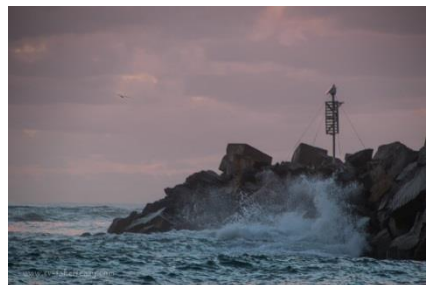


The Return of  
**Take It Easy**  
Back From Queensland

Summer 2015/16





## Our intended itinerary:

A Southerly decent along Australia's East Coast,  
from Yeppoon in Queensland  
to Port Albert in Victoria.







## Friday 4/12/15 – The big airplane trip north

**N**ever have we needed this summer cruise more. Never have we felt quite as beaten up. Never have we felt time is marching on and not always kind to us.

It has been a rough year, particularly the last quarter:

- A horrible environment at work with countless restructures and the threat of redundancy. Although we would happily “take the package” and run laughing all the way to the bank after my 30 years of service, it is still unsettling and wears you down.
- Mum’s death so unexpectedly was terribly distressing and wiped away the joy of having Véro and Didier aboard last winter. Having to deal with her passing was hard, but even tougher is coping with the aftermath: Dad’s sorrow, his difficult adjustment to a lonely existence, the realisation for Véro and me that neither of us can be of much help to him other than moral support. And then there is the impact on both our health.
- My deteriorating diabetes made worse by stress, left me with no energy and close to collapse in November. The medicos had no choice but to put me on insulin. If as they promise the daily injections enable me to recover my energy and strength, it is worth the inconvenience!
- And to finish us off, the worsening mental health of Wade’s Mum with her progression into dementia. Despite her strong will and fierce independence, there comes a time when life alone at home becomes impossible and unsafe.

So this Summer Cruise was not about to be cancelled, deferred or shortened. It is our salvation.

We have arrived in Queensland. For the first time in three visits, our entire luggage arrived with us! The pussycat was a little frazzled but coped with her two plane flights from Melbourne. She is one hell of a traveller. The taxi we booked in advance to transport us and our gear was waiting for us at

Rockhampton’s airport and took us to the Keppel Bay Marina in Rosslyn Bay – a 50km ride.

Take It Easy was there in the heat and sunshine, nice and clean, not a bird poo in sight. We owe this state of cleanliness to yachties and friends Paul and Sjany who were in the marina a few days before our arrival. What a relief! Even Bengie made happy little miaows surveying what will be her home for the next two months.

We spent the hot and windy afternoon unpacking our gear, provisioning the boat with fresh food, fuel and water, and generally getting organised.

We had the compulsory, confused calls from Wade’s Mum wondering why we were not visiting and taking her home... a taste of things to come.

We are both so exhausted physically and emotionally! But one thing is certain: we need to find a way to let our worries wash away. We need to unwind, enjoy life and spend blissful, restorative time together. We need to focus on ourselves now.

## 5/12/15 – To North Keppel Island

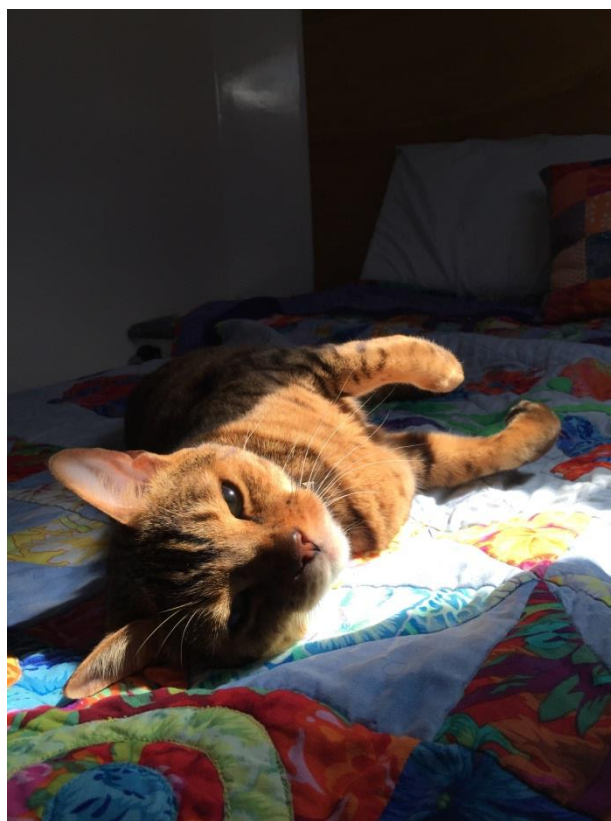
It blew from the southeast fairly hard all night and will be doing so for several days. Not being ones to stay at a marina, especially in the heat and noise, we decide to set sails to North Keppel Island... not exactly in a southerly direction, in fact northeast. However it means we can escape and officially start our cruise.

We are up early without even trying and leave the harbour by 7.30am. It is a bit rock and rolly but two hours later we are anchored at Considine's Bay, North Keppel Island.

The day is spent doing very little; we snooze in the morning, all three of us flaked out on the bed with the hatch wide open. At about 11.30am the tide is low but the water is too murky to snorkel. Still, the ocean is warm so we take dips, read, with the bright orange sunshade set up over the back to shelter the cockpit from the burning sun. It is all a bit slow, lazy, but given our level of energy, that is all we can manage.

We dinghy ashore in the late afternoon to put on the inflatable tube around Peasy. Dragging Peasy up the beach in the wet sand is hard work and we get eaten alive by the midges while we pump the RID, so we beat a quick retreat. By 5pm we get back on board. It is second breakfast time for Bengie and drinkies time for us!

We study the charts and the forecast. Over the next few days the wind is blowing from the east, except for tomorrow when it is a little more southerly. So this may be our only chance to get away to the Reef, toward the southeast. We will give it a try and if it is no good, we will return to Great Keppel and wait there for better conditions. At least we can walk or snorkel there while we wait.



## 6/12/15 – To Great Keppel Island

**A**t 5.00am, we are up and give our 40 nautical miles passage southeast a try. We would like to head to North West Island, the largest coral cay in the Capricorn section of the Great Barrier Reef and also the closest to the Keppels. If we can make it there while the wind is southerly today, we will then be able to hop along the coral cays which are lined up to the southeast over the next few days. North West Island offers anchorages for several wind directions and the diving is supposed to be good.

However it is not to be today! For two hours we beat into the wind and chop but cannot make the heading we need for North West Island and we know the conditions will worsen during the day: stronger wind and more easterly, thus more on the nose. So we give up and fall back onto Svendsen's Beach on Great Keppel Island. We are anchored by 8.00am. At least this little sail blew the cobwebs out! But it looks like we will be around Great Keppel till Thursday!

For now we have another forced rest day which we spend again doing very little. We have a bout of activity: cleaning the sides and windows so the boat is a bit more presentable and the white dribbles along the blue hulls are gone. Then it is time for a snooze.

Cleaning activities resume in the afternoon; this time we attack the bottom of the hulls which have grown some weed and a few trees. We are armed with snorkel and a scraper. It is not very pleasant work: bits of brown plume and algae float around as we dislodge them. Horrible stuff! Two inside hulls get done; the external sides will have to wait till tomorrow. Apart from this attempt at cleaning the boat, there is not much going on.

The weather conditions are such that we are feeling somewhat stuck: too hot to go for a walk during the middle of the day, wind in the wrong direction to sail anywhere, too windy to use the kayaks. Although we need some recuperation time, the lack of activity leaves us – me in particular – feeling a little bored of sitting around doing nothing.

It is a bit of a catch 22: no energy to do anything, but boredom with doing nothing.

Hopefully with the wind switching to the east

tomorrow, we can move to Monkey Bay, which will enable us to go snorkelling. There is nothing quite like seeing corals and tropical fish off the back of the boat! And I can't wait to give the Olympus camera another go



underwater – with all locks done up this time!

## 7/12/15 – Monkey Bay, Great Keppel

**W**e wake up at the crack of dawn – doing the Queensland thing! We are up and active when it is cool early in the day, siesta half way through the day, we surface when the temperature drops in the late afternoon, then in bed by 9.30!

It is a funny old day today. We are up early and decide to attack the second hull deforestation. Well when I say we, Wade is doing the scraping and I am playing with my Olympus camera taking shots of the man at work. The worse of the algae is on the inside of the hulls. It grows incredibly quickly since we scraped the hulls in early November with Waz and Lisa! It must be the tropical environment.

No sooner are we back in the cabin that the heavens descend on us – “Flooding!” – a heavy tropical shower. It is panic station in the cockpit to quickly plug in the rainwater collection system and we manage to fill half a jerry can in a few minutes. Wade runs around the deck wiping down the windows which are now sparkingly clean. And then a few minutes later, it is brilliant sunshine again.

With the few photos taken, we give sign of life on our website. There is not much to tell, but it is good to let people know where we are and Wade’s bare bottom generates a few comments and laughs. People are so prudish!

Just before noon it is time to move to Monkey Bay to enjoy a snorkel at low tide. We raise the anchor and sneak away under sail without motor, a favourite way to escape quietly. We have a very pleasant little downwind sail. It is warm, gentle and quiet, with very few yachts anchored

along the normally busy anchorages. It is amazing the difference when you see these places during week days. As we sail past, we get whiffs of the Citradoras, lemon scented gums. It is heavenly.

There is only one yacht anchored at Monkey Bay when we get there. We slowly edge past it and go and throw the pick well inside the bay, just next to the first Marine Park marker. The markers are there to show the no anchoring zone, to protect the fragile corals and sea life.

It is a short swim to the coral reef and soon we are delighted to see Anemone Fish, the black back variety, nestled in the lovely green reef anemones, hence their name. They are picture perfect and it is the first time we are able to photograph them. It is a treat. There are also some colourful giant clams with their skirt of vibrant yellow, greens and purples. We notice however that the last big storm, which happened the week before we arrived, has damaged some of the coral. It is sad to realise how fragile and impacted by weather patterns these places are. There was a lot of broken coral and less fish about.





## 8/12/15 – Monkey Bay, Great Keppel Island

**W**e are facing northeast in our little cove when we wake up at 5.00am and Wade, ever so hopeful, checks the forecast. Should we be heading off to the reef today? But his hopes are quickly dashed: easterlies till Thursday and all the weather observations along the coast and offshore confirm the wind is indeed blowing east right now. It must be the hills around Monkey Bay that make the breeze swirl around, or the current from the tide which makes the boat face this way.

Being now wide awake I take the opportunity to ring my Dad. It is good for us to chat even if I am powerless to infuse much joy in his life. I hear his loneliness and lack of purpose. It leaves me feeling sad. I never quite know how to comfort him. All I can do is listen and then tell him about what is happening in our world.

“Twilight years are no fun” he often says. Every one of our calls ends with Dad saying “enjoy life to the full while you can.” This is a piece of advice that resonates with us.

Tinkering starts even before breakfast. We have

noticed that some rusty stains have appeared at the base of the toilet where moisture is weeping – never a good thing. Upon inspection, a plastic fitting seems to be cracked. A replacement can’t get here for several days. So Wade smears silicon

over it and we might order a new part and pick that up further south. For now, we will keep an eye on it. We replaced the whole toilet pump and macerator three years ago; you would think it would last longer than that!

We spend the rest of the morning pottering around, reading, day dreaming, waiting for the tide to drop to make the reef easy to view. We would normally go for a walk on the beach, but the sand flies are fierce and we have already been so badly bitten that the thought of having to cover up from head to toe in this heat takes any desire for a wander away.

But we snorkel over the reef twice for an hour. It is amazing how warm the water is. At 26° there is no need to wear a wetsuit and it is tiredness rather than coldness that brings us back to the boat.

We see turtles, butterfly fishes, damsels and the beautiful anemone fish playing hide and seek.

Also striking are the many giant clams with their

iridescent and brightly coloured lips.

It confirms in our mind why waiting for the weather window to head for the Great Barrier Reef is so worthwhile. Monkey Bay is the reef in miniature.

When you

multiply the size, coral shapes and colours and fish variety, you get a sense of what awaits us there.

Only one more day and we go.







## 9/12/15 – To North West Island

**W**e wake up at our usual hour, before 6.00am and Wade suggest we go for a walk ashore before it gets hot and in the hope the sand flies will not be active yet.

However as we surface, we realise the boat is facing northeast and a check of the forecast confirms the breeze will be ENE and light for the next few days. It is as good as we are going to get... we probably will need to motor, but it is time to head off or we will not see the Outer Reef.

The walk is replaced by preparations for a departure: dinghy stowed away, dishes and anything that could fly put away, hatches closed. I make a call to Véro and Didier since we may be out of range for a while.

By 7.30am we raise the anchor and leave Monkey Bay. The breeze is light but too much on the nose to sail. We have the main and staysail up and both engines on all the way. But at least we will make it there. I don't keep my breakfast down for very long, but once thrown up and after a snooze for a couple of hours, things settle down. It is just incredibly hot and muggy... summer in the tropics. We can see why cruisers get down to more temperate regions at this time of year!

As we approach North West Island, black noddies surround us. They are swift, tern like, but sooty black with a white forehead and grey nape. The island is a tear drop shape, covered with

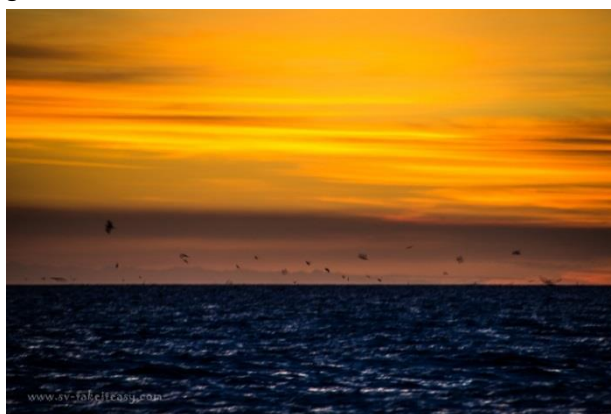
pisonia trees and edged with white crushed coral. It sits on the edge of a large enclosed lagoon which extends for miles. The colours are brilliant as we prepare to anchor: turquoise water above sand, yellowish above reef, blue sky. The reef around the island is quite extensive. The surprise is the

people on the beach! Where have they come from? Only one boat: a large Marine Park vessel which arrived just before us. There are a couple of runabouts on the beach, but no other yacht or fishing boat.

We are settled by 3pm and straight away go for a snorkel from Peasy, which we anchor on the edge of the reef. It is so different and interesting here, with lots of ledges and small canyons which attract a multitude of different fishes. On the island there used to be a turtle cannery in the 1930s. Once hunted and killed, they are now protected. We see many of their tracks right around the island. It is magic.

The water is colder here, and without a wetsuit we don't last very long, but even half an hour yields some nice photos, particularly of different butterflyfish feeding on the corals. The wildlife is abundant. Black noddies and shearwaters fly all around the boat. We see two large turtles cavorting close by and we are astounded when a huge ray explodes out of the water right next to us. "Did you see that?" We keep watching in the hope of a repeat performance, but to no avail.

By 5pm, as the tide rolls back in, a few runabouts come charging in after a day's fishing. North West Island is frequented by campers who apparently come in from the mainland on a barge. We will go ashore tomorrow for a walk around the island. We have been told there are no sand flies, plenty of birds nesting ashore, so I will take the Canon!



We are glad we came here, even if we burnt 40l of fuel: new surroundings, different experiences, the gateway to the Outer Reef. Sunset is a mix of soft pinks and orange striations with thousands of shearwaters in silhouette soaring quietly. Beautiful!





## 10/12/15 – North West Island

**W**e grab an early breakfast and dinghy to the beach at the end of the rising tide. We are intending to walk right around the island before it gets too hot: it is 7am when we set off.

I have taken by Canon camera in the backpack with the big bird lens and the Tamron all purpose lens, and although it is heavy and I am out of practice with panning, I am so glad I made the effort.

For nearly three hours, we amble along the sand and see numerous black noddies, sooty terns, bridled terns, egrets, pied oyster catchers, lots of different dotterels, sandpipers, godwits and curlews. I manage to get many good shots of them in flight. It is a treat. We also see numerous stingrays in the shallows and two types of sharks: little black tip reef sharks and a shovel nose ray – a first! The little reef sharks come right to the edge where we are walking in angle deep water. They are fun and nimble and not a threat to people. And a first for us, we see the many tracks made by green and loggerhead turtles, which nest on the island at this time of year.

Wade is very patient, waiting for me as I am photographing the birds, swapping lenses and taking frequent rests. My lack of energy and fitness make the circumnavigation of the island a real effort. But I have to push myself to get better and stronger.





Once we complete the round trip, we decide to follow the track through the middle of the island in the pisonia forest. The trees are covered with noddy nests and the ground is full of the holes from the burrowing shearwaters. The pisonia trees have fruit that produce sticky resin. We get it on our feet and it is like glue on our soles. We can see how some birds get trapped with sticky berries in the plumage and die. We saw a few along the beach and saw one shearwater yesterday floating next to the boat, covered with the stuff and unable to fly off. It is a cruel fate.





We were on our lonesome when we left after breakfast with all the runabouts gone fishing and the Marine Park boat gone. But when we get back another yacht arrives and the Marine Park boat returns. Wade hops in the dinghy and goes to visit them to ask if they have zoning charts of the Capricornia Cays (showing where we can fish). No sooner does he arrive, that the skipper invites him aboard. "Come inside, it is too hot out there." Air conditioned boat – way to go!

It is really still and hot on Take It Easy. Poor Bengie is flaked out on the floor with a wet handkerchief on her back; we are in and out of the water to cool down. I should sort through the hundreds of photos I took and make some bread, but there is a definite lack of energy.

The weather forecast is slightly improved for our planned trip to Fitzroy Reef tomorrow. We hope we can sail rather than motor with a 10 to 15 knots northerly forecast, a downwind run of about 35 nautical miles.

The afternoon at low tide we move to the other side of the island to get some shelter from the northeast for the night. And of course we go for another snorkel. The water is clear and we get some good wide angle shots as well as lovely shots of a Moorish Idol.

Once we have settled in our new anchorage, Wade reads and I make some bread then plough through the hundreds of photos taken today both ashore and underwater. They get whittled down from 600 to 180! Not bad for a first cull, and there are some particularly beautiful ones of the bridled terns, the black noddies, and of the two turtles cavorting next to the boat. This has been a very nice cay to visit.

