40° South

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Anui's

2025 Voyage

In Tasmanian Waters

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Overview of the Voyage

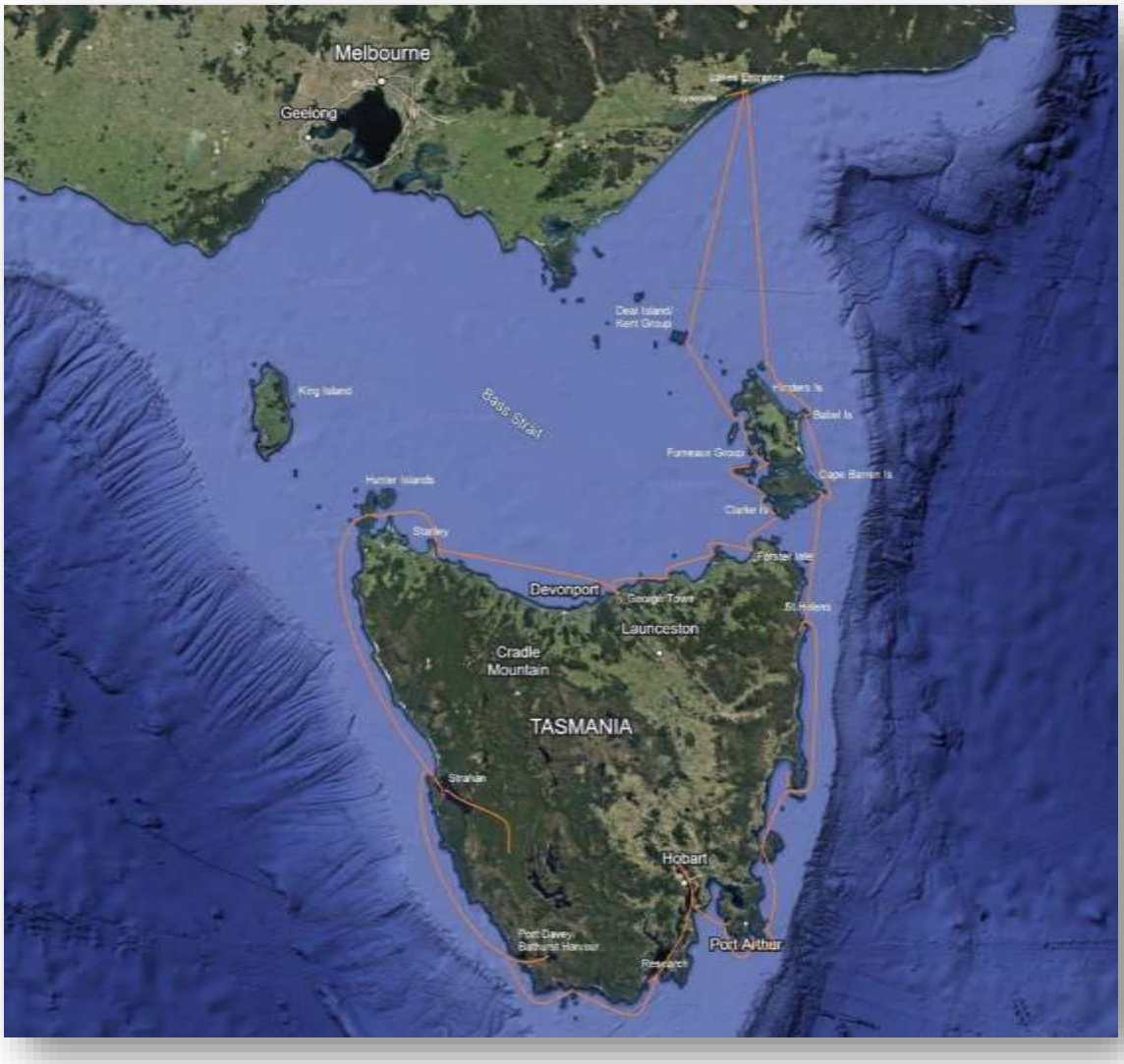
This is the story of *Anui's* three-month voyage in the Roaring Fourties, exploring the Bass Strait Islands and circumnavigating Tasmania between 19th December 2024 and 23rd March 2025.

We had been dreaming of this voyage for ages, three years in fact. We wanted to take *Anui* away from the Great Barrier Reef where we had cruised for over seven years, and spend the summer in southern waters, hoping to do a circumnavigation of Tasmania via the Bass Strait Islands. This would mean spending most of our time in the Roaring Forties, hence the name of this epic cruise story: 40° South!

These used to be our cruising grounds when we were still working, living in Melbourne and sailing on *Medina* and *Take It Easy*. It was time to take our tropical boat *Anui* to the cooler climes! But it took us three years to manage this. Between Wade's prostate cancer, COVID and Chris's breast cancer, previous attempts were cancelled and the project put on hold.

Was summer 2024/25 going to be the year? We did not dare say "third time lucky" until we were crossing the bar at Lakes Entrance, bound for Deal Island!

The plan was to officially depart for Tasmanian waters from the Gippsland Lakes. We aimed to wander around the Eastern Bass Strait Islands, then hop across to the northeast coast of Tasmania and start our circumnavigation of the Apple Isle counterclockwise. We were planning on making stops along the West coast at Macquarie Harbour, Port Davey and Bathurst Harbour, then rounding Southwest Cape, possibly stopping along the wild South Coast if the conditions allowed, before taking refuge at Recherche, then up the D'Entrecasteaux Channel to visit friends and family, before a well-earned stop at Hobart. After that, the East Coast with its stunning seascapes and dolerite cliffs awaited, all the way back to the Northeast corner, hopping back across to the Furneaux Group for different stops on the way north. We would close the loop and bring our voyage to an end back in the Gippsland Lakes.



Although The Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race occurs at the end of December each year and February 2025 was when the Wooden Boat Festival was held in Hobart, both events attracting a huge number of yachties and visitors, we were not intending to be in Hobart for that, much preferring to spend our time away from crowds. We were not going with a buddy boat either, but knew we would probably come across vessels we knew and cruise in company for sections of the voyage.

We took three weeks to come down from the Gold Coast to the Gippsland Lakes, not a rush, but not a doddle either. Delays because of medical issues for Chris had meant we had left Southport a month later than hoped. So, no lazing around! In the back of our minds, we were hoping we would get to the Gippsland Lakes in mid-December, pick up our guest, Trevor, then head out to the Bass Strait Islands. "Deal Island for Christmas" was the mission!

Trevor was on standby, keen as mustard, ready to catch a train and a bus from Kinglake to meet us in Paynesville. This voyage had been lined up over a year ago, when we were meant to do this very trip at the very same time! But of course, we had a medical bomb to deal with then.

As with anyone who joins us, the start and end dates of our friend's stay were left in the air. Being dependent on the weather, it was hard to know exactly when we would depart. At the other end, we also did not know where we would part company. This would depend on how the voyage was going, how everyone was feeling and personal commitments. Having guests on board for extended periods can be hard yakka, and increasingly we are finding it demanding.

But it was not the case with Trevor who was a great guest: easy to be with, helping with boat maintenance, taking turns cooking, happy to get involved in anything we did. And he had a family history project to work on in the down time to keep himself amused when we were boat bound or resting. He left us at Stanley, needing to get back to Melbourne at the end of January with commitments ashore.

We picked up another set of guests in the later part of the voyage in Hobart, with Wade's brother Murray and wife Maree flying in from Melbourne and leaving us a month later when we reached the Gippsland Lakes. It was a different cruise to the tropical voyages on *Anui* they were used to.

Bass Strait Islands

Departure from the Gippsland Lakes

The Gippsland Lakes is a great place to stage a departure for Bass Strait. There are things to do to amuse ourselves while we wait for the weather, we can provision there, and we have friends from when we used to moor our previous boats there.

Paynesville was our pickup and provisioning point. We stocked up on food supplies, topped up our fuel, got the boat cleaned up and presentable after our three-week passage south from Queensland. It was also our social centre, the place where we would catch up with a few of our friends, although it was somewhat rushed since we could see a weather window coming up, which we did not want to miss.

We arrived at Paynesville on the 16th December, picked Trevor up on the night of the 17th, and by the 19th we were heading back to Lakes Entrance, ready for a departure into Bass Strait on the 20th. As we said, it was quick!

Our Tasmanian adventure started on 20th December 2024 with great trepidation. We had been obsessively watching the weather forecasts. An Easterly change was upon us on the 19th. We opted to let the ocean settle after strong southerly winds and set sail the following day.

We are old hands at Bass Strait crossings, having gone across to Tasmania and the Bass Strait Islands and back to Victoria over 24 times we think! But it is still thrilling, especially when we have a guest on board for whom it is a first and who is very prone to sea sickness. We left with a light northeast, bound for Deal Island.

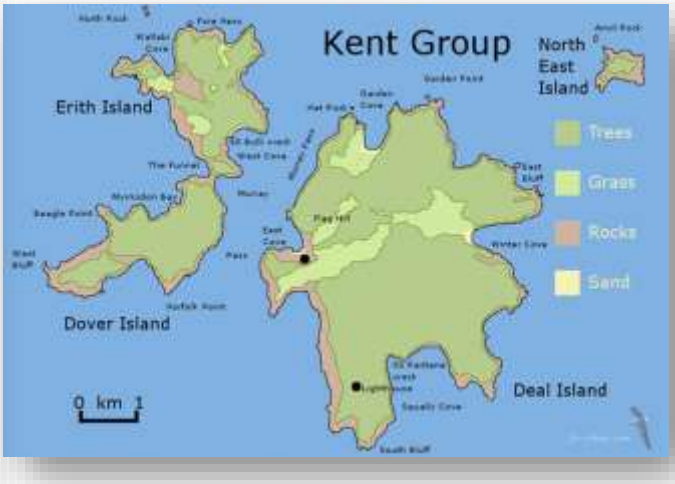
There is something special about pre-dawn departures: full of anticipation, colour, hope.

The passage was smooth, we had taken Kwells tablets to be sure and we were all in fine form. We had a leisurely sail in 10 to 15 knot easterlies under main and screecher, covering the 104nm in 13 hours – not a speed record for *Anui* but better than an overnighter as most yachts do! The sea state was gentle.

Read, snooze, keep watch, gaze at the ocean, snack… repeat it all a few more times, that was the order of the day. The crew was not always very active, but no one got seasick!

Then eventually the tall cliffs of the Kent Group appeared on the horizon. You think you are nearly there, but it takes another three hours before you get close!

Deal Island



Deal Island is a 1,576-hectare granite island, located in northern Bass Strait, that lies between the Furneaux Group, north-east of Tasmania, and Wilsons Promontory, in Victoria. It is the largest island of the Kent Group.

There are several anchorages around the main islands catering for different wind directions. Most yachts aim for the Murray Path and anchor either in East Cove Deal Island, or West Cove Erith Island. We don't particularly like these as they can be a bit active, too busy for our liking and the holding is not great.

In our usual fashion we avoided East Cove where a few yachts were. With the weather forecast to change to the Southwest and West and strong winds predicted right until Christmas Day, we opted to make Winter Cove our bay of choice. We would be back to the beach for the evening, but the wind direction would change during the night and we would end up facing the right way by morning.

What is striking as you reach the Islands of the Kent Group is the colours and textures: crystal clear teal water, tall cliffs reaching straight down to the ocean, granite slabs lining the bays covered with the characteristic orange lichen, grassy tussocks above the rocks giving way to she oak forests and tall eucalypts.

The wind whistles as it funnels down from the hills to the bay and can sound like a freight train when it is strong, but you feel quite protected. At night the calls of the Little Penguins coming back to their burrows can be heard.

For the duration of our stay – four days – the strongest gust we recorded was 43 knots. We sat comfortably.

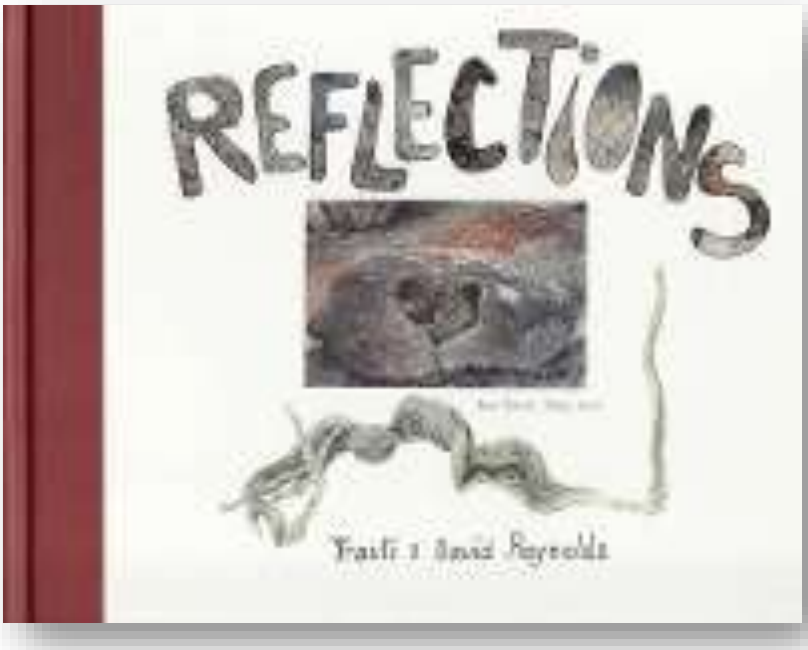
There is only one thing wrong with this anchorage, it is the furthest away from the centre of the island and requires a steep climb, whichever destination you choose to walk to. So we got our daily exercise!

Some days, landing the dinghy was easy, other days when the swell was up, it was a wet affair!

We walked somewhere different each day. First was a visit to the Caretakers who welcomed us with a cuppa and biscuits. They were there for only two weeks to cover the Festive Season. We have friends who have had several stints as Deal Island caretakers, so we understand what it entails.

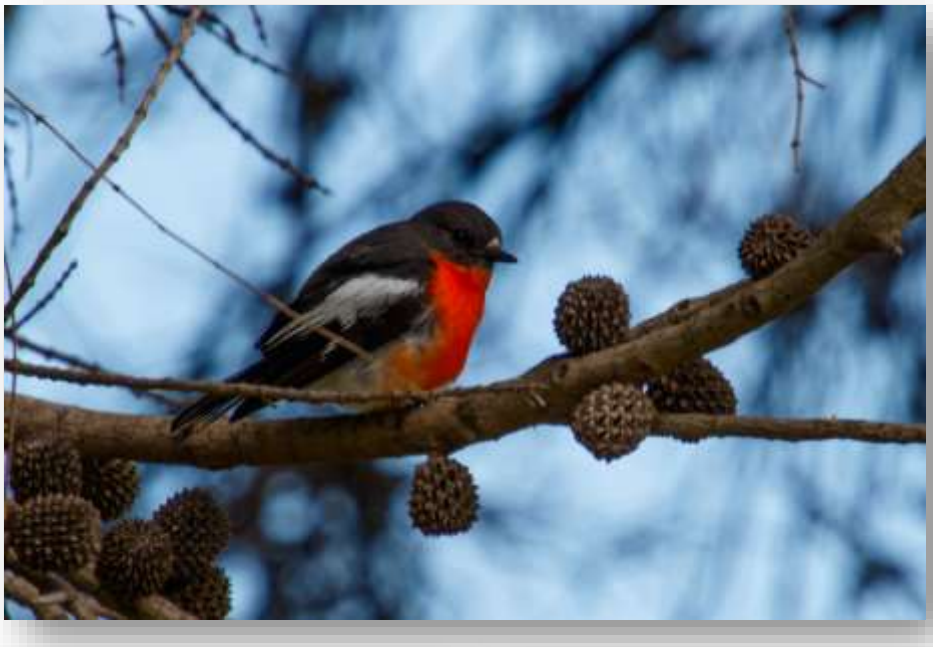
The Deal Island Volunteer Caretaker program has been managed by Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife since 2000. Volunteers are selected based on their ability to live in isolation and their skills for managing the island. They normally spend three months at a time on the island and are provided with housing, power, and transportation to the island by helicopter from either Tasmania or mainland Australia, but they are responsible for providing their own provisions. Imagine having to plan for your supplies for three months, including bringing copious amounts of ingredients to bake cakes and scones for visiting yachties! The caretakers help with visitor reception, weed management, fauna surveys, tracks upkeep, and heritage asset maintenance including the lighthouse, cottages and museum. They also maintain a lovely herb and vegetable garden to supplement their stores. This time, there was so much produce from the garden that they were keen for us to have some greens. What a treat!

We have visited Deal Island multiple times over the past 20 years, making the passage on *Medina*, *Take It Easy*, and now *Anui*. Most caretakers we have met have thoroughly enjoyed their time on Deal Island. We dearly remember meeting one couple who happened to be artists: Trauti and David Reynolds. Trauti kept a journal of their time on Deal which she illustrated with beautiful drawings and watercolours. The book *Reflections Deal Island* is a superb testimony and can be purchased through the Hobart Bookshop. If you love wild places, this is a wonderful addition to your library. A copy of her journal and illustrations are kept in the Museum on the island.



After a good hour spent chatting with the caretakers, we dragged ourselves outside and headed up the track to the Lighthouse.

Lots of birds were flying in close to the house: gorgeous Flame Robins, Juvenile European Goldfinches, and Firetail Finches in particular. Of course the territorial Cape Barren Geese were around too!



The Deal Island Lighthouse is Australia's highest lighthouse at the elevation of 305 metres.

The Lighthouse was first turned on in 1848. It was built jointly by the New South Wales, Victorian and Tasmanian Governments. It is not only the highest light in Australia, but also in the Southern Hemisphere. The high elevation of the light caused visibility problems with low cloud 40% of the time, however the keepers of the day at the Wilsons Promontory Lighthouse (75 kilometres to the north) reported seeing the Deal Island light on an average of 6 nights in 10.

Sailing ships entering Bass Strait from the west were required to thread the eye of the needle between King Island and Cape Otway. Presenting its own dangers, the eastern side of Bass Strait, strewn with granite rocks and islands, was made less treacherous with the construction of lighthouses on Swan, Goose and Deal Islands and Cape Otway in the 1840s.

The Department of Transport installed unattended electric light on North East and South West Islands of the Kent Group in 1987. The main light on Deal Island was discontinued by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority in 1992.

The original cottages were arranged with the head keeper's cottage being about 3 kilometres from the lighthouse and the assistant keepers' cottages being adjacent to the tower. This is a photo from the archive:

Only ruins are left these days and unfortunately the lighthouse is starting to deteriorate as no proper maintenance has been carried out since it was decommissioned in 1992. These days volunteers carry out some work, but it is a massive job.

We used to be able to climb the spiral staircase inside and get to the balcony for sensational views. But it is now too dangerous for visitors to be allowed up. All we could do was sit at the base and nibble on some lunch!

There is a grave just down from the lighthouse: that of a tiny baby called Recamia Jackson. Notice the dates: born on 9th February 1881 and deceased on 25th February 1881, a grim reminder of how tough life was for lighthouse keepers' families.

The walk back down through the Casuarina Forest was a lot easier!

Our second walk up from Winter Cove was for a visit to the cottages and up to Barn Hill for magnificent views of the Kent Group:

It is well worth spending time looking at the relics inside the historic lightkeeper's cottage and reading the stories of this remote cluster of islands, named for William Kent, captain of the *Supply*, one of the first fleet vessels. There are two cottages to visit, each with a different focus.

It is always fun to look at the previous Visitors' Books and find our own entries from too many years ago, one of them with our dear friend Sue in 2014.

As we were ready to go back to our cove, we met up with the crews of two familiar Queensland catamarans anchored at Garden Cove: *Raw Aqua* and *Chilli Cat* who seem to follow our every step! Colin on Raw Aqua has printed every article and post we have published on the Bass Strait Islands and Tasmania and trying to check out every spot we have written about!

From Barn Hill you get panoramic views of the Kent Group: Dover and Erith Islands, the Murray Path.

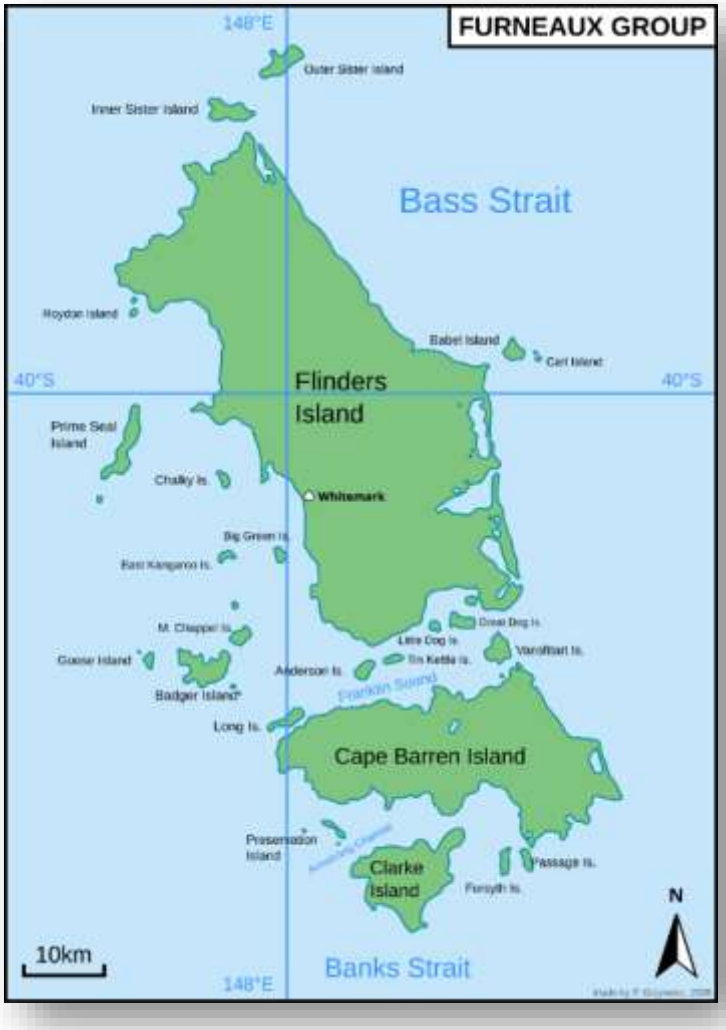
This is looking towards Little Squally Cove which we affectionately call Bunnings Cove as it faces the southwest, collecting a whole lot of flotsams.

The cairn at the top of Barn Hill. If you only do one walk on Deal Island, this is the best bang for your buck, about 1.5kms from the cottages.

And then we took a stroll to Peg Leg Bay:

Onto the Furneaux Group

On Christmas Day it was time to leave Deal Island and head towards the Furneaux Group, a cluster of islands and rocks - some 80 to 100 of them - in Eastern Bass Strait.



The largest islands in the group are Flinders Island, Cape Barren Island, and Clarke Island. The group contains five settlements: Killiecrankie, Emita, Lady Barron and Whitemark on Flinders Island which serves as the administrative centre of the Flinders Council, and Cape Barren. There are also some small farming properties on the remote islands.

After seals were discovered there in 1798, the Furneaux Group of islands became the most intensively exploited sealing ground in Bass Strait. A total of 29 islands in the Furneaux Group have been found to have some tangible links with sealing in the 19th century.

The islands are generally mountainous with rugged coastlines. Most of them other than Flinders and Cape Barren are uninhabited. Some are leased to breed sheep or cattle, and several have been returned to the aboriginal community.

Roydon Island

On Christmas day, the wind had abated. It was time to move to new seascapes and sail from Winter Cove, Deal Island to a favourite of ours: Roydon Island, just off the northwestern coast of Flinders Island.

Roydon Island is quite small, only 37 hectares. In gentle conditions, the anchorage has a lagoon feel, sheltered behind a pyramid-like granite hill with a lovely beach at its base. It is the perfect size to hide behind and to explore.

The advantage of this islet is that it offers good shelter in a westerly or south westerly, but you can shuffle across to the Flinders Island side just 500m away if the wind shifts to the northeast. Not quite an all-weather anchorage, but as good as it gets here! We did have to do the shuffle a couple of times, one of them in the middle of the night, so fickle was the weather.

As usual with drone flights, you have to take your chances and fly while the wind is not too strong. So we did, as soon as we were safely anchored. Here are the views from the air... a new dimension for us compared with our last visit some 10 years ago.

The first image looks west towards the island, the second looks north towards Cape Frankland, and the third looks east towards Flinders Island and the alternate anchorage along the beach when the wind turns. The fourth shows Wade checking the depth all around us in the dinghy. There seemed to be more ribbonweed and other seaweed than we remembered!

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We stayed five days at Roydon Island, with strong winds blowing from various directions. On Christmas night, we had been hoping to stay put at Roydon, but with the NE change coming with a vengeance, we started dragging anchor and had to relocate at 3.00am, dropping the pick again along the beach 500m away. We returned to Roydon during the afternoon of the next day, although the next change was forecast, this time from the West!

Boxing Day was interesting. As the Sydney to Hobart fleet was getting hammered in strong winds and rough seas, so were we with the wind building and gusts reaching 56 knots! But we stayed put and felt safe although boat bound for a couple of days.

And then the wind started easing. It is all relative though, 30 to 40 knots instead of 50+!

Roydon sunsets, no matter what the weather, are spectacular!

And the views towards the Strzelecki Peaks in the south change every day.

As the wind eased, we were able to get ashore. We took Bengie for a beach walk and checked out the hut one day, and the next we walked right around the island.

Here are some of the views from our walk around the island.

Woes and fixes on the fly

Life at sea has been interesting for our friend Trevor who now understands that living on a boat does not just mean hopping from one stunning island to another, or hiding from the weather, or even managing finite resources like water, power and food. It also means fixing stuff nearly every day.

