

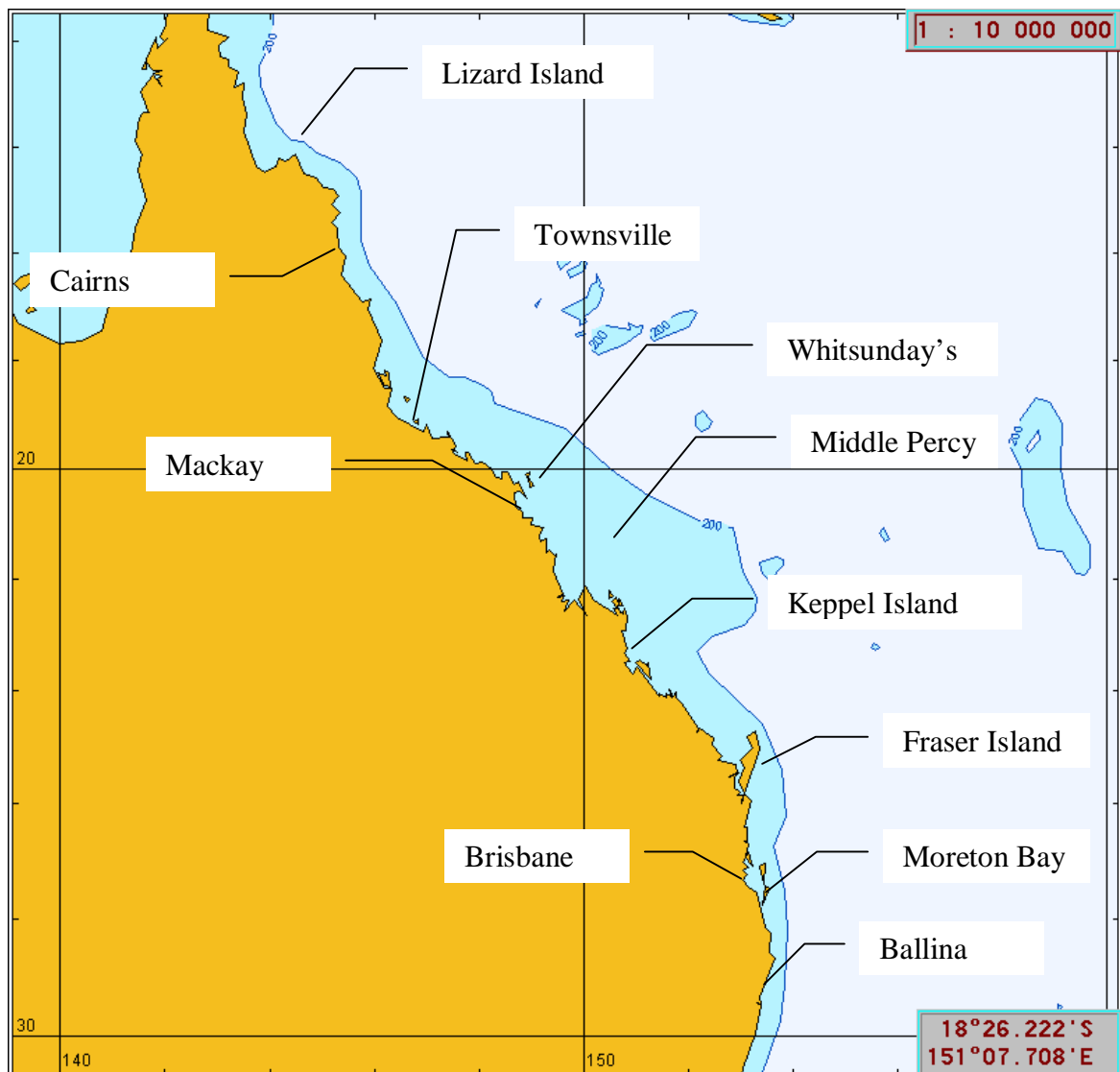
# Sulaventure Photo Essay

## ***Introduction:***

How time flies when you are on holiday, sailing and adventuring. Three months and I have only just found the time to document some of the highlights!

The coast of Queensland has so many amazing places to explore, hundreds of islands, reefs and coastal passages, crystal blue water and clear skies. It truly is an amazing place.

I hope that you enjoy sharing my adventures through the following photographs.



Key Location Diagram.