There are a lot of shearwaters flying back to their burrows during the evening and a couple hit the stays. One falls in the water and manages to fly off after a few seconds, another falls on the cockpit roof, looking a bit dazed, but again taking off a few seconds later. They might have been confused by the light from the torch as I was taking the bread loaf out of the barbecue come oven at the back of the cockpit!





## 11/12/15 – To Fitzroy Reef

It is frolicking time early this morning; two pairs of turtles are being amorous right next to the boat: big splashes, flapping of flippers and attempts at mounting one another. We take a few photos of this display. When we walked around the island yesterday there were many turtle tracks in the sand leading to nests, and we also spotted a few broken egg shells. November/December is mating season.

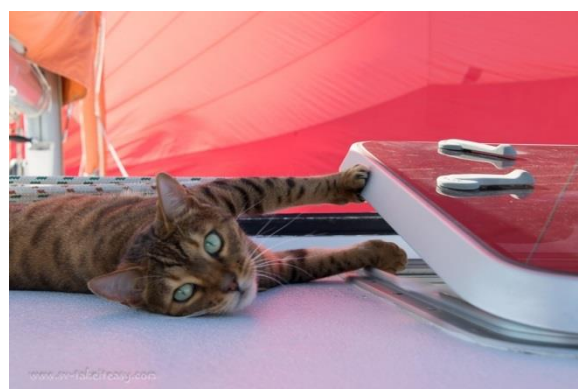
Apparently sea turtles travel vast distances during the year, but usually return to lay their eggs in the same region they themselves were born.

At 6.30 we raise the anchor and head off. The breeze is from the north and light: a Big Red day! The direct line from North West Island to Fitzroy Reef would normally take us right in between Heron Island and the Wistari Reef,

but it is a narrow passage, no doubt with a fair bit of current. So instead of tempting fate we pass Wistari Reef to the west.

An hour later, there is just enough breeze to launch Big Red. It is a slow pull downwind but it is nice to sit on deck in the shade of our big sail, and even Bengie has a laze around on the cockpit roof and in the front with us.

The breeze lightens and there is not enough to keep the kit inflated, so by 9.00am we go on one engine for a while. We pass Masthead and Erskine Islands on the starboard side. Then we pass Heron Island and its lagoon on the port side and we can just see the shallow waters of Wistari Reef. Whereas Heron Island is an actual island with pisonia forest on top of the coral cay, Wistari is just a platform reef with nothing showing on the surface. All you can make out is a thin strip of aqua on top of the ultramarine ocean and the yellowish edges where the reef shoals. The turquoise shallow area extends a long way out.



By 10.30 we launch the kite again, but it is very slow going and we keep one engine ticking along slowly. From time to time a lone brown boobie flies by. These are majestic birds and we see a few noddies too.

It is stinking hot in the cabin and the only two spots comfortable aboard are on the sugar scoops with your feet dangling in the water or in the nets in the shade of Big Red. The tropics in summer are really hot and stifling!



Fitzroy Reef as we approach is just that, a reef encircling a large lagoon about one mile long and half of this in width, but no island here. All you see about 3 miles out is a line of white waves breaking over the fringing reef barrier and a strip of turquoise on the other side of them, where the lagoon is, then the markers to get inside the lagoon.



The entrance is deep (about 4 meters) but quite narrow, especially when you arrive at low tide, but the advantage of doing so is that you see the yellowish rim of the reef and the winding passage clearly. The lagoon is huge and the brightest of turquoise. It is quite special and we are the only ones there! We go and anchor in the designated area, clear of bommies, in about 8 meters of water, then jump overboard to cool down. It is 1pm. Low tide is at 3.00pm. What an amazing place to have to ourselves. Although there is less navigable area than at Lady Musgrave, the snorkelling area is more extensive. There is a restricted area in the centre of the lagoon where we are not allowed to anchor. This is to protect rare and fragile corals which are so attractive.

The diving is amazing: incredible variety of vibrant colours (orange, yellow, purple, pale blue and pink) and shapes. There are large cabbage-like leaves, antlers, ferns, brain coral... It is a veritable underwater garden. And the fish variety is staggering. All this on wall like drop offs on the edge of large platforms. After three quarters of an hour in bathers, we get cold and need to come back on board. When we get back to Take It Easy, we have company. A monohull has come in and anchored next to us. We warm ourselves up with a cuppa and biscuit, download the photos, and then decide we should go again for another snorkel, this time with the wetsuits on. It is a struggle to get into them on a hot day, but we get there and Wade takes his spear gun, the birthday present he has never used yet. He also leaves the fishing line baited, having already caught a stingray which he released.















Off we go to another spot which is a bit murky to start with, but as we round the reef, the clarity improves. Unfortunately though, the wind has picked up and it is hard for Wade to tow the dinghy. He has a long rope attached to his ankle as we are not allowed to anchor. Little did we know there are buoys in some places where you can tie up the dinghy! We will know for next time!

As we round the reef and the sun gets down lower, the colour of the corals are intense, and their shapes are beautiful. We see lots of little fishes. It is really stunning.

After an hour we are both tired and climb back into Peasy. We motor back to Take It Easy and find the fishing line taugt. Something has caught itself! "No dear, I caught

it – just because I was not there does not mean I did not catch a fishy." Not sure what it is, may be a Kingfish or more likely a Mulloway, but one thing is certain, it is big and it is tonight's dinner!



What a great day! The reef here beats anything we have seen before... even at Lady Musgrave. The corals are absolutely magic. They are rich, colourful and alive, probably protected by Fitzroy's fringing reef and sheltered lagoon.

The wind has picked up to 14 knots. There is a bit of chop in the lagoon now. A couple of fishing runabouts have come in but have anchored near the lagoon walls. It is pretty good really, even if we don't have the place to ourselves anymore. With some wind forecast, Wade puts out a lead 'buddy' to weigh down the anchor line. Any coral lagoon becomes a dangerous trap if the anchor drags at night because it is impossible to safely navigate after dark, and the leeward rim of the reef would cause enormous damage if struck. We are anchored in 8 or 9 meters of water at high tide, much

deeper than usual.

Night comes with a stunning Milky Way. We feel physically tired and a bit sunburnt, but happy.

**12/12/15 –Fitzroy Reef**

**W**e have a lazy morning. The tide is high and we are waiting for it to drop to go for another dazzling snorkel.

Wade busies himself with a few “important tasks” such as by-passing a faulty switch, sorting out the crab pots in the hope he will catch something tasty, fishing (he caught and released another stingray), topping up the water tanks, and setting up the rainwater system as the forecast is for 70% chance of rain tonight with the southeast change.

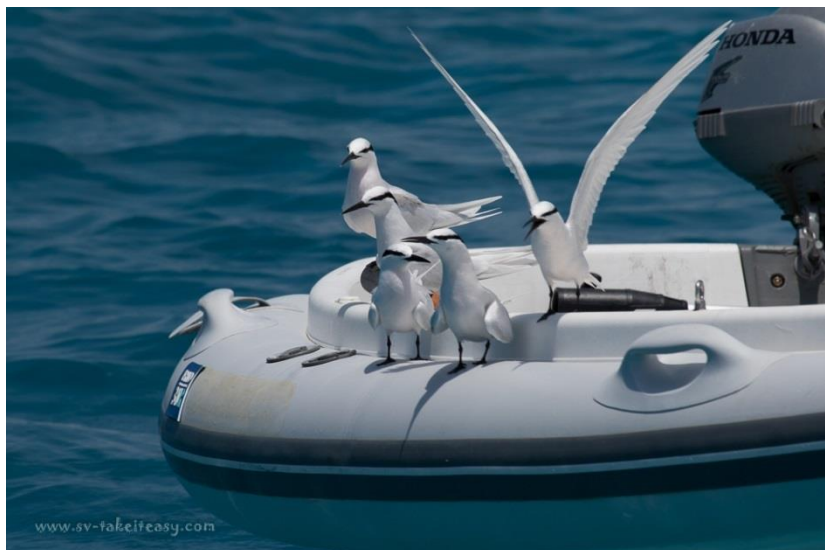
I download the photos taken yesterday as we came into the lagoon and when we went snorkelling. It is exciting to review them and I prepare a couple of posts for the website, which can get uploaded when we have internet service.

Wade also spots a ‘new’ tern. It is white with a black band from the back of the eyes to the nape. The bird book shows it is a black-napped tern. I get the big lens on the Canon, ready to catch a photo and wait for ever, when all of a sudden one flies by and takes a liking for the dinghy... Then 2, 3, 4, 5 land on Peasy and scream at others trying to approach. It is a funny sight. “Dinghy devils” Wade calls them, a term generally reserved for pesky seagulls, not beautiful terns.

We have some lunch and decide to go for a snorkel before the weather turns. There are some big storm clouds in the distance. So although it is two hours to low tide, we put on the wetsuits,

dinghy to one of the buoys and leave Peasy there while we swim to a nearby platform reef. Again it is a beautiful dive and there are plenty of photo opportunities, including Wade on the hunt with his spear gun. His first ever shot is perfect; he spears a Stripey Snapper right through the eyes: instant death for the fish which will make a nice meal. A bit later he spears a Mulloway, but the fish shakes its way off the spear and disappears. That can’t be a good injury for the fish!

We snorkel for 1.5 hours and it is tiredness that brings us back to the dinghy. On the way back we check the crab pots... no luck.







It is 3.30 when we get back to Take It Easy and the lagoon is a mill pond. Not a breath of wind, but the sky is now heavily overcast and threatening:

the calm before the storm. We put everything away, ready for the front. An hour later the southeast wind comes with a vengeance, with gusts at 35 knots and the lagoon is a sea of white caps, then the rain begins. We are riding a bronco.

I am glad Wade put the buddy down! We have the Anchor Watch on and a back-up plan of attaching to the nearby buoy if ugly happens. It is good to have a plan!

A big runabout which had come in for a fish then left, returns thinking it is safer inside the lagoon than out there! They did well to come in the entrance and have anchored next to us. Somehow having someone else in the lagoon is comforting. Once the front has passed, the wind eases off to a constant 25 knots; less noise, less waves, a bit less concerning and no more rain.

But the worry starts again when the runabout decides to move and drop anchor right in front of us and they get the fishing lines out! Wade gets on the radio to ask them to move away, but they haven't got it turned on. And sure enough, they drag, very quickly, and we end up blasting our

horn at them repeatedly before they realise what is happening and move. Company has just become liability!



But we too are slowly dragging and it is low tide. It will get worse at high tide, so we take the opportunity to move right behind a reef in shallower water. We are standing around in the cockpit, watching the instruments. Wade says "there is always the Fortress Anchor we could set up in tandem." I respond "why don't we re-anchor with it in the front and the Manson behind, and do it now while we still have daylight." It is a fiddle, but we are now set. Fingers crossed!

Lesson learnt: in a lagoon where the consequences of dragging are drastic, where you anchor in deeper waters than you do normally, and a strong change is forecast, set up two anchors in tandem as a rule and if possible to do so when the conditions are still calm.

Well we have earned our sundowners tonight! But we are not out of the woods yet. Although we dug the anchors in and pulled back pretty hard on them, the sand bottom is rock hard and we are again watching the instruments to monitor our position. It is now 7.30pm and dark. This could be a long night! By the time we go to bed at 10.30 the wind has abated to 15 knots. It is past high tide, we are facing southeast and not budging.

## 13/12/15 – Fitzroy Reef

It rained heavily during the night and we filled one 20l jerry can. We also had a drip where the inspection hatch is for the electrical wires coming down the mast. It is right over my side of the bed! This is a known issue: rainwater makes its way into the mast shaft from the top where wires come out to the mast headlight and aerials and we periodically have to open the hatch at the bottom to get rid of a little water. It overflowed this time! But it is easy to deal with, just a bit of the “water torture” when the drips start and falls in the bucket!

The southeast is blowing at 20 knots this morning, however it is sunny. We are bouncing in the slop and the hulls are getting slapped, but it is manageable. The fishing runabout left at first light to return to the mainland... 35 nm to 1770, the closest town from here. It will be a long and uncomfortable trip for them on a beam run.

We think we will wait here today for the wind to abate further and since it is forecast to go easterly tomorrow it might be an easier downwind run for us then. Pancake Creek or 1770 will probably be what we aim for. Lady Musgrave won't be a possibility on this trip, since it is on a southeast line from here.

Experiencing the conditions in 20 to 30 knot wind in a lagoon is actually quite useful. We now know how the boat behaves and how it feels. 35 is a bit ugly, but 15-20 is manageable. You would not purposely set out to be out there in over 20 knots, but given we intend to explore Swain Reefs when we live aboard, the chances of getting caught in similar conditions with no easy escape are high.

While we are limited with what we can do outside today, we each busy ourselves. Wade attends to sealing one of the hatches lock by changing the O ring. The one in the spare cabin has been leaking for a while, which explains the stains on the blanket. I sort through all the photos and attempt to identify fishes and birds and keyword them in

Lightroom so it is easy to find them later. We will need to find a good fish book for tropical waters, as most of our reference books are for southern waters. And for safety I back up all the photos onto one of the Seagate drives before anything nasty happens.

Wade then goes for a snooze while I study my Underwater Photography book. I have had two issues with some photos. When using the fisheye lens I sometimes get an oval area of blurring happen if I angle the lens up. I need to hold it square onto the subject to avoid this. Secondly some shots are covered with little prisms which again totally spoil some images. I learn this is called backscatter and happens when the built-in flash fires. Depending on the clarity of the water, light can bounce off small particles, causing bright specks. To prevent backscatter I need to use an off camera flash or a strobe so the light source illuminates the subject and not the column of water in front of the lens. Now I know. I will need to use my Sola Strobe and turn off the automatic flash. There is so much to learn with underwater techniques. But I am getting better at selecting when a wide angle shot is best and a macro more appropriate, and can toggle between the two without looking at my screen. I am also more aware that I get better results (clearer shots, better colour) when shooting straight ahead or towards the surface rather than downwards. It is all a bit learning curve, but it is fascinating and really gets you to observe your surroundings during a dive, and be nimble in the water.

After that it is bread making time. The dough is looking good and plump and rising well.

At low tide, we venture out for a snorkel. It is quite choppy in 18 knots of wind and a bit murky as we expected, but the visibility improves as we swim to one side of the reef. This area is different again with broad petal like corals where little blue and black fish like to hide. There are impressive drop offs with intricate lacy corals on the edges and tiny little fishes amongst them. It is hard to



steady yourself to take good shots as you get buffeted in the current with the chop, but it is still enjoyable to explore. We go as far as we can against the current then let ourselves drift back. We see lots of butterfly fishes, wrasses, and small orange basslets, but our favourite is the elegant Moorish idol with its striking black, white and yellow stripes and elongated top fin.

After three quarters of an hour, we head back to the dinghy and Wade checks Take It Easy's anchors. The Manson is well dug in to the sand and hardly visible, the Fortress does not appear to be doing much of the work, despite being at the front. Wade straightens the chain so it will not wrap itself around a rock. Apart from this, all is in order.

A few little birds are flying around and through the cockpit under the sun shade. When one of them

lands inside, it proves too tempting for our pussycat.

She catches it and won't let go. The poor birdie is crying.

Wade manages to make Bengie drop it and he then cradles the bird to bring it on top of the cockpit roof. We check it: no

blood and it takes off immediately. It looked like a little welcome swallow, but it is odd so far offshore.

Bengie is now on the lookout in the cockpit, sniffing where the bird was and a few little feathers are left behind. She is sitting at one end of the cockpit where they come in, ready and waiting, but thank goodness no more fly byes happen.

Our dinner is crumbed Stripey Snapper – very sweet tasting, and the bread loaf is a hit: very plump and overflowing its mould.

The HF weather report forecasts a southerly at 15 to 20 knots tomorrow and the same on Tuesday. So we decide we will get ready to escape out in the morning. Our intention is to try to sail to 1770 or Bustard Head as a fall back.

It will be the end of our Great Barrier Reef experience. It is a bit sad, but we need to start getting south.







## 14/12/15 – To 1770

**W**e are up at dawn and make preparations for our departure from Fitzroy Reef. The dinghy is already hanging from the davits and the outboard on its mount from last night. We put the dive gear away, clear the cockpit, tidy up the cabin and galley.

The wind is ESE15-20, so we intend to put a couple of reefs in the main since we will be going fairly tight into wind. But we will wait till we are out as we want to exit through the narrow passage under motor. Bengie knows something is up: she is lying on the table, miaowing.

It is a fiddle to lift the anchors: buddy first, then the Mason and finally the Fortress, but it all works quite well. We exit smoothly, raise the main with two reefs in, and we are off, sailing at 7.4 knots straight away. It is 6.45. While we are going along the outside of the reef, the waters are smooth, but once further out we get tossed around a bit, especially where the depth is still shallow.

We are going well and at a good pace, but it is a fairly bouncy passage. Wadie declares “going to windward sucks!” I tend to agree but it is nice to be out sailing. We are on a very tight line to 1770, as high into wind as we can manage. We see a few birds and flying fishes. We appreciate our AIS as we cross the shipping lane and meet two big ships. It is rather handy to see exactly where we will cross paths and how close we will pass one another.

As we come close to the coast, we catch a mighty big blue fin tuna on the trawling line. It is a large beast and we now know what we are eating for a few days: starting tonight with sashimi!

We make the coast just two miles short of the 1770 river entrance and finish this off under motor. We have done really well. We anchor in the Round Hill Creek by 2.00pm. 1770 is an odd name for a little township. The inlet is supposed to be the birthplace of Queensland. This is where

James Cook landed on 23 May 1770, the second time on Australian soil. It is odd to see people, boats and houses after being on our own in the middle of the ocean! But it is nice to have phone and internet coverage and to be able to catch up with friends, emails and messages. It would be nice to have some time to explore up the creek. We won't stay here long though. We need to get south and the weather is not really cooperating: easterlies for several days which means we need to motor. Next stop: Burnett River and Bundaberg.

The afternoon is spent catching up on family matters, dozens of message on the website, and over a hundred emails of no great importance. Wade cleans up and quarters the tuna – a big job – while I load up two posts on the website about our reef adventures, which will come out tomorrow and Thursday. After such a stunning time on the reef and photos that are really special, our coastal sailing south will seem rather ordinary.

It is hot and still in the river as we sip our sundowner drinks and debate what we will do over the next few days of southeast. We are going to find it difficult to sail south with the predominant wind around Queensland's Coral Coast being south east at this time of year. The SE settles in for days on end and the bouts of northerly are very short-lived. Once we get into NSW the angle of the coast is better and you get more variation in wind directions. That is what we hope at least! Over the past two or three years we have never struggled to get down from Northern NSW. We have often done the whole coast on Big Red with north easterlies blowing us down. But from northern QLD we are likely to need to motor a bit and do our hops very early in the morning when the breeze is light.

