

Reflections on FNQ

(2006 Bowen to Cooktown tour)

Photos and text by Rob Mercer

He appeared from the dunes as we dragged ourselves clear of the foamy wind swell. His nose had the shape and a texture of a seed potato and his face was so red you could almost feel the heat from his sunburn:

“Just two questions: where from? and why?”

We looked back at the tight packed whitecaps and spindrift and pointed in the direction of Balgal Beach some forty-five kilometres south. He chuckled in disbelief, muttered about the wind and waves, and then disappeared back down the track to the nearby Caravan Park without waiting for an answer to his second question.

It is a little over a year since the day we stood on Forest Beach, a fairly unremarkable stretch of gritty sand just south of Lucinda, and when I look at the photos I see beyond the images to the many reasons “why...”

1. **Anticipation** as we launch into a building breeze.



2. **Teamwork** on the water as we check headings



3. **Triumph:** Sharon standing with the wind at her back, still buzzing from some wild runs under sail and relieved to have managed so well with a hole in her kayak after a gust pulled one of the fittings out of the foredeck.



4. **Challenge:** Just after these photos were taken the wind strengthened, cameras were stowed and Rob (R) disappeared for a while. As we scanned the lumpy horizon through a salty haze we suddenly realised that finding him in the steep chop was going to be almost impossible and we anxiously started to consider our options. Fortunately he had the skill and presence of mind to deal with the waterlogged sail and perform a re-enter and roll. There were smiles all round when he suddenly reappeared looking very wet and a little more dishevelled than usual. It was a timely reminder that sea kayaking is not without its technical challenges. It is fun but it is serious fun and the risks are real even in the tropics.



We discussed how to manage the foreseeable but unavoidable capsizes over a hearty mackerel dinner and walked back to the tents that night reaffirming what we already knew: that a little risk is part of the adventure, the extra dimension that focuses our senses and gives the challenge its edge.

That night the friendly people of Forest Beach invited us to camp free on the sheltered lawn outside the hotel, the trade winds were forecast to keep blowing us North, the first 340kms had been a blast and we still had 520 to go- this was turning out to be another great trip in FNQ!