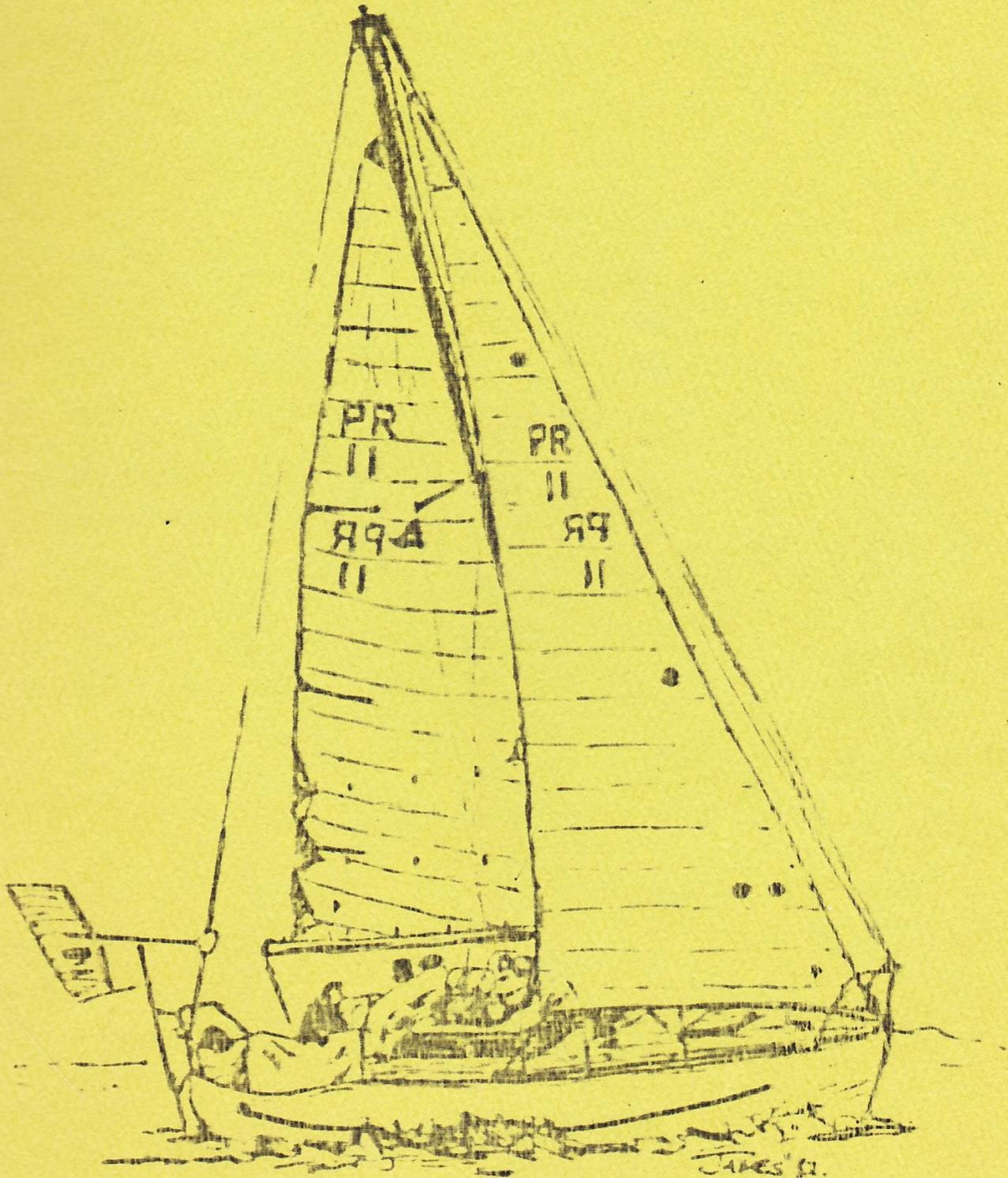
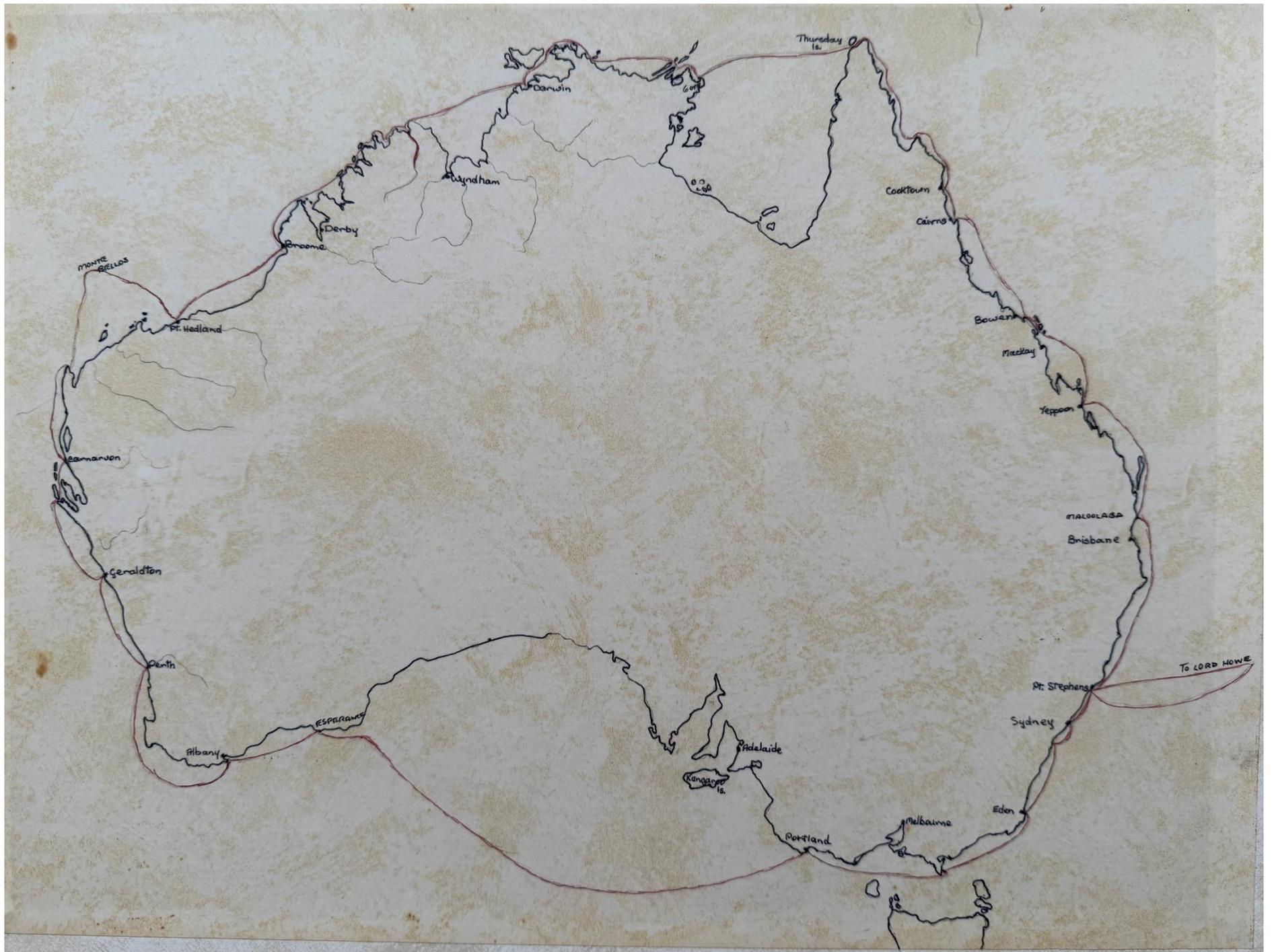


