

CRUISING INSIDE AUSTRALIA'S NORTHERN GREAT BARRIER REEF

TOWNSVILLE

to

TI

THURSDAY ISLAND



CAMERON BURGESS

maritimehippy.com

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ONLY OFFICIAL HYDROGRAPHIC CHARTS SHOULD BE USED FOR NAVIGATION

Whilst every care has been taken in the preparation of this guide, it should only be used in conjunction with the latest official hydrographic charts. Although the author has taken every effort to ensure the information in this publication is as accurate as possible, I accept no responsibility for any errors, omissions, loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by any person using this guide. The natural world is a dynamic place, and things change with time, tide and storms. The maps have been prepared from various sources, coupled with first hand experience cruising the area.

By using this guide you acknowledge you have read and understand the "Safe Navigation Relies on You" section on page 12. **Use your eyes. Go slow. If in doubt, stay out.**



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*We respectfully acknowledge the
Traditional Owners of these lands and
their continuing connection to land,
waters and community.*

*We pay respect to elders both past
and present.*



Write all your plans in

the sand at low tide.

— *Anonymous*

If sailing the tropical waters inside Queensland's Great Barrier Reef is on your bucket list, then this book is for you.

On your trip along Queensland's coastline from Townsville to Cape York and into the Torres Strait, you will experience the dry Savannah tropical coast on one day and then drink in the smells and sounds of lush rainforest around the Daintree on another. You will see the towering sand hills of Cape Flattery and the imposing granite cliffs of Cape Melville. In the morning, why not climb Cook's Lookout on Lizard Island and see for yourself where Captain Cook and his crew steered the *Endeavour* through the Great Barrier Reef, then in the afternoon, visit the world renowned marine research centre on the island. Or just find an atoll in the middle of the Great Barrier Reef and be at one with the rhythm of the wind, tide, sunrise, and sunset as nature puts on the ultimate show of resourcefulness and survival.

On every part of your journey, there is something different to see, explore and experience. The Great Barrier Reef comprises 2500 reefs that sit on the continental shelf. Nowadays this natural wonder has a place on both the UNESCO World Heritage List and Australia's National Heritage List. The marine park is home to over 1500 species of fish, 400 types of coral, 200 species of birds and around 30 species of whales and dolphins.

This book is a travel log and anchorage guide following our journey north from Townsville to Thursday Island (TI) during August and September and then the return journey from October and November.

This guide is not a definitive anchorage guide of the East Australian Coast but this compendium does contain up-to-date information on those anchorages between Townsville and Thursday Island we did use and it is an invaluable guide for planning your own voyage.

Our yacht, *First Contact*, is an Arends 33. Launched from the northern beaches of Sydney in January 1990, she's been to New Caledonia, Lord Howe Island, circumnavigated Tasmania and explored much of the east coast of Australia. This trip to the Torres Strait was a new milestone on her journey to explore Australia.

However you choose to do it, do not make the mistake of running too fast with the prevailing south-easterly winds, especially if you are only going northwards with an onward journey planned for Darwin.

Stop, explore and cherish your time weaving through World Heritage listed reefs and rainforest and be sure to go out of your way to meet the locals. Owning a yacht, after all, is about having an adventurous way to explore our fascinating world and connect with like-minded people as we go.

On every part of your journey, there is something different to see, explore or experience.

Prepare to leave the signs behind ...

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Your Guides...



Cameron has been sailing since the age of four but gave it up as a teenager for horses and motorbikes. It was only years later that he decided to wet his feet again, buying his first keel yacht *First Contact* in 2004.

As with many a keelboat, it really only ever got a good run once a year; cruising the Bass Strait islands here and there and visiting Refuge Cove on the east coast of Victoria's Wilson's Promontory.

In 2008 Cameron took *First Contact* on a 5 month cruise around Tasmania, living aboard for the first time. So immersive was the experience of natural beauty, self sufficiency and yachting camaraderie that Cameron began to look for an opportunity to make this a full-time pursuit.

That opportunity came by the way of a career change. Asked to temporarily Project Manage in Townsville, Cameron moved to the unofficial northern capital of Queensland in 2010. Later that year, Cameron threw in the southern capital city job for a permanent life in regional Queensland. Following Cyclone Yasi in 2011, *First Contact* arrived in Townsville where Cameron has lived aboard ever since. He is now retired and sails full time.



Colin has extensive sailing experience having crewed on several vessels on international passages. Colin's yacht *Hinemoa* is on the Australian Register of Historic Vessels. *Hinemoa* lives in Tasmania's Huon Valley.

Colin works as a marine electrician and divides his time between Queensland and Tasmania seasonally.

“Travel is glamorous only in retrospect.”

