

Round Flinders and Deal Islands in 21 Days



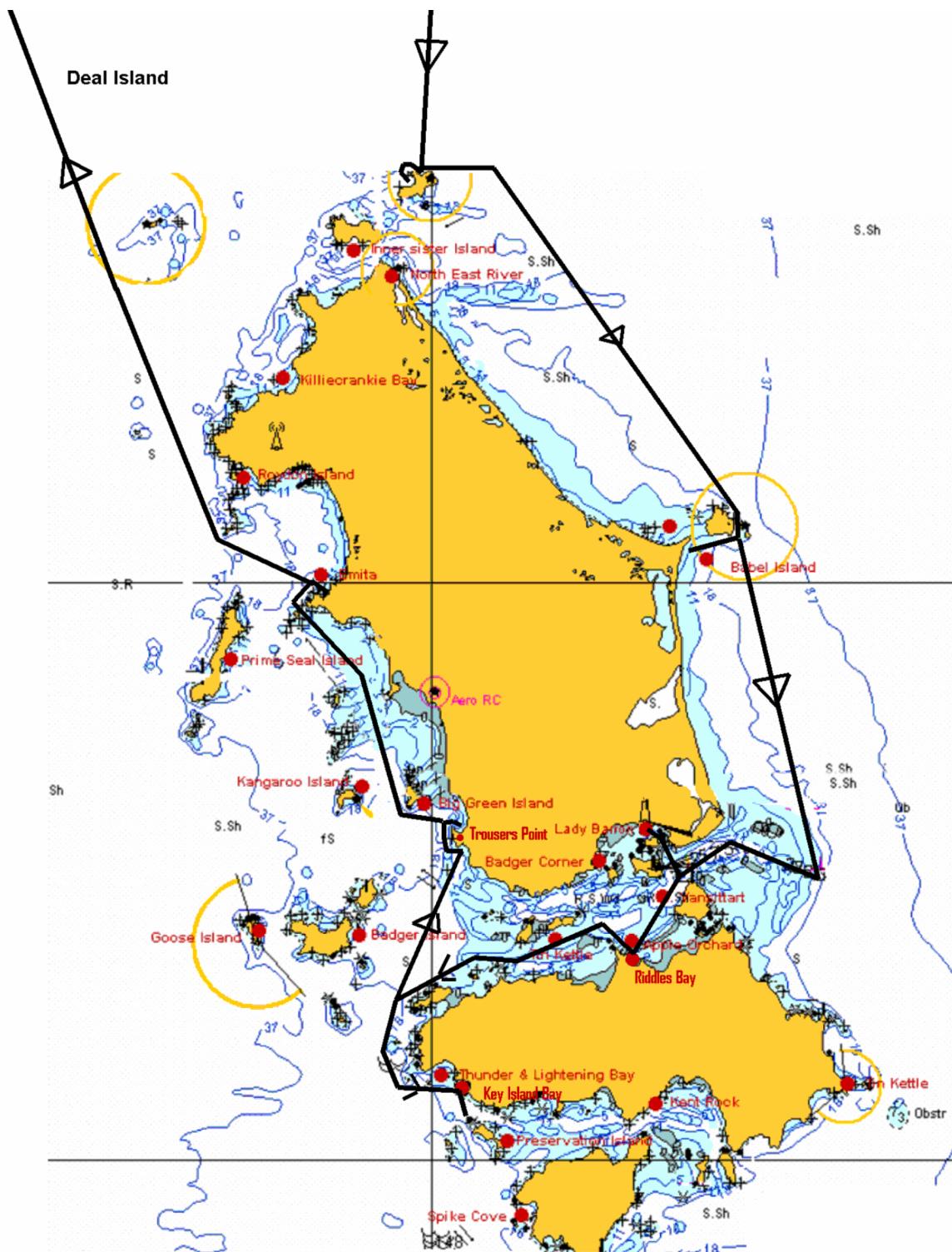
Medina's Log

Summer 2008

Map of the entire trip



Part One: Flinders Island



Thursday 24/1/08 - We are out of here!

Hurray! At long last, at 8.00 am this morning, we crossed the bar, bound for Flinders Island – 6 weeks later than we had intended, and for half the time we intended, but we are out of the Lakes!

We started to think that this trip was never going to happen. Between my slow recovery from neck surgery and the appalling lateness of Wade's suppliers, our 15 December departure went by the wayside and each week of waiting added to our annoyance.

Finally, the long awaited samples from China arrived on the 18th of January, and it was then a matter of waiting for the right weather conditions to leave the Lakes... which took another week!

We drove to Paynesville on Tuesday 22nd, loaded with our supply of fresh food, ready for an early morning departure the next day. The bulk of the non-perishable provisions had already been brought on board back in early December. We left our mooring along the esplanade and motored to the Cruiser Club, to plug into to shore power, get the freezer icy cold, and set up Medina for an ocean passage. Once everything was stored away, Wade set up the safety line and the down buoy, moved the spare sails to the back cabin, filled up with water, and checked the engine. We were then ready to go.



At 6.30 am on Wednesday, we left the Cruiser Club in the soft pink morning light and motored off to the Entrance... a 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ hour trip. We were both quiet. For the first time in weeks, I felt at peace. The gentleness of the conditions, the quietness at this time of day all felt good. As we motored through Metung and the Cunningham Arm, our anticipation slowly grew.

When we reached the last turn before the Entrance, with the April Hamer dredging inside the Lakes – now, that is odd – the rising tide rushing in and the sight of the waves breaking right across the bar, we both had a sinking feeling in the stomach! A radio call to the April Hamer confirmed our fears: “It’s really rough... I don’t think you want to try it today!” What a bummer... this trip really is not going to happen!

We therefore took a left turn and tied up at the Flagstaff Jetty just inside, hoping for the swell to abate. Frequently during the day, we made trips to the lookout, to check the conditions, to no avail.

Nevertheless, our patience has been rewarded, with an uneventful exit this morning... the swell had gone and so were we.

Within an hour of motoring, we see a seal wallowing and 3 dolphins. The autopilot is on. Bengie is nestled on my lap. Wadie says, “Are we there yet?” and I glance at the NavMan: 20 hours and 54 minutes to go!

We expected the NE to pick up late morning, but it never did. In fact, we had light Southerlies for all but the last two hours of the trip, so we had to motor for practically the whole way. Just as well, we have plenty of diesel!

We fell into a 3-hour watch routine. We did not do much! Wadie caught a couta, which he decided to keep for bait rather than a feed for us. We are not big on couta – we prefer pike. I had a few feeble attempts at Sudoku, but concentrating on little numbers in light swell did not do much for my stomach. I had decided that in light conditions, I should be OK without the Avomine tablets which make me too drowsy... wrong! I felt fragile most of the day and finally gave in to seasickness in the evening.

Boy, those long crossings are boring when you cannot do anything to pass the time; the hours go by very slowly.

25/1/08 - Arrival at the Outer Sister Island

Just after 5.30 am, we anchored into the Northern beach of the Outer Sister Island. Phew, that is one long passage out of the way.

We had a lie down for a couple of hours, but then decided that the swell was uncomfortable. After a quick breakfast, we moved to the Westerly side of the island, just a brief motor around a rocky point... no sandy beach there, just deep water over rock... but it is nice and flat, protected and of course deserted: that is our anchorage for the day.

Between a few quick dips, an explore in the dinghy, a nap to catch up on some sleep, the day disappeared. And the cut out bits of couta in the crab pots did not attract anything, so we will have to think of something else for dinner.

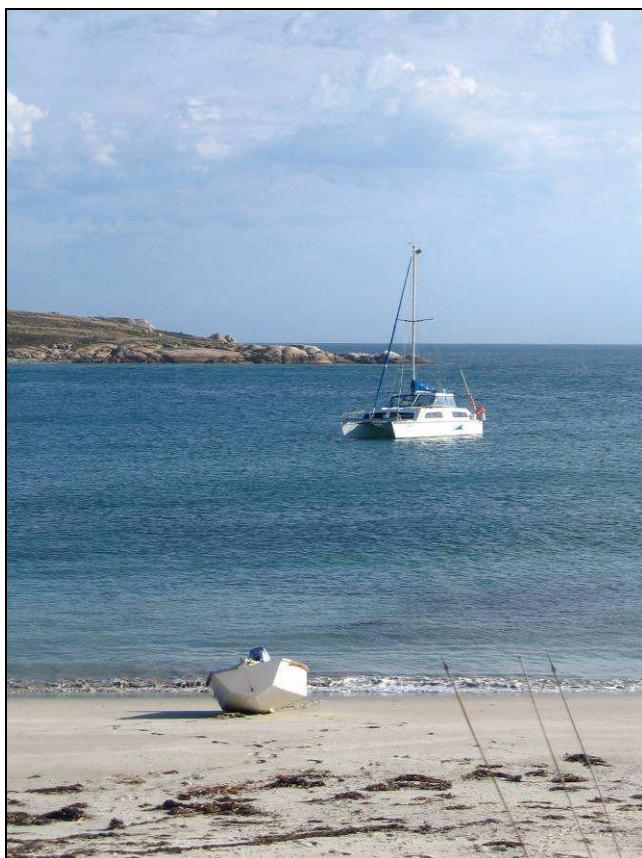
26/1/08 - Bound for Babel Island

With a strong wind warning issued today, we decided to head off South to the Babel Island group, about half way down the East Coast of Flinders. The strengthening NE is promising a good beam run. We have about 30 miles to cover, so about a 6-hour sail once we have rounded the Outer Sister Island. Neither of us take Avomine, thinking the conditions should be benign... mistake! Things turn out to be a bit rough, with a lot of chop and current, even though we headed out a long way offshore...

In fact, we both had to check the chart and NavMan a few times, to reassure ourselves that we were not headed for New Zealand! It all looked 'visually' wrong.

I spent most of the trip lying down in the cabin with Bengie, as I felt decidedly green... the uncomfortable motion made me sea sick, and poor Wadie had to manage the wheel and sails by himself. And he was not feeling too flash either: dry biscuits and water for him and as few trips down the galley as possible!

The last hour of sailing as we came close to Babel Island was quite rough with what appeared to be a few rips running out and making the water very choppy. We snuck in between Cat Island and Babel and finally got into calmer water.



We are now anchored off a sandy beach at Cat Island. It is a very pretty spot. How is this: a cat on a cat at Cat Island!

It is nice to be snug after all this roughness. We had a quick dip and an explore on Nutmeg. It looks like we might be able to go snorkeling along the rocks tomorrow morning. I fancy some abalones!

Tonight, a fishing boat is trawling around the islands and catching some fish. Sunset over the Strzelecki range and Flinders Island is a strong pink over the dark peaks. We sit out in the cockpit until well after dusk and are treated to an amazing display of mutton-birds in their thousands flying back to their burrows on Babel, Cat and Storehouse Islands... an unexpected spectacle. Even Bengie is amazed, watching intently on the back deck and climbing on the boom to get closer to the action!

I remember two trips ago when we wanted to see the return of the mutton-birds at Port Davies and did this huge walk on dusk, and not one bird was to be seen! Truly effortless this time!