# SOVICA



Sovica - 1981

2011 2012  
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## 1. A CIRCUMNAVIGATION OF AUSTRALIA

On 5 February 1981, the yacht "SOVICA" left Princess Royal Harbour heading east.

On 1 December 1981, she re-entered the harbour from the West.

The following is an account of her voyage. She was crewed at various times by:

Geoff Steer  
Russell Hawkins  
Ross Fenwick  
Rod Adams  
Ian Tarbottom  
John Brown  
Bob Lawrence  
Ron Fisher  
Keith Abercromby  
Sam Elliott  
Milton Price

## 2. Hawkesbury.

FOUR WEEKS  
FOUR DAYS  
FOUR HOURS

Some of us, Ross, Hawks and I, took four weeks; Rod, Chris and Tarrie four days, and Lorna four hours to get to Sydney.

However long it was, this is a marvellous place to be with the boat. The waterfront of Sydney harbour can really only be appreciated from the water, and after spending two weeks cruising around here, we really have not seen it all -especially this Pittwater-Hawkesbury area.

To describe the four weeks - after weeks of preparation, during which about half of what had to be done got done, we left P.R.S.C. to beat into a number four jib and a two-reef easterly, with Sovica very heavy in the water and me very unsettled in the stomach. Ross and Russell coped very well and not at all inclined to spend the night at Two People's Bay, which was my fancy.

The easterly blew all that first day and second day but eventually dropped out to be replaced with a south-westerly, which blew us into Esperance at first light on Sunday. We immediately fell into bed, only to be awakened by Burnsie, who took us off to a champagne breakfast which was being prepared on a boat nearby. Nice things happen when you are cruising.

Esperance to Middle Island was a day trip, and Middle Island our last anchorage for some time as we had decided to make Portland our landfall across the Bight. We hoped that by going well south from Middle Island we would avoid the easterly winds.

For two days we had a beautiful north-easterly, which allowed us to make our S.E. course well sprung off. This north-easterly increased in strength to gale force with accompanying very rough steep seas, which forced us to run before it with storm jib only for some hours. Sitting watching the stern rise to those very steep seas was fascinating, but very scary.

As is often the case, this wind eventually dropped away completely, and the next two days gave us miserably little progress - 25 miles in 24 hours. This led us to a panic re-evaluation of our stores, fags and water.

The next day gave us little better. However, the winds that we had hoped for by coming well south eventually arrived and we made good progress with winds from the south giving us a close reach on course for Portland.

These were marvellous days, with "Milton", the windvane performing admirably, and at last we were beginning to feel as if we were going to make it.

The log for these days makes good reading, with steady runs of 10 to 12 miles every watch of two hours.

The log also shows the provisions situation to be pretty basic, e.g.:

Mon 16th SKETTY FOR TEA.

Tues 17th .. 0700 ... SKETTY FOR BREAKFAST

Tues 17th .. 1500 ... SKETTY FOR LUNCH. FOOD AND SMOKES LOW TUNA LINE OUT - and some hours later STILL NO SMOKES ON THE LINE. I think we were going a little dotty.

Thursday 19th Feb. .. two weeks from Albany and we had a fine clear day which allowed us to fix our position with some degree of confidence and calculate that we should sight the Cape Nelson light (our intended landfall near Portland) shortly after dark. It gave us great satisfaction to find the light roughly where it should be, and even more satisfaction to tie up alongside a jetty next morning.

The Portland Harbour Trust makes visiting yachts feel very welcome - keeping an area of scarce jetty space available, and giving visiting yachtsmen access to hot showers and toilets. It is a delight to get ashore, cleaned up and have a change of diet, and we will always remember Portland.

After a couple of days (during which Russell and Ross managed to go sailing with one of the local yachts) we left Portland to tackle the second "dreaded" for the trip, if the "dreaded" Bass Strait was as kindly as the "dreaded" Bight we would not complain.

In fact, this was so - three days of mostly light winds and we were through the Strait around Wilson's Promontory and anchored in Refuge Cove, which is a lovely, sheltered anchorage on the east side of the Promontory, much favoured by yachts apparently, as there was not a rock face that did not have the name of a boat painted on it.

At this stage we thought we had the hard work done and had visions of a quick run to Sydney with lovely S to SE winds - not so. From Refuge Cove to Eden was the most frustrating, uncomfortable part of the trip. Strong NE winds and rough short seas plus the set to the S had Sovica pounding along under very shortened sail with us very uncomfortable, wet and cold, and miserably disappointed with our slow progress.

