

# REPORT ON HERVEY BAY & K'GARI FRASER ISLAND

## SUN, SAND, WHALES, NATURE

WED 16 – SUN 20 AUGUST 2023

**DAY 1:** After a wet Sydney night and with dark clouds still looming, 24 of us met at the airport before 7.30 am and it was an almost perfect mid-morning flight with Virgin Australia to sunny Maroochydore on the Sunshine Coast. It took some time to find the Down Under Tours coach and driver Mitchell but, with bags onboard, we were on the road to Hervey Bay by 11.15 am. The countryside appeared very dry.



Gympie was our first stop. A large, not a particularly pretty place, but does come with the pleasing aroma of Nescafe's Blend 43 and International Roast coffee which are manufactured here. The city has suffered 11 significant floods from the Mary River since the first recorded in 1870, with the last, in 2022, submerging more than 1000 properties. We spent a couple of hours here at the very interesting Gympie Woodworks Museum & Interpretive Centre that included a light lunch and an excellent tour plus demonstrations with volunteer guides Peter and Kerry, plus the entertaining blacksmith. Well worth the visit.



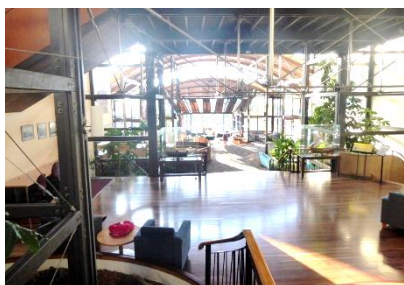
From there, it took close to two hours to reach Hervey Bay via Maryborough which boasts beautiful Queenslander homes. Hervey Bay is actually comprised of a number of suburbs and we were staying the one night in the 4-star Ramada by Wyndham at Urrungan located at the eastern end of the area. The rooms were fine with great beds, the buffet dinner so-so – more vegs would've been good and perhaps some fruit for dessert rather than cake! Staff were lovely. After such a long day, it was an early night for most.

**DAY 2:** A full breakfast at 7 am and check-out wasn't until 10 am, so we made use of our rooms until then. According to our itinerary, lunch was not provided today, so those of us happy to walk quite some distance were able to purchase lunch or do a spot of shopping. Not ideal for the rest, but fortunately we were made aware that snacks could be purchased on the ferry to K'gari Fraser Island. Pick up from our hotel had been organised for 11.40 am, so we filled in the time chatting in the hotel's outside bar area, probably driving the staff mad who were doing their best to clean around us. 11.40 came and went with no sign of the yellow bus that was collecting us. We were getting twitchy, as the ferry was departing at 1 pm



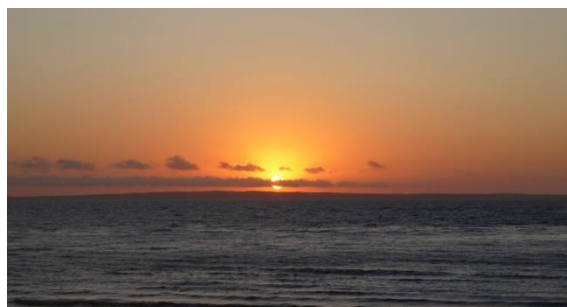
pronto and boarding was 30 mins prior. Obviously, the locals knew what they were doing and eventually a van pulled up to collect our luggage. Then the yellow bus magically appeared for the longish drive to River Heads (mouth of the Mary River), collecting a smaller group of people at the tour company's office a short distance from the wharf. We were even more twitchy by this stage. However, somehow with loads of cars, trucks and us boarded, the "Fraser Venture" departed at exactly 1 pm. Needless to say, we cleaned them out of snacks and coffee (and maybe beer) during the 45-

50 min comfortable ride. The pier at the other end was long, so a bit of a hike, but the Kingfisher Bay Resort's green "train" carried us the rest of the way up the hill to our accommodation for the next three nights.