27/1/08 - Westerly Change

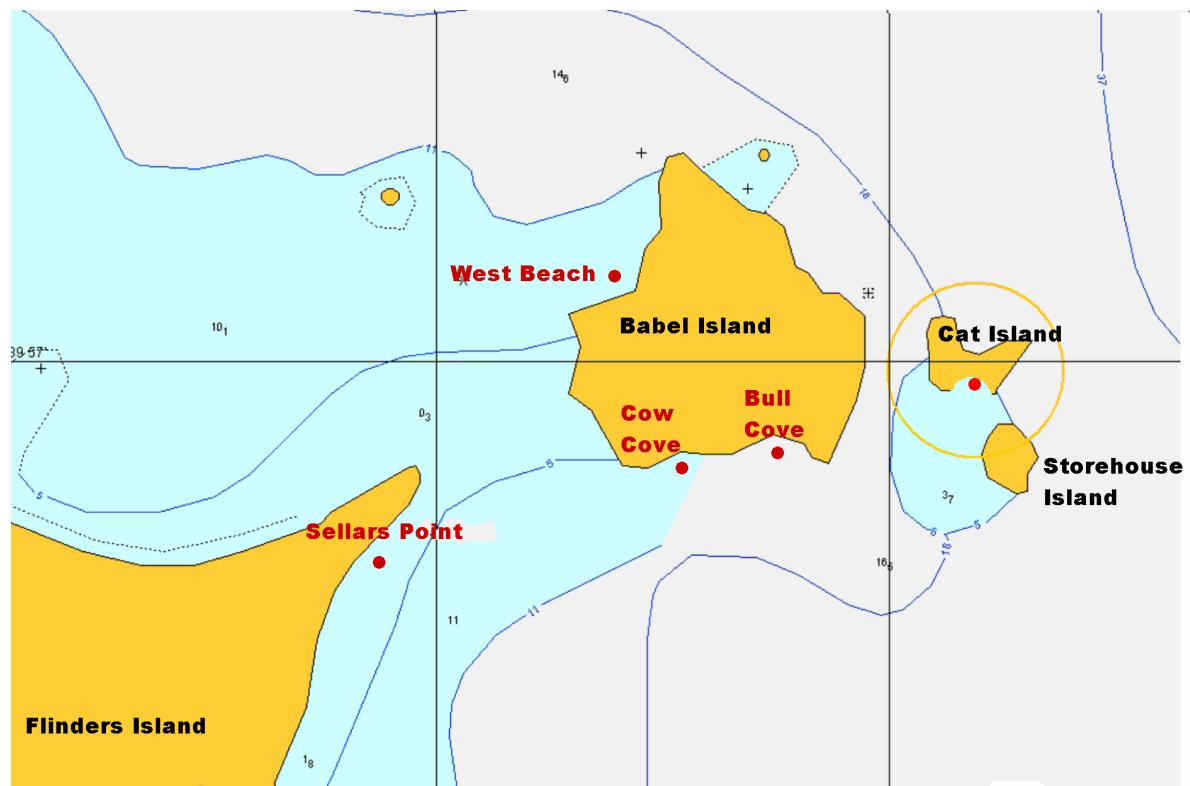
It feels like the change is coming. We are lying across the shore. So we decide to move after breakfast and head off to Sellars Point, on the beach.

We have to cross some “uncharted waters” so we keep an anxious check on the depth gauge. But it is all clear. By the time we reach the beach, the wind is blowing Northerly, not Westerly as we had expected and we decided to motor back to Babel Island, this time to Bull Cove, and stay there until the change comes... Mind you, it is a deep cove and we may be able to stay here and be protected enough from the Westerly.

There are Cape Barren geese patrolling the beach. Wadie decides he needs a good swim and a wash – meaning he is going to check the anchor!

Later, the fishing boat we saw yesterday comes and anchors next to us for lunch... not before suggesting we will need to move back to the beach for safety and selling us a small cray - beautiful feast for dinner tonight! The boss would have been quite willing to just give us the cray, but we gave him 20 dollars anyway, and the sight of the deckie's smile – with front teeth missing, was worth it!

The crossing to Sellars Point is a bit rough, but we sit now in calm waters along with two other fishing boats. The WSW is blowing steadily at 20 knots with 30-knot gusts.



28/1/08 - Dive at Cow Cove

Very good day, today! We went for a long walk along the beach at Sellars Point. We were not even swamped coming into the beach on Nutmeg. Beach breaks are always a bit of a challenge and we tend to negotiate them in bathers, with a change of clothes in the dry bag, prepared for the worst.



Our walk to the Point and then NW towards the Red Bluff was an excuse for beach combing. We are always in search of treasures which can vary from floats, bits of rope (Wadie's favourite), nice shells, feathers (Bengie's favourite)... this time we settled for a couple of lengths of stainless steel wire – always handy for something – and a couple of pretty shells.



The dunes at the back looked like moguls: many little hillocks with tussocks on top, and the stretch of water between Sellars Point and Babel Island looked very shallow. In some spots, we could probably have walked across!

We came back to the boat, this time having got well and truly drenched in the waves getting into Nutmeg. Quick lunch in the sunshine, then with the wind having gone NW, we thought we would sail back to Babel Island and anchor in Cow Cove, where the rocks look promising for some diving.

It is always nice to pull up anchor without turning the tractor on and quietly sail away... $\frac{3}{4}$ hour later, we reached Cow Cove and got ourselves suited up for a dive. It had been a year since our last dive. I had forgotten how hot and bothered you get putting on the wetsuit, the weight belt and all the paraphernalia! It is a relief to jump in the water, even though I always get a bit anxious when we first start.

The water was reasonably clear, and we finned our way to the reef... lots of kelp flowing with the waves. Wadie quickly got to work with finding abalones and he had half a dozen in his bag before I even got my first one. Searching through the kelp forest in between the rocks was fun. You never know what is going to lurk behind it as you forage upside down.

We saw few fishes surprisingly, but there were a few crabs and plenty of abalones. Wadie searched for the elusive cray, but to no avail. A large 'medusa' was waiting for us near the boat on our return, big white jellyfish some 30 cm across with beautiful but long and menacing tentacles. Total catch: 16 abs. Feast coming up tonight! I also made a small loaf of bread and baked a banana cake – how is this for culinary delights?

29/1/08 - Catching Flatheads

It was a lazing around day today, waiting for a change that never came! Whilst waiting, Wadie tried his hand at fishing from the back of the boat, using abalone guts for bait, highly illegal, but supposedly highly effective! To start with, Wadie's version of fishing was to use his super duper bait and just leave it hanging there, hoping some fish would just throw itself at it! After a while of nothing happening, I mentioned that my Dad used to slowly wind the line in and cast again. As soon as Wadie tried it, bingo, he caught a flathead! A real fish, not just a couta! It even got me enthused to try, but I was not so lucky – skillful, Wadie corrects me!

Finally, the wind swung and we motored off slowly to Cat Island, where we anchored for the afternoon. On the way, we saw many little penguins in huddles of 10 to 12. We also met up again with the fisherman on the white trawler and noticed him doing slow circles and hauling in lots of fish... We will have to try that!





We even ventured across the gap between Cat and Storehouse Islands, in 10 meters of water, having seen the trawler do it. So you can cross this gap after all – the book was wrong!

We went ashore on Cat Island, checked out the derelict hut and walked across to the northern bay. We were both singing the snake song... with so many mutton-bird burrows, there are sure to be nasty tiger snakes around. In fact, it was like walking through a minefield with burrows collapsing under your feet, making the walk perilous.



When we got to the bay, we decided it was too narrow to anchor in... not enough space to swing around safely without hitting rocks – pity! Having fallen through so many burrows, my booties were weighing me down with dirt, so I gave something for Wadie to photograph!

We negotiated our way back through the burrows, disappeared down a few and we also found some were in fact penguin nests, with little baby penguins hiding quietly.



With the wind predicted to go SE then NE, we thought Cat Island would not be suitable for the night, so instead headed off to the West Beach of Babel Island, but not before trying our hand at this trawling slowly in circles business... and it worked! Wadie caught another flathead!

As we motored around the Northern Point of Babel Island, giving some reefs a large berth, we noticed some crosses on the Point... graves, how ominous! I wonder who lived here, what they did, what they died from and when? There are quite a few derelict huts on these islands, fishermen shacks may be? One of them had a tractor and an old car. May be they were farmers running sheep?

We anchor in West Beach for the night. Once again, we watch the return of the mutton-birds in their thousands from their ocean adventure. They swirl around in the sky after dusk, playing together, swooping, and spiraling in the calm air before somehow finding their nests ashore on the side of the hills.

We are studying the charts and the forecast... It would be nice to head off South and either round the Southern end of Flinders Island via the infamous Pot Boil, or keep going further South, around Cape Barren Island via the "Narrows". Either way, we would have a tricky passage through shallow channels and fast currents, to join the Western shores of Flinders Island. Both also mean a fair distance to cover: 30 to 40 miles – and thus we would need steady weather conditions.

These last few days, the wind has been very fickle, with 2 or 3 changes in direction each day. We need a steady Northerly to ensure a good sail southward. At least it has been sunny every day.

30/1/08 - Headed for Lady Barron

The 7.30 weather forecast shows we might be able to head off to Lady Barron today, the main harbour at the Southern end of Flinders Island, if the wind change comes in early in the morning. It is 20 miles to the Pot Boil, then another 10 to Lady Barron, which we need to do on a rising tide to go with the 3 to 5 knots current. Therefore, our calculations are that we need to get to the Pot Boil by 3 pm. We will see what happens with the wind at 9 or 10 am. Right now, it is SE!

Even if we have to wait a few days for the next cycle of Northerlies, it does not really matter as we can still explore ashore on Babel Island, climb Mt Capuchin, or Cappuccino as I call it, go diving or fishing. It is a nice little group of islands here.

We now have a neighbour! Another yacht just arrived and anchored next to us. It is the first one in a week! That means we will have to wear bathers for our morning swim. That is a bit civilized for us!

By the way, for the uninitiated, the Pot Boil relates to an area of very shallow water – down to two or three meters in places in the channels between shoals - and therefore where the ocean looks like, you guessed it, water boiling in a pot. There are a lot of breaking waves along the shoals, and as the changes in depth are sudden and significant (it can step up from 30 meters to 2 meters) the water is very turbulent. It is renowned for claiming the unwary.

We have beautiful flathead for breaky this morning. The fish has a sweet flavour and just melts in your mouth... yum. We had to check the previous log to remind us of whether we start cooking the filets with the skin down or up. And it is up first, otherwise the fish arches back.

By about 11.30, we decide the conditions are right to go. Wade is a little anxious about going through the Pot Boil and keen to negotiate it in calm conditions. Since there is very little swell, we might as well give it a go. The wind is light, but forecast to be 10 to 15 NE. So we motor off, and as we round the Northern tip of Babel Island, a pod of large dolphins joins us. It is always nice to see these. They play on our bow for a while, and then suddenly disappear, quick as a flash. We also cross paths with the white trawler and wave each other goodbye.



As we make our heading towards the Vansittart Shoals, we expect the wind to pick up, but it never does, and therefore we have to motor sail all the way. Three hours later, we get to our turn point and start the process of lining up leads through the maze of shoals to keep us away from breaking waves. The channels are quite deep in the main, from 15 to 25 meters, except in one area where the depth is only 4 meters and the water turbulent.

It takes us a further two hours to reach the Lady Barron jetty. It is a bit tricky to tie up as the pier is built more for trawlers than yachts. We also have to allow for the 1.5m tide, which is not much, but we are not very accustomed to this, us lake dwellers! After some serious fiddling by Wadie – it took a good hour for him to be happy with our mooring ropes set up – we are all organized. We lock up Bengie, the escape artist, who has been eyeing the jetty and trying to do the big leap across.

It is now 7pm and we walk ashore to the Furneaux Tavern for a pub meal. The locals have a good look at us as we walk in and then resume their noisy chatter. We opt for the fisherman's basket, with a brandy and dry for Wade and a cider for me. The drinks were good, the food ordinary, the view over the Franklin Sound superb.

On our return, since we have plugged into power, we treat ourselves to a movie on the laptop. We watch the Last King of Scotland, about Idi Amin, the past Ugandan dictator. It is a very unsettling film, which takes me back to my Zambian days. I lay awake in bed for hours afterwards.