**15/12/15 – 1770**

It is a lovely day in the Round Hill Creek. The wind direction is forcing us to stay put today, which is not a bad thing as this is a pretty place worth exploring.

We take the dinghy ashore for an early morning wander. This is a delightful spot for family camping holidays, nice and safe in the inlet. There is not much around for groceries, just a basic campers' store but it is an opportunity for us to get some juice, milk and bread. And we top up two jerry cans of water and get rid of our rubbish.

At high tide we decide to head out of the creek, cross the sand bar and go and anchor out in the bay. It won't be totally smooth but we won't get stranded in the inlet at low tide tomorrow morning, when we want to make an escape for Bundaberg. The rest of the day passes slowly. No great activity.





## 16/12/15 – To Bundaberg

People say Bass Strait sucks, but I reckon this place is not better” declares Wade as we embark on our motor to Bundaberg with the wind on our nose. It is 4.30am, the sea is short and lumpy and the only pleasant thing about this early departure is the soft pink sunrise.



Bengie is surprised by the super early breakfast, but does not complain then goes and sit at the helm seat, where she stays for nearly the entire passage. We need to go hard to get to Burnett Heads before the wind picks up too much. It is a 45 nm passage to the river mouth.



At the current pace it will take 6 hours. We have both engines going and the main and staysail up.

The going is rough on a straight line to Bundy and I suggest we angle closer to the coast where the sea will be smoother. It does mean we can't keep the staysail and main up, but the slamming is a lot less. It also means we can't keep up the same speed. We drop from 5.7 to 4.7 knots, adding two hours to the passage.

We end up following the coast closely all the way. At times when we look at the sea conditions, the strengthening wind and our slowing speed, we wonder whether we will make it to Port Bundaberg or have to turn tail and go back, but we keep at it. It takes for ever, it is hot, wearying and hard on the boat. We reach the outside leads to the Burnett River by 3.30pm

then have another hour up river to reach an anchorage we are happy with, next to the sailing club. It was blowing at 22 knots when we came in and the sea state was unpleasant so it is a 12 hour slog... very tedious.



And we are likely to be stuck here for quite a while since the southeast is strengthening over the next few days. Unless we can do a dash to Platypus Bay at Fraser Island at some ungodly hour in the morning when the wind is light, we will be here for days. And since that passage takes about 8 hours, it won't be a quick dash but another long slog!

We have to do some laundry, pick up some fresh food and buy a new phone charging cable for my iphone as my current one has died, but if we can escape at dawn we will. We can always do the provisioning at Tin Can Bay later and live without my phone.

This cruise certainly is teaching us a thing or two about cruising in the tropics. What you can and can't do with the trade winds, coping with the temperature on board, direction of sail, the timing of your movements up or down the East Coast.

You have to wait for the right conditions to get where you want to go and when you are on a limited time schedule as we are, being stuck for days in the one spot is a hassle - the importance of having time and throwing away the schedule!

## 17/12/15 – Bundaberg

**A**fter a day of chaotic movement, it was nice to get a totally quiet and flat night. Even Bengie thought it was great and wandered on deck. She even did this before dawn, chasing birds! Wade ended up putting the fly screens up to stop her from getting out through the windows in the saloon, since the door was closed.

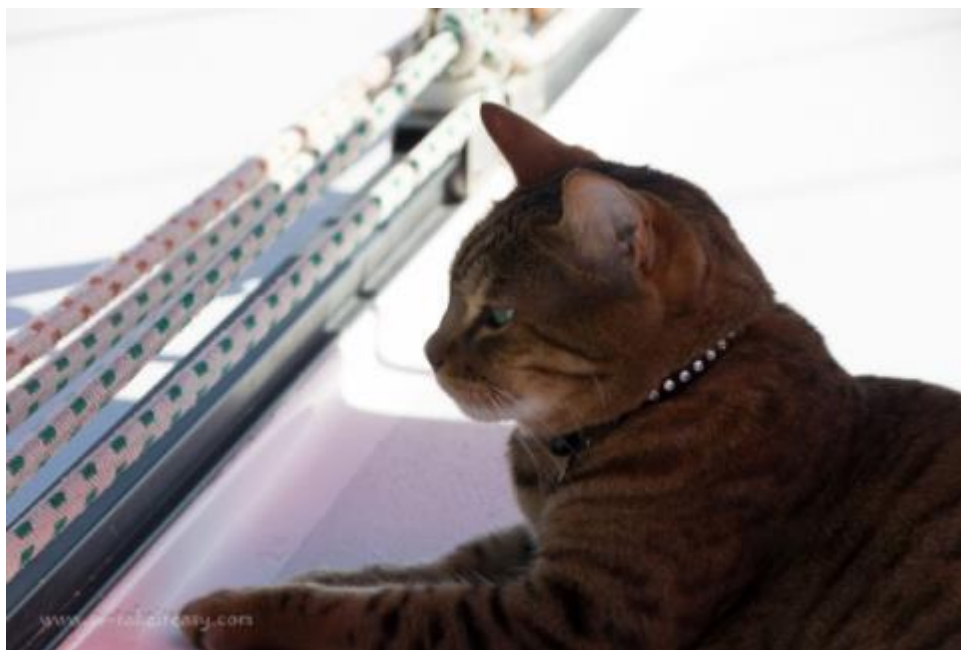
Even though we thought we would sleep in, we are up and about by 6.00am. It is a habit now. By mid-morning the

laundry is done and hanging out to dry! For the first time ever we did not need to use the generator to run the washing machine. We used our brand new 2500-5000 watt inverters and even had both computers going as well. It tested the battery bank, but the batteries remained fully charged. However this is the first time we have seen 30AMP go in from the solar panels which could put between 35 and 40. Wade is happy!

We have responded to emails and are ready to head up the Burnett River to the actual town of Bundaberg. It feels a little strange going up the very river that wiped out our friends Geoff and Maz's boat a couple of years ago in the terrible floods. Their boat ended up washed out in a cane field, miles away from the river bed. We can see the remnant of the flood damage even after two years: no more cable ferry, dead trees sticking out of the water on the edges of the river, wrecked

hulls in the mud, even the wreckage of a catamaran in a riverside paddock, and finally no more Uptown Marina.

Anchoring in front of town is a bit nerve wrecking. It is incredibly deep at 20m+. It used to be 4 to 6m deep, but after the flood carved out the river bed, it is now 20m. We search around for shallower



places, but there are lots of other boats around in those spots so you can't be on a long lead. We are a little nervous about leaving Take It Easy unattended, so intend to do our business quickly: fill up with water, do the groceries including lots of treats (it is obvious we have been on a boat for a while). But then, when we have finished, it is obvious the boat has not budged, so we feel a bit more confident. Back we go for a second trip, this time it is fuel and a nice young guy is giving us a lift to the servo. We go for a third trip ashore, this time it is to the chandlery for a few bits and pieces, including a brand new toilet motor and a fan. By now we have been at it for a few hours. Nothing gets done quickly when you have to ferry everything from shore to ship and do your errands by foot.



By 3pm, the sky is looking very dark, thunder starts, followed by a quick rain shower. While we are on board the tide changes and the boat does a few turns before settling into one direction. We keep an eye out as there are lots of boats around and the river bank is very close on one side. Different boats all face in different directions, which is rather off putting.

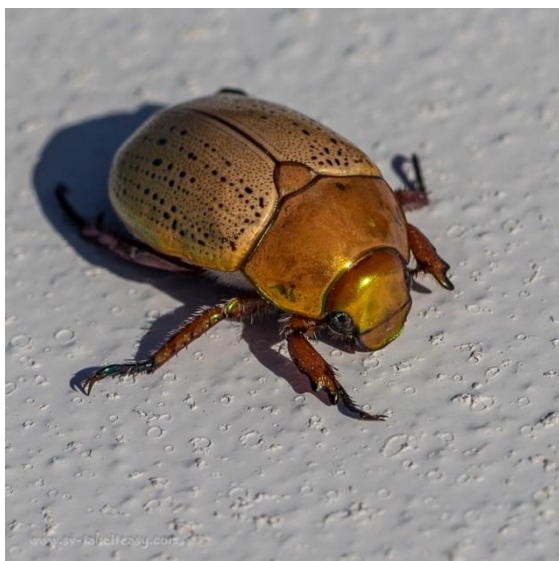
Wade gets to work replacing the leaky toilet motor. That is a big scary job which takes 2.5 hours and much muttering. Although we bought the whole unit, we discovered the leak came from a crack in a \$3.50 elbow piece that attaches to the motor! But we are keeping the new motor as a spare in case it breaks in a remote place. We might splurge and buy another \$3.50 elbow! All these plastic bits become brittle with time.

When Wade finally tests the unit and we hear the dulcet tones of the macerator, we both shout "Hurray"! But then we find the bilge pump has died. Fortunately we have a spare of that too, but the replacement then tidy up takes another hour. Oh the joys of plumbing jobs on board!

## 18/12/15 – Bundaberg

I am awake at dawn and cannot go back to sleep, so I skype my Dad, then my sister. It is good to have a chat with each of them, even if it is to hear that Dad is struggling with solitude. I don't know how we can help him, other than gently suggesting he gets involved with a couple of groups: the Men's Shed, a walking club, or something of the kind. But changes are hard and scary. The trouble is that if he does nothing different, his life will remain painful and lonely. If he tries to get involved with something that might interest him, he may find the load is somewhat lighter even if at first it stresses him.

Wade cooks us bacon and eggs for breakfast and we chat about our respective parents. After breakfast it is time to get moving. Wade changes the oil for the engines and I tidy up the boat, but not before taking a few macro shots of a beetle that has landed on our deck. It is iridescent brown and green - amazing details through the lens.



Then yet again we do a few chores ashore: to the laundromat for our bedding, back to the chandlery for bits and pieces, to a bookstore for a couple of books on reef fishes and a "Fisherman's Companion". Now we can identify what we see and catch.

Back on board after a nice lunch at the Riverside Café, we decide to move back to the head of the river. We are plotting a middle of the night escape out of here while all is calm in the dark, to try a dash across Hervey Bay to Platypus Bay on Fraser Island. It is a 40nm passage so under motor anywhere up to 8 hours! We will leave by 2.00am and see how we go!

## 18/12/15 – To Fraser Island

It is 10.30 am and we have just anchored at Rodney Point at the northwest tip of Fraser Island. This was a 9 hour passage in headwinds, motoring into an easterly of 12 to 15 knots, with the slight help of the main and staysail. It goes without saying this was another tedious trip and the breeze was stronger than we had hoped. But we have made it to Fraser Island and as is our habit with arrivals after an early rise, we have eggs and bacon.

When we left the anchorage in the Burnett River at 1.30am there was not a breath of wind. Perfect we thought! We exited Port Bundaberg and followed the very well-lit channel out, green and red markers lined up for miles like a highway. But about half way along the channel, the wind picked up to 15 knots, right on our nose, and pretty well remained so all the way. It is as if as soon as you are one or two miles away from the land, the wind pattern is different. Nice clear night though with a beautiful Milky Way, and it was not night time for very long. By 4am the sky lightened up and day break was a soft yellow sky over the inky black ocean. Sunrise was at 4.45, not very spectacular, but still a welcome sight.

The ride was very bumpy though and quite uncomfortable. After 5am Wade was reading at the helm seat while I was horizontal. I never could read or write during a bouncy passage! Even sitting up in the cabin with everything dancing around was enough to make me feel icky. We chose to let ourselves drift ENE, rather than dead east, to enable us to put the sails up and also to

slam less. We were not making the heading for Platypus Bay, but it was less rough on the boat and on us. What is the point of bashing yourself against wind and wave when you can make things a little easier by moving off the wind a fraction and go faster.

When the wind shifts easterly we will try to head for the inside of Platypus Bay to the southern end where Sengo is, the big leopard Catamaran Andrew and Trish Ebert and their two pussycats live on. It would be nice to meet up and we told them our intentions last night. But we could not face several more hours of motoring to get there now. However we might try this afternoon, or tomorrow, but no more motoring. We want to sail!



We have no phone coverage here and only tenuous internet on the computer with the Telstra dongle connected to the external aerial. We manage to contact Sengo to let them know where we are, send an email to a couple of friends and I finalise a web post for tomorrow while Wade has a snooze. It was all painfully slow, like dial-up, but we got there in the end. Then it is my turn to crash.



By 3.30pm the wind has shifted ENE and we are lying alongside the beach. We see a tuna jump right out of the water twice, not far from us. We decide to attempt a sail around Rodney Head to Platypus Bay. It is a hard heading to start with and we nearly turn back, but as we tack inshore the breeze picks up and we tack back out. Just as well we did! We have one of our best sails pointing high into wind and hand steering, doing 7.2 to 7.4 for 3 hours.

Platypus Bay is a very large bay that goes for some 30 miles on the west side of Fraser Island. It is 6pm by the time we steer to the shore and we anchor at 6.30 with a glorious sunset. We have reached the Triangle Cliffs, a set of dunes past the Lagoon Anchorage... getting closer to Sengo! This is the sort of sailing that makes you feel good. The colours of the sky, clouds and reflections on the calm sea in front of the dunes are a wonderful way to end what has been a hard but productive day.

Lamb chops on the barbecue with a glass of red are a fitting way to celebrate our progress southward. It is pitch dark now at 7.30pm and totally calm. All we hear is the sound of little waves rolling on the sandy beach. Just perfect! Later the Milky Way and a half moon light up the sky.



## 20/12/15 – Platypus Bay - Fraser Island

**W**e have a leisurely start to the day, then by 9.30 we head off to meet up with Sengo. We love those starts when we just raise anchor and sail off without the engines. The breeze is irregular; we sometimes go at 7.3 knots then drop to hardly anything, just ghosting along. But by 10.30 or 11.00 we come to where Sengo is and decide to again not use our engines: just drop the sails and drop the anchor, still coasting downwind. It is the first time we have ever tried this and it is great fun. One minute we are slowly sailing past Sengo, waving at the guys, the next we have come to a stop and are anchored just behind them. Quite a party trick!

sheltered from the sun, or if you'd rather, the TV lounge inside!

We will be sharing a meal tonight, and then they are off to pick up family at the marina, while we will probably sail to Kingfisher Bay.



It is lovely catching up with Trish and Andrew and we enjoy a few hours of lively conversation, then come back to Take It Easy. Our boatie feels diminutive next to their 48ft place with a choice of forward covered area and back deck, also

## 21/12/15 – To Moon Point - Fraser Island

**W**e feel rather stuck again. The Met Eye forecast shows a week of south easterlies with no respite. All we can do is stay within Platypus Bay or the Sandy Straits! And at 10 to 15 knots we can't bash into them under motor in an ocean run on the outside of Fraser Island or we will break something.

Although we are concerned about our inability to get south, we have a choice: we can waste our holiday by worrying or we can enjoy the area we are in and deal with what happens next later! We have no control over the weather anyway.

We go ashore for a nice long walk on the beach. Wadie, the master scavenger, finds a great bucket, a dunny seat, which I convince him to leave behind, and a Tonka toy truck which he is allowed to bring back to the boat.



By the time we get back, Take It Easy is lying alongside the beach and we decide to move down to Moon Point, 10 miles south. We have another one of our favourite departures without the engines and just the jib. Not long after we have sneaked away, Sengo follows suit.

It is a turtle race. At 1.5 to 3.5 knots, the only record we will break is how slowly we drift down! But we can't be beaten. No self-respecting 4.5 ton lightweight is going to be overtaken in super light conditions by a 20 ton heavy, even if it is 10ft longer than us!

We take the inside line right next to Moon Point, called Moon Ledge. A few boats are anchored there. We end up around Sandy Point, a little gutter called Bridge Gutter. It is quite pretty. Anchored by 1.30pm, we jump into the water for a refreshing dip. Sengo arrives a little later. We have left them a deeper hole to anchor in with their 1.4m draft.

Our nice little gutter becomes a bit rough when wind and current work against each other, but the good thing is that it blows the sand flies away which were appearing when all was still.

We again share our sundowners and evening meal with Trish and Andrew, this time on Take It Easy. We have a laugh about our turtle race. We talk about our spinnaker and the fact we were debating whether to launch it. "We would have cried if you had and would have had to turn the engines on to overtake you" says Andrew. When we part company and give each other big hugs, we realise we won't see them again for at least 18 months. They intend to do a circumnavigation of Australia.

But by the time they are back in Victoria, we will be ready to retire and move on board. "We'll pick you up on the way back up!" It's a deal!



## 22/12/15 – To Elbow Point - Fraser Island

**W**e wave Sengo goodbye at 6.00am. They are off to Urangan to pick up Trish's parents. I ring my Dad who will be driving to Toulouse for Christmas. It is a bit scratchy as we have poor service in our little anchorage, but at least we have touched base.

Then it is the usual weather forecast check. We have very light conditions over the next two days and will move today past Kingfisher Bay and get as close to Inskip Point as we can. We will be ready to cross the Wide Bay bar tomorrow morning, for what looks like a day of very light southeast followed by northerlies. Hurray, we can move! Then it is back to southeast!

We will push hard and burn some fuel to get ourselves out of Queensland and around the corner into NSW. Things are looking up.

By 8.30am, despite going against the tide, we leave our Moon Point Anchorage and enter the Sandy Straits. We make a stop at Kingfisher Bay Resort, to get rid of our rubbish, top up water and fuel and basic groceries. It is a heavy slog, especially for Wade carrying the jerry cans from shore to the dinghy since we manage to do the shuffle at low tide with way too big a sand flat to cover!

By 1pm we are hot and bothered, but ready to go again: dinghy outboard on its mount, Peasy hanging off the davits, everything put away.

For the next five hours it is a game of adjusting the sails and the speed of one engine depending on wind strength and the winding of the channel. Sometimes we move fast, with no need for an engine, other times we slow right down and the engine gets to work to keep us going at a steady pace.

We finally make it to Elbow Point, just next to the exit to the Wide Bay bar by 6.00pm. It has been a long day, but we are perfectly positioned for an exit tomorrow morning... shame about the sand flies though!

No sooner are we anchored that Murray rings. Elaine is not doing well on her own at home, but still does not accept she needs nursing help. Murray in effect plays that role but it is not sustainable long term. Fortunately Craig is coming over from the States in early January to spend 6 weeks with her. At least while we are away and Murray and Maree go on holiday too, Elaine will have one of her sons looking after her. As my Dad says, this stage of life is no fun.



