



by trailerable

by BOB FORSTER

EVER SINCE THE EARLY 1990'S, when I and a group of like-minded multi sailors sailed our Farrer Trailertris from the Town of 1770 out to the Bunker Group of islands off the Central Queensland coast, including Lady Musgrave, Fairfax and Hoskyn Islands, I have had a high regard for the seaworthiness and versatility of relatively small trailable trimarans for short term cruising along Queensland's coastline. Other trips around the Whitsundays, and from the Keppels down to Cape Capricorn and Yellow Patch, reinforced this view.

ON THE FEW occasions over the years when I had driven the coast road to Queensland's northern regions and had passed through the small coastal hamlet of Clairview, I had looked enviously out to sea, realising that only 50nm or so away, lay that much vaunted 'stopover' for cruising yachties on their way along the Queensland coast. I refer, of course, to the Percys, and in particular to West Bay on Middle Percy, where Andy Martin at the time was his own island king. Of particular interest to me as a small multihull sailor, were the many

stories of multihulls being able to enter the small lagoon on Middle Percy, a welcome refuge should the weather turn 'bad'. Thus was born that nagging germ of an idea that I must get to the Percy's at some stage in my sailing life, preferably in my own vessel.

The 90s passed and I became involved in another personal project, the design and building of a modern trailerable cruising trimaran (See — *Australian Multihull World*, Sept/Oct 2008 issue #92). My intention was to build a relatively lightweight ply/glass composite tri suitable primarily for cruising and occasional club racing. Its suitability for coastal cruising



e trimaran

to the Percys

was very much in mind at the design stage, with it having a spacious interior for a tri of the size, as well as provision for cruising necessities such as built in water tanks, icebox/fridge, galley, sink, comfortable bunks and plenty of storage space. Coupled with these features was a strong hull with an internal keelson and grounding 'shoe' under the main hull. This was a very reassuring feature for drying out, either by accident or design, when anchored close in to the beach in areas of extreme tide like the Broadsound.

After a year of sailing *Wavelength*, including cruising and racing on local Moreton Bay waters, the Sandy Straits

and Hervey Bay, I felt it was time to take the boat further a field on a significant proving cruise.

The start to this adventure was not particularly auspicious. I left Brisbane in pouring rain. At Gympie, a serious accident had closed the highway, resulting in all traffic being diverted through several kilometres of narrow local country roads in mud and slush before regaining the highway. Despite these difficulties, I eventually arrived in Rockhampton around 9.30pm, mud spattered, but without further incident.

The next morning, my brother Bruce and I made the short trip down to

Out of the marina berth. (above)

Rosslyn Bay Marina near Yeppoon to rig and launch the boat, where we left it on a marina berth. Although Rosslyn Bay does have a secure parking facility nearby, for tow vehicles and trailer if needed, we took the trailer back into Rockhampton for storage at my brother's home, before doing a final shop for fresh supplies for the cruise. Our third crew member, Joe, a local doctor, was joining us early the next morning for our departure.



Preparations for the trip

The tri has a well insulated 46 litre ice box built into the cockpit to keep the daily supplies cold. We carried another 45 litre portable icebox underneath the cockpit. This was filled with a 10kg block of dry ice, sitting on a protective layer of foam, as well as several three and four litre plastic bottles of ice to replenish the cockpit ice box as needed. This also contained well sealed frozen meat packages and other frozen perishables,

A cruise-laden *Wavelength* leaves harbour. (left)
Leaving Island Head – bound for the Percys.
(above)

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including a couple of pre-made frozen casseroles. A further third small esky had additional block ice and frozen drinks. We had planned for the ice to hold out for at least a week and had non perishable supplies for the last couple of days. In the event, although the ice was finally exhausted on day eight, the cockpit ice box was still quite cold on arrival back in port some 10 days after leaving Brisbane, so we weren't reduced to warm beer! As the ice melted in the bottles, it became our reserve water supply.

As for showering during the trip, this was usually a salt water swim, or in deference to the possibility of crocs in the mainland anchorages, a quick sluice with a bucket of salt water on the self draining trampoline, followed by the luxury of rinsing off with a mist of heated fresh water supplied by a two litre garden spray pressure pack. This was so efficient, that one two litre mix was usually sufficient for the three of us, and much more economical of water than the traditional camp style solar shower.

As there was little likelihood of

resupply of water on the cruise, other than the possibility of rain collected from the cockpit canopy while at anchor, we carried around 150-160 litres of water, made up of water and ice, spread between a fixed 50 litre flexible tank fitted under the forward berth, and the remainder in assorted size plastic containers distributed between the main hull, as well as some in the floats for a balanced weight distribution.

