

CHAPTER 10

Rooke Island

The storm abated and the rain had ceased to fall. Everywhere water dripped from branches and leaves. The sky was lighter. The rumbling of thunder had moved away to the north west where the ranges climbed up over the town of Gloucester to the Barrington Tops eighty miles away. Tom and Mark joined Bill in his exploring. They skirted around the southern part of the island looking for a proper landing place for the boats with a camping spot nearby.

“Here. This looks reasonable,” said Mark.

“We will be able to get in and out of the boats without climbing trees.”

“Hello. Someone’s been here before us. Look at these footmarks in the mud.”

“Must have been the soldiers you saw, Bill.”

“What soldiers?” asked Mark.

“Oh. We didn’t tell you in the excitement. You tell him, Bill.”

“They were in a canoe. They shot out from the end of the island just after the storm hit. You were flying towards the island at the time.”

“You had your hands full.”

“Which way did they go?”

“Downstream. Lickerty split.”

“More seekers after the mystery markers. Perhaps there is another one on this island then.”

“That’s a thought.” They walked back to where the girls were keeping an eye on the boats. Cate had already told Liz about the soldiers in the canoe.

“How did you go?” she asked the boys.

“We’ll paddle the boats around the corner. There’s a good spot there. Bill can walk you there while Mark and I move them around.”

“Before he does so we’ll get you to untie the mooring lines.”

Tom swung down from the overhanging branches into his boat and Mark stepped out through scrub which overhung the water onto the bow of *Sapphire*. They drew in the anchors which had been set out in

the river. The girls untied the lines and threw them into the water as the two got underway. Tom and Mark then paddled the boats around the shore of the little island to the spot they had found. They couldn't haul the boats up at this point so they tied them off at the bows about twenty feet apart and put the anchors out again to hold the sterns of the two boats away from the shore.

In another hour the five had brought all the gear ashore, set up the tents and changed out of their wet clothing.

"What's the time, Cate?"

"Half past four."

"Where's Bill," asked Tom.

"Exploring again, I guess."

"Bill!" Tom called.

"Coming!" came an answering call. "I've been looking for the marker," he said when he returned a few minutes later.

"What marker?" asked Cate.

"We think the presence of those soldiers indicates there is another marker on the island," said Mark.

"How about we all search for it before tea?"

"We are pretty well all set up here now," said Tom looking around.

"Yes. Let's."

"Phew. This scrub is thick, isn't it," said Liz twenty minutes later.

"And wet," said Cate.

"Lean on it with your hips," said Tom.

"If there's a marker it's got to be here somewhere," said Mark. The five had searched the southern end of the island in vain and were now working their way to the rather narrow northern end.

"Why else would the soldiers have been on the island if there wasn't something here?"

"Hey. Look who's going past," said Bill. They had been conscious of the sound of a motor chugging away in the background. Through the trees to their left, some sixty or seventy yards away, was the mystery sailor in his strange looking craft motoring upstream with sails furled. He was looking ahead as he steered his craft.

"He's smoking a pipe," said Bill.

“Not a very nautical hat,” said Liz
“A real bushy’s hat.”
“Look’s like he’s heading for the Broadwater after all,” said Mark.
“There’s something about him that looks familiar,” said Tom staring
after the boat as it disappeared from sight behind some scrub.
“Come on,” said Mark. “We’re not far from the end of the island
now.”
“Shouldn’t we be looking for a tree that’s high enough to hang one
of those markers in it?” asked Liz.
“Of course, Liz,” said Tom.
“Brilliant!” said Cate. “Over there are the tallest trees. Let’s head
for them.” They pushed through the scrub towards the trees she had
indicated.
“Yes,” called Bill who had pressed ahead of the others, “there’s a
marker here all right.” They quickened their pace. The marker hung,
half hidden in the thick branches of a tree in the very centre of the
small forest.
“Someone’s been here before us. Look at the way the bush has been
trampled down.”
“The two in the canoe obviously,” said Cate. Bill was bending over
the ground beneath the marker.
“What is it, Bill?” asked Tom.
“Another S,” Bill replied looking up. “It is an S, isn’t it?” There
was the now familiar small patch of cement with the letter S engraved
into it.
“Oh. Is that all?” said Cate.
“What did you want it to be?” asked Liz.
“Well a vowel would have been nice. An A or an E.”
“Or an IOU,” said Bill.
“Never mind,” said Mark. “If ever we find the key to this
competition it will count.”
“I’ll bet the two in the canoe were annoyed,” said Tom.
“Why?” asked Cate.
“Well they left their canoe at the southern end and had to walk the
length of the island to get here.”

