

# Twenty Hops

## up the QUEENSLAND COAST

Looking for ideas for your next trip up the Queensland Coast? CHRIS DANGER and partner Wade Bishop take us to 20 of their favourite and less frequented anchorages, from the Gold Coast to Lizard Island.

We have travelled the east coast of Australia for a few years now and have written extensively about our explorations of the Great Barrier Reef. In this article we thought we would take readers to a mix of favourites and also less frequented spots we stop at along the Queensland coast. They are not always the most obvious anchorages but are useful for passage planning or for breaking up a trip. These are rarely crowded, they might not always be totally smooth yet are safe, scenic and in the right conditions they offer a great alternative to the well-trodden routes.

We are retired and have been living aboard for six years. We do not sail to a schedule but of course the weather is our boss and what mostly affects where we choose to sail to and stop at. We would rather not do overnights if we can help it, we like to day hop. We love exploring too, so anything a little out of the beaten track has appeal. What follows is not a detailed itinerary but a brief summary of interesting spots worth exploring. If you want to keep your passages varied and

interesting, give these a try. They are a mix of open and reef anchorages.

Open anchorages are just that: open to the ocean and swell. There is only one rule with these: plenty of chain out and full 360° clearance around your anchoring point in case the weather changes which can happen unexpectedly and always of course in the middle of the night! Nobody likes to end up high and dry on a lee shore! We tend to use a minimum of 5 to 1 scope, but the beauty of being in an open anchorage with few if any other boats, is that you can lay out 10 to 1 scope and not collect other people's ground tackle.

As for reef anchorages, as the name suggests there is a reef, either in front of you or even all around you. So the rules for these are to get there in plenty of sunlight, lay a track to make it is easy to come out even if the light is not ideal and ensure your anchor is well dug in. If you drag at night at the reef, you are in trouble.



LEFT: All weather hideaway in the lagoon at Double Island Point.

ABOVE: Anchored at Yellow Patch – Moreton Island.

end of Moreton Island by late afternoon. The anchorage is never totally quiet, with some current running along the top of the island, but it is an easy spot to anchor in 5m of water over clear sand, right in front of the colourful sand hills, hence the name. You will often see fishing boats anchored a little way out, a good sign the place is safe and protected from the southeast trade winds.

### DOUBLE ISLAND POINT LAGOON

We used to anchor in the corner of Double Island Point before the lagoon appeared. But about four years ago, the waves and wind did their magic on the sand banks and a lagoon was formed, the perfect shelter for shallow draft vessels. Now the bets are on as to how long the lagoon will stay accessible for as its length, depth, shape and the position and width of the entrance continue to change. The lagoon is a haven in all wind conditions and directions, offering shelter to a dozen or so other vessels. You will also share its shores with 4WDs and its calm waters with jet skis but what a gorgeous place to spend a few days. Lots of walking, paddling, some surfing, kite surfing, swimming, bird watching ... Even outside of the lagoon is a tenable anchorage, just not as calm. It is also the perfect spot to wait for the right conditions and tide to cross the Wide Bay Bar and follow the Sandy Straits up the western shores of Fraser Island. Get there before it closes off!

So without further ado, here are 20 anchorages along the Queensland coast, which will take you from the Gold Coast, right up to Lizard Island. Not all of them will be suitable on a return trip south, but alternatives can be found. The list is ordered south to north. Be warned, the further north you go during the winter cruising season, the stronger the trade winds get. There is a noticeable increase in wind strength with marked increments as you get past Townsville, Cairns then Cooktown. Persistent 25kts southeast blow right till mid-October. It will be easy to get up, but very hard to come back! So keep this in mind as you make your way north.

### YELLOW PATCH – MORETON ISLAND

When leaving the Gold Coast, we often come out through the Seaway and take the ocean route rather than the inner channels connecting the Broadwater to Moreton Bay. It is a long day, but we aim to reach Yellow Patch at the very northern





WHITE CLIFFS at low tide with its wonderful patterns in the sand.



PLENTY OF SPACE to anchor in the shallows at Fitzroy Reef.