The motor for the boat was a 9.8hp. outboard, for which we carried 40 litres of fuel. In the event, we only used about 15 litres of this for the whole trip.

Finally, electrics included two batteries, totalling 90 amp hour capacity charged by a 20 watt solar panel, running cabin lights, instruments, VHF, CD and Autohelm. On our return, the batteries were near full charge.

Under way at last!

An impromptu group of family and local sailing friends gathered early one Saturday morning in September to wave us on our way from Rosslyn Bay. However, by the time the remaining gear

and supplies were stored, the sails prepared for rigging, and inspections made of our nautical quarters for the next few days, it was after 0900 hours by the time we finally motored out of harbour with the dinghy in tow.

As the immediate weather forecast for the first four to five days of our planned trip was very positive, we decided to head out to the islands off the Broadsound as soon as possible, intentionally bypassing some of the interesting anchorages along the coast. These included Corio Bay and Port Clinton. In the light south-westerly, we hoisted the small kite and made good time, passing a small trailer sailer and slowly overhauling a larger trimaran we



First anchorage – South Percy. (below left)
Looking west from South Percy. (below centre)
Wavelength bound for Mid Percy. (bottom left)
Inside the 'boat harbour' Middle Percy. (bottom right)

could see ahead in the distance. We passed Cape Manifold by mid afternoon and opted to make Freshwater Bay our first overnight anchorage. This bay is part of the Shoalwater Bay Military Reserve and is restricted during military training exercises. We had checked two or three weeks previously that our cruise would not be curtailed by this 'inconvenience'. Signs on the beach warn visitors against

going inland from the beach. We anchored in the southern protected corner of the bay where a small hut is visible on the shore. The 'fresh water' for which the beach is named, at least in the dry season, is a mere trickle across the beach at this end of the bay. If necessity required, a 'soak' would have to be dug to obtain a usable quantity.

Late in the afternoon, the small trailer

oblige. It appears this adventurous bloke was single handing his 20ft trailer yacht *Possum* along the coast as whim took him. As for the radio, subsequently we found we were out of contact when in the sheltered anchorages like Island Head Creek, however once out to sea by a nautical mile or so, we were getting a clear signal from either Stannage VMR at the bottom of Thirsty Sound on Channel



The north-west anchorage, South Percy. (top)
Oysters for lunch. (above left)
The mining scar on South Percy. (above centre)
Anchorage – Hunter Island. (above right)

sailer that we had passed earlier during the day, entered the bay and anchored some distance away from us. Unfortunately, I had discovered that my newly installed masthead aerial for the VHF had limited reception due to poor connections somewhere in the system. Further, the second stern mounted VHF aerial was too low and blanketed in the anchorage to send a 'log off' signal to VMR Rosslyn Bay. Consequently, I radioed the trailer sailer to ask that he log off on our behalf, rather than have a search exercise mounted for us. As his aerial was masthead, he was able to

81 or Mackay further north on Channel 80, so we were able to pick up the regular weather bulletins.

Next day, we bypassed Port Clinton, although we kept in close to the coast for a passing view of attractive Delcomyn Bay and the nearby pine covered Delcomyn Island. Around the next point we entered what is arguably the most picturesque bay along this section of the coast. It is enclosed by two sheltering islands and aptly named Pearl Bay, with its tranquil aqua waters well protected from the prevailing south-east winds. We

tucked into the southern corner of the bay, stern to, and walked ashore onto the beach to enjoy the surroundings, our only company being a couple of distant power cruisers anchored well out in the bay. Our lunch stop was all too brief, as we would happily have spent a couple of days here to relax and explore, given more time.

As we still wanted to make Island Head

Multihull Yacht Club of Qld from Brisbane, were cruising the Queensland coast in their 12m Nimbus cat, *Emerald Lady*. They had picked up on our earlier radio traffic when we left Rosslyn Bay. They soon appeared alongside in their tender to ask us aboard for 'sundowners'. While there, Don was able to rummage through his kit of spares to find us a couple of VHF connectors. While these

spinnaker set shy off the bowsprit, Jan and Don pursued us through the entrance in their tender to wave us goodbye. They took some rare photos capturing us under sail during the cruise.