The comments in the log at this stage are mostly unprintable, but just a few were - BLOODY AWFUL - GOING HOME SOON - DREADFUL - TERRIBLE SEAS - GOING TO WALPOLE (it was the Walpole Regatta at that time) - AWFUL - No.5 AND 3 REEFS.

Eventually Gabo Island and Cape Howe were astern and four days from Refuge Cove we anchored in Twofold Bay. Shortly after a 45ft ketch, on route between Hobart and Sydney, came in with all bilge pumps spewing water. They had loosened some caulking from the pounding those seas handed out and had to be slipped, before continuing.

At Eden Ross had to leave as his time had run out. So, after a day's stopover, Russell and I left for Port Jackson. This was a delightful passage - wind from the south and no sail changes, and a very interesting coastline.

Sovica served as a practice target for a destroyer off Jervis Bay and was buzzed by Harriers. Towns and lighthouses flashed past, and Ulladulla gave us a good anchorage to relieve the drag of two hours on and two hours off. Ulladulla also gave us the worst spaghetti marinara you could ever imagine.

The lights of Botany Bay were indecipherable - ships, airport lights, planes landing and taking off, and the loom of the lights of Sydney made this a very exciting part of the trip.

We arrived off Sydney Heads a few hours before dawn along with a great mass of shipping and stood off until dawn when Russell, in a poetic mood, logged 0615 - ENTERED SYDNEY HEADS AS THE SUN ROSE OVER THE HORIZON.

We made Rushcutter's Bay where The Cruising Yacht Club provided us with a very convenient spot to tie up and made us honorary members. This is a magnificent yacht club - we have been made to feel very welcome and even although the club is short of mooring space any cruising yacht is accommodated and welcomed with a minimum of formalities.

We were 29 days from Albany. Great satisfaction at having achieved this first leg of the trip and being in this most exciting city kept us in a state of euphoria for days.

### 3. Whitsundays.

Rain-bound with strong wind warning out, an ideal time to bring this journal up to date.

After two weeks of delightful cruising on Sydney Harbour and Pittwater, it was time for Chris and Lorna to leave and for us to prepare Sovica for the next leg of the trip, which was to Lord Howe Island. Charts, pilots, provisions, spares of this and that as well as checking rigging, sails and so on kept us very busy for a couple of days.

Eventually we were able to leave the C.Y.C., Rod and I only as Tarrie had to stay in Sydney for a couple more days (for compassionate reasons) and was to meet us in Lord Howe.

A light Northeast wind with calm seas gave us an enjoyable sail up the N.S.W. coast past Barrenjoey Head and Newcastle to Port Stephens, which we entered about ten o'clock the following morning, had a sleep and a feed and left later that day. Light Southeast winds overnight gave us good progress on course for Lord Howe Island.

The next day dawned with black, low, rain-heavy cloud coming in from the east, the wind freshened, the rain fell and so did our spirits as we heard the gale warnings for the whole of the N.S.W. With only a tiny portion of main sail up Sovica lay closer than beam-on to the wind and seas and with everything battened down Rod and I retired below, very apprehensively.

For 48 hours Sovica looked after herself and us admirably, occasionally going about when a particularly bad sea hit her but generally riding up and over the seas and standing up to the gale force winds better than we did down below.

On a few occasions, breaking waves engulfed the boat and took us bodily sideways and backwards, making us wonder what our next move should be. To run before these seas was not a prospect which we welcomed. In any case we never had enough offing from the coast to run for very long, and the gale warnings were still current.

Eventually conditions seemed to moderate enough for us to consider making back to the N.S.W. coast. To try to make any progress on our course was hopeless and in any case the weather forecast gave no promise of any appreciable change. So we were off to Pittwater, this being the nearest harbour which could be entered under these conditions.

However changing conditions altered our plans, and we eventually made Port Stephens, feeling very battered and bruised but Sovica none the worse except where a wave came onboard and bent the stanchions supporting the cockpit dodger and our P.R.S.C. pennant looked very tattered.

A phone call to Lord Howe Island had Tarrie back with us within 24 hours, and after hearing his tale of the conditions we could expect out that way, we changed our plans. A cruise up the coast to the Barrier Reef became our objective.

We left Port Stephens the same time as the Sydney-Mooloolaba fleet left Sydney and made very good progress in enjoyable conditions (being buzzed by F111s frequently during the daytime). The southerly winds gradually freshened until we were roaring along with the number three jib only (we thought we were roaring along until Helsall and Gretel passed us running under big spinnakers).

These conditions persisted, and we passed Cape Byron, the eastern most point of Australia, and the North and South Stradbroke Islands and Cape Morton, in company with the race fleet. Our rig made us not as fast, but a lot more in control than these yachts, which were running square in very steep seas and carrying spinnakers if and when they could.

Mooloolaba harbour and yacht club were both busy and crowded, catering for the 48-boat fleet, so we tied up along-side a local boat, Siska II. She had been salvaged and made to look as good as new after a disastrous stranding on Fraser Island.

A bus trip to Brisbane to stock up on charts and pilots made a welcome change from the boat. This was made particularly enjoyable by Nick Lockyer, who gave us a wealth of information on sailing North Queensland waters and invited us to dinner and a bed for the night. We dined at his grandfather's (Major Edmund's) table and felt quite at home. Nick was pleased to accept our very tattered P.R.S.C. pennant which had been owing to him for some time.

From Mooloolaba, our plan was to go north inside Fraser Island, but unfavourable tidal times at the Wide Bay bar (over which you enter the Sandy Straits) decided us to sail outside the island, a course followed in very pleasant conditions on our way to Lady Musgrave Island.

This is the southern-most coral atoll on the Barrier Reef, very similar to the Abrolhos Islands. The anchorage in the lagoon is open to the wind, but protected from the seas, except at high tides. This was very lively and became our least popular anchorage to-date when we found our big admiralty anchor firmly wedged under a rock. It took three hours to recover - and was very bent.

