

# Two months around wild Tasmania

27/2/18 to 29/4/18

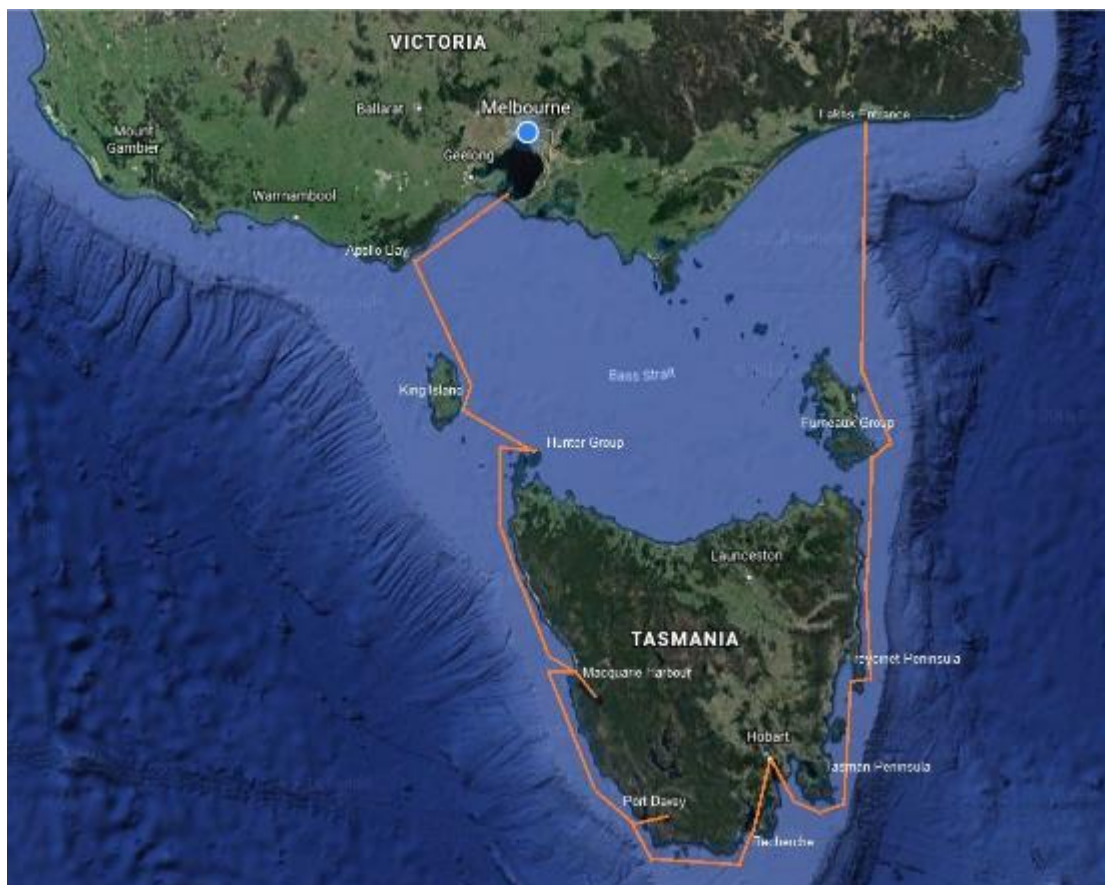


It was supposed to go like clockwork: get back from France, haul out Take It Easy for antifoul and engine service, and leave for Tasmania... But we must have done something really bad to somebody, because a month later we were still in Melbourne waiting.

The theft of our navigation gear while we were in France and Take It Easy was on a mooring at Williamstown, the discovery our engines were on their last leg, the delays in getting both the Raymarine instruments and the Yamaha outboards replaced... it all took an inordinate amount of time and tested our patience. The days and weeks passed, leaving us wondering whether our departure for Tassie would ever happen!

Some would and did say: “better to have all the calamities happen in port than on the wild west coast of Tasmania. But it would have been even better not to have all this happen at all, nor all in quick succession! The silver lining is that Take It Easy has been totally repowered: new sails thanks to my Dad’s kind gift, the latest navigation gear and new engines. And instead of picking up our friends Greg and Ann somewhere along the way, they joined us at Yarra’s Edge and are with us from the very start of what will hopefully be an unforgettable voyage.

So here is our itinerary:



Anyone who has read our previous cruising journals will know that we have done a lot of exploring around the Bass Strait Islands and along the Tasmanian coast over our 15 years of part-time cruising. These are beautiful waters: cold and demanding, with a rugged coastline, but little frequented. And there lies the magic. You can enjoy this incredible wilderness without crowds.

Although we are not new to Tasmania, never have we had the time to take things slowly and enjoy a voyage without being on a schedule. And never have we had the time to go right around and venture along the entire west coast. When you are working, you are restricted as to how far you can go. Looking at the weather while keeping an eye on the calendar is never a good thing. Everybody knows that the most dangerous item on a boat is a time-table. It can lead you to launch in weather you should not, just to reach a destination by a set date. But this time, everyone on board has recently retired and free of annoying schedules!

We always said the first six months of our life afloat were just practice and filling time, since we had to get back to Melbourne for medical checks and travel to France to visit my family for Christmas and New Year. Even though we did not want to, we were on a schedule!

So the first big journey in our sea wanderers' life is this long awaited Tasmanian voyage. There is a lot to look forward to, new challenges to experience, new shores to explore. We love sailing our catamaran, we enjoy being just the two of us and our furry shipcat Bengie. But we also love sharing our adventures with friends. And for part of this voyage we have Greg and Ann with us till Hobart. It is exciting.



## Queenscliff to Apollo Bay

**W**e got underway on 27 February. We all felt a mix of excitement and disbelief. We had been waiting for so long that it felt somewhat unreal.

We got out of our pen without disgracing ourselves. We, who normally avoid marinas in preference for deserted anchorages, have had to adapt in the past month while the replacement gear was getting organised.

It is always a challenge to bring our catamaran in and out of a pen, especially on a windy day. But manoeuvring in the tight spot at Queenscliff lifts the challenge a notch. The Harbour itself is a small marina with little room to move around. You not only have to pivot out of your pen, but you also have to immediately pivot the other way to get into the Cut. A huge volume of water rushes in the narrow passage linking Port Phillip Bay to Swan Bay. It is not for the faint hearted.



*Take It Easy at Queenscliff Harbour*

We were lucky we had the tide against us, making steering easier. We followed the Sorrento ferry out and were soon on our way.

Pressure off, sun out, calm seas... just what we wanted for the first day out.



Our 57 miles to Apollo Bay were a mix of wind direction and strength, and seemed to be the 'shake down' trip we needed. It certainly gave us the opportunity to check the new sails, the engines, the navigation gear, the autopilot. And we are relieved to say it all worked very well.

We left Port Phillip Bay under genoa. It was not long till the wind picked up enough from our stern to launch Big O. But then the wind shifted to the front quarter, and we had to collapse the spinnaker in a hurry, motor for a bit, then raise the main and jib. Man, what a workout!

And apart from the trawling lines getting caught under the rudder as we dropped the spinnaker and changed tack, and the spinnaker halyard getting wrapped around the top of the jib, we had a smooth passage.



*Action stations as we recover from tangles*



## A few days in Apollo Bay

**A**pollo Bay is as far along the west coast of Victoria as you want to go when you are intending to head down to Tasmania, via King Island. It is an active fishing harbour and a good spot to wait for the right conditions before launching across Bass Strait.

We were lucky to get in to the Harbour. We had talked to the Harbour Master a few days earlier, when we were still in Queenscliff, wondering how the entrance was looking. Last year, we found the leads marked on the charts were wrong and if you followed them, they brought you right over a sandbank with breaking waves! It pays to keep a keen lookout for the sea state and apply judgement rather than blindly follow the instruments! This time around, the Harbour Master announced the port was closed! No boat was able to go in or out due to an extensive sandbank right across the entrance. "But we will be dredging all day Tuesday, so leave it as late as you can to try. High tide is at 7pm".

We left Queenscliff later than planned and slowed the boat down so as not to arrive too early. We found we had 3 meters of water under the hulls as we got in at 6.30pm, lining up the boat ramp at the opposite end of the harbour to get the best angle in, as we were told. Plenty of water for us, and an uneventful arrival, just as we like it!

During the night, a mighty southerly change came through, and dawn was spectacular. Red skies in the morning don't augur well for a sailor's departure. But we knew this would be the case and expect to be in Apollo Bay for a few days. More waiting!

We are filling the days somehow: eating, walking, provisioning, playing the ukelele, writing, reading, more eating...



*The sky is on fire*



*The dredge at work at the entrance of Apollo Bay. Days of work to re-open the harbour!*



*Sunrise before the storm*

## Crossing Bass Strait to King Island

**W**e always treat Bass Strait crossings with respect. This body of water has a fearsome reputation all over the world. It can turn out some difficult and dangerous conditions because it is a shallow basin averaging around 60 meters in depth. When wind and sea pick up, the waves are steep and short, often with a secondary swell coming from a different direction. We try very hard to cross Bass Strait in calm conditions. It is a bit tricky: you want enough wind to sail well, but not so much you encounter rough conditions. Only once have we seen it mirrorlike, not a ripple, not a breath of wind. This was on our return from Flinders Island to Lakes Entrance last summer, with Greg and Ann on board.

For our hop across from Apollo Bay to King Island, we have 60 miles of open sea to the tip of King Island, then another 30 miles along the eastern side down to Grassy. We have a very short window to get across: there is a light north east from 2.00am on Saturday 3 March, however a strong westerly change is forecast for the afternoon. So it is important we are in the lee of the island and as far south as we can by 1.00 or 2.00 in the afternoon.

The decision is made to leave at the ungodly hour of 2.00am and get south as quickly as we can. This also means leaving the Apollo Bay harbour at low tide. "Stick to the middle where it is deepest" said the Harbourmaster! Easy to do in day light, but in the middle of the night... Thankfully there is a full moon, and it is a clear starry night. We leave the jetty, the boys tidy up the ropes and fenders while we slowly circle inside the harbour, then we are off. We exit in a lull, avoiding breaking waves.

Once well out, we pull up the main, drag out the jib, turn the engines off and speed up to 7 and 8 knots. "We are sailing, at night, in Bass Strait!" This time our friends get to see it in its typical state: a bit confused, not particularly comfortable, but not too mean either. Sailing at night can be quite special, especially on a starry night. It is not too cold, the sails shine in the darkness, lit up by the moon. You get a sense of speed, and it feels good to be heading out. It is not quiet though, which surprises our friends. Waves slap the hulls, some loudly slap under the bridge deck, there are the creaks and groans of the ropes.

We all stay up for an hour or so, watching the lights of Apollo Bay slowly get further away, then Wade and I take our two hour shifts while Greg and Ann lay down in the saloon. The sea is lumpy, so the ride is not smooth, but we are sailing well, between 7 and 8 knots.



First light is a bit before 7am and everybody is up to gaze at the pinkish sky over the endless water, feeling a bit seedy and tired. We can't see land yet, but we are approaching King Island, still under main and jib with the breeze on our beam.



By the time we are level with Cape Wickham at the very tip of the Island, the wind lightens and gradually shifts to our stern. It is time to launch Big O, the spinnaker. We have a few cruisy hours enjoying the sled ride. With the wind on our stern, the ride is more comfortable.



We should eat, and there is keen interest in toasted sandwiches fried in the pan, but only the boys end up wolfing these down, including those of the girls who felt a bit too fragile in the end. Bass Strait has a way of churning your stomach, and only apples have appeal.

At about 1.30pm the kite collapses as the wind suddenly shifts to the West and it is all hands on deck to douse Big O, hastily pack it away and launch the jib instead, heavily reefed, as the gusts are strong. We manage like this for a while, then try swapping the jib for the staysail, but in the end we give up and turn the engines on. We motor for the last hour down to Grassy Harbour.

It is a frick around to get the boat clipped onto to the mooring buoy. Wayne the fisherman has told us which mooring to take, and we are under strict instructions to clip onto the chain, not the rope. It's a bug bear of fishermen to have yachties using their moorings without permission, clipping on the rope and float because it is easy and ripping the rope in the process. Having been here a few times, we know the drill: get in touch with the Co-op, ask for directions, and do the right thing. But it takes for ever to lift the heavy chain out of the water by hand, with much swearing and carry on from all of us. Tempers get frayed when you finish a 14 hour sail with a superhuman effort at the end, and it's the last thing separating you from a G&T, a good feed and your bed!

But Wayne the fisherman must have been pleased with our effort, as the next morning, on his return from an overnight crayfishing expedition, he came in his dinghy waving a crayfish

at us! "A small snack for you". This little crustacean will make a very tasty addition to our sundowner nibbles!

The day goes by pleasantly: a walk up to the little village, penguin parade in the evening, repeated checks of the weather forecast which augurs well for an early departure towards the Hunter Group of Islands tomorrow morning and a possible foray down to Sandy Cape and Macquarie Harbour later in the week!