### WHITE CLIFFS – SANDY STRAITS

With a large open space, a sandy rather than muddy bottom and protection from most winds, we favour White Cliffs over popular Garry's Anchorage as you are not in a channel, it is not as busy and sandflies are less prevalent there. When the wind picks up, there is plenty of space to swing safely. Crabbing or fishing is an option along the mangrove channels, although we are yet to get a feed!

### FITZROY REEF

As most of you know we are reef addicts, so from Fraser Island, our track moves away from the coast towards the Capricorn and Bunker Group. Lady Musgrave and Fitzroy Reefs are two lagoons we enjoy because they are relatively protected and offer plenty of options for anchoring or mooring. Although Lady Musgrave will often be our first reef stop, we have written extensively about it so we will skip it in this article and instead talk about the less busy but very scenic Fitzroy Reef. There are still some nice spots to snorkel at and fish, both inside the lagoon and along the outside of the wall, although successive bleaching events have damaged what was once a most spectacular coral reef. There are three public moorings, but plenty of options for anchoring in 3-8m over sand.



PANORAMIC OF NORTH KEPPEL – the quiet and wild island of the Keppels.



SECLUDED HIDEAWAY at Pine Tree Cove.

### CONSIDINES BEACH – NORTH KEPPEL

The Keppel Isles are the mecca for many cruisers, Great Keppel in particular. Beautiful beaches, lots of walks, socializing, snorkeling. There is plenty to see and do, but the protection from trade winds is rather lack luster. It also gets quite crowded. So if you want a little bit of space, peace and quiet, head up to North Keppel and drop the pick in front of Considines Beach. It is an open and shallow anchorage, so don't get too eager to snuggle into the beach but enjoy the great walks on the island.

### THE PINES

From the Keppels, most yachties on their way north head for Island Head Creek. We tend to avoid the area because of its narrow channels, strong current, and unfriendly crocs and midges. Our preferred option is the Pines, a quiet cove a little further just on the northern side of the headland. The beaches there are lined with hoop pines which gave the anchorage its name and provide a lovely spot to stop at overnight in relative comfort. A walk on the beach, fishing, magic sunsets are part of the deal.



QUIET NOOK at Digby Island.

### DIGBY ISLAND

From the Pines, or Island Head Creek, most boats make a B line to the Percy Isles. We are not fan of iconic West Bay, at Middle Percy, which although renowned is particularly uncomfortable in all but glass out conditions. Instead, we opt for Digby Island. This spot is an attractive anchorage tightly set between several islands: Digby itself, Henderson and Keelan, with Still Islet standing out by itself, looking like it should have a monastery at the top. It is never totally quiet, but after the extreme roll of West Bay, it feels comfortable. You will often share the anchorage with a prawn fishing boat, a sure sign this is providing reasonable shelter.

### SCAWFELL ISLAND – SOUTHERN WHITSUNDAYS

With the Whitsundays getting within reach, our next preferred anchorage in a southeast is the southernmost island in the group: Scawfell Island. On the northern side of the island is Refuge Bay which is very well protected. We like it there because it does not matter when you arrive, you can just drop



REFUGE BAY, true to its name at Scawfell Island.

the pick anywhere over sand and be safe. There is plenty of space. There are several public moorings located close to the fringing reef also. The only drawback is the lack of internet coverage.

### HILL INLET – THE WHITSUNDAYS

You cannot mention the Whitsundays and not talk about the iconic Whitehaven Beach and Hill Inlet. We have never anchored inside the Inlet, worrying about our draft and thin rudders. But if you have mini keels and are prepared to sit on the bottom, what a hide away! Instead, we have often



NOT YOUR TYPICAL VIEW of Whitehaven Beach, Hill Inlet and Tongue Bay in a panoramic.