Tomorrow, we will be able to fill up with water, although we have been very good at conserving our fresh water. We use seawater for washing dishes; we have multiple dips in the cool but crystal clear ocean each day, so we have not “wasted” drinking water on showers yet. We will also get some diesel and a couple of supplies from the small grocery store, and then head off again.

Thursday 31/1/08

We are awake early this morning... the joys of being next to a working wharf! Therefore, the process of filling up with water, checking the engine for oil and coolant, re-tying the ropes so we do not hang as the tide drops, began early. Then as we were starting our walk to the petrol station, loaded with 3 x 20l empty jerry cans, and not relishing the return fully loaded, a nice fellow on a forklift stopped by. "You two look like you are going to the shop!" I thought we might get a lift there and back on the forklift... better than walking back with 60l of diesel in hand! However, he in fact offered us his ute. "It's there, the keys are in it". A very friendly islander! Off we went in a brand spanking new tray truck from TasPorts! We picked up our diesel, then swung by the corner store on the off chance it would be open early – and it was – bought some cheese, some lures, meaty cat food for Bengie who is now sick of eating fish and turns her nose up at any more of that stuff!

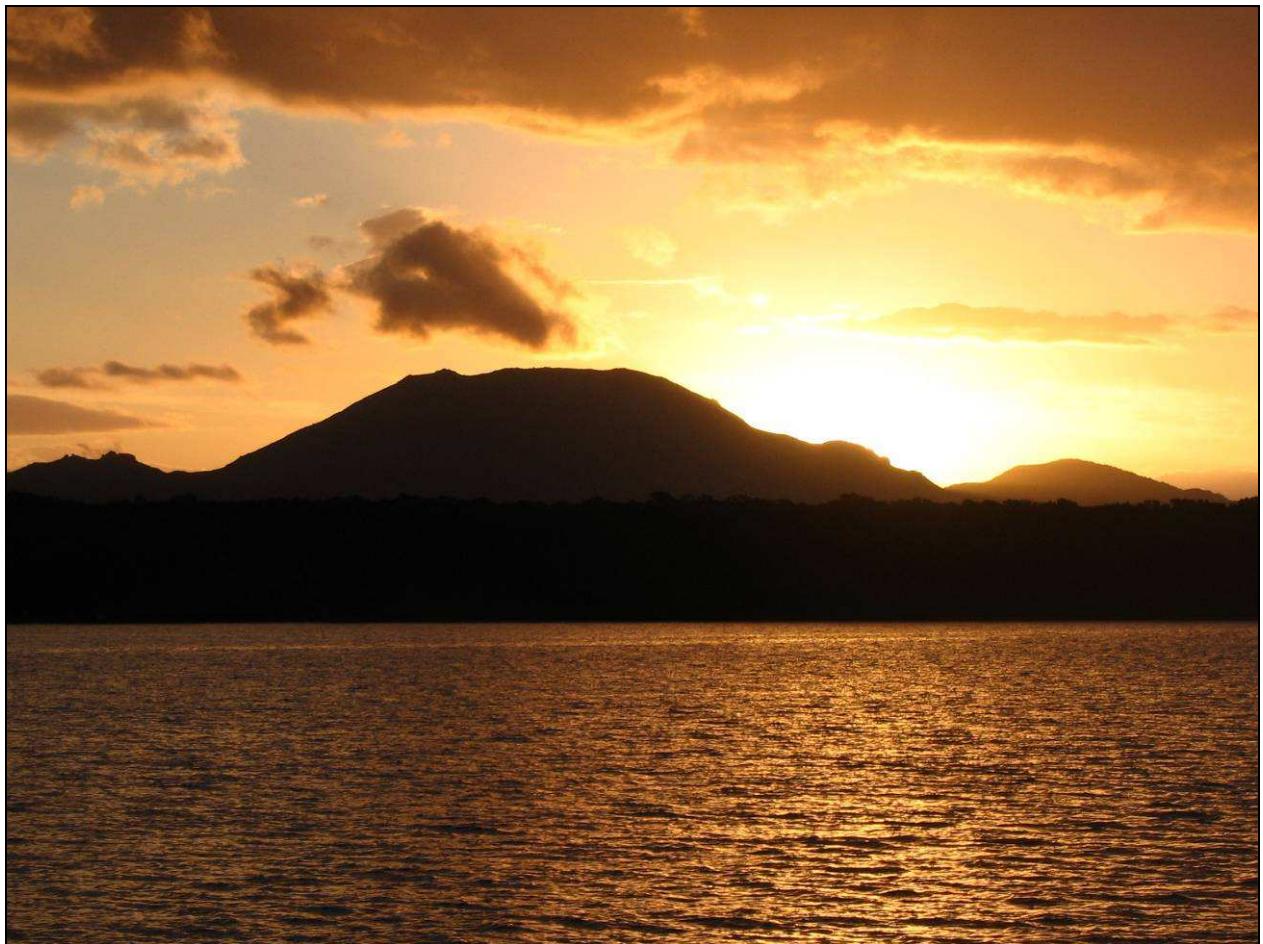
We got back from our foray feeling a bit peckish, so cooked ourselves some bacon and eggs. That killed another bit of time. We then realised we should have got some more tea, so off we went again, on foot this time, and bumped into a couple of yachties from the nice Hans Christian monohull that we saw coming in and anchoring last night.

We are undecided as to what to do, as the weather is not inviting. It is bouncy at the jetty; it is raining and a bit chilly. Bengie has cabin fever. I am feeling a bit achy in the neck and shoulders. Wadie is not keen on departing in the rain... I feel another night at the jetty coming on!

In the meantime, the Hans Christian yacht "Endurance" joins us on the jetty. Wade helps them tie up and we are then invited aboard for a sticky beak and coffee. We meet the proud owner, Richard, and of course his two friends Graham and Rob whom we met ashore before. What a classy yacht: beautiful and warm feeling as we step down into the saloon lined in teak and with all brass fittings. It is spacious and comfortable. Everything abounds with quality and style, not like our 1950s caravan on water. We spend a good hour with them, who surprisingly have never been to Flinders Island from Hobart. We therefore exchange some information on good anchorages.

When we emerge from Endurance, the sun is out, the tide is flowing in the right way and although the SE has not yet come, we head off. As we get out of Lady Barron, and start tracking into the main channel of the Franklin Sound, we hit quite strong conditions – 20 to 25 knot westerly – wind against tide, making the ride rather bumpy and the sail brisk. It is like being in the Lakes on a bad day - short, peaky waves.

We decide that our initial destination: Badger Island, some 20 miles to the other end of the Franklin Sound, just is not feasible, so we select a cove on the Cape Barren Island side of the Sound. We meander our way through some shoals and take refuge in the shallow but protected Riddles Bay.

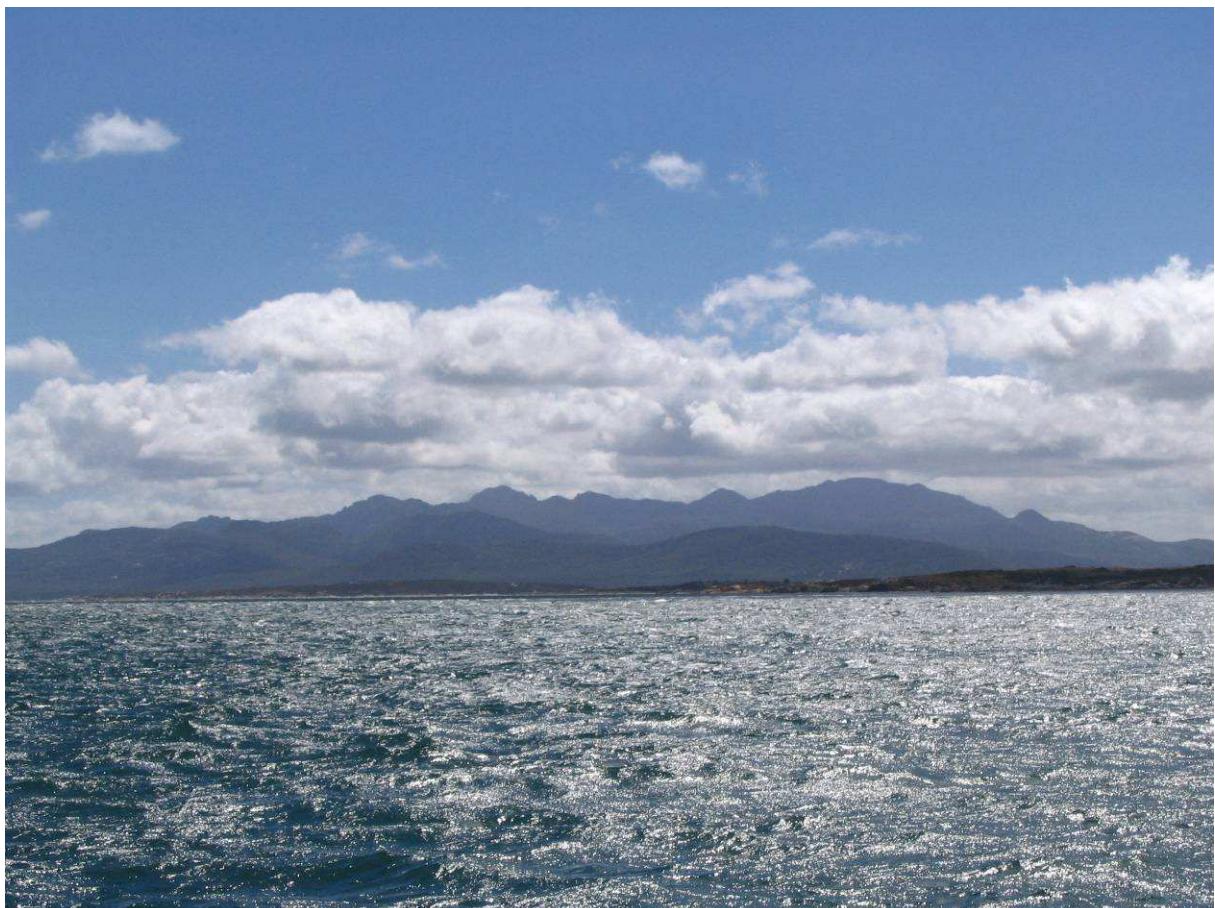


Wadie uses his new pride and joy fisherman's anchor, bought from eBay for \$14. We have not dragged, so he is happy! By 7.00 pm, the SE finally arrives!

