

CYCLONE LARRY SPECIAL EDITION



The paper that can't be bought! **FREE!**

Within Australia

The Coastal Passage

Mourilyan



Cyclone Larry

by Bob Norson

Come with me north as I battle my way to Innisfail to deliver needed supplies to friends and check to see who did OK and sadly, who didn't.

This is a non-commercial edition put together to share my experience and to maybe fill some gaps left by mainstream media that focus's less on the boating community.

It's not too late to help. Innisfail and surrounding areas and ports like Mourilyan are so badly damaged it may take years to rebuild the floating and land based homes.

This edition will be up-dated as new material arrives..



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Cardwell





The Long Wait at Cardwell... frustration, misinformation and bad tempers...

The Cardwell Drama... or, No Good deed Goes Unpunished!

Part 1..

I was in Bundaberg getting web lessons from Sam on *Priority 1* when I got the call from Kay. The 'low' she had been watching with suspicion had turned into a cyclone and was advancing at knots toward our part of the coast.

I wrapped up business in B'burg and drove straight through to Mackay. It was windy and dark when I got in. I got on Marinanet right away to look at the BOM cyclone threat map and projected path and the news wasn't good. They projected the storm to head right to the Whitsundays. I grabbed some sleep that night and in the morning started weaving lines all over the place.

WhiteBird was looking like the victim of a giant spider from Mars. Just as I was getting done, Eric of *Illwilani* shouted over the wind that the latest news was that the cyclone had gone north and we were OK. Turned out he was right of course but nonetheless I was keen to get back to Bowen where Kay was working alone to prepare our building there for wind and flood. As it turned out my timing was perfect, that is Kay was just finishing up as I drove in and it was a big job. Besides all the gear that she had gotten off the floor and stacked up inside, the back lot of our large commercial building had been littered with building supplies including a stack of roofing tin. We have some neighbours that probably deserve to have a few missiles chucked their way but.....

We went inside and got on the web to check the course of the storm again, hoping, wishing Larry to go north and away from us. I had this dream in mind that the rotten thing would dwindle to a gale and roll across some deserted beach between wop wop and no where. So it was with horror and guilt that we watched the computer screen track this growing monster as it homed in on Innisfail. Be careful what you wish for.....

Very good friends, John and Dot Blair were currently on Thursday Island, John skippers a pilot boat there. They had bought a house in Innisfail a while

back and their daughter and family had moved in recently. There was also a daughter who is a school teacher there with her flock of kids and sister and family. We regarded all of them as extended family, the Blair's couldn't leave TI and I could. Besides, it's just what you do. I have no trust for the charity industry and less for government to get help to people without serious "dilution of funds" and unconscionable delay. Besides, it's just what you do isn't it? I think so because later while stuck in Cardwell I saw a several other personal vehicles loaded with gear as well and I believe the personal shipments made a lot of difference to many in the storm torn area. I was also quite concerned for the boating community in Innisfail and neighbouring ports, particularly Mourilyan.

OK... generators, chain saw, tarps, drinking water, gas bottles, jerry cans of fuel, and more. I made a good deal with a local hardware store for big gennys to go with the one I had and a new chain saw. Townsville was already running short of stuff I heard. Kay emptied most of Silly Solly's for tarps, the big ones.

I chucked it all in the van and took the punt to head north even though the radio said the road was out. As I was passing Townville the ABC announced the road was open.. a win! But as I neared Ingham it began to rain. I was an hour too late. They slammed the door on me at Cardwell.

The rain that had started when I was in Ingham was coming down even harder up north where the damage was and where the low places in the road were. The section of the main hwy between Cardwell and Innisfail had long been a matter of contention as northerners were often cut off from the rest of the state and yet the government had ignored the complaints for years and now it was really bad... it was no longer mere inconvenience.

As I approached the road block to check the action and get the official word, I saw on either side of the road, huge generators behind large

tow trucks.. At least I didn't feel picked on at that point. There was nothing to do but find accommodation. I grabbed a cheap room at the Kookaburra Holiday Park.

I reckoned that the water would drain fast so was hopeful for the next day. No such luck in the morning though. By that afternoon they were letting a few of the big trucks through. SES reporting .55 metre of water over the road and with a fast current. I used the day to check what happened at the Cardwell Marina and talked to few people that is in a separate report. And always watching the road block.. Cardwell is one of those towns that is "10 miles long and two blocks wide," as my dad used to say. The entire length of the place was now one big car park with mostly heavy trucks trying to get supplies into Innisfail or on to Cairns. I also saw some vans and trucks that looked like me, bringing up small (relatively) loads of the most needed things. I considered trying for the much longer western route through Ravenshoe but was told it was closed as well. Waiting, frustrated, watching the road block to see what the bright orange suits were doing. Another night at the Holiday park. The SES (State Emergency Services) volunteers are great but the coppers are assholes that appear to be enjoying themselves. Flexing muscle and control and fostering suspicion by refusing information or dispensing misinformation. The gathering at the holiday park is distrustful in large part.