What a beautiful main building! Here, we were ushered into a room where our itinerary was explained and room keys handed out (a map of the property would've been handy). Eventually, our luggage found its way to our very spacious and comfortable rooms, with large balconies overlooking either the duck or waterlily ponds. We whiled away a couple of hours before taking advantage of the free drink offered at the Sunset Bar located back at the pier. Transport was

lacking, but most of our group found a short-cut. Hugely popular, the bar had seemingly attracted most of the resort's guests, so there was a long queue for drinks, but it was a lovely, tho' windy spot and the sunset didn't disappoint. Our pre-ordered dinners back in a separate area of the hotel's Sand & Wood restaurant were okay – entrée was great, but main not so much. Another early night.



**DAY 3:** Cloudy and cool. We'd heard that, due to the wind, the whale-watching for today had been cancelled which made us nervous about our whale-watch outing the following day. The hotel supplied a comprehensive breakfast before we headed over to the nearby shops, our 7.45 am collection point for today's island trip with Fraser (K'gari) Explorer Tours. Like Hervey Bay, the island definitely runs on Fiji time, as our group and other guests finally set off at 8.30 with 'Butch' (Ian Butcher) our driver/guide for the day.



Transport was in two 4WD buses which amazingly held 40 people each and were not the easiest to climb into, but, by the end of the day, we'd (almost) got the hang of it! The trip today was concentrated on the centre/lower half of the island. First stop was the most famous of the freshwater lakes, Boorangoora or Lake McKenzie and, by now, the sun was out. Years ago, it was possible to park (and barbecue) on the lake's edge, but these days there is no vehicle access and visitors are required to walk a few hundred metres along a bush path and down steps to reach the stunning white sand

complemented by vivid two-toned clear blue water that reaches a depth of 8½ m. (Apparently, more pristine these days due to lack of visitor numbers during the Covid pandemic.) We had time for a paddle here or a quick dip before returning to a (dingo) fenced off area of the carpark for a pleasant morning tea.



A short drive to the rainforested area of Central Station. Originally, it was a sacred site for the Butchulla tribe and sanctuary for the aboriginal women to give birth along the banks of the tranquil Wanggoolba Creek, no men allowed. Then white men exploring the island found that logging the beautiful rainforest would be prosperous, so a forestry camp was established. Thankfully, logging ceased officially on the island in 1991. We had

time here to look at the remnants of the village, admire the rainforest vegetation and magnificent trees, and take the 700 m circuit board-walk with Butch to view the gorgeous creek. Next stop on our tour was a short walk into the bush to admire and hug a magnificent Satinay tree, four metres across the trunk and estimated to be more than 1200 years old. Amazing that these beautiful trees are all growing in sand!

Apart from the beach, K'gari doesn't have roads as such, just dirt tracks, and they are incredibly rough, so lunch at Eurong Beach Resort on the eastern side of the island was a welcome break. The buffet was extremely crowded but well organised, however our time here was very limited and it was a rush to eat and no time for a glass of wine!







High tide had been that morning, so Butch was now able to drive north along the enormously busy Seventy Five Mile Beach (120 km long). At The Pinnacles, also known as the “Coloured Sands”, there was time for a walk among the multi-coloured/strange shaped sand dunes which are thought to be at least 700,000 years old. Turning around and heading south, we stopped near the wreck of the SS Maheno, taking great care not to be bowled over by the umpteen fast-moving 4WDs and keeping an eagle-eye

out for small planes which are permitted to land here. The website says that there have been 23 wrecks recorded in the island’s waters between 1856 – 1935 and the Sandy Cape lighthouse, switched on in 1870 plus a smaller light on Woody Island, did little to alleviate the numbers. The Maheno built in 1905 was one of the first turbine-driven steamers. She plied a regular route between Sydney and Auckland until she was commissioned as a hospital ship in Europe during World War

One. She also served in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. In 1935, she and her sister ship the Oonah were sold to Japan for scrap. The rudders of the boats were removed and they were being towed to Japan. When they reached Queensland waters, a cyclonic storm snapped the tow chain and the Maheno drifted helplessly onto Fraser Island’s ocean beach. We could see that the ship had sunk significantly more into the sand since our last trip to the island or perhaps the sand had built up around the hull during those years. Still heading south, we stopped at Eli Creek an incredibly popular camping spot, and a couple of us enjoyed a swim in the



warm waters away from the beach where scattered fishermen were trying their luck in the surf – apparently some sort of fishing competition on. Continuing south and on the return to Eurong for a comfort stop, we were indeed very fortunate to spy three dingoes: two males together (quite unusual) and a single nearby. All looked in very good health. Lots of photos taken, but through the coach windows!