1/2/08 - Key Island Bay

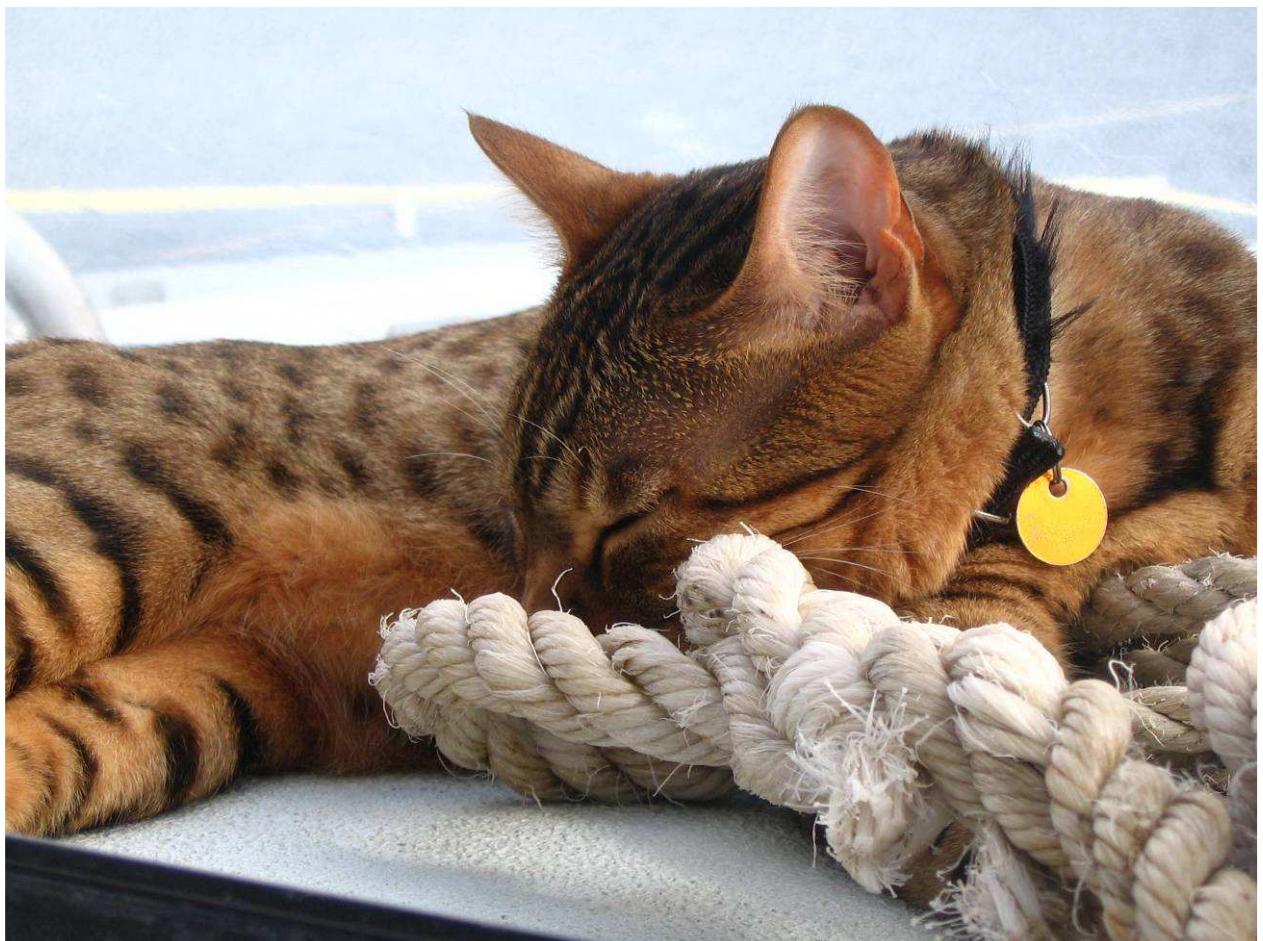
Early start this morning to catch what is left of the rising tide. We probably should have left earlier than 7.30 am, but we did not think of checking the tide time last night.

Our sail through the Franklin Sound with the Easterly wind pushing us along is quite scenic. We have mountains towering around us, with the Strzeleckis on the Flinders Island side and Mt Munroe on the Cape Barren Island shore.



We are not being thrown around like yesterday so the ride is quite smooth, the sun is out, it all feels good.

Even Bengie is in a playful mood and racing around the cockpit rather than hiding in the back cabin, her preferred hideaway when things get rough. As usual, she exhausts herself quickly, and collapses for a snooze amongst the ropes.



We keep a listen out for a group of some 15 yachts from Tassie on a “Flinders Island Cruise”. 7 of them are at Badger Island, so a good place not to be! We would rather avoid hanging around with a whole flotilla!

Today the conditions are right for us to head south, out of Franklin Sound to Key Island Bay, one of our favourite anchorages. It is a super spot for diving, walking on the beach and among the granite boulders, and a good hidey spot we are sure to get to ourselves. I think I like it even better than Roydon Island.

We get to our destination by 1.00 pm and drop the anchor in a sandy patch amongst the sea grass, in the same spot as we did last year.



Last night, I lied awake for a while, and was reflecting on our first week and a bit away. It feels like we have been underway for much longer. Not rushing around from one spot to the next, taking our time to explore new and interesting anchorages, the variety of sailing conditions and activities, all contribute I am sure to this pleasurable trip.

I only wished I could be physically stronger and more closely involved in the navigation and selection of anchorages. I have generally left it to Wade to work out weather conditions and gone along with his decisions. I have not done any sails work; when being at the helm was too hard, I have not been in the mood to tough it out and I have handed over the wheel! It is a bit wimpish for me, but I still do not feel very strong and resilient. You lose confidence and stamina very quickly when you are not 100%.

Gee, I would really like to find a job that gives us the freedom to get away more often. These once a year adventures are just not enough. I was hoping that after 6 months off work, I would have got the solution worked out, but I am still in limbo. I know I don't want to work as hard, I know I don't want the constant stress of ever more demanding targets, I know I will change job when I return to work in March, but I don't know what to and it annoys me!

Now, let us go back to reality and life in the present moment! The sail down to Key Island Bay was really pleasant, in constant 5 to 6 knots boat speed and peaks to 7 knots. The wind was from the stern, from 15 to 20 knots, our favourite conditions. We made good use of the chart plotter and depth sounder, as the Franklin Sound is a maze of shoals, and we could not just pick a heading and sail straight to it.

As we got close and were motoring in past Thunder and Lightning Bay into the anchorage, Wadie put out the trawling line on the off chance we would catch a fish. He even sounded the look alike conch shell for good measure, and bingo, he caught a pike. That is dinner tonight taken care of. We found the shell at the Lakes at Christmas time and Wadie cut the end of it to use it as a horn... works very well... loud as!

As it is a little too blowy for a dive, we have a laze around in the sunshine, and then disappear down the cabin for a little interlude. We should have remembered to turn the radio off though, as guess who comes on loud and clear? It is Mr Tamar Sea Rescue, asking, of all things, for position reports! Err, Bren, it's a bit personal! It gave us a good belly laugh though.

When we eventually emerge, I prepare some dough for a loaf of bread and we go ashore for a walk between rises.



This bay is so peculiar with the many granite boulders dotted around the water. The sun reflecting on the water makes the whole bay shimmer. I love this place. We check the other end of the beach for its suitability as an anchorage for tomorrow night as a strong SE change is forecast and we would like to stay here for more than one night. It should be right.



On our return, we bake the loaf of bread and I make an apple cake to use up the coals in the Cobb cooker. It smells yummy in the cockpit.

Saturday 2/2/08 - Key Island Bay - Day 2

We had a slow start today. Neither of us felt like getting out of bed much before 9.00 am. Even Bengie was lying in! She is normally up and about much before us.

The NE is blowing steadily at 18 to 22 knots and the sky is very cloudy. With a change to the SE forecast for late tonight, we will need to move right into the bay rather than stay amongst the rocks.

We committed to some tidying up as we had stuff lying around everywhere. That killed a good part of the morning. Things get quickly out of hands unless we clean up after ourselves every day. The QLD yacht we saw at Babel motored in from the next bay up, Thunder and Lightning! How dare they pinch the spot we wanted to move to!

By lunchtime, we got ready for a dive, even though the wind was fairly strong. We just went at the back of the boat. The bottom was instantly more interesting than at Babel Island: lots of sea grass, with drop offs, ledges and little valleys, all sorts of anemones, with interesting and bright colors; a multitude of purple and brown sea urchins, and of course large abalones, both black lips and the much cleaner green lips. We saw a lot more fish too. So naturally, armed with our diving knives and grab bags, we collected a few abs for a nice feed, explored around and took in the beautiful underwater scenery.

After about an hour, we started heading back to the boat. We followed the anchor chain and checked out the anchor and buddy. That is when I noticed the breathing was getting harder and figured we were running out of air. We both surfaced and started swimming back to the boat. But I really struggled with my breathing and decided to swap the regulator for the snorkel... breathing no easier and with all the diving weights and the load of abs, I could not stay afloat. Oh, oh, time to call out to Wadie and drop the weights! What a struggle for both of us, me trying to catch a breath, Wadie trying to help me and holding on to my weights! When we got back to the steps at the back of Medina, we were both relieved. This was another reminder that I am not yet fighting fit! I cannot believe how much form I have lost!

We checked the bag limit and minimum sizes... 13 cm abs and no more than 10 each. We had a look through our two bags and threw back a few undersized ones. We kept a dozen for a good feed. We might see if the Queenslanders want to join us for dinner or lunch tomorrow... may be tomorrow... I feel totally wasted. The heat pack for my neck and elbow, a couple of Panamax and a nap are in order!

We must have used every last bit of air in the compressor, as it took some three hours to recharge the battery! Once done, Wadie pulled up the anchor and we motored in to the beach. Our new anchorage is more protected from the SE and coupled with a drop in wind strength, it makes for a calm evening.

Tomorrow we might try to sail to Badger Island, NW of here, another new spot for us to explore.

3/2/08 - Key Island Bay - Day 3

It is blowing SE – 25 to 35 knots! We are not going anywhere today! Even a fishing boat has come in to take shelter right against the rocks. He is probably the most comfortable of the three of us. Tiare, the QLD yacht is rocking a lot in the chop.



We are wallowing in front of the 'Bum', a rock that looks like one!

The fishing boat is resetting its anchor for the third time, thus destroying my theory that his spot was the best and was in fact where I wanted us to anchor last night... so the holding is not so good on weed!

Wadie announces that on a day like this, if we had a wind generator, we would be producing plenty of power to run the fridge and flush the toilet all at once, an impossibility with our current set up... "But we would go batty with the noise", I add, a feature most owners of the thing complain about. Still, this business about having to remember to switch the fridge off before you go to the loo and flush the toilet, then switch the fridge back on again, is driving me batty too!

We did not sleep so well last night. We were woken up by thumping noises on the deck and roof. I realised it was Bengie, got up and found her jumping around trying to catch something, but all I could see was a starry night sky. "What are you doing, trying to catch shooting stars?" It must have been 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning and it was the calm before the storm. By 5.30 am, the wind started howling from the South East and the rock and roll came with it.