Next AM I walk out to see check the road block and I see that there has been more traffic though the road block. I bolt back to the holiday park and jump in the van and go. As I approach though, I am stopped and given the bad news. Still no vans or cars, only large 4X's or big trucks but maybe later.... Using the office in Bowen I get the message from Innisfail where there is spotty phone service that they are keen to get the gear and they have a big 4 X to use. They say

they could come get the stuff in a pinch. I want them to stay with their kids and houses so check with the copper at the road block, "mate, when do you think my van can get through?" The traffic that is being allowed to go is only allowed one direction at a time so that in the wide flooded areas the vehicles can use the whole road. The copper responds, "you'll go the next one, I can't wait to get rid of the lot of ya! Everything can go the next bunch." If he had been smiling that may have been funny but he wasn't. What ever, he was what he was but at least it was good news. I trotted back to my van to go find a pay phone again and sent word to Innisfail that no worries, I was on my way and got in cue.

We all waited for a long time but then the traffic started to roll!! I/we were on our way! Finally! Until I got right to the road block and then the copper pulled me over with a very ugly scowl and accusing and rude gesture! I felt like a stick of dynamite with a millimetre left of burning fuse by this point and I wasn't the only one. A little earlier a truckie that had been pushed too far and made a big scene at the roadblock. The coppers were creating trouble. Though they must have benefited some one, some where that day, they made more enemies than friends of the mob waiting in Cardwell. I don't think they cared though.

Back to the phones and message to Innisfail again. Come and get it! They responded at once and were there in a couple hours. The 4 X was filled to the roof with generators, jerry cans of fuel, lamps, batteries, tarps, rope etc. No room for everything so the load of drinking water and some other gear was left. I squeezed in with my camera and small esky full of ice which was highly prized when I got there. No one had had a cold beer for a couple days and I know how that can make one cranky!

exhausted locals taking a break by the road block



the wharf at Cardwell



Innisfail...

Innisfail.....

It was the Murry River (no, not that one) and the adjoining "flats" and the Tully River that were the flooded areas. The flats went for miles with only markers on the side of the road for guidance. What was usually paddock to the west of the road was a lake made convincing by the tinny running full song across the wet parallel to the highway. The Tully bridge was actually above water (just) but the road on either side was under. Occasional damage was visible all the way from Cardwell but once past the flood waters it became more apparent. Crop damage was everywhere, trees knocked down and the first signs of damaged buildings. People were out exploring about as the rain had nearly stopped.

Very soon the look became far worse as we came to the rolling hills south of Innisfail.



We came upon forests that looked very wrong. From then on every tree I saw... not *nearly* every tree.. but every tree still standing looked like... **They looked like they had been ripped out of the ground by some giant fist and shaken till the earth was flung off the torn**

and wasted roots, then smashed back into the ground wrong side up. There were no leaves or small branches. Even the bark appeared to have been blown off. The Lantana vines still clung lifeless and grim to the sturdier tree trunks only enhancing the effect of roots rather than branches.

Mourilyan Hotel and who knows what else. The brave operators of the Mobile servo are open and pumping much needed fuel amongst the piles and damaged pumps, one twisted sideways and the covers torn off revealing the workings. We are trying to beat the dusk so pass the turn for the Harbour for today.



Closer in still and now flatter land and more cane fields. The high set fibros next to the highway look to have been targeted with a God sized shot gun, their 'skins' blasted to fragments and tin roofs torn and scattered across the cane. Debris everywhere. The Caravan Park between Tully and Mourilyan is a mess. The only casualty of the storm so far is an older man caught inside a caravan there and died from apparent heart attack while other reports say there was a family trapped inside another caravan that was wadded up like used note paper but they all survived. In the town of Mourilyan only the Sugar Museum with it's brick, windowless façade stands in tact. It is surrounded by piles of debris including parts of the classic

In Innisfail proper now and the destruction is awful... awful... what a poor word but I know no other better. A scene from a sort of hell. The high school is knocked down and barely recognisable. Business's are smashed. Roofs are torn off and laying everywhere though most of the shit has been dragged off the road. Some business's are piling all their stock on the foot paths to clear the building. The wind did horrible damage but it was the cruel rain that did worse. A roof is relatively easy and fast to repair but the rain soaked the interior and contents of so many homes and shops. That is the cause of much of the damage and will make the difference between repair and write off for hundreds of buildings.





This wrecked trimaran was seen at Flying Fish Point right at the bar. It was probably washed down from Innisfail. How many boats were washed out to sea?? How many sunk?? The answers to those questions may never be known.

An obvious reason for all the tin roofing failures that I saw?? The wind ripped the battens off the rafters. Newer regulations require many screws to hold the tin to the battens but the battens are only held in with a few nails. Every piece of tin I saw had the battens attached. I will be adding metal straps to the batten, rafter joins in my large building soon.