*Take It Easy at Grassy Harbour*



*Early morning at the top of the hill, overlooking the Grassy Harbour*



*We had our own private little penguin parade!*



## Passage to Three Hummock Island

It looks like a dark and stormy day might develop when we get up and leave Grassy Harbour at 5.00am. Even though it is still nighttime, you can see the menacing clouds and the SW wind is already blowing at 15 knots. Wade puts a reef in the main while we are still inside the harbour, in prevision for some strong conditions. It does not take us long to get on our heading, with reefed main and rolled up genoa. We quickly speed up and switch the engines off.

We have a great sail with the wind slightly forward of our beam. Take It Easy handles well. We all rug up as it is quite cold in the southwesterly, and we have to hang on tight in the lumpy seas, but it is one of those passages that are beautiful and interesting: cloudy soft pink skies at first light, then a golden sunrise above the ultramarine ocean. And with all that wind, the birds are out soaring: lots of shearwaters and albatrosses.

Annie is a bit perterbed by the “huge” 2m swell, “wow, such power in the ocean”! We won’t tell her there is a wee bit more to come when we hit the Southern ocean! Having not taken any Kwells, she feels a little borderline, and stays in the cabin most of the trip. Beam runs are not very comfortable, and it is best to take precautions when the passage is likely to be bumpy. Bengie does not last long in the cockpit, retreating to our bed, right under the quilt. “If I can’t see what’s going on, it is not really happening!”





*Albatross Island with a shearwater soaring. We would have liked to stop there but the conditions were not right*

We went so well that we reached Coulomb Bay at Three Hummock Island in 6 hours, having sailed most of the way at 7 and 8 knots, and peaking at 11.3 as we were passing the tip of Hunter Island. We thought we would thunder in to our anchorage!

Shortly after anchoring, the wind shifted as forecast to the south, and we sat quite smug, having sailed all the way to our destination and reaching it in plenty of time. Here is to good passage planning!

The anchorage was deserted when we arrived. We went ashore for a while, then as we returned on board, a fleet of 3 yachts invaded our private spot. What are these people doing on a Monday? Should not they be working? Fortunately they congregated a fair distance away from us.



We are at Coulomb Bay for another night, waiting for the wind to shift from the southeast to the east. We are plotting our next passage, which is the committal descent south to Strahan. We are hoping to have the conditions to break the trip and sail in daylight hours. Our preference is to sail to Sandy Cape and anchor there for the night, then keep going to Macquarie Harbour and Strahan the next day. But if it is not possible, we will bite the bullet and cover the 120 miles in one long day and night passage.



There is a bit of apprehension in the air, this sense of a big milestone coming up. It will be new to not only our friends, but to Wade and I also, and that is exciting.

But for now, we are enjoying being in beautiful surroundings, floating at anchor in aqua water under a brilliant blue sky. We are enjoying a few walks, even Bengie who had not been on a beach for months!



## Hunter Group to Sandy Cape

There is something momentous about starting our sail along the West Coast. You know it is committal – “here we go, this is it!” You notice the movement of the boat is different in the swell, even if it is not big today. It is not Bass Strait anymore, with its confused chop, it is the Southern Ocean with defined swell lines.



Cape Grim and the Needle, with the first of many wind turbines

We sail a bit under main and jib, then jib alone and as it lightens, we launch the spinnaker, flying Big O past Cape Grim. The cape and the wind farm are major landmarks at the start of our descent along the west coast.

It is a long passage: 67 miles. As Greg puts it there is a “relaxed boredom” for the 12 hours it takes us to reach Sandy Cape. You feel the swell, you observe the coast, you have a rest, you get up and watch the albatrosses soaring close to the boat, you have a snooze, you enjoy a brewed coffee, you nibble on biscuits, there is a bit of action with a sail change, you notice the small settlements along the coast, looking like frontier outposts.





But then the southeast picks up, and the breeze comes on our nose, making for an uncomfortable ride. 15 knots on the nose feels like 20 across the deck and poor old Take It Easy gets slammed and bashed by the waves. It feels awful but there is not much else to do but to keep going. So we grin and bear it for a few hours till we finally reach an area of big sand dunes marking the approach of Sandy Cape. It is quite spectacular.







The monohull that came in after us at Three Hummock Island but left a day earlier than us, is anchored here, at Venables Corner. We pick our spot a reasonable distance away from it. It is beautiful as the sun sets and it is silhouetted against the orange sky.

We have checked the forecast while we still had internet coverage along the way. The decision is to stay put at Sandy Cape tomorrow, while the breeze is still 15 knot Southeast, and make the next passage to Strahan on Friday, when the wind is expected to be variable to 10 knots. It is our chance to have a look around, check out the lighthouse and enjoy a welcome break.







## Sandy Cape to Macquarie Harbour

**W**e are rewarded for our 5am start with a brilliantly red sunrise. The sky is ablaze and while admiring its intensity, we can't help but think of the little ditty "red sky in the morning, sailor's warning"! Hope we make it all the way before the southeast breeze picks up too much.



We could sail this, but have both engines on to get down as quickly as possible. It is a 65 mile passage with nowhere to hide along the way. The words of Paul & Sjany, catamaran sailing friends, resonate in our head. When we asked them what the coast was like, the answer came "low sandy scrub", making it sound uninteresting. And yet we find it spectacular! May be they sailed most of it at night!

With the early morning soft light and the sea mist edging the coast, the mountains in the background look like Chinese watercolours. It is magical. Just past the Pieman River entrance, the coast is rocky, with granite tors appearing in the haze. It looks like a Neolithic site. The Pieman might be inviting from the land, but from the sea, it is said to be a dangerous entrance, not to be attempted by boat! We certainly can see why!



One of the delights of this part of our passage, is the number of albatrosses soaring around the boat, quite close, as well as the pods of dolphins escorting us.



*Shy Albatross*







*Cape Sorell Lighthouse, the tallest in the Southern Hemisphere*

As we motor-sail towards Macquarie Harbour, we see what looks like a tall white sail in the distance, but as we get close it is obvious it is in fact the Cape Sorell lighthouse. As Ann says, it has been holding a very steady course if it is a yacht! What is also noticeable is the colour of the ocean, slowly becoming tea stained – no doubt from the rivers that flow into Macquarie Harbour and out to sea.

Hells Gates and its two white lighthouses appear as we line up our course to enter Macquarie

Harbour. Apparently the flow through the heads seems to depend as much on wind conditions, recent local rainfall and the operation of the Gordon River power station, as it does on the state of the tide. It has a daunting reputation, with a strong flow and narrow passage between the breakwater and the Kawatiri Shoal where waves can break heavily. But today as we come in holding our breath, it is totally calm. We are pushing 4 knots of tide all the way in, but it is manageable.



*Macquarie Heads, also called Hells Gates*





As soon as we are in, we head for the Back Channel, where we intend to spend the night, rather than go to Strahan. The channel is immediately renamed by the boys as “the back passage”. Being a thoroughfare for tinnies that launch from a nearby ramp and run past us at high speed, creating horrible wakes, the back passage is indeed a more apt name. It is a bit shitty here!



## A day in Strahan

The next day, we motor to Strahan some 10 miles away, at the northern extremity of Macquarie Harbour. From the moment we move into the Harbour proper, we become entranced. The views of the waterway and the wilderness in the sunshine are breathtaking.

The boys get us all tied up and we are set for chores: laundry, food shopping, petrol and water top up.

We also check out the “best smelling shop in Tasmania”, a woodworking workshop and gallery. We buy a rolling pin there for some baking, and TIE now smells of the heady aroma of huon pine.



It is nice seeing the village from the water. We are unsure as to where to moor and are directed to a jetty side spot inside a tight basin. That tests my manoeuvring technique, but I am glad to say it all goes rather smoothly. However no sooner are we all tied up and the engine turned off that a fisherman comes to ask us to move. No we don't want to! The guys in a Solares monohull moored on the other side of the jetty are happy for us to raft up to them, so I move us out and reposition us against them... pretty pleased with my handling of our cat, especially with the audience watching the action!



We are social too, catching up with Venture, the mono that we have been sharing anchorages with since Three Hummock Island, as well as some friends of John and De on a Solares who came to say hello.

## Exploring Macquarie Harbour

A very gusty wind gets us out of bed the next day. We are hard against the mono and hobby horsing in the southwest, so decide it's time to leave! We unravel ourselves from the other boat, pick up a mooring in the bay for an hour or so, just enough time to have breakfast. No sooner have we got the mooring, that the wind stops! But it is looking dark and menacing. The forecast indicates a week of grey and rainy weather. We intend to explore a few anchorages around Macquarie Harbour and end up at the Gordon River just before a big blow.

Our walk is a 10km return trek up the hill, then through the button grass moorland and teatree forest. It is a fair walk, but we are determined to get to the ocean, and keep plodding, following little red flags here and there, and the odd beer can on a stick to show us the way through the scrub. The views of the ocean when we get there do not disappoint. It is wild and deserted. Wadie can't resist stripping off and having a quick dip. It looks quite dangerous and we feel nervous watching him. But it is something he has to do and well aware of the rips, he stays close and keeps the swim brief.



Our first stop is at **Betsy's Bay** where we have noticed a track up the hill that leads to the Southern Ocean. We anchor there. There is a cruiser anchored, and a large tinny on the beach. We dress up for a bush walk, and dinghy ashore. The track starts near a bushcamp. It would be an ideal spot if it was not for the beer cans left behind by the fishing campers. There is a tent, a barbecue plate, and copious amounts of alcohol strewn around. It is really disappointing to see that some people have little respect for wild places.



We come back quite sore and tired... we are not youngsters anymore! Greg is limping with a dodgy knee.



The next anchorage we sail to is **Double Cove**. We have to weave our way through fish farms which occupy a large section of the waterway. Double Cove is a delightful spot surrounded by tall timbers, a quiet anchorage for the night.



There are no takers for long walks today, and no track to follow anyway, but a wander in Peasy is a welcome diversion. Two dolphins come close to the boat, cruising slowly for a little look and see, but never surfacing long enough to be photographed! It is nice to have a quieter day.

Our exploration continues the next day with a visit to **Sarah Island**. The site is one of the worst penal settlements in Tasmania's convict history and its ruins are a grim reminder of the brutality people had to endure for minor misbehaviours. Fierce floggings took place with the Macquarie Cat, a cat of nine tails with nails through them – the sure way to shred skin at the first lash! This is how Hells Gates, the entrance to Macquarie Harbour, got its name. For the convicts transported here, it was a life of hell awaiting them. Apparently, Sarah Island later became a site for ship building, and the terrible punishments were greatly reduced.

The weather conditions are in keeping with the grimness of the place. It is raining on and off, the hills are shrouded in mist, and our boat anchored



a little way off the jetty looks alone in a bleak but beautiful landscape.



While it is not raining, we get back on board and decide to head right to the southern end of Macquarie Harbour, and enter **Birchs Inlet**. It is a surprisingly broad waterway despite looking like a long thin inlet on the charts. It is a peaceful place. We go nearly all the way to the end, where there is a ruined jetty on one side with the remains of some rails, and a landing on the other. We anchor there.



The next day is our third day of very overcast and misty weather, and it looks like we have another week of this weather to go at least. Although we try and stay active each day, we are not doing a lot of exercise. I can feel my back seizing up and my sugar levels are rising.



Weather forecasts announce on-going wet weather as well as some strong SW winds, except for a short two day window of easterlies in the next couple of days. East or northeast is what we need to get down to Port Davey. However getting ready for a departure means returning to Strahan from wherever we are, topping up our water and fuel, reprovisioning the boat and doing a round of laundry. And then it requires positioning ourselves for an exit by going out to Pilot's Bay, just on the outside of Hells Gates or at the Back Channel to wait for the right time to leave. So we need two days to get that organised. Everything has to be planned well in advance.

It goes without saying that we are not ready to leave yet. So we will let this window go. We also want to go up the Gordon River. Macquarie Harbour and the west coast are difficult spots to get to and we are unlikely to come back here again in the short term, so we want to make the most of it and see as much as we can during this voyage. But it also means accepting that we could be here for much longer than we would like. As Greg puts it, we might have to do another lap of Macquarie Harbour before we can get out!

So for now the plan is to continue our exploration of various anchorages around the harbour, then go as far up the Gordon River as possible to slowly make our way back down river over a few days.

The morning of the 14<sup>th</sup> march is very overcast and misty, but it makes for atmospheric photography. We dinghy ashore to what is described in the guides as the remnants of an old railway. We spot the rails going from the bush into the water, but the scrub is too thick and wet from the rain to go and search for other artifacts. The views across the inlet with curly reeds in the foreground and the clouds reflected on the water are beautiful and otherworldly. It is a very serene spot... and it feels like we are the only ones here.

Later in the morning, we weigh anchor again, headed for the Kelly Basin. As we motor out of Birchs Inlet, I spot a net spread right across the entrance. It is really hard to see and we just veer off at the last minute to avoid running over it. There are no red or white floats to warn of its presence, just tiny little brown floats on the surface. People who laid this deserve to lose their net!







The **Kelly Basin** is another beautiful inlet with the ruins of the mining town of Pillinger, which was set up in 1898 by the North Lyell Company as its port. Some thousand people lived there. It only lasted ten years then was abandoned. We arrive in very overcast conditions, but the sun later comes out and the atmosphere changes dramatically. We anchor off a ruined jetty.



