

Whatever happened to the man who got the best job in the world on a desert island paradise?

He worked too hard, lost his girlfriend and got stung by poisonous jellyfish

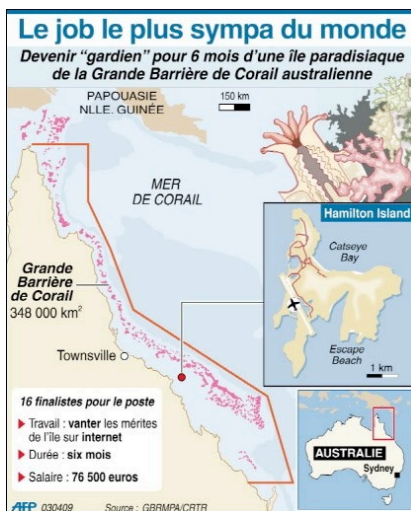
By NICK ENOCH

Three years ago, he won 'the best job in the world' - a £70,000 six-month stint as 'caretaker' of Hamilton Island on the famous Great Barrier Reef.

Ben Southall, now 37, from Petersfield, Hampshire, beat nearly 35,000 applicants for the dream position.

But was life on the doorstep of the Australian surf truly idyllic?

'At the time I saw the advert, I thought it would be like living on a desert island like Tom Hanks in Castaway,' the former charity fundraiser told the BBC.



Although part of his work sounded fantastic - writing about staying in five-star resorts, jet skiing and diving - he found it exhausting due to the combination of long hours and a strong work.

His passion for adventure led to him visiting as much of the area as he could.

Calling it *'the best expedition in the world'*, he set off last May and spent four months kayaking, cycling and sailing 1,600km along the length of the Great Barrier Reef.

He also took part in Australian children's TV programme *Totally Wild*.

'It should have been called, "the busiest job in the world",' he joked.

And also a dangerous one.

Soon after he started, Ben was stung by a poisonous jellyfish.

The seas off Queensland are wonderful but they can also be filled with danger with threats from sharks, poisonous stonefish – and the irukandji jellyfish, which gave him a painful reminder that it lurks in reef.

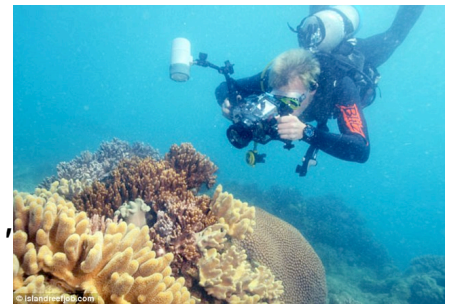
'I was enjoying a post-Christmas jet ski session with some friends at a quiet beach on Hamilton Island,' he wrote on the blog which he had to update frequently as part of his job touring the reef islands to promote their beauty.

'As I climbed off the back of the ski and onto the beach, I felt a small bee-like sting on my forearm.'

What he didn't realise at the time was that he had been stung by the jellyfish, which is no bigger than a fingernail.



He went on to describe the effects as the poison spread:
'I was feeling pretty hot and sweaty, had a headache and felt pretty sick too, with pain in my lower back and a tightness in the chest and a really high blood pressure. I had a minor brush with what can be a very serious jellyfish.'



The incident did not deter him, however, and he excelled at his job - so much so that his job title was changed from 'Island caretaker' to 'tourism ambassador'.

This extended his remit to promote not just the reef but the whole of Queensland - including the outback, the rainforest and Gold Coast.

"I'm a roving reporter, I produce and shoot video content and run a blog."

And will he be travelling solo, or perhaps with a special companion?

Ben was dating Breanna Watkins when he landed the job but the relationship ended a few years ago.

While at a tourist event 18 months ago, he met the new woman in his life, Sophee McPhee – and they plan to marry in November on Hamilton island, Ben's first home in Australia.



He said: *'Looking back on the past three years, I didn't expect to stay out here. I've always travelled and had wanderlust. This is the longest time I've stayed in one place. Four years ago, I was travelling around Africa in a Land Rover. Now I live in Brisbane which is a city, not a very big city but I'd never done city living before.'*

But for Ben, the adventure is by no means over as he next intends to hit Asia.

And despite a few hiccups along the way, he is pleased with the decisions he made.

'The job has allowed me to have adventures and keep exploring, write about it and learn new skills like filming, editing, presenting, public speaking and TV work,' he said.

"I have done so many great things and if it hadn't been for a competition I don't think I would have done them."