There are now some big generators in town but what can they do for individual houses as there are not lines to carry the juice? Many poles are broken in two and the big transformers that used to cling to the tops of the poles lay broken on lawns and footpaths. Some of these may contain poisonous PCP's, a dangerous cancer causing chemical.

Politicians are everywhere there is a news camera. The most cynical grabbing children to hug while grinning toward the cameras. Phoney, ugly, exploiting but maybe handing out a few dollars to those who whinge best. Coming out of their generator and air

condition equipped motels in their thousand dollar suits to mingle with "their battlers" before jumping on the waiting helicopter to get back to the better restaurants down south.

The Army are heroes to all I talk to. Soldiers are everywhere and pitching in to clear roads and electric wires. It is good to see them. They help remove some of the dirty feeling left from the politicians. A sign that there are people out there who really want to help just because that's what you do.

The water front...

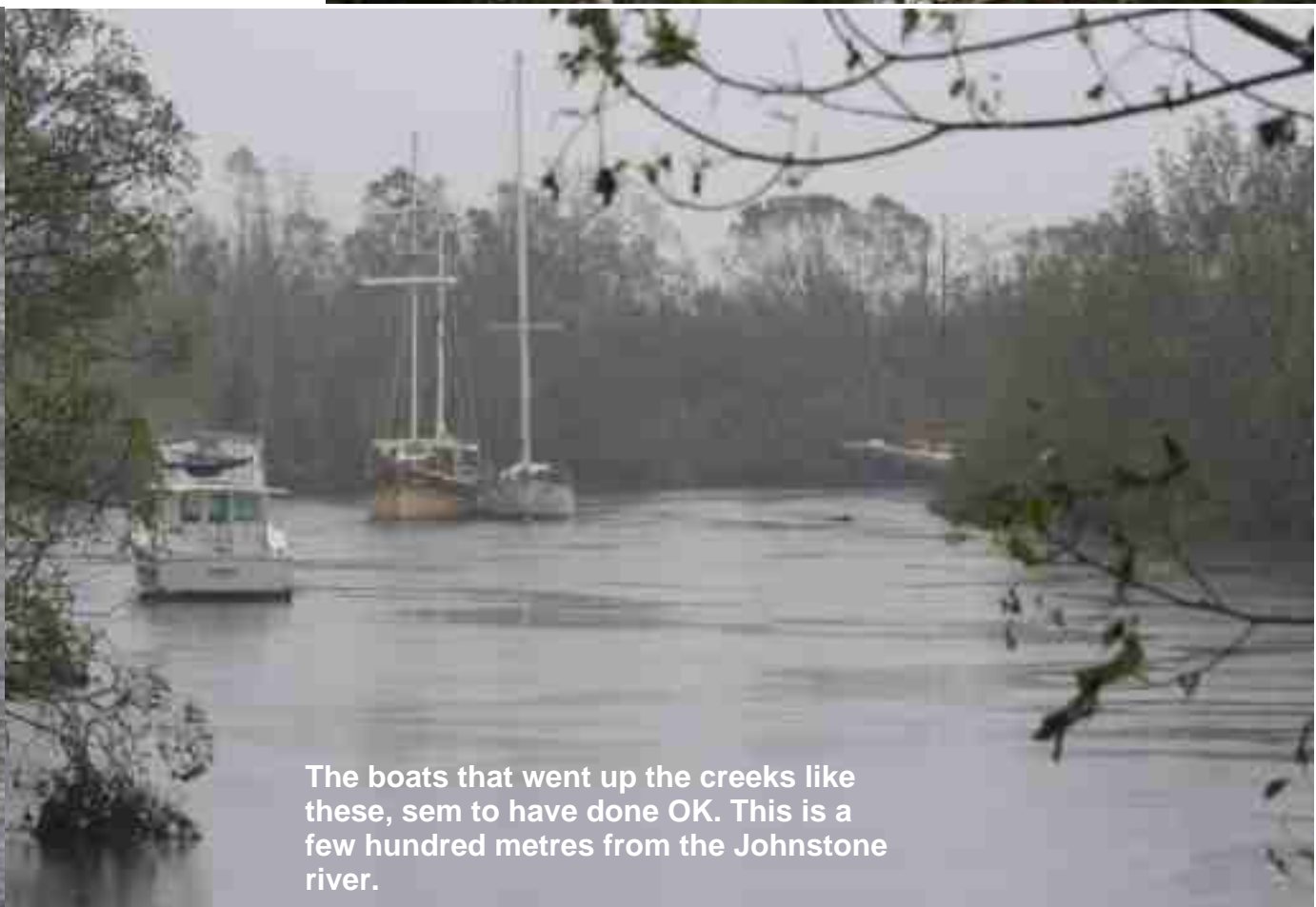
The Johnstone river has a shallow bar but the tides allow large vessels in to careful or knowledgeable skippers. For many fishermen and yachties it is considered a top spot as the river front comes right into the middle of town. Step off your boat and walk across the street to the pub or maybe the church... OK not likely but you get the idea. Some of the boats that have been hiding in the mangroves are coming back.