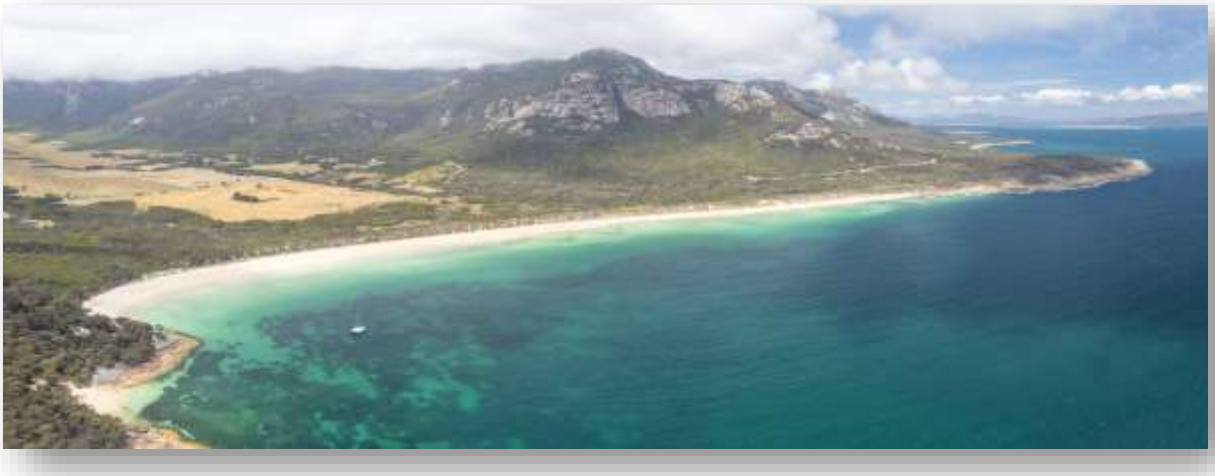
He has been helping us diagnose and fix. We have to admit that the constant gear hassles test our patience. Here are three out of many examples.

1. The pull start cord on the dinghy outboard motor does not always recoil properly and when it does not, you can't start the engine. Some sort of wheel must be tightened up periodically. Not hard, but inconvenient and never when you have the necessary tools around! We had to tackle that one from the beach at Roydon rather than from the back of *Anui*, so we would not drop any essential bits in the drink!
2. *Anui* was doing wild meanders under autopilot mid passage. An inspection of the engine bays revealed the autopilot was fine, but the bar linking the two rudders had fallen off because a bolt had corroded and come off. We had to disable one rudder and stir with the other. Once anchored, finding the right size bolts to rejoin the two rudders kept the boys busy for an hour.
3. Our laptop with all the navigation gear was switching itself off, leaving us with a blank screen at the worse possible moments, like when you are re-anchoring in the middle of the night. We found that the 12volt charger had given up the ghost, and the computer was no longer charging. So until we can buy a new one – not exactly easy in the middle of Bass Strait - we are running the inverter whenever on passage to be able to plug the laptop into 240v. Thank God for our lithium batteries and new solar panels!

And the list goes on! People say: "oh, it's the same as working on a house". Well let us tell you, it is not. It is a lot harder, unrelenting and much more stressful. If radical simplicity, living without debt, single-tasking and minimalism don't get rid of stress, then what does? …. Maybe not living on a boat?

Trousers Point, Flinders Island

Our next destination was Trousers Point at the southwestern corner of Flinders Island. Trousers Point is known for two beautiful beaches, views to offshore islands and Mt Strzelecki, and unusual rock features. The Trousers Point Beach is the most photographed and celebrated beach on the Island with crystal clear waters, wide expanses of white sand, and a mountain rising from the ocean. On the other side of Trousers Point is Fotheringate Bay with granite caves and rock formations.



We did not go directly from Roydon Island to Trousers Point. Instead, we stopped on the way at the little village of Whitemark to replenish our fresh food supplies. In the old days, on *Take It Easy*, we used to tie to the old jetty, coming in at near high tide and leaving before the water disappeared! But we are reluctant to dock *Anui* and its wrap against the dirty wharf covered in large tractor tires and barnacles! So we opted to anchor in the very shallow bay covered in seagrass at near high tide. We had to look closely to find a sandy hole to drop the pick in. To be safe, Wade dropped Trevor and Chris ashore in the dinghy and returned to the boat to keep an eye on things. An hour later, we had returned with tons of food, ready to raise anchor. When we got back the two boats that had been following us, *Chilli Cat* and *Raw Aqua* were anchoring. Time to leave!

We checked Fotheringate Bay, but decided it was a bit too shallow for us to sit comfortably in changing wind directions, so continued around the corner to Trousers Bay and picked up the public mooring. The bay is a popular spot with campers who peered at the big blue boat coming in!

If you are wondering how Trousers Point got its name, there are two stories, both unconfirmed.

The first recounts that in 1872, a young lad called John Burgess was alone on his boat, the *Sarah Ann Blanche*, anchored off Chappell Island and loading mutton-bird oil for Launceston. During a storm, she broke from her mooring and drifted towards the place we now call Trousers Point. John crawled along the bowsprit and dropped safely onto the rocks, minus his trousers. The *Sarah Ann Blanche*'s wreck was never found, nor the trousers, but a point further south bears her name.

The second story to which we subscribe, is that in 1875, the *Cambridgeshire* was wrecked just south of Cape Barren Island. She was carrying general cargo, including some iron rails, slate, machinery and alcohol – and it seems, a box of trousers, which were washed up and discovered on the beach near present day Trousers Point.

Regardless of the history of its name, this is a photogenic place, with nice walks, lovely though cool water for swimming and gorgeous beaches. From this location we wanted to tackle two of Tasmania's Great Short Walks: The Trousers Point Walk, which circumnavigates the headland from Trousers to Fotheringate, and the Strzelecki Peaks Walk, which climbs to the top of the 756m granite mountain. The views from the mountain are breathtaking and on a clear day you can see mainland Tasmania.

We did the warmup, easy walk on arrival to Fotheringate and back. It is a pretty stroll along the rocky shores.

For our evening at Trousers Point, the sunset over Mt Chappell did not disappoint.

The next day was sunny, with reasonably clear skies and light winds. So bright and early, we set off for the big hike: to the top of the Strzelecki Peaks, a 6.5 km climb, although you also have to add a 3 km walk along the road each way from Trousers Point Beach to the start of the climb. It is a challenging hike that takes you from sea level to 756m, straight up. This walk is rated as hard – Grade 4.

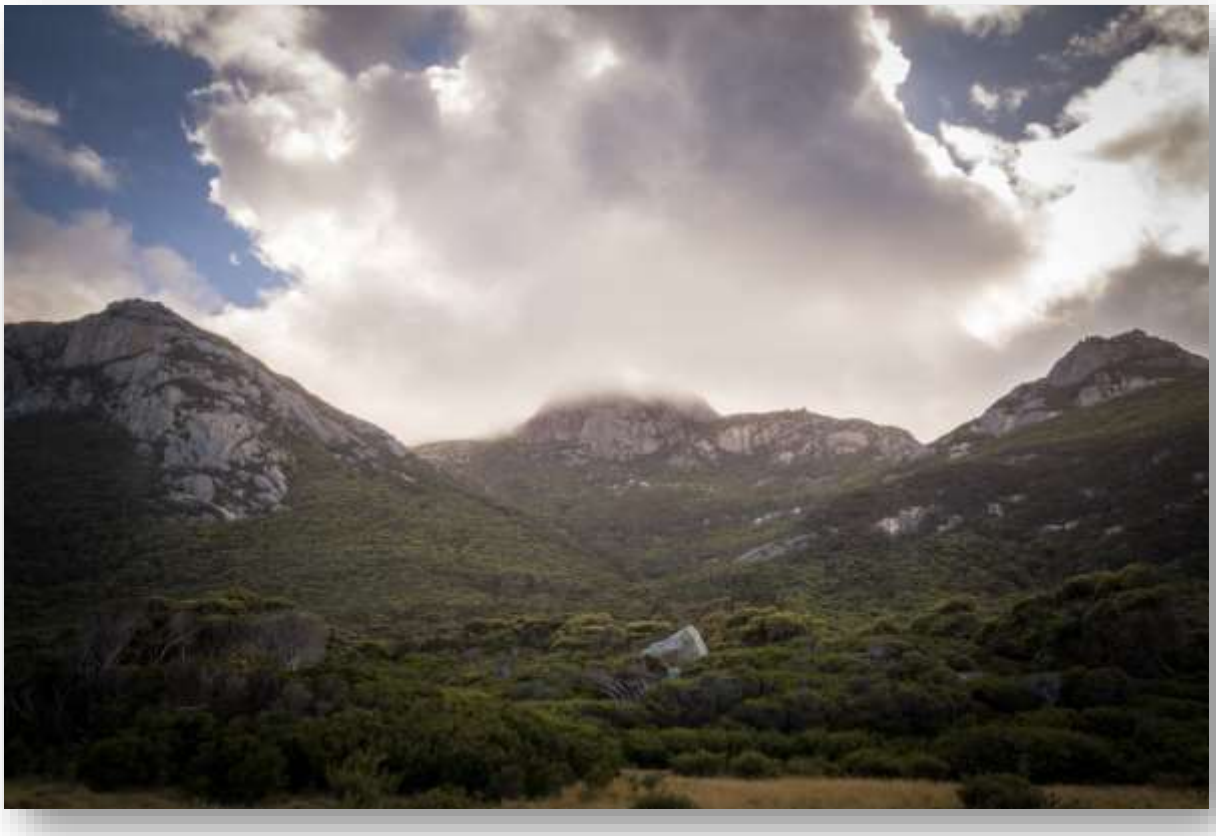
It is best to pick a clear day to do this hike as you want to be rewarded with beautiful views for your exertion, not end up in a whiteout! And an advantage of starting early is that you spend most of the walk in the shade, a good thing as you struggle up.

Last time we did this walk, some 10 years ago, we thought it was tough… The bodies aren't getting any younger or fitter! But you just have to take it slowly, and with grit and determination, you get there. We had clear skies to the base of the rugged cliffs, then we hit cloud base, and the visibility was not great, but the photos were atmospheric!

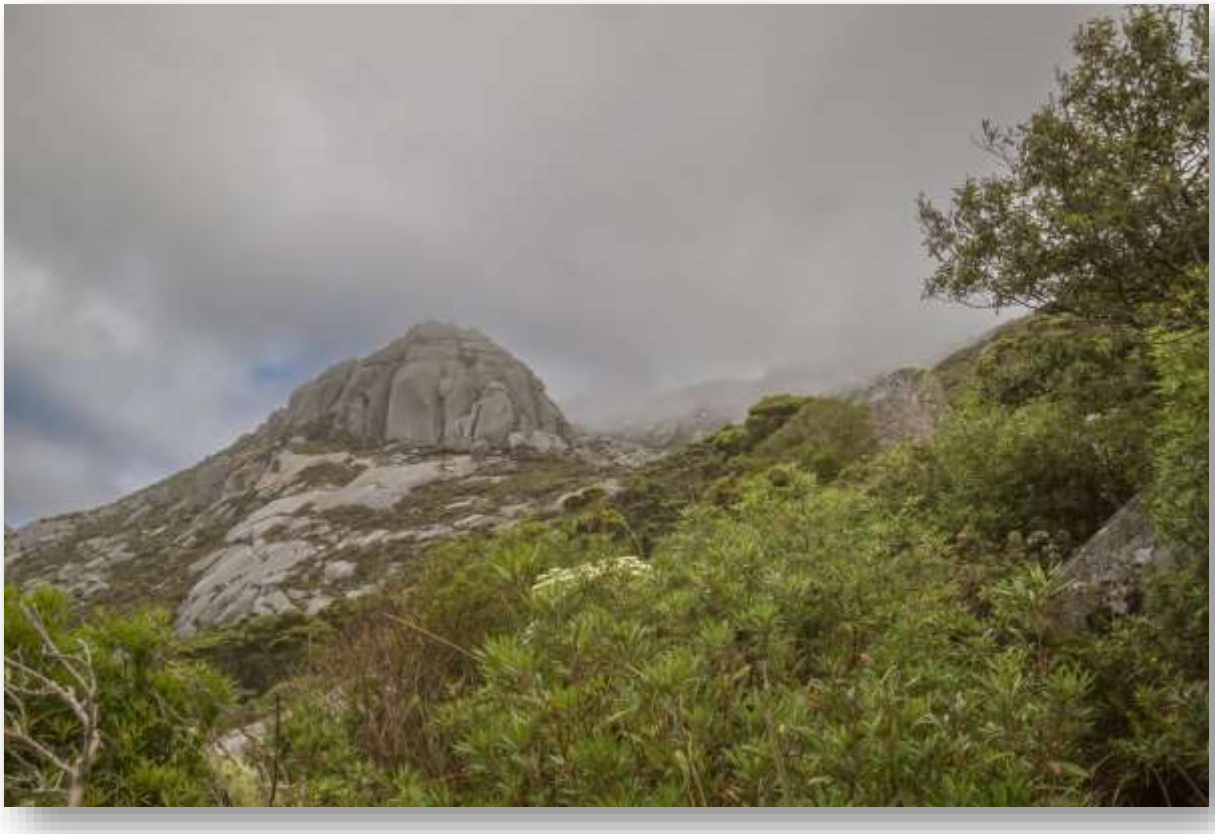
We found that the dry forest seemed to reach higher than last time, only revealing the views once you got higher up, nearly all the way to the saddle. The track was in good condition, although a little overgrown the further up you climbed. Despite being very steep, the hike was enjoyable with lots of wildflowers, paper daisies in particular, and stunning views towards Fotheringate Bay where *Chilli Cat* and *Raw Aqua*, the two cats we knew, had anchored, and towards Trousers Beach where *Anui* was.

We each went at our own pace, a few other couples who were doing the walk passing us, Trevor pushing ahead, Wade spending a bit of time at the rear, chatting with Colin and Pagen from *Raw Aqua* who turned up at the start of the walk, before catching up to Chris who was plodding somewhere in the middle. Slow and steady wins the race!

Here is the peak shrouded in clouds from the start of the track. The ascent is unrelenting.



As you climb, you pass through different types of vegetation: dry forest of casuarina, rainforest, meadow of wildflowers... Steep peaks appear and disappear in the clouds.



Once you reach the saddle, the end is in sight. You can see the summit, and Trevor is waving at the top!

Eventually we got to the summit after a 2 $^{1/2}$-hour climb. We were all very pleased to have managed this, and on the last day of 2024. This was a fitting way to end a tough year and gives us hope for another challenging hike further along: Mt Rugby in Southwest Tasmania… about the same height, although there is no maintained track, just a wombat trail at the start and major rock hopping at the top.

The descent was not quite as long, but hard on the knees. That track was so steep!

We got back to the starting gate, signed ourselves out and started our walk back on the road to Trousers Point. Luckily a local picked us up and gave us a lift back, which saved us 3 kms.

By the time we got back to the boat, the wind was westerly and picking up. So after a dip and shower to freshen up, we let go of the mooring as planned and headed to Badger Island. It is not until late in the afternoon, as we were motoring away that Mt Strzelecki finally appeared from under the bank of high clouds… just as well we did not wait up there for it to clear!

By sunset it was free of clouds and ironically, during the next few days the Peaks were totally clear.

Badger Island

Lucy Bay was the anchorage we were aiming for. It took us a while to find a spot where the anchor would hold. There is so much more seagrass and seaweed everywhere, a lot more than we remember from 10 to 15 years ago! There are a few sandy holes about, but they are so small it is hard to be accurate and even harder for the anchor to be dug in by the time it hits the weed. It took us three goes. Finally, we moved to a small spit at the end of Lucy Bay, edging the boat forward slowly to the sandy beach, watching our depth. Fortunately, we arrived at low tide, so we knew how far to push it! We dropped the anchor in sand in 2.2m of water and reversed, with the boat sitting over the seaweed some 20m out. It was much easier with *Take It Easy* and its 80cm draft and mini keels! With *Anui*, the dagger boards and exposed sail drives are deeper at 1.2m and beaching her is not something we want to do. It's the price we pay for a feistier catamaran.

The evening was to die for: superb sunset, celebratory dinner for New Year's Eve, a few reflections on the year that was, then off to bed to rest our aching bodies. No, none of us stayed up for the fireworks on television, none of us felt the need. It was a quiet celebration in good company, we were content to have achieved what we did on this last day of 2024, and this huge year for all of us.

And talking about reflections, we look at this dreamy photo… life is always more complex than the images and stories we post, even though we make it our mission to be honest and open about our experiences. So many people fall in love with the 'online' version of the cruising life.

This last year has been our most challenging yet. There is so much about our lifestyle which is demanding: more intense, more to manage, more compromises, more emotions than might appear to those reading our musings or following our adventures.

Although there are moments of bliss encapsulated in this gorgeous shot, every hard episode, every setback, every frustration, every insane thousand of dollars spent to keep *Anui* afloat and safe is imprinted on our body and in our mind. We have an incredible life, but anyone thinking we are living the dream might be mistaken… We know of a few people who have been chasing that sunset on the high seas, and got a rude awakening after they bought their boat and realised how demanding being in charge of a vessel is, how all-consuming being a jack of all trades is. Yes the buck stops with you for absolutely everything, yes self-reliance is taken to a whole new level, yes you have to fix everything yourself, yes something breaks every week, yes it gets to you after a while and you wonder whether you can keep doing this, and no, sights like this one above aren't always enough to compensate for the stress, irritation and tiredness.

Okay, enough reflections… We are still having some fun… promise!

On New Year's Day, with the wind due to switch to the south and southwest, we moved to the northern side of Badger Island, finding a large patch of sand to anchor in. It was a new anchorage for us. We have in the past stayed in the bay you can see in the distance in the second aerial, but this was better.

The drone shot really highlights how low-lying this island is. It is an unpopulated granite and limestone island, lying to the west of the Franklin Sound, the body of water which separates Flinders Island and Cape Barren Island. It has been extensively grazed by sheep and cattle. There is an old homestead, ruined jetties, remnants of machinery once used for farming, and an airstrip. For many years this was Crown Land leased by the Stackhouse family. Alf Stackhouse grew merinos who thrived on Badger Island because they did not face the usual farming problems like lice and worms that tend to travel from farm to farm. The isolation protected them. Over the years the Stackhouse family split their time between several islands with cattle on some and sheep on others. We remember meeting Alf at Hogan Island; he was then in his 90s. Ownership of Badger Island was returned to the Aboriginal community nearly 30 years ago. The Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania is happy to share the isolated outpost with the Stackhouse family.

If you wonder why this island is called Badger, the story goes that early explorers noticed many furry creatures ashore which they thought looked like badgers and named the place Badger Island. They were in fact wombats!

We went ashore for a brief walk along the northern shores. The island is flat as a tack, but the rocky shores covered in orange lichen are striking and so bright.

Key Island Bay – Cape Barren Island

Key Island Bay was our next destination. It is located on the west coast of Cape Barren Island or Truwana, the second largest island of the Furneaux Group. What a place to spend the first day of 2025! With a very different feel to anywhere else we have ever anchored in, this bay stole our heart many years ago. At first glance Key Island Bay is just another shallow cove with lots of seaweed as you approach the main sandy beach making a firm anchor hold difficult, and with numerous granite boulders on either side threatening to create havoc. But if you are brave, there is a hidey spot behind Key Island itself with a sandy hole among the seaweed and a private cove away from the main beach.

Whereas the main beach is only protected from the northeast, this nook offers protection from multiple directions. Even better, there is room for just one boat, which gives us privacy and leaves the skating rink in the main anchorage to other boats! The granite boulders are close and from a distance the boat looks like it is anchored among them, but it is safe, calm and oh so beautiful and unusual. We were there all by ourselves in magic calm and sunny conditions, the pick of the weather since the start of our voyage.

This spot is meaningful to us, not just because it is an old favourite. It is about how it makes us feel. It is hard to get to, the weather does not always allow you to anchor there, but when you do, you feel that sense of peace in the wilderness, and satisfaction you are somewhere unique that few people get to experience. And it was not just us thinking this, our friend Trevor felt it too.

Some of you might know about the Shag Islet Cruising Yacht Club. It is a not-for-profit organisation created for cruising sailors and boating people who enjoy the camaraderie and friendships made on the ocean and is affectionately known as “Shaggers”.

The story goes that Ken and Rhonda Thackeray who founded the club in 2009 had been on holidays in New Zealand and wanted to have a look at the Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron to see the memorabilia from the America’s Cup. They found however that one had to be a commodore or vice-commodore of a yacht club to be let in. On their return to Australia, they decided they would create a yacht club where every member was a Vice-Commodore of a place of their choosing. Many years later, over 7,500 people are vice commodores and can get into most of the yacht clubs in the world since they are affiliated to an official yacht club.

When we joined and had to each pick a location, we both thought about the many places we had anchored at in our time afloat and two stood out as particularly special to us. Wade is the Vice-Commodore of Bittangabee Bay, Chris is the Vice-Commodore of Key Island Bay!

And the love affair with Key Island Bay goes further… when Chris finally kicks the bucket, which we think will happen before Wade, she would like her ashes to be scattered in this bay. God knows how an aging Wadie will manage to get himself here, but hopefully he’ll find a way!

Calm, sunny day, not a breath of wind… just reflections and marbling in the water.

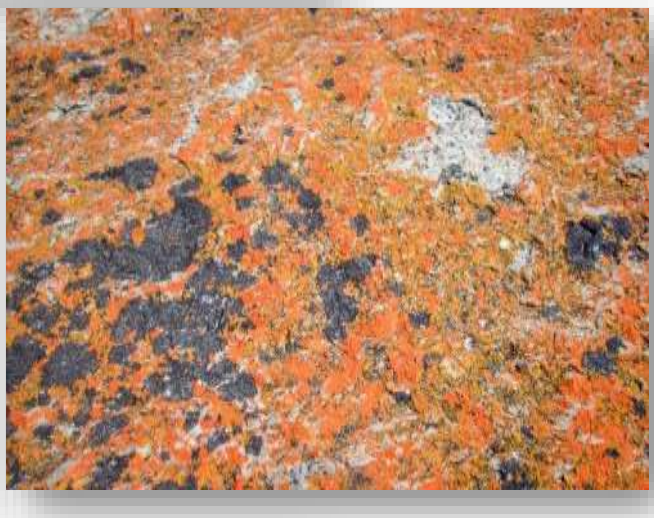
The water at Key Island Bay might look tropical in the sunshine and uncommon heat – mid to high 20°C – but the water is rather cool at 15°C. We went for a snorkel and were toasty warm in our thick wetsuits, but Trevor did not last in his short arms/short legs! We were hoping to pick up a few abalones, but did not find any of legal size. Black lip abalones must be 12cms across and green lip abalones 14.5cm to be harvested. We used to be able to spot them from the boat in this bay, so clear was the water and so numerous they were but this is no longer the case. We did see several undersize ones as well as quite a few urchins, but let them be. It was after all 15 to 20 years ago when we were roaming the Bass Strait Islands and getting good feeds. Time flies and things change, sadly for the worst here too!

However, we enjoy what we can. It is always interesting to observe the very different colours underwater in temperate versus tropical waters. Here the dark green, russet and burgundy hues dominate.

One thing that has not changed at Key Island Bay is our favourite rock we affectionately call *The Bum*!

And sometimes, there could be three!

One of the pleasures of meandering around these parts are the colours and textures. The exquisite blues on a sunny day, the granite boulders, the dry ribbonweed, the Tasmanian devils' tracks in the sand, the orange lichen, the beautiful shells you find… everywhere you look something catches your eyes.



Bengie too enjoyed our private beach at Key Island Bay and her dinghy trips. We could tell from her happy little miaws, and her striding confidently… She has shared our sailing life from the time she was a tiny kitten. Her first ever trip was on Medina across Bass Strait when she was three months old. Look at her now: over 18 years old and still loving life as a ship's cat!

MELB

Thunder & Lightning – Cape Barren Island

Right next door to Key Island Bay, but north of it, is another stunning bay: Thunder & Lightning. Although we did not anchor there this time, Chris sent the drone up there from the boat and we walked there from Key Island Bay.

It is a broad and shallow bay, providing shelter from Northeast to Southeast. Like most of the bays in the Furneaux, the bottom is covered in ribbonweed and seaweed, so you need to find a sandy hole to anchor in or get very close to the beach.