Considering the state of the “roads”, it was a fast drive back to our resort and, by this time, there was significant cloud cover. Dinner was at 6 pm: entrée was okay, another strange main meal, but the gelato was yum! It was here that Elizabeth passed on the disappointing news that our whale-watching tomorrow morning had been cancelled due to the continuing choppy conditions.



**DAY 4:** A more leisurely start this morning, but most of us were at breakfast by 7 am. We met ranger Rachel in the reception area at 8.30 am for



replacement activities which turned out to be Trivia followed by an excellent Wetlands Walk within the resort’s grounds. Our two-course pre-ordered ‘light’ lunch back in the Sand & Wood restaurant was a relaxing affair and the food was particularly good. Mid-afternoon, we met up for a Bush Tucker Medicine Walk, again on the resort’s property, and this was followed by a Bush Tucker Talk & Tasting with both rangers Rachel and Letty plus a very efficient barbecue chef. Each of our tables was supplied with several local bush foods, the most well-known probably bush tomato,

lemon myrtle and finger lime, and there was a tasting of each item plus extras such as freshly barbecued prawns. A first for most of us and very interesting. Dinner that evening was unquestionably the best of the three nights, generous servings and infinitely more appetising.



**DAY 5:** All too soon, our stay on this beautiful island and resort was over. And, wouldn't you know it, today's weather was perfect, so the whale-watching was on for some other lucky people, but we'd need to be content with the 7.50 am ferry to the mainland. Here, Mitchell was waiting for us and our luggage that had gone ahead was to be collected at the tour company's office/shop at River Heads. All very well organised and we were on the road again by 9.10 am with about 20 mins or so to Maryborough. Here, Mitchell detoured so that we could see more of the lovely old buildings including their magnificent city hall. For a short distance, we drove alongside the seemingly innocuous Mary River which is the cause of so much flooding, though Maryborough has never been as badly affected as Gympie.



We'd returned to Gympie by 11 am and time was spent at their Gold Mining and Historical Museum. The volunteer guide, who had been expecting us later, was hastily summoned and proceeded to take our group around the property. The museum houses a vast collection of documentation, artifacts and photographs dating from the discovery of gold in 1867 by James Nash to the recently closed operations of the Gympie Eldorado Goldmine. The museum also had a café where we could've purchased lunch, but the Kingfisher Bay Resort had unexpectedly provided each of us with a delicious "boxed" meal and cold drink.