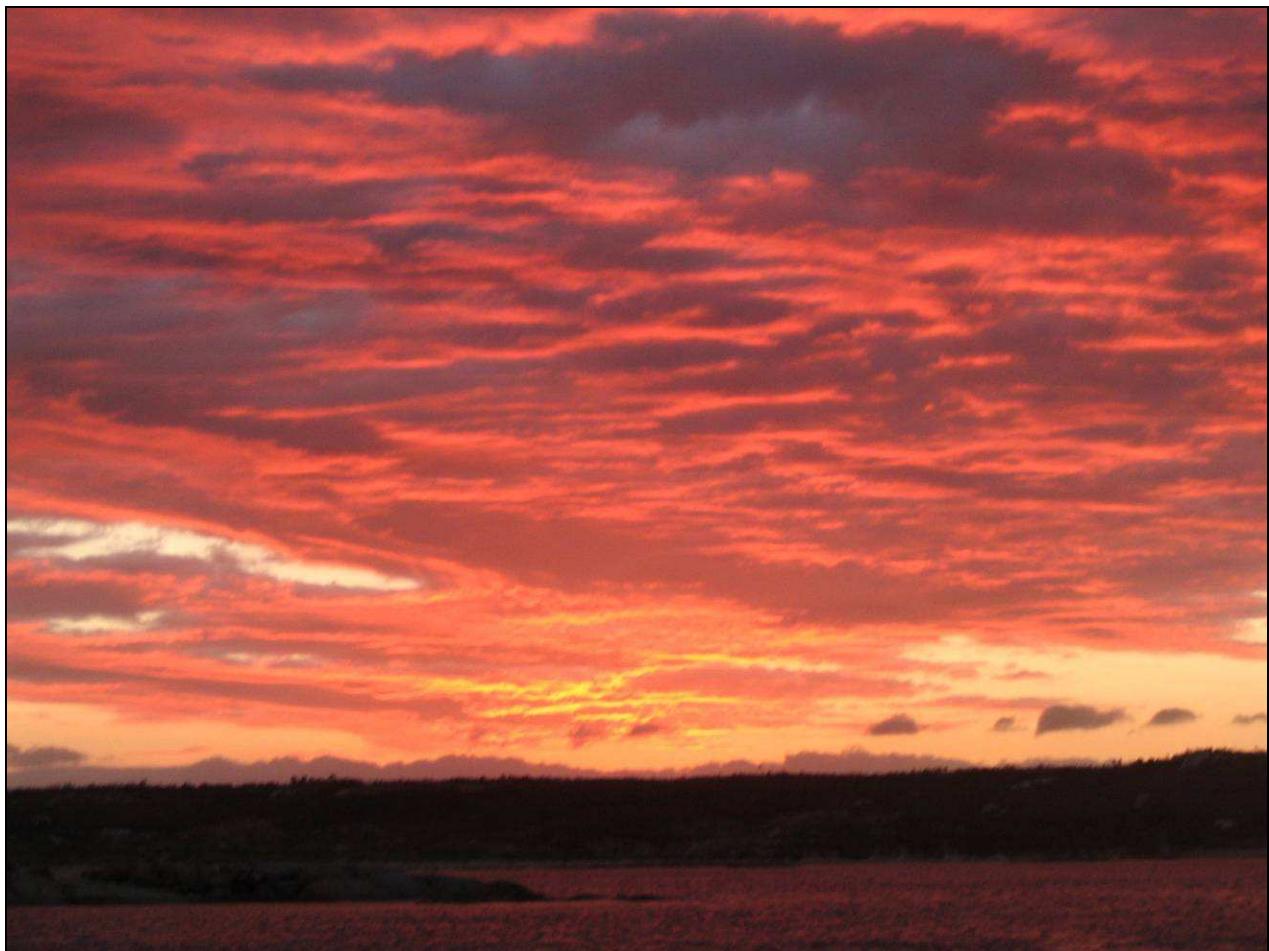
We spend the day reading, playing Sudoku. The wind does not abate. The Queenslanders come motoring by in their dinghy and we invite them over for abalone tasting and pre dinner drinks. Emily and Ron – must not forget their names. But over the afternoon, the wind and chop worsen and they decide to stay put for the night. So we feast on our abs on our lonesome, entertaining ourselves by listening to the chatter on the radio.

Most of the "Flinders Island Cruise" yachts are stuck in Lady Barron, except for a couple at Trouser Point. We hear one yacht leaves Whitemark to get to Lady Barron, but later decides to turn back, so rough are the conditions. Yet another yacht is in Spike Cove on Clarke Island, just south of us, and keeps asking Tamar Sea Rescue for more detailed weather reports. So we listen in, as we too are keen to move and are looking at our options. In fact the yacht "Rollercoaster" ends up saying, "Medina, have you been listening to this?" and Wadie sheepishly says, "Yes, we were thinking of coming down your way". This is another QLD boat, trying to keep away from the 'flotilla'. Studies of the chart and ideas on possible anchorages are exchanged. They want to head north and so do we, but for the next couple of days, the wind will not allow it, so we are all seeking alternatives! Later, Wadie says, "See, it is always good to listen to other people's conversations". But you have to watch what you say, as there is always a sticky beak somewhere on the radio dropping in on your not so private exchanges!

Monday 4/2/08 - Key Island Bay - Day 4

We had thunder and lightning during the night and heavy rain from 4.00 am onwards. At least it flattened out the sea. It had been rock and rolling a fair bit, to the point where I thought it was wise to take some seasickness tablets – a bit sad at anchor in the middle of the night!

The dawn sky says it all! Red sky in the morning, sailors' warning!



We woke up to a soggy cockpit. It is still raining this morning and Wade has rigged up the funnels and barrels to collect some fresh water. The contraption fascinates Bengie, and she tries to catch a few drips with her paw if not with her tongue. She is quite funny standing up on her hind legs on the barrel.



We are thinking of heading South to Preservation Island, just for a change of scenery once the wind goes Northerly, then on Tuesday when it goes SE again, head back up to Badger Island. Yes, we are still trying to get to this elusive destination. We will see what we can do. Right now, there is hardly any wind at all. It is hard to select the right spot to go to when the conditions are so fickle yet so strong. Whichever direction the wind decides to blow, it is forecast to be at least 20 knots, so we need decent shelter. Ideally, we want to find an island with shelter for two opposite wind directions, so that we can easily move from one to the other as the wind changes! With that many islands around us, it should not be that difficult!

Well, we had about one hour's escape out, got halfway to Preservation Island and a squall hit us with strong SE, forcing us to turn around and bravely run back to Key Island. "We are back" - we shouted at Tiare as we anchored back where we were! Time to start reading another book!

5/2/08 - Trousers Point

9.00am, we are motor-sailing out of Key Island Bay, this time determined not to turn back. We have a NE wind, thus making it a beam to close reach run. Wade has decided we would fare better by using the staysail and No2 jib, rather than the furler. He has also put a reef in the main, so we are prepared for strong conditions. In the end, we decide to motor-sail all the way, as after several days of poor weather, our batteries are low and the fridge is struggling.

We reach Trousers Point by noon, anchor close to the beach at low tide in 3m of water. Soon it starts to drizzle and we hide behind the clears for a while.

This sitting on your bottom reading or playing Sudoku is getting a bit boring. I need to move and get ashore as I am getting rather antsy. Wadie is not keen... So I decide to drop Nutmeg in the water, get the oars out rather than the hard to start outboard engine, take a couple of bags of rubbish to get rid of in the National Park bins, and I am off for a walk on my lonesome to the other side of Trousers Point – to Fotheringate Bay. Only one thing wrong, I realise I have forgotten my runners at home and will need to wear my rubber slippers... just as well it is not a very long walk! What a silly thing to leave behind.

It is a great walk, which follows the coast on top of the boulders... the weather has cleared somewhat and I enjoy great views of Mt Chappell and Badger Islands to the West and the vast Fotheringate Bay to the North. I think it is as close to Badger Island as we are going to get! The 3.5 km round trip is just what I needed to blow the cobwebs away and get a bit of exercise. By the time I get back, the weather has turned.

It is windy and drizzly again as I arrive back at the dinghy. Small waves are now breaking on the shore, making it awkward to get into Nutmeg and start rowing. Medina is sitting with its stern to the beach and looks very close. Wadie is on deck, watching me struggling with the oars. I catch myself thinking that if I cannot get back to the boat on Nutmeg, it is close enough to swim to it! Fortunately for my ego, I manage to row out without capsizing or getting drenched. As soon as I climb back on board, we take off and motor to where I have just walked to, the Northern side of Trousers Point, to get a bit more sheltered from the wind, which is now southerly.

We anchor in Fotheringate Bay, in 2m of water right in close. No sooner are we settled that the wind direction shifts again. With every squall, we move from NE to E to S. However, we decide to stay put for the night.

For now, it is time for a dip. Wadie of course has to check his handy work with the anchor, so has a quick jump overboard, armed with mask and snorkel. I look at that cold water and decide a warm shower and shampoo in the boat's little bathroom is more appealing. It is amazing what some physical exercise and a wash in fresh water do to your spirit! I feel much better.

6/2/08 - Port Davies

It blew hard and rained all night. When we got to this anchorage last night, the cloud base was so low that you could not see the Strzeleckis anymore, so our backdrop was a line of dunes with a small gap where there might once have been a river mouth. This morning, as I went up into the cockpit with a cup of coffee in hands, the Strzeleckis were towering over us, our angle to the beach was different and it looked like we had moved and got deeper into the curve of the bay. Panic, "Wadie, we've dragged"! However, a check at the chart plotter confirmed we had stayed put. Phew! That bay is awfully shallow and it would be very easy to be left high and dry at low tide if we had dragged.



Our plan to go and discover Badger Island is unlikely to be fulfilled on this trip. There is more bad weather forecast – SE to SW with a strong wind warning. So we need to head for a spot that will give us good shelter for these conditions, whilst slowly edging our way North. Port Davies might be the go. We will have to motor-sail again, even though we could just sail there easily, since once again the fridge is in 'positive' territory. Without the sun for the solar panels to do their work, we really struggle with battery power. May be we do need a wind generator! We, at the very least need new batteries!

Jobs to do when we return:

- New curtains for the bathroom window. The ones above the basin are rotten.
- New heavy white screen for the front windows in the head and above the fridge in the galley – they too have had it.
- Remake the cover for the seat at the wheel. Although it is new, I made it a bit too small and the seams are already splitting. We will have to take the seat home with us so I measure properly this time!
- Repair the sun quilt again... a few beads fell off when Bengie was hanging from it trying to catch flies.
- Get the wind indicator fixed. The LCD display is now unreadable most of the time.
- Clean up the engine so it does not splatter oily deposits on the sides of the box cover.
- Buy two new batteries to replace our nearly dead ones, at least do so before the next big trip.
- Buy a rechargeable upright vacuum cleaner. The daily sweep of the floors on hands and knees is killing my neck.

It is now 1.30 pm. We have made it to Port Davies and are anchored right in close to the beach. It is all calm. The sun is trying to make an appearance in between patches of drizzle. The trip up was dry. As we distanced ourselves from the Strzelecki range, the weather slowly improved. The hills were shrouded in clouds and on reflection, we probably got buffeted last night by the rotor from the nearby peaks! We were getting very strong gusts, much stronger than the forecast wind speed.

3 pm. It has been drizzling on and off. Wadie has gone for a nap... nothing better to do. I sit around for a while, letting my mind wander. These last few days have not been a great deal of fun. The bad weather is really limiting: too windy to dive, too wet to explore ashore, too rough and changeable to go for a sail just for fun, too grey to feel cheery. These days spent waiting for better conditions can get us down... Please God, a bit of sunshine to make us feel a little chirpier! However, what do we hear for the 4.30 pm weather update? “Securite, securite, securite, all ships, all ships, all stations, this is Victor Mike Romeo 703, Tamar Sea Rescue, with a coastal weather forecast and strong wind warning”. Here we go again!

How is this for silly boat names: Foot Spa – must be a very leaky boat! The evening sked always has a little something to make you laugh. Less silly, but different: Rollercoaster, Illegal, Redundant. That one could be a good name if AXA ever made me so! Dream on!

In between drizzle patches, we get out on the deck... Bengie joins us for her crazy hour: she runs around the cockpit, rushes outside, hops on the roof, gives a loud meow, hops on the boom, runs along it and takes a running jump up the mast, gets a couple of meters up, only to realise her claws don't work so well on aluminium. She slides back down with a screeching noise that makes our teeth hurt. By now she is all fluffed up, bright eye and bushy tail. "What else can I play with? I know, those little shells they found for me. They roll around and make lots of noise as I biff them! Oh yeah, and what about the Cobb bag – that is a good hidey-hole! I looove hidey-holes!"



Thursday 7/2/08 - Port Davies - Day 2

Do we love Rock and Roll? Only the musical type; the aquatic one, not so much!

The SW change came early in the morning, at 3.00 am. It has been blowing at 20 to 25 knots steadily ever since, and with this came some serious swell. We were pretty well in the waves, lying back close to some rocks, and every roll threatened to make us fall out of bed, so by 7.00 am we moved away from the sandy beach into deeper water and thus Wadie set up the fisherman's anchor rather than the plough.