— Paul Theroux

WEATHER, MARINE RADIO AND INTERNET

In 2013 the Bureau of Meteorology changed the boundaries previously used for coastal weather forecasts. This book has been written to align with the regions used by the bureau.

From South to North they are:

Townsville Coast — Bowen northwards to Cardwell

Cairns Coast — Cardwell northwards to Cape Tribulation

Cooktown Coast — Cape Tribulation northwards to Cape Melville

Peninsula Coast — Cape Melville northwards to Escape River

Torres Strait — Sharp Point (Escape River) northwards, including the Torres Strait and westwards to Crab Island on the western coast of Cape York just south of Seisia.

Gulf Waters — Gulf of Carpentaria

Comprehensive marine forecasts are available free at <http://www.bom.gov.au/qld/forecasts>

Along the Townsville and Cairns coasts, VHF forecasts are easily obtained on a regular basis by monitoring VHF CH16 as both the Townsville Coast Guard and the Cairns Coast Guard broadcasts marine forecasts daily. Once you get north of Cooktown, however, VHF cannot be relied upon for communication or hearing forecasts. Your VHF radio will go very quiet from Cape Melville northwards until you approach Cape York.

The bureau broadcasts on HF radio via an automated computer to voice system four times a day which can be heard every four hours on 4426kHz and 16546kHz. We made it a point to always catch the 0700 transmissions as the sun was

low and the reception good. We found that later in the day, reception on our old fixed-frequency crystal HF set was impossible but modern sets may have better luck. All times are AEST, and since Queensland does not adhere to daylight savings, no alterations in time needs to be made.

North of Cooktown, 3G and 4G mobile internet is all but non-existent — the two exceptions are Cape Flattery and Lockhart River, both on the mainland. On Lizard Island, it is possible to get a weak signal by walking the Cook's Look trail up to the second rock ledge which we called "reception rock" to get mobile reception from Cape Flattery. The next time you will get any sort of mobile phone or internet reception is at Lockhart River if you stay within line of sight of the tower. Once you round the corner and go to Portland Roads, you will lose it. Locals at Portland Roads climb the hill to get reception.

North of Cairns it is wise to carry a Telstra SIM card for phone and internet services. Both Telstra and Optus services work on Thursday Island. These days more yachts are carrying satellite phones and satellite internet-connected devices. We did not but we met a few who did and they used it to get marine weather forecasts and use email.

Regional ABC Radio can be heard along the coast. By location, the strongest frequencies are detailed below:

- Townsville: 630 AM
- Innisfail: 630 AM
- Mission Beach 89.3 FM
- Dunk Island: 89.3 FM
- Tully: 95.5 FM
- Cairns: 801AM, 106.7 FM
- Cairns North: 95.5 FM
- Port Douglas: 639 AM
- Cooktown: 105.7 FM
- Lockhart River: 106.1 FM
- Thursday Island: 1062 AM

VMR COAST GUARDS & WATER POLICE

Volunteer Marine Rescue (VMR) Coast Guards provide emergency assistance to vessels needing help as well as maintaining a radio safety watch along the Queensland Coast on VHF and HF radio frequencies. You can log trip details with them and log on and off at the end of each leg.

Additionally, they provide weather reports on a schedule or on request during staffed hours which vary from site to site. They are listed below.

VMR 408 Coast Guard Townsville

0800–1700 Monday–Friday, 0700–1900 weekends and public holidays

VHF Channels 16, 22 & 67
HF Channels 4125 & 4483
07 4771 4831

VMR 407 Coast Guard Ingham

0800–1700 weekends and public holidays only

VHF Channels 16, 22 & 81
HF Channels 2182 & 4125
07 4777 8110

VMR 423 Coast Guard Cardwell

0800–1700 weekends and public holidays only

VHF Channels 16 & 82
07 4066 8792

VMR 412 Coast Guard Tully

0800–1700 weekends and public holidays only

VHF Channels 16 & 80
HF Channels 2182 & 2524
07 4066 9300

VMR 415 Coast Guard Innisfail

0800–1700 weekends and public holidays only

VHF Channels 16 & 21
HF Channels 2182 & 4125
07 4063 2396

VMR 409 Coast Guard Cairns

0900–1800 Monday–Friday, 0700–1800 weekends and public holidays

VHF Channels 16, 67 & 81
HF Channel 6215
07 4051 2192

Coast Guard Port Douglas

0900–1800 Sunday only

VHF Channels 16 & 81
HF Channel 2524
07 4099 5392

Coast Guard Cooktown

0600–1800 weekends and public holidays only

VHF Channels 16 & 21
07 4069 5655, mobile 0417 075 695

Coast Guard Cape York

Weekends and public holidays only

VHF Channels 16 & 82
07 4747 9000

Townsville Water Police

07 4760 7812

Cairns Water Police

07 4057 3577

Thursday Island Water Police

07 4069 1520

THERE BE WHALES!