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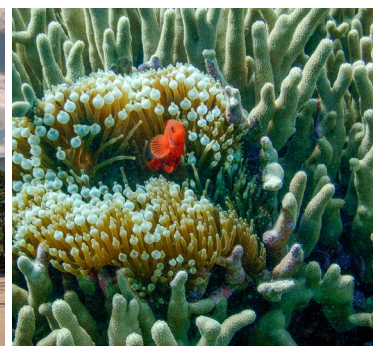
HEAVY WEATHER coming at Cape Upstart.



THE CLAM GARDEN at Orpheus.



HINCHINBROOK PEAKS – just like Polynesia.



ALWAYS A COLOURFUL CRITTER to be found at Little Black Reef.

## CAPE UPSTART

A 60m high headland with steep cliffs and slopes on its northern side, this is a scenic spot. There is a lot of space to anchor in sand on the western side of the cape, but it can be quite rowdy in strong south-easterlies. If the conditions are fresh and the rock and rolling a little too much, go right into the southern end, to Nobbies inlet, which although further to go is much more protected. Cape Upstart is a great spot to launch to the reefs. Try Stanley and Darley Reefs. Try a spot of fishing off the Cape too, mackerels are often caught there.

## ORPHEUS ISLAND

From Magnetic Island, you have a choice of heading east towards the nearby reefs or follow the island way which takes you to the Palm Group and Hinchinbrook islands. Orpheus Island, part of Palm Islands group, is a gorgeous place to explore with several anchorages along its western shores with a few public moorings on offer. No visit to Orpheus Island is complete without a snorkel at mid tide at the now abandoned giant clam nursery located at Pioneer Bay at the northern end of the island.

## ZOE BAY – HINCHINBROOK ISLAND

This anchorage is probably never free from swell, but if you get calm conditions, don't miss it. Zoe Bay on Hinchinbrook Island is a site of superlative natural beauty, one of the most spectacular anchorages we have ever stayed at, with steep jagged peaks reminiscent of those of the Polynesian islands overlooking the long sandy beach. A walk up to the rock pools at the southern end of the bay is a must, perfect for a dip in the clear cool water, away from the nasty crocs, and a place to enjoy the most outstanding views. You are in croc territory, so beware of the toothy monsters!

## LITTLE BLACK REEF

From the Whitsundays, many cruisers dash out to Bait Reef at the first hint of calm weather and compete for the only 8 moorings available. But there is a great, protected and in our view superior alternative. Yes, it is a bit further, but you anchor at Little Black Reef and can enjoy a lovely stay inside a protected lagoon, with plenty of fish and still some nice snorkeling if you are quick! As with many reef locations, successive bleaching events have damaged the coral and it is not what it used to be, but Little Black Reef is still a blissful place to stay at for a few days.



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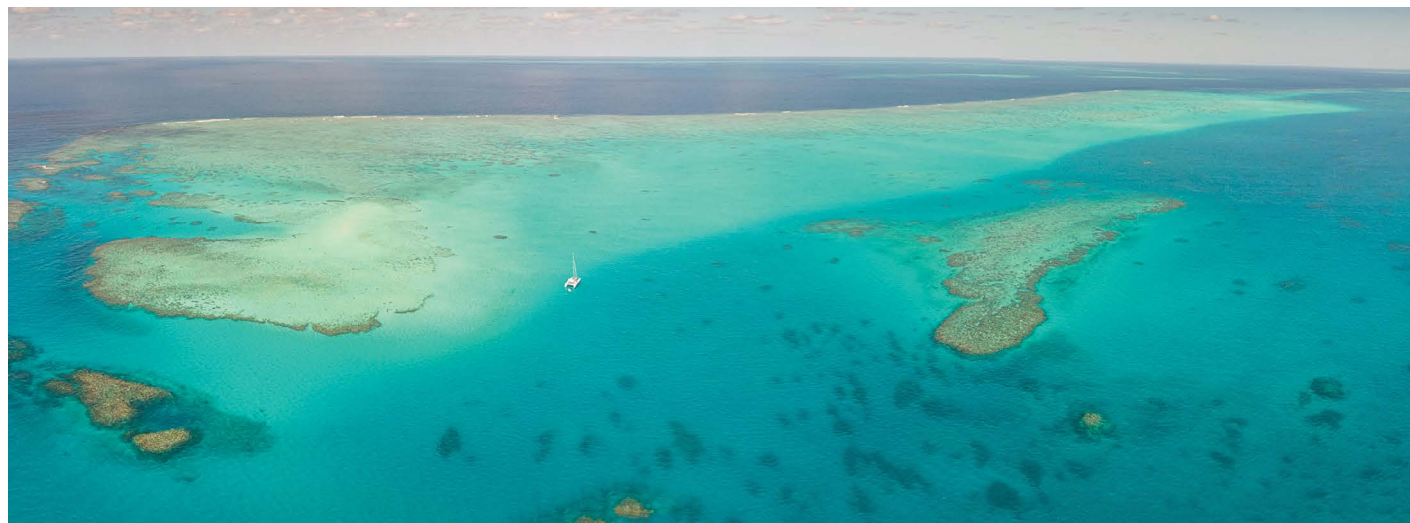
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IDYLLIC SEASCAPE at Walker Reef.