## **Photo 1: Leaving Ballina – 4<sup>th</sup> July 2005 Photo: Kirsty Stratford**

Torrents of rain and a bitterly cold southerly buster threatened to delay my departure further than the extra couple of day required to finally clear up my belongings and get Sula ready for her next adventure.

The rain bucketed down the last week of June with over 500mm in two days, the Richmond River; my home for nearly 11 months, was emptying muddy brown water

into the blue of the pacific. I took one last look from the wall and decided that it was a goer.

Crossing the Bar at Ballina is always an adventure; in marginal weather it is potentially hazardous. With many friends waving me goodbye from North Wall, I didn't want to give a too spectacular display.

I idled around just behind the bar and waited for a lull. It presented itself, and on command Sula accelerated, helped by the brown running tide.

Without incident (and probably to the relief of those on shore) I was out there. In the ocean, free of civilisation and with 25 knots pushing me onwards, northwards, free.

### **Photo 2: Lizard Island – 20<sup>th</sup> July 2005**

Flying over Lizard Island I was still drooling. The past hour had spent on the cramped, exorbitantly expensive (but paid for) flight looking out the window as reef and island past by on the glimmering pacific ocean.

The demographic attracted to Lizard Island includes Marine Biologists, the exceedingly rich and yachties alike.

For this trip at least, I was among the biologists – a volunteer research assistant. My job? Oh, two to three dives per day collecting fish... I liked my career change already.

### **Photo 3: Lizard Island Research Station Photo: Matty**

Lizard Island research Station was started in the 1970's by the Australian Museum. It now caters for up to 30 researchers at a time with scuba facilities, field data collection equipment, labs, aquaria and a comprehensive library. Reef researchers from around the world now congregate there to conduct research.

This often made amusing and diverse conversation during sundowners (drinks).

### **Photo 4: Lizard Island Research Station Building Projects**

After completing my 2 weeks of research, I was offered 4 weeks of labouring work (eagerly accepted!). During this time we built a multi purpose area (we thought it looked like the perfect place for a bar really). Along with a 3-bedroom dormitory / house.

In case you were wondering, there is no concrete plant on the island, and yes cyclone footings are big, and no, there was no crane to lift those trusses.

### **Photo 5: Dan's Spangled Emperor**

Dan the builder had his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday on the island. He took (me) the labourer under his wing and taught me a thing or two about building. I taught him a thing or two about eating (no longer could he take the eating crown!)

We were the guests of Lyle and Ann - (station managers) Bob and Tanya (maintenance and housekeeping), who would take us out fishing a "very secret" reef. The result, on sunset and after a couple of beers was some quite large Spangled Emperor.

### **Photo 6: Playing Games Photo: Matty**

Located firmly within the trade wind belt, the wind at Lizard Island can blow 20 knots plus for "9-months straight". Sailing to the island is easy from the south. However it has been said that it is easier to sail the rest of the way around Australia rather than sail south from Lizard Island into a trade wind.

Regular activities on the station include touch footy, soccer, and volleyball. With our international contingent the research station regularly tried to beat the staff from “the resort”. We got to know many of the staff at the Marlin Bar (which luckily only opened on Wednesday and Saturday nights).

### **Photo 7: James' Portrait Photo: Matty**

You can see that the island lifestyle really appealed to me. Temperature range was 21 – 25°C, hard work, swimming and daily beach runs meant I quickly left the stress of life behind.

Here you can see me sporting the most beard that I have ever grown, along with perfectly “beach styled” hair.

### **Photo 8: Sula at Moreton Island - 30 August 2005**

Cashed up from hard work I flew back to Brisbane where I had left Sula on a mooring, in the middle of the City reach of the Brisbane River.

A few days of reconnecting with friends and I was back to my old stamping ground, Moreton Bay. This is where 20-months previously I had bought Sula and spent many weekends learning the ropes.

### **Photo 9: Tangalooma Wrecks**

The Tangalooma wrecks are an artificial reef of scuttled boats and dredges. This was placed to provide a secure anchorage on the western shore of Moreton Island. In the past I had shared the anchorage with up to a hundred boats – but mid week in winter, I was the only one there.

I was awoken this morning by dolphins playing next to my boat. When I departed a couple of whales played just behind the wrecks.