## 23/12/15 – To Moreton Island

Rise and shine, it's 4.30am! Forecast checked, engines on, tea and coffee ready, anchor up. We leave the Elbow Point anchorage by 4.45 and motor to the bar. The sky is beautiful with a mix of clouds and the rising sun playing hide and seek behind them.

At 6.30am we are out of the shallows into deep water and turning towards our heading. We pass Rainbow Beach, Double Island Point and the line of dunes is impressive, even a few miles out to sea. We have raised the main and jib, but still have an engine on to keep a decent pace, as the easterly breeze is still really light.



From Elbow Point it is about 60 miles to Mooloolaba, then a further 30 or so to the top of Moreton Island's Yellow Patch if we follow the coast line. We will see how we go.

Wade catches a beautiful Spanish mackerel, but drops it as he tries to get it into the bucket! Stinker! Next time, use the net or the gaff Wadie!

It is high tide, still coming in, the best time to head out. There is hardly any wind; all is good. There is a honey aroma in the air, probably from the tea trees on the coast. It is 5.30 when we join the waypoint line we were given last night by the coastguards at Tin Cay Bay. We go from totally flat water to a gentle roll of the ocean, to a rock and rolly "Mad Mile". Every bar has its reputation and the Wide Bay Bar is no exception. It is not so much the crossing that is uncomfortable, but the length of time you are in a choppy passage. At our slow pace it takes about 30 minutes to get through to cover the distance – hence the name "the Mad Mile".



We decide to make a straight heading to Yellow Patch at the top of Moreton Island, as it is easy to get to even if we get there after dark. It is an 82 nm total passage that way. It takes us further offshore but is a shorter run and the conditions are gentle out there. We settle in to the rhythm of the small swell, the hum of the engine and motor-sail. We have done so much motoring on this cruise till now. Our fuel bill is scary!

Bengie is settled at the helm seat where she likes to be when the conditions are calm. She is not sharing the seat with Wade who has to sit on the side to read. She like her creature comforts. What she also likes is cheese. She is funny. I go to the fridge to get a block of cheese out and cut a few slices for us to have on biscuits. She can smell it from the cockpit and starts miaowing to get her share before I have even left the galley!

By 11.00am we are too far offshore to get phone coverage, but we check the forecast on the laptop and plug into the big aerial as where we are the breeze is north east, 3 to 6 knots, not east, and this might make Yellow Patch unsuitable as an anchorage. So we need to check the forecast. But the Bureau of Met confirms the easterly will get a bit stronger and will be followed tomorrow by southerlies. So we will get stuck again for a few days. Man, this weather is impossible!

In the afternoon we are a long way offshore but can still distinguish the distinctive outline of the Glass House Mountains, these pyramid-like peaks. The nine peaks are remnants of volcanic plugs with the tallest 556m high. They are too far away to photograph, and the coast is misty. But they are unusual.

We see a few flying fishes. They are amazing to watch as they stay aloft for ages, able to change direction and looking like big dragonflies. The wind does pick up to 12 knots and we are able to sail at a great pace, doing 7s and 8s - so much nicer than motor-sailing! There is a bit more slapping, but it is great to feel the boat come alive and see

the ocean rush by. We have a few cat naps in turn, we read and do crosswords, snack, more catnaps.

It is 6pm when we reach the top of Moreton Island and anchor. The anchorage is not totally quiet, but hopefully it will improve overnight as the wind shifts to the southeast. We are here for two days, according to the latest forecast.

It has been a long day – 13<sup>1/4</sup> hours passage, low average but then 10 hours of it was motor-sailing and included the bar crossing at low speed. At least we have moved further south. We have another long stretch to do past Stradbroke Island before we get to the Tweed River, marking the border with NSW... Saturday may be!



## 24/12/15 – Yellow Patch - Moreton Island

It rained last night and we bopped around in the chop. This is a tolerable anchorage, but certainly not very comfortable. The swell wraps around the point. This morning the sky is very grey and heavy with clouds. The breeze is southerly.

We probably will go to the beach in the dingy and maybe walk to the lighthouse. There are two lights: one low at North Point and one at the top of the hill, Cape Moreton. It looks like we might get wet though. If the rain does not get us, the crashing waves on the beach will!

Yellow Patch is a large sand blow, not as orange/yellow as the Yellow Patch on the Capricornia Coast, but still conspicuous and begging to be climbed!

I would not mind going there for some snorkelling, but Wade is not keen.

He reminds me of the amount of current that runs along the wrecks and how hard it was to swim last time we were there. But his main objection is that we will have to motor there, then be on the wrong side of the island for a departure on Saturday, when the Northerly comes, which will add a few hours to an already long day (73nm). I reckon we could motor to Tangalooma then sail back to Yellow Patch on the southerly on Christmas Day. Decision, decision! If it gets sunny, Tangalooma will win. If it stays grey and rainy, we will give it a miss.

We check the forecast and the charts to plan the next leg of our trip.



I am looking at the charts for what we might do to occupy ourselves over today and Christmas Day. Tangalooma is about 12 miles around the corner in Moreton Bay. There are a series of wrecks that make a 300m long artificial reef.

Saturday's northerly will only last for about 30 hours then a vigorous southerly change will come in and the south east will last for several days, requiring us to be well sheltered. We decide we will keep going overnight and use as much of the elusive northerly as we can: a 153 passage from

here all the way to Yamba in NSW, on the Clarence River. We have a couple of fall backs too: the Tweed River or the Evans River. Well, that is the decision for now. But as always the weather may change and force us to reassess!

I spend a while this morning loading a post for the January "One Photo Focus" project on our website. It is an image of an old shipwreck on a sand bank, right up my alley. But with fluky internet coverage it takes for ever to load. It is a bit like using dial up with big files! This activity just about fritters the morning away. Wade tries fishing at the back of the boat. He catches little whiting which he puts back in as they are too small, then cleans up the fridge, which was starting to get a bit messy.

That done, we contemplate what we are going to do this afternoon... a visit to the lighthouse in between rain showers is the plan. We are gone for a few hours and manage not to get swamped by the waves on the way in and back out. It is good to get the body moving as after yesterday's long sail our backs are a bit stiff.

When we get back the sky looks very threatening and dark and 15 minutes later a short but heavy shower comes down. We have just had time to have a freshwater shower and hang the dinghy on the davits before the whole boat gets a rinse.



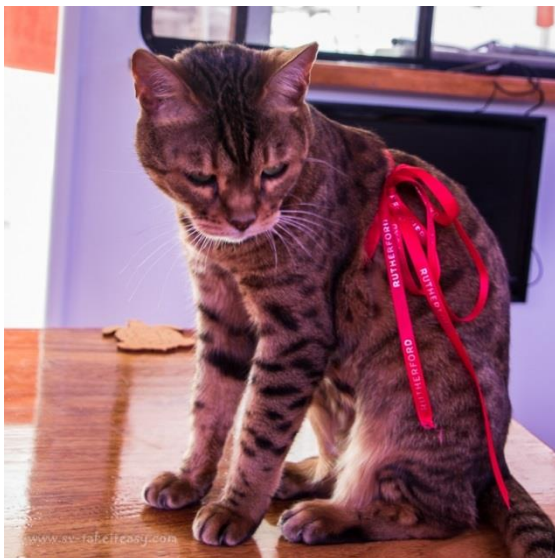




## 25/12/15 – Yellow Patch - Moreton Island

Christmas Day starts early with a call to France at 6am, 9.00pm over there. It feels odd to be sitting on our lonesome at anchor while at Véro's house the big family get together is happening: Papa, Didier's parents, Didier's Brother Hervé, Corinne and kids, Véro, Didier and their adult kids David and Virginie... twelve around the dinner table.

Despite having said we won't bother about presents this year, Wade spoils me with a lovely addition to my pearl collection – a long necklace of freshwater pearls and amethysts, and he gets a couple of Paddy Pallin (Mountain gear) offerings, which lack lustre compared to the pearls! Bengie gets to play with a box and ribbon.



As is our little tradition, we pig out on way too many pancakes for breakfast. I think I catered for four, not two!

It is a more sunny day than yesterday, but more windy and swelly. Of all days to do a round of laundry, Wadie chooses today, but we might as well. It will dry quickly in 15-20 knots breeze and we are unlikely to be able to go ashore and land the dinghy in the breaking waves. So no wander

along the beach today! Plus we make the boat lighter by using 60l of water in three jerry cans!

I go through our photos of the past two or three days, sorting through the duds and the decent ones and prepare next post on our website for tomorrow.

Wade disappears for a nap in prevision for a sleepless two nights. I make some bread which rises well in the sunshine. At least we will have something nice and easy to munch on tomorrow. We have looked at the Met forecast multiple times. Every time you look the northerly lasts for less and the southerly comes in earlier! So we have picked a number of escape routes before Yamba, spaced out at 20 to 30nm from one another. The earliest is the Tweed, then Byron Bay, although being an open anchorage it is not a good one, then Ballina, Evans Head and finally Yamba/Iluka. We will see what the weather allows us to do, but each of these except for Byron Bay is a barred river entrance, so let's hope the swell does not get too big. It is a bit of a gauntlet. We are now aiming to leave at 2.00am since the latest forecast shows the southerly change coming in the morning on the Sunday, rather than in the afternoon. Given the predicted strength – 30 to 35 knots, we want to be safely tucked in a couple of hours before it comes. Southerly busters are mean; we definitely don't want to be out in the ocean when this one comes. The evening ends with a beautiful golden sunset over Yellow Patch and the rising of the full moon over North Point. Nice way to end Christmas Day.





## 26/12/15 – To Yamba-Iluka

**T**he alarm sounds at 2.00am. Up goes the anchor and on goes the kettle. By 2.15am we are off. It is a bright moonlit night and a blood moon at that!



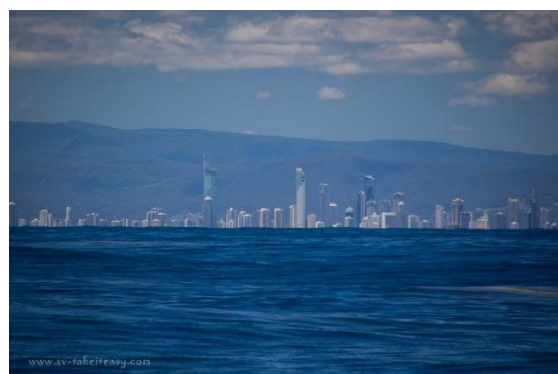
We settle the boat then at 3.00am I take my first watch. I can see the glow of Brisbane behind Moreton Island. Daybreak is a bit after

4.00am but disappointingly the sunrise lacks in colour. But we have daylight with a bright white moon behind us, the silhouette of the coast, a pink graduation to pale blue above.

There are three runabouts a few miles off Stradbroke Island, bopping around in the swell. "Can't think of anything worse to get sea sick than fishing off a tinny in the swell." Wadie comes back with "fixing the outboard engine on a tinny while everybody else is fishing." Speaking from experience!

The wind is very light and variable. We are motoring. By 10.30 or 11.00 the breeze is ENE but still incredibly light. The ocean hardly has ripples on it, just lumps and swell lines. We are level with the Gold Coast. There are lots of swirly lines of coral spawn. They go for miles in tan coloured strips on the ultramarine ocean. It is amazing to

watch. The high rises and beautiful hinterland behind them are also quite different to see from the ocean. We are a long way offshore, about 10 miles, but they stand out – an unmistakable skyline.



At last by noon, the breeze is up to 8 knots from our stern, and a few little white caps are forming. We roll the jib and out comes Big Red. The main is shadowing it so Wade drop that too. We can now cut out the engine, which had been ticking along for hours. We are doing 7.2 under spinnaker. There is shade on deck and we go and sit at the front for a bit of air.

We pass the Tweed at about 2.00pm. We are now officially in NSW! The sea is very lumpy and the breeze light, but we are moving along under spinnaker, just at slower pace.





We are back into the NSW and Victorian time zone now. We have lost an hour!

As the wind picks up in the afternoon, our speed increases. We get a great run. We pass Byron Bay at 6.00pm, doing 8s, 9s, even 10s, and spend some time in the only cool spot: at the front in the shade of Big Red.

We are now tracking for Ballina which we should get to in daylight. Wade is a little nervous about getting into Yamba in the middle of the night: new spot, bar crossing. We have 50 more nautical miles to sail and at the speed we are doing we will be there at one or two o'clock! However we probably will drop the spinnaker once it gets dark and will slow down under jib. And we can always wait outside Yamba for daybreak.

With our spinnaker in full swing, we notice a small tear along the seam of the yoke at the top. We will have to tape this tomorrow. We can't have a failure of our mighty sail!

We are going great guns, but from time to time George goes on wild meanders, which is not the best under spinnaker. One of these is particularly outrageous and even Bengie stands up and looks concerned... "Watcha doing, George?" she seems to ask!

It is dark by the time we reach Ballina; we drop the spinnaker and swap it for the jib. We start the two hour watches at 8.30pm. By 12.30 the wind has died down and we are drifting along at two knots, if that. But as we don't want to come in to Yamba in the dark, we keep this going. Then at 3.00am the wind picks up and we are coming to Yamba too quickly. We end up having to drop the sail and idle till dawn - 5.30am in NSW!

27/12/15 – Iluka

After idling outside the Clarence River entrance for two hours, we turn into the channel at 5.40am. We are crossing the bar at the worst time: low tide still ebbing. The sky is very cloudy and it is raining, making visibility and comfort poor!

But we make it in. We have a choice: Yamba on the southern side, Iluka on the northern side of the river. We choose Iluka, which has a small harbour with a narrow gap in a rock wall to enter. We would not like to negotiate this in windy conditions. It could be called the “hole in the wall”.



It takes us two goes to anchor, but we are set by 6.45, amongst quite a few other yachts, no doubt sheltering in there ready for the blow later today. We will be here for a week probably while strong southerlies blow.

The rock wall is a haven for terns and seagulls which make quite a racket. The breakwater serves as their rookery. And there are dolphins about, moving amongst the boats.

We make ourselves some bacon and eggs for breakfast, then go about repairing our spinnaker while there is no wind. We put sticky back tape around the seam of the yoke and we will see how long that lasts! Better start thinking of a new spinnaker! Big Red is getting very ragged.

Wade goes for a snooze. I download photos then read. The change arrives at 1.45pm, after a stifling morning.

Now that we know the boat is safe and the anchor holding, we might try and go ashore for a wander. We need a leg stretch, but the rain is stopping us and the wind builds - 28 knots now. We have a spectacle with several boats dragging and having

multiple attempts at re-anchoring. We can't be too harsh since we dragged when we first tested our initial anchoring. It is strange as the bottom is mud and supposed to be good holding. I can tell Wade is itching to put out more chain. We have 22.5m down in 3.5m depth at high tide. He normally likes to start at 30 meters. But

you can't do this in a harbour with other boats close by.

A mono called “Brahminy Too” is onto its 5<sup>th</sup> attempt. May be they are going backwards too hard to give their anchor a chance to dig deeper into the soft mud. Slow and steady reverse at first, then big revs seems to work better. At least it did for us. A few more attempts later, they go way away to the front of the harbour. “Oh good” says Wade. “He will have to clean up a lot of boats before he gets to us!”



“Sand Dollar” has settled a fair way behind us and whatever he does, it won’t worry us. Anchoring antics are always entertaining, as long as you are not the main attraction!

Brahminy Too is now on its... well we’ve lost count. “I think by now I would have put another anchor at the front!” says Wade. They must be so frustrated!

Yamba coast guards are on a sea rescue. We hear on the radio that a yacht has come into the river but has no engine and is coming dangerously close to the wall. The marine Rescue boat is about to give them a tow to the marina! It is all happening today!

We hear on the news that the storm has claimed over 30 of the Sydney to Hobart yachts, with torn sails, steering problems and the like. Wild Oats is one of them. We are glad we are in our little nook.



**28/12/15 – Iluka**

**T**oday is an exciting day. Elgar from our old Paragliding days and his wife Claire are coming over from Coffs Harbour to see us while we are stationary at Iluka. They have followed our trip closely, Elgar being a sailor also. It would have to be 20 years since we have seen one another, so there is a lot of catching up to do. It just shows that sharing common interests keeps you connected.

We tidy up the boat to show our pride and joy at her best and get ready early to go ashore for a quick shop, although we know Claire and Elgar are bringing treats!

The village has a great butcher who cryovacs some meat for us and we pick up a few groceries at the IGA and wine at the pub. We will be able to top up our petrol later too. It is a wild dinghy ride back to the boat. And not long after, we get the call from Elgar for the Peasy Taxi Service! Wade goes back to get them. The guys pick up some prawns at the Co-op and are on board not long after.

We spend a great day together reminiscing, and catching up on each other's lives. Lots of laughs, lots of stories exchanged.



By the end of the afternoon, it is time for Elgar and Claire to head back home; they have a couple of hours' drive. So Wade takes them back to shore, armed with empty fuel jerry cans. He takes the opportunity of their car to go and fill them up. We do one more shuffle from boat to shore to go and get ourselves some fish and chips at the Fishermen's Coop.

Late in the evening, I skype my family. We have a good chat.

## 29/12/15 – Iluka

It is still blowy, but a little calmer in the harbour. While it is not too rough, Wade takes the dinghy ashore to top up our water.

We might take a wander later today. For a start I would not mind going in the dinghy close to the breakwater wall with my big lens. I want to photograph some of the baby terns varying in size from big balls of fluff to more developed but not yet fledged juveniles.

Then maybe we could go for a walk. Much of the Iluka Peninsula is a World Heritage listed Nature Reserve. The track passes through a rainforest with lillipilli and strangler figs and there are supposedly lots of whip birds and regent honeyeaters.

We leave the boat by 10.30. It is threatening to rain, so we go straight for the pontoon and take shelter in front of the pub. The shower soon passes and we head out in the rainforest, following the track to the Iluka Bluff. I am ready with my big lens to shoot the elusive whip birds. We hear them, but do you think we could see them? Nope! I carry the heavy camera and 400 lens combination, but have nothing to show for the effort. Once at the bluff, I swap back to the Tamron all-purpose lens and put the beast inside my backpack. It is great to see the ocean from the Bluff and the entrance of the Clarence River. The ocean looks rough and agitated, and the sky is very dark – another big shower is on its way.

We check out the beach, and then retrace our steps back through the rainforest track. The strangler figs are interesting and we see many staghorn ferns high in the tree tops.