Wavelength is a relatively light trailerable multihull, so we elected to sail fairly shy 'racing' angles downwind to our destination at South Percy, guided by GPS VMG settings. Our first gybe took us out



Creek with plenty of daylight, we pressed on up the coast. The small cruising kite was duly hoisted, Joe disappeared down below for a snooze, while brother Bruce nodded off in the cockpit. The breeze was steady from the south east at 10-12kts as I enjoyed the sail along this pristine stretch of coast, passing inside the Clara Group of islands. Before long, it was a 'wakey, wakey' call to the crew, as the entrance to Island Head Creek loomed. Once inside the 'Island Head' and the rocky outcrop near the northern side of the entrance, the creek opened up into an attractive harbour like expanse of water; with a long sandy beach on the opposite western shore, backed by the grandeur of a steeply rising range behind. We opted to anchor in one of the pretty and tranquil shallow sandy coves on the eastern shore just inside the entrance, the big hill behind providing perfect shelter.

Later in the afternoon, the familiar profile of a large cat hove into view through the entrance. Dan and Jan McWatters, fellow members of the



did improve reception over short distance for our mast head aerial, they still did not give us the distance reception we were getting from the stern mounted aerial, which we then relied on for the rest of the cruise.

Next morning at 0830, with a gentle south-easter starting to fill in, we set sail for South Percy, 42nm distant on the GPS. We had previously decided that all our runs between anchorages would be easy day sails, so that we would be safely anchored by mid to late afternoon to give us time to explore ashore. This trip to South Percy in relatively open water was to be our longest single run. As we were sailing out of Island Head, the boat at a jaunty heel with the windward float flying under the pressure of our big

Sunset over West Bay, Middle Percy. (above)
One of the many whales encountered. (left)

past Cheviot Island abeam of High Peak Island before the second long gybe in towards Steep Island. From here, the Percys were now clearly visible on the horizon at 23nm distant, when we were able to make our last gybe that put us on a final course for the south-east end of South Percy. During the middle of the day, the breeze had faded for a period, however we were able to average 6.5kts for the 47.5nm covered during the day. Earlier, when the breeze had started to lighten, we had hauled the dinghy onto the trampoline and tied it down upside down to reduce drag.

Being early September, the humpback whale migration back down the Queensland coast was well underway. On this leg of the cruise, we were

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treated to several sightings of whales blowing, three or four breeches and fin waving, as well as several obvious humps as whales swam their way south.

Our attempt to catch dinner on the trolling line however, came to nought when a large pelagic fish of indeterminate species hit our lure with such force that it dislodged reel and the lot went over the side!

We finally arrived at the rugged south-east corner of South Percy and sailed along its rather uninviting rocky shore until we rounded the eastern corner of the island. Here we were greeted by smooth water and a delightful vista of little bays and sandy beaches extending to the distant north-west tip of the island – and all to ourselves!

After the long sail out, we were keen to go ashore and explore. We anchored over sand close in to one of the sandy beaches in crystal clear water and took the dinghy ashore.

At some time in its early history, mining took place on South Percy towards the north-eastern end of the island and ugly eroded scars from this activity bite into the hillside here. However, this mined area does form a convenient access point to climb to the top of the eastern ridge for a panoramic view of the rugged east coast of the island. Here can be found a small rock cairn, gradually increasing in height as each visiting yachting has left his mark and added a rock or two from the abundant supply on the hillside.

Returning to the boat, we decided to move along to a more central beach with more protection from the wind afforded by the steeper ridges behind the beach. This particular beach was sheer pleasure to walk along in bare feet – the incredibly fine sand squelched out its song underfoot. At the same time however, it was a reminder that in strong northerly weather, the waves must pound in onto this beach to create our present calm weather delight. At the back of this beach, and also in outcrops of rock at the end of the beach, Bruce, a soils scientist, was excited to spot examples of Serpentinite, a greenish tinged mineral he had expected to see here. Our solitude was interrupted when a couple of open powerboats, presumably from Mid Percy, appeared off shore and stopped briefly to fish.

The next morning, *Wavelength* was moved to a picture postcard anchorage at the north western point of the island. A sailing friend, and current *Wavelength* builder, who had visited the Percy's some 15 years previously, alerted me to the presence of an enclosed lagoon fed by the sea on the southern side of South Percy. We decided to investigate it and set off over the high western side of the island for a little 'scrub bashing' to reach the beach there. After crossing the island, we descended down a steep slope through a hoop pine grove to reach a sculptured beach covered in rounded sea worn boulders ranging down to pebble size. As we walked further along the beach to find the lagoon, this gave way to waves of washed up pumice and other flotsam, the legacy of countless storms from the south. After what seemed a two to three kilometre walk, we finally came across the lagoon tucked into low ground and masked by light scrub behind the beach. Far from the sea water washed coral jewel I had been led to expect, the lagoon was a shallow brackish expanse of clear

water, the leafy bottom disguising the mud below, as my brother found to his cost when he descended up to his knees in sludge as he stepped in from the edge! The original sea entrance had no doubt become blocked off over the years. On our return up the beach to the point where we had crossed the island, we passed some oyster covered rocks. Although small, they were welcome pre-lunch snack au naturel before our trek back to the boat.