Worldwide the whale watching tourist industry is estimated to generate more than \$1 billion a year. On your journey along the Queensland coast it is likely you will encounter humpback whales for free. It was only a few decades ago that the idea of seeing a humpback whale off the Queensland coast would have been unusual. Hunted to near extinction in the early 1960's, the population was estimated to be as few as 500 individuals. Fortunately things have changed and the whale population on the east coast is now estimated to be increasing by about 10 percent each year, with the population estimated to be in excess of 19,500 individuals.

While Hervey Bay is considered the whale watching capital of Australia, these mammals migrate up and down the east coast of Australia annually with July through to early October being the "high season" in North Queensland. The humpbacks come to the warm waters of the Great Barrier Reef to breed but make the 4500-kilometre migration south to the Antarctic before the start of the Australian summer.

The humpback whale is a baleen whale. Instead of teeth, a baleen whale has two 'combs' made up of about 330 long, stiff bristle-edged strands of keratin hanging from each upper side of its mouth. Combined, these baleen strands mesh together to form a sieve. When feeding, the whale swims into

a dense patch of krill or a school of small fish with its mouth wide open and then closes it, pushing the water out through the baleen with its tongue and trapping the food which is then swallowed. A baleen whale has a number of folds of skin beneath its mouth known as throat pleats. Humpback whales have 24 pleats. These folds expand to greatly enlarge the area of the whale's mouth when it is catching prey, allowing it to take in huge amounts of food at a time.

When you encounter a whale in your boat you have a special responsibility to give whales appropriate sea-room.

Approach distances are divided into a caution zone and a no approach zone.

The **Caution Zone** is a 300-metre radius around the whale. If an individual comes toward your boat so that the boat is within the caution zone, the boat must not operate at a speed more than 6 knots or at a speed that creates a wake.

The **No Approach Zone** is a 100-metre radius around the whale and 300 metres both directly in front of it and directly behind it. If a whale comes toward your boat so that the boat is within the no approach zone, you are required to stop the boat, turn the engines off, disengage the gears, or withdraw to an area outside the no approach zone

at a speed not more than 6 knots that does not create a wake. When sailing, slow the yacht down considerably and alter course so as not to pass ahead of any whale.

No more than three boats at any one time can be in the caution zone. If three boats are within 300 metres of a whale, you cannot approach and must remain more than 300 metres away.

If a marine mammal shows signs of disturbance or distress, a boat must withdraw beyond the caution zone at a speed that is not more than six knots so as to not create a wake.

Under no circumstances should you separate a calf from its mother or divide a group of whales.

Migaloo

Migaloo is a white humpback whale and is, therefore, a bit special. Migaloo is seen migrating

along the east coast most years. Sightings have seen him as far south as Tasmania and as far north as Cape Tribulation.

In 1998 and 2003 Migaloo was recorded singing and because of the nature of the song, scientists declared him a male humpback whale. In August 2003, when he was believed to be around 15 to 17 years of age, he was hit by a sail-boat off Townsville and now bears a scar arcing diagonally across the left side of his back halfway between his blow-hole and dorsal fin.

White whales are special so particular rules apply. Called **Special Management Declarations** this rule means boats and prohibited vessels cannot approach within 500 metres.

If you encounter an injured, sick or dead whale you are asked to report it to the RSPCA Queensland on 1300 264 625.

A GROUP OF HUMPBACK WHALES PLAY IN LITTLE PIONEER BAY

Orpheus Island (Photo: Cameron Burgess)

HUMPBACK WHALE

Orpheus Island (Photo: Cameron Burgess)

WRAPS/FLAT BREAD

Flat breads come in an amazing array of styles and flavours at local supermarkets. All of them are packaged in plastics which will outlive our existence on this planet. Once the product is consumed the plastic goes into the bin and from there is (hopefully) transported well away from the marine environment.

One way to reduce the amount of plastic in our oceans is to STOP consuming plastics in the first place. You can start with these flat breads - and when at anchor they are simple to whip up in an instant for quick lunches, or to accompany your home made hummus dip platter for sundowners!

MAKES 4

- 1 cup combination whole wheat flour and white flour
- 1 teaspoon yeast
- 1/4 teaspoon brown sugar
- A couple of twists of sea salt from your salt grinder, or a pinch of table salt.
- Water at 25 degrees, but not hotter than 30 degrees C. The amount needed depends on the dryness of the flour you are using. Feel your way, just do not put too much in right away. You can always add more. You cannot take it out. The mixture should form a supple, firm dough.
- Olive Oil or Coconut Oil

Put all the dry ingredients into a bowl, sift with a fork until well combined. Start slowly adding the water and mix vigorously with the fork, until the dough begins to bind up on the fork. Scrape off the fork with your fingers. Start bringing the mixture together until firm and supple. Knead for 5 minutes until elastic. Stand in a humid/warm place for 5 minutes. I use the container the finished breads will eventually go into.