There are a couple of sites in the northwest corner of the Basin with two little inlets and you can walk from one to the other but we dinghy between them. There are ruined jetties and wharfs, remnants of a railway line, some rolling stock and equipment from mining times, a few brick kilns and boilers. These are really interesting spots. So we spend the afternoon ashore, looking around. It

is great to stretch our legs too. On one of the poles from an old jetty, we are lucky to see a stunning Azure Kingfisher, who obliges by taking different poses and looking right at us, and we spot a few Green Rosellas. It is a really good, varied day. We end up moving the boat from Pillinger to St Ledger Point, at the entrance of the Basin for the night, where it is deeper and we may be able to take Bengie for a walk on the little beach later.







I reflect on our time with the four of us on board. We have been sailing now for just over two weeks. When we are on passages, it seems the guys enjoy the experience, although big crossings can be a little long for them and for us too. But we enjoy watching the coast, the wildlife, feeling the movement of the boat and sailing by wild places.

There is a simplicity in our daily life. We enjoy basic things. There is the morning routine: Greg likes his shave, Wade likes his jump in at the back of the boat for a wash, as we all do, although the girls tend to ease themselves down the ladder gently! We check the weather, emails when we have internet coverage, read up on places we want to visit. There is the brewed coffee routine when the boat takes this enticing aroma. We decide on our dinner meal and what delights to concoct, and take turns cooking, even if it is with a reduced pantry – the limitations of life afloat. And once we run out of favourite supplies, we have to make do with whatever is left. At least here we can return to Strahan if need be, but that won't be the case once we leave for Port Davey – no shop there for a few weeks!

When we are anchored and the weather allows, we dinghy ashore and explore as much as possible. We are all normally fairly active and need the regular exercise too.

Life with the four of us on board when they are limited opportunities to go ashore imposes a slower rhythm and it can get a little bit tedious at times. But we read, write, play the ukelele, play games on our devices, plot our next move...

Unavoidably, there are little flare ups here and there, mostly to do with space and personal habits, but we are learning about each others' idiosyncrasies and adjusting accordingly.

A 38ft cat is not very big for four adults. There is not a lot of space to spread out and leaving things lying around can quickly turn the boat into a mess – one of my pet hates. Common spaces like the galley and saloon have to be kept tidy. I am a bit obsessive about that and probably drive our friends crazy.

While at Kelly Basin, we decide to follow a track along the old railway line from West Pilinger to the Bird River Bridge. Greg does not come as his knee is still sore from our walk to the ocean a few days ago. But the rest of us are keen for some exercise and head off. It is a 15 kms return walk on a very gentle incline, through temperate rainforest, tree ferns and moss. It can be muddy at times with lots of tree roots that make it slippery, but it is reasonably level.



which becomes a torrent with rapids. We get to the bridge which is still in good shape across the Bird River, and there is a shelter, perfect for our lunch. By two o'clock we are ready to retrace our steps back to the dinghy.

It is a very pleasant walk. We meet up with the guys from another cat, Catscan, who are intending to go up the Gordon, like everyone else on boats in Macquarie Harbour. We suspect it will be a bit crowded there, and also at Port Davey as everybody we talk to is waiting for the right weather to head south!

We are gone for 4<sup>1/2</sup> hours, including the dinghy ride, and lunch on the go. The track passes through beautiful lush vegetation, with birches, tree ferns, mossy patches; in some places you can really see the cut through the hills the railway used to go through and with the verdant vegetation it looks like we are walking through tunnels of greenery. Eventually the railway path joins next to the tannin stained river





We get back to Take It Easy by four. Greg is noodling on the ukelele. He announces he has been up to some mischief while alone on board. "I could do anything I want – listen to loud music, eat what I want... I was looking for mischievous things to do. I charged every device I could think of, even though it was overcast, then I raided the biscuit tin!" Bloody hell, can't leave him alone!



## Up the Iconic Gordon River

**W**e wake up to brilliant sunshine after a clear night lit up by the Milky Way. It is very cold, about 6<sup>o</sup> as we emerge. We take Bengie for a wander on the little beach, then after breakfast the next phase of our adventure begins: we are going up the Gordon River. It feels special to start the journey up this iconic wild river. It is picture perfect with clear blue skies. It is nearly too perfect: not a cloud in the sky, with mirror image reflections in the normally tannin rich Gordon River.

We have lunch there tied up to the tiny jetty, with two thirds of the boat sticking out at the back. We are waiting for “Harbour Master”, a large commercial cruiser full of tourists which went up river an hour ago, to come back down so we can visit the next spot at **Heritage Landing**, the furthest the commercial boats go. We enjoy a rainforest walk on a timber walkway after the big boat has taken away its load of tourists.



The river is broad and deep, straight at the start, but then the meanders begin, and it narrows little by little as we go upstream. Every corner is a surprise and stunning sight. It might be reflections, the play of greens from the rainforest going right down to the water, a few clouds building. We stop at a couple of spots along the way: one is **Boom Camp**, a very well maintained shack sometimes used by trout fishermen.



The interpretive signs along the boardwalk are quite informative. We see lots of huon pines, including a cut showing the tight grain of this beautiful timber. And we see fungi, different ferns, and even a gathering of little black caterpillars.

Some have lots of dew caught in their hair. I take a shot of that with the Canon, while Greg takes a couple of really close macro images with his Olympus. The little beasties look like they are wearing red desert boots! We love macros for the surprises they reveal!







As we emerge from our walk, we realise the weather has changed dramatically and become very overcast. It even rains a little as we continue upstream quite a few miles to **Lake Fiddler**.

It is a stop that is difficult to identify, but we manage to spot a tell tale 'pad on a log' around a bend in the river. We anchor, dinghy ashore for the very short walk to a Meromictic Sulphide Lake. The lake has a layer of fresh water overlying an anoxic salt water layer, with unusual microbiological communities. At first glance, Lake Fiddler does not look any different from any other lake. But we had to find out a bit more about what made it unusual.

Most deep lakes follow a seasonal cycle of stratification and complete mixing, through wind and temperature, but a meromictic lake has layers of water that do not mix and becomes stratified into layers. The lack of mixing between different layers creates radically different environments for organisms to live in. The bottom layer receives very little oxygen from the atmosphere. Very few organisms can live in such an oxygen poor environment. One exception is purple sulphide bacteria.

So having seen Lake Fiddler, found out about it, we get back on board, and decide it is a good spot for the night and settle in. The stillness of that lonely, beautiful location really is special.



Mist is building at both bends ahead and behind us. It is an eerie, beautiful feel as the fog slowly envelops us, but not before we manage to see and photograph a couple of Platypuses... first time ever in the wild. What a thrill! That is when you know you are on a wild river!



There is not a breath of wind. The mirror-like river reflects the clouds, the surrounding hills, and the colours of the sunset. It is such an otherworldly feel. We are so lucky to witness this spectacle and enjoy the serenity of this wilderness. The boat is like a ghost. It is magical.

The water temperature has dropped from 18° at Kelly Basin to 11.6° here... no takers for an evening dip... and the air temperature is down also. We pile up the layers and settle in for the night. We go to bed to the sound of light rain.





The next morning is sunny but very cold. Only Greg is game enough to take a plunge, the rest of us settle for cat washes! It is foggy, but with the sun the river beckons and we weigh anchor before 9.00am. Again the mist slowly lifting, the sunrays,

the reflections, are all a source of wonder. What a beautiful, beautiful place.

We motor past **Marble Cliffs**, perfectly reflected in the water and our wake forms marbling patterns in the water; another little surprise and the reward of

getting up and going before the wind picks up.





We approach a little island in a gorge, called Butler Island. This islet was made famous by those who protested against the damming of the Gordon and Franklin rivers. It is really quite spacy ... perfect reflections, mist on the surface. As we steer the boat to one side, we are not totally sure where the foggy reflection begins and misty reality ends!

We are so glad to have begun early this morning, before the breeze started picking up, sending ripples through the glassy water of the Gordon.

It adds so much interest: there is marbling in the water from rocks, greenery and our wake, and wispy mist still hangs over the river and in the hills. Had we left our departure till later, we would have missed out on these beautiful sights.



We make it in sunshine to **Sir John Falls**. Venture, the mono we met at Strahan, is moored at the jetty and signals us to tie up to a small floating jetty behind them. It is too small to stay there, but they are about to leave the jetty at Sir John Falls, to move just a hundred meters back to Warners'

Landing. We invite them on board for coffee, then they are on their way and we take their spot. Once settled, we go and explore ashore. It is a very civilised mooring spot, with decking right up to a nice waterfall, and we follow a walking track along the bank of the river to a hut and small beach.



With the sun out and the northerly blowing a little, it is quite warm and we all enjoy a brief dip in the very refreshing river. It is also a good time to bake! We have run out of bread and starting to run low on fresh food. I decide it is time to make a loaf.

Meanwhile Venture comes back from a foray up river and announces it is too deep to anchor near Big Eddy – over 20 meters - and you have to tie up to trees. It is OK in calm weather, but not with a gale warning. They also tell us that dinghying further up to the junction between the Gordon and the Franklin Rivers requires a big engine to get up the two sets of rapids. They have a 10 HP outboard, and could not get up, ours is 2.5 HP. No hope! It is also very silty and muddy, and their attempt at wading up only gets them covered with leeches! Food for thought for us, who were thinking of venturing further up river to Big Eddy and anchoring there! Terry and Dave have decided to start motoring back down river and to stop where we spent last night. We wave them au revoir.

It is all go with the social thing. A few hours later, Catscan, the catamaran that has been following us for a while, arrives and anchors opposite Warners' Landing. Heather and Paul dinghy over and announce they have gear problems. They were going to moor at the jetty at Warners' Landing, but will be far too exposed there once the wind picks up, so Wade helps them beach Catscan on the little sandy strip around from where we are. They all come back later for a cuppa and a chat... Greg and Ann now get the gist of life at anchorages! Meanwhile our cake supplies are running ever lower. Might have to start baking that too!

The evening is quiet but lit up: Milky Way in the sky, glow worms along the track. No photos to show for it, but rather special nevertheless. The weather forecast announces strong wind and heavy rain for the next two days, starting during the night. So we have the clears on and everything that might fly is put away. We have also been warned of rats visiting at night. Venture told us about it, we have read it in the Kayakers' logbook, and even Radio Hobart confirmed it with an offhand comment when we told them our position with 4 POBs and 1 CAT! "A cat on board, that

should keep the rats at bay!" Charming, so close all hatches! We can sort of cope with rats on deck, but not inside the cabin! And we all know that Bengie would probably be scared of rats as big as her, so not much hope for help from our ship's cat.

We do hear the sound of scurrying on deck in the middle of the night, then the wind picks up and the rain starts. It's howling up high in the trees, but not too bad where we are. Still Wade and I are both lying in bed awake, listening.

By early morning on Sunday 18 March, the river level has gone up. Wade and I get up in between rain showers and put on the barge boards for more protection against the jetty. The boat is covered with leaf litter from myrtle beech, but surprisingly no calling cards from the rats.

Our next day is spent quietly reading, writing, enjoying a few bits of sunshine in between rain showers. This will be our lot for the next two days of bad weather. We may be able to motor back out and return to Strahan on Tuesday. The good thing: our water tanks are now full!

On Monday 19<sup>th</sup> March, things start getting exciting. It is a very busy night with much rain and gale force wind, which means the Gordon River is rising. Wade is up every couple of hours adjusting the barge boards and fenders, as we come further and further up the jetty poles.

By the middle of the night the bottom deck of the jetty is under water and by morning so is the top part. The river has risen at least a meter. We anxiously watch as very large logs come down the river which is flowing quickly.



With all the logs and the the gusty NW blowing at 40 knots in the morning, we don't really want to move down river straight away. The wind is supposed to moderate a little, down to 30 knots and swinging to the west in the afternoon, and the rain is supposed to decrease.

We are watching the river level closely. Our options are to stay at the jetty if we can, move to the floating jetty if the water level rises too much, get off all together and make our way down river if all else fails. With the numerous trees coming down, the third option is our least preferred alternative as it is dangerous. At least if we stay here, we are relatively safe.

We discuss all our observations together, as we want everybody to understand our thinking. It has always been our belief that it is best to share thoughts, options, information. Each person can express their concerns, their own points of view and ideas. In the end the decision as to what happens rests with the skipper, but the discussion can allay some fears.

One of the things that are particularly evident here is that we each handle the stress of being in a potentially dangerous situation differently. It is obvious Greg and Ann are very uncomfortable and

worried, and so are Wade and I. And as owners of the boat, the two of us are accountable for keeping all of us safe. In situations like these, we really feel the weight of that responsibility.

I reflect on how Wade and I handle stressful situations. We talk things through, evaluate options, try to think of all the what ifs, decide what looks

like the preferable option, then watch quietly, frequently checking things out. But in this situation, we also have to contend with Greg and Ann's reactions and anxieties. Greg's way of keeping his concerns in check is to gather data: lots of measuring and photographing of the water level, lots of calculations: the rate of rise of the river, the number of logs careering down the river, the time taken for a log to move from the bend upstream to the side of the boat... interesting details at times, but not always what we need to stay calm ourselves.