Time for a break and fish and chips at the Coop, then we walk to the Marine Rescue Tower, in search of information about the Solitary Islands. No luck on this front, but the view onto the Clarence River entrance and surrounding coast is great and it is good to see where we came in the

other morning. We make another stop at the Fish Coop on the way back and buy four sand crabs for dinner. We might as well take advantage of our location and its delicacies!

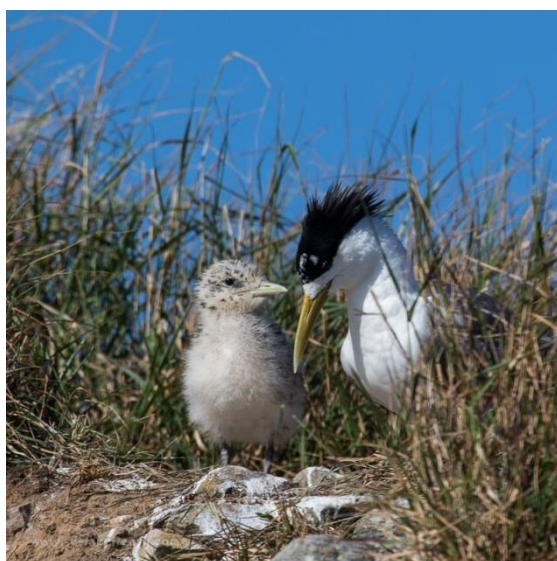
Back in the dinghy, we follow the breakwater wall to check out the rookery. There are terns, seagulls, oystercatchers, but the endearing ones are the chicks of the crested terns. Wade does his best to steer Peasy along the wall, but it is hard for him to stop or keep the dinghy stable in the wind and chop. I have trouble focusing in the moving boat to get some clear shots of the crested terns and their little balls of fluff. We may have to try this again early in the morning when the wind is quieter. The adult terns are fun with their crest all up in the wind like a punk hairdo. I do manage some decent shots, or at least I hope!

When we get back to the boat, Wade is ready for a nap and I am quite tired too, but I can't resist downloading the photos onto the computer and checking out the terns in particular. There are some nice ones of a baby crying for food with Mum and Dad nearby. Their crests are all ruffled in the wind. We will definitely go back early tomorrow morning for more candid shots in calmer conditions.

We are here for a few more days and try to make the best of where we are. Although sometimes it feels rather frustrating, when we reflect on it we have been stuck in one spot or another during every one of our cruises. As Wade says "it is part of the deal. You just hope that when you get stuck, you are in an interesting anchorage with fun things to do."









**30/12/15 – Iluka & Yamba**

**W**e have a busy, eventful day today. Our activities start with a wonderful bird photography session, thanks to Wade driving the dinghy slowly along the breakwater in light conditions. I am able to capture many wonderful shots of the rock wall dwellers. It is nice for once that a man-made structure has turned into a haven for birds and not just a safe harbour for yachts.

Hundreds of crested terns are raising their chicks and we see them at various stages of development. We also see the adults flying in with little fishes in their beaks, bringing food to the nests.

Apart from the terns, we also spot seagulls, oystercatchers, a mangrove heron, a white faced heron, little black cormorants and even pelicans at the western end of the wall. Not all are breeding on the wall. The cormorants, herons and pelicans are just using the breakwater as a resting place. But for the terns, this is a rookery. The noise of bird calls is a constant cacophony from day break to night fall. But somehow you get used to it.











Having captured enough bird photographs, it is time to catch the ferry across to Yamba. We have a 10.15am departure from the other end of Iluka. We dinghy to the pontoon, then it is a rush to get to the ferry terminal, which is further away than we expected. A brisk walk interspersed with running gets us there just in time for the departure. It is a 30 minutes ride up through the Hall in the Wall along Hickey Island and right past moored yachts which include Skellum, much to our surprise! Paul and Sjany have obviously left their catamaran there while they are in Victoria for the Christmas-New Year period.



We spend a few hours in Yamba, exploring the coastline, walking up to the lighthouse, and back into town. The ocean is wild and the waves crashing against the cliffs are spectacular. There are no boats coming in or out of the Clarence River and the bar looks mean. The fishing fleet has not put out to sea for days. Back in town, we pick up a few things we needed: a couple of USB 12 volt chargers, since our existing two died, a pull start chord for the dingy outboard as the existing one is close to breaking. We also shout ourselves a nice lunch.

By mid-afternoon we have had enough and catch the 3.15 ferry back to Iluka. A visit to the Fishermen's Coop for prawns is the last thing we do before we get back to the boat.

The next big task is a major computer back up a move of the Cruise catalogue on Lightroom from my laptop since the hard disk is full. I nervously do this, before I can start a fresh catalogue again and download today's photos. Big sigh of relief when all is safely backed up and my computer speeds up again. There is a disadvantage to taking RAW photos rather than JPEGs, they take a huge amount of space. But the quality makes up for it.

Bengie is very excited tonight. It is not so much our return on board after hours of absence, but what we have brought back with us for dinner: prawns! She can't contain herself and miaows loudly, demanding her share. But don't just throw her a prawn in the cockpit! No, that is not good enough. They have to be peeled! She then devours the delicacies with appreciative wild best feeding frenzy noises. It is quite funny. We have had a good day today.



Last day of what has been a very hard year. I am awake and thinking of our respective parents during the night. In the end I get up at about 3am. Solitude in old age is a terrible thing. It leaves the survivors of couples debilitated, their life lacking in meaning for them. I see it in my Dad and in Wade's Mum. It engenders loneliness and depression at best and the loss of one's mental capacity at worst. As their adult children, we sit there helpless to alter their fate, only capable of making suggestions. But in the end no one can force human interactions or care decisions on others, even if it is blatantly obvious that is what is needed.

For a change to a more positive frame of mind, I draft a couple of posts for our website; one is about the Breakwater Dwellers, the other about our wanderings in the area. Bengie comes to snooze on my lap and snores! It is nice to have her warm soft body to keep me company in the middle of the night.

Wade surfaces at 8.00 and after serving breakfast to "his girls", moves to his first project for the day: changing the pull start chord on the dinghy outboard – a good job done.

On the to-do list today we have laundry ashore at the laundromat and grocery shopping. It is windy, really windy again. We bump into the owner of another cat, "Walk About" from Lake Macquarie. They too are waiting to get south. And another cat, "Wendy Ann", a Seawind, arrived this morning and visited the website! They also are heading south and so are a couple of the monos. It will be a convoy when the wind finally lets us go! They are talking of a move on Thursday next week. It'd better be before that or we will have lost nearly two weeks!

We both feel a bit sleepy in the afternoon but only have a short nap. We have a loaf of bread on the go, so only have half an hour kip. There is little chance of us staying up for New Year's Eve again this year. It is hard enough keeping up for sundowners and dinner!

We enjoy a quiet New Year's Eve dinner just the two of us and Bengie: big prawns, champagne, strawberries and cream. As usual the pussycat gets her share in the cockpit.

During the evening we get another catamaran – "Purrfection" – contacting us through the website. They were at Iluka when we arrived and have moved up river. It is funny how people make contact that way... probably readers of the Multihull Magazine articles. And we have just realised the "Delivery" article is out in the January Cruising Helmsman, so if they are subscribers, that is how they have got our web address!

We quietly think about the year that has been. It has been tough with work, family and health issues, and we are kind of glad the year is over!

The importance of looking after ourselves, our health and wellbeing, of doing things that sustain us.... These would have to be what we take out of 2015, of any year, really. Let's hope 2016 is a year of sound family decisions we can all live with, a year of improved fitness, at least for me, and preparation for the next phase of our life.

There are a few crackers and short sets of fireworks at the pub here, and in the distance at Yamba at about 9.30pm. These must be the "early bird" sets for families with kids and old folks like us who go to bed before midnight!

## 1/1/16 – Iluka

**A**lthough we did not last till midnight, we did get up when the midnight fireworks started: they were short-lived but rather good. We could see some in the distance at Yamba, but we had prime position for the Iluka ones at the end of the harbour.

It is sunny this morning and the breeze is a little quieter, but we are facing in a different direction, towards the breakwater more.

We review the weather forecast. The southerlies are easing over the next two days. It is our opportunity to escape and try motor-sailing to the Solitaries. The moorings at North West Rock and North Solitary Island will be protected in a southerly, so these will be our goals. The other islands in the group might be for another time. But of course, since we are not allowed to anchor, we have to hope the moorings are available!

Having decided we will leave at sparrow's fart tomorrow

morning, we give up on the plan to go up the Clarence River and stay put. Instead, we go visiting: the cat that got in touch last night, Puurfecction, decided the bar was unpassable and came back in, so we go and say hello to Wendie and Ian. Then we move to the other cat,

Wendy Ann, and meet George and Wendy and their Bengal cat Poppy, as well as Wayne and Jillian from Walk About, another cat. Having done the

round of the catamarans, we get back on board for some lunch.

Later, Wayne and Jillian drop in to check out Bengie. They have been looking at getting a pussycat and are quite taken by the Bengal or Tonkanese breeds. We can talk about both since Dimmy, our previous cat, was a Tonkanese. They also want to get to Tassie so we chat about our favourite cruising grounds.

By 5.00pm we go and do what is our habit at the Lakes before a bar crossing: go and check the state of the bar 12 hours before our intended departure. So back to the beach we go and up to the Marine Rescue Tower for a good view of the River entrance, the swell and the amount of waves breaking. Because that is the other thing which will hold us back here, the amount of swell! And after a week of strong southerlies, 3m swell and a bar breaking all the way across is not uncommon. But our inspection gives us heart it is worth getting up tomorrow and attempting to leave.



## 2/1/16 – To the Solitaires and Coffs Harbour

The alarm wakes us up at 5.00am and we get ourselves ready: hot cuppa and breakfast to have something in the stomach since it is sure to be a bit rough out there. We leave the Iluka harbour by 5.40, waving goodbye to George on Wendy Ann. Purrfection has already left; they must have gone in darkness... Brave souls! No sign of life on Walk About. As we motor to the entrance the sky is on fire.



“Red sky in the morning, sailors’ warning.” There is some swell getting into the river and a few waves breaking in the middle, but we hug the south wall as we head out.

Although we had the intention of turning south at the end of the walls, the bar is breaking heavily on that side so we turn to the north end of the crescent shaped bar. There is some big swell but Wade picks a path and we get out, followed by two fishing cruisers. It is a spectacular exit with the fiery sky and the feathering waves.



Once well clear, we turn south and start our motor-sailing passage to North West Rock and North Solitary Island.





We get there some five hours later, but the sea is rough, with big swell, breaking waves all around the islands, right next to the mooring buoys. At North West Rock, the one and only buoy is in the impact zone of big crashing waves. At North Solitary the three buoys we thought would be sheltered are getting so pounded by waves that we can't even spot them and the five on the western side of the island are in very choppy water despite being a little further out. There is no way we can dive in these conditions, even if we manage to hook onto a mooring. It is too rough.

So we keep going and initially point towards Coffs, but as we are not far from another one of the Solitaries, the North West Solitary, we decide to check this one out also. It is close inshore and the leeward side of it might be more protected.

However as we get near, big swell and feathering waves pound the shores. As we both say "no thank you", we notice two sets of breakers in front of us. This does not look good! There are two shallow spots ahead of us and the waves are breaking heavily. I am thinking "turn back", but Wade says "no, we will go in between and head for deeper water past them." I close the windows and cabin door as there is a real possibility of getting pooped here. The one time I could take some really spectacular shots, I chose the safer option of putting my camera safely inside and hang on to dear life. Wade takes us in between two lines of beautiful but scary feathering waves. "Don't look back, just steer" I say, as a big swell line much higher than the back of the boat is threatening to break behind us. But we make it unscathed. Bengie, on the helm seat, would have hated getting wet!



We have now come much closer to the coast and the line to Coffs is dead into wind. We angle off a few times to keep the main up and have the two engines going. We go past Split Solitary, looking wild also, but it is now obvious the Solitary Islands are for northerly conditions. We will know for another time! Still, it was good to see them.



We get to Coffs Harbour and its colourful breakwater and are anchored along the beach by 6.30pm. Time to refill the fuel tanks... another expensive passage!

Later in the evening I ring my Dad. He sounds so down, finding the mornings particularly difficult. He needs to be active and would benefit from being with other people, but he won't change his lonely routine. This call leaves me feeling sad and helpless.

We hear from Purrfection. They are level with us as we get to Coffs but further out to sea and hoping to stop at Port Stephens. They are certainly not afraid of doing long passages!



### 3/1/16 – To Trial Bay

**A**t 5.00am it is get up time again. Just as well we do, as on checking the forecast we discover it has changed, with a 30knot easterly anticipated tomorrow.

We either need to make it all the way to Port Macquarie, 72 miles to the bar, or find a good enough shelter halfway. We are not sure our intended overnight stop at Trial Bay will cut the mustard in 30 knot easterlies but there is a river: the Macleay, which can be entered in the right conditions. We will find out more on the way.

We head off from Coffs at 5.30am with another red sky. There is a fair bit of swell, but a little less if we hug the coast, with a slight land breeze. So it is a motor-sail, again... very tedious. In fact when I think about it, this whole cruise, except for the reef, has been very tedious. We have been at the mercy of very contrary weather and it has not been a lot of fun.

Having said to Wade last night that he needs to share the running of the boat more, I feel very green and spend a big part of the passage horizontal, my way of keeping sea sickness at bay and dealing with boredom too! Mind you, it is not like there is a lot to do when you are motor-sailing into wind.

We pass Urunga, Nambucca Head and arrive at Trial Bay, just past South West Rocks and the entrance of the Mcleay River at 1.00pm. We talked to the Coast Guards earlier who advised the leads into the river have been decommissioned. Although still used by fishing trawlers, it is not particularly inviting, and since we are told Trial Bay is just fine in an easterly, even a strong one, we decide to anchor here. We will be here for this afternoon and tomorrow, while the strong easterly blows, then onto Port Macquarie where Lisa and Waz are waiting for us at their home, a few miles up the Hastings River.

We have put up the clears, since it is raining, and bop around in the small swell. We get on with the typical end of passage things: tidying up inside, refuelling, Wade even changes the oil in the outboards. We have used them so much that this maintenance task has come back quickly. Take It Easy the motorboat, that is what we have been on this cruise.

The jobs done, Wade tries his hand at fishing for flathead on the back steps, while I download yesterday's photos of our exit from Iluka and foray around the Solitary Islands.

We check the BOM forecast to see what the next days will bring. Yet again it has changed. In fact every time we look at an update, things are different! We go from waiting a day in Trial Bay and making a run to Port Macquarie, to needing to find a better hidey hole, such as up the Macleay River because the bay might be too exposed. The wind direction varies wildly, depending on your exact location and what forecasting website you follow. But what is constant is the strength: 25 to 30 knots, too strong to do anything from tomorrow afternoon.

We make a new plan: leave Trial Bay tonight and arrive at the Port Macquarie bar at 6.00am, then up the Hastings River to Waz & Lisa. This means we can be well sheltered, with friends and with shore options for the next few days.

I call Lisa to let her know. Now we need to ready the boat again!



#### 4/1/16 – To Port Macquarie

With an 11pm departure last night, we have motor slowly all night to get to Port Macquarie before the strong southeast descends on us for three or four days.

We have the main up and motoring on two engines against southerlies of 10 to 15 knots. It is slow going, about 4.7, but if we go faster we slam too much as there is a fair amount of swell about. It is spitting a little. Motor-sailing at night into wind, swell and rain is the pits.

Wade starts us off since I manage to have a hypo when we wake up at 11pm. In fact he takes the lion share of the watches:

he gets us past the stretch of coast between Laggery Point and Smoky Cape.

There the water is very rough as you would expect when you hug the coast past two capes. He continues on till we are past Point Korogoro, by then over 3 hours on duty.

At 2.15am he wakes me up for my two hour watch.

We are now heading to Crescent Head. The ocean is still agitated and it is a

battle not to get sea sick. I spend a lot of time standing at the back with my head in the air and light rain, but half an hour before the end of my watch, I have to use the bucket. So it is with relief that 4.30 comes and Wade takes over from me. Sleep comes easily on the couch in full wet weather gear, despite the noise and movement.

It is 6.30 when we arrive in front of the sector light of Port Macquarie indicating the safe through the bar, and half an hour later we have crossed and are in the Hastings River. It takes us another hour to get up to Blackman's Point where Lisa and Waz live. It is fun to see Lisa waving and filming as we arrive in front of their house and anchor.

We get organised, tidy up the boat and get ashore in Peasy. There is a little beach and some steps just opposite their house, handy to leave the dinghy.

Bacon and eggs and real coffee await us. We are tired and ravenous. It is so nice to see the guys and be welcome in their beautiful home. The doggies are pretty happy too. Rusty and Bindi are friendly and love their cuddles. We will have some explaining to do when we get back to Bengie!

We return to Take It Easy for a snooze, well, Wade snoozes, but two coffees and a shower have well and truly woken me up. I am tired but can't sleep and instead I prepare two posts and answer



emails. One of my articles about the "Queensland Delivery" is published this month in Australian Multihull World and I hear from Cruising Helmsman who will publish "Cruising with Novices" in June. Better late than never!

Mid-afternoon sees us get back at Waz and Lisa's house and we spend a great evening together. Waz is a great cook and make us a very tasty paella. Authentic flavours. It buckets down all evening and we find Peasy half full of water on the beach when it is time to go back to the boat. Waz tips it sideways to empty is out and we have a very soggy motor back to Take It Easy.

## 5/1/16 – Port Macquarie

Breakfast is at Lisa and Waz. I make French crepes for us all then Wade and Waz spend the day in the shed, doing a major clean up. It is helpful and something to do. I go back to the boat to pick up my camera and macro lens, and spend some time wandering around the grounds taking shots. There are lots of short showers and some wind, so it is not a good day to be out there but it passes the time pleasantly!

The forecast for the next few days is awful: gale warnings, East Coast low, huge surf!



## 6/1/16 – Port Macquarie

**T**oday's forecast goes like this: "Cloudy, 95% chance of rain, heavy at times South of Port Macquarie, the chance of thunderstorm.

Large and powerful surf conditions are expected to be hazardous for coastal activities such as crossing bars and rock fishing. Seas 2 to 4m, swell 1.5 to 2.5m."

We have lengthened the chain, with 40 knot winds expected. We have 45 meters out in 2 to 3 meters of water. No point having chain inside the locker. Might as well have most of it at the bottom of the river!

Nothing much today, just a relax in company: an aborted ride to Blackman's Point because of heavy rain, a hot spa, watching a movie on Netflix, dinner at Sushiko, our favourite Japanese restaurant. The dinghy rides were wild but we managed!