SCENIC RUSSELL ISLAND, part of the Frankland Islands Archipelago.

## WALKER REEF

Walker Reef is a dream of a reef anchorage. Ease of access to a large shallow expanses of sand free of bommies, space for several boats to anchor without feeling crowded, snorkelling options, fishing, don't miss it! You can easily spend a few days there in absolute bliss.

## FRANKLAND ISLANDS

A nice stopover on the way to Cairns, the Frankland Islands are a small archipelago of five continental islands. They are all uninhabited and surrounded by healthy fringing reef. We have stayed at Normanby and Russell Island, both offering public moorings. If it is quiet enough, go for a fish or a snorkel, have a wander ashore, go beach combing. These islands are only 10 miles off the coast, but you feel you are in a wild place.

## LOW ISLES

The Low Isles are a great spot to shelter from strong southeast winds, with a few moorings and space for anchoring over sand. Although popular and very close to the mainland, the fringing reef has pleasantly surprised us although the visibility underwater leaves a bit to be desired. The walk ashore and



WAITING FOR fair weather at Low Isles.

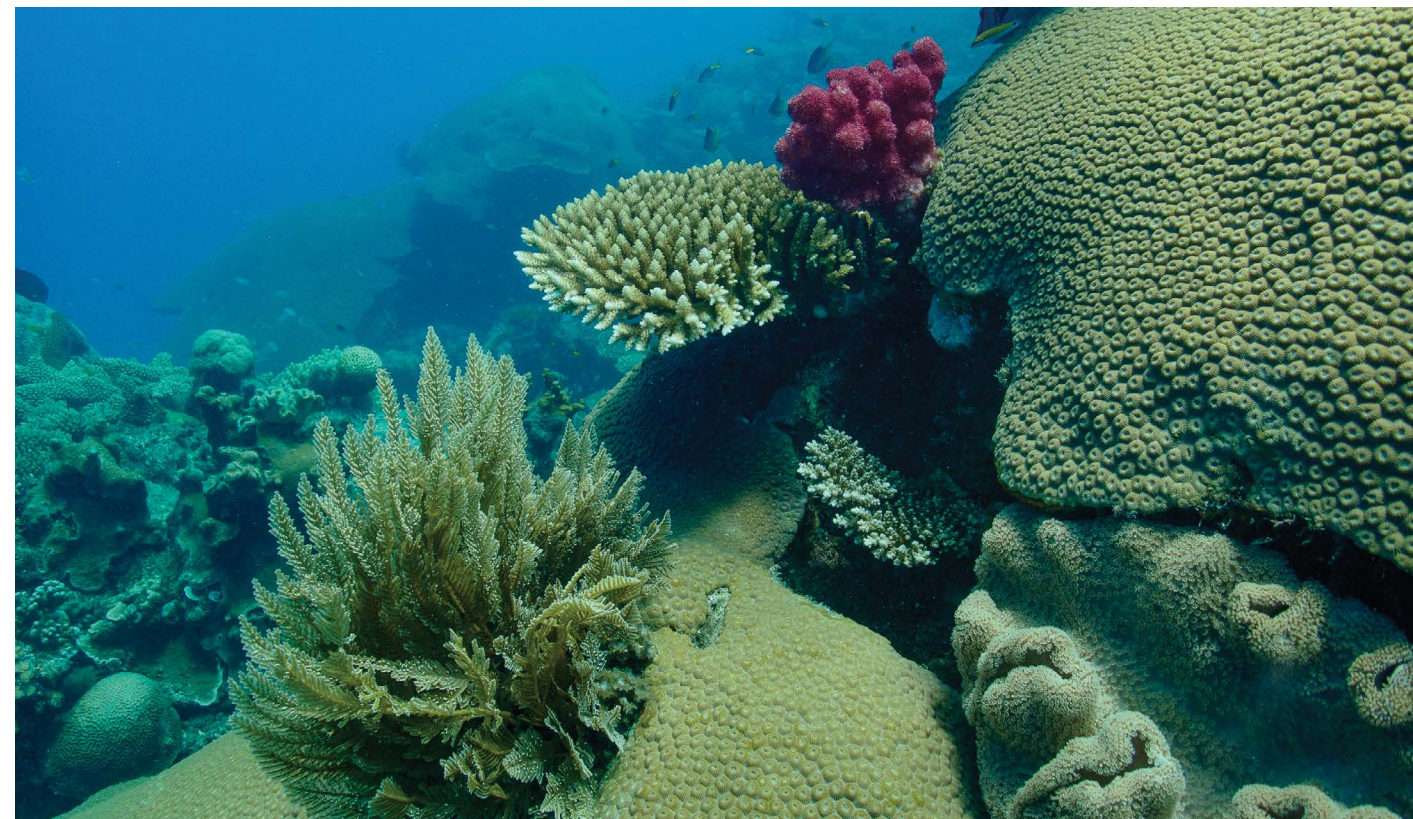
the birdlife have great appeal particularly early in the morning or late in the afternoon when the tourist boats have left. So don't give Low Isles a miss.

## MACKAY REEF

A sand cay, some nice coral, plenty of fish, a protected anchorage and not far from the coast, what more do you want? As well as anchoring options in clear sand, Mackay Reef offers two public moorings close to the sand cay. The highlight there is a snorkel along the reef wall on the outside edge rather than the lee side of the reef. The marine life is excellent, the coral in good nick, especially if you are brave and go on the exposed side of the reef. Of course, you need a calm breeze and slack water for ideal snorkelling conditions.