It is an anxious wait as we keep watching our markers sink deeper, at 3cm/hour, and numerous large logs float by. None of them come close to the boat, staying in the middle of the river, although some swing around in an eddy a few meters away. The level keeps going up and we are at risk of floating off the pylons in the middle of the night if it keeps climbing at this rate, unless we move. We decide to reposition the boat while we can to the floating jetty. It is noon. The boys don the wetsuits and then wade in the water up to mid thigh, dragging the boat forward, to take the mooring lines to the tall poles the jetty slides up and down on, rather than the dodgy cleats on the jetty itself.

We are as organised as can be and in a reasonably sheltered spot, and can only hope the jetty poles will hold.

At least if all hell breaks loose, the crew is safe, can get ashore and take shelter in the hut. We have our sat phone to call for help and our grab bag at the ready.

As we wonder how Catscan is going, tied up to the trees, the catamaran appears, motoring up towards us. We later find out that with the rising water they were getting closer and closer to the trees on the banks where they had beached themselves, and were doing some damage to their boat, so they let go of the ropes. Before anchoring, they came up to see what was going on with us. They go back to anchor and retrieve their ropes. They are intending to then head off.

We share our intentions, which are to stay put if possible for a day or two until the conditions are less hazardous - the number of

trees floating down at speed being our main concern.

We also wonder where the logs will end up. They could easily pile up in the river bends, against little islands and shallow banks, and block navigation. By 4pm the water level is up further. It is nearly up by 2 meters.

By 10pm it is dark, the wind is somewhat lighter, and the river seems to have stopped rising. Wade is however more comfortable sleeping in the saloon and waking up every two hours to check the lines!



Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> March is an all together different day when we wake up. Wade has kept an eye on the ropes, waking up every two hours to make adjustments as the waters were receding.

It is sunny, very cold, and the lower jetty deck is surfacing! The river has dropped by one meter, amazingly quick! It still has another 50cm to a meter to go, but things are looking up.

We haven't seen a big tree trunk coming down for a while and can safely come down the river. We feel relieved and elated, raring to go. There is a sense of excitement that we have come through unscathed. After breakfast, it is time to release the mooring lines slowly, and let the wind push us off the jetty.



I jump ashore to check out the waterfall and little stream that goes into the Gordon. The stream is covered with foam and the waterfall is much larger than when we first arrived!

## Back to Strahan

**W**e motor off and start on our way downstream at 10.00am. We are all keeping a keen eye ahead for nasty logs. I am steering us in between the twigs and the odd branch, but the big logs seem to have disappeared. The river is flowing fast, probably 3+ knots through the narrows.

As we get downstream and the river widens, we see less debris and the flow is slower. We are going at 5 or 6 knots speed with the engines on

Our intention is to get back to Strahan late this afternoon. We enjoy a fast passage sailing the length of Macquarie Harbour, doing 9s and 10s! it is great fun and great relief.

We have also moved on mentally to the next stage of our voyage. Most of the tree trunks seem to have disappeared, and some are against the banks of the river, but we do not see any log jam nor lots of branches at the entrance. May be they have been collected?



3500 revs, rather than 7+ knots when we first started. It is funny, although the scenery as we come down is nice, it is not as spectacular since the wind makes lots of ripples on the water, with less reflections.

It is just before 2pm when we exit the river and are back in Macquarie Harbour.

Sailing freely gives us a great feeling of speed and release, especially after the last two days of tension.

After a busy day of chores which also happens to be Ann's birthday, we celebrate with a nice pub dinner and bubbly. Our celebrations are as much about Ann's 61<sup>st</sup>, as they are about escaping from the Gordon River and being ready for the next phase to Port Davey.

## Bound for Port Davey

**W**e head off on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> March. It is another one of those days we know is committal. But the forecast is fine, with light easterlies and northeasterlies predicted. So we take the plunge!

Passing through Hells Gates in calm conditions again is a relief. The light and clouds in the sky make for a spectacular exit.

We look back at this stunning region, and think ourselves lucky to have experienced it in all its moods. We are motor sailing, and we enjoy an easy, uneventful day in about 2m swell – a gentle rhythm and movement of the boat. The coast is quite beautiful: a few rocky islands, some sand dunes. We even recognise the spot we walked to from Betsy Bay, where Wadie took a dip.



*Hells Gates, or Macquarie Head with its lighthouse.*



*Cape Sorell, the highest lighthouse in the Southern hemisphere*

We left Strahan at about 9am and passed through the Heads at 11.00am. Five hours later, we reach Point Hibbs, where we intend to stop for the night. A large pod of dolphins escorts us in – magic!



We are not sure which side we will stay at, but decide to try behind **Hibbs Pyramid**, an aptly named rock near the shore. There is a little bit of swell, but it is not too

uncomfortable. The water is crystal clear, a teal colour which is rather nice after the tannin stained Macquarie Harbour, and the temperature is appealing too at 17.2°, which is a welcome change after the Gordon River! We all take a dip at the back of the boat... After all this is the



Southern Ocean and we just have to do this! It does not feel that balmy though!



Sunset is brilliant, with Hibbs Pyramid in silhouette.

The next morning, we set off at first light. Ann points out that our pyramid now looks like the profile of a gorilla!



Our passage to Port Davey is one of those great runs when the ocean is calm, the breeze is strong enough to sail at a good pace, and the sun is out. We use all our sails, bar the spinnaker. The staysail is proving to be a really useful sail now that it has been cut properly. With it as well as the jib, we gain half a knot to a knot speed. In fact all our sails, despite having been cut smaller than the originals, are performing really well. Considering we are overloaded, we are sailing better than ever. Well cut sails with a radial construction makes a huge difference.



The number of fishing boats we come across is surprising, and we keep a sharp eye out for the many craypot lines they have set. There are several off Nye Bay and Mulcahy Bay which are both quite deep. Some of these would probably offer some shelter in the right conditions, although the swell is always there, even on a calm day, with waves crashing along the shores. As they say in the guide books, these can only be described as West Coast anchorages – very exposed, with weather changes that can happen in the blink of an eye!





From Strahan down, the coast is low and scrubby with mountains way in the background, but once past iconic Low Rocky Point, about half way down to Port

Davey, the tall ranges are right in the foreground and are spectacular. We all comment that many of these would not have been climbed by anyone, nor named! There are no tracks, no roads, no habitations.

The South West

Wilderness really is impressive and this is by far the most magnificent part of the West Coast.

The closest we get to Port Davey the more wildlife we see: lots of Shy Albatrosses, but also the much less frequently seen Wandering and Buller's albatrosses, a first for us. And of course there are other sea birds, several pods of dolphins which are busy fishing, as well as a few seals.



Buller's Albatrosses

## Arrival in Port Davey

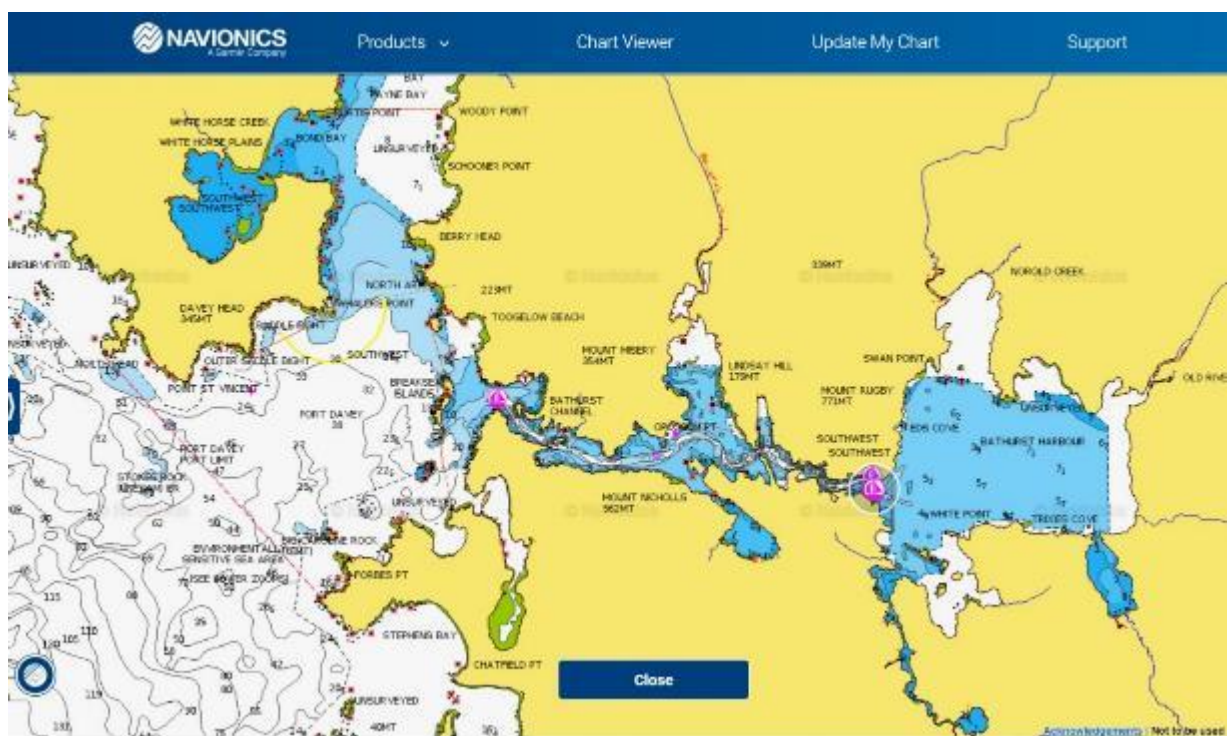
It takes another hour once we are officially within Port Davey, to get inside Breakwater Island. There are three or four boats at Spain Bay that probably came up from Recherche. We keep going to **Bramble Cove** where three other yachts are anchored, including Venture. So much for reaching a remote place... So many boats! As soon as the anchor is down, we get ready for a walk up Mt Milner, a steepish but short walk that offers great views of Port Davey and the start of the Bathurst Channel.

More boats are arriving. There are two cats entering Port Davey, probably the two Lagoon catamarans which got in touch in Strahan via the website. There are from Queensland and following our blog and magazine articles. And then more yachts and a fishing boat appear, light planes are flying over, and it feels like our wilderness is not so wild anymore. We feel somewhat disappointed to find ourselves in a crowd in this so called remote place.



*Inside Port Davey, looking towards Payne Bay*

Here is the overall chart of this World Heritage Wilderness area. You come in to Port Davey, the waterways on the left, open to the Southern Ocean. This year, we have not spent time in the Port Davey waterways, as we had done a fair bit of this during our last visit. Instead we choose to go into the Bathurst Channel and Bathurst Harbour.





*Bramble Cove from Mt Milner*



## Down the Bathurst Channel

It rains overnight. We laze in bed for a while. There is something really cosy about staying in our nest, knowing it is grim out there, yet being comfortable reading. But eventually we get up.

What a gloomy view out of the cockpit, such a different mood to yesterday! We are glad to have climbed Mt Milner while the weather was good and we had clear visibility. It would have been such a shame to have come all this way and see nothing before several days of rain!

With the forecast predicting a change to the NW then SW, we need to leave Bramble Cove. We should try to get somewhere before hoards of boats move also. **Wombat Cove** has appeal. It is small, we have never anchored there before, and there is a walk to the top of Mt Misery. We would dearly like to be anchored by ourselves. This is after all a major reason for coming to these wild places! So before too many boats motor down the Bathurst Channel, we make our move. The Channel is about 7 miles long and very deep in places – down to 34 meters. Shallow coves of 3 to 4 meter depth come off it.



Motoring in the rain is not pleasant, nor very easy for visibility, but the Navionics charts on the Raymarine help a lot. When we reach the entrance to Wombat Cove, it is free of any boat.

It is a good opportunity for Ann and I to set ourselves up on the sugarscoops and clean them, which takes a while.

We see quite a few yachts, including Venture, motoring past, but none come to Wombat Cove.

Yeah!



*Wombat Cove and Mt Misery looming in the background*

It takes us a while to get sorted. We come uncomfortably close to one side of the cove, turn the boat around, down the anchor and back onto the shore, then Wade takes the dinghy to tie us stern to shore to some tea trees. It is a lot of work, but from experience, once all organised, you are very safe and tucked in, regardless of wind conditions. In small anchorages, it really is the best way to go, especially if storm conditions are forecast.

While getting us tied down, Wade saw lots of mussels and collects enough for a feed tonight. The rain has stopped by then and the sun comes out.



Our second day in Wombat Cove delivers typical Port Davey weather: strong gusty wind, rain, cold, gloomy conditions. We probably have another one or two days of this, then better weather.

Surprisingly the water is not so cold, and we all take a dip in the morning. But it is hard to warm up during the day as the temperature drops and we all pile up the layers.

Wade pins our port side out with another line attached to the Fortress anchor from our bow. This helps to hold us square to the shore and keeps us in place when the gusts pick up from our port beam. They come in waves down the cove and there is a lot of chop in the Bathurst Channel, but we are tucked in and reasonably comfortable.