### **Photo 10: Sula at Mooloolabah**

While I waited for the rest of our flotilla to arrive (I had joined a group of boats travelling to Keppel Island) and then for the weather to abate (after one foiled attempt to make headway into the weather) I surfed, caught up with friends and sampled the local nightlife.

### **Photo 11: The Ex-HMAS Brisbane Photo: Nev Watts**

The HMAS Brisbane was sunk 2 miles off Mooloolabah in August 2005, after about 4 years of toil and political wrangling. I was excited to see her so soon after scuttling. I went for two amazing (but expensive) dives on her, which rated as among my ‘top 10’ finest dives ever.

Apparently there were so many boats observing the sinking that the rolling was intolerable (despite near perfect conditions). Many people missed the sinking as they were sick over the side.

### **Photo 12: In Company North**

Accompanying me on the 280nm journey to Keppel Island were Soya, Fairwind, Bee Jin and later, Warlock of Sydney and Elena. The “flotilla” was especially helpful to follow on tricky bits of the sandy straights (I only touched bottom once...many thanks to Les) and for help when a very suspect fuel filter blocked (“fixed” by adding 20L of diesel into the tank). We had many a joke even more drinks and Gerry (of Bee Jin) was always available for a hug.

As the only solo sailor, I had my work cut out on a few 18-hour days but Sula and I kept up and never veered off course for too long.

### **Photo 13: Keppel Island - 10 September 2005**

The first of my “visitors” turned up to Keppel Island. Not liking the idea of boat life Suzie and Craig from Ballina stayed in the resort and accompanied me on daily sailing, relaxing and kiteboarding missions. The weather at the Keppels was near perfect and we sipped the odd beer while relaxing on board.

### **Photo 14: Craig in Hammock**

I think his time on Sula has given Craig a taste of the adventures of sailing. He will be back, and I wouldn't be surprised to see him in his own boat one day.

Craig is a mad keen kitesurfer and he was able to give me advice and tuition on some of the finer points of kiting.

I rig my hammock off the spinnaker pole swung over the side of the boat – great for an arvo nap or a beer.

### **Photo 15: Dinner BBQ**

Bianca also joined me from Ballina for a well-deserved holiday. I thought the Keppels would be a great holiday destination with lots of anchorages and bays to explore. Bianca took to boat life very easily and was soon sleeping, reading and relaxing her days away – with not even a tinge of seasickness (despite some pretty rolly anchorages and 4am weather changes requiring upping anchor and moving bays). Suzie was also in for an adventure as her dinner BBQ required a nighttime dingy transfer, something not high on her wish list! The fingernail scars on my legs are slowly fading.

### **Photo 16: Long Beach Keppel Island**

Want crystal clear water? Want long sandy beaches with coral reef incrustated headlands? The Keppel Islands have it all. Probably some of the nicest sand in Queensland – I loved it. I would happily recommend it far and beyond many of the more renowned sailing destinations.

But the resort looked pretty average, the bar expensive and the nightlife dismal! After 10-days in company it was time to bid my friends farewell for their journey south via the reef. I stayed another few days with my guests on board

### **Photo 17: Kiteboarding - Photo: Bianca Smith**

After seeing some of the best kiteboarding locations in the world (around Lizard Island), I was determined to finally bite the bullet and invest in some kiting gear. While in Brisbane I found a second-hand set of gear going cheap and now with a second kite lent from Craig, I am up and flying. I can now fly the kite ok but the getting up on the board is still a challenge!

### **Photo 18: Fish eye View- Photo: Bianca Smith**

Kind of a warped view on the world but a cool photo – thanks Binko!

### **Photo 19: Full Moon Keppel Bay**

With some nice wind filtering through after a boisterous 4am weather change, Bianca and I had a beautiful afternoon sail to Roslyn Bay. Bianca had to get her flight home

and I needed to make use of the light southerly wind while it lasted. With all sails up and the motor off, I think that Bianca was finally sold on the adventures of sailing. I wouldn't be surprised to see her trading in a little more of her annual leave for some sailing adventures!

Not long after this photo was taken we caught a 70cm school mackerel – yum!

### **Photo 20: Pearl Bay Moon Set - 18 September 2005**

With the moon setting and the sun about to rise, I quickly raise anchor, set sail and slide off into the purple morning light. It is mornings like these that make 5am wake-ups worthwhile.

