

The Boomerang 20, an Australian Classic Yacht and the Shaping of Modern
Ireland
(Cruising the Coral Sea, Queensland, 1990-91)

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Interlude on cruise, Magnetic Island

The Boomerang 20 is a 20 foot Australian trailer-sailer which was designed by Eric Maizey in the late 1960s to sail and race on Port Philip Bay, Melbourne, Australia. She quickly developed a reputation for excellent sailing qualities and bullet proof design. Many hundreds were built and the design became one of the all-time bestseller of trailer-sailers. The concept of a trailer-sailer is very attractive. A yacht you can keep in the back yard and put to sea only as and when required. A great concept but the twist is always stability - achieving enough ballast down below but still keeping it light enough to tow behind the family car. Many have tried but then came the Boomerang 20. The manufacturers hired a crane & arranged a tilt test. With keel fully retracted, main and jib set she was tilted until mast and sails were fully immersed. Upon release she self-righted without hesitation. The legend was born. Rumour spread that she could cross oceans.

Sandra & I picked up our Boomerang 20, *Interlude*, in Brisbane Queensland, in September 1990. She was our first yacht and her name fitted our itinerary at the time. Newly qualified to the medical profession, we had taken a sideways step from the career path, for an extended working holiday adventure in the Antipodes. We had her transported to Mackay, East Queensland, where we were based and set about exploring the Coral Sea and Great Barrier Reef coast. This section of coast easily offers the finest cruising ground in Australia. The climate is tropical and a myriad of coral islands, inhabited and uninhabited, lie just offshore. The Cumberland Islands (more commonly known as The Whitsunday's) are a chain of coral islands extending for over a 100 magic miles along the Queensland coast. They lie roughly between the towns of Mackay and Bowen and are fringed to the east by the Great Barrier Reef. Mackay sits at their southern end and Brampton Island was one of the closest to the town. At 18 nautical miles distance she was a short sail and offered a good

anchorage with a welcoming resort. Life in the tropics was hot and the sunshine relentless. A cold beer and good tucker in the resort at the end of a day's sailing was most welcome.

Emboldened after a couple of weekend sorties to Brampton, we set off through the Whitsundays proper in December. *Interlude* was launched in Mackay and we spent a very pleasant week sailing northwards through the group. We retrieved her at the jolly anchorage of Airlie Beach. Our cruise took us through the more remote isles that are denied to the charter boats of the area. *Interlude* proved a capable boat and up to the challenge of exceptionally high tidal ranges characteristic of the area (up to 6m metres) with their attendant currents, over-falls and choppy seas with wind against tide.

In the New Year we fancied a change and relocated further north to Townsville. Magnetic Island -named by Captain Cook after an unexplained deviation in HMS Endeavour's compass while he was passing- became our regular haunt. By June the humid tropical conditions were beginning to get to us and we decided to head south to more temperate climate. But not before one final blast on the Coral coast.

On 15 June 1991 we set off to explore the Palm Isles. This group lie 30 mile northwest of Townsville and stretch for 20 miles north and south. Great Palm Island is the largest of the group and supports a major Aboriginal community. *Interlude* was launched north of the isles at Dungeness, near the huge sugar cane wharf of Lucinda and we set off across the mud flats at the south end of Hinchinbrook Channel. At high water, pilotage posed no difficulty and we steered a direct course for Pioneer Bay on the western side of Orpheus Island. We anchored for the evening but didn't venture ashore. Orpheus is a resort island where high end celebrities seek quietude and escape from attention. Casual visitors were not encouraged.

Early winter in Capricorn was mild with clear skies and light breezes. The area is remote, self-sufficiency is required and we did not encounter any other cruisers on our trip. The following evening we anchored in Casement Bay Great Palm Island and found a welcome ashore in the Aboriginal community.



Palm Island Queensland

Our return to Hinchinbrook channel in the late afternoon on the Mon 17 June was, in contrast to our departure, after the half tide and on the ebb. The narrow channel through the mud flats to the slipway at Dungeness was poorly marked and we soon found ourselves

running out of water. *Interlude* with keel and rudder retracted could float in less than a foot. But even that was rapidly disappearing below us. It was 5pm and we were aground about 1 cable from the shore. Daylight hours are short in the Tropical winter. Twilight is brief and with no settlements nearby, darkness would be complete. Warning signs were prominent - beware salt water crocodiles!!! The "saltie" is a fearsome predator and needs to be treated with the greatest respect. I had watched video footage of them leaping 6 feet or more in the air from a stationary start below the water. Our little vessel didn't provide much freeboard so we would not be dining on the afterdeck for supper. No evening stroll either. After laying fore & aft anchors, Sandra and I retreated indoors for the evening.