“And the weather was foul while they were here,” said Mark. They were close to the western edge of the island now and they pushed through to the water’s edge.

“That boat is just going around the bend,” said Liz pointing up river.

“Look, he’s waving,” said Cate. The figure at the helm had turned and was looking back at them over his shoulder. As they watched, he raised an arm. They waved back at him.

“Our mystery man,” said Liz.

“Or guardian angel,” said Tom.

“What do you mean?” asked Cate.

“Well, he’s *always* nearby, isn’t he? Almost as if he was keeping watch over us.”

They returned to the camp and prepared their dinner. Liz was down at the water’s edge cleaning some utensils when she saw something small and white just along the shore half in and half out of the water. With difficulty she retrieved it. “Cate,” she called, “look at this.”

“What is it?”

“I’ve found a piece of paper. It’s got typewriting on it.” She held it out as Cate came up. It was a sheet of paper with creases which showed it had been folded very small. It was also a bit grubby.

“*Joint Chiefs of Staff Gold Cup*,” Cate read the heading. “*Open to teams of four from each of the Army, Navy and Air Force...*” The two girls scanned the contents of the note.

“What are stations?”

“I don’t know.”

“Look it says—‘Rooke Island, Corrie Island, Snapper Island and Boondaba Island’. We’ve been to them all.”

“This must be the key!” said Cate looking at her excitedly. “Quick, we must tell the boys. Tom!” she cried, “Mark! Bill! Look what Liz has found.”

The boys who were busy near the tents turned towards them and, seeing their excitement, dropped what they were doing and came over.

“Liz has found the key,” said Cate. “It explains everything.”

“One of those soldiers must have dropped it in the excitement of getting back into their canoe,” said Mark, as they scanned it.

“The ‘parachutes’ are orienteering markers,” said Tom.

JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

GOLD CUP

Open to teams of four from each of the Army, Navy and Air Force.

Location: Port Stephens, Myall River and the Myall Lakes.

Rules

1. No motored vessel or vehicle, no radio or telephone contact allowed.
2. The object of the exercise is to find a gold key in a leather pouch.
3. Clues as to its whereabouts will be provided at each of 18 stations beneath standard orienteering markers located throughout the area bounded on the north by the northern shore of Myall Lake, to the west by the Pacific Highway, to the south by latitude 32 degrees 45 minutes south and to the east generally by the Australian East Coast but including the easternmost points of Broughton Island, Cabbage Tree Island and Boondelbah Island.
4. At each station there will be discovered a letter of the alphabet or a numeral. The 18 letters and numerals will, when assembled and juggled, provide the location of the key.
5. Each team will commence at 0600 hrs on a day to be advised at one of three places to be determined by lot—Nerong, Hawk's Nest and Bungwahl.
6. The locations of the stations are as follows:

Corrigan's Island
McGrath's Island
Sheep Island
Saddle at 425094
Saddle at 347054
Buladelah Point
Shack at 274078
Chinaman's Knob
Rooke Island
Cabbage Tree Island
Corrie Island
Baromee Hill
Snapper Island
Broughton Island
Boondelbah Island
Boondaba (Middle) Island
Mt Stephens
Yacaaba Head

Good luck and watch out for ticks and sandflies!

Organiser JCOSGC

“What is orienteering?”

“Navigating in the bush from point to point. These things we have been seeing must be the markers they use.”