While at Lady Musgrave we realised that an outboard motor for the dinghy was going to be essential as the high rise and fall of the tide necessitated anchoring well offshore which, combined with a regular, strong southeast trade wind, made getting ashore difficult.

We made an overnight passage from Lady Musgrave to Great Keppel, which was interesting in that we achieved unbelievably fast progress, due to favourable tide and winds, and the fact that the lights on this coast are at times visible for a far greater range than shown on the chart, (sometimes we had four lights visible at one time), which was a great aid to the navigator.

Great Keppel was our first tropical island. Palm trees, rain forest, clean beaches, protected anchorage, but provisions were low, so after a short stay we made for Rosslyn Bay, the port for Yeppoon. We were now beginning to appreciate the effect of tides on us, the range in these parts being about 3.5 metres. The wind with and against the tide effect was very noticeable and made it necessary to plan a passage in more detail than normal.

Rosslyn Bay is typical of the fishing boat harbours on this part of the coast, a small, dredged basin with fore and aft pile berths, very crowded, but with good provisioning facilities and strong tidal movement of muddy brown water.

From Rosslyn Bay we visited a string of islands, each one of which provided a good anchorage in the lee of a high, densely vegetated island. Anchorage had to be well offshore due to the tidal range and fringing reefs. Swell rolled into many, and on the odd occasion when the south easterly dropped for a bit, made us roll and roll.

Pearl Bay was a beautiful mainland anchorage where we nearly left Sovica to rot on a reef, but fortunately with help we were able to get free without too much damage. This experience decided us to miss Island Head Creek where, with some intricate high tide navigation, you can enter a very small creek in which gigantic black lipped oysters abound. Hexham Island was a good island anchorage in strong south easterly winds. I learnt a lesson at Hexham - that when the engine and gear box seize completely, before pulling it to pieces, it is wise to check to see if there is not a rope around the prop.

Middle Percy Island is a very much favoured anchorage for cruising boats, with a gallery of carved boat names in a special shed, and myriads of sand flies just waiting to fall upon unsuspecting yachtsmen. A creek that dries with each tide, gives a very sheltered haven for those boats that can dry out happily and are equipped with mosquito coils for burning continuously.

Another anchorage in the lee of a high, densely vegetated island was Scawfell Island, where the wind came roaring down the lee side of the hill and hit us like bullets. So much so that we thought twice before committing ourselves to the dinghy to visit friends anchored a hundred yards away. Our first encounter with a resort island was at Brampton, where the manager made us feel very much intruders and unwelcome, due, he said to the poor behaviour of yachties in previous years. His desire to get his hand in our pockets eventually overcame his scruples and we had a meal and a few drinks and left.

This, happily, is not the general attitude at the resort islands, most of which welcome boat people and are only too happy to have you use their dining room and bars. Provisions were low at this stage, and we were delighted to catch a large tuna, but although it looked like the tuna we catch on the south coast, it was dark all the way through. We cooked it and pushed it around our plates before throwing it overboard. It wasn't very tasty.

Shaw Island in Kennedy Sound yielded no fish and the tide was too high for oysters, but it was a very calm anchorage in a beautiful setting. We visited Bill and Lee Wallis' Dent Island gallery of coral art and jewellery and were asked why Fred Casey hadn't sent over the shark's teeth as promised - Albany is known over here at least for something!

Airlie Beach was our next anchorage, and this was for provisioning for the next week or so, when we were to cruise the islands in the Whitsunday Passage before heading for Bowen to slip Sovica. Airlie Beach is the tourist centre of the Whitsunday area, well supplied with hotels, motels, restaurants, boutiques and all the other trappings of a tourist centre. The anchorage is good in southeast winds, although, as usual, on this coast it is a long pull to the shore, and if it is low tide, it's a yucky, squelchy

wade through the mud for the last part. We provisioned here and set off to tour the islands; South Molle to start with.

This is a long-established resort which has recently been taken over by the Telford hotel chain - everyone welcome - golf, squash, tennis, sailing, swimming pool, bar, restaurant all being available to guests, day trippers and yachties with the minimum of formality. Cid Harbour is a beautiful anchorage at a completely uninhabited part of the Island and even although the anchorage is very popular, black lipped oysters abound. Whitehaven Beach was a rarity - we could take a walk along a clean, white sandy beach, so unusual here where most of the shoreline is crowded to the high tide mark with dense rain forest.

Solway Pass leads to Whitehaven and is a great test of your faith in the navigator, charts and tide tables. It is a narrow, deep channel through which the tide boils and swirls. Once committed with wind and tide there is no turning back even though every instinct you have developed sailing tells you that the water can be only a couple of feet deep, being so turbulent and murky.

Another tidal passage to Hook Island, where there is an underwater observatory, and then to Nara Inlet, which is a long fiord-like inlet with high rain forest clad hills and aboriginal cave paintings which eluded Rod and I, which Tarrie (after much Burke and Will's stuff through the bush), saw. There were also plenty of black lipped oysters and sand flies.

Sovica was making water and badly needed cleaning and, antifouling, so from the Whitsundays we left for Bowen, where we were to slip on Geoff Hoffman's slip (he owned the pearling lugger Cornelius).

We spent a very busy few days - but enjoyable - in Bowen. We recaulked the garboards, drew and resealed two keel bolts, cleaned and antifouled all in very quick time, as commercial slip charges encourage speed. We much enjoyed Bowen, eating with Geoff and Nancy on Cornelius, and with the "frogs" Patrick and Sylvie at their restaurant. Apparently "allo mate" is a French greeting.

We slipped back at 02:00 on the high tide and later that day left for Airlie, anchoring at a quiet bay overnight. Quiet, until the dingoes started howling.

Earlando resort was to be just a quick stop, but the hospitality and friendliness turned it into a longer stay. It was here that Rod had the misfortune of falling out of a coconut tree and thus providing the resort with the day's amusement. Eventually we arrived back at Airlie, where Rod had to leave the cruise, Tarrie went off to see Pagey in Gladstone, and Lorna and Alison joined me. The next 10 days are better described by Lorna and Alison. There was a strong wind warning out each day, with a gale warning thrown in for good measure on one day. The 35 lb. C.Q.R. and chain and nylon warp that I had invested in proved to be excellent ground tackle, and Sovica was a good dry boat in heavy rain.

