

Bass Strait Anchorages

The Furneaux Group

part two



The Furneaux Group of islands to the north east of Tasmania is a wonderful cruising ground. In the last issue **CHRISTINE DANGER** introduced us to Flinders Island. In this article, she gives us a taste for other smaller isles of the group.



When we talk about sailing in Bass Strait, most people are surprised to hear that there is actually a lot to see ... in fact some 80 islands, many offering pristine, secluded anchorages. 52 of these islands are part of the Furneaux Group in eastern Bass Strait. This archipelago is our very favourite cruising ground. Over the years, we have explored many of these islands, every time discovering new anchorages as well as returning to our preferred spots. In a previous article, we focused on Flinders Island, the biggest isle of the Furneaux Group. This time, we are exploring a few very different destinations in the smaller islands of the archipelago.

BADGER ISLAND

Badger Island is located opposite the western entrance of the Franklin Sound, a body of water separating Flinders Island from Cape Barren Island. It is a low lying granite and limestone island, aboriginal owned and extensively grazed. The island was named after the vessel *Badget* which was wrecked here. The rock formations along the shores are remarkable, and the limestone pavements and granite intrusions make this a significant site in Tasmania from a geological point of view.

left: Take It Easy anchored in Jamieson Bay, Cape Barren Island.

above right: The tall lighthouse of Goose Island, part of the Badger group.

There are a couple of good anchorages in about 3-5m of water over sand, one on the northern shores, offering E to SW shelter, and one on the eastern shore, called Lucy's Beach, offering SW to NNW shelter. From Lucy's Beach, the view towards the Franklin Sound and nearby Chappell Island is to die for and this is one of our favourite anchorages. What is there not to like: the views are panoramic, the fishing is good, beachcombing excellent, walks ashore scenic. There is a derelict pier, an abandoned shack, a windmill, a small graveyard, all attesting to active pastoral life not so long ago.

A few nearby islets are clustered together and form part of the Badger Group, including the more notable Mount Chappell Island (feared for its numerous tiger snakes) and Goose Island where there is a tall lighthouse. So with a little time and the right weather conditions, a circumnavigation of the group can be quite interesting.



THUNDER & LIGHTNING BAY – CAPE BARREN ISLAND

Situated on the Western shore of Cape Barren Island, the large bay of Thunder and Lightning offers great shelter from NNW to SE winds in 2-5m of water over sand and weed. You can anchor close to the beach at the northern end of the bay, or anywhere in the centre; the southern end has a few large rocks and shoals, so is best avoided. A long sandy beach offers plenty of leg stretch and beachcombing opportunities and there is a fresh water creek at the southern end, not good enough for drinking, but fine for replenishing camp shower bags.

Contrary to what the name might suggest, this is a quiet, peaceful and rather beautiful anchorage. We wondered where the daunting name 'Thunder & Lightning' came from. Is it referring to the foul weather that descends from the nearby hills? Not so ... we found out that the name comes from a descendant of Mannalargenna, Chief of the aboriginal Ben Lomond Tribe. His fourth daughter was called Wobberertee, which translates as 'Thunderstorm, Thunder and Lightning'. The bay is named after her. I bet it was not wise to argue with this woman!

It is nice that someone in their wisdom retained a little of the aboriginal past of Cape Barren Island. Nowadays, this island is aboriginal land and a few families live in a tiny settlement on the north west shore.

JAMIESON BAY – CAPE BARREN ISLAND

At the south east end of Cape Barren Island is the very beautiful Jamieson Bay. It has two main anchorages at either end of the bay, in 3-5m of water

over sand, offering shelter from W to NE, but anywhere along the beach is fine, although it can be more affected by swell. You'll often see one or two fishing boats overnighting here. And talking about fishing, you can catch some flathead here!

Jamieson Bay is a very scenic anchorage. At either end of the very long white beach as well as about half way down, are remarkable granite outcrops with the characteristic bright patches of orange lichen. Behind the beach are dunes and scrub, and the backdrop of Mt Kershaw overlooking the entire bay. The colours are magnificent: orange rocks, white sand, ultramarine ocean, grey escarpments. On a clear day, when you look south, the north east coast of Tasmania is visible.

We often stop at Jamieson on our way to or from Tassie. This is a handy anchorage when contemplating the crossing of Bank Strait, a body of water separating Cape Barren and Clarke Islands from the northern coast of Tasmania. You can safely wait here for

the right tide and weather conditions to get across those often rowdy waters.

PRESERVATION ISLAND

Lying south west of Cape Barren Island in the Furneaux Group, Preservation is a low and undulating granite and calcarenite Island. The Preservation Group also includes the Preservation islets, Rum Island and Night Island, with similar geology.

The Preservation Group is an important historic site. The islands were named following the 'preservation' of the Sydney Cove's crew, a merchant ship which ran ashore there in February 1797. Neighbouring Rum Island was so named because much of the cargo of the Sydney Cove was rum, and was stored there away from the survivors! During the early 19th Century, Preservation Island was a base for sealers hunting for fur seals and elephant seals, and was used, as it is now, for grazing cattle.