Some never left and they can be seen piled up on the rocks along the town reach. Many vessels are still up in the creeks. Many vessels were lost. Some may be found at sea later, drifting, rig less and listing, having

been flushed out with the flood. I spotted a wrecked trimaran clinging to the last spit of sand at the bar by Flying Fish point. I wonder where it was to start.



The wild life survives! While looking over the creeks, these rare to spot Cassowaries were seen strolling around the devastation.



The boats that went up the creeks like these, seem to have done OK. This is a few hundred metres from the Johnstone river.

Mourilyan Harbour...

Mourilyan Harbour is one of my favourite places on this stretch of coast. The entrance to it is uncanny. Many sailors will go by it for years and not even notice it because the rock solid hills that front it open only briefly to the eye as you cruise by. It looks as if it were blasted there, a work of man not nature and in fact it has been deepened a little to allow the coastal bulk sugar carriers to come into the large sugar wharf there. The rest of the basin opens up into shallows while the main creek with its deeper water stays close to the east and works its way south into the mangroves, branching into smaller creeks. The pile moorings are in the deep channel nearer the main channel out to sea. (See "Cruising the Coral Coast" by Alan Lucas for more details) The smart skippers got their craft way into the southern creeks before Larry came knocking. The not quite as cautious got their boats in but not far enough and found their boats piled up on the bush and rocks. The downright fool hardy left their boats on the piles with lines on the bow to let them swing. Only one of those survived. The remains of the others are scattered about the shore line and the bottom.

I talked to Steve Brown who skippers the pilot boat in the harbour and he estimated the waves to have been three metres inside. His boat was OK and tied to the wharf by the sugar terminal when I got there. I asked where he had left it during the storm and he told he sure didn't leave it in the open harbour! (or words to that effect!) The trees lower on the hill sides on the windward side of the harbour were wrecked like most others I had seen but the ones higher up were not as bad. I think this to be evidence that the wind may have popped over the hills and hit the mooring piles situated below in bullets.

Mourilyan Harbour photos next page



The road into the harbour



THEIR BLOODY ROOFS BLEW OFF!!

by Kay Norson

It's Thursday, March 23rd now. Bob left Tuesday morning, and I've been watching the news since Monday realizing the roofs of many homes and business blew clean off from Larry's tempest! I get ready for Cyclone Wati to do the same to me. After all, it could have been me, here a block from the beach. If it was me, I would have had a disaster in this shop, as I was definitely not prepared to have my roof blown off!

Hah! I have another chance to be prepared, so I do this while listening to the radio and television of all the heartache the towns north of me are going through. I talk to Bob who is trapped in Cardwell with van load of generators, gas bottles, water, fuel batteries, lollies, etc..., because as many know the Tully River *a/ways* floods. Why? It's a MAJOR road!

So, I prepare and also hope we can help others if I am ready for the worst. Isn't that what, as human beings, we should be doing? Help in times of disasters? Me Mum told me *that's just what you do*. Some can do more than others, but you do what you can.

How many tarps do you need when your roof blows off? How do you make sure they don't blow away too?! I need lots...the computers, benches, my pottery & books and all those precious files and TCP back issues... The Chevy Malibu is in the safest place of this building, so I may sleep in it for a few nights...should I stock it with food and bedding now?

Well, Wati is messing with our heads and hovering around offshore, so I relax a bit. Bob still in Cardwell, but meeting lots of storytellers. After all when things go bad you find like minded.

I remember my past: earthquakes, fires, hurricanes. I was never in the worst of any, never lost my home, but suffered with friends who weren't so lucky. Now I feel the need to contribute stronger than ever. ***That's just what you do.*** I think of our friends in Innisfail and have a chat with them filling them in on Bob's progress-none. I realise how many others have friends, brothers, sisters, grandmas and grandkids in Innisfail, but you never think *your* family will go through this. I guess now many can.

How do I help? Send money via banks?, government? Will they give the money to people who need to buy bread & milk? Or will the money go into "funds" for loans? LOANS! Why? We pay taxes for this help don't we? How do I get the donation to people that need it **today**-with no strings attached if I can't go there myself?

Well, I have no real answer. I will go there myself. I feel the need to more than ever. I will bring my lollies, powdered milk, tinned butter, coffee and some time to listen. **If YOU have time go there.** Wait a week-or-a month. They will still be fixing up their lives.

This area will be repairing their lives for years. THEIR BLOODY ROOFS BLEW OFF!!! I don't know how it must have been "getting Larried" Monday, March 20th 2006, but the memories and lessons learned will affect all there and all who care! DO YOU???



