

Environmental groups sail to remote wilderness on a conservation

Mob of helpers protect island



Volunteers from Reef Catchments, Wild Mob and the community included Bev Weston, Andrew Houley, Rose Houley, Jacqui Shields, Irene Champion, Sue Wynn, Ernst Klose, Dave Pratchett.

PHOTOS: CONTRIBUTED

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IT might look like something from the television show *Survivor* but sailing to a remote and beautiful island to help protect natural resources is all in a day's work for a Mackay team of conservationists.

A group of 10 from Reef Catchments, and volunteers from the community and conservation group Wild

Mob, braved strong winds and took to the waters on the yacht *Wild Cat* bound for the remote Middle Percy Island in the first week of October.

Their mission – to help eradicate weeds, remove rubbish and bring in supplies from the mainland to protect the island's unique ecosystem.

The trip was one of Reef Catchments' Island Task-force sustainable resource

management projects, funded by the Australian Government's Caring for our Country program, supported by the Queensland Government and assisted by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, and Wild Mob.

Reef Catchments project manager, Derek Ball, said Middle Percy Island, located about 120km south-east of Mackay, was ecologically special.

"Middle Percy Island is a unique island. It sits between two bio-geographic regions and is home to a number of threatened species, as well as some unusual sand dune habitats," he said.

Volunteers stayed on the island for a week, performing activities like weed control, providing fire management advice, and clearing netting and rubbish from water. "We pulled out

close to a tonne of weeds in sensitive beach habitats, including *Periwinkle* and *Prickly Pair Cactus*," he said.

"We also created signage to help future visitors identify weeds.

"The island is here for visitors to enjoy, but it is important people check they do not land carrying seeds or similar on clothes or socks."

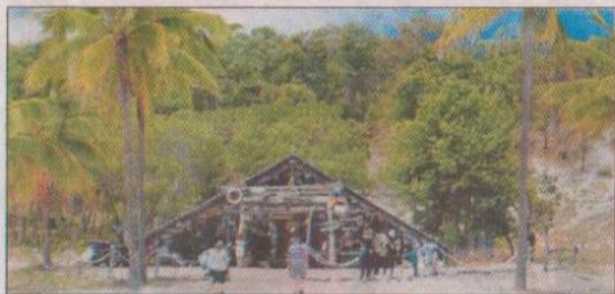
Island caretaker Cate

Radclyffe has lived on Middle Percy Island since 2008.

She said Reef Catchments had made a "huge impact" on the island's vegetation, and had also funded the Mackay barge *Alpha Bree* to bring over essential materials to re-roof the island homestead and protect sand dunes from erosion.

Ms Radclyffe said the island's pioneering and international yachting heritage should also be pre-

mission to look after the fragile Middle Percy Island ecosystem



The A-Frame or 'Percy Hilton' houses years of yachting mementos from visitors to the island including messages in a bottle.



Up to 5000 visitors from the international yachting community visit the island each year to enjoy its unspoilt wilderness.



The stunning Middle Percy Island lies about 120km south-east of Mackay, about a 10 to 12-hour sail.

served. European settlers have been living off island resources since the 1850s.

"There have been coffee farmers and sheep farmers, and the island is home to a contained level of heritage goat stock which were originally brought in as a food source for shipwrecked sailors," she said.

Today, Middle Percy Island attracts another breed of sailors – up to 5000 yachties each year.

"They come from America, Switzerland, France, Germany, and Australia –

everywhere," Ms Radclyffe said.

"What they love is the island's undeveloped remoteness.

"It is one of the few places in the Mackay and Whitsunday region where they can experience nature, without a commercial resort down the road."

The island's yachting history has been recorded in a unique building known as the A-Frame or 'Percy Hilton' on the island's West Bay.

"Everyone who lands on

the island leaves a memento. We've got everything from boat names to messages in a bottle," Ms Radclyffe said.

The island caretaker said organisations and volunteers like those from Wild Mob should be congratulated for their hands-on approach to conservation.

"We welcome any volunteers ready to help make a difference on Middle Percy," she said. She said the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) had also provided welcome support in

keeping the island's sustainability, heritage and history intact.

Since 2010, the bulk of Middle Percy Island has been classified as national park, with a small area set aside as a conservation area, to allow the island's pioneer heritage and homestead to be maintained.

The island can only be reached by boat, or by charter helicopter.

To express interest in island volunteer work email: middlepercy@bigpond.com

Cate attempts to keep work going

SKILLS like skinning a goat, catching a fish and grinding your own flour may not be in the average woman's repertoire but for Middle Percy Island caretaker, Cate Radclyffe, it's all part of life on an island.

The originally English Ms Radclyffe said while her unique lifestyle was not for everyone, that living in the "pioneer spirit" had plenty of positives.

"It's varied, it is never boring, and it's all set in one of the most beautiful places in the world," she said.

She said island living forced people to rely on their own ability, to think on their feet, and to be conscious about resources like water and power.

Ms Radclyffe got her first taste of the island when she came from the UK to see her cousin Andrew Martin (a leaseholder of the island for 33 years), in 1985.

"As soon as I set foot on the island, I knew this was where I belonged. It is just so incredibly beautiful, and wild – truly a piece of



Caretaker of Middle Percy Island Cate Radclyffe.

PHOTO: AMANDA BALMER

un-spoilt wilderness."

After returning to England Ms Radclyffe completed university studies in land resource management and planning and returned to Australia in 1994.

Following Mr Martin's death in 2003, she fought to be able to continue work on the island, and took up the job of caretaker in 2008.

"Andy entrusted me to look after the island's ecology and heritage. With the aid of dedicated volunteers, I am doing my utmost to continue his good work," she said.