



The Pandozer

A SNIPPET

Before I leave Thursday Island tomorrow (awesome spot), I'm going to the TI Primary School to hand over the blue PVC tube I've carried since Ulladulla. If you can remember I lost the original school gift in Bass Strait many moon ago. Whichever way you roll it over it's been for a bumpy ride. So bumpy in fact that it rattles now. I don't think it used to rattle. It's the thought that counts.

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Thursday Island

Welcome to the last installment of what has been a grand old journey up the coast. I'd love to be able to tell you of the intense relief or joy or whatever it is that is supposed to flow at the completion of such a trip, but I can't. It was a matter-of-fact ending. Cars drove along the road. A girl and a woman ate lunch in the park. The wind whipped at loose clothing, hair and hatch covers. I sat on the edge of the Hope and Grace

for a moment but no more than that. It was a time to smile but not yelp. I asked the woman if she could take a final photo but she hadn't eaten breakfast and prompted the girl to do the honours. It really was windy.

I bounced over the road to the motel, bouncing seemed appropriate. The receptionist noted that I looked 'buggered'. I suggested 'rugged'. She was uncon-

vinced. I portaged everything over, found a home near the gas cylinders for the boat, had a shower and then sat down. It didn't feel much like an ending at all. Maybe it wasn't then. Or if it was an ending, perhaps it was just a little one. That felt more like it, a happy, bouncy little ending.

To very briefly repeat what I expressed in the final entry of the blog—thankyou.

Day to Day

169. Cooktown R&R
170. Cooktown to Cape Bedford, 39km
171. Cape Bedford to Cape Flattery, 34km
172. Cape Flattery to Turtle Group island, 29km
173. Turtle Group island to Red Point, 49km
174. Red Point to Ninian Bay, 30km
175. Ninian Bay to Cape Melville, 27km
176. Cape Melville to Stanley Island, 30km
177. Stanley Island to Stainer Island, 49km
178. Stainer Island to Fife Island, 36km
179. Fife Island to Cape Sidmouth, 29km
180. Cape Sidmouth to First Red Rocky Point, 40km
181. First Red Rocky Point to Cape Direction, 22km
182. Cape Direction to Restoration Island, 30km
183. Restoration Island to near Fair Cape, 31km
184. Near Fair Cape to Gore Island (Cape Grenville), 45km
185. Gore Island to Round Point (Shelburne Bay), 20km
186. Round Point to Captain Billy Landing, 39km
187. Captain Billy Landing to Orford Ness, 39km
188. Orford Ness to Albany Island, 70km
189. Albany Island to Punsand Bay, 12km
190. Punsand Bay to Thursday Island, 35km

Tern

A tern is a bird. It's not a bird I've grown overly attached to over the last six months. Whales I grew to like a lot, dolphins I already quite respected, and the white-bellied sea eagle, well, that's a cool bird. But the tern, I don't know, there's just nothing there. At least there wasn't.

Hordes of terns have been migrating south recently. Either that or they've been flying foolishly into a gale for no good reason. Hundreds of them flock and fish along the way creating a stupendous flurry of wings and beaks. Often they come past in dribs and drabs, each fighting a personal war against what must be a soul shattering headwind. But birds are good like that, they don't complain about the wind. If it even turns ten degrees off south-east I get a grumble up. Not the terns though, wheedle and swoop, speedle and floop, along they go.

On the day my kinship with terns

turned so to speak, it was even windier than a typically windy day. Instead of 20-25 knots it must have been nudging 30 or more knots. That means water is starting to fly about with disturbing violence and you hope like diggery that the bilge pump is in contact with the battery terminals, just in case. Into my vision came a little tern. Not in the distance, dancing on the breeze, but right in front of me so that I had to duck to avoid it smacking me in the face. "What are you *doing* tern? Get a grip." It came back in front and did the most amazing thing I have seen for the entire journey. It landed ever so gently, wings out but crooked, onto the sprayskirt in front of me. I rested the paddle against my belly and let my astonishment be known to my new compatriot with a laugh. It wasn't flying away. After some time I noticed several green ants latched on around its eyes and feet. Obviously it had been in for a feed or had inadver-

tently stepped on a nest. Either way it couldn't be much chop having them clinging to your eyeballs. I reached out and put my hand over its wings to close them. Still didn't fly away. Came a few steps closer in fact. I was starting to like terns. The green ants were dead but still had their docile little nippers buried in. Green ants aren't particularly nasty—a sensation more than a bite. When they strayed into the tent I'd eat them as their green bums have a delicious lemon sherbet flavour.

The tern twisted its head (or maybe I did?) and allowed me to finish the job. With spongy clumsy hands it wasn't at all delicate. Still didn't fly away. I removed my hand from its wings and it flew to the bow where it sat on the rope. I had to keep paddling as it was a long day only half done. The spray was too much and it was forced back to the sky. Terns are excellent.