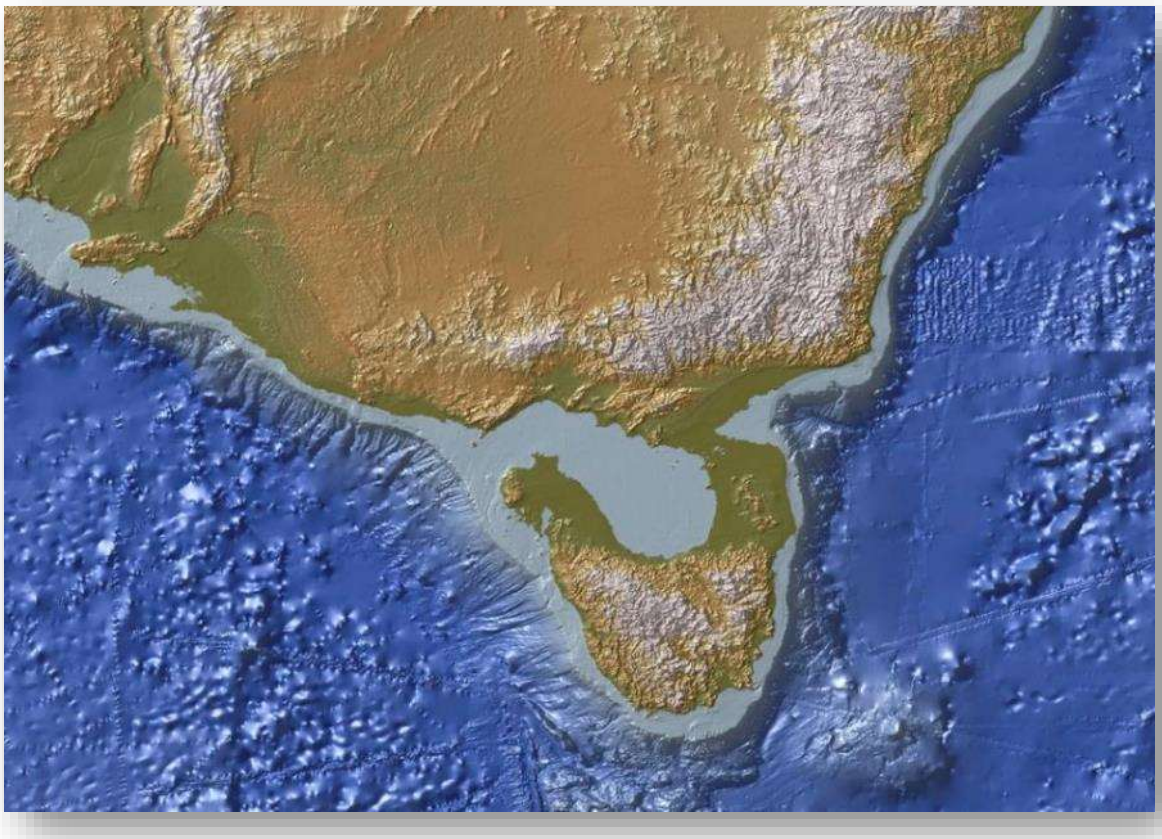
Our hike across was interesting, with the bright orange lichen covering imposing boulders. Wade, dressed appropriately for the Furneaux in orange and grey! Notice the footwear too!

This is the Modder River snaking out to the gorgeous blue ocean.

Spike Bay - Clarke Island

Spike Bay on the Western side of Clarke Island, was our next stop for a few days. This island has significant indigenous history.

According to information published by the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, “Middens and artefacts on what are now Badger, Clarke, Cape Barren, Goose, Flinders and other islands show that Aborigines were living there as long as 24,000 years ago until about 4,500 years ago when the rising sea waters forced people to retreat onto mainland Tasmania.” Before the Last Glacial Period these islands were still connected to the mainland, being all part of the Bassian Land Bridge which linked Tasmania to Wilson’s Promontory on mainland Australia until it was submerged by rising seas around 12,000 years ago.



There are many archaeological sites on Clarke Island, showing evidence of aboriginal presence over a long period. These days the main settlement is located on the northwest corner. The island remains in the care of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, from whom we gained the necessary permission to set foot there.

We spent four days at Spike Bay, weathering a blow there and waiting for the right conditions to cross Banks Strait towards the Tasmanian northeastern shores. It was a very enjoyable time.

This bay is spectacular, and it is obvious why it is named this way. It is bordered by granite spikes, slabs covered in orange lichen and large tors, reminiscent of Easter Island statues. It is an enthralling place. Here are a few aerials taken when we first arrived. The first two show the two small beaches where landing the dinghy is easiest. One is covered with gravel, the other with sand.

This image shows Spike Island, on the outside of the bay.

The channels between the islets looked interesting.

These give an overview of the whole bay. *Anui* is tucked in at Snug Cove.

We went ashore a few times. We are so glad we got permission to go beyond the beach as we could explore and see so much more.

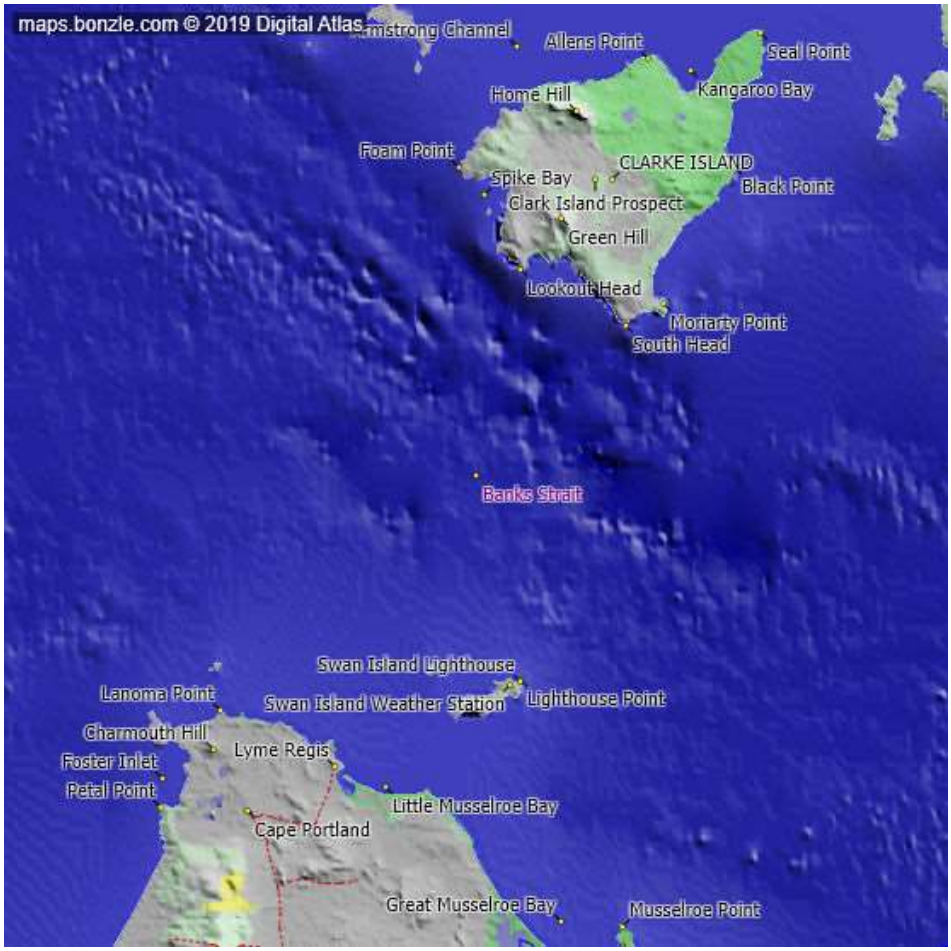
The granite tors were spectacular. They are huge.

On our last day at Clarke Island, the wind had eased, the sun was out, and yet again we were lucky enough to enjoy this captivating place on our own.

North Coast of Tasmania

Banks Strait Crossing

Banks Strait, in the Southeast region of Bass Strait, is a narrow and shallow body of water running between Clarke Island and the northeast coast of Tasmania.



Depths there vary between 10 or 12 meters to 30; the bottom is very uneven, and the quick moving tidal flow is strong, running at up to 3 knots. All this causes eddies and choppy waters, particularly when wind and tide are heading in opposite directions. So it pays to time your passage and wait for the right conditions: ebbing stream with Westerly winds, or flooding tide with light Easterlies. The latter is what we used.

We remember reading somewhere the warning of a fisherman: “So you have crossed big mean Bass Strait and think you are all done. But then you start going across Banks Strait and get a slap on the backside, just to remind you who is boss. Don’t relax too early!” We always exercise caution with this body of water.

It was an uneventful and fast passage across to Forster Inlet, just as we like it!

Forster Inlet

On a clear day you can see Forster Inlet and its distinctive wind turbines from Clarke Island. It is only 18nm away. There is a nice, protected anchorage in the easterlies, although the inlet is shallow inshore, so you need to take account of the tidal range before dropping anchor. We stayed a long way out, and are glad we did… not just for a safe depth, but also to escape the March flies that are ferocious on the beach!

After the spectacular coast of the Furneaux Islands, the north coast of Tasmania seems rather low lying and dare we say a little lacking in interesting features!

The main attraction here are the wind turbines which dominate the landscape. Some 56 turbines, all part of the Musselroe Wind Farm, produce 5% of Tasmania's electrical energy needs over a 12-month period.

We did go ashore, walking along the beach and towards Cape Portland, taking Bengie for a brief wander.

One interesting find was this stone hut with rusty machinery nearby, remnants of activities pre-dating the wind turbines!

Our wanders along the beach also got us intrigued. A Longsnout Boarfish had been trapped in a shallow water pool at low tide, and was struggling to stay in deep enough water. We took pity on him and moved him to a deeper spot. We hope he survived until the high tide.

The Croppies

A new anchorage for us, our next stop was at the Croppies, only 18nm further west. A lovely spot, protected from the easterlies, we stayed for two nights, enjoying beach walks, and even a snorkel and fish for abalones.

The sunset was colourful. One of the aspects we enjoyed in Tasmania are the long evenings. The sun sets much later, at about 9.00pm.

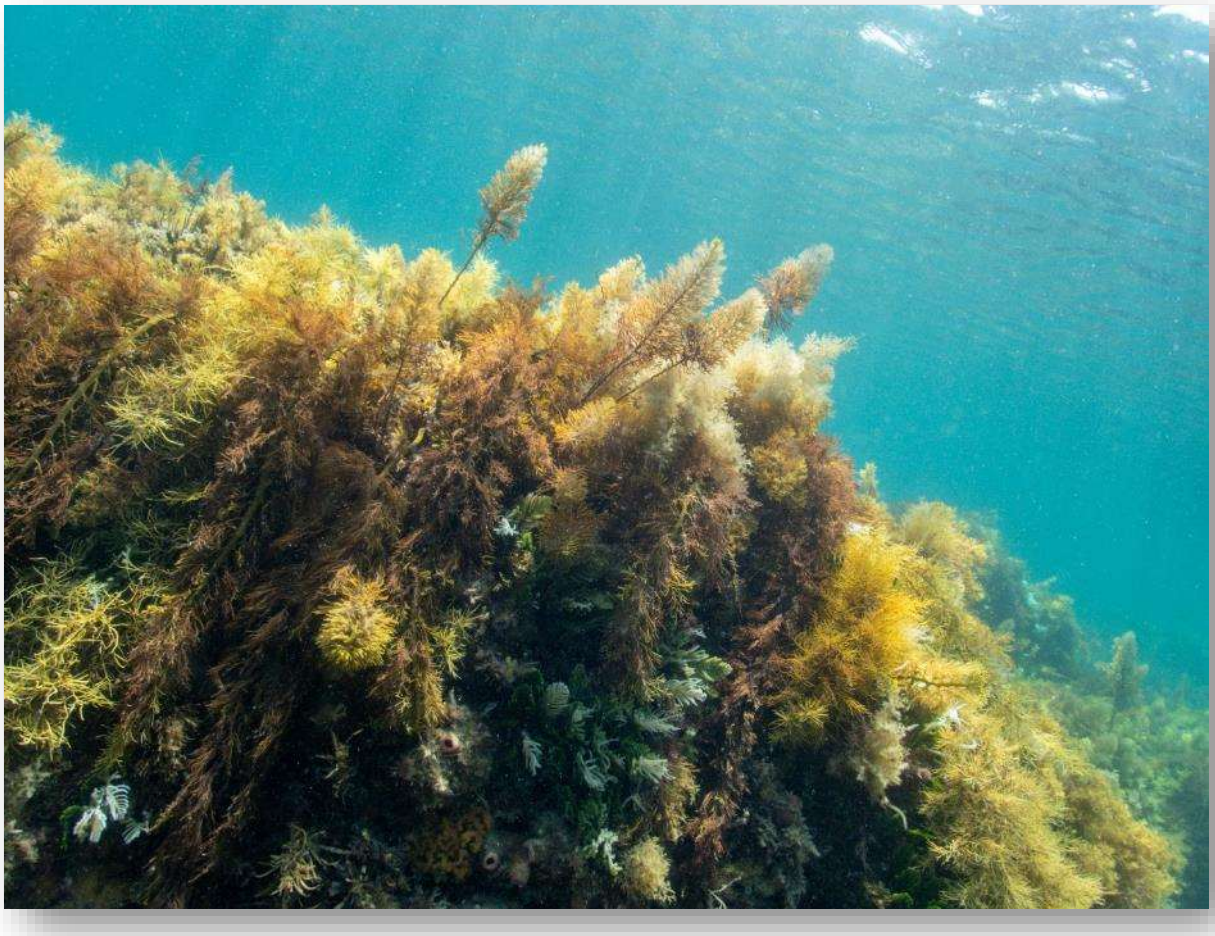
Bengie liked the Croppies too, enjoying the big logs washed out on the beach.

Our second day was fun. With all the rocky outcrops around and the seaweed, we decided a snorkel might be interesting. It is amazing to see the different colours underwater and the type of seaweed and kelp growing, compared to tropical waters.

We donned warm wetsuits, which is always an exercise in contortions, and you wonder how on earth you can get in there, let alone extract yourself afterwards. But with help, we got suited up and organized; Wade was on abalone finding duty, measuring gauge and ab knife in hand, Chris was taking photos, Trevor was guarding the boat with Bengie, not keen on the bracing temperature of the water!

Our thick wetsuits kept us toasty warm, and the activity was successful for all of us. We ended up with a few photos, a catch of four abalones, and a great feed that night!

It was like a garden down there, all part of the Great Southern Reef, a system of interconnected reefs that spans the southern coast of continental Australia and Tasmania. The Great Southern Reef is named after its world-famous neighbour to the north, the Great Barrier Reef, but has received a fraction of the attention and protection given to the latter. The robust health of the reef can be attributed to its cool, oxygen-rich waters and sprawling forests of giant and golden kelp. The kelp provides food and shelter for thousands of species of fish, sea dragons and penguins.

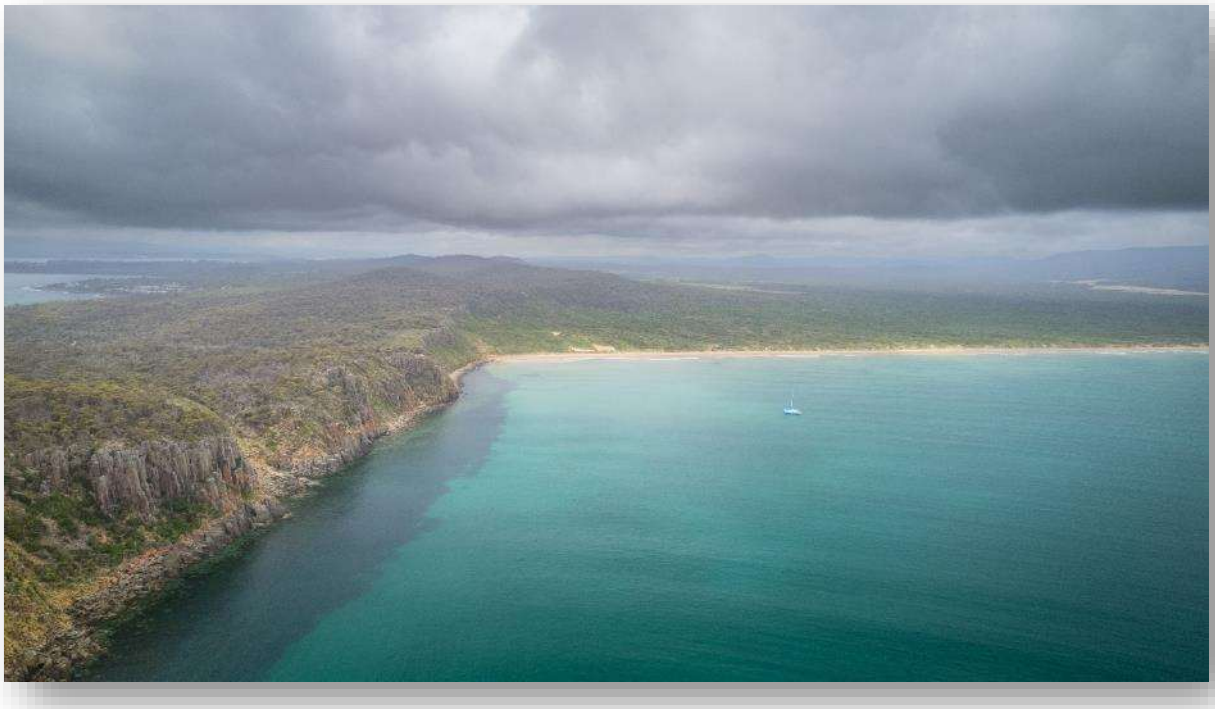


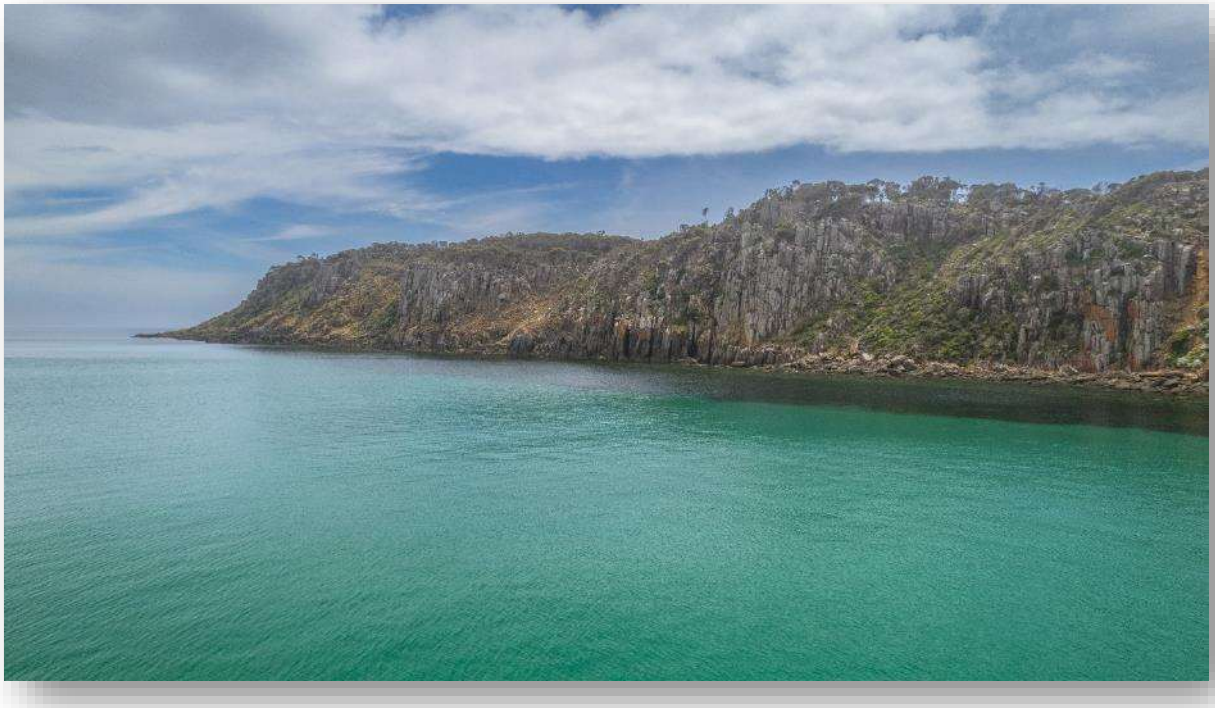
It is well worth braving the cooler water to see the rich marine life.

There were lots of fish, in particular the Magpie Perch, the Brown Striped Leatherjacket and the Horseshoe Leatherjacket, all nice eating, but we just observed them.

West Head – Tamar River

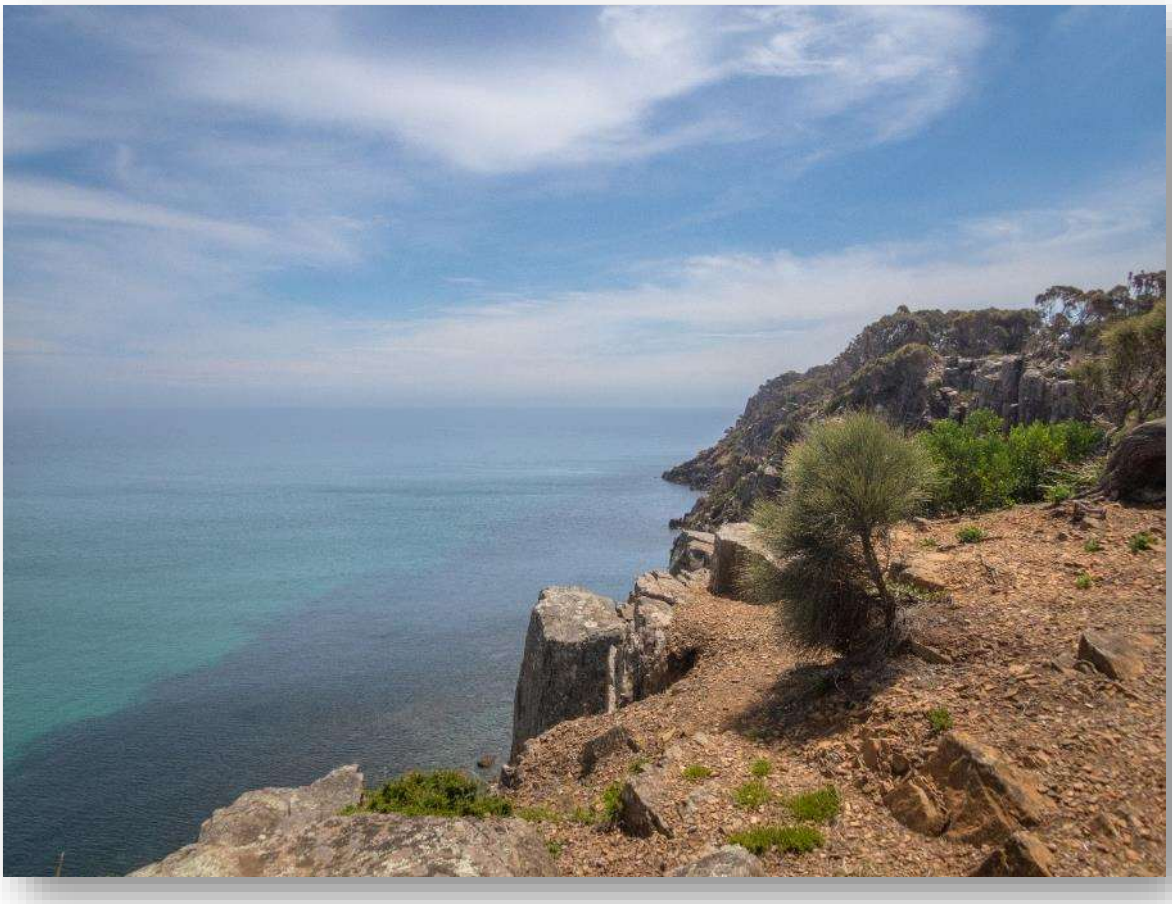
Although we stopped at one spot between the Croppies and West Head, the anchorage and seascape was not very inspiring nor very comfortable in the 20kn easterly, so we opted to do a longer sail of 28nm to the Tamar River, and shelter behind West Head. It was very moody when we arrived, but soon the sun came out.





These organ pipe-like cliffs are the first of many we will see as we circumnavigate Tasmania. They are made of dolerite. Here are the basics about this rock: Dolerite is an igneous rock, formed when a large amount of subsurface material melted during the dramatic break-up of the former supercontinent of Gondwana, starting about 170 million years ago. The resulting magma bubbled and oozed its way towards the earth's surface, becoming one of the largest upwellings of magma in earth's history. It cooled near the surface, but it took millions of years of erosion before it became visible at the surface. Today by far the largest surface exposure of dolerite is found in Tasmania. In fact a little under 40% of Tasmania is made up of dolerite. That's an eye-watering 30,000 square kilometres of the stuff! More on this when we eventually reach the East Coast!

We had a nice easy walk onto the headland, doing a loop walk through the dry forest, serenaded by the cicadas and their courtship calls. Boy were they loud!



The redeye cicadas were incredibly noisy and numerous. Male cicadas make the buzzing noise to attract nearby females to their location from the day they are born, and to increase their chances they work together by the millions in one location to make an even bigger racket!

George Town – Tamar River

After three weeks on the go, it was time to replenish the supplies and do a few chores. On the advice of a friend, we headed back to the mouth of the Tamar River, using the incoming tide to snake our way through the sand banks and reefs to George Town.

There is a small pontoon in front of the small settlement, barely long enough to fit *Anui*, and thankfully vacant when we arrived! Docking was uneventful just as we like it and it was then time to do a major food shop… the last opportunity until Strahan – top up the fuel and gas, and hit the laundromat. It took a good part of the day to get it all done, but what a handy spot!

The little cove is very shallow and we would not have wanted to anchor in there. *Anui* attracted attention and a whole lot of questions from the locals fishing from the pontoon, especially the kids. “How much did it cost? – A small house.” “How much is a small house? – Ask your dad!” “Can we have a look inside? – No it’s our home, do people from the street ask to see inside your house? – No. Well there you go!”

We had a productive day, got it all done and settled in for the night. The evening was peaceful.

The next day, we left early with the last of the out-going tide. It was serene in nil wind and at slack water, a change from when we came in and the boat was being thrown off course by the eddies!

We were headed for Port Sorell. On the way a pod of dolphins joined us, which delighted Trevor who has now ticked off a few must-see items on his list: dolphin, penguin, sea eagle, albatross.

Port Sorell

Port Sorell is a quiet holiday town set on the shores of a protected natural harbour. You can hide around the corner on the eastern side of the estuary as we did, or go further upriver. We anchored opposite the Narawntapu National Park.

The shallows are extensive and with a 3m tidal range, you have to be careful where you drop the pick, or you might end up high and dry. There is also quite a lot of current running, so wind against tide conditions occur at some point during the day. We generally choose to use our short bridle in these conditions as we do 'the dance': wild swings and circles.

The estuary of the Rubicon River has been named an Important Bird Area by Bird Life International due to its geographic importance for the Pied Oystercatchers.

We were monitoring the weather closely from here on, as Port Sorell was one of two possible drop-off points for Trevor who needed to go back to the mainland for commitments later in the month, the other being Stanley.