By the time Lorna and Alison had to leave, and Tarrie arrived back from Gladstone, the weather had improved, and we left Airlie for Cairns with few regrets.

As is so often the case after a blow, the weather was fine and the winds were light, making the trip to Cairns a delight. Good anchorages are plentiful on this coast and overnight passages necessary only to make time. Armit Island was an unusual island in that we were on the beach almost before finding water shallow enough to anchor. In contrast Cape Bowling Green had water, shoal enough for us to ground on, five miles offshore (we didn't).

Magnetic Island, where the earth's magnetism is so great that people can only move at half pace was the spot where we caught our first mackerel, a beautiful fish that was to provide us with a regular supply of fresh food all around this north Queensland and Arnhem Land coast.

To keep our fuel supplies stocked up we called at Great Palm Island, which is an aboriginal settlement on a very beautiful island. Bob and Jo, who teach school on Great Palm, and cruise the nearby islands in their Wharram cat, invited us to dinner and told us of the delights of the nearby islands. We spent a couple of days finding out that what they said was quite true and that this Palm group of islands was magnificent cruising ground. The water was clear and the coral magnificent. The islands gave sheltered water and good anchorages.

From the peak of Curacao Island, the panorama was magnificent and on this island goats abound. On Fantome Island in the same group (which are all Aboriginal reserves), we looked over the ruins of a leper colony abandoned in 1974. The razed buildings and the graveyard were a sombre sight.

We had been told many times that Zoe Bay on Hinchinbrook Island is a must, and we were heading in that direction planning on seeing this bay with its backdrop of steep mountains, then entering the

Hinchinbrook Channel for some quiet water sailing north. A favourable tide is essential, and we did not have one. Then it started to rain and rain and rain (the annual rainfall here is measured in the hundreds of inches). Visibility was restricted and winds were wrong for anchoring in the bay, our draught was too much to enter the Creek, so though the rain and murk we saw Zoe Bay and headed off for an anchorage at the northern end of Hinchinbrook Island, hoping to dry out a little.

Mourilyan Harbour gave us a beautiful calm anchorage for the night, and an opportunity to refuel and give away a very large mackerel which we just could not face eating. The following day was windless, and we motored all day to make Fitzroy Island for the night, and entered the Trinity Channel into Cairns Harbour early the next day.

All along this coast, we had been relishing a one knot set running with us, which was very consistent and a great boost on the days when light winds meant slow going. Cairns waterfront is very busy, and visiting yachts so numerous that they are a nuisance. But luckily, we found an unused pile berth and settled in comfortably across the harbour from the very hospitable Cairns Yacht Club.

We met up with Prince Hal, an SS30 from Freshwater Bay, with whom we spent some time at C.Y.C. in Sydney, and we decided to cruise north in company. From Cairns north, supplies are not readily available and very expensive, so what with maintenance jobs, provisioning, Tarrie leaving and the next crew arriving (John Brown and Bob Lawrence), sightseeing and the flesh pots, 10 days slipped by very quickly and very pleasantly.

## 4. Northern Waters

Sovica sailed out of Cairns just after first light on a Sunday morning with all of us excited about the prospect of the next leg to Darwin. This part of the coast has an interesting history, with Cook, Bligh and Flinders all having sailed it and left their names on many features. These include Cape Tribulation, which was named because it was in view while the Endeavour lay on the Reef; Weary Bay, which was named as the Endeavour was slowly towed north looking for a careening site; Endeavour River, Cooktown, and Lizard Island from the peak of which Cook sighted a passage through the Reef to the open sea.

Then there was Providential Channel through which he thankfully passed inside the Reef again at a time when he thought it was imminent that they were to ground again. There is Bligh's Boat Entrance, through which he entered the Reef on his small boat voyage back to the Batavia after the mutiny. This is only a little way north of Cook's Passage, which Bligh thought he was using and noted that it was some way north of where Cook had charted it. Restoration Island was where Bligh's men rested, and Sunday Island was the place on which he put down another mutiny.

The Flinders group of islands, including Flinders Passage through the Straits, Booby Island which was named thus by both Cook and Bligh, each without the knowledge of the other. More recently, this part of the coast was littered with airfields and army bases and naval depots. It was from these airfields that the planes flew that fought in the Coral Sea. All these bases were supplied by sea, as roads even now are often unusable, and hence there was a great history of coasting.

We carried extra fuel from Cairns and as much in the way of provisions as we could cram in, as you cannot rely on being able to re-provision after Cooktown. This extra fuel was essential because the persistent 25-35 knots southeast trade wind, which blows for eight months of the year on this coast, did not blow for some reason, much to the amazement and delight of the locals.

Our routine became number two headsail and main when the wind was on the beam, twin headsails when astern and motor when we must to make an anchorage. It was never ahead. The consistent set of one to two knots was a marvellous bonus on light days.

Navigation on this coast must have been a nightmare before the present-day system of beacons was established. The major part of the reef is still only partially surveyed, the steamer passage being the only well surveyed route through it. This reef in many cases, is less than half a mile away on each side and usually completely undetectable.

The anchorages we used were Low Isles, a beautiful sand cay with coral reefs surrounding the lagoon. The log entry is "beautiful sun, coral, prawns." The prawn trawlers are very friendly and will usually sell prawns, or if prawns are scarce, will give you a feed of bugs or crab legs. Typical of the people on this coast was a mackerel fisherman, who on a day when we needed fish and caught none, took two

gigantic fillets of a freshly caught mackerel, and when we offered to pay said "things are not that tough that you cannot give a fellow a feed of fish".

Port Douglas was a lovely quiet town on a tidal creek and gave a perfect anchorage once you had negotiated the shoals.

