

THE STORY OF THE *BARETO* AND THE *SAPPHIRE*



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Bareto and the *Sapphire*



HISTORY

Bundaberg has long described itself as the 'Southern Gateway to the Barrier Reef', and cruises to Lady Musgrave Island are an accepted part of the Bundaberg itinerary. It was due to the foresight and entrepreneurial talents of a group of Bundaberg businessmen back in 1931, that these cruises have become so popular.

Barrier Reef Tourist Trips (Ba.re.to) was formed by Bundaberg businessmen George Arnold (saddlery company Arnold and Marsh), Stan Mahoney (butchers Mahoney and Dexter), and newsagent Sam McCracken. They decided a cruise company would be a profitable venture, given that Bundaberg was ideally located close to Lady Musgrave Island and its coral reefs.

Lady Musgrave

While there is little recorded about the discovery of Lady Musgrave Island, it is believed that the first documented contact was in 1843, by the *HMS Fly* on a trip to Northern Queensland. In the 1890s, British firm John T. Arundel & Co. began guano (phosphate) mining in the Capricorn Bunker group of islands, which included Lady

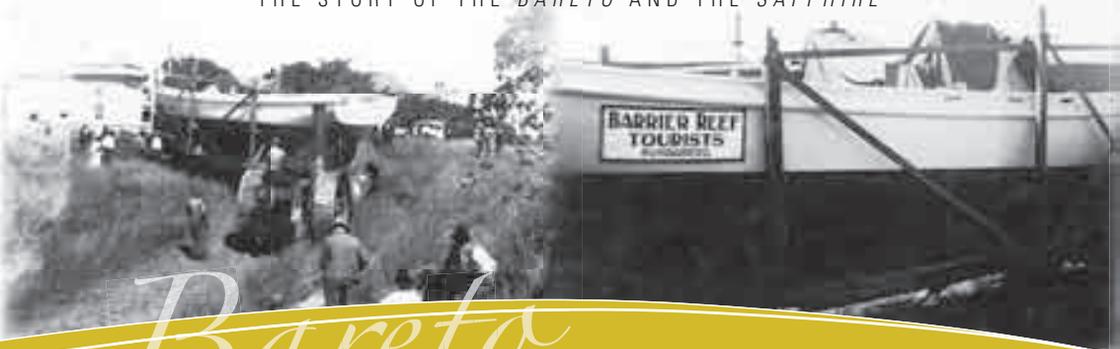
Elliott and Lady Musgrave Islands. On their arrival at Lady Musgrave in 1892, employee Albert Ellis noted that earlier visitors, possibly Asian beche-de-mer fishermen, had blown an entrance through the coral ring into the lagoon, allowing small vessels to enter and leave at will.

Although the phosphate deposits on Lady Musgrave proved to be small, the company set up a minor operation there, with George Ellis as Manager. Eventually John T. Arundel and Co. moved on through the Capricorn Bunker group, and Lady Musgrave Island was not inhabited again until 1931, when Barrier Reef Tourist Trips decided to build a tourist facility there for their planned cruises.

Stan Bell wrote some years later that 'Iron' Jack Theodore, a Bundaberg plumber, was included in the group sent out to Lady Musgrave to construct a building. It became known as The Old Tin Shed, and was built from corrugated iron on a wooden frame. The Shed included a kitchen and sleeping quarters, and was built "in record time", according to Jack Theodore.



Images: Top left - Launch of *Bareto* near traffic bridge. Bottom left - *Sapphire* TMV c1938. Above - The *Sapphire* conducted cruises to Lady Musgrave, 1939.



Bareto

The *Bareto*

The first cruise boat was named *Bareto*, after the parent company, and was built in Bundaberg by Captain Bill Petersen and Andy Larsen in a shed in Lamb Street. The boat was launched in the Burnett River in December 1931, and the *Bundaberg Daily Times* printed this article the week before, on December 23:

“The world’s best holiday” is an apt description of a trip to the Great Barrier Reef, which is offered by means of the Bareto. This luxurious yacht will leave Bundaberg on Boxing Day morning, and will return on Saturday, January 2. Anybody wishing to make the trip can do so by applying to Messrs. Arnold and Marsh, Bourbong-street (sic), booking agents for Great Barrier Reef Tourist Trips Ltd.... Passengers will be provided with all the comforts possible on this modern deep sea yacht, which has been specially designed to meet the requirements of the tourist traffic to the reef.”