Preservation Island offers good protection from light westerly conditions for shallow draft vessels. Horseshoe

Bay offers shelter from SSE to NW on a weed and sand bottom in depths of 2-3m. However in stronger conditions (over 20kts), because the island is low lying and the bay quite shallow, a short chop can develop, making this anchorage quite uncomfortable and it may require a quick exit.

We enjoy stopping at Preservation, often embarking on a walk ashore along the southern part of the island. There are lovely beaches to stroll along, plenty of scrambling around boulders, and the birdlife is abundant with Short Tailed Shearwaters, Sooty Oystercatchers, Caspian Terns, Little Penguins and the obligatory Cape Barren Geese breeding on the island.

There is a small house at Horseshoe Bay. From time to time, people are there to care for the livestock, and the last



top left: West coast of Preservation Island.

top right: Thunder & Lightning Bay.

above: Raft of shearwaters at Babel.



Seagrass patterns in Horseshoe Bay, on Preservation Island.

time we were anchored in the bay, a light plane came in to land on the grass strip to park next to the house! Not exactly what you would expect on a tiny island, but entertaining to watch the pilot make his approach and put his Cessna down without a hitch.

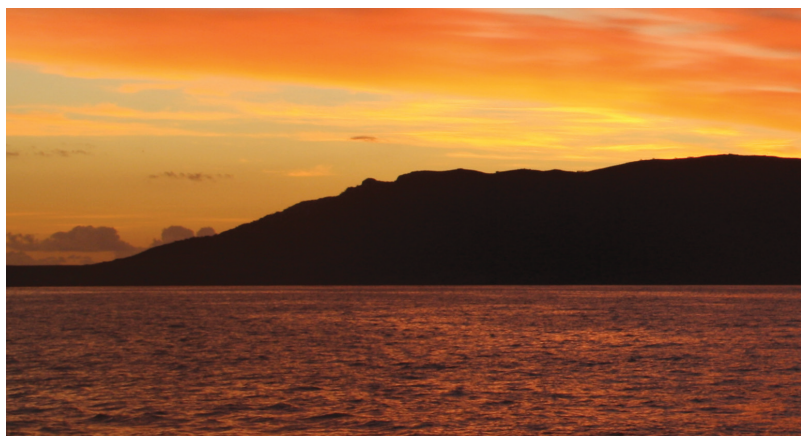
The surrounding views at anchor are magnificent: you see, Preservation Island sits right at the head of the Armstrong Channel, half way between Cape Barren and Clarke islands. So from the comfort

of Horseshoe Bay, you can admire the imposing rocky peaks of Mt Munroe and Mt Kershaw on Cape Barren Island, the fast moving tidal flow in the Channel and the distant shores of Clarke Island.

SPIKE COVE – CLARKE ISLAND

A small hop across the Armstrong Channel from Preservation Island and a little way down south along the northwest tip of Clarke Island, is a very good anchorage, safe in all conditions except south westerlies. Spike Cove is often frequented by fishing boats which tend to anchor out deep in the middle of the bay, but yachts can throw the pick in 4-6m of water close to the shore, over a sandy bottom.

We have sat an anchor at Spike Cove in a north easterly blow for a few days, feeling quite snug. But apart from offering good shelter, Spike Cove holds particular interest for us because of its really unusual rock formations, reminiscent of Easter Island. There are tors of granite standing erect, hence the



top: Take it Easy and Erika II anchored in Lucy Bay, Badger Island.

Photo Graeme McArthur

above left: The granite tors of Spike Cove, on Clarke Island.

above right: Babel at sunrise.

name Spike Cove, and massive boulders tinged with bright orange lichen, which all make for an interesting visit and great photography.

The island once was used by pastoralists. It is not inhabited these days, but since it is now managed by the Aboriginal Land Council, we do not recommend tramping around widely without permission.

THE BABEL ISLES

The Babel Isles are located about half way down the east coast of Flinders Island. The largest island is Babel, but

there are two others close by on the south eastern end, called Cat and Storehouse Islands. All are granite isles covered with low scrub, tussocks and sandy soil, pitted with millions of bird burrows.

Being half way down the eastern shores of Flinders Island, the Babel Isles are a good stopping point which we often enjoy when exploring around Flinders, or on our return northwards from the east coast of Tasmania. Babel offers several safe anchorages, one on the north west side of the island, called West Beach, a couple of others on the southern side, in Bull Cove and Cow Cove. There is also a good day anchorage in the shallow waters tucked in between the isles of Babel, Cat and Storehouse. And when the wind is coming from the W or SW, the best place to be is off the beach at Sellars Point, near the sand spit bridge that joins Flinders and Babel at low tide. Fishing boats often overnight there.