Cooktown was where, against advice, I tried to enter the river on the leads and when we found only seven feet of water, went to sea for a few hours to allow the tide to make a little more. Entering with the leads well open to the north is the proper way. We spent a few days in Cooktown looking at the many monuments to Cook and the early settlers, and the excellent James Cook museum. It was here that the "meeting of Commodores" was duly celebrated - Terry Bridge (P.R.S.C.) on Pilgrim thrashing south, and John Brown (E.B.Y.C.) on Sovica going north, with Prince Hal from Freshwater Bay also joining in. The locals were wary, suspecting a West Australian takeover.

We left Cooktown on a high tide, with a real southeast trade blowing - three reefs in the main until we were over the bar, and we never got around to putting a headsail on but still managed to make a quick passage to the anchorage in the lee of Cape Flattery. Cook was "flattered" into thinking this was his chance to escape the reef. Prince Hal's mob came over for drinks, and we discussed plans for our trip further north.

An early start the next day saw us anchored in Watson's Bay, Lizard Island, with plenty of the day left to explore the Island. The water here was crystal clear, the coral magnificent, and the ruins of Mrs Watson's cottage recalled her story. To escape marauding aborigines she, her baby and Chinese servant took to sea in a beche-de-mer pot and perished on an island somewhere north of here.

From the peak on Lizard it was easy to see the break in the outer reef that is Cook's Passage. From Lizard, we headed for the Flinders group of islands in Princess Charlotte Bay, using Ninian Bay as an overnight anchorage on the way. Princess Charlotte's Bay is an entire cruising ground on its own with good island anchorages, mainland anchorages and creek hideways. We chose to anchor at the Flinders group as Prince Hal was planning on a goat feast.

It was here that we met three adventurers who had sailed and paddled their 20ft kayaks from Townsville and were heading for Thursday Island. The three of them ate a whole goat on their own at a feast that went through until late the next morning.

In very light weather, sailing when we could, motoring when we must, we followed the beacons through the zig zag course recommended, anchoring at Hannah Island and Night Island, which are just mangrove thickets growing on small sand cays with fringing reefs, but in these conditions very good anchorages. Portland Road, and Margaret Bay were mainland anchorages that afforded us very sheltered nights. The mackerel, oysters and south easterly persisted, while our booze dwindled alarmingly. Fuel supplies were lasting well which was most important as we wanted to have fuel in hand to face the tides of Torres Strait.

Bushy Island proved to be a very comfortable anchorage when the high tide covered the reef and allowed the joggle spilling over the top and the tide ripping around each end of the reef to toss us about all night.

After poring over the chart and tide tables we decided the inshore route to Cape York was feasible and set course for the Albany Pass which leads to Cape York. With wind and tide, we had a beautiful sail through this exotic pass, with rain forest hills on each side and the remains of Somerset, a now deserted early settlement, (complete with the graves of the ambitious settlers) to port, and a still functioning pearl farm to starboard.

A few miles after the pass was Cape York, with York Island, Aborac Island close north. The passage between these islands and the Cape is quite narrow and obstructed by reef except close by the Cape. With a strong south easterly and favourable tide we held our breath and charged through the churning water leaving the northern most tip of the Australian mainland 20 yards to port. Once through this passage there is a very sheltered anchorage where we anchored to go ashore and repossess Australia with due ceremony.

After a peculiar night of Sovica doing 360° turns in the swirling tide, we set off for the short sail to Thursday Island. The tide and strong south easterly gave us a very quick passage, so quick in fact, that I could not quite keep up with which beacons were which, and our approach to Thursday Island was not quite as per the pilot. The strong south easterly made the anchorage at Thursday Island look most

unappealing, so we anchored Sovica in the lee of Horn Island a few miles away, commuted by ferry to Thursday Island and had a very welcome clean up.

After a magnificent counter lunch of crayfish mornay (three dollars) and a visit to the laundry, we once more felt civilised. Thursday Island is a very colourful place, and the Torres Strait Islanders friendly people. The traditional luggers are still being operated for pearling and crayfishing, the latter being speared by hand. The waterfront here is the centre of interest, with the Islanders coming and going in their dinghies, the Torres Strait pilots putting out, and various island supply ships coming and going.

After a day of re-provisioning and sightseeing around Thursday Island, we were ready to leave for the Gulf crossing. Mike and Ingrid (who were returning home after three years cruising round the New Guinea and Solomon Islands), joined us for a crayfish dinner and told us of the excellent cruising around those parts.

After much studying of the tide tables and charts, our departure from Thursday Island was better than our entrance. We left all the buoys on the appropriate hand, were whisked very quickly out to sea via the Normanby Sound and soon had Booby Island (which marks the limit of the offshore shoals) astern. Later that night, we picked up the Carpentaria Shoal light vessel and were happy to see that the tides were not taking us appreciably off course.

The southeasterly was giving us a great push along but was also kicking up a rough sea and was cool enough to make a jumper necessary at night. The wind was very consistent all across the Gulf, southeasterly during the day and swinging to the south overnight. A little rain gave us the opportunity for a freshwater wash.

The Gulf was a very lonely bit of water, very little sea life, bird life or shipping and we were keen to get back to our coast hopping. Our landfall of Truant Island light turned up on Saturday night and we anchored in Gove harbour on mid-day on Sunday, making it three days and four hours from anchor to anchor. Considering the following winds, this would not create any records for the 350 nautical mile crossing.

Gove boat club consisted of a very active group of people who have created a strong sailing club in the few years that the community has existed. The atmosphere is very reminiscent of Esperance Bay ten years ago. The ready employment available here, the excellent anchorage and the hospitality of the club make it a popular spot for cruising people to stop over for a few months to replenish the coffers. The couple of days here were spent in the usual way, showers, laundry, refuelling and reprovisioning for the next leg, which would take us across the top of Arnhem Land to Darwin.

Just a half a day's sail from Gove, we entered the very sheltered cruising ground around the English Company's Islands and the Wessells group. These are two chains of islands, lying at right angles to the southeast trades, provided cruising ground equal to any we had experienced to date. Very little of the area is surveyed and we moved very cautiously, with the lead line often giving us nasty surprises and the tidal steams having to be constantly considered. The anchorages are abundant, and the oysters and beach-combing excellent - scrambled turtle eggs appeared on the menu, and we were having a marvellous time with calm seas and good following winds and not a sign of civilisation anywhere.