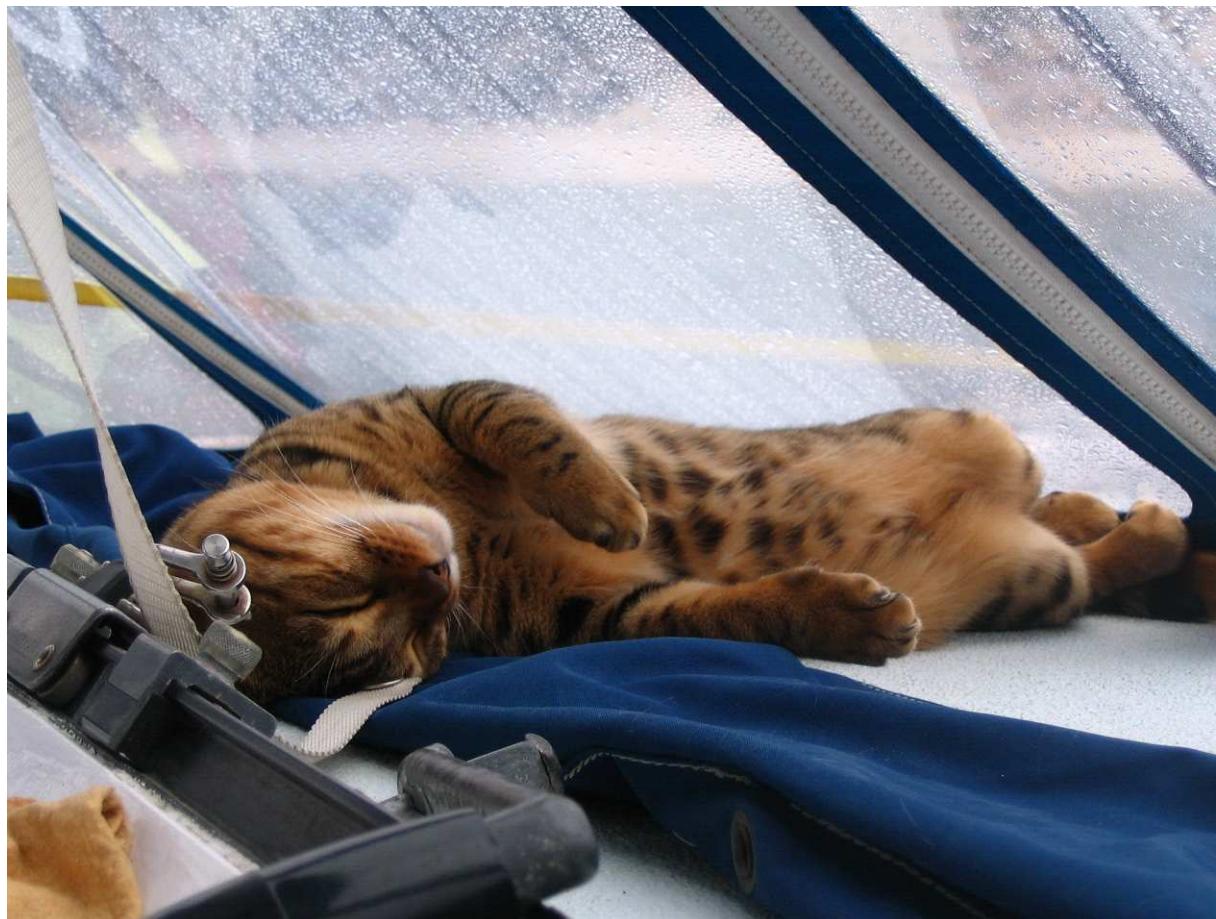
The holding was poor in the sea grass and we dragged, so had to reset a couple of times, but we kept drifting back close to a fishing boat, so in the end we picked up a vacant mooring. We do not like doing this without permission, but at least we will stay put now and if the owner comes back, we will just have to move....

At least it is a sunny day, the first we have had for a week. We still cannot get ashore, because the rock and rolling is so pronounced that we would probably do the boat or ourselves some damage trying to launch Nutmeg, not to mention being tumbled in the shore break. So we are stuck on board a very bouncy Medina.

The noise of the howling wind, the sunshine and our constant rocking is exciting our leopard who is racing around all fluffed up.

With the wind and sun, Wadie decides it is a perfect day to try the little washing machine. It is a drum on a frame, which we rotate by hand. Pretty good for some knickers, T-shirts and T towels. Medina looks like a Chinese laundry now with everything hanging out to dry on the safety lines.

The anchorage is really only just acceptable in a SW. The swell makes it quite uncomfortable, to the point where I swallow some Kwells to settle my stomach and lie down on the back deck in the sunshine, for a bit of a nap. Wadie reads for a while then he too goes for a kip. As for the pussycat, well, what can a cat do but snooze?



It is now 3.00 pm, still blowy and bouncy. I would really like to go for a walk, but there is the small matter of Nutmeg and the chop... I ought to bake some bread as we have run out, but I do not fancy kneading dough in these conditions.

I sit out for a while watching the clouds, picking out shapes as they build up then dissipate: curling waves, pussy cat face, seal, witch's nose and pointy hat... the things you do when you are bored!

8/2/08 - Port Davies - Day 3

Oh no, the wind has stopped howling, but now we have rain! It is a grey, soggy day. The weather is really not very cooperative. It is raining on our summer holiday. Cabin fever is setting in! We will end up with bedsores or seat sores on our bottom if this continues!

Wadie is doing a small repair job; the pump switch for the basin in the heads has stopped working. There are tools everywhere, which tickle the interest of the biggest sticky beak around, Miss Bengie.



It got quite cold last night. It is 14° in the cabin this morning. Put away those shorts and T-shirts, get the homers and polar fleeces out, and a spare quilt for the bed.

As Wadie is working on the switch, I look around the cabin. We will need to freshen this up a bit when we get back. There are a few areas in need of a coat of paint, in particular the 'high traffic' galley and heads. There are a few spots of mould appearing on our bedroom roof that I need to spray when the bed is stripped, so I do not end up bleaching the bedding like last time! As for the cockpit and deck, well, it is the full blue catastrophe with Emerclad that is required there, as it is all a bit grubby.

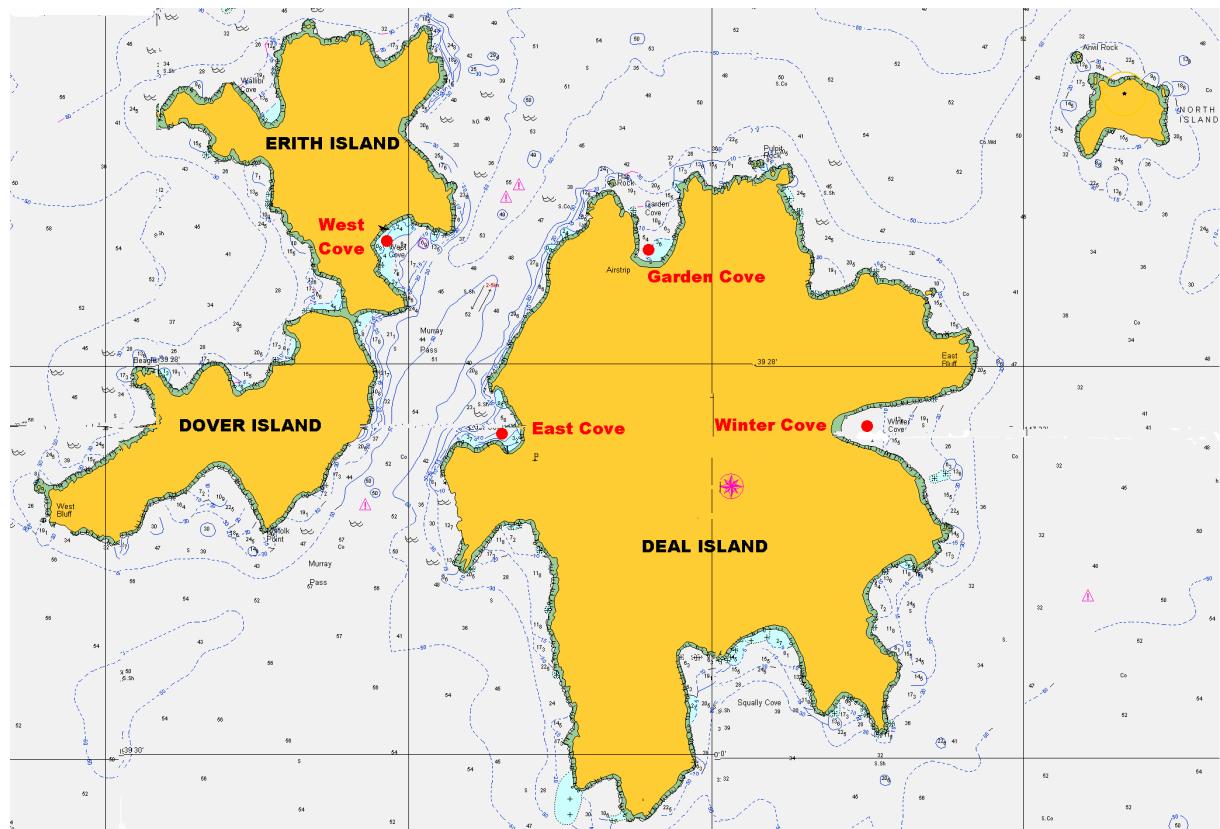
It is noon, it has not stopped raining and now the SE wind has picked up, which is not the direction that was forecast. We are standing in the cockpit, cup of soup in hand, wondering what to do. We could go up to Killiercrankie and be cold, wet and miserable, or stay here and be just cold and miserable.

By 2.00 pm, we have the answer to our question. Let us just be cold and miserable. We have just heard the fleet from “Flinders Island Cruise” on the radio. They are on their way to Killiecrankie from Deal Island, struggling in 30-knot winds and rain. One of them, Nirvana, says ‘the boys are harnessed in. It is howling. We are not having a good time’. So let us not join them – besides, there will not be any mooring left for us up there.

The one good thing for the day: bacon and eggs this morning. Another not so bad thing: a game of Scrabble, which I am winning!

During the afternoon, we hear more reports of yachts having a tough time, including Endurance and illegal, going ‘over the top’, headed for the Sisters Islands. So we hide away for the rest of the day, turn the generator on to make the fridge cold again, and while we have power, we watch a couple of movies. It is not so bad after all, and a lot drier than some of those poor people are.

Part 2: Deal Island



Saturday 9/2/08 - Deal Island

9.00 am. It is sunny! There is still a fair bit of wind about from the SE, but no more swell nor rain! I decide to have a warm shower and wash my hair – luxury. In the meantime, Wadie drops Nutmeg in the water and takes some rubbish ashore, then comes back in time for the weather forecast: SE 10 to 20. We decide to give the long awaited walk ashore a miss, and rather than join the troops at Killiercrankie, we head for Deal Island, a 45 miles trip and our final destination before heading back to the Lakes – well possibly.

We leave Port Davies by 9.45. It is great to be on the move again and be able to sail, even though we missed out on a walk along the beach. The wind conditions are good, not too strong and with the sun out, the coast is clear, a first for at least a week.

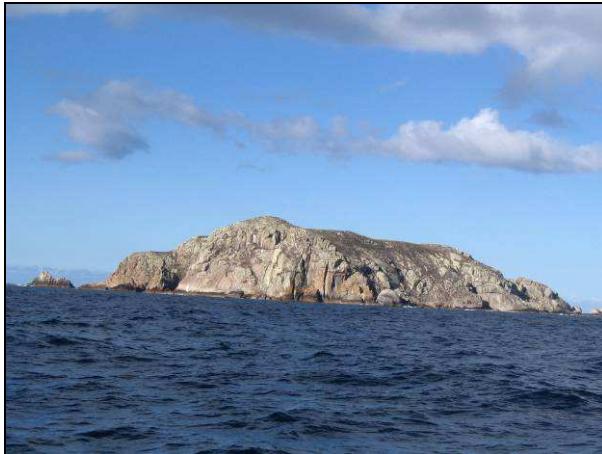
We decide to head out wide around the Pascoe Islands and give Cape Frankland a wide berth, as we have been known to go in irons and even backwards when we have past it too close in previous years. No such challenge this time. We have the genoa out, and average 5.5 knots. It is a pleasant sail. Along the way, we go through an area where hundreds of shearwaters (mutton-birds) are resting on the water. As we near them, they take off and fly around us. There are so many, and it is quite beautiful watching them play and swirl around.