Flour the working surface. Divide the mixture into four even lots. Roll out each into a very thin disc.

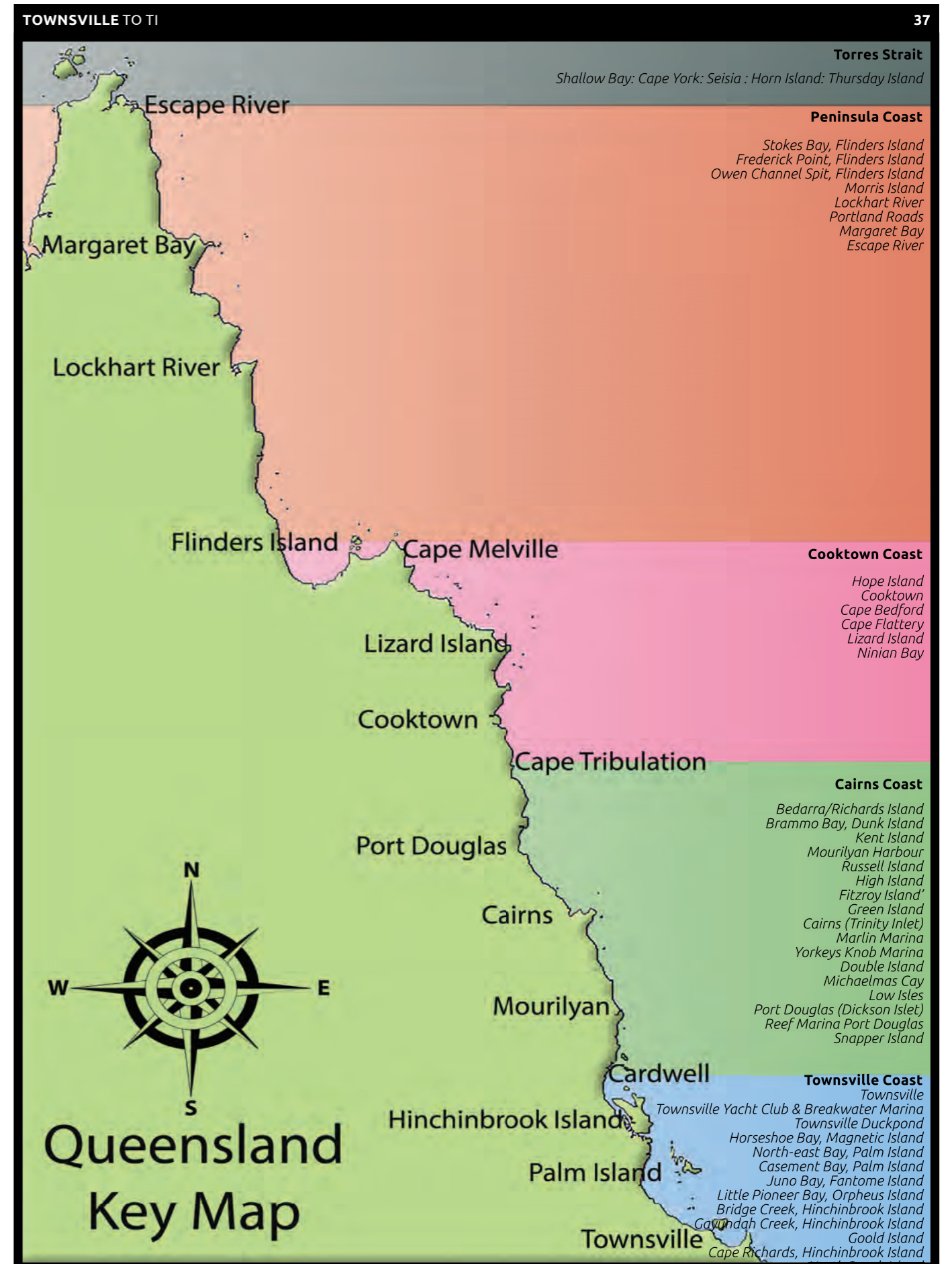
Drop the disc into a very hot, lightly oiled frying pan. Coconut oil tolerates higher cooking temperatures than olive oil. Cook on each side for a minute or two (you will know when they are done.)

Remove from pan and immediately place into a sealed container so they sweat. This keeps them supple so you can wrap them! I keep mine in reusable containers in the fridge once they have had a chance to sweat on the bench (sealed) for 10 minutes.

Use as desired, within three days (they never last that long!)

If you want them to be crisp-breads, leave them wrapped in a tea towel and use within 36 hours.

These are great to accompany a curry, or use the precooked base to make lunch-sized homemade pizzas with your favourite topping.