The weather has been fickle. With some strong SW and rain for the following two days, we were not going to go anywhere – we hate sailing in the rain, not to mention into head winds! Trevor had the option to get picked up by his nephew while we were at Port Sorell, or wait till we got to Stanley, 60nm and a couple of days away. His preference was to stay on board for as long as he could!

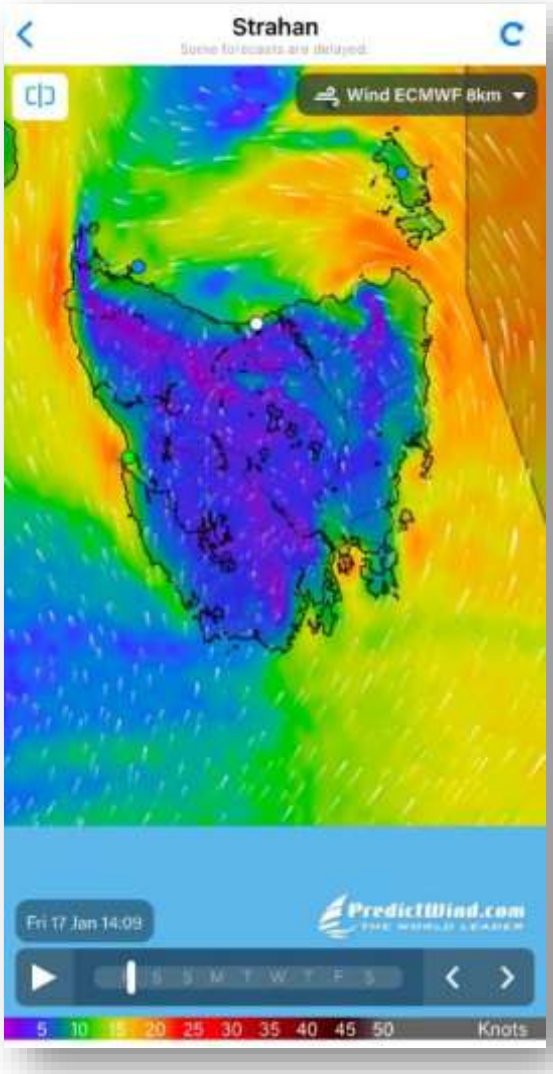
However another challenge was that we were not sure whether we would find a spot on the floating jetties at Stanley and were not keen on rafting up to a fishing boat. So whether we would have the opportunity to stay the night, have a civilized stop to say our goodbyes and invite his family on board for lunch, or only manage a brief drop off and go was unclear.

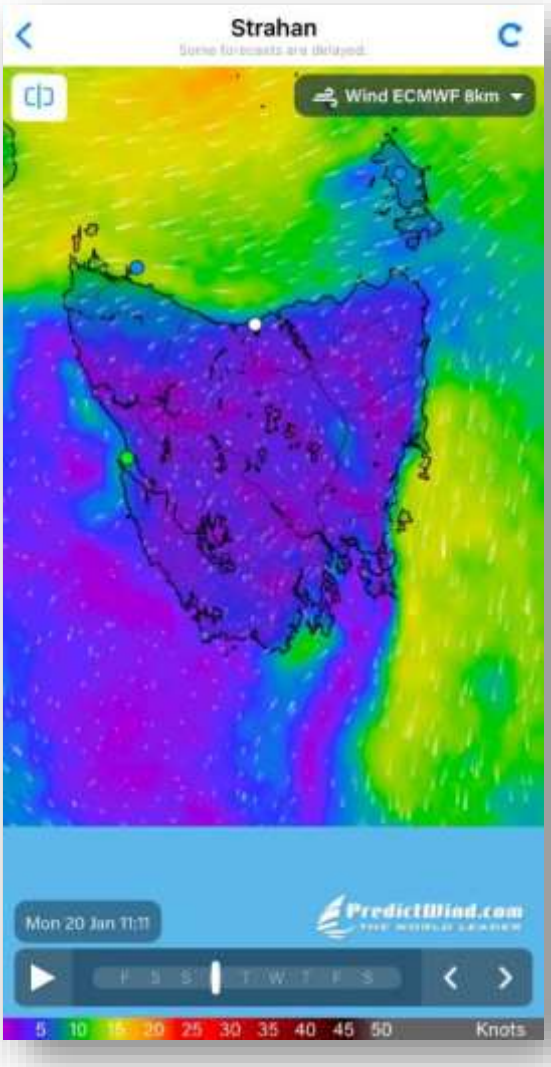
How long we would stay at Stanley was also dependent on the weather for the following days… Would we get a window to get around the corner and start our descent along the West coast, or would we need to get up to the Hunter Group of Islands on the NW corner of Tasmania and wait there?

Obsessive consultation of the weather forecasts was intensified over the next few days! Here is what we were looking out on PredictWind for the passage to Stanley then halfway down the west coast to Macquarie Harbour.

The image on the left is the forecast for Friday 17-1-25, the one on the right the forecast for Monday 20-1-25. We had a weather window to get to Stanley on the Friday and drop Trevor off on the Saturday, then get up to the Hunter Islands on Sunday, ready for a departure south on Monday in very light winds!

The white dot on the charts shows where we were at Port Sorell, the blue dot shows Stanley, and the green dot Strahan and Macquarie Harbour. We had very light conditions for the Monday and Tuesday to get south to Sandy Cape then Macquarie Harbour, both 50nm hops from the Hunter Islands in the NW corner of Tasmania.





We would probably have to motor sail, but it would mean we would not have to hang around too long at the Hunter Islands. So we had a plan!

We stayed at Port Sorell for three days, while some rainy SW weather passed. Our walk, in still sunny conditions when we first arrived, took us right around the headland you see in the aerial below, for a pleasant beach stroll, then across the tundra for a small bush bash to find one of the main tracks back to where we had left the dinghy.

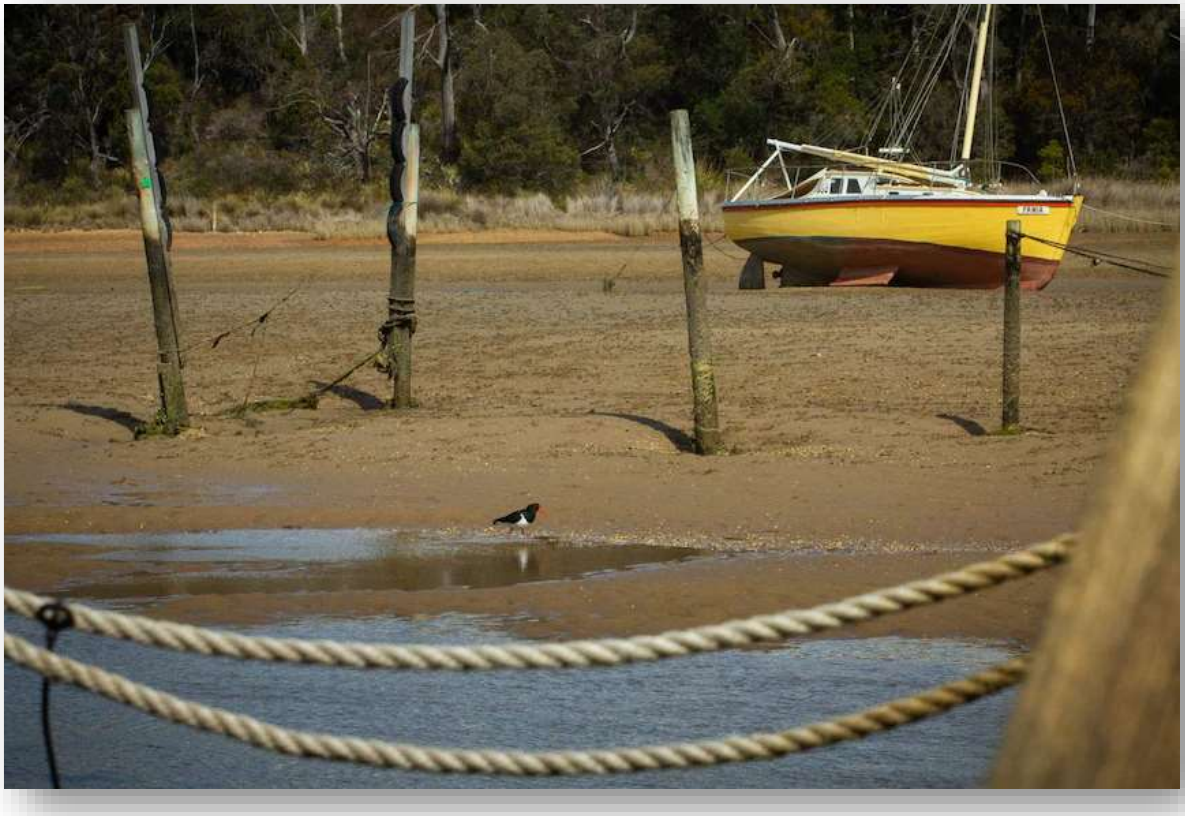
We had one day boat bound with strong winds and rain, but the sun was out the next day, allowing us to fly the drone, and go for another walk in the Narawntapu National Park. The following aerial shots confirm why you need to be cautious where you anchor: sand and mud flats for miles! This is looking east.

In comparison, this is the same view at mid tide from a bit higher up:

And here is the anchorage at low tide on our third day; we are safe, the little trailer sailor is right on the edge and looked to us like it was close to drying out, but only draws 80cms.

During our second walk ashore, we discovered some whale bones on the estuary side of the beach which looked like pectoral fins and a shoulder joint. It was rather smelly!

We also went for a little dinghy trip up the rivulet you see in the aerial below called Muddy Creek or Panatana Rivulet. Low tide drains the small stream down to a few puddles, leaving old wooden boats to lay over in the mud. There has been a tradition of ship building and restoring in this creek. These days you see more rotting and sinking hulls than boat building projects and you'd better have a shallow draft and short mast to fit below the power lines that cross the entrance at a height of only 13m. Not a spot for *Anui*!



Stanley

Bright and early, 5.00am, we raised anchor and set off for Stanley, 65 nm away. We sailed well initially, but the wind swung and got light, so we ended up motor-sailing some of the way.

We reached the harbour in the afternoon. It is a spectacular spot to come to with the historic village nestled at the base of The Nut, a sheer-sided bluff. It is all that remains of an ancient volcanic plug and is one of Tasmania's most distinctive landmarks.

We thought we were lucky to pick up a spot along the newly constructed public floating jetty. We were the only yacht in the harbour, all other vessels being fishing boats. In the past with *Take It Easy* we had to raft up to a fishing boat, but we were not keen to do this with *Anui*. We had intended to stay one night, drop Trevor off, then leave and anchor at the Hunter Islands on the northwestern tip of Tasmania and wait there for the conditions to head south along the wild West Coast. However, the weather forced us to reassess our plans!

The floating jetty has four spots designed for monohulls. But one of those spots, the closest to the rock wall has enough space for a catamaran. There is not a lot of room to maneuver. It was quite stressful reversing our oversize vessel into the spot and tying it with the wind pushing us off dangerously close to some pylons. But eventually we were in and comfortable… initially!

We say 'initially' because while the wind was light and mainly from the north, it was a gorgeous spot… You can see from the photo above how calm it all is. However, as the wind picked up during the night between 20 and 30 knots from the ENE, we were quite exposed. The swell started coming in and the surge was terrible: ropes squeaking, *Anui* moving back and forth and up and down, yanking at the lines, us worrying we were going to pull a cleat off the deck. We did not sleep much during our first night! Instead, we were busy lengthening the ropes – the longer ropes mean there is some stretch and less yanking - doubling up every line tying us to the floating jetty to ensure if chaffing happened and a rope broke, we would not end up on the rocks! Once that was done, the boat was safe, but it was still very noisy and unsettling. The floating jetties are perfect in northerlies or westerlies, just not when there is some east in the wind!

The next day, Trevor's family came to pick him up and we had a celebratory smorgasbord lunch on *Anui*, a novel experience for them. By late afternoon, it was time to say our goodbyes.

The forecast strengthened to over 30 knots during the weekend and we were stuck in our corner of Stanley harbour for several days, until the wind abated. It would have been just too scary to depart earlier. During the day things were not bad at all. We entertained Trevor's family who came to pick him up on the weekend, got the boat tidied up after our guest left, and we went for walks. But that first night was so uncomfortable that Wade declared he did not want to sleep on board for the next two nights we needed to stay. It was not about safety but about having a decent night' s sleep away from the horrible creaking and screeching noises. For the first time ever in nearly 8 years, we opted to sleep in a cabin at the local Caravan Park! The good thing: comfy bed, long hot showers and no worrying racket!

Despite the drama about the surge in the harbour, we enjoyed our stay. Stanley's beautifully preserved colonial architecture, quaint streets and beautiful views make it a lovely place to visit, and the seafood is particularly tasty: scallop pies, oysters, tasty fish had us eating out a few times!

Cozy little cottages line the streets which give Stanley a romantic feel. Every house has gorgeous gardens.

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We even went to look at the little penguins at the end of Godfreys Beach on the opposite side of the Nut from where we were moored while Trevor was still with us. They come back to their burrows after dusk, at the base of the Nut.

We have seen them on the islands of Bass Strait, especially at King Island and Deal Island and they are always a delight, especially when you can just sit quietly on the sandy beach without anybody else around and watch them waddle up in little huddles.

At Stanley the viewing is a little more organized for the tourists, with a viewing deck and penguin friendly red lights installed to help visitors see them without disturbing them. We recall seeing them when we took Chris's parents for a car trip around Tasmania. This was well before the viewing deck was installed. We were by ourselves, walking in the grass and had them waddling right next to us, even passing between our legs!

This time, the colony came quite late in the evening. The tide was low, they had a long way to hop along the rocky shore to climb up to their burrows. It was dark at 9.30 pm and we did not see them appear until after 10pm. The ranger indicated that about 50 Little Penguins came ashore.

Little Penguins are shy, cautious and sensitive birds who are easily frightened by noise, movement and lights, so torches and camera flashes are a no-no! We managed a few shots with our phones, but they are not our clearest and we had to 'de-saturate' the photos to get rid of the red tinge! Still, it was lovely to see them.

Monday the 20th of January was departure day, although not until the afternoon, to ensure the conditions were calm enough not to scare ourselves at the exit. We watched several fishing boats move around the harbour beforehand. They are so impressive as they power in and out of their pens, use their prop walk, and move decisively. Prop walk is a marine phenomenon that occurs when a boat's propeller pushes the stern of the vessel sideways. The fishermen use it to their advantage when manoeuvring. On our cat, we don't have prop walk but we do have two engines to help us pivot! However we have little practice at moving in and out of marinas since we spend our time away from harbours, preferring to anchor. So there is always a lot to learn observing the pros in action.

Stanley has quite a fleet of cray and shark fishing boats. The red ones are part of the Hursey fleet of nine vessels, the backbone of the family business which supplies wholesale seafoods and fresh seafood for the award-winning Hursey restaurant, take-away and fish sales. The vessels catch Southern Rock Lobster, Giant Crab, Stripey Trumpeter, Gummy Shark, Flathead and other local reef fish. The blue vessels are part of the TOP Fish family business, which stands for Tasmanian Octopus Products. They supply octopus and live seafood, and they too run their five vessels and their processing facility.

We watched the blue boat in the centre of the image - the *Farquharson* - come out of his pen, reverse into the spot next to us at the floating jetty to clean his water line on one side, come out, pivot around and nose back in to clean up the other side, then return to his parking spot, all this with over 20 knots of wind blowing!

All of these Stanley vessels move like they mean it, with plenty of speed to have control, using prop walk and knowing they have powerful enough engines to stop their boat exactly where and when they want. We are very shy with maneuvering at speed in tight spots, especially in strong conditions... and that's our undoing! Still a lot to learn!

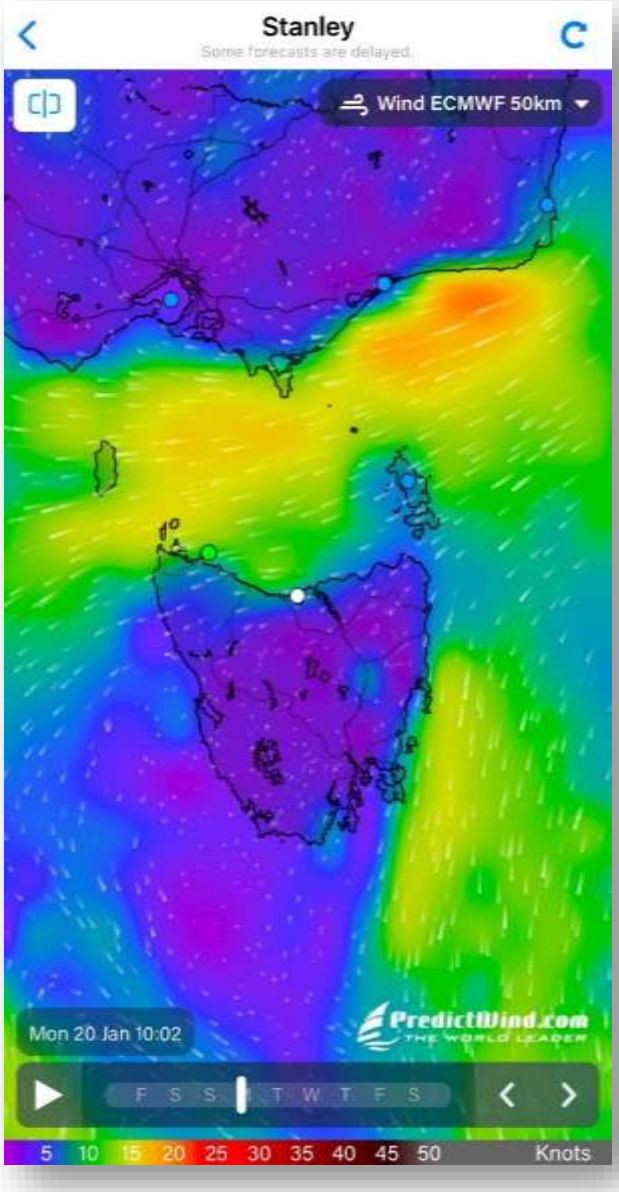
Onto the Wild West Coast!

On Monday 20th January, we waited for the wind to ease and light showers to stop, and got ourselves ready to leave Stanley. We were intending to cast the mooring lines by the middle of the day.

The West Coast has few safe harbours along the way. The main ones are Macquarie Harbour about halfway down the coast, and Port Davey/Bathurst Harbour at the southern end. These are very large bodies of water fed by many rivers.

It is committal to say the least. It is a very exposed coast, with nothing between it and South America, which means Southern Ocean swells even in calm conditions, a very rugged coastline, and not many places to hide if the weather turns nasty.

If you are lucky and have northerly or easterly conditions, which does happen in summer, you can anchor overnight at Sandy Cape, about 50 nm north of Macquarie Harbour, at Point Hibbs, and Elliot Bay between Macquarie Harbour and Port Davey.



We had been watching the weather closely, wondering whether we would get the opportunity to cover the 150nm from Stanley to Macquarie Harbour in two hops. However the weather window ended up being shorter than hoped. We had a choice to make: we could leave Stanley, head for the Hunter Islands and wait there for the next window which might appear in a week to ten days, or we could bite the bullet and go all the way in one go, even if it meant motoring some of the way, to take advantage of light conditions for 24 hours, some of it on the nose. The latter is what we did!

Stanley to Macquarie Harbour

We left Stanley at 1.00pm, sailed well that afternoon and weaved our way through the passage between the Hunter Islands and the far northwest coast of Tasmania, helped by the outgoing tide. The current was strong and there were lots of eddies in the water, but we were flying!

From Stanley, it is quite a long, winding way – 33nm - to get through the Hunter group of islands and the shallow sandbanks, out of Bass Strait and into the Southern Ocean. There may well be a quicker way, but without local knowledge, we stuck to the standard route.

The current is strong, with eddies forming all around you as you pass between the tip of Robbins Island and Three Hummock Island, then meander between shallow banks, the islets of Stack, Bird, and the southern tip of Hunter Island, past Trefoil Island, and then you are in the open ocean.

With a reefed main and furled jib, we made fast progress, averaging 10 knots speed, helped along by the tide. By 6.00pm we were out of the maze of rocks and islands, and it was time to turn south. The wind was by then slightly forward of our beam, and we had magnificent views of Cape Grim and the Woolnorth wind farm. The spectacular coastline has not changed since Bass and Flinders first laid eyes on it and named Cape Grim from the sea in 1798.

Woolnorth was originally a massive merino sheep farm. These days it has evolved into a Wind Turbine green energy farm and Australasia's largest dairy operation.

The birds were very active: large flocks of shearwaters, petrels and our favourite shy albatrosses. What a hoot!

A few of the albatrosses were flying close to *Anui*, making clear shots easier. Chris took a series of photos. These are shy albatrosses, also known as shy mollymawks. They are a medium-sized albatross that breeds on three remote islands off the coast of Tasmania. Their lifespan is about 60 years. As of June 2020, the species is listed as "Endangered" in Australia; there are thought to be 15,000 pairs of shy albatrosses left. It is Australia's only endemic albatross.

They are magnificent to watch as they soar. Albatrosses fly in a series of broad ellipses, or S-shaped loops, called dynamic soaring. This flight pattern allows them to travel long distances with little energy output.

We continued sailing well for another hour and a half, then the wind gradually became light and eventually came on our nose. We had to turn an engine on, and took the opportunity to make water. By 9.30pm it was dark, our water tanks were full, we turned the second engine on, beating into 10 to 15 knots southerlies and started our two-hour watches. It was a little rough and noisy with the bows lifting then slamming into the water. The conditions improved as the wind dropped to below 5 knots during the night and gradually switched to the east.

Dawn was lacking in colour and very hazy, with a lot of mist over the mountains in the distance; the ocean was calm with slow and gentle swell lines, like a breath. Photos of the seascape just don't come out well in these conditions. But here is a glimpse.

At 9.50am, we were in front of Macquarie Heads in dead calm conditions.

Hells Gates, as the entrance is known, is a notoriously dangerous and shallow channel entrance to the harbour. The actual channel is between Macquarie Heads on the west and Entrance Island on the east (the main length of the harbour runs southeast of Hells Gates). There is a wider area of water between Entrance Island and the eastern shore, but it is too shallow to get a boat over.

Hells Gates were so named not so much because it can be hellish to get through the devilish narrows, but because for convicts transported here, it was their point of "entrance to Hell", their Hell being the Macquarie Harbour Penal Station on Sarah Island and the outlying surrounds of the harbour.

Cape Sorell stands tall, to the west of the entrance passage. We follow the breakwater and pass through the gap – the Hells Gates. The breakwater was built between 1900 and 1902 and the channel was dredged. Even in calm conditions, the current is strong as the water rushes through.

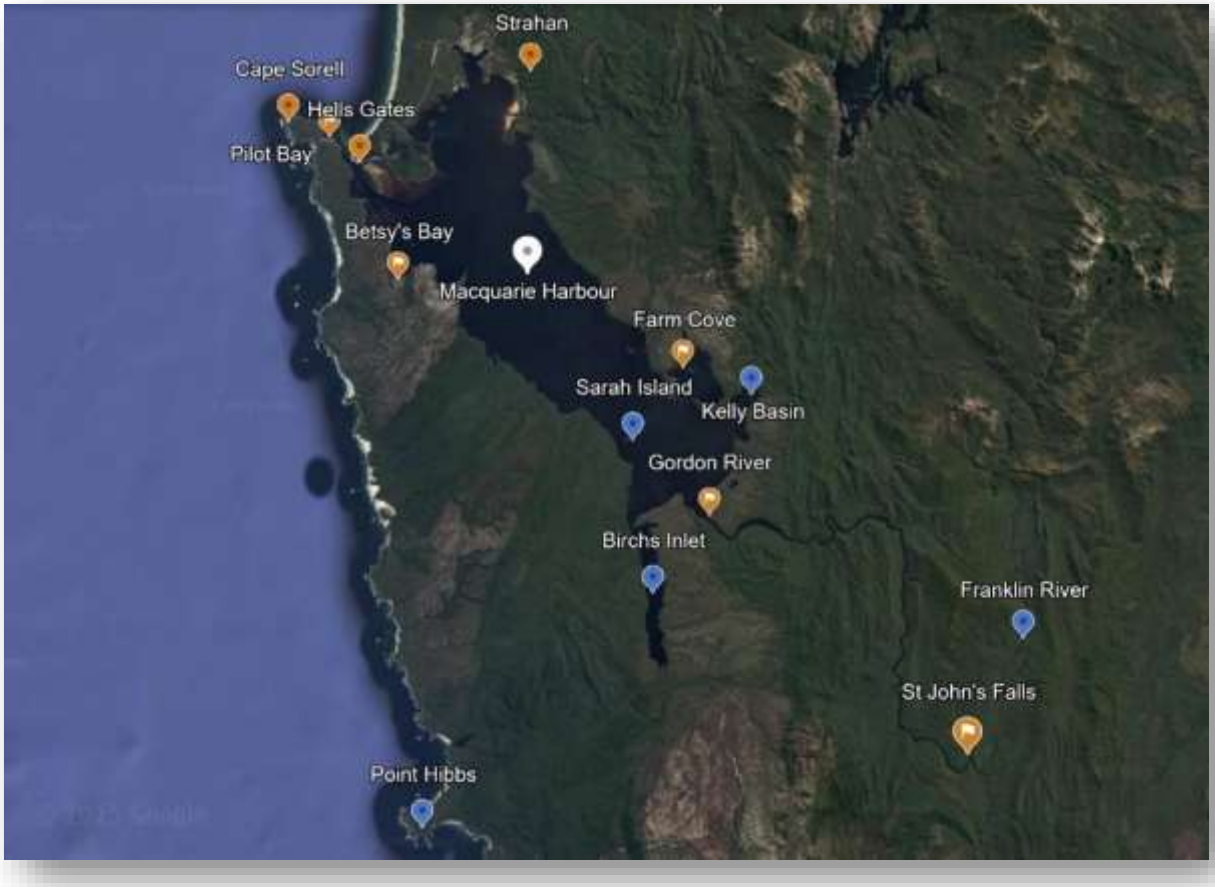
Here is a series of images we took as we came into this spectacular natural harbour through its notoriously narrow and dangerous passage in strong conditions. But as happened during our previous visit, the Narrows were calm!