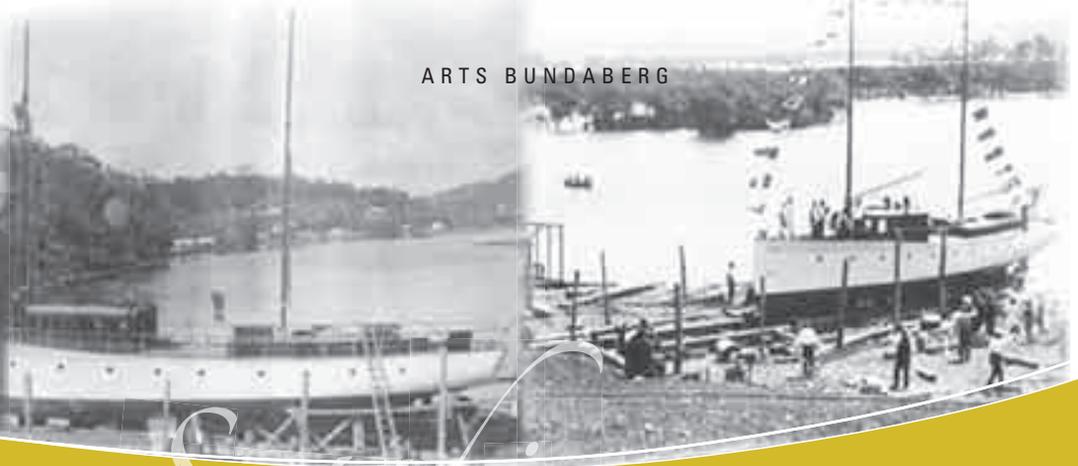
The *Bareto* became a common sight on the Burnett River, with moonlight excursions a popular form of entertainment. The *Bundaberg Daily Times* reported in 1932 that the cruise boat was hired almost every night of the week by city organisations, and was a popular venue for weekend fishing parties for many years.

In 1935, local public accountant Stan Bell took over Barrier Reef Tourist Trips, and in the next few years the *Bareto* was chartered by the rich and famous for cruises. American millionaires the Vanderbilts took a honeymoon cruise and pretended to be marooned on Lady Musgrave for a week, while Sydney Department Store magnate Anthony Hordern chartered the *Bareto* for a Dunk Island holiday. In later years, the *Bareto* became an oil exploration vessel chartered by the Shell Oil Company to explore the waters around New Guinea.

The *Sapphire*

In 1937 Stan Bell formed a new company – Tourist and Marine Investments Pty Ltd – and purchased a new marine vessel, a motor yacht named *Sapphire*. According to Alan Bell, the MV *Sapphire* was built at Gordon Beattie’s yard in Palermo, Daley’s Point, which was on the central coast of NSW, and launched in 1924. The *Sapphire* was given an extensive overhaul early in 1934 by previous owner Ernest Major, before being sold to Stan Bell. The yacht sailed up the coast from Sydney, and arrived in Bundaberg on December 29, 1937. The *Sapphire* was 72 ft (22m) overall, with a beam of 14 ft. The power plant was provided by two Atlantic engines of 40 hp each, with twin screws and was capable of a speed of 11 knots.

After arriving in Bundaberg, the *Sapphire*



Sapphire

was refitted for tourist trips, and a tourist handout from 1938 describes the comforts on board:

The yacht "Sapphire" is a luxuriously fitted vessel having five compartments fitted with berths besides a well-appointed galley, passenger's lavatory, food cupboards and two large refrigerators in the section aft of the Engine Room, and cruise quarters with separate lavatory ahead of the Engine Room. Of the five compartments used for accommodation of tourists, one has two berths, three have four berths each, and one has six berths making a total of twenty berths throughout the ship. A motor launch and sailing dinghy are carried on davits amidships.

