The George Haddock Extension to the Fraser Island Great Walk

During January and March volunteers representing the National Parks Association of Queensland, Queensland Bushwalkers, the Butchulla people and FIDO completed the task of defining the preferred route to extend the Fraser Island Great Walk from Lake Garawongera to Arch Cliffs passing five of Fraser Island’s unique perched dune lakes — Hidden Lake, Lake Coomboo, Lake Freshwater, Lake Allom and Lake Bowarrady. Four of these lakes will only be accessible to hikers. The route passes close to the island’s most pristine and spectacular rainforest on the island at the headwaters of Eli Creek.

This is the first stage of the most ambitious walking track project yet undertaken by volunteers in Queensland. It aims to honour the late George Haddock who contributed indefatigable voluntary service for Fraser Island, National Parks and community organizations. When completed the George Haddock Section will add over 50 kilometres to the Fraser Island Great Walk. The route chosen is removed from motor traffic and has been determined on gradients, environmental values and aesthetics.

This project has the approval in principle of Queensland Minister for Sustainability and Climate Change, Kate Jones, provided that the sponsoring volunteer organizations produce an Environmental Impact Statement and Cultural Heritage Assessment that meets requisite standards.

Now that the preferred route has been delineated, the challenge is to undertake those studies. This needs to be done before work can commence on the track work and associated infrastructure of toilets, shelters and signage.

A distinctive name: The stunning Fraser Island long distance walk deserves a unique and distinctive name to differentiate it from Queensland’s 12 other Great Walks. Other famous walks such as the Milford Track in New Zealand, the Overland Track in Tasmania and the Bibbulmun Track in Western Australia have internationally known names. The name proposed is the Kgari Track. (Kgari is the Butchulla name for Fraser Island).

When the George Haddock Section is added, the Kgari Track will pass beside 12 spectacular lakes and traverse spectacular heathlands and rainforest. It will establish a 150 kilometre through-track on Fraser Island through the interior of the island without going on any beaches and complement the recently opened 102 kilometre Cooloola Great Walk from Noosa to Rainbow Beach immediately to its south. It also offers access to the trackless northern part of Fraser Island for wilderness walks.

The Kgari Track is destined to become Australia’s most popular long distance walk because of the scenery, climate, sand and location on the continent’s east coast.

The new walks make it possible for ambitious bushwalkers to spend at least two weeks intimately exploring the Great Sandy Region on foot without traversing the same track twice.

The George Haddock Walk is a joint initiative of FIDO and the National Parks Association of Queensland who are the Project Coordinators. The project is now in urgent need of funding to enable the critical assessment work to proceed. The lack of finance to cover some of the logistical costs to undertake the Environmental Impact Statement is slowing work on advancing the project to the construction stage. There are many volunteers wanting to participate but work can’t begin until the planning process has been completed and assessed. Tax deductible donations can be made to the NPAQ, PO Box 1040 MILTON CENTRE Q 4064.

Planned Infrastructure

The coordinators of the George Haddock Track are proposing to build enclosed dingo-proof shelters with sleeping and cooking benches along the lines of those used on the Bibbulmun track in Western Australia rather than establishing hikers camp grounds as currently exist on the Fraser Island Great Walk. Veteran bushwalkers consulted have expressed a unanimous preference for these shelters. They may also have less environmental impact than alternative campsites. Four (4) such shelters are proposed for the George Haddock Section — all between 10 and 13 kms apart — at Pine Hill, Lake Coomboo, Lake Allom and Lake Bowarrady.

The Environmental Impact Statement will consider this when we finalize and submit the proposal.

* Hikers shelter have a much smaller footprint on the landscape than a fenced off dingo-proof 100m by 100m yard. To allow about 15 people to sleep would affect an area of about 15x20 metres.

* It would be easier to maintain the hiker shelters as dingo and crow proof areas than the alternative type of campground even with dingo proof lockers.

* Hikers would be safer from falling branches in tall timber areas. A well-supported iron roof would provide better protection than thin fabric.

* The iron roof would provide a water catchment that would be a great advantage for hikers. A tank for drinking water is proposed for each site. Other forms of water supply have significant environmental impacts.

* The shelters would provide an under-cover sleeping bench, the edge of which would also serve as a seat, shelves for storing food and a bench to enabling cooking to be done under cover in any weather.

* The option of not having to carry a tent would make this walk more attractive for hikers planning long distance walks because of the extra food they need to carry in this remoter part of Fraser Island.

* The existence of such shelters would be most advantageous and help volunteers undertake the requisite work on the track construction and maintenance.

Toilets are proposed to be provided at three of the shelter sites while the Lake Allom shelter would be able to take advantage of the existing day-use toilet.