
Pen Friends Wanted !



20-year-old Margaret Reid, of 29 Whitton Park Road, Peak Hill, would like some pen friends. How about some letters for her?

We were on a reef about 150 miles east of Ayr, when we saw a great manta-ray lying on top of the water. As we neared it the engine disturbed it, and it threw its wings into the air and then brought them down with a tremendous thud. Water splashed all around it, and as it began to swim out of sight, I noticed its wing movements were the same as a bird in flight. Its graceful movements reminded me of a giant hawk flying in the air.

We went north as far as Bramble reef, which is situated about 70 or 80 miles east of Townsville. During the morning we talked to another fishing boat over the two-way radio.

Finishing with this reef, Les decided to head back to Mackay. We had been at sea for seven days without sighting land.

I had noticed birds such as terns way out at sea, even at points of over 100 miles from the coastline of Australia.

On the way back to Mackay, we got a good catch, and soon had one ice-box filled with fish. There was about 1,400 lb. of fish in one box alone.

The next day, after leaving Bramble, Les decided we would go near the outer edge. He said, "This is where the horizon has mountains on it." When we reached there I saw what he meant.

Although the day was calm, the swell of the Pacific Ocean was tremendous. Instead of a level horizon as one would expect, the horizon was like a wavy line, and although the waves of the Outer Pacific were not breaking, it gave the appearance of a topsy-turvy ocean.

The reef was between us and the outer edge. It was here that we caught a lot of turrum, which are about three feet long and weigh in the vicinity of 70 lb., although bigger ones have been caught.

They are a great fighting fish and inhabit a point between two reefs where the current of the sea is apparently stronger than any other part of the reef. When there is a school of these fish and one is hooked, the others follow the hooked fish as it is pulled into the boat. When they are near the boat we then throw about 20 feet of line over and catch them.

That night, just after tea, a storm struck. The wind brought in the rain, and although we were anchored in a lee, the ocean was a turmoil. The boat rolled and the anchor chain was hitting the bow of the boat very hard. The skipper put a rope on the anchor chain, about two feet from the water-level and tied it again to the coil, where the rest of the chain was on deck. This formed a cushion on the chain, and stopped the noise, and also prevented the anchor chain from breaking. After that everything was all right.

Next day, after breakfast, we continued our trip South again, along the reef. At one reef fish were not biting well, so Les suggested we use hand lines, because there were many red emperor in this part of the reef waters.

The boat was drifting and we dare not let our lines drag on the ocean bottom as the reef would break the line after snagging it. Les showed me how we had to have heavy weights for sinkers, and after letting the lines into the water we would feel for the bump the weight made as it struck bottom, then we would hold our lines so that the weight would be about a foot or so from the bottom, preventing the hook from snagging. If the weight came in contact with a reef, the vibration would be felt and so we would shorten the line by pulling it in until we had the required length needed to reach about two feet from the bottom. If it got deeper we would know, as at short intervals we would jerk the lines up and down to see if they were at the required depth.

Here the fishing wasn't too good, and we soon decided to call it a day. Bill was over on the next reef, so we called him in, tied up the dory behind our boat and headed further in.

To be continued next month