We see a few monos go past, and a small cat even comes into Wombat Cove, anchors awfully close to us briefly, but soon decides to go elsewhere to our relief. As Greg puts it, he must have felt the vibes! This person has been a chatterbox on the radio with another boat for the past two days. It sounds like they are waiting for a window to get away and looking for a spot to shelter. We are glad they decide to go elsewhere. There is nothing we dislike more than people crowding us in a small anchorage when there are plenty of other spots to choose from. And this is even more the case in a remote wilderness area.

In between rain showers, we have small bursts of sunshine which come with rainbows.





Another day, another deluge. It has been raining heavily for two days and two nights, we are on our third day in Wombat Cove, cabin bound. It is also very windy, 40 knot SW. But on the bright side we are not threatened to float off our pylons and we are not being attacked by tree trunks! And we have views, when the hills are not clouded over.

Still, there are only so many books we can read quietly, and so many episodes of Breaking Bad we can watch before cabin fever sets in! The highlights of the day are all to do with food: coffee time, lunch, nibbles and dinner! We try to concoct tasty meals and are doing pretty well. The low light is the lack of exercise. Our backs are sore, we stiffen up and move like little oldies. Greg has an exercise app on his phone and we gradually all take part in a workout in the cockpit. If only it would stop raining for long enough for us to take a walk, even a soggy one.

Last time we were here, we had a bout of bad weather too. It goes with the territory! Wade and I had limited time to explore the area and figured we should go walking regardless, which ended up being steep bush bashes through soggy shrubbery right up to our thighs. We are not on a schedule anymore and with time on our hands we do not feel like repeating this little folly. Our friends have no desire to embark on demanding bushwalks either. So we will wait for better conditions to venture outside.

It is funny, Greg has been wondering about “critical paths” to us staying out in the wilderness:

- Electricity - tick, we have solar and wind generation and our gauges show we are on full power.
- Water - tick, we are collecting more rainwater than we can store.
- Food - tick, that’s why we are low on the waterline!
- Clean clothes - tick, we have a washing machine.
- Really the only weak link is the supply of toilet paper! We should have bought some more. A dozen rolls will last us two or three weeks. So we are on ration with that. Wade threatens us with a bottle brush, and there is always a soap up at the back of the boat!

So all in all, we are self-sufficient and doing rather well.

Bengie is happy too, getting lots of cuddles from everybody. She is comfortable sitting on any lap, a first with friends on board. Mind you, Ann and Greg are playing with her, and give her tasty bits when they cook, which helps win them brownie points. A warm furry beast on your lap is welcome when it is chilly. We are quite impressed that our ship’s cat is obviously totally comfortable with Ann and Greg. And our friends are quite tickled to be ‘accepted’ and treated as part of the furniture!



Day four of our stay at Wombat Cove is a brighter one. The rain has nearly stopped, so has the wind, and we can see the top of the hills! So the decision is made to get ready for a bush walk. We are not convinced we can make it to the top of Mount Misery, but we have our sights set on Mount Stoke, a less demanding climb. We dinghy to the head of the cove, look around for a while for a

possible way to get onto the hillside, and find some little wombat trail. We climb slowly along a ridge.

The ground is very soggy, with little rivulets dribbling down the mountain. The heath and buttongrass come up to our knees, but overall it is manageable, especially with boots and gaiters.

There are a few light showers, however most of the time there is a bit of sun. The views as we climb are spectacular and the atmosphere is very moody with golden light on the hills, broody clouds in the sky and shimmering water in the Bathurst Channel and Port Davey entrance. We can even see the ocean and islands in the distance. From time to time a brief shower obscures the landscape.







The panoramic views with the overcast sky make for very moody photography and are well worth the effort. After days of being cooped up on board, the physical exercise is very welcome, even if we come back feeling stiff a few hours later.

As soon as we are back on Take It Easy, we untie our cat's cradle, weigh anchor and motor down to **Casilda Cove**, a few miles further along the Bathurst Channel. We are lucky to find the cove empty and again decide to tie ourselves back to the shore. As we approach, we see a quoll!

Once organised, we all take a dip – the water here is much colder, only 14.4°, and not as salty. But after a bushwalk, we grin and bear it! Hot toddies are called for together with nibbles to

warm up and celebrate a good day.

From Casilda Cove, we have a couple of walks we can tackle. One is up Balmoral Hill and is described in the guidebooks as the “best value for effort climb for the views over Bathurst Channel” and our anchorage. Something to look forward to for the next day.



Although it rains overnight, we wake up to a sunny and very still morning! The reflections are amazing. We think ourselves lucky to be by ourselves in this beautiful anchorage.





But this is short lived. Late in the morning, another yacht arrives and gives us plenty to observe and complain about! For a start they drop their anchor right in front of us to the point where Greg asks “should we put fenders out”, and I get out and say to them “you’re a bit close, guys!” Not that it does much...

They have this weird way of tying up to shore, dragging the rope and boat with a dinghy whose engine keeps stalling, instead of taking the rope to shore then taking up the slack from their boat. That is the trouble with short sets of ropes! Eventually they organise themselves. Then another yacht arrives and those two end up rafting up to each other. Interesting move, but at least it takes them away from us! And the third boat in their party arrives, and Casilda Cove is full!

While all of this is going on we get on with chores. We have a load of laundry to do and a large bucket of mussels to clean, collected before we left Wombat Cove. Just as we finish our chores and think of going for a walk, we notice our battery level is down to red. That is not good! Last time we checked was yesterday afternoon and it was full. The only thing different about today is the laundry operations. We turn all power off: fridge, freezer, devices charging, sump and water pumps.

We have had signs on and off that something is not right with the batteries. Back in Port Phillip Bay we had a couple of occasions when the autopilot was giving "low power" messages. We feel restless and uneasy.

It is raining, windy high in the trees... There won't be any walking this afternoon. And the cockpit looks like a Chinese laundry.



Wade digs out the generator from the toy cupboard and connects it to the battery charger. It starts without trouble which is amazing since we have not used it in years. That will endear us to the neighbours! A couple of hours later the battery gauge is back to full, but the amp meters shows 13.2... better than 12.9, but not quite right yet. We leave the generator running till bed time. Intermittent, unexplained drops in charge are a worry.

When we reflect on the last few days of grim weather, we realise that we have probably been producing very little power. The solar panels would only have put in a trickle, and the wind generator did not produce anything since we were tucked in against the hill with the wind passing well overhead... a trap for the unwary!

The next morning the weather is still overcast and drizzly. Our batteries are OK, but we turn the generator on again to top them up.

Greg has been unwell during the night, possibly a bad mussel from last night's dinner. The rest of us are fine and we decide to brave the weather and climb Balmoral Hill. It is a very muddy trail up the ridge. We start in a little sunshine, but it soon disappears, and sure enough, wind and rain come as we near the summit. Yet even in this weather the views are worthwhile in all directions: towards Port Davey to the West, and Bathurst Harbour to the east. The views onto the Casilda Cove anchorage are best mid way up the ridge.

The weather reigns supreme in the Port Davey and Bathurst Harbour wilderness. When you walk up the hills, the mood of the place changes quickly. One minute the sun is out, throwing a golden light over the landscape, then the clouds build, and curtains of rain drape over the hills.

The mountains disappear, you lose any sense of depth and the light changes to a steely blue-grey. Even in drizzly, overcast conditions this place is beautiful, soggy, but beautiful.



*Looking down Bathurst Channel towards Bathurst Harbour*







*Looking towards Port Davey from Balmoral Hill*



*Looking towards Horseshoe Inlet on the way down from Balmoral Hill*

## Onto Bathurst Harbour

Good Friday is a better day with some sunshine in between showers. The three boats in the Cove decide to move on and so do we. We want to see different spots and it is time to untangle our cat's cradle. Just as we get out, the two Lagoon cats are coming in. As we exit, we warn them on the radio of the many rocks in the inlet and advise them to anchor stern to, then get on our way.

We take advantage of the slightly brighter conditions to motor out to Bathurst Harbour and select **Clayton's Corner** as our anchorage. Two boats and two zodiacs are at the little jetty, so we just anchor in two meters of water and go ashore in Peasy.

There is a fair bit to see at Clayton's. There is a little house that was the home of the Clayton's family. A couple who are doing some maintenance

work are settled in there and have a lovely warm fire going! There are also a couple of walks with panoramic views of our anchorage and Bathurst Harbour.



We choose to climb up to Mt Beattie. The track is terribly muddy through the tea tree forest, and once out in the open moorland, the path resembles a rivulet. The views are stunning, but the track is unpleasant and gumboots would have been better than hiking shoes! Greg and Ann give up two thirds of the way up and go back to the house. Wade and I keep going.

The further up we go the more blowy it becomes, to the point where we have to watch our balance in the gusts as we try and avoid the worst of the endless puddles. As we reach the summit we have panoramic views of the Bathurst Channel, the Harbour and the Melaleuca Inlet. But it is short lived as the rain comes in curtains from the West.

We race our way back down, skidding along the muddy sections and trying to pick a path through the quagmire and rivulets flowing down the mountain. It would be a bad thing to fall on our bottom!

We get totally soaked and very muddy, get back to TIE, drop Greg and Ann off then go and say a quick hello to Roo Bin Esque and Temptress, the two 40ft Lagoon cats. They follow our blog, so we feel we need to go and say hi. But it is a very brief hello as we are both shivering. We find out they did not like Casilda Cove, with Temptress hitting some rocks as it ventured too far into the inlet, and they came back to Clayton's Corner where they had already spent a few days. They were not prepared to tie to shore.

Back on board, it takes for ever to warm up after this arctic walk!



*Bathurst Harbour, the Celery Top Islands and Melaleuca Inlet, with Clayton's Corner anchorage*



*From the top of Mt Beattie, the Bathurst Channel with Mt Rugby dominating and Iola Cove in the foreground*



*Bathurst Channel from the top of Mt Beattie*

The next outing on the following day is a trip to

**Melaleuca Inlet.** The inlet extends for three miles and leads to a lagoon. It is very shallow in places and stakes mark where to pass with the boat. Unlike last time we were here, we decide not to go all the way up the Melaleuca Creek and instead we tie to the shore just before we reach the lagoon and junction with the creek. Up the creek is a small pontoon for dinghies and tour zodiacs.



*Coming in to moor at the pylons before we get to the lagoon*

The Melaleuca Inlet is a busy little place. There is a small settlement at the end where the fabled Deny King used to mine tin. The settlement consists of a bushwalkers' hut, the National Park hut manned by two volunteers, and the original residence of three generations of the King family. There is a small airstrip and an alluvial tin mine which is still in operation.



*The lagoon at Melaleuca Inlet*

We manage to enjoy a dryish day there, enough to have a good look around comfortably. We are incredibly lucky to see critically endangered orange-bellied parrots. A male and a female together with firetail finches are at the feeding station at the bird hide. There are only 14 of these rare birds here.

The Orange-bellied Parrots like to feed on fresh new button grass and there is a practice of mosaic burning to encourage new growth. It makes amazing patterns in the meadows and on the hills.







*TIE moored at one of two sets of rubber pylons in the Melaleuca Inlet*



*On the way back from Melaleuca to Clayton's Corner, with Mount Rugby dominating*



The company Par Avion flies very small aircrafts – Cessnas - to bring tiny groups of two to four tourists at a time, who are then taken for a quick zap around Bathurst Harbour and Port Davey by zodiac. Some stay for a few hours and fly back to Hobart, others camp in the huts for a few days. It is a surprisingly busy little aerodrome. While we were there, we saw four planes fly in and out.

In fact the whole area of Port Davey-Bathurst Harbour seems to have become quite popular. More and more people come to experience this unique region. There are five of us anchored at Clayton's Corner... We guess because of the weather, there are few spots offering reasonable shelter and this is the most popular.

It is a bit shocking to find ourselves surrounded by other boats in such a location. Having said that, we enjoy a social sundowner at the Clayton's Hut, with the entire fleet joining in for a couple of hours of chatting. It is nice to meet everybody.



*The views from the Clayton's Corner anchorage*

Easter Sunday is the worst day to date, with incessant rain, heavy at times. We are onto our 8<sup>th</sup> day of bad weather, and can't see the end of it! The forecast announces four or five more days of this. It is unbelievable. The local Tassie guys were saying last night that this is very unseasonable weather. Normally March/April are very settled, ideal conditions to spend time in this wilderness. But instead, we are getting typical start of winter conditions with persistent rain and strong winds. We are all weather bound and it is not a lot of fun.

After breakfast, Wade starts the generator and does two rounds of laundry – not exactly a good drying day, but the cockpit is under cover and it is time to wash our muddy clothes! Meanwhile Greg and Ann read, I write the journal and go through our photos. As for Bengie, she is cold and bothered by the generator noise, so decides to hide under our bed quilt. That kills the day for all of us and we pray for milder weather.



No walking nor venturing to a different anchorage today! We had planned to move to North River in the northwestern part of Bathurst Harbour for a change of scenery. But none of us are interested in making a move in these miserable conditions. Instead, we start the morning with a warm shower each in the bathroom... might as well be wallies with the fresh water which we are collecting in great quantities.