## 7/1/16 – Port Macquarie

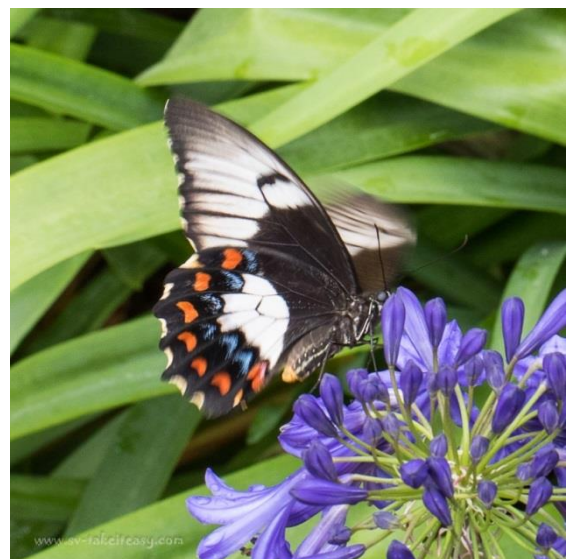
It is still very windy, but at least it is sunny, which makes the morning a little more pleasant. The southwest wind is blowing at 20 to 30 knots.

We attend to a few things on board, keep Bengie company for a while; there is no rush to get across the river. Lisa has gone to be with her family for a few days on the Central Coast, and Waz will be putting together a garden shed with Wade's help later today. While the boys are doing this, I process my macro photos and do a post. It means taking the computer across in the dinghy. We'd rather not do this when the river is choppy, but there is no choice. We have a big dry bag backpack. The current this morning is very strong and Peasy hardly manages to inch forward.

It looks like we may be able to leave on Saturday, based on current forecast, and next week will allow us to get south with several days of northerlies. We still have three weeks to get back home, but I suspect we won't get back on time and I will bail before the end.

All activities go to plan and the day passes quickly. We have dinner together quite late then head back to the boat in calmer waters than this morning.

I ring my Dad but our conversation is stilted. He may not have had his hearing aid on as he has trouble hearing. I find these calls difficult. I feel so helpless to do anything to comfort him.



## 8/1/16 – Port Macquarie

It is Véro's birthday today. We exchanged messages last night, both feeling frustrated with our family situation.

Today is our last day in front of Waz and Lisa's house. We help Waz put the shed in place now that each panel has been built, then borrow a car to do some fresh food shopping, check out the bar at the breakwater, and we bring all the fuel on board. Then in the late afternoon we motor closer to the entrance so that if the bar is passable tomorrow morning we have not got far to go. The BOM is still warning that that surf is deceptively powerful and hazardous for bar crossings, so we may not be able to go until Sunday, but we will give it a try.

While we were in town we went to the breakwater and looked at the bar. It was ugly and impassable. All sector lights were red – no boats to come in or out.

We leave Waz at 4.00 pm, get back on board and move down river. It takes us a while to motor close to the entrance against the rising tide. We anchor behind Pelican Island.

I ring Véro on Skype. It is good to have a long chat for three quarters of an hour. I am sitting in the cockpit as the sun goes down and the sky becomes fiery. I can't help but grab my camera and click away to capture the sensational sunset as we chat. Even Bengie thinks it is a pretty sight as she wanders on deck and looks out. I capture the moment and send the photo to Véro and Dad, and to Lisa and Waz who have been wonderful and welcoming, and have made this week of foul weather enjoyable.



## 9/1/16 – Port Macquarie

**R**ed sky in the morning, sailors' warning... at 5.45am the sunrise is spectacular but ominous. I go back to bed and we sleep in till nearly 9.00am! Given we would have to motor into light Southwest and rough seas if we did manage to cross the bar, we can't see the point and stay put till tomorrow when northerlies are forecast.

After days of gale force wind, all is quiet on the Hastings River. It is strange to be still. We later find out today was a fishing competition day – probably the Golden Lure – and there has been a fair amount of traffic across the bar. Still, we did not feel like motoring into waves and wind.

We are hoping the next few days are going to be good with a sustained northerly. We will see how we feel, but we intend to put a big effort in and keep going day, night and day to make some serious progress. Port Hacking then Wreck Bay would be fantastic and would put us back on track to get home together.

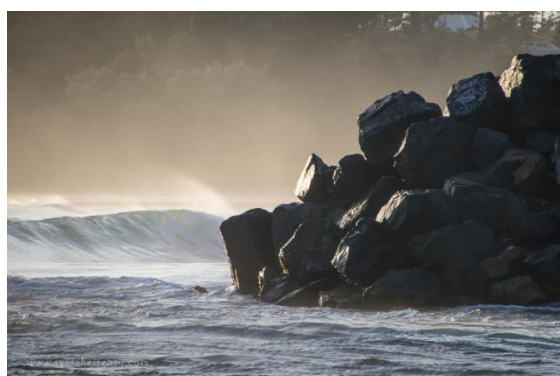




## 9/1/16 – To Jervis Bay

**W**e are up at 6.00am for our big departure. The tide is flooding and high. By 6.15 we have swallowed breakfast and are underway!

The bar is calm. There are lots of motor cruisers and game fishing boats leaving Port Macquarie for their second day of the Golden Lure Competition. They are much faster than us, but show us the way out.



No sooner are we clear of the bar that we notice the wind indicator at the top of the mast is not working. Some bird must have sat on it! Wade announces he wants to climb the mast to try and fix it. This means I need to belay him. Climbing masts at sea is one of the most dangerous things you can do. And even though there is not a lot of swell, all movement is amplified up there. So we take extra care with the harness, attach a rope from Wade's harness around the mast to keep him close to it rather than swinging widely in the swell, and I am especially cautious with the belay as he gets up. We do the business and half an hour later, the wind indicator is working and we are on our way again, motor-sailing with main and jib up. There is hardly any wind at all until Crowdy Head, then it picks up a little but it is still northerly, so we keep one engine going.

Once past Forster we are sailing well. No more engines, we are doing 8.6 – now we are talking! "Nice Try", a ketch, has been following us since Camden Haven. We are now gaining on them... Nice try, but not good enough!

We part company as they veer off towards Port Stephens whereas we continue in a straight and offshore line towards Port Hacking, just South of Sydney. We are hoping that by staying a long way offshore, we will avoid the large ships at Newcastle during the night. By 6pm we have a shower, underway! It is lovely and warm. We have dropped the main as we now have the wind on our tail and are flying the jib. There are lots of shearwaters and white-chinned petrels fishing, and a large pod of dolphins joins us. All this wildlife brings a smile to our tired faces.



By 8pm we start the night watches. I have three of them, Wade has two. Something has gone wrong with my planning! As is often the case, Wade manages to avoid nausea, but feels headachy – probably because of lack of sleep. I can keep my stomach under control during the day, but the nights get me.

It is a busy night too, as we pass Newcastle and its many ships. We are a long way offshore but we still have to negotiate through half a dozen of them slowly idling. We are sailing well most of the night on the jib, only needing one engine for a couple of hours when our speed drops to below 4 knots.

The sky is beautiful with a clear Milky Way. The whitecaps shine in the dark, slapping our hulls from time to time.



## 11/1/16 – To Jervis Bay - continued

**M**y 4.00 to 6.00 watch does not get rewarded by a nice sunrise. It is all bland. Wade is up a quarter of an hour before he is due to relieve me. He feeds the starving pussycat then announces it is time to swap the jib for Big Red. It takes some fiddling, but we launch it without problem.

I feel very seedy and go to bed for a couple of hours, then surface again for bacon and eggs.

The second day after an overnighter is never very pleasant: tiredness, quizziness. But we have decided to keep going all the way to Jervis Bay, which means another 72 miles and another day and part of the night. It is better to make headway than stop at Port Hacking early afternoon and waste productive hours of northerlies.



As we go past Botany Bay, there is more big ship traffic. We have a containership dead ahead of us. Wade announces “it’s better if we have the ocean to ourselves, really. I don’t like having to avoid other ships, especially when they are big.” Yep, wait till we go past Wollongong! At least we are doing it in daylight now!

As we move past Wollongong we are far enough offshore to avoid the ships, but what we find are big anvil clouds forming. There are ominous dark clouds taking over our sunshine and there is rain in the distance... and then the grumbling of thunder.

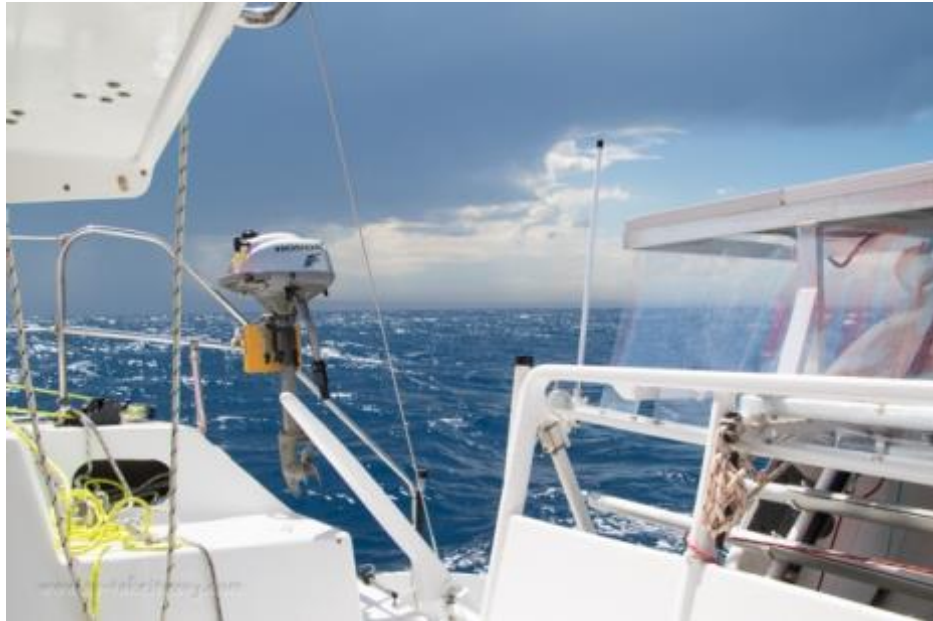
“Thunder and lightning, very, very frightening” says Wade on cue as he drops the copper plate and stay in the water at the back! A bit of hocus pocus can’t hurt! Let’s hope we can outrun the storm. We are doing 9s and 10s and going great guns. At this rate we will get to Jervis Bay tonight.





A Marine Rescue "Securita" comes on the radio, announcing a severe thunderstorm warning for Wollongong, fortunately moving northeast. We have just passed it and skirted around the edge of it. It is a bit chilling to hear of damaging winds and large hell stones. "What

do we do with that?" No choice but to keep going and it is a relief to leave the darkness behind us and re-emerge in the sunshine, even if we are not going as fast anymore, just 5s and 6s.



In fact by 4pm we have to douse the spinnaker and put the two engines on. It is as if the storm is sucking up every bit of breeze there is. The wind eventually returns by 6.00pm, but as we have packed Big Red away, we use the jib and the engine to reach Jervis Bay at a reasonable hour – probably 10pm by the time we get inside the bay to the Hole in the Wall. Let's hope we get a mooring.

As we did last night, we have a shower at the back. It feels good to wash away the sun cream and sweat of the day – feeling a bit more human.



We have covered 280 miles from Port Macquarie in 39 hours, doing 7.1 average, not too shabby!



We have dinner underway and watch a beautiful sunset over the tall cliffs of Jervis Bay. It is 8.15pm and we have another hour to get in front of the entrance, then probably close to an hour before we are moored. Nearly there! We will sleep well and in our bed tonight... no crashing on the couch.

We are tied up by 10pm. It does not matter how many times you have been to an anchorage, coming in at night and finding a free mooring in darkness is always nerve wracking.

## 11/1/16 – Hole in the Wall - Jervis Bay

We don't even sleep in after our long passage... creatures of habit. The two racers that were moored last night have already left. Soon the southerly picks up and we hang back away from the buoy which had been annoyingly hitting the hulls. We have discovered that a long lead to the buoy avoids the knocking in nil wind. In stronger breeze it does not matter.

We are both feeling the effort of the past 48 hours: tired, headachy, but there is a bit to do.

Wade has Stayz rental requests to organise for the house in Jan Juc, then his BAS statement. I sort through the photos of our passage and prepare a post for the website. With both of us

needing the internet we discover how to use my mobile as a hot spot... That is really nifty! Then it is time to clean up our hovel. It is lunch time when we draw breath and collapse in the clean saloon!

It is sunny and warm, but the water is very cool compared with where we have come from. The afternoon passes slowly and pleasantly. Wade continues to potter around, cleaning Peasy which got very grubby in the Hastings River. I should go for a walk ashore, but I lack the energy and watching a fellow yachtie struggling to row his dinghy ashore against the breeze does not help my lack of motivation. We go and lie down, but cannot even snooze.

Finally, late in the afternoon, we go ashore and walk to the Hole in The Wall, a breach in a small cliff which gives this anchorage its name.





### 13/1/16 – To Moruya

**W**e have a leisurely wake up and breakfast, as we wait for the right wind conditions to get out of the bay into the ocean. By 7.45 it is westerly at Point Perpendicular and further South it is northerly. So we slip the mooring and go. It takes nearly an hour to get well out of Jervis Bay and start our passage south to Moruya River, some 65 miles away. We are not sure we will be able to get into the river through the bar, as we will arrive at low tide, but we will see. We can always backtrack to Broulee or Bateman's Bay.

We generally give them a wide berth. At best it is bouncy. On a bad and windy day it is a washing machine! If you don't easily get seasick, you will be tested here.

As we get further offshore, the ocean is a little smoother and we are joined by a huge pod of dolphins. They are charging in from all directions and play at our bows. They stay with us for a long time, jumping and weaving. It is magic and this time I have my polarising filter on the camera lens, and all the shots are crystal clear. What a difference that makes! There are flesh footed shearwaters and petrels fishing too. We can tell we are getting further south as we see our first



The cliffs are glowing in the morning sun. The sea is calm, although it is still bouncy along the kilometres of tall walls. The cliffs of Jervis Bay make this stretch of water uncomfortable, because the waves rebound against the walls.

albatross for the trip. He is sitting in the water, waiting like us for the breeze to pick up.

It is an immature Shy Albatross. We will be seeing more of them as the wind picks up. We like this about sailing south. We have launched Big Red and now doing 7s and 8s.







At one stage I spot something at the end of one of our trawling lines. Wade says "I'll let it tire out and finish my chapter" as he is reading his e-book. But he can't concentrate and starts bringing it in. Unfortunately it's just a "seaweed fish". No fish for dinner tonight!

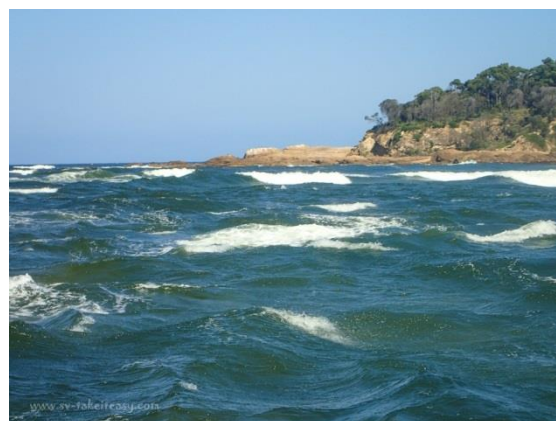
We pass Broulee Island at 3.30pm. It is less than 40 minutes to go and we will reach the head of the Moruya River. There are kite surfers playing at the ocean beach of Broulee. "Kite surfers, Dear" Wadie says. I respond "there are not kites, this is a kite", pointing at Big Red as we are doing 11.9 with rooster tails at the back!

A pod of dolphins joins us between Broulee and Moruya: several mums with their babies, some only about half a meter long. It is gorgeous. They are so nimble and fast, shadowing their mum and from time to time racing ahead excitedly.

One mile out of the heads, we drop the spinnaker with enough wind for the boat to keep on course for the last stretch. Then it is time to start the engines and have a good look at the bar. The tide is low, there is no swell, but a lot of chop and the gap between the breakwater and the breakers on the sand bank is rather narrow.



However we commit and get in, hugging the rock wall, and continue up river. We sail for a bit, then motor as there are areas with very little depth.



The depth sounder is going berserk, but we make it all the way to the jetty before the bridge without running aground. I bring the boat in to the jetty, feeling nervous and out of practice, but all goes well. We take a while to tie up properly and make sure we take as little of the jetty as possible to avoid hassles with the local charter boat. There is the welcoming party of aboriginals under the she-oak at the end of the pier, playing music.

We are still fiddling with the mooring ropes, but already people are coming for a sticky beak and a chat. People always want to help, but we have to keep them at bay. One guy tries to push the boat and grabs a garden light, and of course breaks it. "I know you are trying to help, but best if you don't touch anything and let us handle this" I say to him.

We have been in touch with Baz and Lyn who live in Narooma and Chris who like last year will be at Broulee, camping. They will probably come and visit us over the next few days. We are here till Sunday while a 30 knot southerly blows.

Bengie is looking longingly at the jetty. "I might be able to get ashore here!" First time in the whole trip she sees terra firm that close. "It is very scary out there, Stink" says Wade, "there could be puppy dogs."

Later in the night a thunderstorm comes. It rains a bit and sends the noisy locals packing.

**14/1/16 – Moruya**

It is unbelievably muggy. The strong change is due at about 11am and till then we are dripping with sweat. Being in full view of town, we can't even hang around semi-naked on board!

We take the opportunity to do a round of washing at the laundromat while we have breakfast at the Blue Heron Coffee shop. There is a big meet up of older men in lycra on the way back from their bike ride. We think of my Dad. That is what he could get involved in: a bit of exercise then a coffee in company.

We return to the boat and sit in the nets, hoping for a bit of breeze. Can't wait for the wind and rain to come and cool things down! Even Bengie thinks it is unbearable, spread eagle on the floor in front of the door.

We catch up on the phone with a few friends and family. At 11.10 am the wind picks up, Bengie gets

up, we stand in the breeze with relief. The Met Eye got it right! Ah that's better!

We do very little for the rest of the day: emails, photo sorting, a post on the website for tomorrow, reading, crosswords and sudoku, small shop (mainly treats). When we come back from our wonder, as we approach the jetty, shock horror, we see some guy on board fishing! The bloody cheek! "I will deal with this" I say as I step on board and Wade says "be nice." "Can you get off our boat" I say in no uncertain tone, and Wade adds "we don't like fish guts on the deck." The young guy jumps off without saying a word. Other people fishing from the jetty observe with looks that say "we knew he would get into trouble."