## PICKERSGILL REEF

Not many people have stopped there yet there is a small cay, a large reef, a little lighthouse, with the backdrop of the Tablelands on the coast just south of Cooktown. Snorkelling there is interesting with a good mix of corals, giant clams, and fish life which is surprisingly good given how close to the mainland it is.



HEALTHY CORAL and fish life at Mackay Reef.



ANCHORED AT the large and deserted reef of Pickersgill.



PANORAMIC VIEW of Lizard Island from Cook's Lookout.

## LIZARD ISLAND

Lucky last is an iconic spot which is often the 'bucket list destination' for many cruisers and with good reasons. But if you don't want to get stuck there for weeks on end, leave it till October when the trade winds ease a bit. While you are there, the 'must see' include the walk up to Cook's Lookout for a spectacular and panoramic view of the island and surrounding reefs, a snorkel at Mermaid Bay on the northern side of the island where the coral regrowth is vigorous, a meal and drink at the Marlin Bar, a visit to the Research Station with a group of other yachties!

So there you have it ... a few anchorages to explore. Some of these you will want to spend a few days at to relax, enjoy your surroundings and have fun. Don't rush, be curious and a little adventurous. See you out there!

CHRIS AND HER PARTNER WADE BISHOP have been sailing on catamarans of various sizes for several decades, cruising Bass Strait, Tasmanian waters, the Australia's east coast and the Great Barrier Reef. In July 2017, they retired and have been sea wanderers ever since, living on board their beloved catamaran Anui, a 52ft Crowther.

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