The Coastal Passage

The Voice of the Great Barrier Reef

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Hinchinbrook Marina at Cardwell

Cardwell Marina

Cardwell copped it hard but came through OK!

mgr. Andre



There is no doubt who the hero is at the marina. Andre is the manager there and took a personal interest in the safety of the fleet. He worked tirelessly to organise efforts to tie things down on boats that had absent owners and did head counts during the storm to make sure everyone had shelter, offering vacant shops to those that didn't have a place to go. He even took the Parakeet off SY Karu into the office for safe keeping. He had been feeding for the absent owners. Some boat people were put up at the local "Plantation Lodge."

Andre credits the livaboards that pitched in to help with the success of the storm preparation of the 12 boats that had no one else around to look after.

By Thursday the boats that decided to ride it out in the mangroves had left for Anchorage, Deluge or one of the other numerous creeks. One rather bold and perhaps foolish boat decided to have a little sail to a near by island before making a nervous run back to the shelter of the Mangroves. Andre was keeping in radio contact with that fleet all the time. At 6:00PM Saturday he shut down the marina. He was concerned as he was looking for the crew or "Paquita"... unaccounted for.

By 3:00AM Monday it was howling in the marina. Winds were 80-90 knots and some boats in the creeks reporting up to 120 that may have been bullets off the highlands of Hinchinbrook Island. Andre lost all communication then and would have to wait to see how everyone had got on.

And the result??? The boats that went up the creeks all survived unharmed or at least only minor damage though some admitted being scared shitless and sea sick from the violent action. A group of six boats lined up in one creek and the skipper of SY "K Sera" confessed worry that if one of them had gone it would have cleaned off the lot of them.

Back at the marina all was well. Andre reported that the damage in the marina was limited to one unfurled heady that trashed itself, a missing side cover and a couple very minor bits of jetty hardware. He says he's had more damage done by a boat coming in with a flaring prop that wouldn't reverse in time.

Though some of the boaties were concerned about the height of the piles being sufficient for the surge, the marina was tested and passed!

There is more to tell from this marina and this site will be up-dated as the material is organised.

Mourilyan Harbour photos

All the visible remains of a trawler that was on the piles



Boats were washed up on the far southern end of the basin

SY Saroena gets as close as it ever wants to!!

contributed by Ian and Jennifer Gibbs

Our boat Saroena is a 42 ft Roberts Spray, ketch rigged, motor sailor. We have based ourselves at Port Hinchinbrook Marina this year and last specifically because the Hinchinbrook Passage has to be one of the best cyclone refuges on the coast of Queensland.

We prepared for cyclone Larry by clearing and securing the upper deck and stowing items below for sea. We held off moving out of the marina as long as possible because the \$1000 excess on our insurance policy is not enforced if we are damaged in a nominated marina.

When Larry strengthened to Cat 5 and seemed unlikely to veer away we considered that the Marina would be untenable if the predicted tidal surge coincided with high tide. I was at one time on the counter disaster Committee in Mackay and in my opinion, all of the marinas in which we have been based (Half Moon Bay, Port Hinchinbrook and Breakwater) are at risk of the pontoons floating off the piles with catastrophic results.

We left in mid afternoon which gave us time to motor to the location shown on the chart and secure the vessel. We chose a creek between Hinchinbrook and Boat Passages because of the reduced risk of flood borne debris, and the particular creek (un-named) because of it's general south easterly direction which permitted mooring with bows into the likely wind direction.

On arrival, we entered a narrow tributary creek with just sufficient depth of water for entry at low tide. We put out 2 bow anchors (1x 60 lb, 1x 80 lb plow) and a stern anchor (1x 40 lb Danforth), and secured to the mangroves amidships on both sides with 2.5 cm silver rope. After lowering and stowing both our foresails we retreated below to avoid the unrelenting attack of the mosquitoes and sand flies. At this time it was calm with virtually no wind and extremely hot and humid.

During the evening the wind slowly increased from the South East and had

reached gale force by 2200 hrs with constant rain. We needed to adjust our warps and mooring lines from time to time, but otherwise dozed in our main cabin and monitored ABC Far North until it went off the air suddenly at 0358 hrs.

By this time wind strength according to our mast head anemometer was 50 - 60 knots, gusting higher. We tended to sail around on the anchor warps but were restricted by the breast ropes until the starboard mooring became detached. This allowed us to lie alongside the fringing mangroves, breaking off a number of branches and sustaining minor damage. On deck it was remarkably calm with most of the wind going overhead and the water was calmer than it would have been in a marina due to the minimum fetch. There was virtually no flying debris.

By first light the wind seemed at it's worst, still from South to South East and consistently in the 60 - 70 knot range with a maximum recorded gust of 101 knots. I was able to go on deck however and clear mangrove branches with the aid of my Gurkah kukri. We enjoyed a healthy fry up for breakfast and soon after regained radio contact, when we heard that Larry was crossing the coast around Innisfail.