However no change in weather is forthcoming. Several days later, we are still weather bound. We have changed anchorage as Clayton's Corner was not offering the best of holding and was too crowded with some eight boats there. We moved to Kings Cove, just underneath Mount Beattie, and there we have stayed for several nights.

Cabin fever is building, the food supplies are going down, the loo paper reserve is dangerously low.

We are finding it hard to be cooped up inside, unable to get physical exercise. There are only so many books we can read, and articles I can write! These are conditions when you feel the weight of being four adults on board, weather bound.

There is nowhere to go, the rain is too heavy to get off the boat, and the only place to withdraw from our group is in our bedroom.

We cope with this mostly but at times you become impatient, find it difficult and want to escape... at least I do. We are pretty sure Greg is finding it quite tedious too. He is so used to being free to come and go at home, kite surfing most days... So he is most definitely out of his comfort zone and badly missing physical activities.



Finally we get a reprieve on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> April, with a little less wind, and some drizzle instead of driving rain. There is even a few little bits of sunshine. All of a sudden, boats weigh anchor and there is movement in Bathurst Harbour.



There is also some hope of a short break in the weather, just before another big low for the weekend. It looks like we might make our way back to Spain Bay, ready for a release out of Port Davey on Friday. The weather gods might even be kind enough to let us make an overnight stop at New Harbour, just around from Southwest Cape.

But for now, we take Bengie to the little pebbly beach for a walk. She needs a leg stretch just as much as we do and enjoys the frolic. There are traces of animals: little digs, a small dog looking scat which could well be that of a quoll or a Tassie devil. Bengie sniffs it and growls!



On our return, I express the wish to weigh anchor and move somewhere else for a change of scenery. We end up motoring to **Moulters Inlet**, a spot we wanted to see at the eastern end of Bathurst Harbour.

It is a pretty anchorage in a shallow basin surrounded by tall hills. A trimaran is anchored at the narrow entrance. We go a little further and settle in the middle of the inlet in 2.7m of water. It is very peaceful, otherworldly, one of these primal places, and so serene after days of wind and rain. What a nice find.



## Preparing to leave

**T**hursday 5 April marks the start of our departure from the Port Davey-Bathurst Harbour wilderness.

With the forecast changed for this Thursday to 20 to 30 knot westerlies instead of 15 to 20, Wade is eager to leave early to get across the Harbour before the headwind gets too strong. Once in the Channel you are a bit less exposed, but out in the



*Bathurst Harbour, looking towards the northeast*

The reprieve in weather really was just that, a small break. But we are very glad it enabled us to come to Moulters Inlet before leaving Bathurst Harbour. This is one of the furthest anchorages in the Harbour and it has a primeaval feel. As Greg puts it, you expect to see teradactyls! The wind hums in the background, but you don't feel it in the inlet. It is as if we were in a cradle.

open it could get ugly. So we weigh anchor in the drizzle and leave.

The mist shrouds all the mountains behind us, yet the sun is trying to pass through in big rays, lighting some hill sides and not others, casting a silver line on the water, with swirling wispy clouds, patches of blue, and summits playing hide and seek with the mist. It is breathtaking. I take numerous photos, hoping one will capture this mystical landscape.



*Bathurst Harbour, looking north*



Bathurst Harbour, looking west towards Mt Rugby

Ahead of us, up the Bathurst Channel, it is raining. And yet Mt Rugby is in the sun, with only the top in misty clouds. It looks imposing as always.

Where there were many boats in Clayton's Corner and King's Cove, these anchorages are now deserted. Everybody has moved back towards Port Davey. Big exodus tomorrow! We see a few boats at Schooner Cove and Wombat Cove.



We swing past the waterfall just after Schooner for a look. There is quite a lot of water coming down as you would expect with all this rain.

We get out to check the conditions at Spain Bay. It is rock and roly and there is foam on the water. Ann describes it as scorched marshmellow. She has a way with great descriptions.

It is rock and roly out in the bay, and grim looking.

We anchor at **Spain Bay** on our own for a brief moment, then other yachts come in, including the two lagoons headed to Strahan. It is a busy bay!

We find out that TAS Maritime has been trying to contact us with an urgent message. Although we try to radio them, we can't get through. Velocity, a fishing charter boat manages to radio them, but they won't give him the message.



He kindly offers us the use of his sat phone, and we get through. It is a call from my sister Véronique, but no other information. I can't help but think something terrible has happened to my Dad, but we won't be able to find out anything until we are in Recherche! A very anxious wait follows for two days, and it is hard to keep my mind from imagining the worst and keeping my emotions under control.



## The Great Escape from Port Davey

**F**riday the 6<sup>th</sup> April is a momentous day when we all escape out of Port Davey. We are the last to leave Spain Bay, at 6.30am. A few other yachts are leaving from Bramble Cove and Schooner. The two Lagoon cats are headed north to Strahan, about nine of us are going South, to Recherche and Hobart. It is rock and rolly as we get out and thread our way through the islands, but not as rough as we expected. The sky looks tormented above the mountains. The exodus is impressive.

It is an exhilarating ride and so spectacular with South West Cape dominating in the distance. We pass a yacht, and get away from half a dozen others behind us. Tall masts and sails appear and disappear in between swell lines. The ocean is a teal colour, the sky is menacing, there are squalls out to sea that threaten to drench us and rainbows are forming. Seabirds are flying right around us. The closer we get to the Cape, the more numerous they are, soaring, banking, skimming the surface. It is a magnificent sight.



It is not until we get two or three miles offshore and are past the last of the Pyramids that the sea smooths out a little and we can sail. There is a two to three meter swell and a NW breeze. We start with the jib alone, then raise the main with one reef in it and off we go, catching up to the yachts in front.











Of all the capes we have passed in our years of sailing, South West Cape is probably the most dramatic. It is a narrow promontory jutting a long way out to sea, like a knife cutting into the ocean. It sits on the south west corner of Tasmania and you have to make a right angle turn to round it. Other capes are less sheer and tend to be a small headland along a straighter coastline that you sail along.



Having turned the corner, the dramatic coastline extends as far as the eye can see, with sheer cliffs and deep bays. By now we have the wind on our tail and have to drop the main. It is a constant thing of having to put the jib on starboard or port as the breeze switches back and forth.

It is quite physical, and all this happens in the rain. Wade and I have the full Musto gear on, while Greg and Ann are inside the cabin. No point them getting wet as well and there is nothing much they can do anyway. The wind soon lightens, and we decide this is a job for Big O. We get the spinnaker set up and launch it, as we weave our way through the Maatsuyker group of islands.

The birdlife is astounding: shearwaters in large number, no doubt gathering for a soon to happen migration north, albatrosses and giant petrels soaring, tiny Wilson's Petrels pattering on the surface.

Everywhere you look, birds are flying and you feel dizzy just watching them whiz past in all directions. We see and photograph several Wandering and Buller's Albatrosses, a first for both species for us. They are so beautiful.



*Buller's Albatross, with its grey head and black and yellow bill*



Buller's Albatross soaring in the big swell





Shortly after passing Dewitt Island, we manage to break a spinnaker block and have to douse Big O.

We replace it with the jib, but the breeze is so light that we need the engine to keep going at a decent pace. We want to reach Recherche before dark.

We eventually pass South Cape and its sheer cliffs. There are waterfalls coming off the cliffs, which is quite impressive.

Shortly after we pass South East Cape, and we turn the corner to get into **Recherche Bay**. We choose to anchor at **Cockles Creek**.



*Escapees from Port Davey in Cockle Creek*



Once in Recherche, we have internet and phone coverage, the first time in weeks! We reconnect with family and friends. The news from my sister is not good. Dad has been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and starting chemo. But at least he has not died as I feared when so much effort was put into contacting me. He is alive and choosing to fight rather than let the disease take its course, and I don't have to rush back to France – not yet anyway. I am relieved and angry at the same time. So much anxiety could have been avoided.

The next morning, we go ashore, once to take Bengie for a walk on the beach, the other to go and see the whale sculpture on the point.

It is a lifesize three months old southern right whale sculpture, a poignant reminder that whale calves once frolicked in this bay. Whalers harpooned calves first, as their distress calls kept adults close. Little wonder that whaling almost wiped out the species altogether.

Recherche Bay is pronounced Research by most Australian, the translation from the French name. French explorer Bruni D'Entrecasteaux gave the bay its name, which also happened to be that of his ship.



## Up the D'Entrecasteaux Channel

**W**e move from

Recherche Bay, a little way up the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, to **Mickeys Bay** on the Bruny Island side of the channel. Just across from Mickeys bay, you can follow a track through the bush to the Cloudy Bay Lagoon, where oysters abound. We get there at high tide unfortunately, but enjoy the walk and the views. We may return tomorrow at low tide.



*Looking towards Cloudy Bay*



*Looking into the Cloudy Bay Lagoon*



*Mickey Bay Sunset*



Our next anchorage up the D'Entrecasteaux Channel is at **Missionary Bay**, still on the Bruny Island side of the Channel. We have left the wilderness and are now seeing pastoral land, with cleared paddocks and gentler colours, although it also makes it abundantly clear how men have changed this once heavily forested land.

We are not sure what is at the bottom of Missionary Bay – not mud – may be very hard sand, as we drag anchor multiple times, a very rare thing for the Manson Supreme.

The next morning the sun is out, but there is a halo around it – a sure sign of forthcoming rain!



Our next stop is **Kettering**. Oh what a busy place! Oyster Cove Bay is absolutely packed with boats, tightly spaced moorings, and with a 20 knot northerly blowing, manoeuvring is an extremely stressful affair! There is one space alongside the public wharf, but a cruiser is sticking out a lot at one end from the side space, and the dinghy of another yacht is encroaching at the other end, so we keep going. The outside wall of the marina at the bottom of the cove is packed with yachts, and there is no space at all there. Having to move around the moorings is scary! We end up coming back to the public jetty and I do a poor job of bringing TIE in, but at least avoid the nasty bow and anchor from the cruiser. Thank god for the sacrificial rubbing strip at the bow is all I say! I have hurt my pride more than the boat, and feel quite shaken. But as friends say later when I relate the story, the only people that never have anything like this happen are those that never get their boat out of the marina! Thanks guys!

Some fellow who appears to have had a few drinks too many and watched us coming is, mumbles to Wade there is a spot on the little floating pontoon, just around the corner. He had his dinghy there occupying the spot, but is moving it! After all these emotions, we move again and take the spot. Much better than being against the concrete jetty. But I let Wadie handle the move, still too shaken to shift us.

We catch up with Wade's uncle Rupert, sailing friend De, who brings us home grown tomatoes and apples and takes us shopping for milk and bread. We have a beautiful pub meal that evening, fill up with petrol and gas the next morning, and are off again, this time in much more sedate conditions and without drama.



## A week in Hobart

**W**e head off to Hobart in drizzly conditions, but have a nice sail, goose-winged, the last one for Greg and Ann, which seems to leave Ann a little sad, but Greg relieved they are close to getting home, back to normality! It is fair enough after all this time.

With the laundry and shore facilities nearby, we spend a day doing multiple loads of washing: all the bedding, lots of clothes and wet weather gear. It goes on for ever, but after several weeks in the wilderness it is very much needed.

Greg and Ann leave us the next day to spend a couple of nights in the comfort of a hotel before



It is odd seeing populated shores as we go up the Derwent River. We go in to the Marine Authority pontoons just before Constitution Dock, on the advice of TAS Port for the night. It is another stressful 'parking' with the wind picking us up and I stuff up again – no damage, just frustration.

They open the bridge for us the next morning. Third time lucky, I manage our entry into Constitution Dock properly, bringing the boat through the narrow gap ever so slowly. It is a tight fit and you have to hug the left wall so the mast does not hit the top of the bridge, which does not open up totally vertically. We are moored along the side of the dock, on the Franklin Wharf side. Greg films the whole thing, which is kind of fun and we are able to put a link on the website.

heading back to Melbourne. After nearly 7 weeks together, it is odd to end up just the two of us and Bengie again, but we need the breather. Although we did really quite well all together, when there are four of you in the restricted boat space and at sea for so long, you always get a sense of being on top of each other. Our catamaran is not very big and you feel it most when four people are on board. We got on well, and got to know one another a lot more. But as can be expected, we all have our own habits, our own likes and dislikes, and it can be a strain to be stuck together for so long. There are times when you yearn for a bit more space, more comfort, and a break from one another. The weather made it more difficult too, when we were boat bound. But all in all we did well and remain good friends!



Constitution Dock is a busy place. The good thing about being right in the middle of town is that it is a social spot. Debbie and Peter who are following are adventures and building Easy catamaran Selah in Port Sorell just happen to come to Hobart and drop in to meet us. It is nice to talk face to face at last. They have lots of questions for us and it is interesting to reflect on what works and what does not on board. And Gerry from Aqualibrium, a Schionning catamaran built in the Gippsland Lakes who we saw in Strahan, has just pulled in and comes up to say hello.



A few days later, the two Lagoon catamarans we met in Port Davey, Temptress and Roo Bin Eske come in the pens at Elizabeth Pier! They were bound for Strahan the day we left Port Davey, got to Point Hibbs, but had to turn back the next day because of the weather conditions. More socialising, and more catamarans... They are taking over Tassie!



