

# **A L D E B A R A N' S**

## **Sailing Circumnavigation with Pat & Olivia Murphy Report 45**

### **From Brisbane to Darwin**

**On 20<sup>th</sup> April 2005** at 0855 hours we cast off from Andrew & Nickie Knight's private pontoon in Raby Bay, Cleveland south east of Brisbane at the start of our passage to Malaysia by way of Darwin, Indonesia and Singapore.

After almost 9 hours and 45 n/miles, in calm weather, we had negotiated the intricate channels across Moreton Bay into clear water north east of Bribie Island. At this stage the sea conditions began deteriorating and the wind was increasing. Our destination was the entrance to the notorious Wide Bay Bar 57 n/miles further north between Fraser Island and the Mainland. As darkness fell it began to rain, the sea increased, the wind was blowing at over 20 knots and with a deteriorating weather forecast we considered diverting to Mooloolaba. However as the forecast was for the adverse weather to continue for a number of days we decided to continue to the Wide Bay Bar as once we crossed it we would be in the sheltered waters of the Sandy Straits and could continue to Bundeberg where we planned to stay for a few days.

As we approached the Bar the wind increased to 30 plus knots with the seas increasing accordingly. On approaching the Bar the Coast Guards advised us that due to the extreme conditions we should not attempt crossing until daylight. In 2003 and again in 2004 we had crossed the Bar, in ideal conditions, from the inside out and so had an idea of the dangers involved. The four hours we had to wait outside were the worse conditions we had experienced to date. Winds were now blowing at over 40 knots with seas in the region of 5 meters. We hove-to, about 3 miles from the Bar, during which both of us got violently seasick, Olivia to starboard and me to port, it was not nice. Just prior to dawn a local fishing boat made radio contact with us and said he would follow us in. Why he did not agree to lead us in we do not know. As soon as dawn broke we informed the coast guards, having first confirmed our waypoints with them that we were heading for the entrance to the Bar. The leading marks were totally invisible due to the high seas and so we had to steer to our waypoint tracks ensuring we did not deviate in any way as the channel was very narrow. We had our lifejackets on and had ourselves harnessed to safety points in the cockpit. About quarter ways I looked astern and saw a massive wave bearing down on us and shouted at Olivia to hold on. It picked us up and carried us, luckily in the right direction, for about 200 meters during which our log (speedometer) read 13.8 knots. Our previous fastest was 9 knots and that happened off the coast of Colombia in 2000. Had I allowed ALDEBARAN to deviate, even by the slightest, from running directly with the huge wave we would most likely have lost control with devastating consequences. We were almost across the bar when we saw the leading marks and were relieved to discover we were still on course. Eventually we reached the point where you have to turn 90 degrees and sail broadside to the waves breaking

over the Bar. While it is still a dangerous section it is not as dangerous as the first section. Eventually, after 22 hours since departing Cleveland, we anchored at 0650 hours in the sheltered and flat waters of Pelican Bay.

With the gale still blowing we were able, over the next four days, to continue north inside the sheltered Sandy Straits to Bundeberg. On route at the Kingfisher Anchorage we saw our first “Moon Beam”

Two days later we departed Bundeberg and in 20 knots of south east wind we had our best days sailing in a long time. It was sailing at its best.

After a very uncomfortable rolly night anchored at Great Keppel Island we had the complete opposite the following night at Island Head Creek. Continuing north we stopped at Percy Island, Mackay Marina for 4 nights at €14 per night, Brampton Island, Shaw Island and Cid Harbour. Between Cid Harbour and Port Dennison we had a very bad passage through Gloucester Passage in a rain squall with 25 knots of wind and very poor visibility. We were now well and truly inside the Great Barrier Reef with many of the headlands, bays and islands named by Captain Cook and his crew on the Endeavour in 1770. After Cape Upstart and Cape Bowling Green we arrived at Breakwater marina in Townsville where we stayed for 4 nights at €24 per night. Here my brother Jim and his wife Diane who live in Melbourne joined us for the trip to Cairns. Some of the other anchorages we stopped at on route to Cairns were Magnetic Island, Dunk Island, Fitzroy Island and Cape Grafton. During the seven days we spent at the Marlin Marina in Cairns, at €23 per night, we became land tourists and visited many of the local attractions. The reason for staying so long here was to await a replacement gear box dip stick to be flown up from Melbourne at a cost €40. This was the first time since departing Ireland in 1999 that we lost any time awaiting replacement parts, even without the breakage we would have spent at least 4 days here.

From here north there would be no swimming due to the presence of crocodiles. Our next anchorage was up river at Port Douglas from where we had another great sail of 48 n/miles to Hope Island at an average speed of 6.7 knots. We anchored in 9 meters and with a bad forecast we put out over 60 meters of chain giving us a scope of 7:1. As forecast the winds rose to over 30 knots. Two days later on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> June we sailed to Lizard Island a distance of 67 n/miles at an average speed of 6.9 knots, great sailing, passing on route Cape Bedford and Cape Flattery.

Lizard Island is renowned for two historical sites, the first and earliest is Capt. Cook’s lookout and secondly the remains of the Watson homestead. Finding himself being trapped inside a great reef Capt. Cook climbed to the top of Lizard Island to try and find a passage to the open sea. It is a hard climb to the top where a plaque describes the event. From this vantage point he saw a passage which eventually allowed him escape the confines of the reefs. The passage has since been called “Cook’s Passage”.