As far as tides are concerned we experienced was amounted to a double high tide, both of around 2.5 metres and I guess that the first, which flowed in very strongly, was the surge. I believe that this occurred at around 0830 hrs. It is very difficult to predict tidal times or flows in this region as the tide enters the passage from both ends, the opposing streams meeting



The wind...



close to our location. The second tide arrived around 2 hours after the first which was approximately the predicted tide time and was slightly smaller.

At 0830 hrs the wind was still in the 50 - 60 knot range but the rain was decreasing affording glimpses of Hinchinbrook Island. Although calm in our side creek, there were waves to about 150 mm in the main creek which at this point runs in an East to West direction with a fetch of about 100 metres.

The squalls, accompanied by rain, could be heard roaring as they approached across the mangroves, and in the main creek could be seen blowing water off the surface and lifting it into the air.

The wind strength slowly moderated during the course of the morning. We tidied up and re -attached our moorings, remaining until the following day until returning to Port Hinchinbrook Marina.

Saroena was looking

dreadful with mangrove sap stains all down her starboard side, but once this had been cleaned off, damage was confined to some tears in the Dachshund safety netting and some minor scratches. Most vessels which moored in the narrow creeks appeared similar. I know of no serious damage sustained.

Meanwhile, back in the Marina, the manager nearly had a heart attack when the pontoons rose to within 300 mms of the pole tops. Several vessels sustained to damage to sails, awnings and inflatable dinghies because their owners had failed to take adequate preventative action.

We would certainly recommend the mangroves as a good place to be in any future cyclone. In future we would make the decision earlier and take down all our sails. We would place only one bow anchor, keeping the other in reserve, and put out 2 lines to the mangroves on either side, probable rigged as springs.

We were close enough to the centre of cyclone Larry for it to be exciting without being significantly scary. I have no desire to be any closer to a Category 5 Cyclone

The surge..



What we learned from Cyclone Larry

Photos & story by Petrea Heathwood, SY *"Talisman"*

Until Larry came along I was feeling pretty lucky. In 40 years of sailing, 5 of them based in north Queensland, I had avoided close contact with any serious weather. Larry changed that. Right from the start he was headed for my chosen safe haven of Mourilyan Harbour, just south of Innisfail.

After living aboard for over 20 years, the last 5 single-handed, last year I was persuaded to try living in a house. Our property is on the southern edge of the Atherton Tableland, west of Innisfail. Mourilyan Harbour is our closest access to the sea, so that's where we moor our boats. (Yes, two boats, one house).

Last year when a cyclone threatened, we moved the boats way up a narrow creek. This was before we had moved ashore fully so we found a good spot, set anchors fore and aft, lines to the mangroves and waited. After two days and nights spent testing insect repellent, the cyclone had moved on and so did we. Back out into the blessed open.

It was a fizzer, but we learned a lot:

We had felt unable to moor the boats properly until the cyclone was almost upon us in case another boat wanted to pass further up the creek. That's OK if your timing's right and you are planning to stay aboard for the duration.

For live-aboards there's not much option but to stay, come what may. If the boat is home and contains all your treasured possessions it makes sense to be there to look after it. Conventional wisdom says it is safer to leave the boat and shelter ashore. Larry tested this theory, and I think disproved it.

Another thing I discovered was that this small, short creek develops a powerful current, bringing down all sorts of rubbish to snag mooring lines. So you'd have to be on hand to keep lines clear of debris.

Alan Lucas and other authorities warn of storm surge, and suggest lines be tied as high as possible. This allows the boat to rise and also helps to keep the lines clear. Well, from our small dinghies we couldn't get the lines up very far above normal high tide level. I also particularly disliked groping around in the mangroves in my 4mm plywood dinghy as I'm fairly frightened of crocodiles.

Talking to the locals afterwards, we found that they all reckon the creek is the place to be in a cyclone. Some had ridden out many cyclones there. This added another worry to my worry-prone mind. What if one of the other boats wasn't well secured? Too many boats in one place can be a recipe for trouble.

This cyclone season we were determined to be better prepared. As we now live ashore, most of our treasured bits and pieces are ashore also. We decided to make a cyclone plan to secure the boats early, then get ourselves ashore and back to the house.

Firstly we surveyed the Moresby River, which flows into Mourilyan Harbour, and its' tributaries. We found a well sheltered creek which had a very shallow mouth, but plenty of depth for our shoal draft boats not far inside. This creek wasn't likely to get crowded.

As we planned to leave the boats unattended we didn't think it appropriate to truss them to both sides of the creek so no one else could get past. Our chosen reach of the creek was fairly wide so we decided on a different strategy.

We felt the long row back to the boat ramp could be a problem in the strong wind which might precede a cyclone. So we bought and outfitted our "cyclone boat". This is a 3.8m tinny with a 15hp outboard. It lives on its' own trailer in the shed at home, ready to go at a moment's notice.

Being so well organized we felt it unlikely any cyclone would dare threaten us, but history proved otherwise. When Larry was imminent, we rushed down to Mourilyan Harbour to prepare the boats. We stripped everything moveable from above deck. This included all sails, sail covers, booms (except *Talisman's* main boom, which I left in place), solar panels, boat hooks, sail ties, dinghies, and awnings.