We are in, leaving Entrance Island behind and Bonnet Island Lighthouse in front of us.

This shot looks back towards the Macquarie Heads and both island lighthouses which were built before the Cape Sorell Lighthouse.

Macquarie Harbour

Here is a map of Macquarie Harbour. The orange markers show our anchorages and places we visited, blue markers show other well-known points of interest.



Macquarie Harbour is a shallow fjord approximately 315 km^2, with an average depth of 15 meters, although with deeper places up to 50 meters. It is navigable by shallow draft vessels. The King River which cuts through the West Coast Range and the Gordon River empty into Macquarie Harbour. The narrow entrance to Macquarie Harbour has hazardous tidal currents. Outside of the Harbour the entrance area is known as Macquarie Heads, and the most western point is Cape Sorell. The sheer volume of fresh water that pours into the Harbour through the rivers, combined with the narrow exit result in barometric tides. When there is rain in the mountains surrounding the Harbour, the tide rises, and it falls when the atmospheric pressure reverses and results in less rain. There is only about 50cms difference between high and low water.

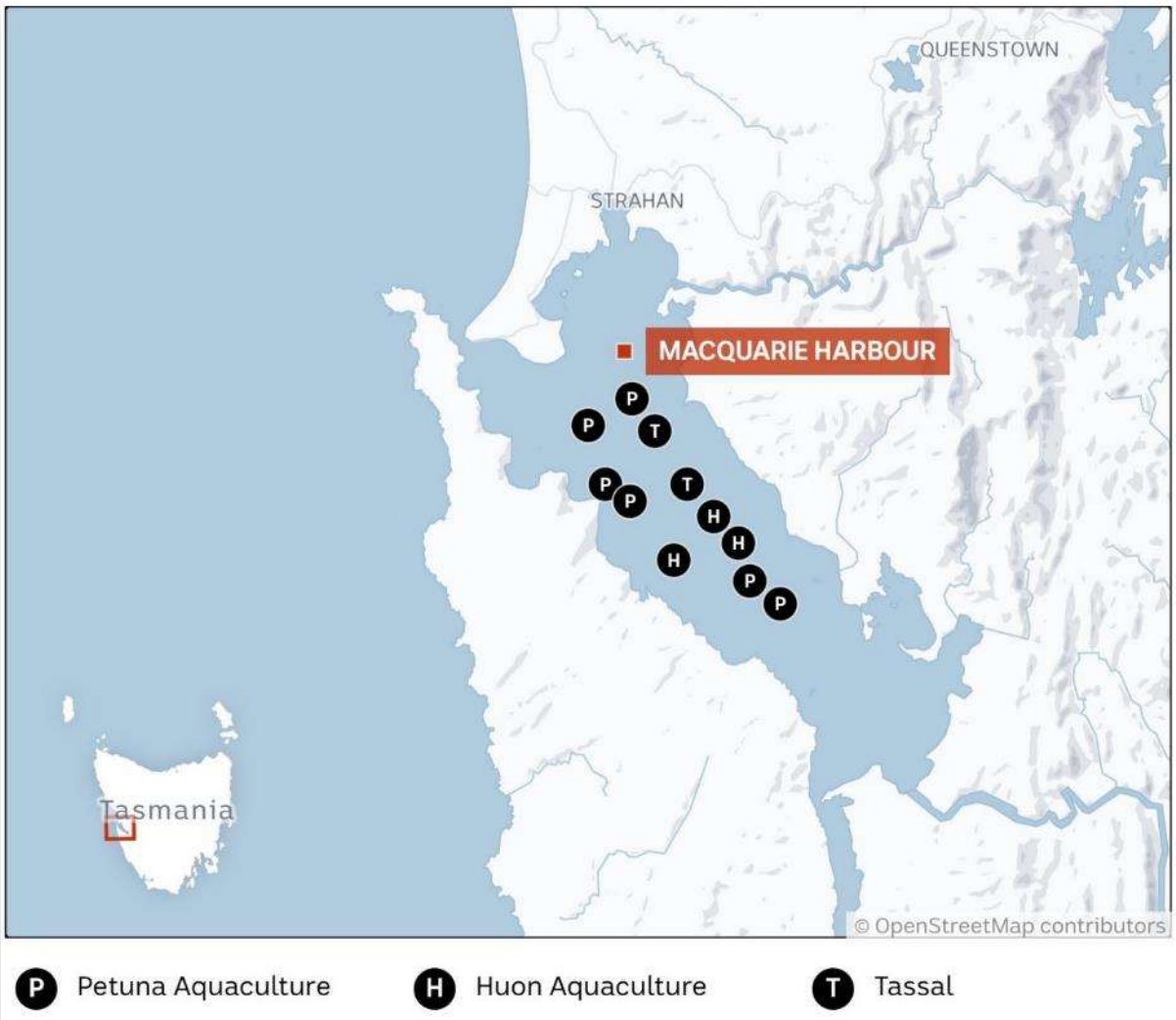
The dark colour of the water is typical of waterways throughout the southwest of Tasmania and is caused by naturally occurring tannins in the water, leaching from vegetation and being carried through by the rivers which have their mouth at various places in the inlet:

- Bird River – mouth of river in Kelly Basin
- Braddon River – mouth on mid-eastern shore
- Clark River – mouth at Pillinger, Kelly Basin
- Gordon River – mouth on southeastern end of harbour
- King River – mouth at northeast of harbour

The first settlement at Macquarie Harbour was on Sarah Island, a small island in the harbour, used as a prison for recalcitrant prisoners from other settlements in Tasmania, due to its extreme isolation and extreme climate.

Later the small port of Strahan was developed on the shores of Macquarie Harbour to support the nearby mining settlements, mainly Queenstown. Another port was developed on the southeast section of the harbour in Kelly Basin along with townsite of Pillinger. The settlement and port were short lived as was the North Mount Lyell company that developed the facilities.

You cannot come to Macquarie Harbour and not talk about the controversial salmon farms. These were first established in Macquarie Harbour in the 1980s. Production increased significantly in the 21st century. Tassal established farms there in 2003, Huon Aquaculture in 2008 and Petuna around 2011.



Source: Department of Natural Resources and Environment

A range of associated environmental issues have followed the harbour's industrialization. Problems include the creation of de-oxygenated "dead zones" beneath pens and massive stock mortalities occurred as stocking and pollution loads increased. The fate of the endangered Maugean skate has also been a subject of concern and investigation. All three operators are now owned by foreign companies but of course employ local labour. A reduction or closure of the salmon farms would impact the local economy.

Management practices have been questioned and challenged, after which the EPA reduced the farms' stocking capacities, but it is not enough. The fish poo and other discharge from salmon farms generate the same amount of nitrogen pollution as sewage discharged by a city of half a million people – more than twice that of Hobart! It is that same old problem of greed, excess and terrible impact on the environment. Whether the salmon farming licenses will be reviewed remains unclear. Can we find a way to have sustainable salmon farming and the environment?

Betsy Bay

Our first anchorage in Macquarie Harbour was Betsy Bay, a few nautical miles in, to get some protection from strengthening southerlies during the next few days. Unlike anchorages on the north coast, once inside Macquarie Harbour the water is stained by tannin. You cannot see what's underneath the boat and rely on the chart, satellite maps and your sounder to figure out the depth. You can see the discoloration along the beach in the aerial below.

We anchored in 5m of water, a way away from another yacht and stayed in the bay for two nights. There is a hike up the ridge to the ocean beach, a 9km return walk along a wombat trail. You can just see the rough track up the ridge line. The track disappears under the moorland and button grass once you are on top of the plateau.

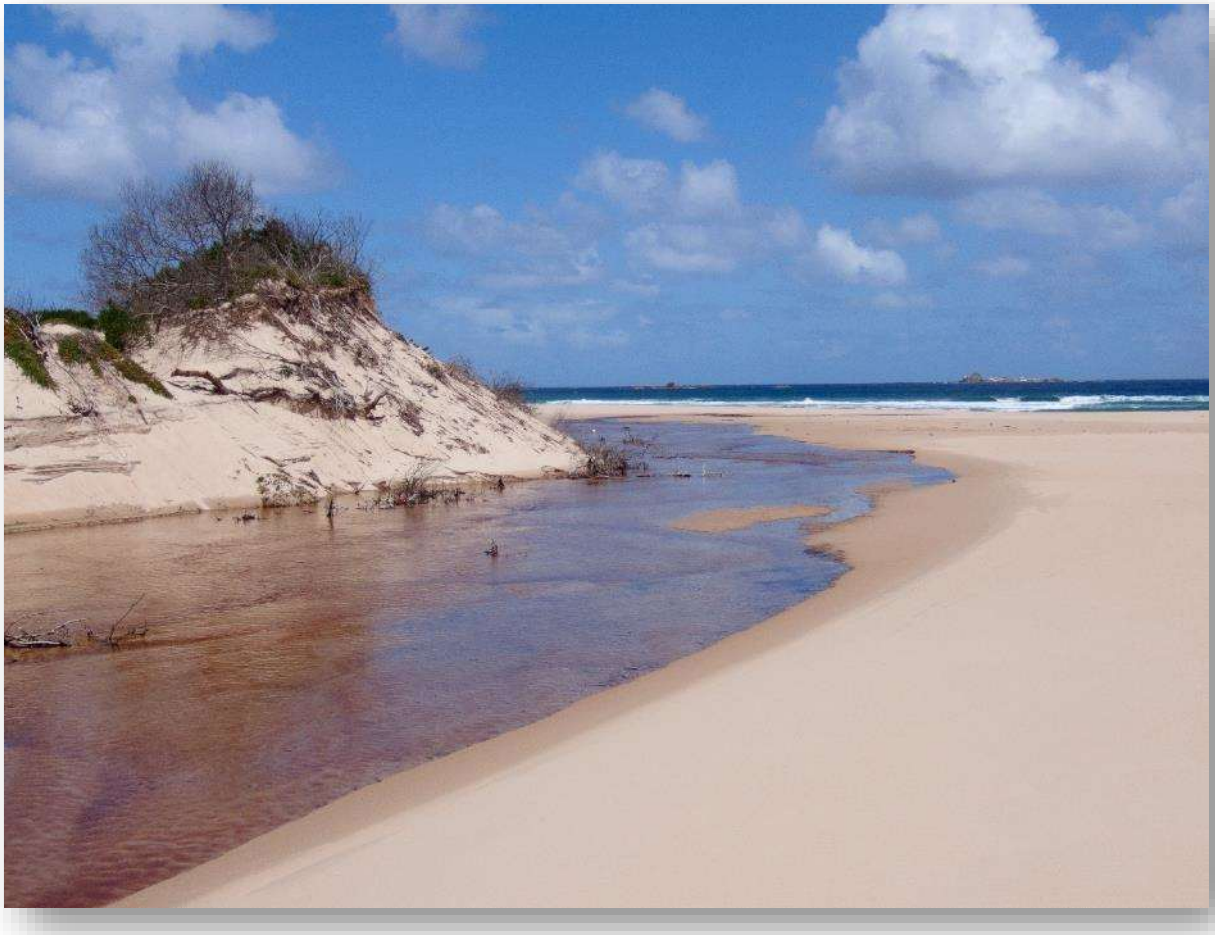
It is quite steep to get up, but the views of Betsy Bay with Table Head in the foreground and the Western Range in the background make the effort worthwhile.

The plateau is covered in wildflowers – tea tree, epacris, heath, grass trigger plant, mosses.

As we progress further through the wooded section, the vegetation is taller than us and very overgrown. In places, we can no longer see the trail, we just follow the indent and hope our feet can find it, while we push the bushes aside to open the way in front of us! By the way, long pants or gaiters and a long sleeve top are well advised on any of those so-called tracks, to save you from death by many scratches!

Eventually, a couple of hours later, you reach the other side of the plateau and can see the beach.

The last dash involves a steep slide down to the ocean beach, helped along by a rope. That knotted rope is even more needed on the way back up!



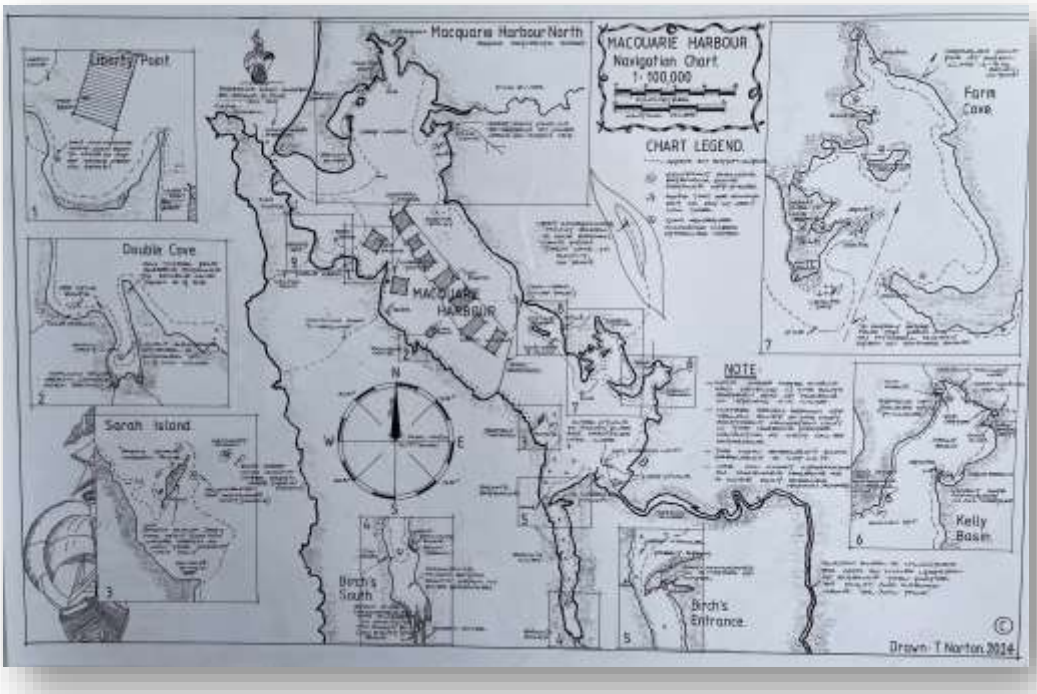
Wade, as usual checked out the flotsam on the beach: ropes, lots of buoys! And true to form he had to lug a slightly deformed but big fender back to *Anui*.

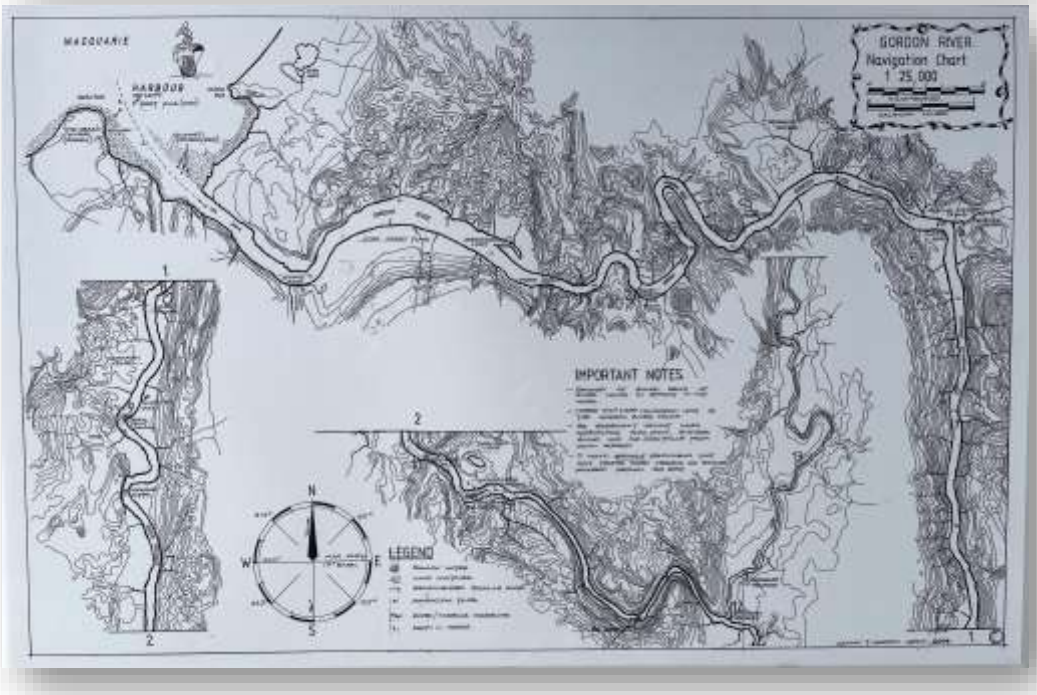
Farm Cove

Our next anchorage was at beautiful Farm Cove. We selected the West Arm, one of two unspoilt anchorages with heavily treed foreshore and Mt Sorell dominating the bay, for once clear of clouds despite the overcast sky. The best part was arriving there in totally calm conditions, not a breath of wind, not a ripple on the water. It was divine.

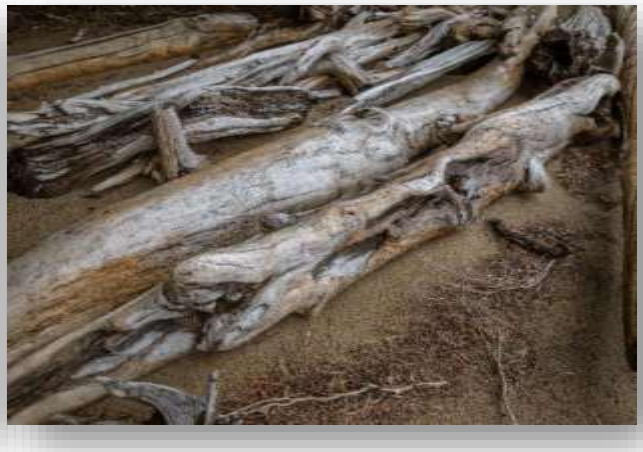
Although we like challenges, climbing Mount Sorell was not on our must-do list. Its main difficulties are that it has no point of access, no track and a whole lot of forbidding vegetation to get through. Trevor Norton, local cartographer and skipper of the yacht Stormbreaker has drawn two charts of the harbour's many hideaways and features.

In Farm Cove where Sarah Island convicts had grown pumpkins and onions more than a century ago, his artwork shows a dashed line sweeping inland towards the summit and next to it a note: "Very conspicuous Mount Sorell – 15 hours from Farm Cover return walk to Summit Track". But we knew better than contemplating what is actually a very tough bush bash requiring an overnight camp and a level of fitness we simply have not got!





Instead we stayed in our heavenly anchorage for two nights, and took an easy stroll across the isthmus, leaving the dinghy at the small landing spot, and walking through a patch of tree ferns on our way to a small beach, lined with many dead tree trunks. One of these had the distinctive scent of Huon Pine, a warm, spicy fragrance. The aroma is subtle and reminiscent of cloves, pine and leatherwood. There had been a fire a few years ago and many trees were dead unfortunately.



During the day we were visited by a pod of five dolphins, two coming right next to the boat, and several black swans. We were quite surprised the dolphins came so far into Macquarie Harbour.

The next morning was a chilly day, drizzly, and overcast at 12°C – remember it's supposed to be Summer here! Time to use that diesel heater of ours, installed 18 months ago in preparation for this very trip that got postponed by a year! Only one problem: when you switch it on after months of not using it, it smokes like a steam train for a few minutes, making it look like *Anui* is on fire! Best to start it in a deserted anchorage so we don't alarm anybody and end up with the fire brigade descending on us. Mind you, no risk of that at Farm Cove, miles away from civilization.

We have talked to the distributors of the Eberspacher D4L, which happen to be in Tasmania and they assure us it is normal after a long time without switching it on… but regardless, when we get to Kettering, we will have them check our set up.

We were toasty warm after the initial smoke screen, and it is gorgeous to take the chill away in the morning and in the evening.

Up the Gordon River

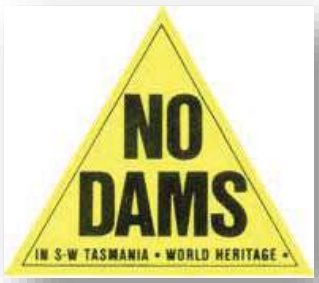
Despite the overcast and at times drizzly weather, we started our cruise up the iconic Gordon River. The Gordon River is navigable for up to 40km upstream of its mouth, then further by dinghy and outboard above Sir John Falls and Big Eddy. Commercial tour boats however only go 10kms upstream to Heritage Landing, so once past this, you are often blissfully on your own.

A journey along the magnificent Gordon River and its 25 tumbling tributaries serves as a reminder of how lucky we are to be surrounded by such natural beauty. The Gordon descends 570m over its 172km course, much of it located in an uninhabited wilderness area contained within the Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park and Southwest National Park.

The mighty Gordon River flows pure and clear from its source in Lake Richmond, a deep glacial basin way up on the precipitous eastern slopes of the brooding Mt King William. It plunges down from the high country in a brawling, tumbling torrent, scouring dark tannins from the boggy buttongrass plains to emerge as black as billy tea, yet fresh and drinkable. It plummets in foaming cataracts through limestone gorges so impenetrably deep and dark that the river was once thought to vanish into an abyss of underground tunnels and ferocious chasms no man had ever seen. It descends almost 600m through a magnificent uninhabited wilderness of towering forests, ferns and emerald mosses.

In its lower part the Gordon becomes a sinuous serpent of a river, broad and slower moving. Its lower reaches are part of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and contains a cold climate rainforest and rare trees. Much of the landscape was shaped by glaciers and has a long natural history, with ancient Huon Pines that grow to an age of over 3000 years.

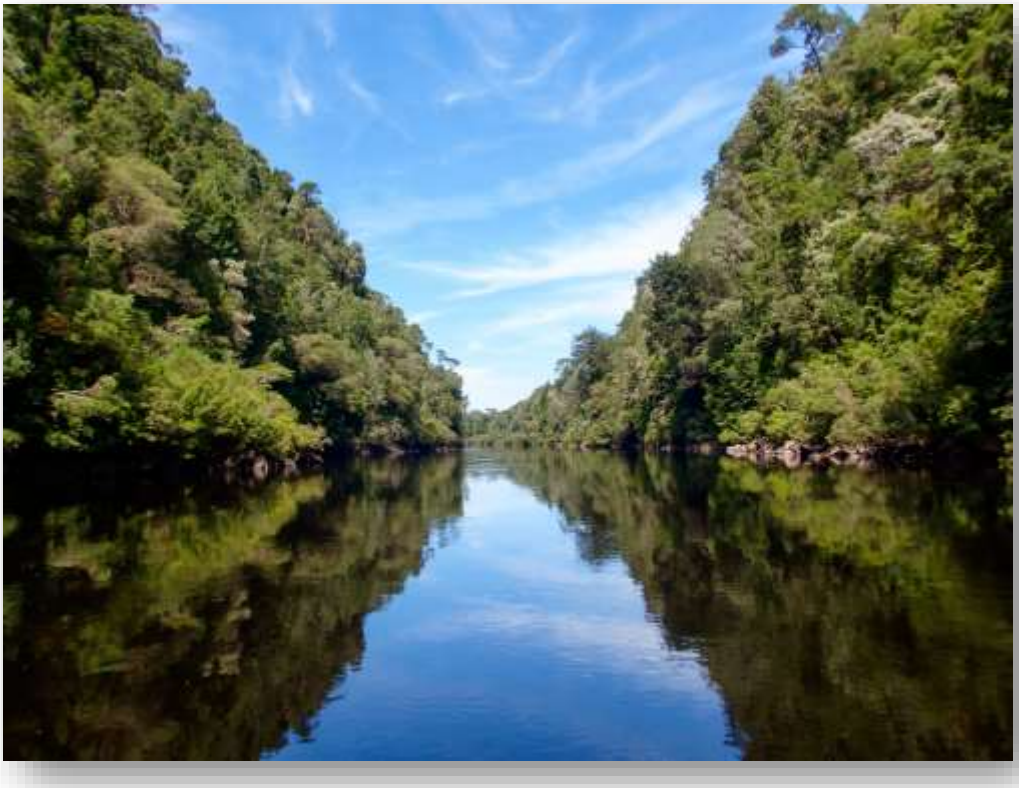
This beautiful wilderness was also home to political controversy in the 1980s. The Franklin Dam project was a proposed dam on the Gordon River that was never constructed. The movement that eventually led to the project's cancellation became one of the most significant environmental campaigns in Australian history. It was incredible to learn how the then Liberal Premier of the day, Robin Gray, described this pristine location as:



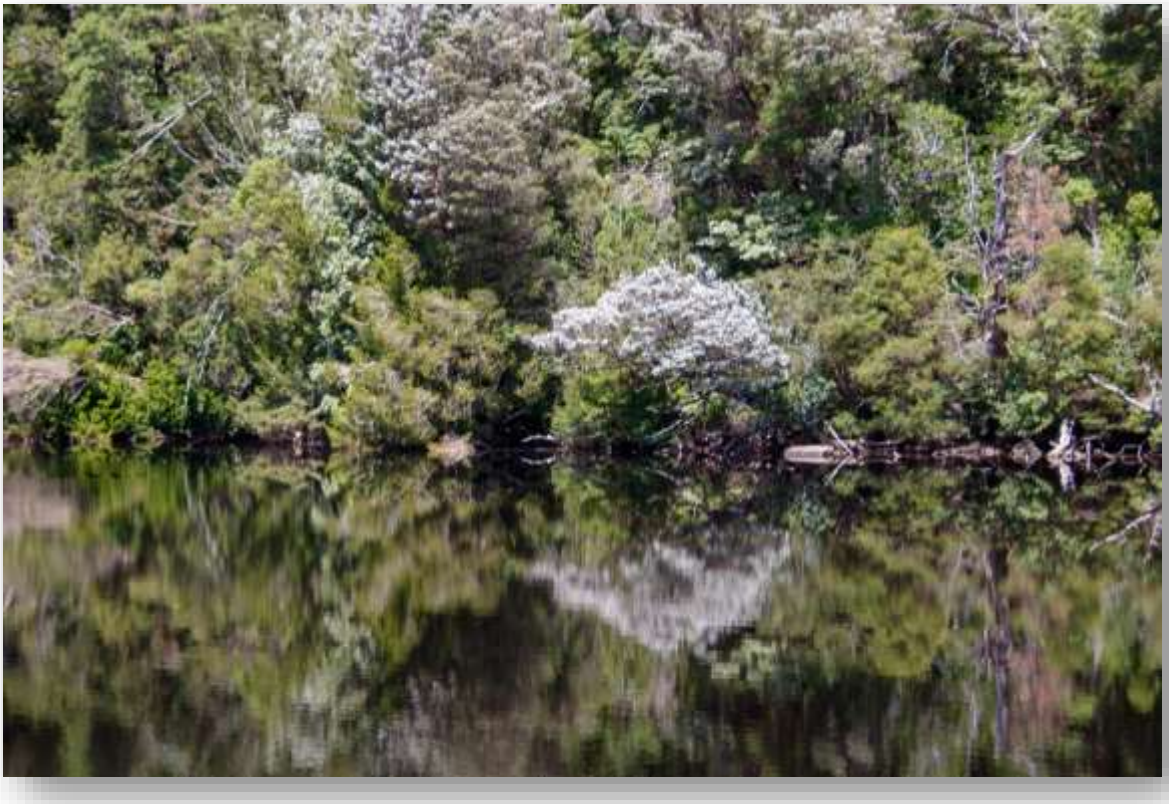
"...nothing but a brown ditch, leech-ridden and unattractive to the majority of people..."

