



Brendan McMahon, the owner-operator of Caloundra Jet Ski



Brendan McMahon and a client about to go for a spin

into the wild



NATHAN WOULFE EXPLORES THE FAR REACHES OF PUMICESTONE PASSAGE DURING A GUIDED JET SKI TOUR.

AS A young bloke, in the days before Steve Irwin, Malcolm Douglas was my wild man of choice.

His journeys into the most remote of the Australian wilderness were a staple of my television diet.

With faithful mutt by his side, Malcolm would head off into the wild unknown, discovering what he may, eating what he might.

Obviously, the fact that you're reading this means I didn't do likewise and disappear into the great empty expanses that make up the bulk of our country.

But as I discovered on a grey Tuesday morning, one doesn't need to travel for miles to get beautifully lost.

You can't go wrong when it comes to operating the ski – green to start, red to stop...

The Pumicestone Passage has hugged Caloundra's coastline since long before Caloundra rose from the sand dunes and wallum.

Head south, away from the building-lined northern end, and for all you know, you've left the Sunshine Coast and arrived in the most remote of estuarine systems.

It is untouched territory – as would be expected of a conservation zone within the Moreton Bay Marine Park.

But untouched does not mean out of reach – Brendan McMahon, the owner-operator of Caloundra Jet Ski showed

me this much.

Brendan launched the eco tour company in December of last year, leading hire-ride tours deep into the marine park, combining the excitement of guiding a high-speed watercraft through mangroves and saltmarsh, with an informative eco-adventure.

The park is home to a wide variety of bird and marine life – the weather kept the dugongs and dolphins hidden, but the multitude of birds were obviously not put off by the grey skies.

It almost seems wrong racing through the pristine waters: you feel like you should be treading lightly.

But Brendan assures me, before we leave Golden Beach's Military Jetty, that the spanking-new Yamaha skis had met strict EPA guidelines – guidelines so stringent that he is the only guided jet ski tour operating in the Passage.

You can't go far wrong when it comes to operating the ski – green to start, red to stop, the harder you squeeze the throttle, the faster you go. Easy.

With that and a few simple hand-signals in mind, we're off.

This isn't just a case of hiring a ski and racing around in circles for an hour. Rather, it's a 90-minute guided tour of the ecosystems and communities that make up the Pumicestone Passage, with intermittent stops allowing Brendan to impart his formidable knowledge of the area.

The tour takes me as far south as Mission Point, with Donnybrook (apparently the tavern is fine spot for a cold one, so says Brendan) visible in the not-too-distant distance.

As much as I enjoy the informative side, I'm itching to throw the ski around and see, for one, just how capable the latest

machines are, and two, how inept I am at throwing said machine around.

I get the chance on the homeward leg, once we enter the wider end of the Passage and leave the delicate mangroves behind.

If not for the familiar silhouettes of the Glasshouse Mountains, we could be anywhere. I think such pristine areas existing so close to a city the size of Caloundra is something unknown to most.

Caloundra Jet Ski tours depart twice daily from Golden Beach, for \$199 per ski, with each able to carry up to two adults and one child.

Bring sunscreen, swimmers or boardies and a sense of adventure – Brendan provides the rest, down to a cold drink at the halfway point (not at the Donnybrook pub, although I'm sure it could be arranged).

Caloundra Jet Ski also offers personal watercraft licensing and testing.

Call p 0434 330 660 for bookings and enquiries.

CALOUNDRA JET SKI

Hire-ride eco tours of the Pumicestone Passage and Moreton Bay Marine Park.

Departing twice-daily from Military Jetty, Golden Beach. 90 minutes, \$199 per ski (up to two adults and one child)

escapes.

Words **Christine Middap**

I've always admired people who do daredevil, adventurous things on their holidays. We all know them; the A-type personalities, the thrillseekers who jump out of planes or leap off mountains, casting aside their fears, embracing the moment, reciting the "you only live once" mantra. So I felt just a little foolish at the knot of fear tightening my stomach as I stared down at a jet ski bobbing at my feet. Partly it's because I don't do daredevil (not, I admit, that jet skiing equates with daredevil in most people's minds, but at this moment it did in mine). But mostly it's because I had a five-year-old clambering onto the machine with a blind faith in my ability to operate the thing.

The wind was gusting strongly around us, chopping up the water in Pumicestone Passage off Caloundra and Brendan McMahon, the owner of Caloundra Jet Ski, was giving us the drill. "Here's the lever to accelerate, but there are no brakes." *No brakes?* Speed was, Brendan said, my friend on this machine; decent acceleration meant more control and a smoother ride. "Just stay about 30 metres behind me," he added. By this stage I was ready to bail out, but then Brendan uttered the magic words: "Jennifer Hawkins has done it." Yes, this exact tour. *Well, what are we waiting for?*

With wetsuits and lifejackets in place, we're off, my little girl and I squealing with excitement (or was that fear?) as we ploughed through the water. At first we bounced along the waves, but



remembering Brendan's words I picked up speed and by the time we entered the more sheltered waters of the passage, we were gliding. Ospreys circled overhead, fish leapt out of the water and we kept an eye out for dugongs and dolphins. Come September, some 50,000 birds will migrate here from as far away as China, Brendan told us on one of our three stops on the 40km trip. We talked about the Glass House Mountains, in clear view from our sheltered spot, and the mangroves and salt marshes. As we powered along we took care not to upset other water users, slowing down as we approached fishermen. I've been known to curse the noise of jet skis during a quiet moment on the water but the relationship between Brendan and the local fishermen seemed cordial.

By the time we turned back I had negotiated

the feared S-bends through the narrow navigation channel without too much trouble, my daughter, sitting in front of me on a seat that can take three, was still laughing and we hadn't come close to falling off. But the cold wind had pierced our wetsuits and my mind was now on a hot spa at our resort, Crowne Plaza Pelican Waters (formerly under the Ramada brand), a short drive away.

The 18-hole Greg Norman-designed Club Pelican Golf Course is a major drawcard here, but this is a seriously good resort for non-golfing families and couples. Our master suite (pictured) came with its own full kitchen, separate bedroom and ensuite, while the children slept in an adjoining queen room. Both were modern and spacious with marvellous views over the vast pool and golf course. There are bike paths to explore, an Endota Day Spa, a games room for the kids, a very good restaurant and plenty of curious kangaroos that visit the grounds. Most importantly, the spa in our room was hot, deep and relaxing: the perfect antidote to our day of adventure.

THE PLACE Crowne Plaza Pelican Waters Golf Resort and Spa, 38 Mahogany Drive, Pelican Waters, Caloundra **PH** (07) 5437 4666

WEBLINK www.crowneplaza.com

THE DEAL Queen bed studio from \$130 per night, 2 brm deluxe from \$280. Caloundra Jet Ski departs Golden Beach esplanade: **PH** 0434 330 660 / www.caloundrajetski.com.au; \$199 per jet ski (max. two adults, one child) for 1½-hr tour.

MUSTDO.

EXPLORE the diverse beaches of Caloundra on foot. There's a 4.3km walk from the western end of Bulcock Esplanade to Kings and Shelly beaches and all the way to Moffatt Headland. There's another good walk along the Golden Beach esplanade.

CHECK OUT Caloundra's inaugural Tastes of the Coast Food and Wine Festival, until July 13, featuring wine tastings, food and art shows and a concert by Jimmy Barnes. Visit www.tastesofthecoast.com.au

water

From jet ski to spa jets – a cool adventure, followed by warm immersion.

courses

