

On the Thorsborne Trail Hinchinbrook Island

Most parts of the world have their versions of a great wilderness walk. Our own particularly north Queensland experience is the Thorsborne Trail on Hinchinbrook Island which has been attracting thousands of visitors a year for many years to walk along its tropical beaches, through diverse forests and past waterfalls.

I recently re-visited the island and circumstances led me to trek south to north which seems to be contrary to what the majority of visitors choose to do. However, all the track guides and references are from north to south (maybe because it seems like downhill all the way!) and that means you have to read backwards to get an idea of time, distances and features along the way.

So for the benefits of left-handers and true individuals here's my guide to walking backwards along the Thorsborne Trail.

Firstly, island access is now served by 2 operators who can each provide you with a complete drop-off and collect service, depending on your circumstances. Business is competitive rather than complimentary so call or check out their websites for details. They both offer a good and efficient service. Details at the end.

So from the south you arrive at George Point not far from the mainland sugar port of Lucinda and the longest jetty in the southern hemisphere. From here it's a long beach walk of around 2 hours without stops to Mulligan's Falls and rainforest campsite. Good swimming and newish pit toilet is provided.

From here it's a steep climb up to a slightly difficult crossing of Diamantina Creek well above the falls. The trail continues through cyclone damaged forests over hilltops and in and out of gullies to the high point of the 265m saddle between Mulligan and Zoe Bays. Before then you will pass the turn-off to Sunken Reef Bay. It's a steep drop down to the bay but a worthwhile overnight diversion if the south-easterly winds aren't blowing too hard. Allow 2 hours from Mulligan camp or 4 from George Point. From the high saddle it's a pleasant and gradual downhill journey along the banks of South Zoe Creek and lots of pretty scenes as you get close to Zoe Falls. Enjoy the pools and views from the top of the falls before the very steep descent to the bottom of the falls. The pool at the bottom of Zoe Falls is iconic. Its beauty is complimented by its remoteness. Crystal clear and refreshing after your long (5 hour) walk from the last camp. Collect water from the track crossing below the falls as it's another 20 minutes to the beach campsites. The presence of the falls makes Zoe Bay right up there with Cedar Bay as one of the top wilderness beaches of far north Queensland.

Recharge your batteries as it's another long walk to the next camp at Little Ramsay Bay or Banksia Beach. The 6 hour walk wanders for hours through the forests and swamps behind the beach but the trek over the saddle isn't as arduous as the previous climb. Before arriving at Little Ramsay Bay you can take the short detour to Banksia Beach and camp or just check it out if you have time. From Banksia there is a low tide opportunity to walk out to Agnes Island. It's a further 45 mins to Little Ramsay and a bit of rock-hopping around headlands to the campground at the far end of the beach.

Little Ramsay is my favourite Beach. Sure, there are no waterfalls but unlike all the other beaches it possesses beautiful golden sand and the lagoon behind the beach is often freshwater. Reflections of the mountains at sunrise are unforgettable. Good freshwater is always available just upstream.

From here all the walks are relatively short. It's a gradual incline over the saddle to Nina Bay but there is lots of boulder and rock-hopping as you get closer to Nina that can be a bit tricky at high tide. Boulder Bay is very pretty at high tide with its colourful smooth boulders and less than 2 hours will get you to Nina. Water is available at the creek at the

southern end of Nina and the campsite is towards the northern end. Nina Bay features a spectacular mountain backdrop.

Almost home now. Over another lowish saddle and through some tall forest as you drop down to Blacksand Beach (watch for the exit track) then another saddle over to (big) Ramsay Bay and your collection at the mangrove boardwalk on the other side of the dune. Give yourself 2 hours so you don't arrive late. Not much water available on this last stretch. Watch out for the half buried sign directing you to the boardwalk.

Some people attempt this 32 km trail over 3 or even 2 nights. But some people are crazy too. I'd recommend 6 nights and this is what I would do:-

Night One - Mulligan's Falls camp

Nights Two and Three - Zoe Bay - because it's just so good and you should spend a day relaxing around the pool or exploring up the beach.

Nights Four and Five - Little Ramsay Bay - exploring the headlands, follow the creek upstream, ocean and freshwater swimming. Or 1 night at Banksia Beach and take a low tide journey out to Agnes Island

Night Six - Nina Beach allowing for a short easy walk out to your ferry collection.

Track summary:-

This is NOT an easy trail. I have met many travellers used to similarly iconic long distance wilderness trails who admitted it was harder than expected. After any rain rocks can be very slippery - and there are a lot of rocks you have to walk, hop and climb over.

Temperatures and humidity can get extreme.

There is unreliable Telstra phone coverage from Mulligan Camp and some of the saddles. Expect maybe just text signal at best.

Sand flies and mossies can be a major issue but I have only found this to be a problem on occasion only.

Water is usually not a problem between bays.

Toilets and steel food lockers are at all designated campsites and if you are lucky - some picnic tables.

No rubbish bins so plan to carry everything out.

Access to the island is through the following two companies:-

Absolute North Charters - 0419 712 577 - www.absolutenorthcharters.com.au

Hinchinbrook Island Cruises - 0499 335 383 - www.hinchinbrookislandcruises.com.au

Call or browse their websites to get an idea of what's on offer.

Take care and enjoy this great wilderness experience. While around 3,000 people use this track annually you often don't see anyone but it pays to book your permits well in advance as limits apply and school holidays are often booked out months in advance. Go to <http://www.nprsr.qld.gov.au/parks/hinchinbrook-thorsborne/about.html> for permits and more information.

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October 2015

some scenes along the way