Our rough timetable kept us on the move every day, and we could not really afford the time to coast hop all the way to Darwin, so from the Wessells we made a 200 mile passage, leaving the Crocodile Islands well to the south. We made landfall on South Goulburn Island, where we took a look around the Aboriginal settlement and managed to buy some fresh bread, which is flown in from Darwin and priced accordingly. From South Goulburn Island, the passage through the Bowen Strait saves a lot of distance and provides some very interesting inshore passage making! with lead line and tide tables.

Anchoring around here was just a matter of choosing what depth of water was necessary and that was it - no swell to worry about and the wind dropping every night. On re-reading the log for this area I found a rather pathetic little note in the margin "gin's gone".

Port Essington was our next stop, and on making for the anchorage, we were surprised to recognise Alan Lucas' "Alegrias" at anchor. As his cruising guide had been our constant reading for so many weeks, we called over to visit but found that the boat had been sold. It was now being used as the accommodation for some great white hunters who had had a good day and gave us a few steaks from their prize (bintang - some type of Javanese cattle) - which when cooked for two days in a stew remained inedible.

Port Essington has an interesting history of early settlement, the failure of which was attributed primarily to malaria. Many interesting ruins remain at the site of the settlement (Victoria), but as this was 20 miles further up the sound we decided against a visit. The weather remained settled and all around this Arnhem Land coast, very hot days with good southeast winds which faded in the afternoon and died completely at night - delightful cruising weather.

After leaving Port Essington, we sailed through some very unnerving water, the constant change of colour causing some anxious moments. Soundings are sparse, and shoals keep you far enough offshore to make positive fixes from the featureless coast difficult. We spent a night in Popham Bay at a quiet anchorage, and most of the night was spent discussing whether it was actually Popham Bay or not.

We were now only two days sail from Darwin, and the next day took us around Cape Don - very slowly due to the foul tide which when it turned, pushed us quickly down the Van Diemen Gulf. We were pleased to pick up the Abbott Shoal beacon, as it is 30 miles from Cape Don with no landmarks on the way through very tidal water. Around this area there are different tidal predictions for areas as little as 10 miles apart.

Fine weather and favourable tides persuaded us to forego an anchorage for the night, and we negotiated the Howard Channel (which separates Melville Island from the mainland) in the dark. We agreed later that this was a good move as we could not see the discolouration and disturbances in the water and hence worried less.

Once through this channel, the approach to Darwin harbour was quite straight forward and we had a glorious night's sail with No. 2 genoa, smooth water and a beam wind. At first light, we entered the Darwin harbour against the tide, to end what had been a most enjoyable and challenging leg of the voyage.

Sovica was to be left in Darwin for a couple of months, so I arranged with the Darwin Sailing Club to anchor off their clubhouse in Fanny Bay with a boat yard to act as caretaker. I left her with much misgiving, as over the months of sailing and living aboard, a boat gets to mean a lot more to you than just a boat.

## 5. Homeward Bound.

On October 2<sup>nd</sup>, Rod Adams, Keith Abercromby, Ron Fisher and I arrived in Darwin to commence the next leg of the journey - which was now very much a Homeward Bound voyage. To save time so that we would be well south before the start of the cyclone season, I had arranged for Sovica to be slipped before we arrived, and she looked clean and smart. Even so, we spent a couple of frantic days in unbearable humidity, provisioning and making repairs.

Darwin to Port Hedland promised to be a very interesting voyage, the Kimberley coast being so isolated and poorly charted, weather forecasts unavailable and radio reception impossible, tides huge, water murky and islands and reefs plentiful. We had been told that all this aside, the area held more attraction for cruising than the Queensland coast.

The weather at that time of the year, just before the cyclone season, is hot, hot, hot, and the winds very light so we crammed as much fuel as possible onboard and were delighted to leave Darwin in a brisk south easterly for the 250 miles crossing of the Joseph Bonaparte Gulf. The wind persisted and we had a very good passage in warm sunny weather and raised the Leseur Island light in good time.

The King George River enters the sea here, and we planned to stop and explore the area for a day or two. Our first attempt to enter the river failed, with the dinghy ahead sounding, we found insufficient water over the bar to allow us to enter, so we anchored off, and Rod and Ron spent the afternoon sounding in the dinghy. After finding the most favourable passage across the bar, and with a little more tide, we managed to enter the river early the next day and motored the five miles or so to the head of the river. The river runs in a narrow gorge with 200ft. high vertical cliffs on each side.

The head of the river has two large waterfalls (unfortunately dry at that time) that dropped 200ft. into a pool too deep for us to anchor. The scenery was spectacular, the weather perfect and oysters abundant, altogether a magnificent place and as we sat in the cockpit that night with the clear starry sky, warm air the night noises of the bush and the splash of fish jumping, conversation was not necessary.

The next day we motored down river and found the tide lower than when we entered, so spent the day swimming and reading and erecting complicated tide markers calculating that it would be early next morning before the water reached Keith's "go" marker.

At first light we crossed the bar without trouble and spent the day under No. 1 genoa and full main - sailing in smooth water under a very hot sun across Napier Broome Bay, making our next anchorage (Geranium Harbour), just as the sun set. The log reads "mackerel and rose for tea, lights out at nine".

The next day we spent sailing in similar conditions - too hot down below, and in the shade of the mainsail the only place bearable on deck. Buckets of sea water tipped into the cockpit made it possible for the helmsman to stand on the floor, and we learnt what Kimberley cool meant - beer hung in a wet bag.

We anchored in the lee of Cape Bouganville that night and watched dozens of small sharks scavenging in ankle deep water for the scraps from our fish cleaning on the beach. Next day across Admiralty Gulf through Institut Islands to anchor in Krait Bay and wondered whether this was named after the Z force ship (alongside which we tied at Pittwater). The hundreds of rusted fuel drums stacked ashore made us think it may be.

These were long hot days of sailing, passing through cruising grounds in which you could spend weeks, but we had to keep moving to be ahead of the cyclone season and get to some civilisation before our fuel and water ran out. Food is no problem as a line over the side will have a mackerel on the deck in no time.