The *Sapphire* sailed between Lady Musgrave and other islands such as Heron, South Keppel, Daydream and Hayman, with

visits to Yeppoon, Gladstone, and Bustard Head on the return trip to Bundaberg. The cruises departed at midnight on a Saturday, returning to Bundaberg a fortnight later on a Friday morning. Activities available while on the cruises included fishing, oystering, pig, duck and scrub turkey shooting, as well as the more traditional reef viewing and bird and marine studies.

The cruises cost sixteen guineas for the fortnight, and aimed to anchor each evening in sheltered waters, with all cruising done in the daylight hours. The promoters assured tourists that "the catering service on board the 'Sapphire' is of the highest possible standard, and no pains are spared in making the holiday one that for interest, comfort and variety will always be remembered with great satisfaction and pleasure."



IMAGES: (Top) 1. *Bareto* launch at Ferry cutting. 2. *Bareto* on blocks at launch. 3. *Sapphire* at Beattie's shipyard, Daley's Pt NSW. 4. Launching of *Sapphire*. (Bottom) 1. On board the *Sapphire*, 1938. (Bottom) 2. *Sapphire* after RAAF refit, in Darwin.

Zane Grey and the *Sapphire*

Considered the father of the modern American western novel, Zane Grey wrote more than 80 westerns, and remains one of the best-selling authors of all time. He was also an avid fisherman, especially big-game fishing, and although based in America, traveled throughout Australia and New Zealand in search of deep sea sport fishing.

Grey's impending visit in 1939 excited the local fishing enthusiasts so much, they held a meeting in the Council Chambers, and Mayor Fred Buss commented that 'I cannot stress too much the importance of forming a Game Fishing Association in view of the publicity it will give Bundaberg, quite apart from the sport it will provide for members.'

Zane Grey arrived in Bundaberg on March 1, and the following day told the *Bundaberg Daily News & Mail* that "we are out to put Bundaberg on the map as far as big game fishing is concerned...", as he boarded the *Sapphire* for a fishing cruise to Lady Musgrave Island. Grey's main interest on this trip was marlin, but as the season was later in the year, he decided to spend time on the island planning his next novel and pursuing what he told Stan Bell was the millionaire's hobby – shell collecting.

War Years

The *Sapphire* continued her Lady Musgrave cruises until January 1942, when owner Stan Bell was informed by local authorities that it was considered too dangerous for them to remain so isolated out at sea, now that Japan had entered World War II. The Principal Naval Overseer based in Maryborough inspected the *Sapphire* on 22 July, 1942, and according to records obtained by Alan Bell from the National Archives, the Secretary to the Minister for the Navy sent the Army the following assessment:

"A survey of the yacht *Sapphire* has revealed that she is in a poor state of repair and generally unsuitable for service conditions. In view of this report the Naval Board are not desirous of purchasing the vessel".

The *Sapphire* was subsequently requisitioned by the RAAF for duty and sent to Darwin. The waters around Darwin Harbour became the final resting place for the *Sapphire*, when it sank after a fire started in the engine room and engulfed the vessel.

Sue Gammon

Bundaberg Library

Many thanks to Maurie Anderson, and Alan, Lorraine and Ian Bell for information and photos about the *Sapphire*.

Photographs of the *Sapphire* and the *Bareto* are in the Picture Bundaberg collection, kindly donated by Gus Kuhnel and M. Andersen.

References

Bundaberg Daily News & Mail, March 1939, various issues.

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Sapphire Cruise Trips information sheet, 1938

'Some Early History of Lady Musgrave Island', and

'Stan Bell's Impressions of Lady Musgrave Island after an absence of 45½ years', from <http://www.1mcruises.com.au/en/mining.html>



Images:

1. Dorothy Bell with fish.

2. Sign on Lady Musgrave Island.

3. Zane Grey in Australia.