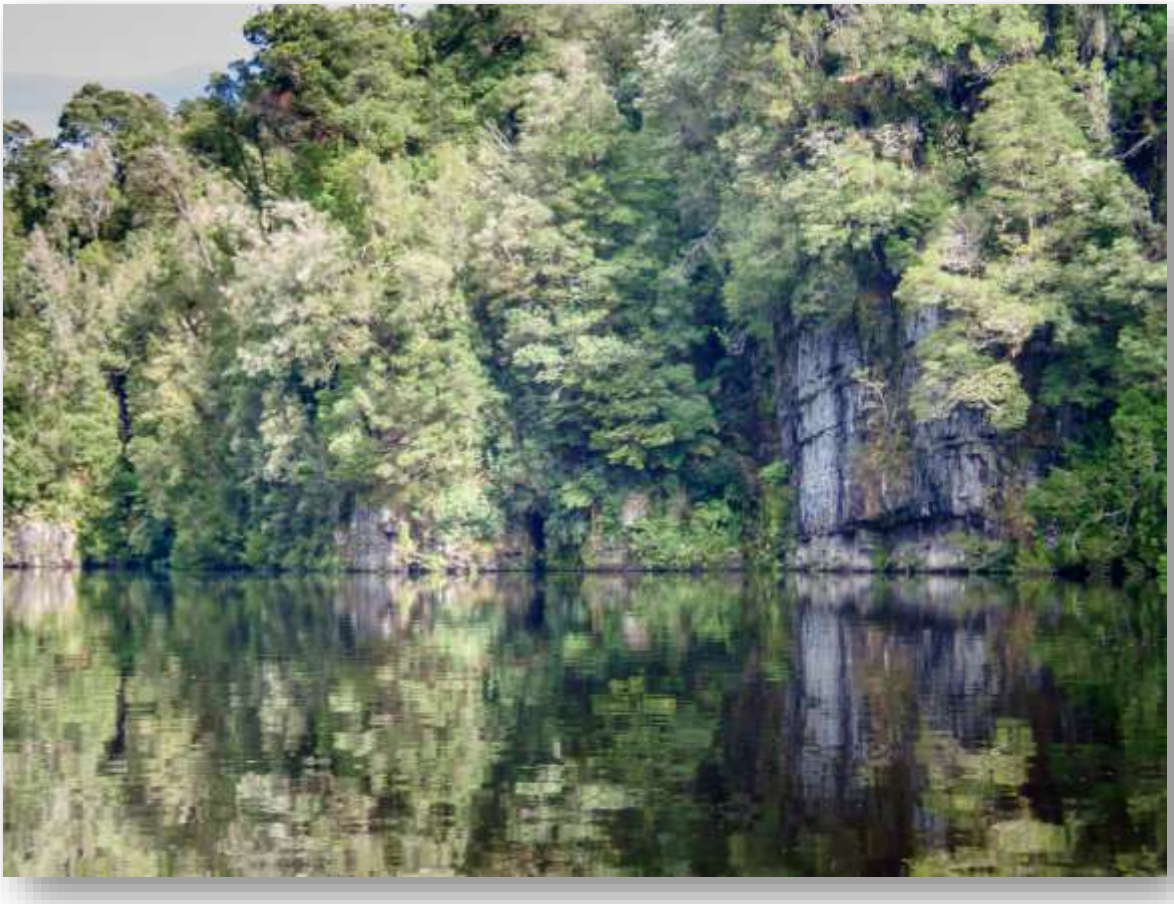
Seriously? It is no wonder so many thousands of Tasmanians took a stand, protested and saved these rivers for future generations.

Initially the Gordon River is quite wide, but as you progress upstream it passes through several gorges, narrowing and deepening, then widening and shallowing again. Reflections, particularly in calm conditions, are a feature of a cruise up the Gordon.



Marbling patterns form as our wake disturbs the still water reflecting the luxuriant vegetation.





At every bend of the river, you discover beautiful views. Whether on an overcast day or sunny one, for us these looked like a Chinese watercolor, with the surrounding hills shrouded in mist.

All along the Gordon River the forest is a cool temperate rainforest which receives 2.5m of rain every year. It has been free of fire for thousands of years and has been aboriginal country for more than 35000 years. This is part of the Tasmanian Wilderness Area and we feel fortunate to be travelling through this ancient, rare, irreplaceable and magnificent region.

We anchored for a while at Horseshoe Bend, opposite Heritage Landing, which is as far as the Gordon River Cruise boats go.

Once *Harbour Master* had left, we dinghied ashore and enjoyed the guided boardwalk circuit. We found the signage particularly helpful, as it told us about the vegetation, how to recognize the rainforest trees, their bark and leaves, what they were used for and providing useful information which we referred to in later bush walks.

Special trees, meaningful to us because we love wood and also because some of our furniture back home is made of them attracted our attention. This included the Myrtle Beech and Blackwood.

Myrtle beech are rainforest giants which live for 500 years. Their new growth is red-bronze and stand out as we cruise along the river. Their timber have a striking variety of colour and character, from blonde to dark chocolate to radiant gold.

Blackwood is a hardwood timber from the wattle family, native to Australia. Its rich golden brown colour, wavy grain and smooth finish makes it a beautiful timber for furniture making and Chris has a number of pieces made of it. It is another giant, with distinctive bark.

The Huon Pine is also a very precious tree, a symbol of endurance and antiquity. It is the slowest growing tree in the forest (one millimeter per year) and the oldest (up to 3000 years). It is part of an ancient family of native conifers dating back 135 million years. Mimegin Aborigines used pine logs for quick river crossings. Piners – the men who logged Huon Pine - paddled up west coast waterways to harvest Huon Pine for boat building. Its sweet-scented timber is high in a natural oil (methyl eugenol) which resists rot and insects.

Every year a tree grows new cells, which are arranged in circles called growth rings. Each ring represents one year of growth. The width of the ring shows the amount of wood produced during that year. Good growing seasons produce thicker rings while a poor year will produce a thinner ring. The Huon Pine growth rings are very close together.

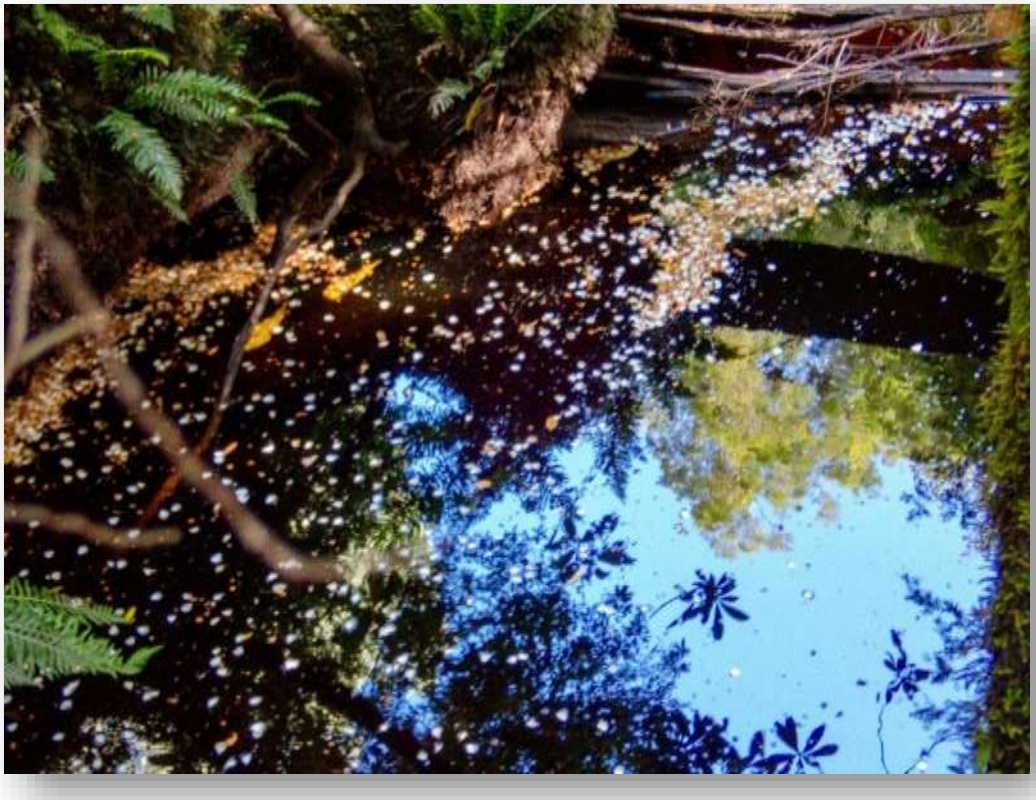
Our second anchorage up the Gordon River was just past a right-angle bend in the river, where the Eagle Creek flows into the Gordon. We dropped the pick in the middle of the river, intending to follow the Eagle Creek Track the next morning, a walk we had not done before.

It was a peaceful night and dawn was a magnificent gift: mist over the river, slowly rising, exactly what we were hoping would happen. Misty mornings are another feature of the Gordon River.

After breakfast it was then time to dinghy over just past the Eagle Creek, hop ashore and start our hike. This turned out to be our favourite walk of the entire trip. Why? Because it was enchanting, magical, green, lush, with a mossy path following the creek. This remote part of SW Tasmania receives nearly three metres of rain every year, so the slopes are slippery, plenty of leaches tried to latch on to our gumboots, but we were enthralled.

Lichen draped fallen trunks and a multitude of bright green ferns and mosses covered the track.

Everywhere you looked, something captured your interest: ferns of all sorts, fallen petals of the flowering leatherwood trees over the tannin-stained creek, dropping around us like confetti. It was such a wonderland!



The track eventually joins the Franklin River, 8kms further. This time around we had no intention of going for many hours. We kept walking for about an hour, then turned back when an increasing number of large fallen trees made the going a little hard. We retraced our steps, wrote a comment in the visitors' book and promised ourselves to do this again during a future voyage, armed with a pruning saw to get further along – maybe all the way to the Franklin.

Back on *Anui*, it was time to head up a few kilometres further to Sir John Falls. By then the mist had cleared, it was sunny and the reflections were spectacular. The high banks and hills surrounding the river are decked in luxuriant vegetation, reminding us that this is a wild, water-soaked part of Tasmania. Huon pine, tea-tree, paperbark, native laurel, horizontal and myrtle all grow prolifically here.

Before arriving at Sir John Falls, you go past an iconic spot: Butlers Island, also called Rock Island Bend, made famous by the photo taken by Peter Dombrovski, a defining symbol of the successful campaign to prevent the damming of the Franklin River below its confluence with the Gordon River in the late 1970s. This is the photo, taken in wilder conditions than we were in:

We anchored just before Sir John Falls, in the bend of the river. We stayed for several days, absorbing the peace and greenness under different skies. The legendary and ancient Huon pines are common here at the water's edge, but sassafras, leatherwood, celery-top pine, myrtle, native laurel, and more contribute to an array of green hues quite unlike anywhere else. This place doesn't need the human race. It thrives very nicely on its own.

Sir John Falls, 70kms from the nearest outpost of Strahan. The first is one of ours, the second was from Trevor Norton's website.

The landing at Sir John Falls is used by Stormbreaker, a 30m ocean going vessel skippered by Gordon River legend Trevor Norton, who runs Southwest Expeditions. He regularly navigates the Gordon and beyond and picks up kayakers, rafters and bushwalkers at the Sir John Falls jetty. Seaplanes also tie up there, taking off and landing pretty much where we were anchored. Both vessel and plane movements are logged on the wharf's notice board. When free of bookings, cruising yachts can tie up to the wharf.

Once you pass this point, the river narrows and navigation upstream in anything other than a dinghy is ill advised. There are eddies, fast running current, lurking rocks which are difficult to spot in the tannin-stained water and many sunken trunks threatening to chew up dinghy props!

From there it was time to hop into the dinghy and explore further upriver, past Big Eddy towards the junction of the Gordon and Franklin Rivers. The 18HP engine comes in very handy to travel a long way against the current, through the eddies and swirling waters.

We reached the junction of the Franklin and Gordon Rivers and continued upstream of the confluence of both rivers a little way.

The lower reaches of the Franklin River are shallow, sinuous and we went as far as we dared, moving slowly and carefully. Eventually it became too risky for us to keep going. We had the drone with us and sent it up for a view a little further.

We returned to the junction and followed the Gordon a little way up. By then it was becoming shallower, with increasingly more races and eddies, hidden rocks and fallen trees threatening to damage the dinghy prop. It made us nervous. So we decided safety was more important than curiosity and turned back.

Further upstream is the domain of kayakers! We were happy to have seen so much already.

Our next exploration was by foot, up the Gould Track, which starts a little way up from the Sir John Falls Landing. It is hard to spot the tiny clearing along the river, but we did a couple of passes and eventually found it.

The track was originally cut by the first Geological Surveyor of Tasmania Charles Gould in 1862. The Gould's track opened up the west coast to the populated east of Tasmania giving access for geologists and miners who searched for much-needed resources. About 1900, this same track was then used by piners to access the upper reaches of the Gordon and its tributaries. It is a steep scramble up past remnants of a shed to a clearing where a winch and trolley have been left by those who harvested exotic logs in this area.

On either side of the track, the vegetation is lush. It is amazing to see many Huon Pines still grow there.

As we progress further up the track, the surrounding vegetation becomes thicker. Nature has reclaimed clearings and tracks and huge trees have fallen, making it hard to find a way around through impenetrable bush. We are not into suffering and pushing ourselves too hard, especially Chris with her medical issues. So yet again, we went as far as manageable for us, then turned around.

Our last day at Sir John Falls saw a change of weather conditions. We woke up to overcast skies and the wind picked up during the morning. The forecast showed one day of strong westerly, then a few days of calm weather, long enough to allow us to reprovision and prepare ourselves for a sail further along the West coast. It was time to go back down the Gordon River and make our way across Macquarie Harbour, all the way to Strahan.

Strahan

With 20 knot westerlies, we had the wind on our beam across the length of Macquarie Harbour, which made for a brisk sail in the lee of the salmon farms.

A few hours later, we reached the little outpost of Strahan and anchored in Risby Bay.

We had the usual chores to tackle: laundry, fuel top up, re-provisioning at the local IGA. We did some of our jobs that afternoon, the rest the next day.

The next morning, all was calm, perfect for a drone flight.

We also walked to Hogarth Falls, an easy but scenic track. The well-maintained path follows the creek and is lined with luscious ferns and tall trees.

Pilot Bay

Having completed all we wanted to do in Strahan, it was time to head out to Pilot Bay, just outside of Macquarie Harbour, for a last hike to the Cape Sorell Lighthouse, and to be ready to sail away to our next wilderness area of Port Davey.

Pilot Bay is a protected anchorage in westerlies and southwesterlies, so it is a great spot for an early morning exit.

It was interesting sending the drone up to look at Hells Gates from an aerial perspective. It is a narrow passage indeed between Entrance Island and the break wall, and onto the next light.

The walk to the Cape Sorell Lighthouse was worthwhile and had we had more time and energy that afternoon, we would also have gone to a few of the rocky ocean beaches. But it was not to be… it leaves something else to explore during a future voyage. Chris struggles increasingly with low energy and difficulty coping with long or steep walks… unfortunately due to the ineludible progression of chronic health issues. Wade patiently keeps an eye on her, walking behind her, insisting on letting her set the pace.

The walk to Cape Sorell is an 8kms round trip and follows a vehicle track from the jetty at Macquarie Heads which we joined from the beach.

The narrow,120 metre wide, entrance to Macquarie Harbour from the west coast is extremely difficult to navigate. It is obstructed by reefs and shoals and subject to fast running tides. In 1892 lights were established on Entrance and Bonnet islands at Hells Gates but these were of little use to shipping at sea off the west coast. The installation of a coastal light together with improvements to the harbour such as a breakwater at Hells Gates was seen as a priority. The result was the establishment of a light at Cape Sorell, just outside Macquarie Harbour, in 1899.

The lighthouse, which is regarded as the most beautiful in Tasmania, was designed by Hobart architects Huckson and Hutchison and built with brick by Duff Brothers. The tower has to withstand the full force of the Roaring Forties but is slim and elegant. It is the second tallest in Tasmania, 30.5 metres high and another 6.6 metres high to the top of the vane.

On the way back, Chris saw a Tasmanian Devil scampering down the track. Wade said it probably was a Tasmanian Tiger! We wish!

Near the lighthouse are ruins of the old lightkeepers' cottages.

Originally there were three keepers, but their number was reduced to two in 1962 and withdrawn altogether in 1971. There were three brick houses of superior quality with six to seven rooms, regrettably the houses were demolished in 1971 following the withdrawal of the keepers.

The coast is wild and the beaches rocky.

Onto Port Davey

Our sail to Port Davey started at dawn on 31 January 2025. It was an early departure under pink skies, accompanied by albatrosses. We had 85 nm to cover in north to northwesterly of 15 to 20 knots. We had to contend with a three-meter swell coming at us from different directions. It was choppy. Initially the wind was on our beam, and we had the reefed main and jib up.

The highlight of the passage was seeing so many shearwaters and albatrosses soaring. They are a magnificent sight and one of the pleasures of cruising in southern waters. But they are difficult to photograph on a heaving boat!

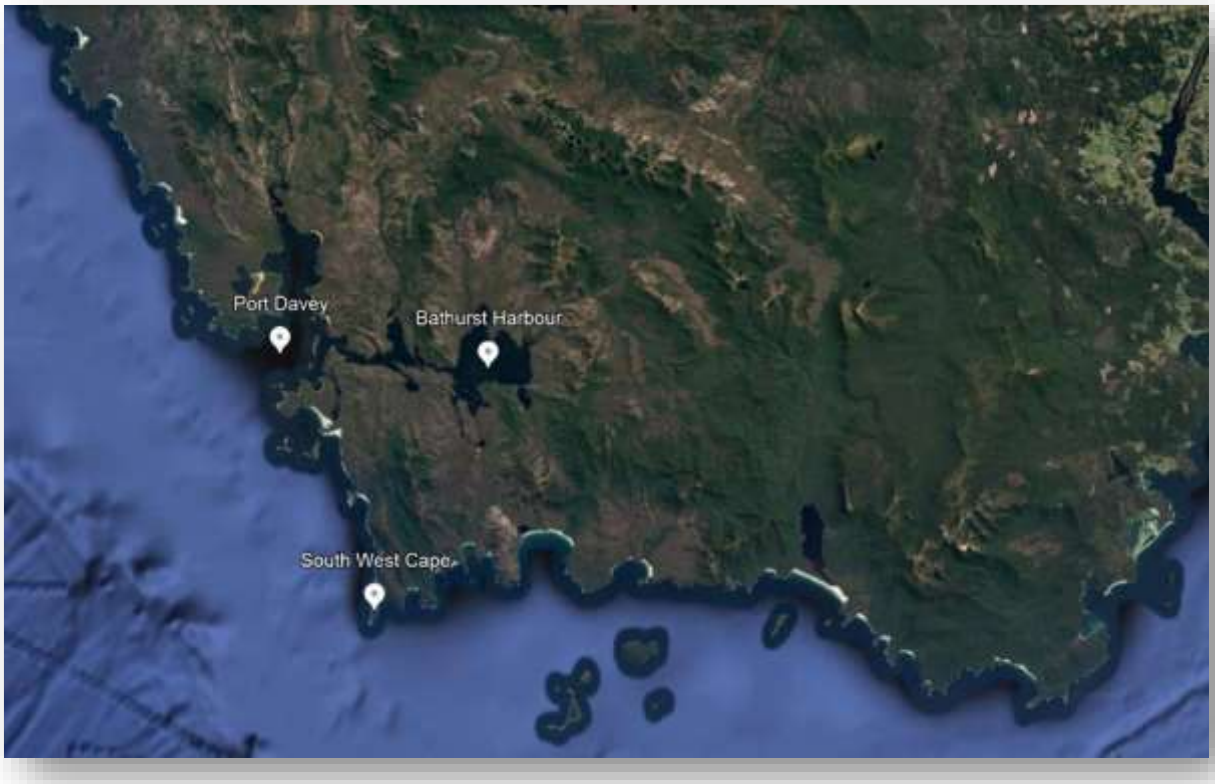
The further south we progressed, the more rugged and high were the mountains. This part of the West Coast is truly spectacular. The sailing was more challenging too as the wind gradually shifted to the northwest, thus more and more on our tail, an awkward angle with the main and jib up. In the end we were going with the main on one side and the jib on the other, goose-winged.

Over the 85 nautical miles, we averaged 7 knots speed, but had peaks doing 11 and 12 knots, particularly as we got closer to Port Davey. On our instruments in this shot, we have 18.4 True Wind, 15.4 Apparent Wind, and sailing at 11.4 knots.

Finally, we reached Port Davey, roaring in at 12 knots with the swell rolling straight in. We went all the way into Payne Bay, the large bay to the north and dropped anchor in Bond Bay after a 12-hour sail.

Port Davey is an oceanic inlet. It lies between the Southern Ocean and Bathurst Harbour, which is linked by the Bathurst Channel. The inlet leads north into Payne Bay, fed by the Davey River, with Payne Bay being defined by the features of Davey Head to the west, and Mount Berry to the east. The eastern aspect from Joe Page Bay to Bathurst Harbour is sheltered from the Roaring Forties that buffet the south and west coasts of Tasmania by a narrow part of the inlet that effectively makes the land to the south a peninsula.

The geology of the area is largely billion-year-old Precambrian quartzites, originating as sand and mud laid down in shallow seas, which over time were metamorphosed by heat and pressure into quartzites and schists, then uplifted, folded and partially eroded away. This ancient rock is slow to weather and remains as ridges and mountains. Valleys have formed in places where softer phyllytes and schists weather away more quickly. The quartzite is what gives the rugged hills of the region their distinctive, marble-like appearance.



When we use the terms Harbour or Port around these parts, we are not talking about an urban area, nor a man-made boat shelter. These are natural waterways, valleys which drowned when the sea levels rose after the last ice age. They are isolated, unpopulated, far away from any civilization. The Port Davey/Bathurst Harbour Estuary is the ultimate in cruising Tasmanian waters and as wild as you get: no roads, no habitation for several hundreds of kilometres, and the only way to get there is by boat, by foot or by air.

Port Davey is not populated, but for many years Deny King and family resided at Melaleuca, engaged in alluvial tin mining. Since the death of Deny King in 1991, the family retain a leasehold within the national park and is actively involved in conservation programs but is not permanently resident.

Gold-green ranges, with bony quartzite ridges, rise sharply from the Southern Ocean and the broad interior waterways of Port Davey. Wild rivers and creeks cut through gorges and snake across open plains, draining rust-coloured waters into the marine reserve. Tiny islands dot the surface of the dark waters. White quartzite sands fringe the shoreline. On calm days, the harbour reflects this almost prehistoric-looking landscape to endless perfection.

We were lucky enough to have calm weather, a rare occurrence in this wild part of Tasmania.

Bond Bay

Bond Bay, on the western side of Payne Bay, was our chosen anchorage for the night and our first in Port Davey. We found that the swell was rolling in right inside the main bay, but it settled as we turned into Bond Bay. Although it is shallow, we anchored in 2.5m of water over sand. *Discovery II* arrived an hour later and anchored next to us. A motor cat was anchored further away, close to the entrance to Kelly Basin. It was too windy to fly the drone that evening, but the next day was dead calm and sunny.

We picked Bond Bay as our first anchorage because we wanted to dinghy up to the Davey River and its gorges.