That afternoon, we elected to do the relatively short run over to West Bay on Mid Percy. As the weather forecast from VMR Mackay had been for winds to reach 25kts, we put a reef in the main for a more comfortable sail. Just as we were leaving South Percy, friends Jan and Don on *Emerald Lady* sailed into the anchorage, their camera recording our departure.

We left in moderate winds not really warranting a reef. However, it was only as we approached the south-west tip of middle Percy that we really noticed the freshening breeze and the boat lifted onto an exhilarating two sail reach at around 13kts, with the dinghy happily planing along behind.

Rounding the corner between Pine Islet and Mid Percy to enter West Bay, we were met by the sight of at least 10 cruising boats of all types, cats, trimarans, monohull yachts and power cruisers. On *Wavelength* at 7.8m length, we were clearly the smallest yacht there. We found a comfortable spot to anchor not far off the beach. In front of us, fringed by cocoa nut palms, was the distinctive A-Frame shed, the 'Percy Hilton', bedecked inside and out with the calling cards of the multitude of cruising yachts that have passed this way over the decades, their presence honouring the legacy of the Percy's most celebrated former resident, Andy Martin.

We spent a leisurely afternoon inspecting the shed and its heritage of nautical visitors past, as well as the 'Telephone Box', an adjoining tin shed, also filled inside with the names and mementoes of passing vessels. A felt pen and some driftwood beach-combed the previous day, ensured that *Wavelength's* visit was enshrined for posterity!

Camped out on the table in the A-Frame was a lone German sea kayaker



who was making his way north to the Whitsundays. He told us that his kayak, equipped with a pocket handkerchief sized sail mounted on the stern, was giving him daily averages of 60nm, at speeds up to 13kts!

Inspecting the 'boat harbour' and its entrance was our next priority. This can be accessed by either scrambling around the rocks from the beach or by a short walk up the track behind the A-Frame. As the West Bay anchorage was perfectly calm, we had no immediate need to go into the lagoon, however we decided that we would take the boat in early morning on the high tide before leaving the Percys, if only for the photo opportunity and the 'sense of completion' it gave to our cruise.

Our original plan had been to continue our trip west towards the Guardfish Group where Curlew Island offered the prospect of an attractive anchorage,

Bruce finds Serpentine! (top)
Chefs in the *Wavelength* galley! (above left)
Farewell to the Percys. (above right)

before heading south again towards the coast and ultimately, Rosslyn Bay. Time constraints of the crew amended this plan however; and we elected to head directly south towards the Duke Group, a course that took us inshore of our outward passage. We left the Percys with some regret, as we could happily have spent a few more days sailing around the group, fishing and exploring ashore.

Our next destination was Marble Island, the largest of the Duke Group, which we reached after an easy three and a half hour sail, anchoring for lunch in a bay on the north east of the island. The island is

now a private resort, with plenty of signs to discourage yachties from venturing inland from the beach. Sailing along the northern shore of the island, we passed several prominent outcrops of white rock, that give the island its name, before entering the Lola Mantes Passage, separating Marble from Hunter Island. Known for its strong current, we found the passage fairly benign when we passed through to reach our secure overnight anchorage in a bay on the western side of Hunter Island. Like Marble, Hunter Island is part of the same private lease, with evidence of small cattle yards inland from the beach. A climb up the

extremity of the bluff at the southern end of Hunter, besides providing a stunning view of the island surrounds and of the anchorage, also provided our first opportunity for mobile phone contact with the mainland. We also found to our surprise, that the tide goes out a long way in this bay, leaving a shingly sand underneath, so anchor well out here if you do not intend to take the hard!