MAP SYMBOLS & ICONS

Maps & Navigation

- | | | | |
|--|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| | Cardinal Mark, Keep East | | Cardinal Mark, Keep North |
| | Cardinal Mark, Keep South | | Cardinal Mark, Keep West |
| | Lateral Port Marker | | Lateral Starboard Marker |
| | Suggested Anchoring Position | | Public Visitor's Mooring. You should use these! |
| | Private Mooring | | Commercial Mooring |
| | Lead Marks (Blue Lights) | | Lead Marks (Shapes) |
| | Lighthouse | | Isolated Danger |
| | Yellow Buoy, Special Marker | | Wreck |
| | Rock, bommie or underwater obstruction | ALL depths on maps are in metres (m) | |

Cautions

- | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------------|
| | Crocodiles | | Nesting Birds |
| | No landing. No humans on land. | | Alcohol restrictions apply |
| | No fires allowed | | Waves, over-falls or strong tidal flows |

Shore Facilities and Activities

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|--|-----------------|
| | Campsite | | Lookout |
| | Marina and described facilities | | Meals available |

- | | | | |
|--|--------------------|--|-------------------|
| | Fuel | | Fresh Water |
| | Shore toilets | | Showers |
| | Medical Facilities | | Museum |
| | Shore phone | | Picnic facilities |
| | Shops | | Walking/Hiking |

MAP LEGEND

- | | | | |
|--|----------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | Land (always dry) | | Water Depth (Shallow. Caution. Depths are indicative only and may not be adequate for your vessel.) |
| | Structure (building, wharf, hut, etc.) | | Water Depth (Shoaling water. Refer to official hydrographic charts for safe navigation.) |
| | Rocky shoreline | | Water Depth (deep but remain aware of rocks and reefs shown on official hydrographic charts.) |
| | Mud (dries at times) | | Coral/Bommies (may dry, but mostly underwater - do not anchor on coral) |
| | Trees, vegetation or mangroves | | Sand, sand spits and beaches |
| | Walking track | | Suggested navigation paths/routes |

WHERE YOU SEE THIS ON MAPS

+ = Heightened Risk of Encounter



Townsville Coast



LITTLE PIONEER BAY

Orpheus Island, Great Palm Group



- 1  **18° 35' 44" S**
146° 29' 09" E
WGS84 Datum (ddd° mm' ss")
- 2  **18° 35' 59" S**
146° 29' 20" E
WGS84 Datum (ddd° mm' ss")

Little Pioneer Bay is a popular destination, not only because it is a pretty bay, but because it is a good day's sail from Townsville being just over 45 nautical miles from the port's channel markers.

Orpheus Island, known as Goolboddi Island, is at the northern end of the Great Palm Group of islands. The Manbarra Aboriginal people are the traditional owners.

Approach and Anchoring

There are four public mooring buoys available to be picked up in Little Pioneer Bay. Three are located in close proximity to position 1 on the northern shore of the bay, while a single buoy is located at 2 along the southern shore. This buoy offers better protection from the south-easterly winds, although the others are fine in moderate conditions.

If you miss out on a buoy on arrival, most yachts anchor in 6 to 8 metres of water seaward of the northern cluster of buoys. The bottom there is sand and dead coral, but beware the fringing reef and associated bommies on the northern shore. At dusk, westerly katabatic winds from the mainland can blow into this bay with some force for short periods of time, so ensure you are secure and have enough swinging room.

Go ashore using a rising tide to clear the reef and ensure you have enough water to get back to your boat without having to wait, or worse, carry your dinghy across the extensive drying coral reef. Ashore there are camping facilities, a table, and toilet. A very short walk up the path leads to ruins of the old sheep station house and beyond that, follow the path (sometimes unclear due to vegetation growth) through the rainforest and up over the hill to the top of a cliff overlooking the eastern shoreline of Orpheus Island. From there, commanding views of the reef and the greater Palm Group of islands to the south can be enjoyed.

In October 2012 we were visited by four migrating humpback whales while stationary on the southern buoy. The whales played alarmingly close to the yacht for about 45 minutes.



