



problem merely a cyclic phenomenon with no cause for alarm. Shades of Nero fiddling while Rome burned!

The Great Barrier Reef has been referred to as the "Eighth Wonder of the World". I would suggest to readers interested in the ecology of the natural environment that they buy or get a copy of Theo Brown's book from the Public Library to read — they will be amazed at its revelations.

To return to the August 1972 survey this was to be a continuation of an inspection of the Darley Reef area made by Dr. Robert Endean and Theo Brown in mid 1970. They reported they had found no trace of Crown of Thorns at that time. Our objective was to try and plot the southern perimeter of the plague.

The Darley Reef is well off-shore from just north of Bowen in Queensland and is one of the biggest coral complexes in the Great Barrier Reef, covering more than a hundred square miles. It has no islands. Much of the area is uncharted and not many boats venture in among the tangle of shoals.

The survey was organised by the "Save the Barrier Reef" committee and was carried out from a base camp on Holbourne Island between the 5th and 28th August last. Holbourne Island is uninhabited with no

fresh water and is 24 miles out to sea from Bowen. Theo Brown was in charge of the operation.

Finance for the expedition was obtained from fund-raising by the committee in Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales. The Queensland Government did not contribute a cent towards the cost. The money raised was used for working costs of the expedition and covering the costs of living on the island. Divers and other camp members had to provide their own transport to Bowen.

Another N.U.R.G. member selected to take part in the survey was Peter Smith, who comes from Toronto and has been with the N.U.R.G. for about eight years. Peter and myself travelled by car to Bowen, towing Peter's 13 foot Quintrex boat and it proved to be very useful on the island.

We arrived at Holbourne Island on Wednesday morning (9.8.72) and before settling-in had a look around what was to be our home for the next twelve days. The tents and the camp equipment, which had been provided by the Army, was already set up. (Apparently, Senator Georges, who was a co-organiser of the survey, had done some good work in obtaining a loan of the equipment.)

ABOVE (LEFT): An underwater shot of a Crown of Thorns starfish eating coral on Hope Reef and (RIGHT) the underside of a Crown of Thorns photographed on the beach at Holbourne Island. Wristwatch (lower right) gives comparison of size.

There were sixty divers in addition to some volunteer cooks and a Doctor on the island. The divers were split-up into two groups and each group was sub-divided into six boat crews with each crew consisting of four divers. The crew dived and did camp chores together. Each group dived every alternate day when the weather permitted. Weather conditions for the whole time were sunny and hot and diving was only occasionally postponed due to strong winds causing rough seas.

A normal dive day began with a 4.00 a.m. rise and breakfast at 4.30 a.m. Then we would take the six small aluminium (13 foot) boats out into the bay where the 50 foot charter boat, "New Moon", was anchored. All equipment and personnel transferred to the charter boat and the small boats were towed astern. The "New Moon" usually left the island an hour before daylight for the thirty mile

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