Pearl Bay on the Shoalwater Bay Military training grounds is one of the more remote anchorages on the Curtis Coast. VHF Radios do not work there; you are 50 miles from the nearest Marine Rescue crew. It is not surprising that some people get spooked there, however I loved the seclusion and the beauty.

### **Photo 21: West Bay Middle Percy Island**

Middle Percy is an enigma in the cruising yachting circles. One of the few leased islands (among hundred that are National Parks) it has always been home to leaseholders welcoming to passing yachts.

The island boasts a small market garden, honey keep, sour dough bakery and rampant goat breeding requiring regular culling. It is also now a historical remnant aiming at preserving and enhancing the hospitality on which the island was founded.

Over the next two weeks, Nick, Loz and Earnst (plus Zee the dog) would become firm friends as I explored their little piece of paradise.

### **Photo 22: The Homestead**

Set high on a ridge overlooking West Bay, the circa 1880's Homestead is part museum, part information centre, part nostalgia. Commonly the words "sit down and have a cuppa" are heard and it is here talking to any of the caretakers that you can get a real feeling of what living on the island is all about, both now and in the past.

Struggling with the continuing drought, it is increasingly hard to re-establish the veggie gardens and orchard to their former glory.

### **Photo 23, 24 & 25: Castle Rock**

I made a trip to Mackay to pick up fuel, supplies, fix a recalcitrant starter motor and pick up Adelle, who had gamely agreed to come sailing for 8-days with me.

We sailed back to Middle Percy over a couple of days with stops at some beautiful islands. Adelle was not certain what to expect from Middle Percy, but with an hour long whale show (breaching, tale slapping and pectoral waving) 5 miles off, we felt welcomed with open arms. I had in mind some serious exploration, and Adelle didn't seem phased by that at all.

Middle Percy has an area of about 2500 hectares. Owing to about 800 hungry goats on the island, the undergrowth of Middle Percy is kept in a condition that allows 'no track' walking and exploring to all corners of the island.

Castle Hill is a rocky outcrop on the northeastern tip of the island that descends nearly 225m vertically into the sea. Nicks instructions are simple to get there from the Homestead – climb that ridge (points vaguely east) turn left, and you can't miss it – it has pines on top! That is castle hill behind Adelle in photo 24.

If the views along the walk were not good enough, and the final climb to castle hill, past a little cave was overwhelming. Whales were again doing there breaching in the distance, the light northerly wind was not even creating a ripple in the vast blue below. Absolutely Magic.

### **Photo 26: West Bay**

Due to the lack of undergrowth we hiked directly back to west bay, for a well-deserved swim across the bay to pick up the dinghy. With spring tides approaching 7m, the water clarity during neaps becomes clearer and clearer, until you can easily see the anchor in 8m of water.

The White family, to give the beach a tropical feel, planted Coconut palms – Earnst still lives on his daily coconut milk ration – even better mixed with vodka while the sun sets. Most evenings were spent on the beach with nibbles, a drink or two and some other yachties for company.

Most yachties are astounded to see someone under 30 sailing, especially solo around the place. Not surprising seeing the average age we met would have to be nudging grey nomad status, retirement and 60 years of age!

Adelle kept them all amused with tales of our adventures.

### **Photo 27: Coral Gardens Adventure – 30 September 2005**

While travelling around, but especially apparent at the Percies was the divide between fisho's and sailors. When sailing alone I will talk to anyone – and I often got surprised looks from the “power boaters” when they found out that I was from a sailboat. When they also learned that I was alone I guess that they worked out that I was desperate for human contact and conversation (and would therefore talk to anyone).

Thinking that this political divide on the size of your motor, was a little strange, we planned an expedition to South Percy and especially a Coral Gardens which reportedly existed behind a natural dam – filling only at high tide.

Steve (a fishing boat owner) volunteered to ferry us all over – much quicker than in Sula! We ended up with 3 yachts and 2 powerboat “families” coexisting together for a day and really enjoying each others company – even kind words were muttered about the benefits of speed in a “stink boat” albeit very quietly.

### **Photo 28: Coral Gardens**

The coral gardens themselves lived up to all the stories we were told. An amazingly diverse coral reef community and plentiful fish life has been preserved in a lagoon behind a natural conglomerate rock dam. The resulting snorkelling was out of this world. Especially with a maximum depth of only 1.2 m at low tide!

Apparently big turtles sometimes get stuck behind the wall and are good for a ride around the lagoon – I was disappointed that none were in evidence while we were there.