At some stage through the passage, when our speed is particularly good, Wadie puts on Joe Cocker's CD and we are sailing to the tune of "unchain my heart" – it is loud, the beat is great, it is a favourite for when the wind and waves are pushing us along at a good pace.

We hand steer all the way and sail for 6 hours, alternating our sail combination between just the jib initially, and then jib and main goose winged.





It is only for the last 2 ½ hours that we have the tractor turned on as well. We get close to Deal by about 4.30 pm but have to round the island to get to Garden Cove. These last couple of hours seems endless.

We finally anchor in Garden Cove by 7.00 pm, making this a 9-hour crossing. Wadie warns, “Don’t jump in the water”. I just think it is because it could be freezing, but when I look more closely, there are thousands of small jellyfishes, some tiny, others looking like blue bottles!

There are little wallabies on the beach, having a drink at the small creek that runs in the middle of the cove; there are also a few cape barren geese further up in the grass. The light is golden and bathes the surrounding rocks in an orange hue. It is quite a beautiful, tranquil spot.



I suspect nobody knows we are here; we tried to radio our position to Tamar Sea Rescue, but they did not answer. Neither did the Deal Island caretakers. We will have to walk up to the house tomorrow and ask them to relay a message to Bren. We are wondering whether our radio is working properly as we seemed to pick up lots of static when we were trying to reach Tamar. Mind you, we did hear a couple of interesting calls, so we certainly can receive. One was some sort of base calling “warship two”. We felt like cutting in to say “we are here, don’t bomb us”... and another exchange from a rescue vessel talking to a helicopter about airlifting someone! We wondered where that was.

10/2/08 - Garden Cove

We heard Deal Island radio calling Tamar early this morning so made ourselves known and asked them to relay a message to Bren.

It is a nice sunny day with a light breeze blowing from the NW, not where we expected it to come from, which means we are lying with our stern to the beach!

During a pancake breakfast, we hear a vessel calling Deal Island asking for some diesel. When Wes, the Caretaker tells them they are only 40 miles from Flinders Island where they can refuel, "Windward Bound" replies "It is out of bound for us, we draw too much and we are running very low on fuel after being involved in a medivac!" Hello, hello, that is our rescue ship! Wes reluctantly tells them they can have 100 litres...

Gee, what sort of ship cannot get to Lady Barron? I can understand some not being able to get into Whitemark, 2 meters depth there is not much, but Lady Barron... there are 8 meters at the wharf and most of the main channel is 12 meters plus. We will have to investigate, since we also find out this vessel is anchored at East Cove!



So after a quick climber up the mast by Wadie to check our radio antenna – which by the way looks fine – we hop into Nutmeg to get ashore and walk up the 2.5 Kms from Garden Cove to the Caretakers' house.

As we get to the top of the hill overlooking East Cove, we discover that "Windward Bound" is a tall ship... that was Wadie's guess.

Wes and Ethel, the Caretakers, invite us for a cuppa and cake... yum. We have a good chat. Wes' grandfather was a lighthouse keeper at Deal and his Mum got married on the island! Their family connection enabled them to get the Caretaker's job for 3 months as volunteers, a gig that seems to be very popular as over 100 people put their hand up for each rotation.



We sit around with them for a while, waiting to see the tall ship sail off, bound for Hobart... In the end, it only raises 3 squares and a staysail.

Back to the boat, still facing the wrong way, we debate whether to stay here or move to Winter Cove, but the breeze is light and changeable. We spend the afternoon doing circles around the anchor and settle for remaining here.



I get some dough ready for a loaf of bread, while Wadie tries fishing... in fact, he calls me over to see this stingray moving slowly underneath us. He tries dangling bait in front of it, but it does not bite. I remember Mum cooking ray wing fillets... pretty tasty. This would be nice for dinner! We keep looking at this bluish ray with envy.

A couple of hours later, Wadie does some tidying up and asks, "Have you seen the good blue rag?" He looks everywhere and concludes it must have fallen overboard. That is when it dawns on him that may be this blue stingray is in fact the blue towel... no wonder it was not taking the bait! However, undeterred, he grabs his fishing rod, hooks the look alike fish and reels it in, proud as punch.



We wanted to go diving at low tide in late afternoon and catch some ab to share with Wes and Ethel who have never tasted them, but the jelly goobles are still around. They have long tentacles and are in the hundreds still. Even though we would be fully covered in our wetsuits, we are not very enthused and decide to wait until tomorrow morning. May be the tide and wind will have taken them away. The thought of tentacles wrapping themselves around masks gives us the heebie jeebies.

At about 5.30 pm another yacht came in to the cove. They anchored some respectable distance from us who are bang in the middle of the bay, close to the beach. A little later, a huge catamaran comes powering in, but when it sees two yachts in there, it turns away and continues to East Cove. That is better, we do not like crowds.

Large hills surround our cove. By 7.30 pm the sun has gone, and we are in shadow. It is amazing how quickly the temperature drops. We have noticed it has been colder here than at Flinders. I am not sure whether it is because we are in the middle of Bass Strait, or because the Southerlies have been cooling things down...May be both. Even though the Cobb oven is warming up the cockpit – bread done, kangaroo roast next – it is not long until we have to put on the polar fleeces.

Monday 11/2/08 - Busted!

Well, we had some excitement this morning! Nice sunny morning, not too many jelly fishes around, so we decided to go for a dive. As usual, it is a job in itself to get all the gear ready and by the time you are all suited up, you are already tired!



Anyway, we finned over to the rocks, dodged a few jellies, then had a fossick around. There was lots of kelp flowing back and forth with the current, a few stripy fish, some urchins, a few undersized ab, but not many at all. I figured this would be a look and see, rather than a snatch and grab dive. Wade had taken the Hawaiian sling with him, hoping to catch crabs or a large fish.

At some stage I saw Wadie surface. He had heard a funny sound and deep growl. I came up too... and what do we see? A very sizeable police boat – 50 to 60 foot, quite imposing in the bay. At the same time, I notice “Jolie Brise”, the yacht that came in last night, quickly set sails.



We dived back down, decided to definitely not catch anything, since we did not have a Tassie fishing license, nor a Victorian one for that matter, and had a bit more of a look around. We saw a spotted wobbegong and a few more stripy fishes. I was getting tired so signed to Wadie to start heading back to the boat. On the way back, we saw a stingray lying flat on the bottom half covered with sand. We could not help but think of Steve Irwin as we swam above it and could see its barb.

As we surfaced close to Medina, the Police boat had a zodiac out and they offered us a lift back, but we were just about there anyway. We downed the fins, weight belt, mask and goggles as the zodiac came alongside and boarded us for a good old check of ID, grab bags (which were empty), fridge and freezer (also empty of fish or abs). They reminded us we needed a Tassie license if we fished, asked where we had been and where we were going next. They had a friendly chitchat, and then went back to the mother ship, Van Diemen. Apparently, they are based in Hobart and go on a patrol for 7 days at a time.

Lucky shmucky! Next trip we had better have our fishing license... They must have thought we had dropped our catch when we first saw them. We did not, but it certainly stopped us from trying to catch anything! And if we had had anything in the grab bags or the fridge, we would most certainly have been fined!

They stayed around for a while as we were putting our diving gear away, then powered off. Half an hour later, they were back... comfy spot for lunch, or may be they are keeping an eye on us!

“Jolie Brise” certainly did not hang around for the action. We had not seen any movement from them by the time we had got ready to dive, thinking they were having a sleep in, and then in a matter of 40 minutes if that, they were gone! By the way, the name of the yacht means nice breeze in French – I just wished the owners knew how to say it properly instead of calling their yacht jolly breeze! These people who pretend to speak French and haven’t got a clue...

We had a lazy afternoon, sitting in the sunshine in the nets at the front. Some of the police guys went for a dive themselves. The skipper came for a visit after dropping them back – nice fellow – he has been doing this since 1978. We told him he had a great job, but he sounded like he had had enough. “7 years to go till I am 55 and I can retire!” Apparently, they are on the water, away from family, about 100 days a year. It would be hard after a while.

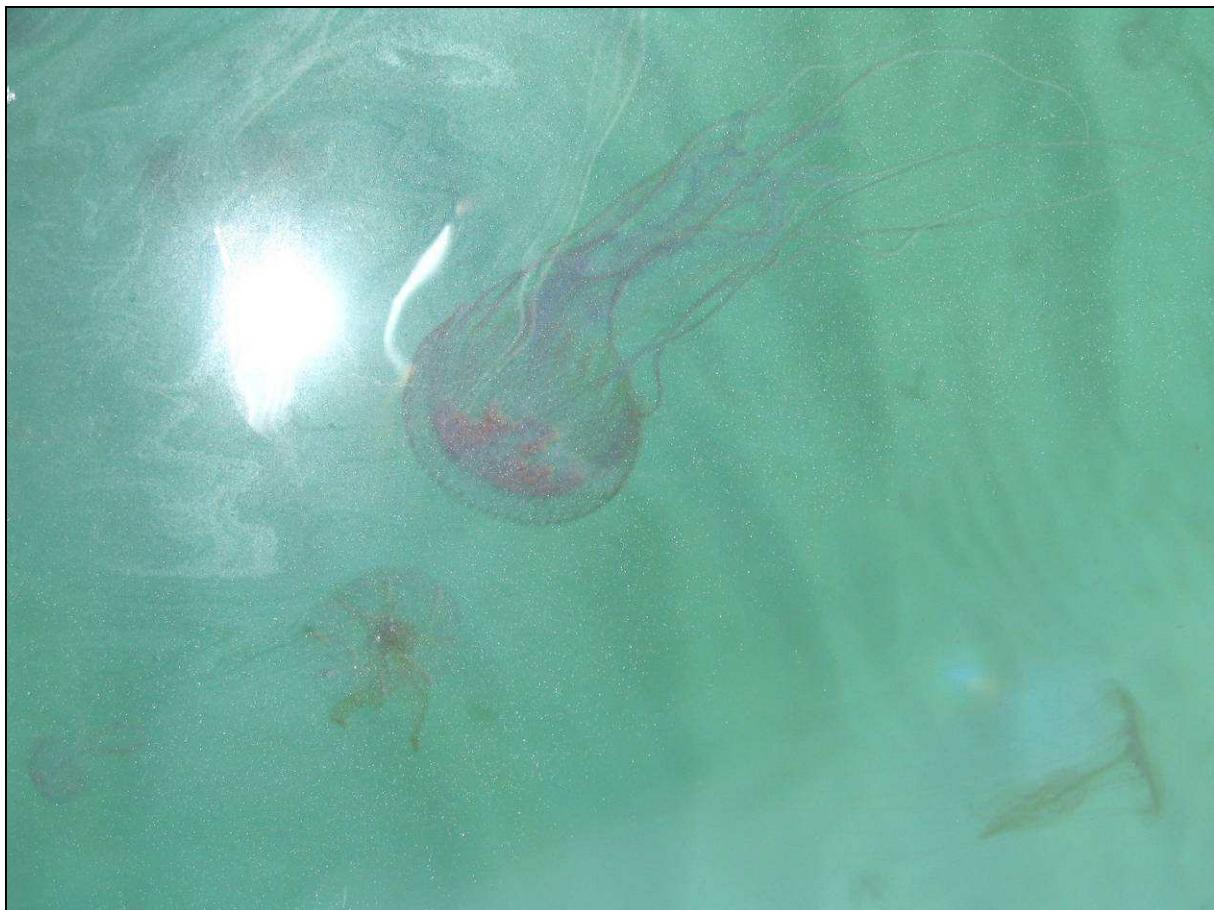
With the wind shifting to the NE, we moved to West Cove at Erith Island, whilst Van Dieman moved to East Cove, for a BBQ on the jetty – as we said – tough jobs!

