

3.0 METHOD AND APPROACH FOR DATA COLLECTION

This study was exploratory in nature since little research has been undertaken with the aim of understanding recreation and tourism experiences in the GBRMP. The research design needed to evoke responses from participants on their recreation experiences with as little imposition of meaning as possible from the interviewer. It is important in experience research to capture visitors' own perceptions as they are evolving and in the ways that they themselves would like to express it. On the other hand, the study was funded by resource management agencies which were engaged in management planning and were responsible for the ongoing day-to-day management for that area. These managers needed to understand visitors' perceptions on a number of issues which are considered in the context of management practices. Furthermore, research on outdoor recreation experiences identified the multi-dimensional nature of these experiences (e.g. Scherl 1988a) and it was also important to gain understanding of participants' perceptions of all of these dimensions.

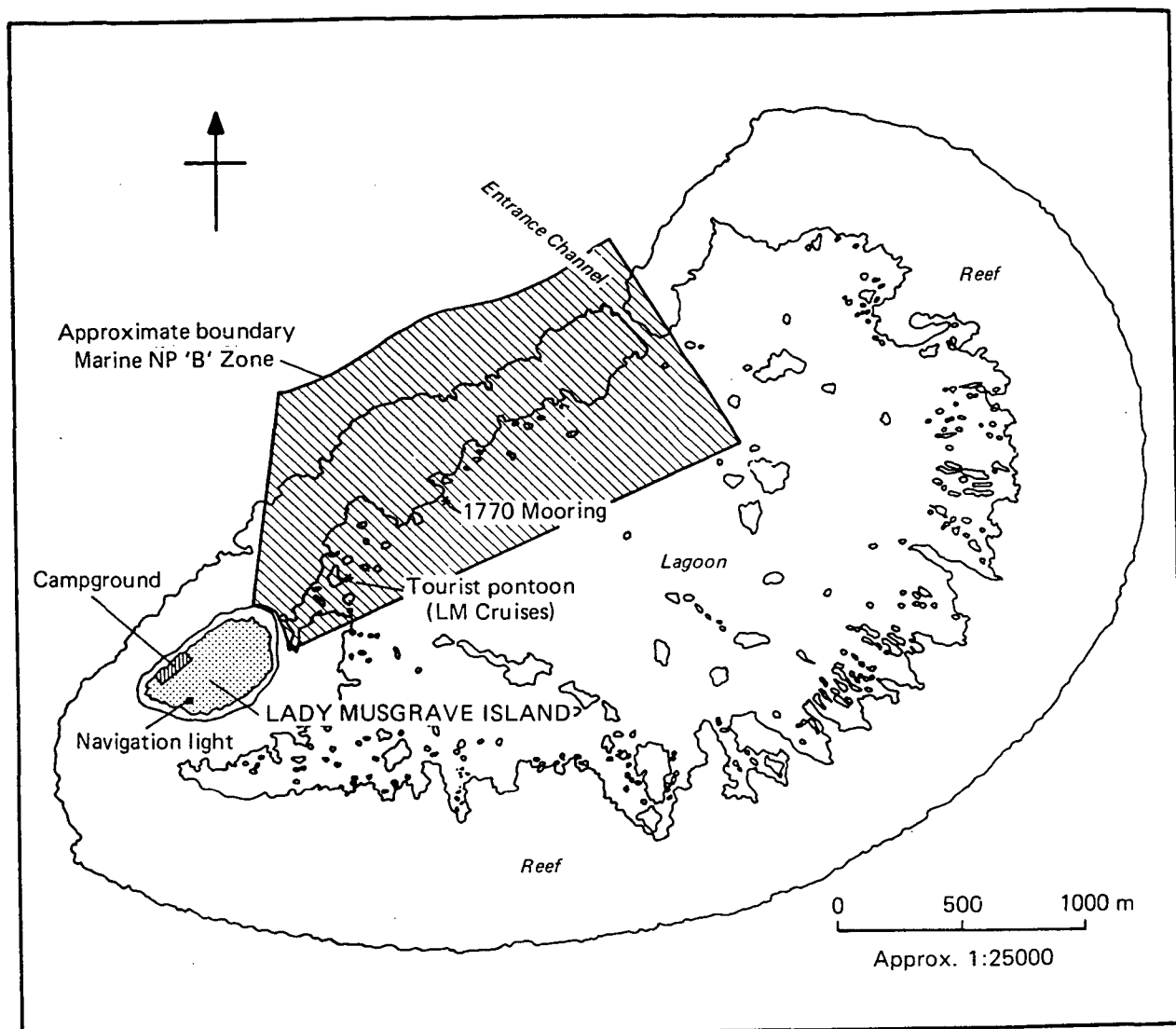
It was hoped that respondents would address a number of the management-specific issues and comment on many of the outdoor experience dimensions through open-ended general questions. However, as there was a need to ensure a full coverage of such management issues and experience dimensions, open-ended questions focusing on specific issues were also part of the research design.

Data for this study was collected through on-site interviews and was recorded onto tapes with the respondent's permission. Respondents remained anonymous. The interview contained in essence three parts:

- a) participant's personal information;
- b) open-ended general questions asking respondents to tell the interviewer about his/her visit to, and their experience at, Lady Musgrave; and
- c) open-ended questions asking respondents about a particular experience dimension (e.g. social environment) and more specific management issues related to that experience dimension (e.g. numbers of people encountered).

A number of isolated questions tapping motivation for going to Lady Musgrave Island and Reef, and perceptions of the study, were also included.

In addition to the interviews, site behavioural observation for the daytrip tour operations was conducted. The intention was to document the spatial distribution of visitors throughout the time of their stay at Lady Musgrave Island and Reef as a means of understanding their behavioural patterns. Map 2 shows the spatial pattern of the island, reef, lagoon, pontoon and camping ground.



Map 2. Lady Musgrave Island, Reef and Lagoon