**The once large stone building of the Watson homestead was probably built around 1860 and soon after became the home of Robert and Mary Watson.**

**In October 1881, Robert was away fishing when his young wife recorded in her diary.**

*“Ah Leong killed by the blacks over at the farm.  
Ah Sam found his hat which is the only proof”.*

**With Ferrier, her baby son and Ah Sam the wounded Chinese servant, she fled the island in an iron boiling tank.**

**Adrift for days, they landed on Howick Island.**

*“No water. Ah Sam and self very parched.*

*No rain....nearly dead with thirst”.*

**Nine days after leaving Lizard Island they died. Their bodies were discovered three months later.**

There is also a very exclusive holiday resort on the island. While visiting the Fisheries Research Station on the island we learned that the previous night they caught a large crocodile in the bay. Sometime during the night it escaped and they were out hunting it. The incident was being kept quiet for fear the tourists at the resort would hear and cut their holidays short. The publicity would be very bad if the croc attacked somebody.

We covered the 83 n/mile sail to Flinders Island in just less than 12 hours at an average speed of 7 knots, another great sail with a wing-on-wing rig for most of it. After such a long days sailing we would love to have been able to jump in for a swim but, of course, with the possible presence of crocodiles it was out of the question.

After overnight stops at Morris Island, Portland Roads and Margaret’s Bay and an overnight sail we finally anchored at Cape York and the entrance to the famous Torres Straits. On going ashore we were confronted with a large “WARNING” indicating the presence of crocodiles. After taking the usual photographs on front of the signs indicating that we were at the most Northerly Point of the Australian Mainland we made a careful retreat back to our dinghy and Aldebaran. As we sailed through the Straits we were in the vicinity of famous islands such as, Possession, Horn, Thursday and Prince of Wales.

Since leaving Raby Bay in Cleveland we logged 1,422 n/miles and visited 29 places.

Using our headsail only we had a lovely sail between some of the smaller less well known islands to Seisia, a distance of 19 n/miles, just inside the western tip of the Cape. After the very tiring passage through the Barrier Reef we rested here for four days. Seisia has very little to offer other than a small supermarket, a small restaurant, a camp site, lovely scenery and a calm anchorage, but no swimming. The nearest town is Bamaga about 9 miles inland. We hitched there and in seeking a place to have a cup of coffee were told that the nearest coffee place was in Seisia. Anyway it was a pleasant way to kill a few hours.

The Gulf of Carpentaria from Cape York to Cape Wessel is 330 n/miles and rather than anchor at Cape Wessel we decided, due to the good sailing conditions, to continue a further 300 n/miles to Port Essington in the Northern Territory where we anchored just over 5 days after leaving Seisia. While rounding Cape Wessel we encountered a 2 knot current against us.

During our visit to the Ranger Station at Port Essington we were shown the devastation caused by the cyclone that hit the area a few months earlier. Ten miles in at the head of the inlet we visited the remains of the Victoria Settlement established in 1838 and abandoned 1849. The settlers were mainly from Cornwall in England as is evident from the design of the houses they built. To my unqualified eyes it was a ridiculous place to build a settlement as it

is about twenty miles from the mouth of the bay and would mean that sailing ships would have to beat to windward to exit the settlement.

At 0330 hours on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> June we departed Port Essington and passing Cape Don and the Abbot Shoal we anchored in Fannie Bay, Darwin at 0120 hours on the following morning after a passage of 134 n/miles. We were told this was a nice anchorage; however we had a very uncomfortable night rolling from side to side. Two months earlier we booked a berth in Cullen Bay Marina and so at 0900 hours we moved to the holding pontoon outside the lock entrance to the Marina where the boat had to be inspected by the Dept of Fisheries. As we had lifted and anti-fouled Aldebaran in April we only required to have a solution poured into our heads (toilets) and left there for 24 hours before being allowed through the lock to the Marina. Boats that had been left in the water for longer without being cleaned and anti-fouled had to pay for an underwater inspection. The precautions were to prevent a particular mussel from entering the Marina complex.

As we had just over three weeks before the start of the Darwin to Indonesia Rally, which we had entered, we hired a small camper van for ten days and toured the adjacent area of the Northern Territory. Some of the highlights were, a boat trip up the Katherine Gorge, seeing the size and difference between Magnetic and Cathedral Termite Mounds and swimming in the cool waters of rock pools cleared of crocodiles for the tourist season, at least that is what the signs said.

Somewhere on this inland trip I picked up a virus and came out in a rash all over my body and despite visiting a hospital in Katherine and a second in Darwin was unable to establish the cause, I was very sick and tired for over a week. It was the first time in the six years of our travels that I was ill.

In preparation for the forthcoming Rally we filled up with diesel at AU\$0.85 (€0.53) per litre and petrol for the outboard at AU\$0.73 (€0.46) per litre. Of course we also availed of our allowable duty free alcohol. The Marina cost AU\$20.71 (€12.50) per night plus an extra AU\$5.70 (€3.50) each night we stayed on board.

From Raby Bay in Cleveland near Brisbane to Darwin we logged 2,228 nautical miles or 2,562 miles or 4,100 kilometers.

### **PREVIEW:**

Our next report the 46<sup>th</sup> will cover our 3,000 n/mile sail from here to Langkawi in Malaysia. The journey entails sailing through Indonesia, which we were very anxious about, onwards to Singapore and the notorious Malacca Straits. Also included will be our face to face encounters with Orangutans in Borneo and Komodo Dragons on the Indonesian island of Rinca. During this trip we also lost our dinghy and outboard, was it stolen or was it an unfortunate lax of security? Find out in the next report.

Pat & Olivia Murphy on sailing yacht ALDEBARAN

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