With everything secure, we motored up the creek, *Beluga Too* towing the engineless *Talisman*. Yes, I know I could have sailed in, and then cleared the decks, but the thought of being eaten by sand flies while I worked deterred me. I acknowledge I took the soft option, but not all engine free sailors are masochists. (Quite the opposite, I don't have an engine because I hate working on the things.)

I anchored the 31' *Talisman* in the centre of the creek on her "mooring". This is a 45lb Manson plough attached to 18 metres of 10mm chain and a heavy nylon rode. I set her 10kg Bruce main anchor on its' 8mm chain to port, at about the 8 o'clock position. The spare 30lb Manson plough was set to starboard, in the 4 o'clock position. Both smaller anchor chains were attached to the large one below with a swivel at the join of the



chain to the rode. All came aboard over the bow rollers, prevented from jumping off by a pin fitted above the rollers.

As a backup, I added two more lines to the junction of the chains, and took one each side through the mooring fairleads, to the bow cleats, then aft to large amidships cleats. I would have liked closed fairleads to ensure the lines couldn't jump out, but they are the standard open type.

All lines were well protected from chafe. The main reason for the extra lines was that *Talisman* is fairly lightly built, and I felt happier not relying totally on the bow cleats which are both bolted to the king plank.

30' *Beluga Too* was moored in much the same way. Her 60lb anchor was firmly stuck in the mud out in Mourilyan Harbour, so she used her twin bow anchors, 35lb Manson ploughs on 8mm chain, and a 27lb plough. *Beluga Too* is very stoutly built (they do that in Tasmania) so all her anchor lines came aboard over the big bow roller and on to one of the bollards, then round the mainmast as a backup.

Having done all we could for the boats we drove home and hoped for the best. I was not very happy when the 0500 weather chart revealed Larry had increased to category 5. Unusually, Larry didn't lose much intensity over the land. After devastating the Atherton Tableland as a category 4, and passing just north of our house, hundreds of kilometers inland he was still rated a category 3.

The morning after....

Ignoring the mess at home, we were among the first people down the Palmerston Highway to Innisfail. Seeing the carnage at ground zero just south of Innisfail prepared us for bad news at the harbour. Launching the tinny and optimistically leaving the 2" petrol driven pump in the car, we sped off upstream.

Coming to the final bend before our boats I hardly dared look. I spotted *Beluga Too's* tall mainmast, but nothing else. Rounding the corner, there they were! Smiling at us, perfectly intact. Relief flooded over me as I climbed aboard *Talisman* and opened the hatch. Dry inside. I noticed the crockery and cutlery, left in its' normal sailing stowage, had jumped across the boat. So she'd had a bit of a hiding.

The wind in the creek had been strong enough to strip leaves and tear branches off the mangroves, but both boats were clear of debris. I guess they were washed clean by heavy rain.

With cyclone "Wati" looming, we left the boats where they were and went sightseeing in the rain. As Bob* has noted, only one boat survived on the piles, but all those we saw in Walter Creek were in good shape. Most were moored in the traditional way - anchors fore and aft into the centre of the creek and lines from the shoreward side to the mangroves. One large charter boat had moored in the centre of the creek with anchors, and lines to each side, barring further progress in the tinny, so we didn't see every boat in there.

Outside in the main river, several boats had tried to ride out the blow anchored behind a small mangrove island. We saw four that were driven ashore, including the Innisfail Coastguard vessel, complete with its' heavy mooring. Some boats appeared to have had only one anchor down. The one boat remaining at anchor behind the island had several anchors out, all from the bow, allowing her to swing freely.

We felt that for our relatively small and shoal draft boats, our mooring method had some important advantages. Being able to swing head to wind allowed them to present their smallest profile to the blow. In effect, they were able to "roll with the punches". We were able to set up our gear quickly, without venturing into the mangroves. Although we used fairly heavy ground tackle, our boats' relatively modest size means that this gear is not hard to manage. *Beluga Too* is about 4 tons and draws 0.6 metres while *Talisman* is only about 3 tons and draws 0.5 metres with the rudder and centreboard retracted.

Our creek's shallow entrance did keep other boats away. We were able to use a full reach of the creek to keep our boats well separated in case one of them had a problem.

The different approaches showed that there's no one correct way to prepare for a cyclone. Even with the best preparations it can come down to luck. The boats moored conventionally seemed to do as well as ours. This cyclone didn't drop enough rain to cause major flooding of the river system and storm surge wasn't a big issue. Experience of floodwater in the Endeavour River at Cooktown has shown that the less you have in the water to snag floating debris, the better. In the event of flooding I think our method would prove superior for an unattended boat, but heavier displacement boats may just be better securely tied in one position. What do others think?