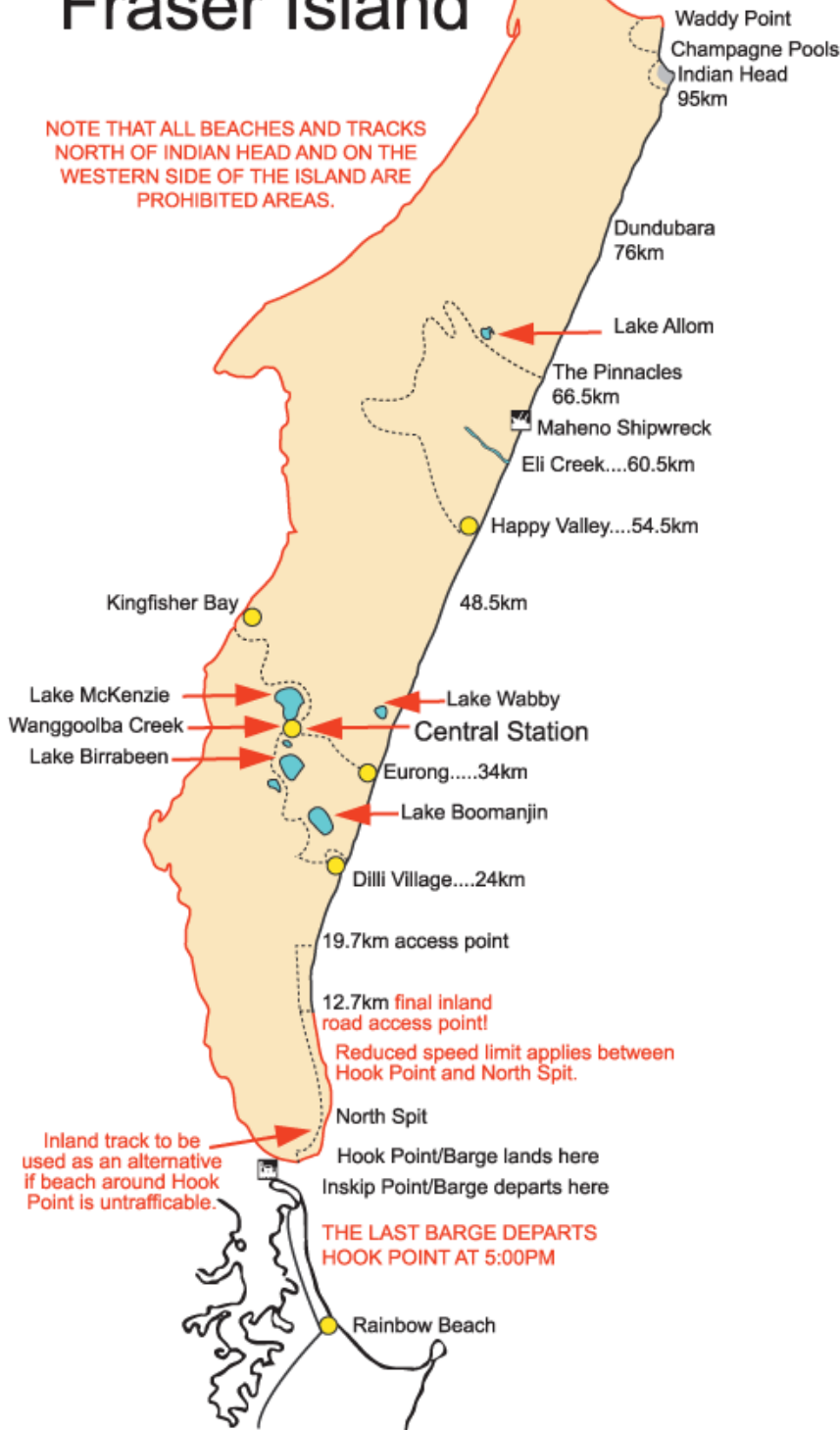
An hour in Noosa Heads was next, our coach fortunately securing a parking spot at the bus interchange. There was a quick dash to check out the town's trendy shops, but, being a Sunday afternoon, many were (fortunately!) closed. Elizabeth was able to catch up with her grandson who is a current resident. By 4 pm, we'd arrived at the bustling Maroochydore Airport and said our goodbyes to Mitchell who then turned the coach around and drove back to his home near Hervey Bay. An easy check-in at the airport, time to relax – some played cards – before our uneventful 5.20 pm Virgin flight home. On arrival, we went our separate ways. It had been a short break, but a great one! Thank you to Trade Travel and Elizabeth, also Jenny, Heather and Elizabeth for their photos.





# Fraser Island

NOTE THAT ALL BEACHES AND TRACKS NORTH OF INDIAN HEAD AND ON THE WESTERN SIDE OF THE ISLAND ARE PROHIBITED AREAS.



Take care at all times when driving on Fraser Island.  
**WATCH OUT** for.... children, fisherman,  
sunbathers, wildlife, washouts, creeks, etc.  
People on the beach cannot hear you, **SO SLOW DOWN**.

This map is presented as a guide only - observe daily driving conditions.