*Victoria Dock – Notice the snow on top of Mt Wellington!*

While in Hobart, we visit a few museums: Mona, the Maritime Museum, and our favourite the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery... Being moored right in the centre of town has its advantages. And the neighbouring docks are vibrant with their brightly coloured fishing boats. Hobart really is a beautiful town.



## Colossal Tasman Peninsula

**F**inally, on Wednesday 18 April, we call TAS Maritime to let us out of Constitution Dock. We are on the move again. Wade wanted to take the short cut through the Denison Canal at Dunally, but I would rather go the long way around and follow the spectacular south east coast for photos. So he accommodates and we take the scenic route – much longer, but so much more interesting.

Although a motor sail all the way, it feels so good to be on our way again. Even Bengie feels excited and comes out on deck, sniffing the air, looking mischeavious, and having a good old chew on the ropes.



Once out of Storm Bay, the coast around the Tasman Peninsula is really colossal with stunning rock columns towering 300m directly above the ocean. The seascape is astounding, the best we have seen to date. We are brimming with excitement and feel so lucky to be here.

The light is amazing with the afternoon sun on Cape Raoul and the ocean is rough, but remarkable with big swell and chop. The swell created from the last few days of strong wind rebounds against the tall cliffs and turns the unruly Southern Ocean into a washing machine.



*Cape Raoul with Tasman Island on the right in the distance*

These rocks are what geologists call dolerites, with a distinctively elongated shape and hexagonal columns.

Apparently dolerites form when molten rocks, pushed up from the deep underbelly of the earth, cools quickly and forms visible crystals in the rock. When the rate of cooling is just right, the rocks shrink in volume, causing the creation of cracks, which end up forming the columns. These cliffs were likely formed in the Jurassic – 185 million years ago from a massive volcanic event.

Consistent abrasion from the sea has undercut and shaped these spectacular cliffs to what we see today. The Navy might also have contributed to abrasion since at one point it used Cape Raoul columns as target practice!

You have to hang on tight as the boat wallows in all directions. It is quite uncomfortable and I feel a bit green, but the scenery is so majestic, and having chosen to come this way, there is no wimping out!

To us what is most striking about these bastions of the Tasman Peninsula is how they stand vertically in almost perfect geometric shapes, so different from the cliffs we see elsewhere, rounded and eroded by sea and wind. Sea mist and spray rise from the cliffs and as we round Cape Raoul and look back, the silhouetted cliffs in the setting sun look dark and menacing, while the ocean glitters.



A strange sight appears just a little way off the cliffs. There is some weird sea foam on the ocean which we go right through. It looks like marshmallow or maybe the “oeufs à la neige” desert my grandma used to make, I think they call

it Floating Islands here. Apparently sea foam is formed by the agitation of seawater particularly when it contains higher concentration of dissolved organic matter, such as the breakdown of algal blooms.



We make it to **Port Arthur**, Safety Beach, well before dark, but can't find a spot to anchor where we don't drag in the weed. We try somewhere different before sunset and motor opposite Port Arthur to a tiny cove with a mooring in it – **Denman Cove**. Perfect! It is very cold during the evening, so we cook inside to warm up the cabin and pile up an extra blanket on the bed. The next morning we take Bengie for a walk on the little beach. She loves it and frolics happily. Then we do a 'drive by' Port Arthur proper for photos of the ruined penitentiary. That done, we head out again. We could stay on a bit, but we have been there before and are keen to make progress north.







*Cape Pillar on the left, Tasman Island on the right... we go through the middle!*

The ocean is rough and the rebound savage, but we sneak in between Cape Pillar and Tasman Island for dramatic views. Once past there, the sea smooths out.



*Cape Pillar*



*Cathedral Rock*





*Cape Hauy and the Lanterns*



*The Totem Pole on the right, and Candle Stick in the centre*

We get really close to the bottom of Cape Hauy and the Lanterns, where the iconic Totem Pole and Candle Stick are. It is a favoured spot for tour boats, but it is pretty special to be there in Take It Easy. Wade gets us really close so I can take good shots. He knows what I am after but for some reason refuses to take us through the gap... claiming we are too wide! Oh OK...

We could definitely get through in the kayaks on a calm day. That little activity might have to be put on the to do list for a future visit... that and getting up at dawn for a shot of the lanterns in silhouette from Fortescue Bay on the northern side.





*The back of the Lanterns, on the Northern side*

Having turned the corner we can now sail with main and jib and we decide to go straight to **Maria Island**. It is a smooth run and it is lovely to be in a more sedate ocean.

The next morning, we wake up to seamist. We dinghy ashore with Bengie, who enjoys her walk and I take a couple of photos of the eerie but evocative view of the boat in the fog.



*My Captain looking happy!*



*Misty morning at Riedel Bay, Maria Island*

## Freycinet Peninsula

Our next scenic bit of sailing takes us to the pink granite of the Freycinet Peninsula. It really is “la vie en rose” in this part of the coast, so different from the Tasman Peninsula, gentler, more serene, but quite attractive too.



It is also great for fishing flathead! First time in a long time, we have caught a dozen of them, enough for a meal tonight and freezing for two more meals! On the advice of another yachtie, we drifted in 10 meters of water just off the

anchorage. As soon as the rods went in the water it was on! That is the sort of fishing we enjoy: fish committing suicide every few minutes, without us trying very hard!

We leave Bryan’s Beach after two days and get out to the Eastern side of the Freycinet coast.

The remarkable landscape of the Freycinet Peninsula is not only the dome-shaped pink granite hills, but also the white sand, blue water and crescent shaped beaches.

We stay at two beautiful such anchorages:

**Bryan’s Beach** for a couple of nights, on the west side of the Peninsula, then Wineglass Bay on the eastern side.

Bryan’s Beach is a lovely anchorage, with beach walks, the opportunity for Bengie to frolic, and us to get some exercise.





We move onto **Wineglass Bay**. It is a surprise to be the only yacht in the normally busy anchorage. Only a fishing boat is anchored for a few hours. Before dropping the pick, we try our hand again at fishing for flathead again and catch a few more. Better get on the internet to find recipes as we have a few meals of this – so much so that we freeze the fillets for later.





If Wineglass Bay is empty, the beach and track up to the lookout are not: processions of tourists of all nationalities keep coming up and down. We climb up for a view of the bay from the saddle. It is one of those bays that you need to see from up high, in fact from the air would be best, to get a panoramic view of the bays on either side of the



peninsula. But we don't do too badly and scramble up the boulders on the opposite side of the saddle for a slightly different view, without the crowds.



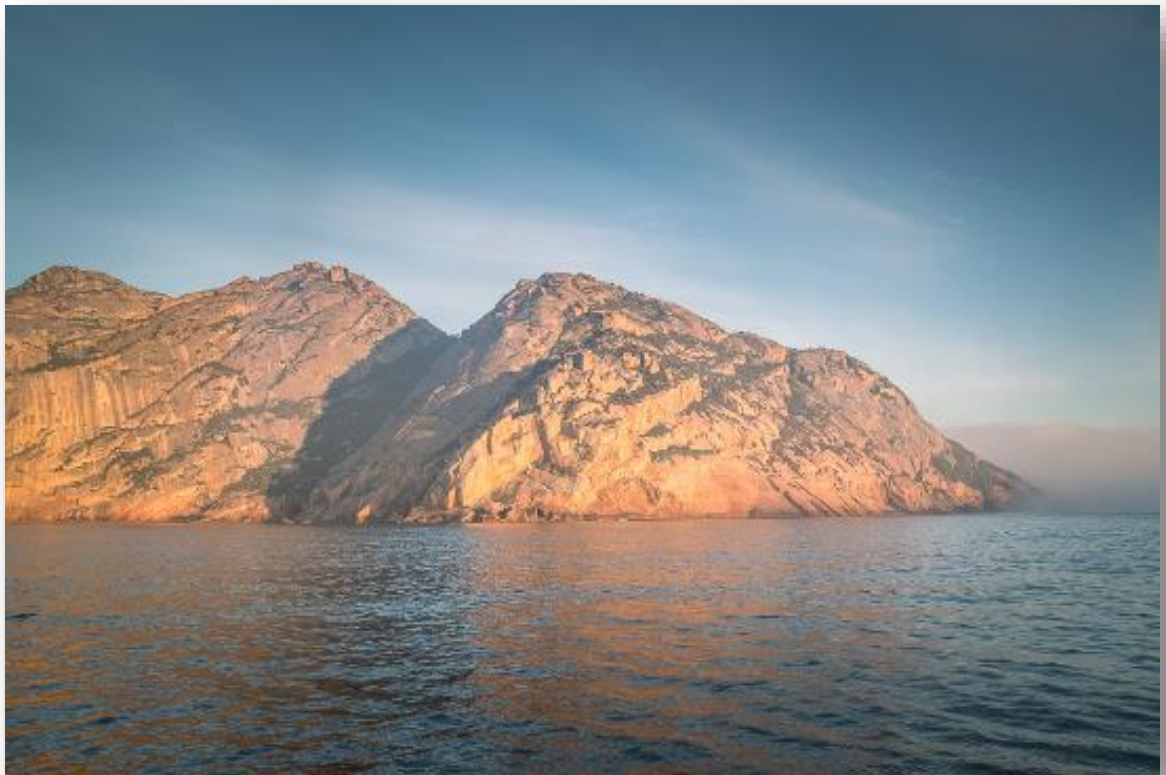
*Iconic Wineglass Bay*

With little internet coverage and a Skype appointment with my specialist, we decide it is best to head off early on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> April and stop at Bicheno. It's a 7am departure, complete with sea mist. It is eerie but atmospheric.

I was disappointed with the photos I took when we first arrived at the Freycinet. They looked flat and ordinary, especially after the drama of the Tasman Peninsula. But this morning start in the fog provides the unusual conditions that give images a great feel.



*Freycinet Peninsula in seamist*



I would love to linger around these parts, and really explore more places we have not seen previously. However Wade is over the cold weather and focused on getting to Queensland by the end of May, so wants to push on even if it means motoring in a light breeze.

We still have a fair distance to cover to get to the tip of Tassie, across the Furneaux islands and Bass Strait, to the Gippsland Lakes for repairs. We have a leaky starboard window, requiring the whole window to be reset, we need to get our shipwright to check the rubbing strip at the bow which I hit in Kettering, and the Raymarine wind instrument is no longer working after less than a year, so we are booked in at Paynesville to get all this attended to.

Once done at the Lakes, we still have several weeks of uncomfortably cold weather to sail in before we get to warmer climes - not as biting as when we left in July last year, but not balmy either!

I reluctantly accept we need to get north, but this is on the condition we plan another trip to Tassie. It is so beautiful here, and not too crowded. So we will be back – when, we don't know for sure.

## Northeast Coast of Tassie

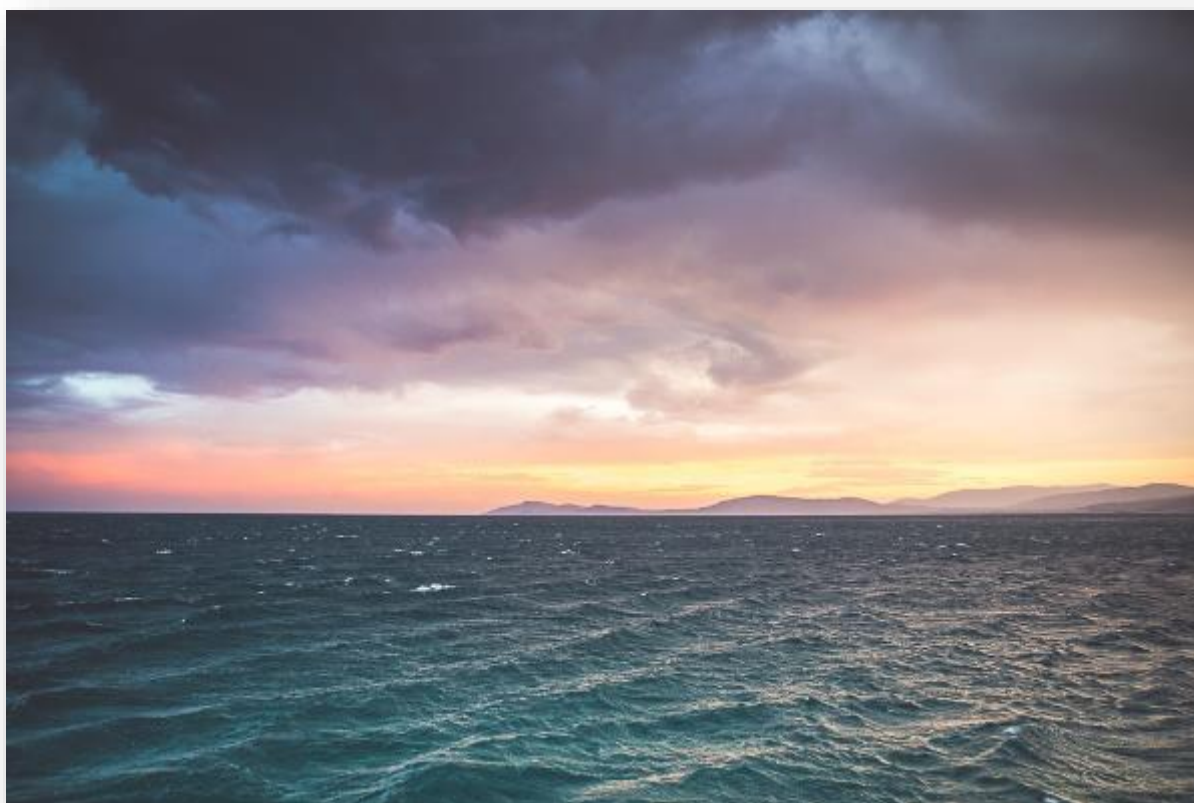
**W**ith stronger northerly winds forecast during the next few days, Bicheno is exposed, so as soon as we have dealt with our Skype consult, topped up with fuel, water and a few fresh vegies, we motor 8 miles on to **Long Point**, which offers protection in these conditions. There is a southwesterly forecast for Thursday – just what we need to get north towards Eddystone Point and the Furneaux Group.