I turn to Bengie: "you are supposed to guard the boat and growl at intruders, Miss Shipcat!" But she miaows and rolls over for a pat.



## 15/1/16 – Moruya

It is sunny when we get up, but much cooler, thanks to the earlier rain. We nearly have a loo disaster this morning. I am about to have a warm shower to wash my salty mop and have put Bengie's litter box up on the steps outside the bathroom door. She decides to have a serious use of it and Wade promptly scoops up the deposits before it stinks up the whole cabin and she sends litter flying everywhere. He hands me the scoop to flush down the toilet, but there is too much litter and... oh no... the water rises, looking dark and evil. No amount of flushing does anything. Onto the plunger! That does not work either... more frantic pumping of the plunger! The handle comes off! Oh yuk, I am not putting my hand in there! But after some skilful re-attaching of the handle by Wade, this last pumping effort unclogs the shitty mess and we watch it all get flushed away. Phew!

We have had a few close calls with Stink's litter. Too much litter with the lumps of poo, and you are courting disaster.

During the morning, Trevor and Fiona from the catamaran Exhale, drop in for a visit. We saw their cat as we came in yesterday. We met them here last year when they were about to launch their newly constructed boat. They have sold their Coffee shop, live aboard and are about to go cruising north.

For something to do, we go for a walk to the servo, armed with three empty jerry cans and the trolley. Hopefully that will be the last fill for the trip as we expect to be sailing all the way to Port Albert now.

That done, we have a wander around town and find the little health food shop we stopped at last year. They have wonderful products: we stock up on mung beans for sprouting, quinoa, and a mix of dry wild mushrooms, and I can't resist a summer outfit at the fashion shop.

In the afternoon we are sitting around, reading. There are creaking noises from the boat mooring lines and barge poles. Wade gets up to check our lines with the rising tide and wind. He calls me over to proudly show me how superbly set up the lines are: two lines at the stern and two lines at the bows to keep us from going out too far, two springers to stop forward or backward movement of the boat along the jetty, all tightening up evenly when a gust comes along. They keep us at a perfect distance from the jetty so we don't rub and Bengie has to think twice about jumping off.



"Absolute perfection!" He is right, it is a work of art and I smile and give him a nod of approval and admiration. "Spot on, sweetie pie."



## 16/1/16 – Moruya

**W**e had a fearsome moment last night. At 2.45am we wake up in a fright as we hear someone come on board.

Our hearts are racing. While Wade is putting some shorts on, someone is at the door trying to open it, then moves on deck and the heavy steps resonate through the boat in the darkness. Wade gets out the door and shouts “eh, what do you want, go away!” The guy responds “sorry, I am going” and jumps off. There is another guy on the jetty and one next to a car.

Wade, the brave, checks the mooring lines as I get up and I am standing in the cabin. “Are you OK?” “Yes, they have gone. The ropes are fine.” We go back to bed and hear them drive off in a huff and screaming some obscenities. If goes without saying that we both spend the rest of the night listening to every noise, wondering what they wanted and whether they will come back. All of a sudden, Moruya does not feel so safe. I keep thinking we would be lightweight if someone really wanted to do us some harm. We can’t even lock ourselves in! Just as well the front door is awkward when you don’t know how to open it! We might have to put a bolt inside though.

In the morning the Saturday market stall holders set up early. We have a wonder around and buy some fruit, vegies and prawns, then Baz arrives and we go and have breakfast at the Blue Heron Café. It is good to catch up even though it is obvious we have all had a tough year.

Later, Chris and his son Lachlan arrive from Broulee where they have set up camp for a few days. They would really have loved to sail their newly launched catamaran Outback Dreamer, but it is a bit too soon to embark on a big sail from Melbourne.

By mid-afternoon, the market is gone and Moruya is deserted. We get a text from Fiona and Trevor on Exhale, inviting us aboard for sundowners, but after the 3am uninvited visitors, we are not keen to leave Take It Easy unattended and instead we invite them over.

So all in all, we have been social butterflies today.

## 17/1/16 – Moruya

This is our last day at Moruya. The weather looks right for an escape tomorrow. It is a calm sunny day and I go for a wander with my camera along the river bank, while Wade tops up the tanks and potters around. There are some nice shots along the river and I discover a gorgeous lily pond with superb lotus flowers.



Back on board we contact Trevor and Fiona on Exhale to catch up with them since they did not make last night's sundowners. We end up spending a couple of hours rafted up to them.

It is great to see their Grainger Barefoot 40 catamaran finished and furnished. Whereas our colours are orange and blue, their furnishings are orange and lime green inside.

They have a very nice set up. Their outdoor entertaining area is spacious and their living area, galley and navigation table are all on one level. It works well. They have more bridge deck clearance than us. It is always interesting to look at other cats.



Early in the afternoon, we untie to go and anchor at the mouth of the river, ready for tomorrow's departure. We sit quietly on the side of the channel. I sort through my photos of this morning, ready for a post early next week, proof read an article submitted for Dynamic Range, the photography magazine I co-edit. Wade is reading and fretting about our position in the channel. We are just fine, just swinging around in circles with the change of tide and wind. He never stops worrying about the boat and keeping a watchful eye... the challenge of being a good skipper.

The afternoon passes quickly and soon it is time for a shower at the back of the boat and a cider for sundowners. It has gone northerly already! The day ends with a pink sunset. We can't wait to go again. It should be an easy passage; only 35nm to Bermagui, a small fishing harbour we have staying at several times.





## 11/1/16 – To Bermagui

**A**t 8.00am it is slack water, a good time to up anchor and cross the bar. It is a benign exit. With hardly any breeze, we motor for a couple of hours, and then as the wind slowly picks up, we launch Big Red by about 10.30am. It is slow going, but free!

By lunch time we are sailing well, doing 7s and 8s. As we pass Narooma on one side and Montague Island on the Port side, Baz rings us. "I can see you!" He is on his break and standing at the top of a hill looking at our big red balloon of a sail. Elgar from Coffs is watching from a distance too, through Marine Traffic and email exchange. "I can see northerlies, are you sailing?" and later as our speed is recorded on the app: "You're going great guns!"

We drop the spinnaker outside Bermagui, and motor in. We have 15 to 18 knots of breeze on our backside and need to get in at speed to have steerage, but then come to a stop fairly quickly. We have talked to the Fishing Cooper and they have directed us to raft up to a green fishing boat called Consolato. I have a try at bringing Take It

Easy against the fishing boat while being ready to reverse hard as there are other fishing boats in front of us. But I am scared and I don't bring us close enough to the green vessel for Wade to tie us. He takes over, backs us out to line us up properly, but he too has problems. It takes him another go. We are finally tied up by 2.00pm, but a bit frazzled. We should have come in, spun around and come to rest against the fishing boat facing into wind and tide; even if it meant coming in on the wrong side for the controls, it would still have been easier than coming downwind. Lesson learnt for me!

Bermagui is always nerve wracking and difficult to get into: so little space and big steel vessels that would not be very forgiving if we mucked up. But we are set now. We go for a brief walk to buy some bread and an ice cream. We both feel a bit sun burnt and tired. Then it is time to be a wally at the showers. Luxurious hot shower without feeling rushed!

Baz later comes to join us for a cider and a meal. He shouts us fish and chips. It is a nice to spend a bit of time together once a year!



## 19/1/16 – To Bittangabee

**W**e untie from the green fishing boat before the wind picks up too much, to make it easy to pivot quietly and face the right way to get out. It all goes very smoothly... a perfect departure at about 8.30.

We motor for a while until there is just enough breeze to keep Big Red inflated, then as the morning unfolds, the ocean fills in with white caps and we pick up speed: a cruisy 7 or 8 knots in sunshine. It is a very pleasant sail, but we will have to attend to the spinnaker while we are next at anchor as the bit of stitching that was coming off and which we taped at the very head of the sail has come undone again.

We get a few comments for our latest post and even hear from Phil Brown - our Singapore friend – who has given up work and is embarking on a sailing adventure on his trimaran.

A few more emails come in, including one for Dynamic Range, the photography magazine. I have another article to edit and I download it while we still have coverage, as once inside Bittangabee, we are “off the grid” for phone calls and internet. Doing this at sea is not the best thing. I feel instantly seedy. Editing will be for later! An hour’s nap settles things.

We pass Merimbula and Eden a fair way offshore and start angling towards Bittangabee. As we get closer to the land, the wind drops and the sea becomes very choppy. Gone is the pleasant sail. We are motoring in a rock and roll sea for the last hour of our passage. The last bit always seems to take the longest.



By 3.30pm we are in front of the Bittangabee Creek inlet and are anchored by 4.00, opposite the Storehouse. Since we are here for only two nights, we can't be bothered to go right into the creek and tie ourselves to the shore.



is from Eden and will sail back there with the southerly.

It is time for a cider and some music. Cary Lewincamp is playing gentle guitar. Gorgeous! The sunset is spectacular, with a pink hue just above the tree line over the beach and big mammatus clouds in the sky... the storm is not far away.

This really is one of favourite anchorages. It is a shame we won't stay long to enjoy it, but with the weather the way it has been, we can't afford to miss the next window.

There is a trailer sailor anchored just at the start of the narrow part of the inlet, a little before where we normally hide. And there are the usual families from the nearby campsite on the little beach, and people fishing off the rocks. It is all very pleasant and sunny.

The guy from the trailer-sailor comes over in his dinghy to say hello and ask about the conditions out there. They are benign but are due to pick up tonight and go southerly tomorrow. He





## 20/1/16 – Bittangabee

It rained overnight and when we surface this morning it is a very grey day. We are rolling a little bit, but it is peaceful. There is no phone nor internet service and our radio calls to Eden Marine Rescue for an updated weather forecast remain unanswered. We are “off the grid”!

But later we manage to pick up the weather broadcast from Eden and receive emails when using our big aerial. Somehow it depends on how we are lying. If our stern faces out we get something, if it faces the rocks, the world disappears!

Wade also picks up the HF forecast. It is all looking right for our departure tomorrow morning, although it looks light and a bit rainy. Chances are we will go all the way to Port Albert – 200 nm to the finish line.

The weather does not improve during the day, remaining grey and rainy, so we stay on board. I had hoped we would go for a walk to see the lyrebirds, but the thought of rain showers and leeches is enough of a deterrent and we stay on board all day, reading.



## 21/1/16 – To the Skerries

**W**e are up and away by 5.30, just on day break. The sky is pink and as we get out in the ocean the colours intensify.

The Green Cape lighthouse in the distance has a soft pink and pale blue sky surrounding it and further out to see the sky is orange and mauve. It is breathtaking.



I love how the colours get reflected in the side window of the boat as we look out along the hull facing the rising sun.





The ocean is reasonably calm and while we have internet I quickly upload the photos of Bittangabee and the post I prepared yesterday. It will be published at 8.00am. It is sad to leave Bittangabee so soon. We could have lingered and waited for the next weather window to get into Victoria and on our way home, but with our luck during this cruise, it is safer to get back while we can now and enjoy the Prom next week.

I tried to be brief on the computer but was not fast enough... I chuck up my cup of coffee, however at least the nausea quickly passes.

We soon sail past Green Cape, Cape Howe, and Gabo Island. It is always beautiful and wild there, and today the clouds in the sky above the lighthouse are wispy and emphasise its height. Further out to sea there is a mackerel sky – a sign the change will be here in a day or two. But today the conditions are calm and the sea gentle. We have the kite flying and are going rather slowly in the very light breeze but not for long. Soon the breeze shifts to the south; we drop Big Red, raise the main and put the engines on. With a variable breeze we are likely to keep changing sails and alternate between slow sailing and motoring.

Dolphins come and join us and stay for a little while. It is a pod of big males, about a dozen of them. An hour later another pod comes to visit together with shearwaters. All this occurs within a few hours and it feels like there is something happening constantly. It is nice.





The return to Lakes Entrance will be punctuated by lighthouses: Green Cape, Gabo, Rame Head, Point Hicks, Cape Conran, this last one we will pass at night.

One of the wonderful aspects of being back in southern waters is seeing albatrosses flying. To us it says we are sailing Bass Strait. No more Coral Sea, Tasman Sea, we are in Bass Strait now!

It is 11.30 and the breeze has picked up with white caps on the ocean, however not from the direction we expected. It is southwest! What? That could make things interesting – NOT! We might have to make a stop at the Skerries if this keeps up.

An hour later, with an 18-20 knot SW breeze, we are hobby horsing, the waves are slamming and the engines are cavitating at times. It is uncomfortable. We are heading for the Skerries to take shelter but make very slow progress.

All the forecasts show it should be ENE, but the wind observation readings at key locations along the Victorian coast all show SW. If the worst comes to the worst, we will turn tail and go back to Gabo Island. We are taking a lot of spray over the deck and on the windows, much to Wade's dislike. He has that thing about dirty windows!

We are crawling at 3-3.5 knots. It always takes for ever when you are trying to get somewhere in a hurry. The dolphins and shearwaters love it though. Pods of dolphins charge towards us. They look so powerful at speed.

This trip will have been a battle from start to finish.

We are anchored at the Skerries by 2.15pm. It has taken us three hours to get here, battling against 20 knot southwest, right on the nose. It is calm behind the rocks, but not quiet! The seals that inhabit the rocks are bellowing. It is a seal colony. We will be protected here in south to southwest conditions. Once it goes southeast, we can head out and sail west again.





It is as if the southwest change came in much earlier than forecast. Several boats reported the same conditions to Eden Marine Rescue after they broadcast the official northeast forecast!

The updated weather forecast still does not talk about southwest but the HF talks about light southwest.

We raise anchor by 8pm and motor off, hugging the coast. A small group of seals escort us out.

The sunset is glorious with strong colours that last well. At 8.30pm we start the night watches. I take the first one and it is nice to have the remnants of the sunset colour lasting till 9.00pm.



We rest here for a few hours. Then the wind abates to well below 10 knot and we therefore decide to head off and resume our passage after dinner. It is an 80nm trip from the Skerries to Lakes. So we might get there by lunchtime tomorrow.

It gets chilly during the night. There is a fair bit of chop and it is not very comfortable. During his first watch Wade brings us in really close to the shore, where the water is calmer. There is no wind to speak of and the ocean is like a millpond, with lots of phosphorescence; but there is swell, so it feels as if we are wallowing.

## 22/1/16 – To Lakes Entrance

**T**he second watch at night is hard, but it is nothing compared to the third! Tiredness, lack of sleep, aching body, feeling seedy are not a fun mix.

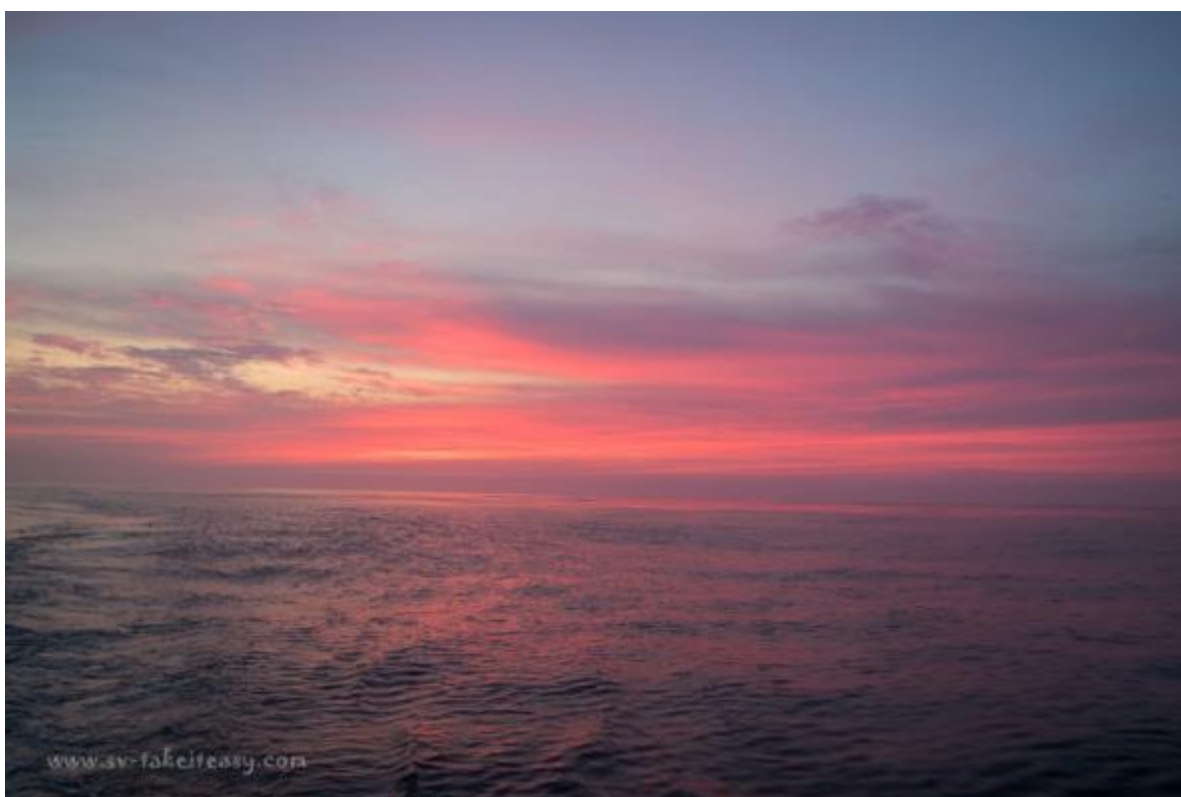
There is still hardly any wind and the ocean is like a mill pond, with sea mist on the surface and along the coast. It is daybreak when Wade wakes me up at 5.30, an hour later than he should have. I am grateful for the extra hour's rest, but getting up is hard as I feel instantly nauseous. Still, Wade has done a three hour shift which is very good of him. I don't know how he keeps going.

Sunrise is a very soft pink in mist and unlike any sunrise we have witnessed before, with the haze and mirror-like ocean. You can hardly distinguish the horizon in the distance. The pink sky is reflected in the water. All you see is the glowing pink swell and the pink clouds.

It is quite a sight and even though I feel horrible, I have to grab my camera and take a couple of shots. Then I drop the camera and grab the bucket! It takes me back to when we were approaching Lord Howe Island. I felt like crap, but had to capture the moment.

Dry reaching is the pits. I should get something in my stomach but can't face food. I last on my watch for an hour then Wade sends me back to lie down and he takes over. Three hours later we arrive in front of the Lakes Entrance rock walls.