We met up with a prawn trawler of Cape Chateaufort and found we could not buy any prawns from them, it was "have them as a gift or nothing at all" - so we ate beautiful prawns for the next few meals and cold beer (cooled on the frozen prawns).

Most days we were buzzed by the surveillance aircraft - our only touch with civilisation, as we still could not get any reception on the radio. Leaving Krait Bay well before daylight, we spent a long hot day sailing in unsurveyed waters to make Lamarck Island in time to feel our way in close enough to anchor before dark (the tide rose 20 ft. that night).

From Lamarck Island we were only a day's sail from Kuri Bay - which we were keen to visit as fuel was very low, but where we were told visitors were not welcome.

This was a most intriguing day's sail, the approach to Camden Sound is by way of Roger's Strait or another unnamed Strait between two groups of islands. Roger's Strait was given a terrible description in the pilot, so we chose to enter via the other (about which the pilot said nothing). Identifying the passage was not easy, no soundings were available, and the tides were very strong, the water very murky and swirling up in great tidal "boil ups".

Just before sunset we felt our way into the lee of a tiny dot on the chart to anchor for the night in 30 metres of water. We were nearly at the top of the tide and the island was diminishing in size rapidly. In the middle of the night, we were all awoken by the noise of water boiling and gurgling around the boat at the peak of the tidal flow.

The next day was just a short sail to Kuri Bay where we anchored at 0830. A hundred years ago, some ambitious settlers from Victoria arrived in Camden Sound to establish a farming community - but so harsh is the country, that within three months the venture was in dire straits with all the stock and many settlers dead. Relief came just in time to divert a total disaster. The area has remained uninhabited until some years back when the Kuri Bay pearl farm was established. Over a bottle of whisky, we learnt much of the interesting history of the venture and the area generally from Mr Muroka, who was in charge of the ship that came from Japan (using just two charts) to establish the venture.

Kuri Bay was our first civilisation since leaving Darwin, and we were able to telegram home, shower wash clothes and refill our fuel and water tanks. The people there were very hospitable, and we did enjoy the dinner we had with them and appreciate the film show that was on that night, even though the Thursday Islanders did laugh at the most unlikely times.

From Kuri Bay, we sailed to Samson Inlet, a beautiful spot used as a cyclone bolt hole for State ships, and then Deception Bay where quite tall mangrove trees appeared from under water as the tide dropped. The tidal range here was 30 ft., and just a few miles into the Sound the predicted range was 50 ft.

After leaving Deception Bay, we skirted the Montgomery Reef and laid a course for Cockatoo Island, where we entered a unique tidal creek on the mainland called Crocodile Creek and spent a most delightful day swimming and watching the tide transform the area.

Late that afternoon as we were approaching the anchorage at Cockatoo Island we ran on to the edge of the skirting reef and stuck fast on a falling tide. Despite everything we could do, Sovica would not budge and heeled slowly as the tide receded. The decks were nearly vertical before the tide turned and gradually restored us to our normal trim and floated us off, none the worse for our four hour very harrowing ordeal.

The next passage was from Cockatoo Island across the mouth of King Sound round Cape Leveque and into Broome, using Beagle Bay as a stopover spot. Sailing across the Sunday Straits provided some of the most spectacular tidal effects we had seen on the whole trip -Sovica being set way off course - whole areas of what we'd seen to be calm water suddenly turning into a churning white capped mass of water.

Rounding Cape Leveque brought a very marked change. We felt once again ocean swells and the winds tended west and south. We realised that the tropical cruise was over and that we faced a long head wind sail to get home. We spent a couple of days in Broome anchored at the deep water jetty. Anchoring in the tidal creeks near the town would have been more convenient, but a lot of hassle as Sovica doesn't take the ground as well as the pearling luggers.

While anchored here, we had one very rough night during which the fire extinguishers onboard the pilot boat anchored nearby came adrift and released their contents, what a mess for the crew next day.

Broome really marked the end of our northern waters cruise. From Cairns to Broome, the sailing was markedly different to any we had done before. Generally hot sunny days, light following winds and no ocean swells. From Broome south, the winds were predominantly from ahead, there was always some swell and the temperature gradually dropped (no more sea water showers) and we really felt as if we were heading home.

Port Hedland was where Ron and Keith had to leave the cruise, and after a couple of busy days organising a new steering compass, log cable, battery and so on, Rod and I left for Dampier, where Sam Elliott was to join us. We anchored two days at the Monte Bellos Islands on route from Dampier to Exmouth. The turtles and sea snakes in this area were prolific. Ashore the islands are barren, but the reefs around would make this place a fisherman's paradise.

Two nights endured at anchor in Exmouth Gulf were enough to make us glad to get to sea again - the very hospitable reception ashore may have had something to do with this also. An entry in the log when we were near Cape Couvier reads "very rough seas - wind is always ahead - rotten cruising country".

We met up with "Madelon" at Carnarvon. She had lost her main mast just out of Exmouth. It was very nice to chat with Tom Kenny and his crew and hear of the doings of Brian O'Keefe, Bill Mazey, Ken Marshall and Darrell Simpson who had cruised with him on his voyage to the Mediterranean.

We threaded the extremely narrow and shallow channel through the south passage of Shark Bay with Rodney on the spreaders and Madelon close astern.

Very strong easterly winds gave us a good fast sail to Geraldton. A few log entries after leaving Geraldton tell the story - "No. 5 jib and three reefs - rough sea - lumpy - cool - cold".

Thompson's Bay at Rottnest was our next anchorage where we spent a very pleasant day with all the other trippers before going into Success Harbour where Sam had to leave, and we were joined by Milton Price who was to help us make the final passage home.

On the final leg of the circumnavigation, it was unmistakable that we were nearing home - the Southern Cross was way up there where it should be, and once round the Leeuwin we had strong westerlies, rough seas, heavy rain and poor visibility. Hawks, listening by chance, heard us call up on the radio as we rounded Bald Head, and by the time we reached the Club we had a marvellous welcoming committee to see us finish - leaving club stake to port and finishing to the east.