To sum up:

1. Plan your tactics well in advance.
2. Have enough adequately sized ground tackle, and be able to handle it. This is important for large cruising boats crewed typically by a couple. You may need help to set your gear.
3. Get everything off the deck that you can move and lash the rest very firmly.
4. Stock up on insect repellent.
5. Give yourself plenty of time.
6. Choose a location sheltered from the wind and away from the full force of possible floodwater.
7. Allow for storm surge of many metres.
8. Try not to follow the herd; this is one case where there is no safety in numbers.
9. Experience counts. Having been through one of the biggest cyclones on record, I hope I'll be more confident and relaxed next time. That feeling of having to accept the possibility of losing the boat is not one I wish to repeat.

Bobs note:

Petrea is one of those quiet people who's breadth and depth of experience should be listened to in matters of sail and Dennis is the teller of tall tails, general entertainment and a good sailor I'm told. He had a good teacher!

** refers to Cyclone Larry Special edition on the web site.*



Petrea and Dennis at Lizard 04
That's Dennis's boat, *Beluga Too* in the background

Who would have thought....



B. Norson photo



Paquita photo



Paquita photo



Paquita photo



B. Norson photo

There was no doubt the cyclone was going to hit the coast very close to the Hinchinbrook Marina at Cardwell. Matt, Trudy and toddler Will, were waiting for friends on SY *Clair de loon* to make it in to the marina. They were then going to get up the creeks in the mangroves to hide from the storm with them.

Marina manager, Andre, had offered shelter from the storm in vacant buildings within the marina complex to any who had no where else to go and had assisted in providing accommodation in town. Every effort had been made by Andre, to secure craft in the marina, provide shelter and to keep in contact by radio with those that chose to run up into the creeks. Nothing but high praise for the man from all I talked to while there.

Matt had talked to the coppers earlier and they advised that if he had a car the best thing he could do was bolt! Their friends were running late. It would mean navigating into the mangroves and preparing in the dark. Matt thought of his wife and young son.... Their Boden Helena steel yacht, *Paquita*, was tied down best possible, they jumped into their 4 X4 Ute and took off to a spot in the Tablelands where they reckoned they would be safe. **Who would have thought!**

They had stayed in cottages in the town of Youngaburra before and headed there. On their way they passed through Innisfail at a time of spooky "unnatural" calm and made it up the tablelands around 11:00PM, just in time for the first winds to start warning all that trouble was coming. By 4:00 AM it was in hard and still gathering. 7:00 to 8:00 AM was very

rough. Trees were crashing everywhere but their sturdy cabin held together. This was NOT supposed to be happening there! This was meant to be the "safe" spot!

By noon the winds had eased and they were keen to head back. Even with the Ute it was nearly impossible going, driving over trees and fallen power wires everywhere. The Palmerston HWY was impassable. Matt had a hand saw and with the help of others, cleared fallen timber as they went until it was beyond their capability, then a car showed up with a chain saw and they were at it again. As they neared the bottom of the range they met the rescue forces that were just getting organised to clear from that end.

The destruction they were witnessing as they drove was horrendous. It was almost 1:00 AM when they finally got to Innisfail, exhausted. The town was crushed and dark. As they neared the end of town there was lights on at a motel. The only lights in town. They pulled in past the huge generator out front. A lucky cancellation got them a room in the place that was otherwise reserved for ERGON employees and the Premier and his entourage. Hmm.

They made it back the next day by way of a quick stop to check out Mourilyan. What they saw there was not encouraging and they barely made it through the highway before it was closed by rain but when they got to Cardwell *Paquita* was resting quietly in her berth with only a little paint chipped on her bow to tell the story.

Due to cooperation between liveaboard cruisers in the marina and top

management, all craft were well prepared. A damaged head sail and a canopy cover were the worst of it. Miraculous under the circumstances. Of the craft that headed into the mangroves, all came back in one piece but I hear there may have been some loose bowels.... If you know what I mean!

This is but one story.....

I was stirred to action myself as we are not far from the impact area and we have friends in Innisfail. I made a blast in the van north to deliver chain saws, generators, tarps, water etc. The drama to get there and the devastation that I saw were unforgettable. Immediately upon return I wrote a raw, unedited and admittedly emotional account for a non-commercial special edition of TCP for distribution via the TCP web site. Thousands have downloaded the edition so far and it is still there and available FREE as normal for all TCP's. For your copy go to www.thecoastalpassage.com then click on "Recent editions." *The Cyclone Larry Special Edition* is on that page. **Right Click** on the cover and download the PDF file, about 450kb, for the six page special.

The latest up-date? Nearly continuous rains for the month after Larry have made progress difficult and aggravated an already ugly situation. I would suggest to sailors coming north this year that have building trades to sail up the Johnstone River to Innisfail and go to work for a while. Not to gouge, there will be enough of that shit already, but to help in return for a fair wage or just to make some peace with your Karma
Cheers to all
Bob Norson

There were losers,

and the lucky



B. Norson photo



B. Norson photo



B. Norson photo