As we patiently float around in our anchorage for a couple of days, we enjoy warmer and sunnier conditions, allowing Bengie to have little frolics in the morning and us to go for long beach walks. Getting some exercise is good, as my Skype consult with the endocrinologist confirmed I need physical activity coupled with a significant increase in insulin to get things back under control.



Type I Diabetes might be energy sapping, but it does not stop me from being excited about our adventurous life and Nature's magic.

While at Long Point, we weather a thunderstorm just on sunset – a sudden burst of very strong wind and eerie colours in the sky and ocean. It is spectacular.





*Anchored at Long Point*

On 26<sup>th</sup> April, as hoped, the SW change comes and we head off, bound for **Eddystone Point** at the northeast tip of Tasmania. It is a frustrating day with strong wind one minute, then nothing, requiring constant tweaking of the sails as well as starting then turning off the engines. But we sail more than we motor, which is always a good thing.

We get to Eddystone Point in the middle of the afternoon, and check the conditions on the southern side, but there is too much swell, so we round the point, weave our way through the many rocks, and end up anchoring at the northern end.

It is funny as we go past the lighthouse, made up of the local grey granite blocks, we notice a second little light, hiding low behind the bushes.

We have been past this cape many times, but had never really seen the stunt little thing, probably because we have never been that close!

Wondering what that was about, we do a search on the internet.



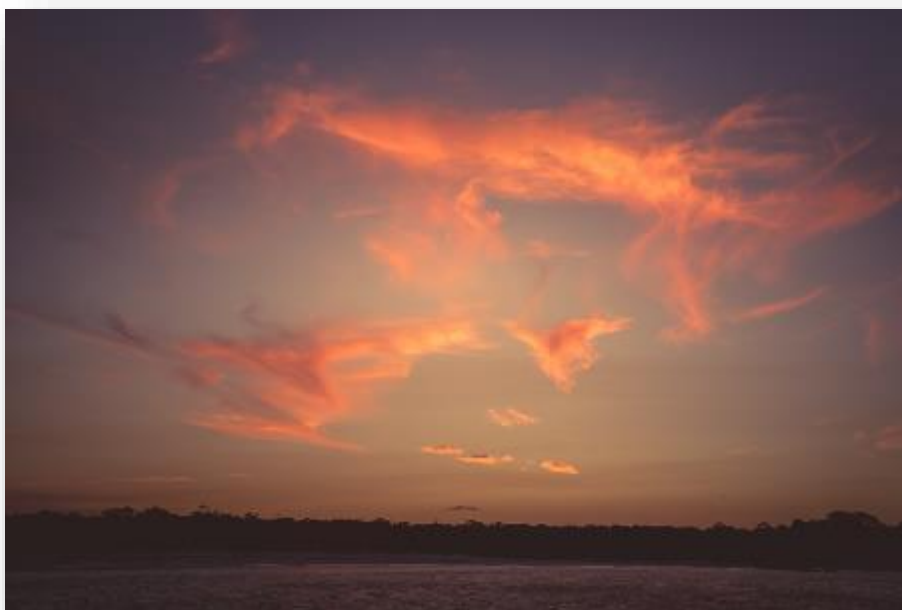
*Eddystone Point from the southern side, with a second little light poking out of the bushes*

Apparently this is an auxilliary front light which used to light Victoria Rocks, on the SE point. It was taken out of commission in the 1930s.



*Eddystone Point from the northern side*

A beautiful sunset marks our last night in Tasmania, although not the last night in Tasmanian waters since tomorrow we sail towards the Furneaux Group.





## Onto the Furneaux Group

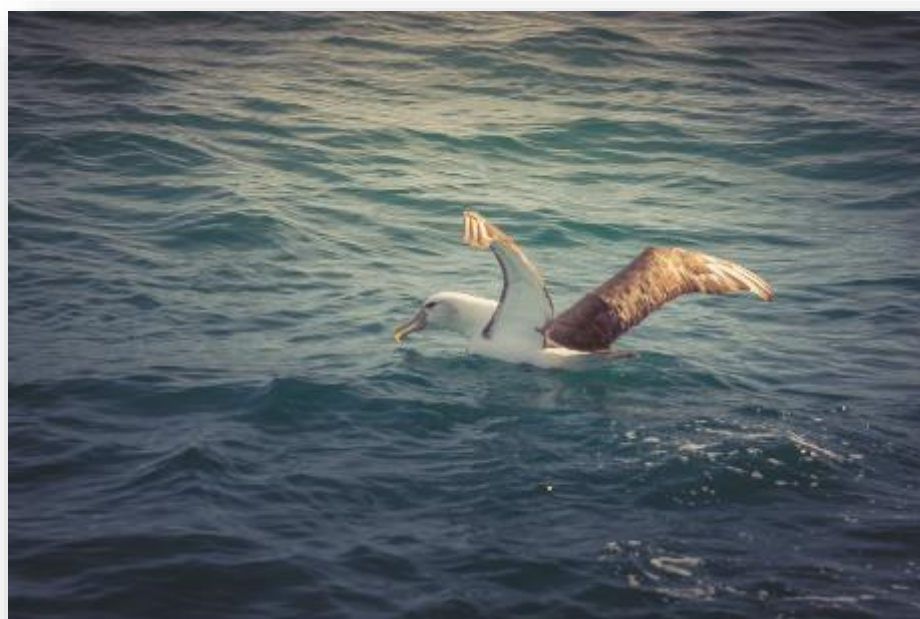
**W**e have left Tasmania's mainland, although we are still in Tasmanian waters till we leave the northern tip of Flinders Island.

With very light and variable wind conditions forecast for Bass Strait over the next few days, we decide to make a 48 mile jump across Banks Strait all the way to **Cameron Inlet**, on the Eastern shores of Flinders Island. This puts us in a better position to get across Bass Strait over the next 24 hours to cover the final 130 miles. Of course this means an overnigher.



Our passage across Banks Strait to the Furneaux

Group of islands is a very sedate one. We motor-sail all the way – a bit boring but in the sunshine it is pleasant enough and we see lots of wildlife along the way: albatrosses, dolphins...



*This Shy Albatross has just caught a bit of squid!*

All of a sudden I hear Wade shout: 'Miss Cricri, there has been a nuclear explosion over Tasmania.' I rush out in the cockpit camera in hand, expecting a thunder cloud of some sort. And here it is!

'We managed to leave Tasmania in time! We can take refuge at Flinders Island!' is my response.



*Funny looking mushroom cloud over the Northern Tassie coast!*



*Cape Barren Island and the Furneaux Group in the distance as we sail across Banks Strait*

We anchor for the night just off the beach at the end of Cameron Inlet after a 10 hour motorsail. The sun is already hidden by the clouds and the air is cool, but we still take a dip at the back of the boat. Sunset is fiery with wispy clouds of pinks and oranges over Babel Island, reflected in the ocean.

It feels a little melancholic, but this is such a fitting way to spend our last night in Tasmanian waters.

The next morning, seamist envelops the nearby hills and hovers over the ocean. It is beautiful, totally calm, sunny and quiet.



There is not a breath of wind, just a gentle rolling swell and hardly a ripple on the water. We love those early mornings when nature wakes up. There are a few shearwaters bobbing around on the surface, hardly moving as we ghost past them. But then I witness something nasty. I can see a little Shearwater in the distance with a much bigger juvenile Pacific Gull harassing it.

I zoom in with my camera, only to see the gull grab the shearwater by the neck and repeatedly dunk it. In the end the shearwater drowns and is left floating lifelessly on the surface, while the Pacific Gull flies away as we motor-sail past. I know it's nature at work, but it is cruel.

The first two images are of different short-tailed shearwaters to the last one who died.



## Bass Strait Crossing

**M**ay all our Bass Strait crossings be as benign as this one, although we'd rather have had a fast sail! Our 24 hour passage is spent motor-sailing - well really motoring with the sails up doing very little – in totally calm conditions. There is hardly a ripple in the ocean, just swell bumps. It is not very exciting, but on the positive side it is super flat and allows me to tidy up the journal of the voyage.

The 130 miles are the easiest we have covered in the whole trip, even with an overnighter. Because the ocean is so flat, we can read at will without feeling ill, and night watches pass quickly. We get across the bar at Lakes Entrance at 7.00am on Sunday 29 April and put a serene end to our Tasmanian Voyage. It feels odd to be back in the Gippsland Lakes – like a home coming, like the end of the holiday and back to work... except that there is no more work and the 'holiday' continues!



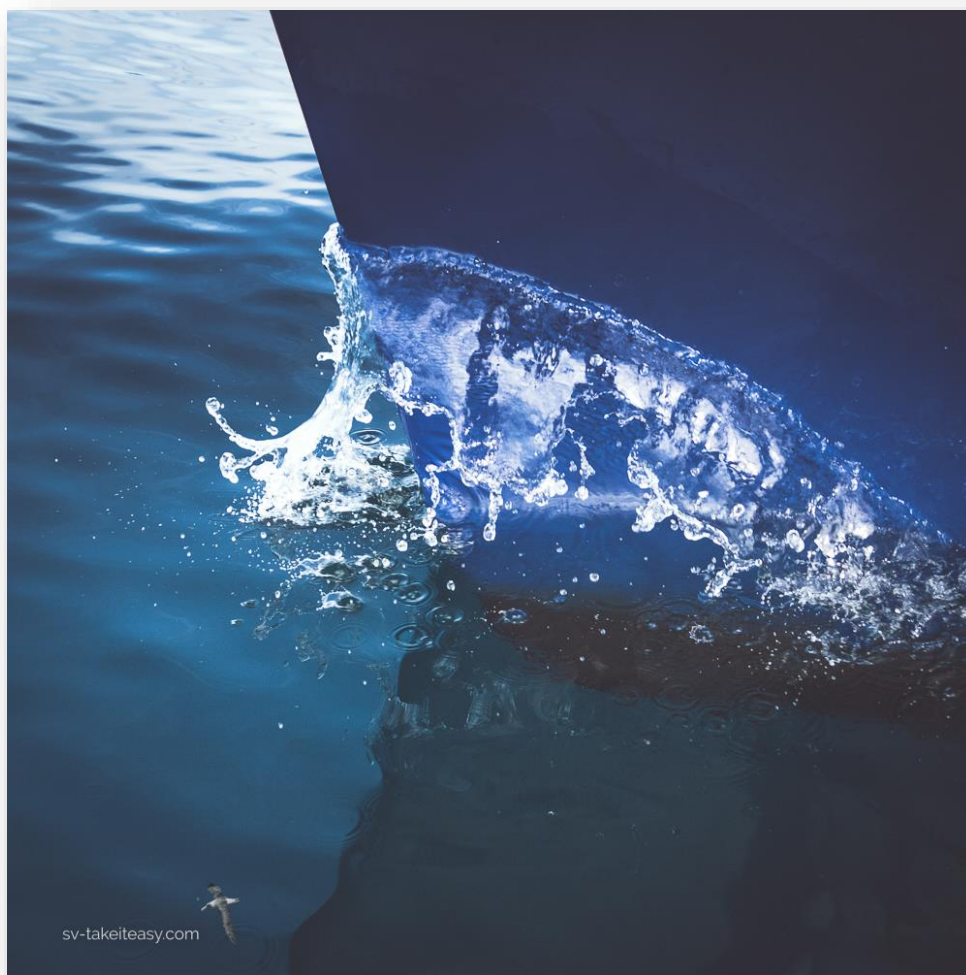


## Mission Accomplished

So there you have it. We have witnessed it all during this 1200 mile voyage around Tasmania: the stillness of some lovely locations, the ruggedness of others. We have sailed to some of earth's grandest waterways and World Heritage sites, seen glorious wildlife, felt the ups and downs of life afloat, experienced the exuberance of nature.

Cruising is not for everyone. Some people would be truly miserable living this life day in day out with our minimalist lifestyle in a tiny floating home. But that is the choice we have made, and we shared some of this with friends. We traded comfort for experiences and adventure, we connected with nature, came to a world difficult to access and have experiences to last for a lifetime.

For our friends it was a temporary involvement, for us it is our life now. So the adventure continues, beyond this Tasmanian voyage.





Two is a crew!