**"Time flies like
an arrow. Fruit
flies like a
banana."**

Groucho Marx

Science Week Winner

Winning Entry

"The winner would depend on how warm the day was. If it was warm then the rock one would win because the water one would evaporate. If it was rainy then the water one would grow. But if it was cloudy the water one would win because it could find water and drink it then grow. Also after a long time rock wears away in water." Vincent (West Ulverstone Primary, Gr.4)

Close But No Cigar

"Rock because the crocodile made of water will just fall apart. Also water because every time the rock gashes the water open it just drips a bit whereas the rock will crack open." Alex (Curie-ous Kids, Hobart)

Dishonourable Mention

The rock-croc wins, here's why. The water croc is made of pure H₂O, while the rock-croc is made of pure

CaCO₃, aka limestone. As the fight starts things are looking bad for the big rock-croc, water-croc wraps him in a sloppy embrace and straight away rock-croc starts dissolving. He's disappearing almost too quickly to fight back. His teeth fall out and his eyes dissolve. Then a strange thing happens, the referee steps in, stops the fight and awards it to the quickly disappearing rock-croc. Everyone in the crowd who backed the water-croc wants to know why. The official verdict was that the water-croc ceased to exist after absorbing parts of the rock-croc and turning into a weak solution of calcium carbonate. The rock-croc never fought again. James Hews

It turns out that James Hews is none other than James Hughes, my very naughty and completely ineligible brother. Not only is he the equivalent of about grade 24, but he has gone over the word limit. Nice try mister.

Congratulations to Vincent who scoops the book prize and indeed to all the thoughtful entries that came in. If science has anything to do with keeping an open mind, and I think it does, then it's in safe hands with our students of today. Well done.

The Burning Question

There is a great room filled with people sitting around its edges. Facing each of them is a canvas held aloft by an easel. In one hand is a brush and the other a palette smeared with paint. Each wall of the room has an opening to another such room. And again and again and again. There are no ceilings but there are doors. All the doors are different, some swing like a saloon's and other are bolted shut with reinforced steel. Within each room the people chatter amongst their neighbours and wander around freely, sometimes they poke a head through to the next room or even further if they can. They love poking around but most of their energies remain concentrated on the brush and the palette, dipping it, mixing it and sloshing it onto the canvas. Some in the room squeal with delight when they execute a striking form with bold colours. Depending on how loud the squeak is seems to determine how many others come for a look. Others prefer to work away quietly on their painting though their work is of no lesser quality.

This is how I should answer people when they ask "BUT WHY???". We each sit in front of the portrait of our life, defining the person that we are. The paints on the palette are our attributes. We all have very similar colours but the paints only exist in our minds, it is the brush that transforms them into reality. The brush is the action that gathers up and mixes our ideas of self together and spreads them

onto the canvas. It is the brush, the action, that defines who we are. Until it is on that canvas, until it is transformed from thought into deed, no-one else can see it. It is as invisible and unreachable as the blinding light of midnight. The people in our room, the ones closest to us, are our families and friends. Most of our artistic labours are just for them, our foundation network, but sometimes we wander to the next room for a look, or we squeak loud enough that others come into our own room and see what we've produced. The actions are everything from how we greet a stranger in the street or handle the dog digging up the garden to how we speak to our parents and treat our own bodies. Whether we like it not our actions will be seen, and what is seen can be judged. Maybe in a small and forgettable way and maybe in a large and indelible fashion. Many can be painted over, many will be forgotten with time. Our actions really do count, at least, as much as anything counts in the end.

So the paintings are there to be seen, hanging around the walls of the world. Each person that steps up for a look at yours will see something different. Paintings are like that, always open to blasted, wonderful interpretation. The squiggle you scrawled in the corner, the one you thought expressed your honesty and openness, not to everyone's eyes. Some thought it evasive and shallow. Others detected arrogance. So be it, listen a little but paint on, life's too short to be wor-

rying about every faulty brush-stroke. And there are many in all of our portraits.

And what of this kayak journey? I simply loaded up the brush with a few different colours, held it up for a brief thought and then plunged it across my canvas. In the process I squeaked more than usual. Not gifted in the real world of painting or creating with traditional expressions, I chose, and have chosen for a long time now, the medium of challenging travel. In this format I've found a deeply satisfying way to physically express who I am. This journey required no great skill, no particular strength and less planning than you might imagine. It was always going to be no more than art class for a plodder.

Through persistence (stubbornness) and commitment (narrowness) it will at best be an example of an action that can carry more than those simple ideas. If it did, good, if it didn't, oh well, life goes on. On a personal level I can tell you that the last six months have been happy, not outlandish happy, just simple happy. The way to tell if a person is living in a way that accords with their own idea of themselves (whether you agree with it or not) is to see if they are simple happy. I have been living in many but not all the ways that closely aligns to an idea of myself.

If adventure is art and art is self expression, then this was a good adventure.

That's why.