It is 9.30am, high tide with water rushing in. We let a fishing boat go in first and then follow in. One of our smoothest, fastest entries into the Lakes!







We will be in the Gippsland Lakes for a few days with the southwest change coming, so instead of going to the Flagstaff Jetty, just on the inside, we decide to go and anchor at Two Dogs, behind Baxter Island. It will be quieter and more private since it is the Australia Day long weekend.

By 10.30 we are anchored; we tidy up the boat, grab some food and a wash to feel a bit more human. Marine Traffic has got us officially in port, so our friends will know we have made it in. We cannot be bothered to ring anyone yet. Catching up on sleep comes first. It is snooze station on board till 2.30pm. When we emerge, the rain has set in. It is looking very miserable out there and it is cool.

Then slowly we make contact with a few people. It is not all good news with our friends, particularly Ann who has had a very rough time and we kick ourselves for not calling her since Christmas.

Talking to friends makes us say out loud how we have been feeling about the whole cruise.

Apart from the period spent at the reef and seeing friends along the way, it has all felt like hard work. It was too far to come in contrary winds. Wade even talks about next summer. Our original idea was to do a circumnavigation of Tasmania, but now he thinks it is too much in two months and I have to agree. "May be we can just go to Flinders and the Furneaux, and just enjoy an easy trip." Yes, no more pushing hard all the time. You think two months is a long time, but it passes quickly, particularly when you get stuck in contrary weather multiple times and for extended periods. We count eight forced stops of 3 to 7 days duration in eight weeks. When you are on a schedule, long distances are too hard.

We should be celebrating. We have just about made it home. But we feel too exhausted and beaten up. However as Greg puts it, it is another experience, more time on the boat in not so easy conditions, so good to add to our sailing history.

## 23/1/16 – Gippsland Lakes

**W**e stay in bed for ages, but I wake up with a raging headache and end up chucking up. I have had it! I just want the trip to be over. The thought of another 14 hours in the ocean to get to Port Albert really does not appeal.

We also have to decide whether we want to take part in the “Classic Boats’ Festival” in Paynesville in early March. If we do, we need to leave the boat here or we will end up doing trips back and forth from Port Albert: one to get there, one to bring TIE back for the boat show, one take it back to Port Albert for the Easter trip, and the final one back home after Easter.

We will be doing the trip every fortnight and that is simply not a fun way of spending our long weekends over the next few months.

We also would rather be near Wilson’s Promontory than in the Lakes for the rest of summer. It is more fun for us and for friends who join us for weekend sails.

So we come to the decision: we will not be taking part in the festival. It is a little disappointing, but this is what will work out best for us.

We have a very quiet day. Wade reads; I am a bear with a sore head most of the day. Bengie snoozes.



## 24/1/16 – Gippsland Lakes

It is still windy when we wake up this Sunday, but the sun is out. So we take advantage of the warm cockpit to do a round of laundry – the last for the trip!

While it is all drying, we busy ourselves: we have good internet coverage so Wade does some research on spinnakers, and I start writing an article for Cruising Helmsman. I am hoping the editor will be interested in a story on the Southern Great Barrier Reef. I also intend to write on a similar topic for Multihull World, but it needs to be written a little differently and provide a different set of photographs as editors don't like it when you submit the same material to multiple magazines. For now I do my research on some of the coral cays to provide useful information and construct the first article. Wade reads the draft, adds his two bobs worth and we are set.

Later in the afternoon it is a matter of selecting the photos. And this is when disaster strikes. I go back to archived catalogues from our trip and the Lightroom Software upgrades them to its latest version. I always get a bit nervous with upgrades. All but one catalogue gets upgraded without problem. But the October-December folder does not and looks empty! And you guessed it, this is the folder with all the reef photos! No amount of reloading, talking to photographer friends Leanne and IT specialist husband David helps. In the end I have to contact Adobe for assistance, but not until Monday in the US (Tuesday here) – two anxious days of waiting!

If we can't retrieve this folder, half of our cruise photos will be lost, so there is a lot at stake. It is a big lesson learnt and Leanne takes me through a way of filing and backing up my work independently from Lightroom. Now I know, but will it be too late?

Without those beautiful photos, articles in Cruising Helmsman, Multihull World and the one I have been asked to write for Dynamic Range on underwater photography won't happen! The photo book I wanted to compile on the reef won't happen. The illustrated journal of our entire cruise will be affected... I try to not stress out too much but it is hard.

Later in the evening I catch up with my sister Véronique on Skype. It is good to talk about how we are each feeling and how Mum's death continues to haunt us. She is struggling with physical and mental exhaustion. Grief is a strange thing. You might manage for a while, but it can affect you more strongly at times when you think you should be getting better. Sometimes a small upset can be the drop that makes the glass overflow. Talking to each other helps.

I think the stress of the afternoon comes back to haunt me with a massive hypo in the middle of the night – good excuse to hoe into the jelly beans!



## 25/1/16 – Gippsland Lakes

**G**rey Monday today, but it is still southwest. In the afternoon we up anchor and move back to Lakes Entrance for a fresh food shop. The forecast looks like Wednesday is D day for a Port Albert passage. It will be blowing strongly from the northeast offshore, but manageable close to shore and easing as the day progresses. Hopefully it will be a nice run.

The question will be whether we can get out early through the bar: low tide ebbing (the worst time to cross) and possibly some swell.



As usual we will check out Flagstaff on Tuesday night. We spend a few hours doing a bit of reading and writing. Wade continues the research about spinnakers and talks to Andrew on Sengo to get his input. I start writing my article for Dynamic Range on underwater photography, hopeful I will recover my reef photos.

At 3pm with the ebbing tide we leave Two Dogs. Two dolphins are vigorously fishing in the shallows. They are pursuing a prey, darting one way then the other. We always like to see dolphins in the Lakes. It is a sign they are healthy.

We go right into Lakes Entrance and moor inside the Cunningham basin. There are lots of boats everywhere as it is the Australia Day weekend, but we manage to get a good spot.

In the evening we are watching the Australian of the Year nominations on TV. One of the finalists is a campaigner for gender equality. In his speech, General David Morrison talks about the day

women stand on an equal footing to men. I comment "well we have a way to go." Wade responds "Oh, I think we are doing pretty well on this boat... the woman steers and moors the boat and the man does the laundry!" I have to laugh. We do get

funny looks when I bring our big fat cat into a jetty, like today.

## 26/1/16 – Gippsland Lakes

First thing this morning, I log on to Adobe Support in the US to try and recover my missing photos: one month of our cruise in particular! After trying for nearly an hour, the Adobe technician comes to the conclusion I did not properly copy my files when I moved them from my computer to my back up drive and somehow deleted them! He cannot recover them. My heart sinks... but by an incredible twist of fate, we find one week's worth of photos left on my hard drive - one week of Reef photos! And I still have all the photos I loaded on our website during December.



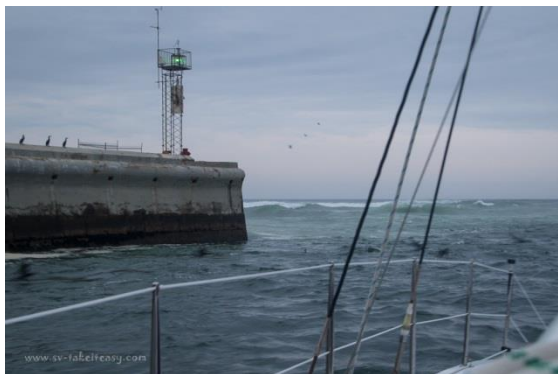
So at the very least I can continue working on my articles and will be able to put together the reef book and the journal. Big lesson learnt. My back up process is now changed!! I feel very sad and disappointed, but not half as much as I would if I had lost those underwater photos.

Yesterday we got in touch with Dicky, our Paynesville jetty neighbour. We get on well with Dicky and he keeps an eye on the boat when we are moored there, but away in Melbourne. He has a good heart. So we thought we'd see if he wants to join us for lunch today and we get some prawns. It is 9.30 and he has just come in with his boat to tie up opposite us. He was moored at Barrier landing, spending time with his son on board. The two of them join us at noon, and we enjoy a great feed and catch up.

In the evening we move to Flagstaff to check out the entrance and the lookout. It looks passable so worth getting ready for tomorrow morning at dawn.

## 27/1/16 – To Port Albert

**A**t daybreak we climb up to the lookout. The bar is calmer than last night and the water is not flowing out as fast. Still not the best time to cross the bar, but we get going at 6.00am.



It is a smooth exit considering the conditions. The wind is easterly, blowing at 20 knots, and there is quite a bit of swell. We instantly feel green! We both look at the horizon and take deep breaths!

The big question: do we want to launch Big Red or just unfurl the jib? With the swell and strength of the wind I vote for the jib. We are doing 7s and 8s, which is quite acceptable and more manageable than an oscillating kite, particularly when both of us feel rather ordinary.

Soon I succumb to sea sickness. You would think that after two months we would have our sea legs, but with all these extended stops, it is as if we have to re-train each week. And two meter swell on the beam does not help.

From here on, we experience all sorts of conditions: rain, strong easterly at 20 knots, no wind at all, light northeast, strong northeast at 25 knots... We go from tail wind on the jib, to reefed main and jib, to no sail and motor, back to main and jib. But we are going at a good pace overall.

By 6.00pm we reach the fairway buoy marking the entrance into the Port Albert archipelago, but are not sure we will be able to get through the bar with the swell.



However we commit! What a ride we get: we close windows and door, ready to get wet, and off we go. There is quite a distance between the red fairway buoy and the first green buoy and the breakers come in sideways, which puts the boat in a vulnerable position, just what you want to avoid. So Wade brings the boat as close as possible to the break then positions it so if we catch a wave, we surf down and across the channel, then turn back on track and repeat as we need. That is the plan and it works. We see a breaking wave descending on us. "Hang on tight!" says Wade who is at the tillers, with the engines going as fast as they can. The wave catches us, the back of the boat lifts up and we slide down the face of the wave and surf, with white water surrounding us and the engine making this high pitch whizzing sound. It is spectacular! No idea how fast we are going, but we are surfing fast. The wave takes us for a long stretch and after that we are OK, no other breaking wave picks us up. We are relieved to reach the first green buoy. We have made it in and in record time: 11 hours.





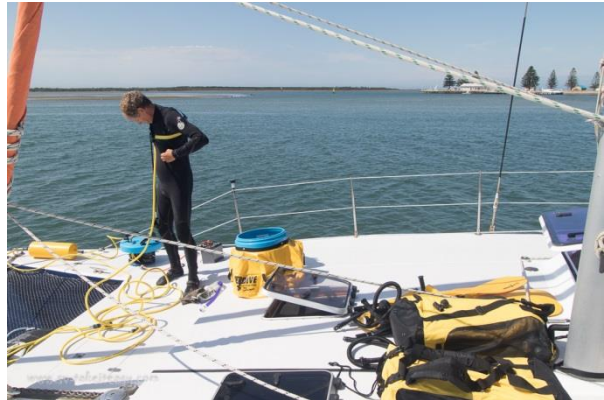
We have an hour to go to reach our mooring. We hook on and collapse exhausted. It has been hard till the end!

## 28/1/16 – Port Albert

**W**e should be sleeping in but can't help ourselves. We are up by 7.30 and start the process of tidying up the boat. I hastily put together a post to announce we have completed the last leg of our odyssey, while Wade is putting away the safety gear: dan buoy, life ring, life line, etc.

Then we get a call from Trevor who has driven from Inverloch, 1<sup>1/2</sup> hour away from Port Albert, to join us on board and eventually take us home. Although we intended to take him for a sail to the Prom, the forecast is such that we are pulling the pin on this. Rain and wind are expected for the whole weekend, starting from today, although you could not tell with the calm and sunny conditions this morning.

So for now, we get ready to inspect the mooring. This is the annual dive to check the condition of the chain and block we are attached to.



It means setting up the Power Dive, Wade donning the wetsuit and gloves, checking the chain all the way down, cleaning the links of all the growth and inspecting the attachment to the cement block. It all looks fine.



While he is doing this, I pack away our clothes and the linen. By lunchtime we have a break and devour a kilogram of prawns and nice bottle of rosé.

By early afternoon the clouds are building, the sky is getting dark and we decide we should go home tonight.

It takes a few trips ashore with the dinghy loaded with our luggage to get everything into Trevor's Prado.

The boys take care of ferrying our gear and food while I clean up the boat: fresh water rinse of all crockery and cutlery, clean-up of galley and bathroom, vacuum and mop.

It is 3.30pm by the time we have finished and leave with a happy pussycat who knows a car trip means a drive home!

She settles happily on the driver's lap. Trevor is quite tickled that she makes herself comfy on his knees. Three hours later we are home and it is a relief to find land comforts: a warm shower, space, water at will.





## The To-Do List!

**N**ormally, after a long cruise, we compile a maintenance list. This year the list is a little different. It is less about repairing broken things, and more about attending to a number of big jobs in preparation for our living aboard.

- Sand and revarnish the cork floors – these are worn and lifting in places.
- Revarnish the table and timber work – we need to use a hard wearing product, particularly on the table which shows a lot of scratches.
- Do a serious pressure-wash of the deck and cockpit to get rid of the flaking grey paint and repaint the lot.
- Check and reseal the jib tracks – a leak has appeared at one of the bolts and we want to ensure each bolt is properly reset and does not let freshwater in, which would spell a rot attack.
- Consider doing a similar check on all deck hardware.
- Waterproof the mast top – this is to minimise the drips down the shaft when it rains.
- New Laminex for the kitchen benches.
- New mainsail bag – the existing one is perishing and the zip is broken.
- Purchase a new spinnaker – Big Red is showing its age and needs to be replaced.
- Buy a tray to place under the freezer to protect the floor from condensation.
- Install a data aerial up the mast
- Check our gas fittings compliance and replace what is not kosher (possibly the gas water heater and stove top).

There is no major hurry for these jobs. Most of these will need to wait until we are back in the Gippsland Lakes. But we will need to start ticking the items away during the year, before the next summer cruise.

Other aspects we need to think about also are the upgrade of our instruments, the investigation of a water-maker and a communication package (phone/internet). But these can wait until next year.

## The End of our Odyssey

**N**ow that we are back from our eight weeks at sea, covering an ambitious 1500 nautical miles from Yeppoon in North Queensland to Port Albert in Victoria, people are asking us “what was it like, really? So here it is, warts and all.

### Unusual weather conditions

Heatwave, thunderstorms, then heavy rainfall, and most of all strong persistent contrary winds were a feature of this trip. This was the worst cruise weather wise we have experienced. All this affected our voyage in ways we had not anticipated:

- **Take It Easy the motor boat** – We did an incredible amount of motoring. Usually on our summer cruises, a quarter of the distance is covered via motoring or motor-sailing. But this time, three quarters of it was spent motoring, with significant impact on the hip pocket!
- **A long way to go in 8 weeks** – It could have been straight forward and very manageable in the right conditions. During our summer cruises, we normally expect to have at least a week’s stop because of contrary weather; it is part of sailing. But we got stuck for extended periods of 3 to 7 days not just once or twice, but 8 times: at the Keppels, Bundaberg, Fraser Island, Moreton island, Iluka, Port Macquarie, Moruya, and even in the Gippsland Lakes. This meant we spent excessive time ‘waiting’ in places we would not normally have, and could not stop in anchorages we would have loved to explore or linger at.

- **Long tedious passages** – Because of the delays, we were for ever in catch up mode. Overnighters and 12 to 14 hour day sails are not much fun and we had more of these than we would have hoped. When the wind was with us, we had to make use of it! One of the unexpected side effects of extended stops is that it can be hard to get your sea legs. Wade was not too bad, but I suffered from sea sickness a lot more than usual right till the last day, and could not read or write underway, which made the long passages even more tedious.

So although we made the most of what we experienced, it felt a bit like hard work.

### The highlights

The absolute highlights were the time we spent on the Great Barrier Reef, and with friends along the way. The Reef was such a magic place. We will definitely spend time exploring the Southern Great Barrier Reef again and the Swains Reef when work no longer gets in the way of our fun. Spending time with friends was also really nice: Andrew & Trish on Sengo around Fraser Island, Elgar & Claire at Iluka, Lisa & Waz in Port Macquarie, Chris at Moruya, Baz at Moruya and Bermagui, Dicky at Lakes Entrance, and finally Trevor at Port Albert. It was great to catch up and a lovely way to spend time together on non-sailing days.

We had some good sails and managed some fun manoeuvres, like anchoring under sail downwind as we were arriving in a bay to meet our sailing friends on Sengo. It was an impressive flick and Wade is still chuffed about it!

I had some very satisfying practice with the camera, especially underwater and nature photography, and have material for multiple articles in yachting and photography magazines.

We are happy with the way the boat handled – no drama, just normal bits of maintenance. And we are very pleased with our electrical system – lithium batteries, inverter, solar panels and wind generator. For the first time, we did not worry about power consumption. Fridge and freezer worked ceaselessly, computers were used at will, we charged our cameras and phones on demand.

### The Learnings

We learnt about bar crossings! We had never gone into so many barred river entrances to hide. We normally favour open anchorages or little nooks, but when big blows descend on you, you'd better be 'holed in'. These experiences reinforced what we already knew: any bar can be mean in the wrong conditions. So it is best to cross on a high flood tide, in daylight when you can see the sea state. It is best to avoid crossing at a low ebbing tide, when the water is shallow, when the wind is against the tide, or in darkness. We might run the gauntlet a few times, but we know that cat of ours might run out of lives!

We also came to understand it is a fine line between being challenged and pushing too hard. A cruise is much more enjoyable when we do not demand too much of ourselves and of the boat, and when we take our time. In fact it is preferable if we are less ambitious while we are on a schedule limited by work demands.

Would we do a long distance cruise again? Not while we are still working. It was too far to go. But then we had no choice. We had to

bring *Take It Easy* back after the winter cruise with my family.

### Where to next?

Interestingly, we were thinking before this trip that for our 2016/17 Summer Cruise we would embark on a circumnavigation of Tasmania, braving the West Coast for the first time. But just after entering the Gippsland Lakes, we both said out loud: "Next year, let's just play around Flinders Island and the Furneaux Group. Beautiful, no pressure, no big distance, short hops." So maybe we will be tamer. Or maybe we will display a case of selective memory. Time will tell.

As for the next few months, we will enjoy regular trips to Wilsons Promontory and nearby Bass Strait islands. After all, this is why we have a summer mooring at Port Albert. It gives us the ability to still enjoy short escapes in the ocean before winter comes and we return to the Gippsland Lakes.