Davey River Gorge

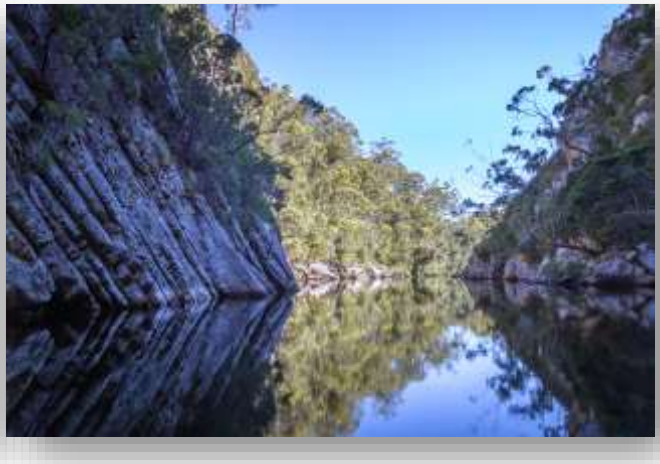
With calm and sunny conditions, we had the perfect weather to go upriver. Chris and Suzanne from *Discovery II* joined us for the excursion. It is quite a long way to go and you definitely want to make that trip with a dinghy that planes otherwise it takes all day! Once across the sand bar and breaking waves at the head of the Davey River, the depth returns, and you can safely travel at speed. We were immediately struck by the stunning reflections of the surrounding hills and vegetation into the still, mirror like water. We could not have asked for better conditions.

The winding, Huon pine lined bends of the Davey River are breathtaking. This pristine river is the only major river system in Australia utterly untouched by humankind. In these calm conditions, the river mirrored a forest twin, inverted yet just as vividly verdant.

As we progressed along, the meandering river narrowed, and we soon reached the first gorge.

There are a series of three gorges, with small rapids between obvious rocks and shallow races. We negotiated the first without any problem, lifting the engine out of the water and rowing across the shallower bits. For the second we had to get off the dinghy and push it along the shallows then got back in. But the third gorge was too challenging and rather than risk damage, we turned back.

This was a captivating excursion!



On the way back we managed to go up a little tributary for a brief look.

The return trip was fast! Ah the joys of a powerful dinghy!

Coffin Bay

Just across from Bond Bay, was Coffin Bay, an anchorage we had not been to. At the suggestion of the *Discovery* crew, we went there to check out some sea caves along the shoreline.

Notice the motor cruiser in the anchorage? The skipper, Stew, was a very friendly and generous fisherman who had been catching Southern Rock Lobsters and gave us and Chris & Suzanne two each! You can guess what we had for dinner for the next couple of nights!

In fact that very night, we cooked one crayfish per couple. Wade provided a lesson in preparing the beast, and we had a feast on board *Discovery*, savoring our crays with a rather tasty Tasmanian bubbly shared by Chris and Suzanne. Sumptuous!

We spent the afternoon exploring the sea caves.

We managed to get inside one cave, but most were too affected by swell to get close. This one was interesting, with red anemones clinging to the side.

Then we dinghied to this heavenly spot for a bit of arty farty photography! The aerial gives a hint of the textures and colours that await.

In the late afternoon sun, the reflections and colours of the tannin were brilliant.

The next morning we were ready for more cave exploration. We dinghied a little further around to Wallaby Bay. Some of the arches reminded us of Etretat, in France!

Edging the cliffs are large extents of bull kelp swaying in the swell. Bull kelp grows incredibly quickly, sometimes by 25cm a day! We were not quite brave enough to go for a dive, but were fascinated by the thick large ribbons and could not resist taking the Olympus camera with us and dunking it in the water from the edge of the dinghy for some photos.

Other types of seaweed were there too such as the Golden Kelp and Sargassum.

Kelp forests are one of the most widespread and valuable marine ecosystems on the planet. Kelp provides habitat and food for ocean dwellers like abalone, crayfish, crabs, octopuses, fish, sea otters, sea lions and whales. It also helps reduce damage from storms, stores carbon, produces oxygen and reduces nutrient pollution in the ocean. Kelp thrives in cool waters, and it was wonderful to see so much of it in the Southwest, well away from pollution and warming waters.

Bramble Cove

Our next anchorage was just around the corner to Bramble Cove. This is a popular arrival spot for boats coming from the South as there are several anchorages with slightly different angles to the wind. There were a few yachts in there, particularly behind Sarah Island. We managed to drop the pick close to the little beach, next to Rusty on *Sagan*, a small monohull we got to know on this trip. A few hours later, *Discovery II* joined us there.

This aerial shows the anchorage and Mount Milner, which we climbed that afternoon. The track follows the ridge line and is quite steep but worth the effort for the views.

Would you believe we have no photos of that hike? Chris managed to wipe out the SD card by mistake!

Breaksea Islands

While anchored at Bramble Cove, Chris and Suzanne joined us in our speedy dinghy for a ride to the Breaksea Islands, a group of six islands so named because they protect the harbour from some of the Southern Ocean swell. We went there to have a look at the sea caves, blow holes and dramatic rock formations.

It is quite an experience to come close, something you can only do in calm conditions. Wade was in charge of driving and keeping us safe from rogue waves while the rest of us were taking dozens of photos. On the protected side, the morning sun glints off porcelain-white quartzite cliffs. Jagged rocks jut skywards like vertical razor blades, fleshy bull kelp sways with the swell, the surge sends whitewater frothing skyward, waves thrash against rocks and enter caverns, spurting water ten meters up from the blow holes. On the exposed side two-meter swell is still rolling in even in calm weather, crashing onto the cliffs and rebounding, creating very choppy conditions, sea foam and sea mist.

The islands are also a breeding site for many seabird species, including the little penguin and short-tailed shearwater. We saw evidence of their nests and burrows.

Even in calm weather and low wind, on the exposed side of the islands, things were very hazy. Two-meter swell and rebound made for choppy conditions. There were patches of sea foam which are created by the agitation of sea water, particularly when it contains high concentrations of dissolved matter.

Bathurst Channel

Schooner Cove

We chose Schooner Cove as our next anchorage. Although open to the East and subject to willy-willies in gale-force westerly weather, we had light conditions and were looking forward to lovely views behind us to the west, east down the Bathurst Channel and towards Mount Rugby and the colourful dawn. Our first day there was in 30°C heat, unheard of in these parts! It is not often you get to have a swim to cool down here!

By evening, we had company. The Golden light was beautiful with *Discovery II* and a fishing boat joining us.

Looking east down the Bathurst Channel from the Breaksea Islands in the morning light.

Schooner Cove and looking west to the start of the Bathurst Channel in the late afternoon.

We were lucky to wake up to a colourful dawn the next morning, particularly since the wind later picked up and drizzle set in, persisting for the rest of the day. It was a reminder of the need to take advantage of the conditions as they present themselves.

Casilda Cove

A short way down the Bathurst Channel is Casilda Cove, a place you can shelter in from gale-force westerly weather. We have been there before, tied to the trees along the shore, just inside the entrance of Horseshoe Inlet. There is a deep hole, but not a lot of swing room and several dangerous rocks lurk just under the surface as you come in. The best way to moor safely, particularly if there are other boats around, is to back the boat into the shore and tie to the trees in a kind of cat's cradle. If you are hiding from a gale and intending to be there for several days, it is worth the effort. In very light conditions, and being there only for a few hours while climbing Balmoral Hill and dinghying up Horseshoe Inlet, we chose to anchor *Anui* just before the entrance. *Discovery II* went all the way in and tied themselves back for practice!

Balmoral Hill, the pointy peak you see in the first aerial, is a lovely climb which offers the best value for effort views anywhere along the Bathurst Channel. The track follows the ridge line. The first image shows the view towards Joe Page Bay, the second towards Mount Rugby.

This image shows the western part of Bathurst Harbour, back towards Schooner Cove.

And here are Suzanne and Chris from *Discovery II*, walking back down, with a view towards Horseshoe Inlet which we then dinghied to. It is broad, but very shallow.

Iola Bay

Welcome to our favourite anchorage in light conditions, your worth nightmare on windy days! Iola Bay is a small diamond-shaped cove with a narrow entrance, offering just enough swing room for one boat if anchoring in the middle, but be warned, the bottom is a bit slippery and if the breeze picks up the boat dances around in the swirling wind.

We had hardly any breeze, so it was a blissful spot for us. Why did we want to anchor there? It has the best views of Mount Rugby on the Northern side, Mt Beattie on the Southern side, and in calm conditions the reflections are to die for, as are the dawn shots!

Sometimes the bird's eye view surprises you with interesting textures and patterns right next to the boat! This was at the very southern point of the cove, in shallow water at low tide.

And then, there was dawn, nil wind, heavenly silhouettes, pink tones, perfect reflections.

Did we say perfect reflections? To watch the ever-changing light and colour on the white crags of Mount Rugby is the epitome of the Port Davey experience. This is as close as Chris was going to get to it this time though. Climbing this challenging mountain was beyond what she could cope with, so there would not be a repeat of the hike we had done ten years ago. One of the sad consequences of Type I Diabetes and Osteoarthritis is the loss of fitness. Age does not help either. There is a limit to the amount of arduousness you can put yourself through, not matter how headstrong you are! Unfortunately, we have to come to the realization that tough climbs are becoming out of reach. It is hard to accept and disappointing, but as Wade keeps reminding us, we are doing this for pleasure and fun, not pain and suffering. Moderate climbs, long but flat hikes are okay; steep, long ones are not.

However, it does not mean Wade can't go! A couple of hours later that morning, he was packing his backpack with snacks, water and a radio, and he headed off by himself. Luckily, he met up with the crew of two other boats – *Sagan and Finesse II* - and climbed Mt Rugby in company. He was gone for the day. Although by the time he reached the summit, smoke haze from the fires in the northwest filled the air, he took a few photos that really tell the story.

Dusty from *Sagan*, John from *Finesse* and Wade at the Summit!

The summit:

Bathurst Harbour

The Bathurst Harbour and Channel region is often mistaken for a glacial fjord. However the channel was a river valley while the harbour was once a large buttongrass plain – both were flooded when the sea level rose at the end of the last ice age, about 7000 years ago.

Most of the harbour is nearly flat bottomed, between 5 and 7 meters deep. But there are many uncharted rocks and shoals just below the surface and completely invisible in the dark brown water.

Kings Point

We anchored at Kings Point, where the holding is excellent, to be able to leave *Anui* there and take dinghy trips to Melaleuca Inlet, Claytons Corner and walk up Mount Beattie.

When we first arrived, although it was overcast, there was not a breath of wind and the cloud reflections in the water were beautiful. Mount Rugby is omnipresent, dominating Bathurst Harbour, and Mount Beattie overlooks the anchorage at Kings Point.

Also lovely were the Celery Top Islands. The inlet southeast of them is too shallow for anything other than a dinghy. They are so named because they are covered with Celery Top Pines. The leaves of these is shown here.

Melaleuca Inlet

Lying deep within the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, Melaleuca is a special and spectacular place to visit. Although it is one of the most remote areas of mainland Tasmania, and beyond the road network, Melaleuca receives many visitors arriving by air, sea or on foot. It attracts a wide range of people due to its beauty, isolation, and both natural and human history.

From Clayton's Corner it is a 10km trip to Melaleuca. Although if your boat draws less than 2m it is possible to negotiate this inlet - which we did in *Take It Easy* - we decided it was best to do the trip by dinghy, and we gave a lift to Chris and Suzanne from *Discovery II*.

There are stakes in the water as you pass through two shallow lagoons and a speed restriction of 5 knots south of the second lagoon.

Eventually you get to a junction in the waterways. To the left is Melaleuca Lagoon, only navigable by dinghy and to the right Melaleuca Creek continues about 500m to a pontoon, which you can tie to. It is used by tour boats. From there, a boarded track takes you on a loop walk on one side and to the small airstrip on the other.

We took the Needwonnee Walk, which has a contemporary installation we had not seen on previous visits. Creation panels have been erected depicting the creation story of the first Tasmanian Aborigine. The story is set in the Needwonnee's homelands.

We have included the wording from each panel:

Parlevar was the first aboriginal man. To make him, Moihernee, the Great Spirit, took some earth up to the sky and fashioned a man who had a tail like a kangaroo and legs without knee joints.

Without knee joints, Parlevar could not lie down. Dromerdeener, the Star Spirit, helped Parlevar. He cut off his tail, cured the wound with grease and made knee joint for Parlevar.

Parlevar stayed in the sky for a very long time. Eventually he came to the land by walking down Laway Teeney, the sky road or Milky Way.

Later, Moihernee and Dromerdeener quarrelled. Moihernee was forced to leave the sky and came to live on land near Louisa Bay.

Moihernee fought with many evil spirits who lived in the ground. His wife came down to live in the sea and their many children came down in the rain.

When Moihernee died he went to the land near Cox Bight. There he was turned into a large rock that stands majestically on a point of land near the sea.

The huts would have been built out of the wire rush plant that is plentiful around here. The windbreak would probably have been filled with leafy vegetation to cover the cracks of the vertical wooden branches. And the fish trap would have been used to catch fish in the lagoon.

Melaleuca Lagoon, serene and still:

The undergrowth was thick with impenetrable rush like vegetation that formed dense thickets. We later found they are *Empdisma Gracillinum* or Tanglefoot, a plant endemic to coastal areas of SW Australia which grows prolifically here.

On emerging from the Needwonnee Walk, you arrive at the large green painted huts, which offer bunk style accommodation for bushwalkers.

Our walk took us of course to the bird hide, now transformed into a Deny King Museum. Charles Denison King was a legendary bushman, tin miner, naturalist, artist and environmentalist who spent fifty-five years living in Melaleuca in Port Davey.

The main attraction was of course the Orange-bellied Parrots, small grass parrots with an orange patch on their belly and are one of Australia's most threatened bird species.

The Orange-bellied Parrot breeds in south-west Tasmania in summer and spends the rest of the year in coastal regions of south-eastern Australia. A combination of threats caused steep decline over the past 100 years and fewer than 50 birds remain in the wild. Significant recovery efforts have reduced declines and prevented extinction, but the species' perilously small population and loss of genetic diversity means threat of extinction remains high.

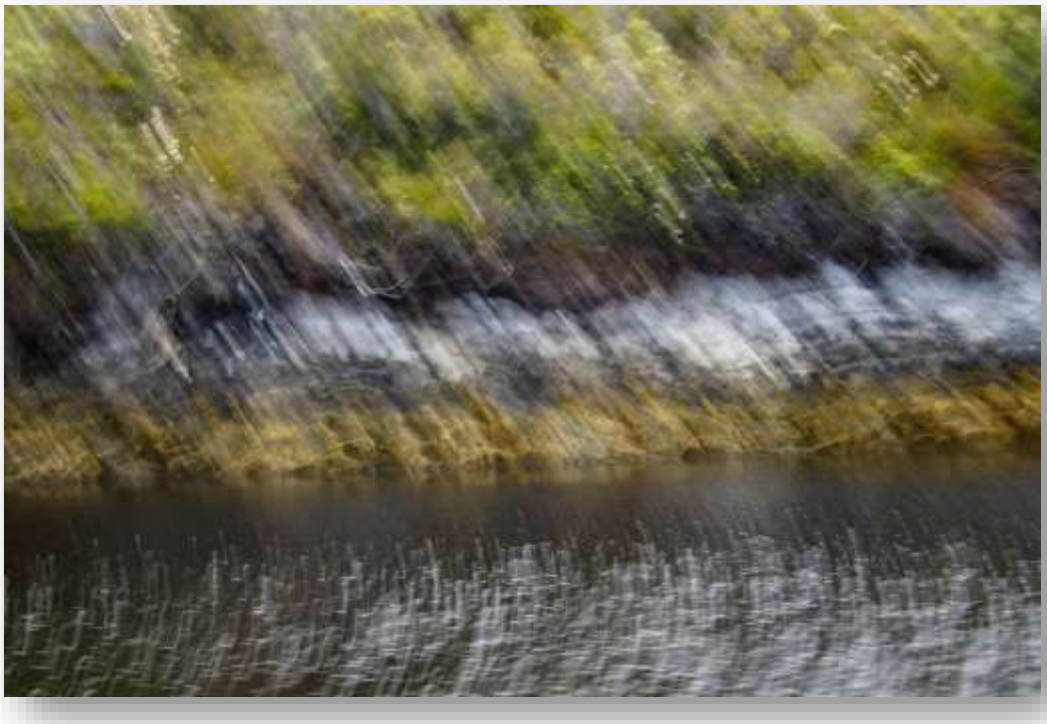
The Critically Endangered Orange-bellied Parrot is one of only three migratory parrot species worldwide. Twice a year, these tiny and remarkable parrots make the long and arduous journey across Bass Strait – departing their summer breeding grounds in south-western Tasmania and travelling more than 1,000km to spend autumn and winter in coastal Victoria and South Australia.

Four parrots came to the feeders. Chris took a few shots of them, but decided she would patiently and quietly sit outside by herself, Canon Camera and 400mm zoom at the ready. She was rewarded when a couple jumped on the branch, away from the feeders, allowing a few clear shots.

It goes without saying that this made her day, in fact it made the whole trip! Seeing and photographing one of the world's rarest birds was intensely satisfying, when you think this bird is so endangered that just last time we were here, some 7 years ago only 20 birds had returned from the species' annual migration to Melaleuca.

But 81 orange-bellied parrots returned to Melaleuca in 2023 and in 2024, 92 returned, including 55 males and 37 females, 64 of which were born in the wild, and 28 of which were bred in captivity. It is a turning point for critically endangered species, which requires considerable human intervention to avoid extinction.

The return down the inlet and back to the boats was trouble-free. Mount Rugby was watching over us!



Once out of the 5knot speed limit zone, we flew and there was no chance to focus on the banks, although this photo is kind of fun... all a blur!

Claytons Corner and Mount Beattie

We did not anchor at Claytons as the holding is not ideal, but it was a quick dinghy ride from Kings Point to the jetty, just around the corner!

Our wander started with a visit to the Claytons' house, home to Win and Clyde from 1962-1976, now maintained by Friends of Clayton Corner, and accessible to walkers on the path up Mt Beattie. The house remains open and accessible for visitors. Inside, information panels have been installed on the walls throughout to give insights into their lives.

The cottage snuggles next to a slope swathed in rainforest. It is a favoured meeting place for yachties and bushwalkers who enjoy the cosy and warm refuge especially when it blows hard outside.

The sign over the bath gives a hint of some of the visitors who come by:

"*Leave stick in bath for quolls to escape*."

Onto Mt Beattie we then went. This is a gradual climb, 2 kms to the top, with fabulous views along the way.

We remember climbing up there in howling, icy wind and rain, with water rushing down the track, a time when we wished we had hiked it in gumboots!

The climb up Mount Beattie is on a well-used track. Inevitably in this peaty buttongrass country, the track's popularity led to degradation. Bog holes, track braiding and drainage issues worsened over the years. But since our last visit much track remediation has taken place by Friends of Melaleuca and the Tasmanian Parks & Wildlife Service (PWS), with a grant from Wildcare Tasmanian Nature Conservation Fund funding the work.

Gear was heli-lifted close to the site prior to the working bee but the work still involved a lot of load carrying uphill. Work achieved: • 80 metres of wire mesh stapled to slippery boardwalk sections • Drainage water-bars renovated • Difficult step renovated • Five metres of parallel boards installed over bog • Peat bog holes re-bridged • Vegetation cut beside and across track in overgrown sections • Eight treated pine steps reinforced, boxed, solid-filled.

The trek meanders through mature rainforest to the open slopes and summit, which afford wonderful all-round vistas of the waterway and surrounding mountains. Down low, looking south, you see the Melaleuca Inlet, to the east King's Point and the Celery Top Islands. Looking north: Mount Rugby!

Once you reach the summit there are panoramic views of Bathurst Harbour, Bathurst Channel all the way to Port Davey and back towards Melaleuca. It is well worth the effort. Even on a sunny summer's day, the breeze is chilly up there.

Mount Rugby is a constant, and we even could see our favourite Iola Bay immediately below.

Moulters Inlet

Our last overnight spot in Bathurst Harbour was at Moulters Inlet. On the way we passed Dixon Islet where our cruising friends on *Discovery II* were anchored. They took this picture of us.

We like this quiet place only frequented by shallow draft vessels because it is less than two meters deep, with a narrow mouth and has a two-meter hole in the middle to anchor.

We proceeded inside carefully, especially in the gusty conditions, since as usual you cannot see anything in the tannin-stained water.

It was far windier that afternoon than any other day we had in the region this time around. But we sat comfortably, having dropped the pick in 1.9m at low tide, and we enjoyed listening to the howling wind. It was a strong reminder of what this place is normally like... not glass outs and mirror reflections, but short chop, roaring forties and cloudy skies!

The strong wind died down during the evening and as forecast the next day was calm. Chris set the alarm for a 5.30am wake up and dawn photography!

The extent of the inlet was revealed... and the soft hues, the silhouetted mountains, and our boat so tiny in the immensity. Although we did not have glass-out conditions, it was still breathtaking.

And then it was light enough to leave Moulters Inlet and head across Bathurst Harbour and back along the Channel to Bramble Cove.

Back to Port Davey

Bramble Cove and Mount Stokes Climb

The 7.00am exit out of Moulters Inlet, at the very eastern end of Bathurst Harbour meant we had time to motor all the way back to Bramble Cove. We could see a weather window coming up a few days later and wanted to be positioned for an exit out of Port Davey.

Along the way we saw two cruise ships which is a surprising addition to the many more vessels that frequent these waters compared to 7 years ago! Odalisque was still anchored at Kings Point and even bigger Coral Discoverer was at Eve's Point, later moving to Bramble Cove. If you have $15,000 to $18,000 per person to spend, you too can experience Port Davey it seems! This place used to feel so remote, but it is not the same when cruise ships anchor in a bay next to you! Call us selfish, but it does not feel right!

A couple of hours later we were anchored at Bramble Cove, and were getting ready for our hike up Mount Stokes. It used to be called Mount Misery on old charts, which does not instill a great desire to climb it! It certainly looks imposing.

By 10.00am, after anchoring the dinghy and organizing the pulley system to bring it back to shore later, we started scaling the mountain.

The track follows the ridge line, so the pace is gradual with only a few very steep sections just before you get to the saddle, then near the top. It means you can get your legs and lungs accustomed to the effort and find your rhythm. Panoramic views regardless of how high you go make every step uphill worthwhile. We paced ourselves. Wade found it easy after Mount Rugby, Chris would describe it as a moderately challenging walk. It took us two hours to get up, with a few strategic stops for photos and recovery! We were at the top for half an hour, enjoying lunch and the panoramic views, then just over an hour to get down.

Made it to the summit!

Other finds: some of the many yabby holes along the track, a trigger plant.

One cannot climb this imposing mountain and not talk about the hard rock which lines part of the tracks and which many of the crags dominating the region are made of: quartzite!

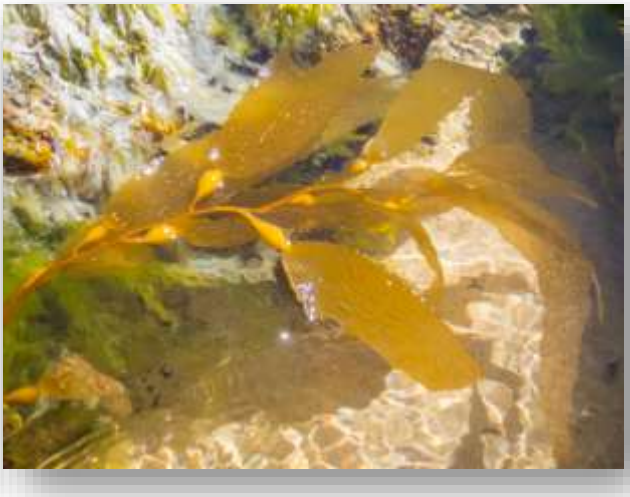
Quartzite is very resistant to chemical weathering and often forms ridges and resistant hilltops. It is formed when the sandstone's quartz grains are fused from heat and pressure. The nearly pure silica content of the rock provides little material for soil; therefore, the quartzite ridges are often bare or covered only with a very thin layer of soil and little (if any) vegetation.

When we got back, sharing Bramble Cove with us were three boats we knew: *Discovery II* who had just climbed Mt Stokes too, *Sagan* skippered by Dusty, and *Finesse II* with John and Bev on board. Both Dusty and John had climbed Rugby with Wade. We decided to invite everyone for sundowners on *Anui*.

It was a nice way to meet up with everybody and celebrate being in such an enthralling place. Both *Finesse* and *Sagan* are from Tasmania and have been here many times. They even went fishing for crays and very generously shared one with us. They used a hoop net, bated with fish and left it in the water at the Breaksea Islands for just 10 minutes. Wade went with them to see how they did it… Next time around, we might have to try this!

We used to have craypots on board, but they are bulky and rust away, and we never caught anything in them so we got rid of them.

The next day was a pleasant rest day but we managed a little beach walk, looking at kelp flowing near the rocky shores, and checking out the waterfall which some yachts use to top up their water tanks. The softness of the golden kelp and harshness of the quartzite rock were such a contrast!



Spain Bay

Early the next morning we moved to our final anchorage in Port Davey. Spain Bay is a handy spot at the southwestern end of Port Davey, often used as an initial arrival point when coming up and around South West Cape, as well as a departure point when heading south. When we first got there, we had this large bay to ourselves.

A few hours later, five other vessels had turned up from Hobart, the first wave after the Wooden Boat Festival using the light conditions to motor around before the forecast change! Time for us to leave!

We had a look around the caves that line the bay, then our friends on *Discovery II* arrived from Bramble Cove and joined us on a walk to Stephens Beach, open to the Southern Ocean.

The hike to Stephens Beach is not a hard one, but on a hot day you are exposed to the burning sun as you walk across the buttongrass plateau. Some parts of the track were very overgrown with bushes head high. You do get great views of the ocean and South West Cape in the distance.

There were some nice vegetation, including the Fairies Apron and the Juniper like Common Pink Berrybush.