National Park



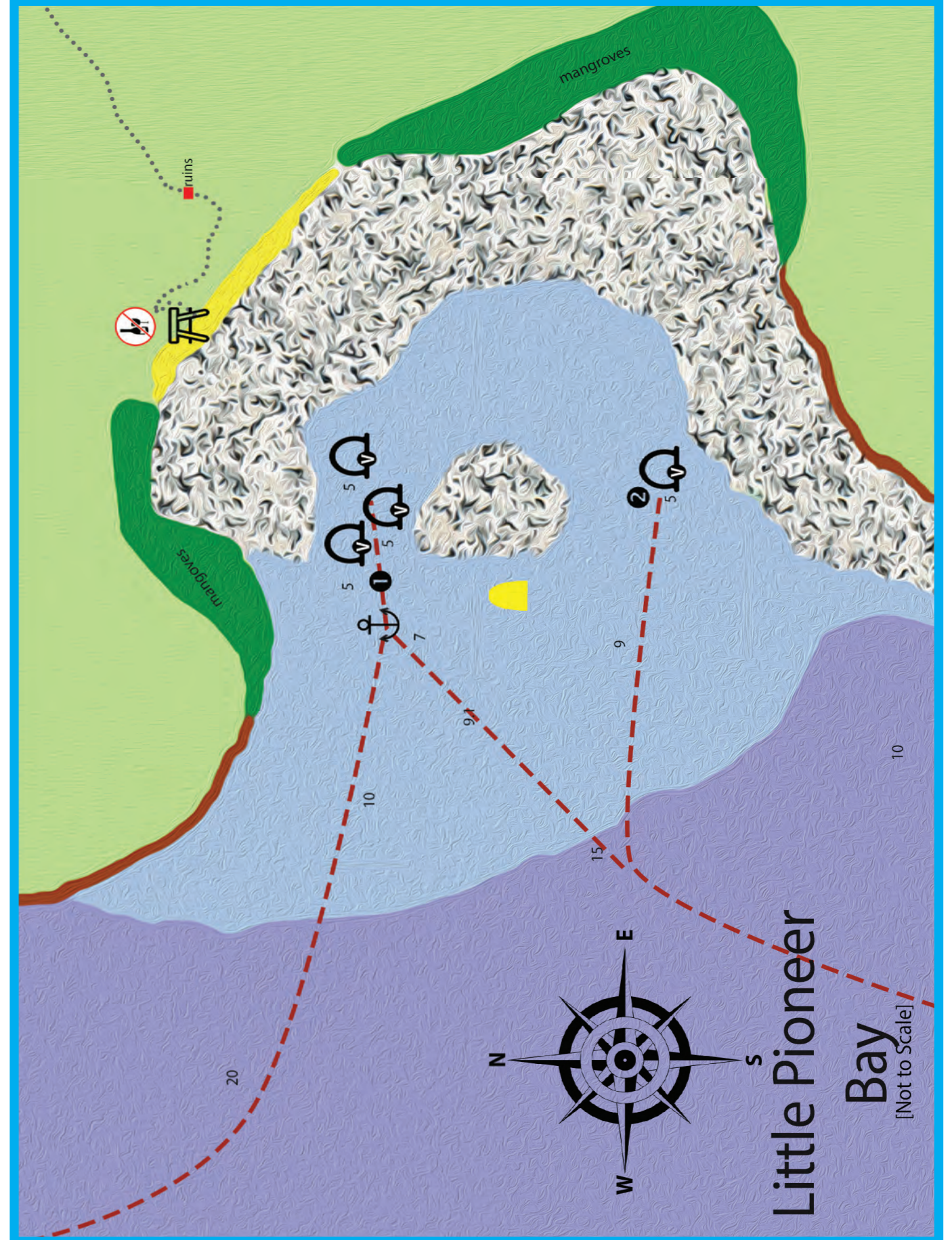
Croc Country



There be whales...

A GROUP OF HUMPBACK WHALES PLAY IN LITTLE PIONEER BAY

Orpheus Island (Photo: Cameron Burgess)



Cairns Coast



SNAPPER ISLAND

Hope Islands National Park



16° 17' 32" S
145° 29' 17" E
WGS84 Datum (ddd° mm' ss")

Snapper Island lies 11 nautical miles north-east of Port Douglas and 2 nautical miles east of the mouth of the Daintree River. The island is part of the traditional sea country of the Kuku Yalanji people. This high continental island is popular for camping and bird watching as the lush forests and mangroves support a variety of bird species.

Snapper Island is a great place to stay the night if you've just left Port Douglas and need to seek some solitude before venturing further.

