





Research Station

## 02 Lizard Island Research Station – a fortuitous event

Close up view of the western section of Lizard Island showing the location of the Research Station. The dark patches show the extensive reefs around the island. The resort is in the foreground. *Photo: Charlie Shuetrim*



The Lizard Island Group in the late 1970s. Palfrey Island and South Island are in the foreground. An extensive fringing reef surrounds the group and encloses the Blue Lagoon.

*Photo: Australian Museum Archives*

The story of Lizard Island Research Station starts with the family of Henry Loomis from the United States. Pixie Loomis, Henry's daughter, came to Australia with the express purpose of buying an island. This quest led to Frank Talbot (then Director of the Australian Museum) and Max Day at the CSIRO.

Both Frank and Max subsequently spent time with the Loomis family at their home in the USA and were intrigued by their desire to buy an island. The family had owned a number of islands in the USA but had never had the opportunity to pursue the scientific value of those islands. They resolved that on their next island they would establish a research function so they could truly appreciate its values. Australia was the preferred location due to its political stability and easy access to coral reefs. The desire for the research function came from Henry's scientific background. His father, Alfred Lee Loomis, was a fabulously wealthy Wall Street tycoon who had survived the depression years in high style and then, at the height of his influence, quit Wall Street and devoted himself to science. In a small town 40 miles northwest of Manhattan, he created a magnificent private laboratory and personally bankrolled pioneering research into radar detection systems and nuclear physics. At his home, he conferred with the leading scientists of his time including Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr. Henry followed his father's interests and was deeply involved with radar and physics during World War II. He retained his passion for science for the rest of his life.

Coincidentally, at the same time as the Loomis family was seeking to buy an island, Frank Talbot was pondering how to establish a research station in the northern area of the Great Barrier Reef. The Australian Museum had a small



research facility on One Tree Island and it was showing some anomalies, presumed to be because of the cooler winter temperatures due to One Tree being at the southern end of the Great Barrier Reef. So... when Henry visited Australia in 1971, he and Frank searched up north for a suitable site for a research station. They selected Lizard Island where plans for the establishment of a fishing lodge and an airstrip were already in progress. Henry and Jacqueline Loomis donated \$110,000 to enable Lizard Island Research Station to be established and a 25 year lease over about six hectares of Lizard Island National Park was negotiated in 1973 by the Australian Museum. Loomis House at the Research Station perpetuates Henry and Jacqueline's name at Lizard Island and Talbot House recognises Frank Talbot's enormous contributions to LIRS and LIRRF. By a strange coincidence, as this publication was nearing completion, Henry Loomis died on 2nd November, 2008, aged 89. Frank Talbot's comment, upon hearing of Henry's death was "he was a fine and generous man, and we owe Lizard in a large part to his enthusiasm for science".

Max Day, a scientist with CSIRO, had met Pixie Loomis on her first visit to Australia. He became involved in marine research when he accompanied Malcolm Fraser (then Minister for Education and Science) to Townsville in relation to a proposed institute of marine research. Max wrote the report that led to the creation of the Australian Institute of Marine Science and was the Chairman of its Interim Council when it was formed. Later he was a member of the Council.

*Top right: Henry and Jacqueline Loomis when they visited the Station in January 1997. Photo: Anne Hoggett and Lyle Vail*

*Bottom right: Frank Talbot, Director of the Australian Museum 1965–1975 and the man whose vision created Lizard Island Research Station. Photo: Australian Museum Archives*

Sunday <sup>1<sup>st</sup></sup> <sup>1<sup>st</sup></sup> <sup>1<sup>st</sup></sup> I immediately went upon the highest  
 hills on the Island where to my mortification I discerned  
 a reef of Rocks laying about 2 or 3 Leagues without  
 the Island extending in a line N.W. and S.E. farther than  
 I could see on which the sea broke very high this  
<sup>however</sup> gave me great hopes they were the outermost shoals  
 as I did not doubt but what I should be able to get without  
 them for there appeared to be several breaks or partitions  
 in the reef and deep water between it and the Island  
 I stay'd upon this hill until near sunset but the weather  
 continued so hazy all the time that I could not see above  
 4 or 5 Leagues round me so that I came down much  
 disappointed in the prospect I expected to have had but  
 being in hopes that the morning might prove clear and  
 give me a better view of the shoals. With this view I stay'd  
 all night upon the Island and at 3 in the morning sent  
 the Pinnace with one of the mates I had with me to sound  
 between <sup>the</sup> Island and the reef and to examine one of the  
 breaks or channells and in the mean time I went  
 again upon the hill where I arrived by sun rise  
 but found it much hazier than in the evening —  
 about noon the Pinnace returned having run out  
 as far as the reef and found from 13 to 28 fathom  
 water. it blowed so hard that they durst not venture  
 into one of the channells which the mate said seem'd  
 to him to be very narrow but this did not discourage  
 me for I thought from the place he was at he must  
 have seen it at a disadvantage. Before I quit this

The text of the adjacent page of Cook's Journal reads as follows:  
(the *small text* represents corrections made by Cook to the original text)

*Sunday 12th* <sup>^when</sup> I immediatly went upon the highest hill on the Island where to my mortification I discoverd a reef of Rocks laying about 2 or 3 Leagues without the Island, extending in a line NW and SE farther than I could see on which the Sea broke very high this <sup>^however</sup> gave me great hopes <sup>^that</sup> they were the outermost shoals, as I did not doubt but what I should be able to get without them for there appear'd to be several breaks or Partitions in the reef and deep water between it and the Islands I stay'd upon this hill untill near sun set but the weather continued so hazy all the time that I could not see above 4 or 5 Leagues round me so that I came down much ~~disap~~ disapointed in the prospect I expected to have had. but being in hopes the morning might prove clearer and give me a better View of the Shoals. with this view I stay'd all night upon the Island, and at 3 in the Morning sent the Pinnace with one of the Mates I had with me to sound between <sup>^the</sup> Island and the reefs and to examine one of the breaks or Channells and in the mean time I went again upon the hill where I arrived by sun rise but found it much hazier than in the evening —

About noon the Pinnace return'd having been out as far as the reef and found from 15 to 28 fathoms water. it blowed so hard that they durst not venture into one of the Channells which the Mate said seem'd to him to be very narrow but this did not discourage me for I thought from the place he was at he must have seen it at a disadvantage. Before I quit this ...

This text has been reproduced from the National Library of Australia document: Cook's Journal daily entries – <http://nla.gov.au/nla.cs-ss-jrnl-cook-17700812>



*Top:* Captain Cook visited the island and wrote: "The only land animals we saw here were lizards and these seem'd to be plenty which occasioned my naming the island Lizard Island".  
*Photo:* Charlie Shuetrim

*Far left:* James Cook – Journal of the HMS Endeavour 1768-1771  
12th August 1770 at Lizard Island  
On this day Captain Cook climbed to the highest point of Lizard Island (359 metres above sea level) to look for an opening in the outer barrier reefs to allow his escape to the open seas. This page from Cook's Endeavour Journal details his disappointment when he "discoverd a reef of Rocks laying about 2 or 3 Leagues without the Island, extending in a line NW and SE farther than I could see on which the Sea broke very high".  
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