

# TWO-ISLAND ODYSSEY

The remarkable North Stradbroke and Moreton islands are no longer well-kept Queensland secrets. And for that, ALLAN WHITING is very thankful



PICS BY ALLAN WHITING

**W**hen you're on the northern or eastern sides of North Straddy it's difficult to believe that you left Brisbane on the car ferry only an hour before. The Coral Sea outlook is magnificent and the lifestyle is laid-back.

## STRADBROKE ISLAND

Straddy offers an attractive combination of beach and inland off-roading, as well as a choice of beachfront camping at camp grounds or DIY.

The sand that makes up most of Stradbroke Island came from the hills that eroded in New South Wales and was brought northwards by currents, to be blocked by the rocks at Point

Lookout. As sea levels changed, exposed sand blew inshore to form the island.

Maps and brochures show many inland tracks on Straddy, but that's deceptive, because most of them are closed to recreational traffic. The only trans-island track that was open to 4X4s when we visited in September was Tripod Track.

## The white, sandy track cuts through hilltop vegetation

This track starts at the east coast bitumen road that connects Dunwich (where the car ferries berth) with Point Lookout and ends on

Tazi Road. Tripod Track winds uphill to Tripod Lookout, which is a vantage point offering sweeping views of Moreton Bay and the island's southern sections. The white, sandy track can be seen cutting southwards through the windblown hilltop vegetation from this high point. After Tripod Track drops below the wind-swept ridges the vegetation changes to become

more wooded and some large trees flourish on the lee side of the hills.

From Tazi Road it used to be possible to



*Koorinal Trader, the five-car ferry that runs between Straddy and Moreton. Moreton is in the distance*

## Straddy offers a tasty combo of beach and inland off-roading as well as spot-on camping



drive along the sandy creek bed that feeds Blue Lake, but this track is now closed to all but pedestrian traffic. As you walk along you can imagine the places where the track might have proved a serious 4X4 challenge, either from deep, soft entrapping sand, or black, clinging mud.

The eastern beach front – 18 Mile Beach – is driveable and certainly provides a challenge at half tide, when you have to drive up on the softer sections of the beach. Low-tide travel is more relaxing, on firmer sand.

We camped behind the shallow frontal dunes at Flinders Beach and enjoyed two memorable days on Straddy.

### GETTING THERE

Stradbroke Ferries runs a regular service from Cleveland to Dunwich. You could buy 4X4 usage and camping permits at the information centre, until September 2003, but now you have to obtain these crucial bits of paper from

rangers' offices. We picked ours up at Cylinder Beach, before driving onto the northern beach at Adder Rock.

Return trip ferry charges in September 2003 were \$88/4X4 (\$70 for age pensioners) and trailers at \$20/metre.

Bookings for camping sites and ferries are essential – phone 07 3409 9555 for camping bookings and 07 3286 2666 for ferries. Visit [www.stradbrokeholidays.com.au](http://www.stradbrokeholidays.com.au), which is a useful website.

### PERMITS

Vehicle and camping permits are required for Straddy – vehicle charges are \$10.60 for two days and camping is \$4 per person, per day.

### CAMPING AND ACCOMMODATION

There are camp grounds at Dunwich, Point Lookout and Amity Point, and beach camping at Flinders Beach and Main Beach.

There is ample holiday-unit accommodation on the island.

### MAPS

We used Hema Maps' North Stradbroke Island, readily available at Cleveland and on the Island.

### TREK NOTES

Before you go anywhere near a beach, buy a tide chart. It's absolutely essential that you know the timing and height of the tides.

Head to Main Beach by following George Mothling Drive. The beach is very soft and driving room at high water is minimal.

Turn off the beach at Fisherman's Road entry, then head south on Fisherman's Road, passing by Yarraman Lagoons.

Return to East Coast Road on Fisherman's Road, then left on Tripod Track Road SE back to Tazi Rd, then left into Blue Lake NP.

At Blue Lake National Park the 4X4 track is now closed, but understandably because of very soft sand and possible flooding. Notch up some exercise by taking on the 2.5km walk to Blue Lake.

## MORETON ISLAND

Moreton Island is far less populated than North Stradbroke and there are no bitumen roads. Like Straddy, Moreton was formed from north-moving sands. This continuing process is obvious as you approach Moreton from Straddy – its southern tip is being eroded and fallen trees that tumble into the sea, as waves undermine the coastline, have rendered the beach's southern tip impassable.

Moreton Island has an interesting history that begins with the Ngugi Aboriginal tribe. Captain Cook named Cape Morton and Morton Bay in May 1770, but the spelling 'Moreton' is down to Matthew Flinders, who picked up a misspelling in one of Cook's journals.