“Look at the area it covers,” said Mark who had stepped back to the tents and picked up their map of Port Stephens and the Myall Lakes. He laid it out on a ground sheet between them. “From the top of the Myalls down to Port Stephens. And from the highway east to the islands off the coast.”

“There are three stations off the coast,” said Tom. “Broughton, Cabbage Tree and Boondelbah.”

“What about these other islands?” asked Liz. “Here is Corrigan’s Island, and here’s McGrath’s on the main Myall Lake. Where is Sheep Island? With heads together the five perused the map from top to bottom.

“Here,” said Cate pointing. “In the middle lake. What is it called? *Boolombayte*.”

“Where are these saddles and the shack?” asked Bill. “What are these numbers?”

“Grid references,” said Tom. “We’ll have to get out the topographical maps to find out.”

“I’ll get them,” said Cate. “They’re in the forward compartment on *Emerald*.” She left the others and ran down to where the boats were tied off. She was soon back with a plastic case containing the maps.

“See the map is divided up into squares across the top and down the side,” said Tom as he opened up the *Myall Lake* sheet. “Each one is numbered. You go across the top first. What is the grid reference for the shack?”

“274078,” said Mark.

“Right. You go to the top to the line marked 27. Then you mentally divide the square to the right of that into ten parts and go across four tenths. That gives you the horizontal reference.”

“I see,” said Mark. “Then you do the same with the vertical one.”

“07 and go up eight tenths,” Tom replied. “Where they cross is the grid reference 274078.”

They traced the two lines with their fingers.

“There,” said Mark, “on the Myall River where it comes in from Bulahdelah.”

“Who’s got a pencil?”

“We’ll put a cross there. Let’s do the same with the tourist map.”

“Where are these others?” asked Bill. “Saddle at 425094 and another at 347054.”

“Liz and I will work these ones out,” said Cate. With heads bent over the map they set to work using the method Tom had shown them. All thought of dinner was forgotten.

“So the first one is on the south eastern shore of Myall Lake,” said Mark when they had defined them all, “and the second is on the neck that divides Lake Booloombayte.”

“We’ve got four clues—an N, two Ss and a 5,” said Bill.

“That leaves another fourteen,” said Cate.

“What a pity we didn’t know about Baromee Hill,” said Liz.

“Or Yacaaba Head,” said Mark.

“And Stephen’s Peak!” said Tom with a grin. “It’s a bit of a pipe dream hoping to keep up with them, isn’t it?”

“Well, we can still get the one at Chinaman’s Knob tomorrow. We might as well enter into the spirit of the thing.”

“Since we’ve done so well up to date.”

“It would be good if we could get the ones at the shack and at Bulahdelah Point.”

“I don’t know how Dad and Mum will take it if we go tripping off up the Myall River when they are expecting us at the camp on the Broadwater,” said Tom. “It will take a while to get those two.”

“But if we did,” said Cate. “We could get the two at the saddle on Lake Booloombayte and at Sheep Island the following day.”

“That would give us nine clues,” said Bill.

“And we would still be nine short,” said Tom.

“And we’ve got no chance of getting the markers on the islands off the coast,” said Cate.

“And the defence forces are well on their way, as we know.”

“What a pity,” said Liz. “Still, it’s added a bit of adventure to the trip, hasn’t it?”

“Come on,” said Tom. “We had best get the fire going and get some grub into us.”

“Yes. I’m starving!” said Bill.

“You’re always starving.”

The boys got a fire going. It took time for the flame to catch and was a bit smoky because the rain had wet the wood but in due course they had a merry blaze. The sun was setting as they prepared dinner but they managed to get it eaten before the light faded completely. They sat around the fire after dinner swatting mosquitoes and talking about the competition and the clues they had discovered.

“It says it starts at ‘0600 hrs on a day to be advised’.”

“Well, if we accept what Bill overheard, that must have been this morning.”

“What time was it when you got up, Mark?”

“It was after six.”

“So if the Navy was the party starting from Hawks Nest, that would make sense, wouldn’t it?”