Below in the cabin, there were bigger problems to contend with. Our return to shore coincided with a number of significant events. One was the eminent arrival of a long haul flight from United Kingdom into Cairns and the other was an early stage of cross party peace talks in Northern Ireland. These were lat to become known as the "Brooke-Mayhew" talks. Sandra's younger brother Daniel had just finished his A-levels and was on his to join us on the flight. Aground and waiting for the tide we were going to be considerably overdue for our rendezvous in Cairns, a drive of 4 hours away. The mobile phone was still an aspiration, so we made contact with volunteer coastguard in Ingram via marine radio and asked them to relay details of our predicament back home. Duly done, this required an interruption of the NI peace talks where my intended father-in-law was engaged as a government participant. He was required to excuse himself from the talks on several occasions to deal with the Australian crisis. Thus the Boomerang 20 made her impact on the political life of a nation.

The tide turned, *Interlude* re-floated in the late evening and we made our rendezvous at Cairns somewhat behind schedule. After a spell in Melbourne, Victoria, our southern interlude came to an end. Our Boomerang 20, *Interlude* was sold, Sandra and I returned to Ireland and we got married. The Brooke-Mayhew talks did not have such a happy ending and subsequently wound up in late 1992 without significant agreement. However in the wake of their demise emerged the Hume-Adams initiative and the beginnings of a fledgling Peace Process, which was bring about the end of our Troubles and has shaped the political landscape we have today.

Historians may long debate the role of the Boomerang 20 in shaping the modern Ireland. She may never be recognised as a peacemaker but there is no doubt that she was a sturdy sea boat and an Australian classic. I cannot confirm if a Boomerang 20 has ever crossed an ocean but I have no doubt she had the capability.

Interlude, Boomerang 20, fondly remembered.

Paul McSorley



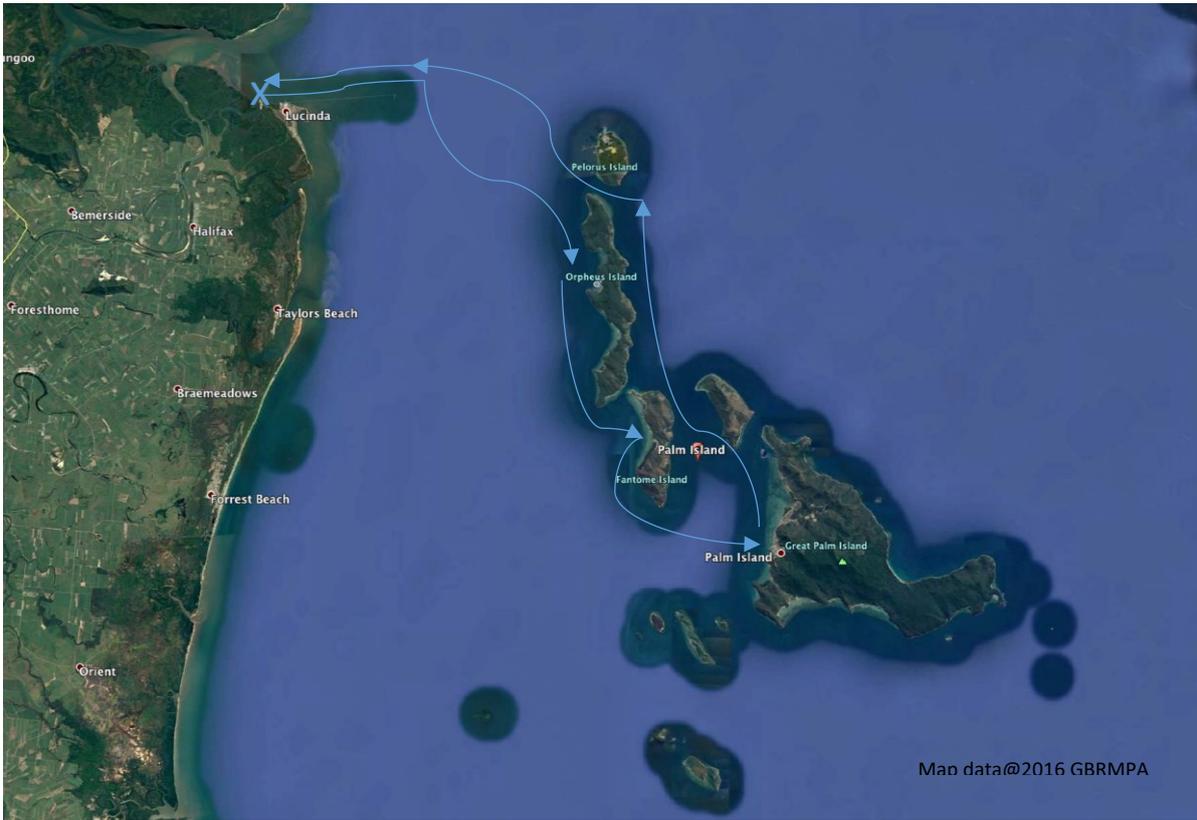
Spinnaker run to Townsville



Aground Hinchinbrook Channel, Queensland



Ongoing maintenance, Brampton Island



Palm Isles Route 15-17 Jun 1991 (X =