Each anchorage offers different attributes to enjoy. In Bull Cove and the adjacent Cow Cove, snorkelling or diving lets you discover a beautiful underwater world, and we have been known to catch an abalone or two. You

can scramble ashore at the northern end of Babel and stroll to the point, where a group of crosses are a grim reminder that some folks once lived and died there. I have often been tempted to climb to the top of Mt Capuchin, the imposing peak at the west end, but with shearwater burrows comes the threat of tiger snakes, so this probably will remain on the to do list forever! Cat and Store Islands are the domain of little penguins; so if you don't want to break an ankle or disturb the little critters, tread lightly along the rocky shores only and avoid trampling the burrows. The area between the islets is a good spot for trawling ... Flatheads lurk in the sandy shallows. For those who wonder how Babel got its name, an entry in Matthew Flinders' Diary on January 8, 1799 records that "the islet is inhabited by geese, shags, penguins, gulls and sooty petrels, each occupying its separate district, and using its own language. It was the confusion of noises amongst these various animals which induced me to give the name Babel Isles to this small cluster."

One of the unique aspects of Babel Island is that it is home to the largest colony of Short-Tailed Shearwaters in the world. There is an estimated



three million pairs, or about 12% of the whole population of this species. The shearwaters are often called 'muttonbird', the 'flying sheep', no doubt because of their large flocks, and perhaps also because they were harvested during 'mutton-birding' expeditions, and as is the case with sheep, every part of the bird was used: their feathers, their oil, their flesh, their eggs! I prefer to use the name shearwater, an apt reference to their graceful shearing flight moving from centimetres above the water's surface to high in the sky.

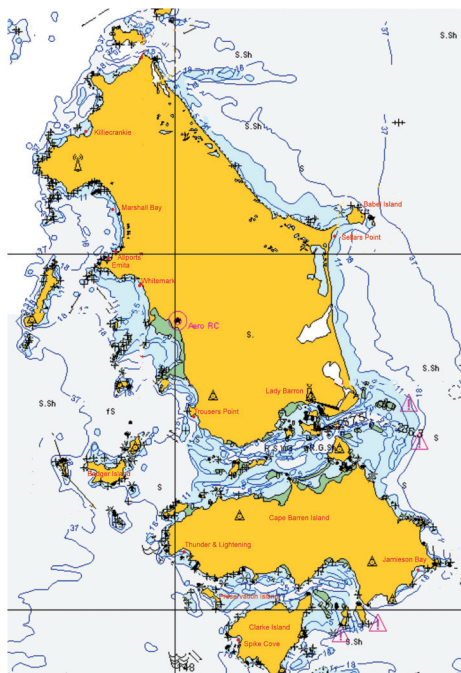
Babel Island also has a major colony of little penguins with some 20,000 pairs. So between the shearwaters and the penguins, when you get there, don't expect a quiet evening! Every time we anchor around Babel in summer,

we watch in awe the return of the shearwaters in their thousands from their daily ocean foraging.

During our last trip there in January 2011, we anchored in West Beach, and were admiring the bright red sunset over the hills called the Patriarchs, back on Flinders Island. The wonderful sunsets are another treat at Babel Island.

The dark jagged outline of the hills against the blazing sky was stunning. As night fell, hundreds of thousands of shearwaters came flying back to their burrows. This quiet spectacle went on till dark, then the whole island came alive

with the sound of thousands of chicks calling. We stayed outside in the cockpit till nearly 10 o'clock, watching the late stragglers flying home and listening to



the birds in their thousands on the side of the hill. It was an absolute cacophony of calls, and we could appreciate how aptly named this island is.

We keep a journal of all our trips. Here is an extract of our impressions as we headed off the next morning. "We wake early. It smells of mutton! The same astounding display occurs at dawn, as we are slowly motoring off, headed for Killiecrankie on the northern shore of Flinders Island. The shearwaters are flying off in their thousands, gathering in large flocks on the water a little way out. This dawn is breathtaking ... We should do this more often. George, the autopilot, is in charge and we are both standing on the deck looking back towards Babel Island. The sky is ablaze around the distinctive silhouette of Mt Capuchin. There are pink and orange reflections on the silvery water, shearwaters flying low over the ocean and just above and around us. It is a stunning spectacle. Even Bengie, our ship's cat, is up looking, sniffing, mesmerised. We turn around and look ahead, towards the big full moon. There is a flock of shearwaters rafting together. As we approach and our path takes us through the middle of the flock, the water appears to be boiling from the thousands of birds flapping their wings and skimming the surface to take off. Then at 6am, the sun rises, the colours soften and it is the rising fireball that we now admire. This departure has been an absolute delight ... even if red sky in the morning means sailors' warning."

As mentioned at the conclusion of the first article on the Furneaux Group, there are of course many more appealing anchorages to discover in addition to those covered here. All you need is a little time, a taste for adventure and a desire to explore. If you do, like us, you will fall in love with this archipelago. You will want to come back again and again to experience these unspoilt and remarkable cruising grounds.