After several serious shipwrecks off Moreton Island seven lighthouses were built on the island and the passage to the north of Cape Moreton became the major entry point into Moreton Bay.

Moreton Island is smaller than Straddy and is more park-like. The settlements of Koorringal, Cowan Cowan and Bulwer are nestled among trees and even the resort at Tangalooma isn't overpowering.

Fishing year-round is popular and becomes obsessive during the summer months.

Moreton's sand tracks are well maintained and steep sections are laced with sand ladders

or rubber matting, to aid traction and prevent erosion.

We spent two days driving around the island and camped off the beach, just south of Camel Rock.

### GETTING THERE

There's a \$160-return ferry from Brisbane, but if you're doing our three-island odyssey [AI heads to Fraser next issue], the best way to Moreton is on the five-car *Koorringal Trader* (return fare \$65) for a 40-minute trip between Amity on Straddy and the beach at Reeders Point, on Moreton. Bookings are essential – 07 3409 0111 or 0408 199 924.

The track north from Reeders Point is via Koorringal, then onto the eastern beach north or south of Mirapool, depending on tides.

### CAMPING AND ACCOMMODATION

There are organised camp grounds north of Tangalooma, but most visitors camp just off the sand along the 35-kilometre eastern beachfront.

### PERMITS

Camping permits are available from the Brisbane-Moreton ferry operators, or from park rangers. The rangers' station is at Tangalooma – phone 07 3408 2710.

### MAPS

We used Sunmap's Moreton Island, readily available in Brisbane and at Tangalooma.

### TREK NOTES

Because of the uncertainty of odo readings on sand, distances have been omitted.

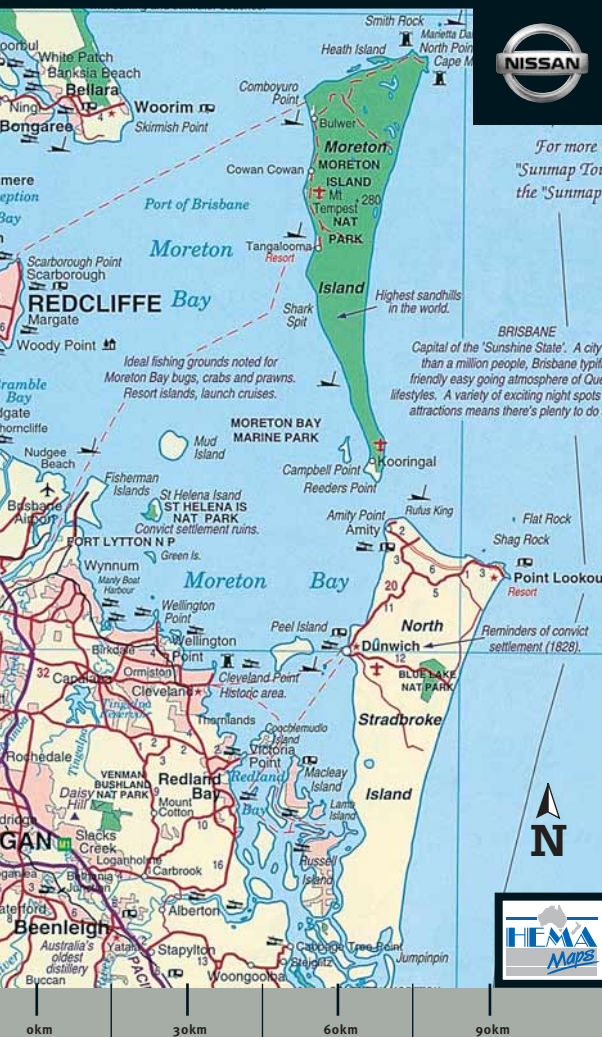
We drove Middle Road to the east coast, then south to look at the wrecks just north of Tangalooma. Then we headed north on the eastern beach, bypassing Cowan Cowan, returned to the beach and drove to Bulwer.

We turned inland through a swamp-edge track to Tailor Bight and out onto the magnificent sand spit at the island's northern tip. We hit the Bulwer-North Point-Cape Morton Rd, reaching the beach we then took the sandy climb up to Cape Morton Lighthouse. From there it was an easy, low-tide run south down the western beach to our campsite, with a side trip to Honeyeater Lake.

For our departure we headed south at low tide and camped near Mirapool, to be ready for barge loading back to Straddy.

Too much time is never enough at these two gems off south-east Queensland's coast – the secret is out.

■ Allan Whiting continues his Queensland island sojourn next issue as he heads north to Fraser Island.



## Smaller and more park-like than Stradbroke, Moreton is a treat



Some of the steeper sections on Moreton are laced with sand ladders or rubber matting

For more treks and four-wheel drive information check out the Nissan website: [nissan.com.au/patrol](http://nissan.com.au/patrol)