Once safely anchored at Erith, we went ashore and visited the hut, a well-maintained shelter, then came back on board for a warm shower on the back deck, followed by Gin and Tonic.



This was quite a pleasant day. We had dinner and settled inside when we heard the noise of a deep engine. Just when we thought we were safe, here came the police boat again. We reckoned they had their BBQ and came over to the better anchorage for the night. We had a guilty conscience, having not worn our lifejackets on Nutmeg – naughty!

At least if anything happens to us during the night, we have not got long to wait for the rescue crew! Who knows, the thousands of jellyfishes surrounding us might gobble us up. It must be breeding season for them.



Tuesday 12/2/08 - Erith - West Cove

We both got up a few times during the night to check how we were lying. Finally at 6.30 am, we hear the Police boat raise anchor and roar off, and Wadie gets up to listen to the weather forecast on HF since we missed it last night. He also checks a large brown rock looking thing that has appeared alongside us, rather too close for comfort. On closer inspection, it is a huge mass of jellyfishes. Yuk! Millions of them!

Today is most likely to be our last day here. We are waiting for a SW change due this afternoon. We will follow it back to the Lakes tomorrow, once the strongest part of it has gone over us.

For now, it is 9.00 am, we are lying with our stern to the beach, in 3 m of water – not what we expected. We are very close to the beach... and having read the notice at the hut not to anchor anywhere near the beach because there is only “a small veneer of sand over rock”, we are not very comfortable. It would be good if the wind behaved according to the forecast!

So we wait and have a nice breakfast of ham steak and eggs. Tasty! Once the wind blows from the right direction, we will go ashore for a walk around the island, maybe to the Sloshway, a little sandy bridge between Dover and Erith Islands.

By noon, we are still lying with our stern to the shore and figure it is safer to go back to Garden Cove. The walk on Erith will have to happen on another trip. As we get out of West Cove and get into the Murray Pass, between Erith and Deal Islands, the tidal stream is against us... It gets very deep, very quickly, as we go from 12m to 36 then 55 in just a few meters. It is as if there were giant steps down underneath us. There are lots of eddies, but we get back to Garden Cove without hassles. We will have to go for a walk here even though with my runners in Melbourne and blisters from our last walk up to Wes and Ethel's, the rubber slippers might not be very comfortable. Maybe I can put a pair of sox on, then my diving boots! I would like to get a bit of exercise before the long trip back to the Lakes on our backside! The lack of physical exercise is what I miss most with sailing, particularly when the weather does not allow us to get ashore.

We have some lunch, then put Nutmeg in the water and walk up the hill. We have a bit of a chat with Ethel and Wes. Ethel is tending the veggie garden, which looks lush with goodies. We have a laugh with them about the visit from the coppers. Apparently, they were working up at the lighthouse when they heard the police boat roaring in. We were not the only yacht they checked... they did go to Winter Cove to check Jolie Brise after us.

Anyway, we walked up to Barn Hill, and on the way had a close encounter with a cape barren goose and a wallaby.



The view over Dover and Erith and further out to sea is breath taking at the top. It is a very rugged coastline.



On the way down, we stopped again at the house and were invited in for tea and cake and a bit more of a chat. They must welcome the sporadic company, as it is a fairly isolated spot. The afternoon quickly disappeared. We walked back to Garden Cove, checked the beach for Paper Nautilus shells. There is a nice collection up at the house... They apparently appear on the beach after a full moon. We had no luck, but Wadie did collect a few Cape Barren geese feathers for Bengie and I remembered Sue wanted a couple too... They were not of the best quality, but they will do for our kitten and we will have to check our collection for a decent one to bring back to Sue.

The SW has picked up now and we have been listening to the forecasts with greater attention since we want to get back to the Lakes on this low. To make the most of the SW without being bashed around, we are aiming to leave tomorrow morning at about 9.00 am. It is 100 miles back to the Entrance. If we average 5 knots, we will make it back by about 5.00 am on Thursday. We may well do better than that, it all depends on what tonight and the 6.30 am update tomorrow morning brings us...

13/2/08 - Sailing Home

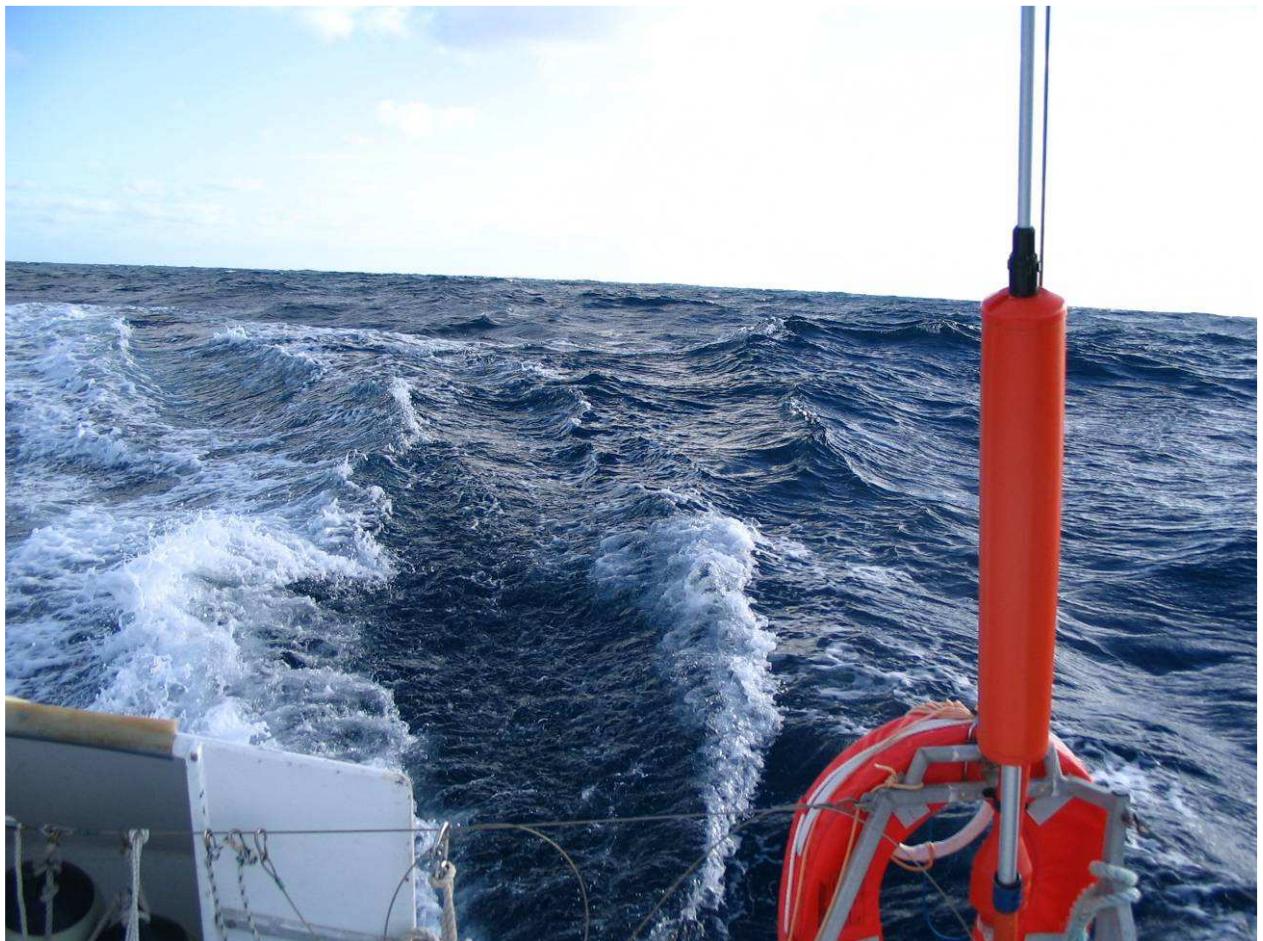
The SW had been howling all night and it was no surprise that the 6.30 am forecast gave reports of winds in the high 20s to low 30s along the Victorian coast and heavy swell. Therefore, instead of leaving at 9.00 am, we waited until the 10.30 am weather update and ended up leaving Deal Island at 11.10 am.



We started slower than we expected, averaging 5 knots with the jib poled out and the main reefed. The reef soon came off, and then the main was dropped as it was stealing too much wind from the jib. After 3 or 4 hours of sailing, we were still showing 24 hours to go on the NavMan... a little depressing! But then, the wind shifted a bit more WSW and our speed improved markedly.

From 3.00pm onwards, we had a beam run averaging 6 or 7 knots, with spurts up to 9 and 10 knots. Only one problem with this, George, the autopilot, did not cope. Tired of constantly correcting our heading, we instead opted to hand steer all the way back. We settled into 2-hour shifts, an easier duration to manage when you are stuck at the wheel.

The swell was a bit confused, but overall not too big – about 1.5m. We surfed the waves a few times. The photos do not do the ocean justice. They always make the sea look flatter than it is.



We did not see much traffic. Only two very large containerships and fortunately that was in daylight. They appear on the horizon and are on top of you very quickly. Wadie was at the helm then and let us go way off course to get out of the way of the first one, as it looked too much like a collision course otherwise! We felt like getting on the radio and saying “big ship, big ship, can you see us, we are the little sailing yacht on your port side. Don’t mow us over!”



Sunset came quickly. Then it was total darkness.



It was quite unnerving sailing fast in absolute darkness during the night shifts... The sky was very cloudy and we did not even have any moonlight to help us see the waves. All we got from time to time was some fluorescence off the breaking waves. So steering through the bouncy ocean had to be by feel and of course with a constant eye on the NavMan. Sometimes I felt somewhat dizzy with nothing to settle my sight on in the distance. Talking to Wade about it the next day, he said he found it better at night in rough weather not to be able to see the waves coming at you. "You don't anticipate, you just have to go by feel".

14/2/08 - Back to the Lakes

We had calculated we would get to the Entrance by 5.00 am on an average of 5 knot/hr with a 9.00 am departure from Deal. But even having left 2 hours later, we had to slow the boat down during the night, as at the speed we were doing we would have got there by 2 or 3.00 am.

With a handkerchief of a jib and full main, we arrived at 4.30 am and hoved to till 5.30am. As dawn slowly came, we started motoring in and lining up the leads, and were inside by 6.00 am.

The Entrance was not the calmest we have seen, but we crossed the infamous bar without difficulty. It is always a tense moment, regardless, and I am glad we did not attempt it in the dark. Wade likes to see where the waves are breaking and cross the bar with as little wind as possible, so dawn tends to be our preferred return time.

As soon as we were in, we turned into the main arm and tied up at Flagstaff Jetty for a bit of shuteye as neither of us got much sleep. The jerky movement of the boat and the noise of slamming waves against the hulls just did not allow us to fall asleep during our two hours off. We surfaced at about 9.30 am and had bacon and eggs for breakfast on the BBQ ashore.

Bengie got very excited about jumping off Medina onto the jetty for the first time in three weeks! She has been very well behaved. It was funny, yesterday, when we set off from Deal; she had a bit of a crazy hour, running around everywhere, very alert and talkative. It is as if she could sense there was something different about this departure.

Anyway, we had to capture her and put her back on board by 11.00 for the final 3-hour motor back to Paynesville. You guessed it, it is on our nose! Still, we had a great return trip. 17 hours of non-stop pure sailing!

It is back to short chop and pea soup for a while. The Lakes look very, very green, and very, very flat.