Approach and Anchoring

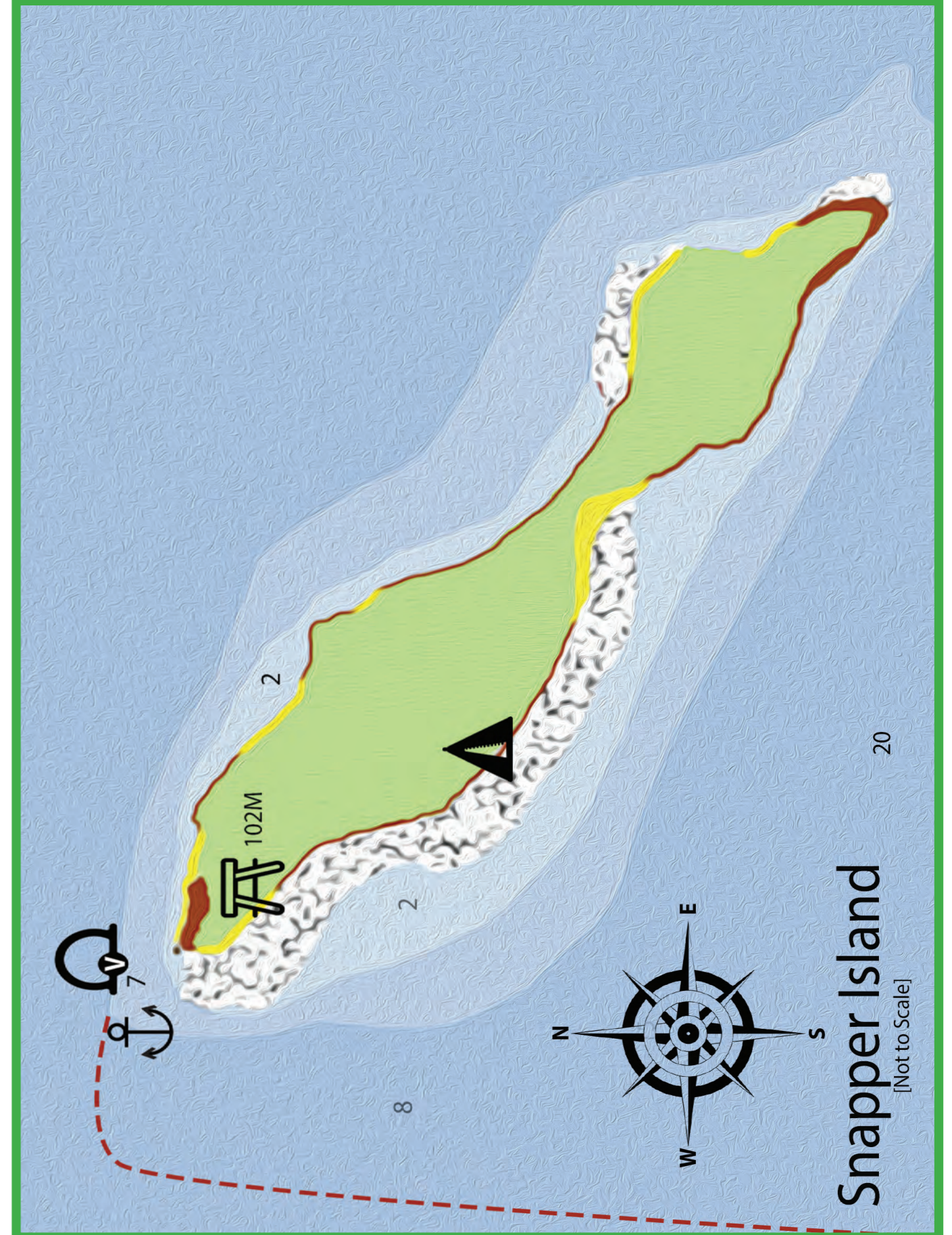
There is a single blue public mooring buoy available to be picked up for monohulls up to 25 metres and multihulls up to 22 metres. You are allowed to stay the night if the buoy was picked up after 3:00 pm otherwise a 4-hour limit applies.

Snapper Island is a popular tourism and sea kayaking destination. The campsite on the north-eastern side of the island gets regular use during the dry season. Going ashore is straightforward; land your dinghy on the coral beach just off the mooring.

A short track leads from the day use area on the north-west point over a rocky ridge to the northern side of the island. You can walk the beaches around the perimeter of the island, however, access to the interior of the island is not encouraged as the fragile forest is easily damaged.

Swimming or paddling off the boat or from the shore is not advised as this is very much crocodile country. The mouth of the Daintree River is less than 2 nautical miles away so even if you cannot see them you can be sure there are salties around.

In the early 1900s, a lime kiln was set up on the island which was fired by wood from the Daintree. It is thought bêche-de-mer processing may have been undertaken here and there is evidence of remains of an early Chinese market garden on the island with the remains of the watercourse stonework still visible today.



Cooktown Coast



COOKTOWN

Mainland Australia



 15° 27' 45" S
145° 14' 42" E
WGS84 Datum (ddd° mm' ss")

Cooktown lies 22 nautical miles north of Hope Island and 15 miles south of Cape Bedford.

Approach and Anchoring

In our experience, Cooktown is best visited by car. Cooktown is not an active commercial port anymore and depths in its channels upstream of the swing basin markers are not maintained nor anywhere near accurately marked. Once upon a time there were lead markers that indicated a clear path — when we visited they were still in place and we followed them and ran aground. The lesson: make sure you enter Cooktown with good light and on a three quarter rising tide, still rising, so if you do hit turf you have a chance of floating off shortly thereafter. Additionally, the sandbanks beyond the swing basin shift annually with wet season rain events. Seeking local knowledge beforehand is wise. The chart opposite shows our track in 2014 and our yacht draws 1.49 metres. We had to pick our way up the river keeping a close eye on the chart and depth sounder. You can anchor where indicated on the map, or with a high tide, continue upstream and around the first bend where a 2-metre patch on the charts can be found.