“That’s right. Remember what you told us the Navy fellow said as they paddled past. It sounds to me like they had just begun.”

“Did they look fresh, Mark?”

“Hard to say.”

“If two of their party of four was heading into Port Stephens, where were the other two going, I wonder?”

“Maybe up the river past here.”

“What about Mt Stephens and Yacaaba Head?”

“And don’t forget the islands offshore.”

They went off to bed soon after with Tom’s warning ringing in their ears—“We’ll have to be away early to catch the tail of tomorrow’s high. Otherwise we’ll be waiting around for hours for the ebb to flag. Up by 5.00. First up wakes the others.”

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“Tom! Tom! Come here, quickly.” Mark’s loud whisper was urgent. Tom woke at the sound. It was pitch black. He emerged half asleep from the tent grabbing his flashlight as he did so. There was no sound from the other tent.

“Where are you, Mark?”

“Over here. There’s a light flashing a signal and I can just see it through the trees. Bring a pencil and some paper. Quick!” Tom rummaged at the bottom of the tent. Bill was sleeping soundly. He found some paper and a pencil in his map case and pushed out of the tent again and over to where Mark was standing looking intently to the south.

“Take this down—AABA N for November SNAPPER N for November—that’s as far as he has got. Now here comes some more, are you ready?” Tom marvelled not for the first time at Mark’s remarkable memory for numbers and figures. He scribbled quickly.

“Yes. I’ve got that. Fire away.”

“Right—B, then O—he proceeded slowly as the letters were signalled—O, N, D, A, B, A—that’s Boondaba, then 5.”

“That’s where we were today. That’s the number on Boondaba Island.”

“Keep going. Now B, A, R, R, O, M, E, E—that’s ‘Barrome’, then H for Hotel. That’s the one the fellow in the canoe mentioned.”

“Yes. I’ve got it.”

“C, O, R, R—this will be ‘Corrie’, I’ll bet—yes, I and E, then S.”

“C, A, L, L, that’s ‘call’, new word, Y, O, U, that’s ‘you’, new word, one, eight, three, zero.”

“1830 hrs—that will be 6.30 pm.”

“M, O, R, R, O and W, that’s ‘tomorrow’, then K.” Mark fell silent. “That’s it apparently. That’s all we’ve got.”

“Heck. It’s enough. Come on, Mark. Let’s analyse all this in the tent.” Tom had forgotten all thoughts of sleep.

“Shall we wake the girls?”

“No. Nothing will change between now and the morning. We can tell them then.”

“Now,” said Tom in a low voice when they got into the tent and set their flashlights. “Where was the message coming from? You were facing pretty well south and a bit west. Let’s look at the map.”

“The *chart* Tom, the *chart*,” said Mark imitating Cate’s voice and Tom gave a chuckle. They spread out the map over their sleeping bags.

“The light was through the trees. So it must have been on a high point. It wasn’t always clear. As if it had to push through a lot of branches.”

“Thank heaven it was a still night or you wouldn’t have seen much at all.” Tom traced his finger south down the map. “It must have been from Yacaaba Head.” He pointed to the northern most of the heads of Port Stephens.

“How high is it?”

“Over seven hundred feet.”

“That must have been it. And that would explain the first bit of the message I got. What did it say?” They looked at Tom’s scribbled note of the message. “CAABA N. It must have read ‘Yacaaba N’.”

“How did you manage to notice the light in the first place?”

“I was taking a final stroll and thinking about the information in the sheet when I noticed the light. At first I thought I was seeing things.”

“Let’s list them.”

They wrote them out.

Yacaaba Head	N
Snapper Island	N
Boondaba Island	S
Baromee	H
Corrie Island	S
Rooke Island	S

“So we have two additional stations.”

“Yacaaba Head N and Baromee H.”

“What was the K?”

“That’s the sign ending a message.”

“How many clues have we got now?”

“We had four when we went to bed. Now we’ve got another two.”

“Only twelve to go!”