### **Photo 29: Pine Islet Haunted Lighthouse**

Pine islet is a tiny steep little outcrop about 1km off west bay, Percy Island. Nick and Loz had told us a story about how one of the old lighthouse keepers house was reportedly haunted.

It was decided that an expedition to test the haunted theory was required.

### **Photo 30: Pine island Anchorage**

There is no natural anchorage for access to the island, apart from a little cleft, which had been rigged with a crane to lift supplies up the cliff from the fortnightly supply barges.

Carrying copious amounts of alcohol, food and sleeping gear we trudged up to house number two.

### **Photo 31: Pines on Pine Islet**

Hoop pines dominate the skyline of the islet.

The haunted story goes a little like this. In 1893, Dorathea McKay, one of the original lighthouse keepers wives died of cancer. She was buried on the western facing ridge of the island, overlooking the sea. In the 1920's the government decided to rebuild the houses on the island, and Dorathea was resumed; false teeth, wedding ring and all to another site, and the number two cottage built over her previous grave.

Generations of lighthouse keeper's families residing in the number two cottage reported hearing footsteps in the hall and living room of this house, all the way until the lighthouse was decommissioned and an automated station installed in 1986.

### **Photo 32 History Lesson**

We tried everything to aid the discovery of ghosts, including having a large dinner cooked on an open fire and ingesting copious amounts of alcohol.

As the sun went down and the stars came out in their millions the mood became somewhat sombre, and nick started reading accounts of the trials and tribulations of living on the islet from some articles and books written by past keepers and their wives. Being slightly too soporific for me I quickly fell asleep.

Around midnight (awake again) and with some more wine on board, we decided to visit Doratheas gravestone and toast to her good health in the afterlife.

This completed we decided that the lighthouse also needed climbing. Adelle, definitely a fearless adrenaline junkie, led the way and the view from the top was spectacular, even if Loz did need a helping hand up by standing on my head.

Unfortunately the only scare we got was from nick jumping out from behind a rock, however our reactions, being dulled somewhat by alcohol failed to register much shock!

We had a memorable evening of history and reflection of what it would have been like to live in an amazingly remote, but beautiful part of Australia.

They must have liked the area somewhat though, as apparently the lighthouse keepers families used to go on holiday to Middle Percy Island!

### **Photo 33: The Tree house**

Another enigma created by the Percy Island crew is their amazing hospitality. This treehouse is available to any boat needing a spell from a rocking anchorage (or break from a sailing spouse or child). Fishermen often bring their tinnies (small boats) and a couple of eskies of grog and come and stay for the weekend. – All for free.

It is a different world out there and I take my hat off to Nick, Loz and Earnst for keeping the spirit of the island alive and sharing their amazing fortune of living in paradise with so many people.

### **Photo 34: The A Frame**

Another piece of history full of yachting memorabilia is the A frame on West Bay beach. Filled to the rafters with artefacts left from visiting yachts, this monument alone will always be a shrine to passing yachties, many adding another piece or date on subsequent trips.

### **Photo 35: Sula Monument**

I prepared a little monument to our trip, which is now sitting for eternity in the A-Frame. I wonder how many more times I will visit? I am sure I will be back.

### **Photo 36: Cheers!**

Reality was rapidly closing in and Mackay was calling Adelle back to work. We sailed back over two lovely days, and sadly back to the reality of “people”, mobile phones and Internet connections (necessary evils!).

Since then I have been in Mackay for a couple of days, I have secured work here starting in about a month to 6-weeks time, when the required cruising kitty will be extinguished. I am tentatively preparing to make this a short stop for about 6-months, with plans starting to formulate for a trip to PNG and then on to Darwin starting in about May or June next year.

The next month however will see me head north to Airlie beach in the heart of the Whitsunday's, and on to Townsville for a quick visit. I also have some crew joining me from both Ballina and Brisbane.

I look forward to sharing more of my adventures with you in the future.

James Foster  
4<sup>th</sup> October 2005.

### **Statistics:**

Sula – 31' Muira Sloop

13 Hp Yanmar Sail Drive

Distance Travelled so far on this trip: 863 Nautical Miles

Engine Run Time: 129 Hours

Approximate Number of Anchorages: 42

James' Total log on Sula: 2371 Nautical Miles

Total Average Speed: 5.0 Knots