The further you anchor away from the township the more inconvenient it is to get ashore. When the wind blows (which it often does, and for days) staying dry in a dinghy can be a real challenge. Additionally, great care should be exercised, especially at night, since this river is home to some very



35 knots, 6 days, snubber broken

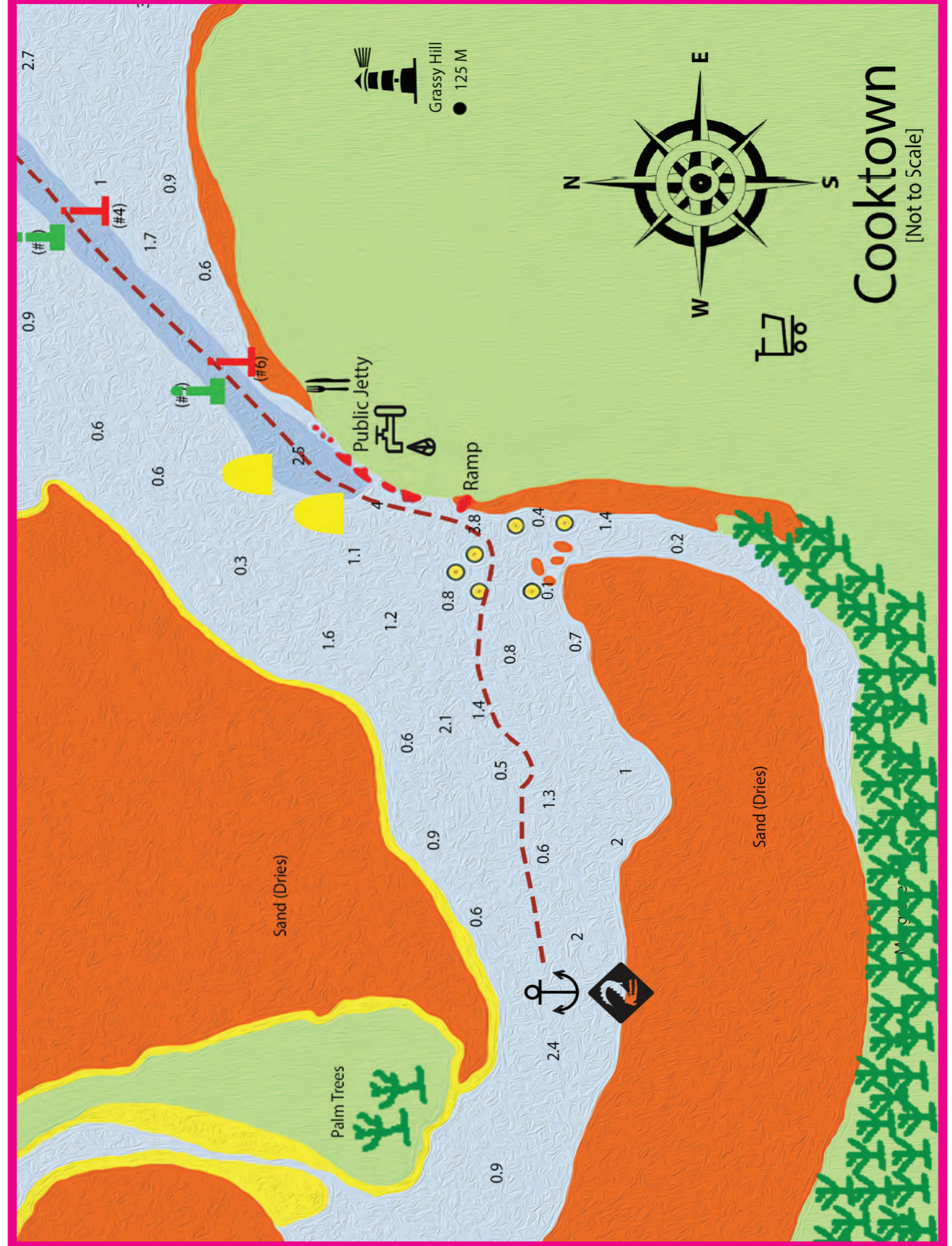


Aground at Cooktown



At anchor, Cooktown

35+ KNOTS OF WIND AGAINST TIDE
Cooktown, Endeavour River (Photo: Cameron Burgess)



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CRUISING INSIDE AUSTRALIA'S NORTHERN GREAT BARRIER REEF

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