Restoration Island

Restoration Island is about two thirds up the Cape if you are starting, as I did for the final hurrah, in Cooktown. A few hundred meters over the reef and a sandy strait the mainland at Chilli Beach. It used to be an alternative lifestyler place but they've all moved out and Lockhart River locals use it as a weekender now.

Dave Glasheen lives on Restoration Island and greeted my arrival on his beach like an old friend. He thought I was someone else. Back in Cooktown I had learnt the story of another kayaker, Anthony Malloch, who had started in Brisbane and was intending to go through to Thursday Island. His plans changed when he fell in love and pulled the pin. When Dave suggested that we open the box it took me a moment to put the pieces together. Anthony had sent a food drop ahead and

Dave thought I was this sender. I did as I had to and told Dave of the unfortunate mix-up, but suggested that we open the box anyway. After all, the ants were into it and it'd be no good to anyone soon. Dave thought this was a splendid idea. Our eyes glistened with anticipation. I might have even rubbed my hands together? It didn't disappoint. Vacuum packed rations of beef jerky and lollies, twenty freeze dried meals, sticks of salami, two casks of wine, chocolate, shortbread, the list goes on and on. I pilfered a bit but left most with Dave. By then I was quite content with porridge and sultanas. The looking was the best part. "A bit like going through someone's wardrobe isn't Dave!" He agreed. We had no regrets.

"Art is the desire of a man to express himself, to record the reactions of his personality to the world he lives in."

Amy Lowell

(1874 - 1925)

COMING HOME

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It's been an adventure in itself just to organise myself and the kayak to get off Thursday Island. I'm taking the plane from nearby Horn Island and connected through to Sydney. The Hope and Grace is going back on the water with the freight service back to Cairns, from there she will be picked up and flown back to Tasmania. The complication has been around Culture Week celebrations and end of school term up here. "All booked out" is a phrase that can have many meanings. Anyway I won't be back in Tassie until about the 10th November with delays in Sydney, Melbourne and maybe Adelaide. However, I'm keen to catch up with the schools and students that have been part of the journey when I return. If teachers out there can express an interest before the end of October I'll be able to hatch a plan. Just email me.

Face to Face With Water Croc

There are two modes of thinking when on the water. You either think you are fully aware of your surroundings and in control of the situation or you know that you are not. Usually I lapse into the first mode of thought until something reminds me that the second way of thinking is actually the reality.

The manta-ray leapt out of the water like a giant frying pan made of jelly and landed with a splat. I was startled. A reminder. The morning had already been more anxious than usual as I shoved off from Captain Billy Landing in strong wind and sloppy brown waves. The turtle had lain crushed no more than thirty meters up the beach, edging up the beach with the rising tide. The day before I had watched that lifeless turtle head south clamped firmly in the jaws of a crocodile. Less than ten meters away it swam against the tide and wind, sometimes diving to swim or walk along the bottom. Progress was painfully slow. "Turn around crocodile, go north." I urged to no avail. "Come in and eat your turtle then, rest a while and then go south when the tide turns." No reaction, it seemed determined to bash along however slowly.

What of the abandoned turtle next morning then? Had it finally given up after dark and continued without the lead weight between its teeth? Or was it lurking nearby, waiting for a pig to come and investigate, waiting for a meatier meal? These were my thoughts as I lined up each wave. Stay in the boat. Stay in the boat. I always felt safe wrapped up in the five meters of orange polyethylene. No crocodile would take on such a large shadow without a few second thoughts...., surely. In a river I could understand some aggro, my patch— get out sort of stuff, but not in the ocean. The ocean was for all of us. A hunting

ground, yes, but plenty to share around.

A week earlier I'd watched from atop a hill as a crocodile cohabited a calm bay behind a point with numerous sharks coming and going. Each I suppose had a feed and a look around. No need to fight amongst the big kahunas. In the kayak, in my mind, I was a big kahuna. Stay in the boat.

Paddling along later the edge of anxiety was long gone. I neared the beach at Orford Ness where I planned to stop. The wind waves on open water were up to two meters but where they reached the shallow sand bar they were poor imitations. Just a trickle really, should I even pull the rudder or will I surf through to the calmer waters and do it then? I will, no I won't, yes, I should... The wave steepened and drove me across at an angle as I deliberated. Then I was upside down. A reminder.

Dormant panic, anxiety fully realised, hit me like a bullet. I scrambled for my hat and sunglasses which had been knocked off. Bigger 'em, I'm getting back in the boat right now. It was chest deep as I rolled the boat upright and dived on top. We rolled back over together disgracefully. That's what panic does. Unfortunately it did not serve to compose me but only made my panic worse. Why didn't I learn to bloody-well Eskimo roll? My legs were kicking about in the murky water and I could feel every exposed centimeter of them. Thirty meters to shore, too far. Stop and think. NO, don't stop and think, get my legs out of the murky water. NOW. So I dived back on top and somehow fell into the cockpit. There were probably no crocodile within coo-ee anyway. Even if there was it would probably just have sat back and laughed at my antics. On the beach I had a laugh myself.