Our next day's run was planned to take us from the Duke Group back to the mainland via Cape Townshend and then on to Island Head Creek. After leaving Hunter Island and passing close by Tynemouth Island, our course took us approximately south-east towards Cape Townshend. Fortunately we had a light breeze blowing from the east-northeast which provided perfect conditions to try out 'Fred', the fourth, and until now, 'hidden' member of the *Wavelength* crew,

in the guise of a newly installed Autohelm 1000. 'Fred' performed his duties faultlessly, however it was not long before other members of the crew, overcome with boredom while Fred hogged the steering, had him disconnected so that they could again enjoy having a hand on the tiller! As further relief to the monotony of this open stretch of water, we passed another whale making its way south.

We eventually pulled into a sheltered, but fairly unremarkable stretch of timbered shoreline for lunch, in the lee of Cape Townshend. A prominent sign on the beach however, ominously reminded us that we were anchored in front of a bombing range, part of the Shoalwater Bay Military Reserve.

As it was only mid afternoon, and Island Head Creek about eight nautical miles distant, we set off with the expectation of making Island Head Creek well before dark. We left the protection of Cape Townshend with the intention of keeping fairly close to the coast for a more scenic sail along the shoreline of Townshend Island. After some time it was apparent we were making next to no headway against the current in the light breeze, so we tacked away to head out to sea in the hope of finding more wind and less current. With the breeze

Bruce and Bob at the 'Percy Hilton'. (below left)
 Mementoes on display! (below right)
 Sailing through the Lola Mantes Passage. (bottom)



dropping further, and fading light, we dropped the jib and opted to motor sail under the main. Earlier in the week at Island Head Creek, we had noted an apparent channel along the beach separating Island Head from the mainland on the high tide. It had now gone dark and it would take us considerably longer to round Island Head and come into the creek through the main entrance. As *Wavelength* has only shallow draught however, we elected to follow the mainland shoreline into the creek on the high tide, using our GPS track log to guide us in between the prominent rock hazard in the middle of the creek entrance, marked on our GPS chart, and the beach. We kept an eye on the depth sounder, which registered a comfortable minimum of 10ft on the near full tide. In the pale moonlight, we found our earlier anchorage on the eastern shore.

The next morning, after a leisurely breakfast, we motored up the creek for a brief look at some of the 'fiord like' branches of the creek, where we could see two or three other vessels tucked away in protected spots. We were surprised at the depth in the main channel, registering over 100ft in one particular spot.

It was time to move south again, so we headed out of the creek, this time into very choppy confused seas just offshore from the entrance. These conditions eased as we moved further out to sea into deeper water, where we had a southerly following current of one to one and a half knots on the outgoing tide. The light north-east breeze allowed us to make Port Clinton comfortably by lunchtime. Here, we stopped to anchor in a pretty and protected little cove just inside the northern headland of Port Clinton, tucked in behind the 'perforations' of Perforated Point. After an investigatory sail along the beach inside the Port entrance, we made our way up the south arm to anchor for the night under the protective lee of the adjacent Mt Flinders. As we had had relatively little luck with fishing for the entire trip, Bruce was out in the dinghy with the fishing lines in one last determined effort to catch us a decent feed. A small Remora was all that was managed. Ah well, we had a couple of tins of salmon left!



Leaving Port Clinton next morning on our 34nm trip to Corio Bay, we were able to log in with VMR Rosslyn Bay again. Our biggest surprise on this run was having a whale surface between us and the rocky shore of Cape Manifold as we took the inside course between the close lying island and the Cape. We continued south, passing the popular local day trip anchorage at Five Rocks, past Nine Mile Beach with its procession of four wheel drive vehicles running along the beach, finally arriving at the narrow isthmus of Stockyard Point, marking the entrance to Corio Bay, a shallow sheltered bay with immense drying sand flats. The entry channel from the sea, which snakes its way in on the southern side of Stockyard Point, is a popular fishing spot. In the

channel, near where we anchored, were a couple of roughly built floating fishing shacks, which we felt did not quite meet the more dignified description of 'house boats'. Going ashore, we walked across the neck of the narrow isthmus, where a number of campers could be seen at this popular spot on the beach.

Our cruising adventure was nearly finished. On our final morning, we were graced with a moderate breeze from the east south east, so we hoisted the small flat cruising spinnaker for a smart run home to Rosslyn Bay at 10-12kts, where we were met by a welcoming party of family and friends, together with a welcome picnic lunch of fresh bread and salad.

Wavelength was pulled out at the ramp, de-rigged, and prepared for the road trip back to Brisbane.

We all were immensely satisfied with our round trip from Rosslyn Bay to the Percys, through the Duke Islands and back in near perfect weather conditions. In all, we recorded a 250nm trip over eight days on our GPS track log.

Joe enjoys the sail entering Island Head. (above)
Corio Bay. (below)