We eventually reached the beach, the only footsteps those of wombats in the sand, a mum and bub!

There are middens at the very southern end of the beach, but it was so hot that none of us felt like walking all the way there and back. We looked for flotsam on the sand. Last time we were there Wade found meters of good rope still being used today. But this time, only small botanical treasures were found.

The evening back at Spain Bay was colourful, a result of the smoke in the air from the bush fires burning in the northwest of the state. And we had a full moon!

Around South West Cape

We did not expect to have such a tame passage to South West Cape: no wind, no swell, reflections of our hulls in the mirror like ocean. It felt so wrong for the location!

The closer we got to the cape the more seabirds were flying which was strange in the windless air.

And then we were there, right at the front of this normally daunting cape, in a becalmed ocean. It is rare to come around so close to the towering cliffs. It felt unreal. Part of us said “lucky us”, but the other said “It is not quite right!”

The Exposed South Coast

Soon, we had rounded South West Cape. We stayed the closest we have ever been to the coast.

Hundreds of birds and dozens of seals were around, then you discover the rugged South Coast with its islands: De Witt, Maatsuiker, Flat Witch... Being able to follow the coast closely, unhindered by wind or swell, was a rare treat.

Instead of going straight to Recherche, it was the ideal opportunity to make a few stops along the coast, something we had never been able to do before.

New Harbour

We elected to stop at New Harbour for a day and overnight. This is a very deep bay protected from the northerlies. Although we had very light SW initially and were stern to the long sandy beach, the forecast indicated the breeze would switch to the north in the late afternoon and become quite strong the next day from that direction.

We anchored right in the middle of the bay in 6 meters of water over sand. There are rocks at its entrance with a lot of kelp on the western side, so we hugged the eastern side to get in safely. We had the bay to ourselves to start with. *Discovery II* joined us late in the afternoon. In these idyllic conditions, New Harbour was heavenly.

We enjoyed a couple of beach walks at different stages of our stay. The birdlife was lovely with Hooded Plovers, Pied Oystercatchers and Lapwings about.

At the back of the beach, buttongrass and reeds were lush. We investigated the creek and were going to bring the kayak up, until the sandflies started swarming!

Abeona Head separates New Harbour from the small bay to its east. Lots of swell seemed to roll in even in calm weather.

Cox Bight

Strong Northwest winds were building with a forecast of 6 meter swell developing. We debated whether to stay put at New Harbour through the worst of the gale, or move and investigate a few of the bays to the East of us along the way, going in close, but not anchoring. The wind was not going to be a problem, but the swell? We just did not know. So we played it safe and moved on.

The cliffs all along this part of the coast are impressive: tall, jagged quartzite cliffs with numerous caves and vertical or sometimes slanted blade-like rock slabs, “hull tearers” as Wade calls them. This is Cox Bluff.

Cox Bight is a very large and deep bay. Anchorages are marked on the eastern side of Cox Bluff but these are in deep water. The sandy bay is not protected from the swell and obviously exposed to any breeze from the south. We would not anchor there, even on a calm day.

The gap in the hills leads all the way inland to Melaleuca.

Louisa Bay

On the other side of Cox Bight is another interesting spot: Louisa Bay. The bay is quite broad with lovely views of the ranges. There are two possible anchorages, one on the western side, behind patches of kelp, the other on the eastern side in the shelter of Louisa Island and offering much nicer conditions with a shoaling area. There are extensive reefs in the middle of the bay. We really liked the Eastern anchorage. The cliffs of Louisa Island had a lovely pink glow, different to the quartzite cliffs.

With the wind picking up, we did not anchor in Louisa Bay, but would love to do this on a future trip. From here on the sailing conditions became challenging, with wind varying from 14 knots to 38 knots in the gusts. We just had the jib out; one minute we would be going fast, the next we'd be crawling and needing to turn an engine on.

The northerly wind kept bringing with it heavy smoke and the light became gradually eerie, giving the seascape a kind of sepia tone.

South Cape and South East Cape

Quartzite gave way to Dolerite as we reached South then South East Capes. The further east we went, the gustier the wind and the choppier the ocean, made no doubt worse by the rebound against the tall vertical cliffs which we were sailing close to and the nearby capes . The air was thick with smoke, the smell of bushfire overpowering and a sense of foreboding pervasive. Northwest Tasmania was burning. It was terrible to think that areas we visited just a month ago were threatened.

It became quite uncomfortable. We were burying the hulls in the swell, hobby horsing and all we wanted to do was get past those capes!

The light was eerie, sinister, the sky and sun making it look like dooms day.

Once past the capes, the ocean settled. There were large numbers of seabirds: gannets diving for fish, albatrosses soaring. But in the heaving boat, they were difficult to photograph; that is until we saw a small group of shy albatrosses floating on the water, seemingly playing with a seal!

Recherche

Finally, by about 6pm we made it around the corner, started heading north, passing Fishers Point, and an hour later we were anchored at Recherche Bay – Cockle Creek. After weeks in the wilderness, anchoring with half a dozen other boats felt a little… crowded. We have experienced enough returns from remote places to know what to expect when you return to civilization. But it still gets us every time: a kind of discomfort and displeasure with not being alone anymore.

Cockle Creek is popular with not only yachts hiding from the weather or waiting for a window to go "around the corner" to Port Davey, but also with bushwalkers intent on hiking the South Coast Track and RVs camping at "the end of the road". Cockle Creek is the furthest south one can drive to in Australia. So we were no longer on our own in the wilderness, but we were safe!

There is a lot of history at Recherche Bay. It was the landing place of the French D'Entrecasteaux Expedition in 1792. This was a high profile dual-purpose expedition. Its mission was to search for the lost maritime hero, La Perouse, but also to undertake top-level scientific research including astronomy and research into the Earth's geomagnetic field. Recherche, which means *Research* in French, was the name of one of the expedition ships.

Being isolated from the main areas of early settlement, exposed to westerly gales, and the terrain and soils of a nature that discouraged European agriculture, Recherche Bay saw only moderate activity following the British settlement of Van Diemen's Land.

One of the more gruesome activities here was built around whaling. Soon after their arrival in 1803 the British colonists saw hundreds of migrating whales enter Tasmania's sheltered bays to calve. With whale oil in high demand worldwide for lighting, heating and manufacturing processes, whaling stations were soon established in the late 1820s. Recherche Bay was the site of up to five whaling stations. It was a popular place: the flat rocky shoreline was good for butchering, the tall trees useful for building, fresh water was readily accessible, and anchorages were safe for waiting ships. A pilot station, which doubled as a rowdy pub, was built at Fishers Point to guide ships into the bay to collect the bounty.

From the 1830s to the 1850s, whalers arrived and the waters ran red with the blood of a thousand whales. Two years later, the number had plummeted to 300. Unsurprisingly, the industry soon collapsed and within two decades of their arrival, the whalers departed.

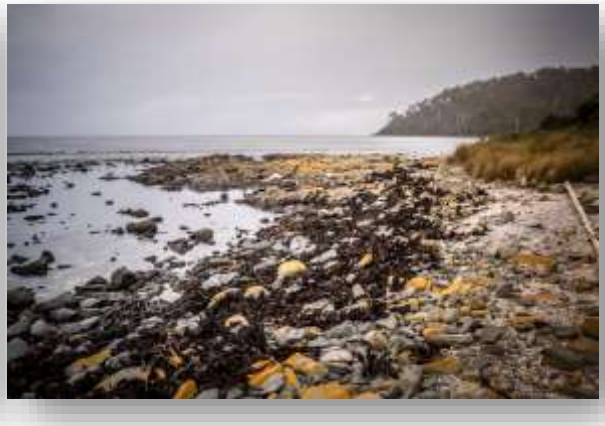
A bronze sculpture by artist Stephen Walker remembers the slaughter of thousands of whales in the bay. It has been erected at Adams Point. Before the onset of whaling the global population of southern right whales was around 100,000. Today they are an endangered species, with their population slowly recovering.

Today, if you are lucky, you might see a real southern right whale migrating north from June to September or migrating south between September and late October.

The main commercial activities in the later 19th century and into the early 20th century were timber-gathering and coal mining.

A flywheel from one of the mills is still visible near Cockle Creek.

We went ashore the day after our arrival, to visit Fishers' Point. It is an easy walk along the rocky shores, best done at mid to low tide.



Remnants of the pilot station are still there and traces of a garden remain, with fuchsias growing wild.

We stayed at Cockle Creek for another day, while wind, rain and cold reminded us that we are in Southern Tasmania, in summer maybe, but in rowdy weather at last!

It was a good opportunity to catch up on some writing, photo sorting and developing. There is a cruise story to update, a coffee table book of the Tasmanian coast to think about… The creative juices are flowing!

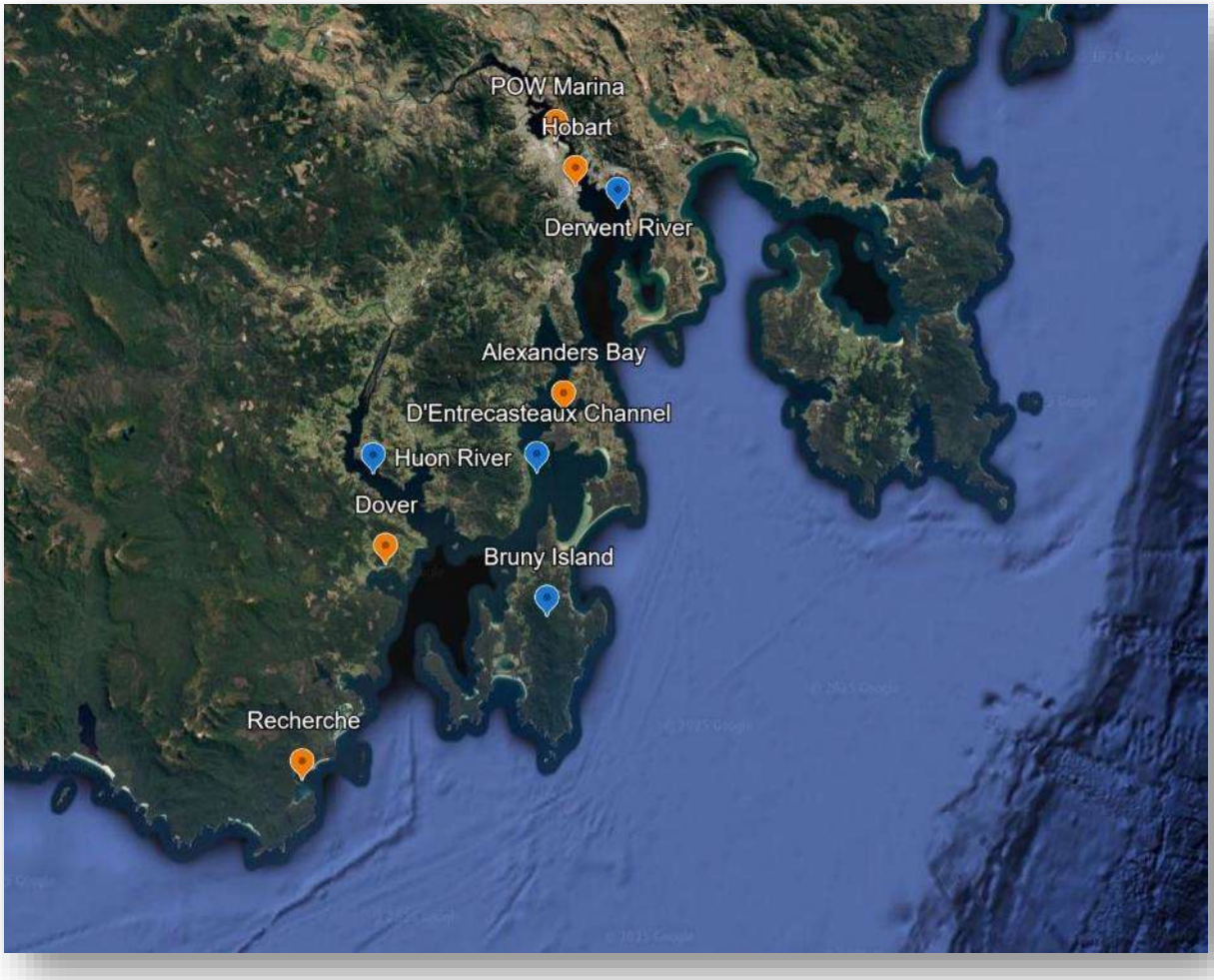
We also started organizing the weeks ahead, and the rest of our circumnavigation, getting in touch with local friends and family and organizing a few things while in Hobart. There is a fridge/freezer to get fixed, new walking boots to get for Chris whose current hiking shoes are close to their last steps, a few pairs of jeans for Wade (shorts aren't cutting it in southern climes), various medical things to organize, and of course major boat cleaning and re-provisioning after a month in the wilderness.

Wade was on the phone to every single marina around Hobart to find a berth for *Anui*. He finally got us a spot at the Prince of Wales Marina so we can get ourselves sorted. We have also invited his brother Murray and wife Maree to join us for the last leg of our journey up the East Coast back to the Gippsland Lakes, via the Furneaux Isles. So there is a major change of pace coming up!

The weather improved slightly while at Cockle Creek and we were able to get a photo from up high before moving on.

D’Entrecasteaux Channel

The D’Entrecasteaux Channel is a body of water located between Bruny Island and the southeast of the Tasmanian mainland, with picturesque scenery and lovely anchorages on either side of the Channel. Only one drawback: it is popular and often a bit too busy for our liking.



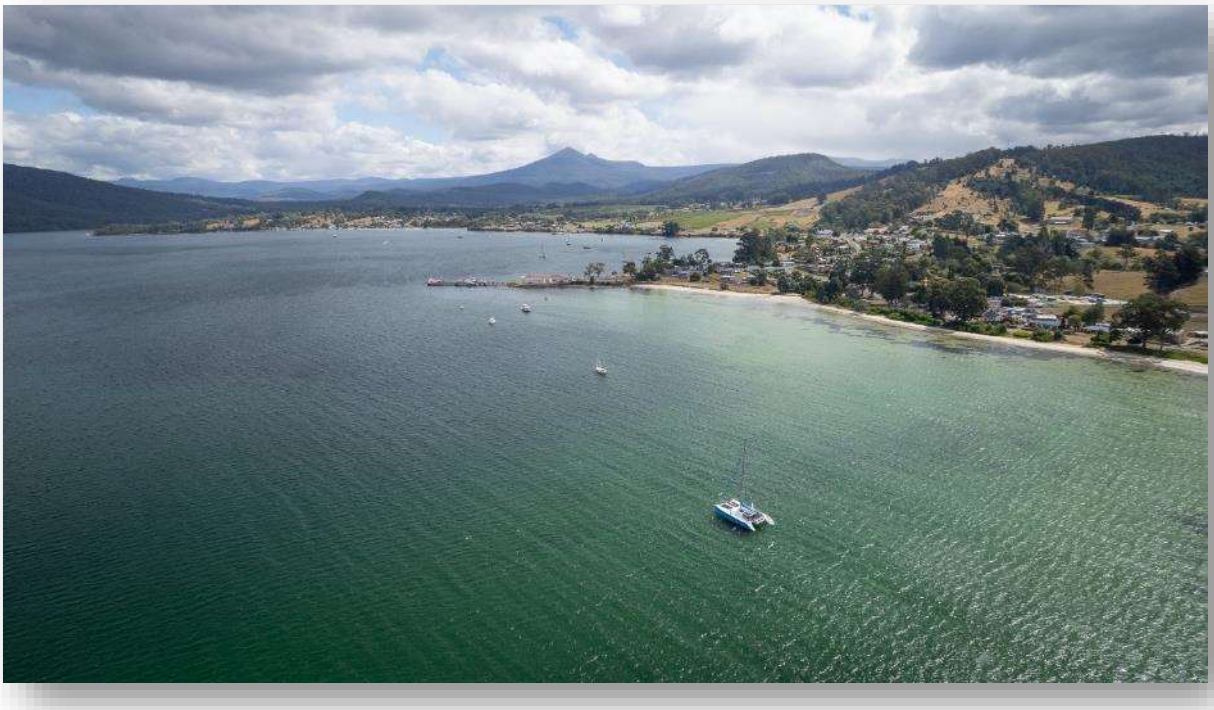
Dover

After a couple of days at Recherche, it was time to move to Dover for a change of scenery and to top up our fresh food supplies. It was just a 20nm trip north, with a fresh breeze on our beam initially and two-meter swell rolling in.

The sail up was active and the ocean rather choppy! And it was so chilly!

But what a treat to watch the albatrosses soaring!

Dover is a picturesque village on the edge on Port Esperance Bay, at the Southern end of the D'Entrecasteaux Channel. Tassal has its salmon farm in there on the southern side of the bay. We anchored on the other side, just off the jetty and dinghied ashore for some fresh vegies and seafood!

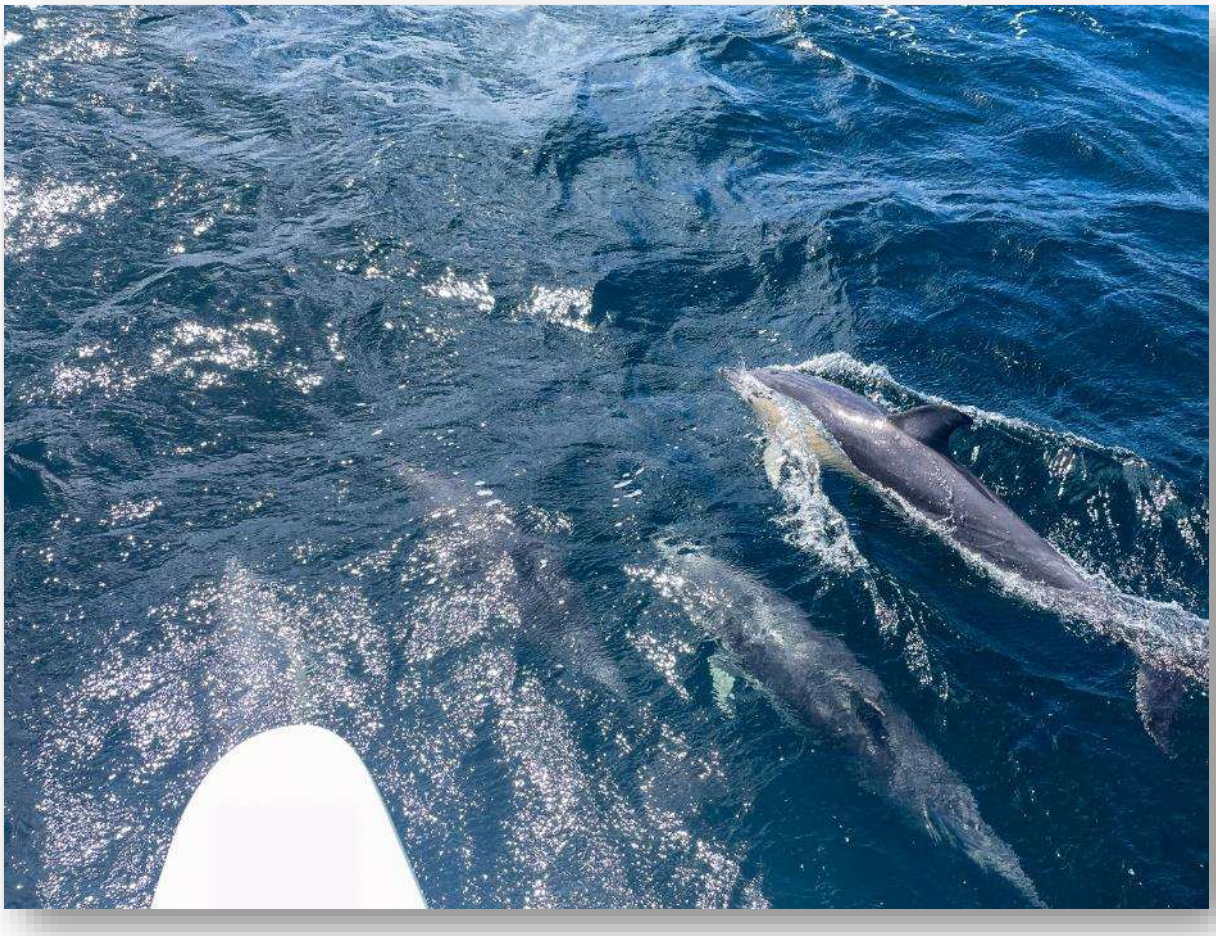


The next day we caught up with our Paynesville friends, James and Carol who were also cruising in Tasmania. James was our shipwright when we kept our boats in Paynesville, so we have always had a great connection with them. And we went for a walk along the foreshore. On the beach, there were wave patterns imprinted in the sand, and in the bush, beautiful painterly gum leaves... ideas for artwork!

The Adamsons Peak dominates the bay. There are two main peaks, one higher than the other. The locals call it Cow and Calf.

Alexander's Bay

We had another lively sail from Dover to Alexander's Bay, with 38 knots gusts and drizzle. It was a downwind run under jib only, one of those awkward passages when one minute the wind is light and you crawl at four or five knots, then a huge gust comes, and you are flying at 12 knots! Lots of dolphins were escorting us.



The D'Entrecasteaux Channel can get quite busy, and we were by now on our way to Hobart, so we did not spend much time exploring its many coves. But we did want to catch up with our Kettering friends, John and Dee, so agreed to meet them at Alexander's Bay, a lovely spot protected from the southwest. We had dinner with them on board *Storm Boy II*, their beautiful motor cruiser, also meeting the gorgeous puppy Milo, who had been with them for just a week and was only three months old. Dee spoilt us with fresh produce from her garden.

We also caught up again with James and Carol on *Time*, one of the yachts that joined us in the bay. Alexander's Bay was lovely in the morning light and we had clear views of Mt Wellington in the distance. There were only a couple of boats anchored when we first arrived, but a few hours later, another half a dozen came in... a bit popular for our taste!

In the light breeze and soft light, Bengie got excited, galloping to the bows for a deck patrol, then hopping up on the boom bag, and down again. It has been so cold in the morning that she has not been seen out much, preferring to hide under duvet covers, but not this time!

East Coast of Tasmania

Bound for Hobart

With a week's booking at the Prince of Wales Marina, just past Hobart, it was time to make tracks. It was a very cold morning with SW blowing gently, so we sailed under main and jib.

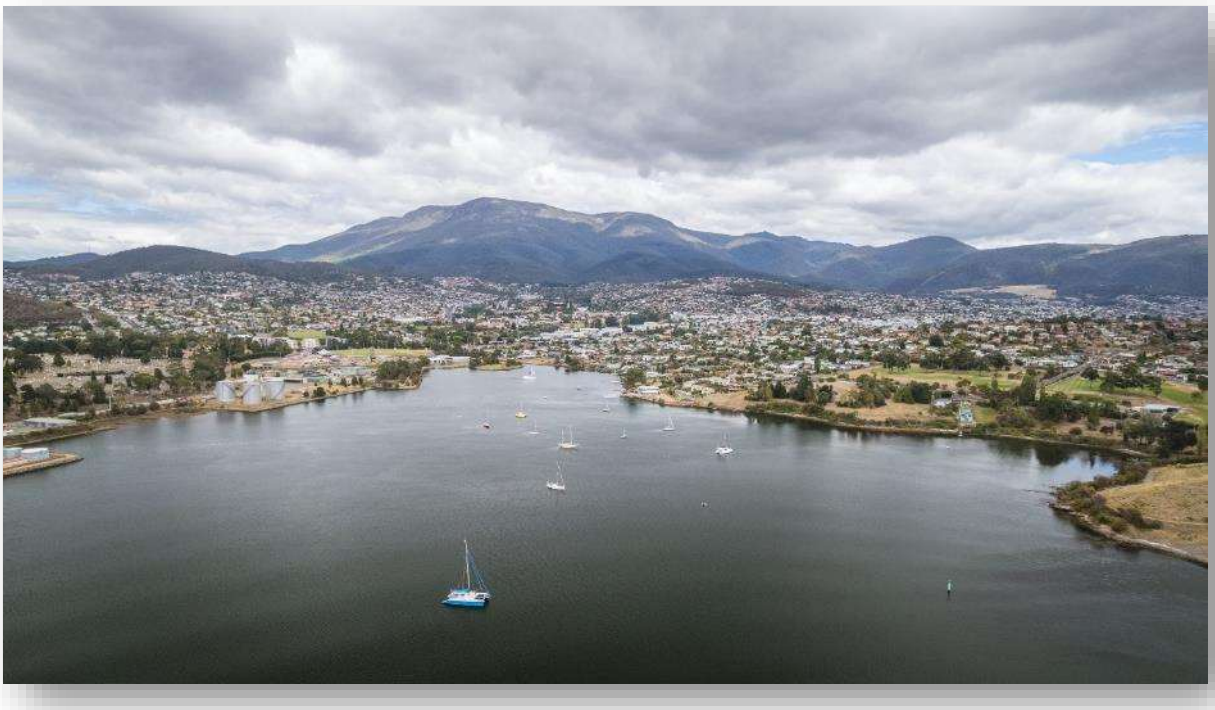
The approach to Hobart was interesting, although quite overcast. As we got close to the Tasman Bridge, we dropped the sails and just motored on.

The Australian Antarctic Icebreaker RSV Nuriya really stands out along the wharf!

The next bit of excitement is passing under the Tasman Bridge. Recreational vessels aren't allowed to pass through the central three gaps, reserved for large commercial boats. We went to the right of that, through the wide gap, so we did not have to stress about our width.

Made it on the other side of the bridge! A few hours later, we sent the drone up from our anchorage and got a shot of it looking south.

We anchored overnight at New Town Bay, past Hobart, to be ready to move into the marina early the next morning.



The area is industrial, so not particularly scenic! This is looking upriver. The marina is on the left in a small bay, before the next bridge.

Opposite us was a small cove.

A week at the Prince of Wales Marina

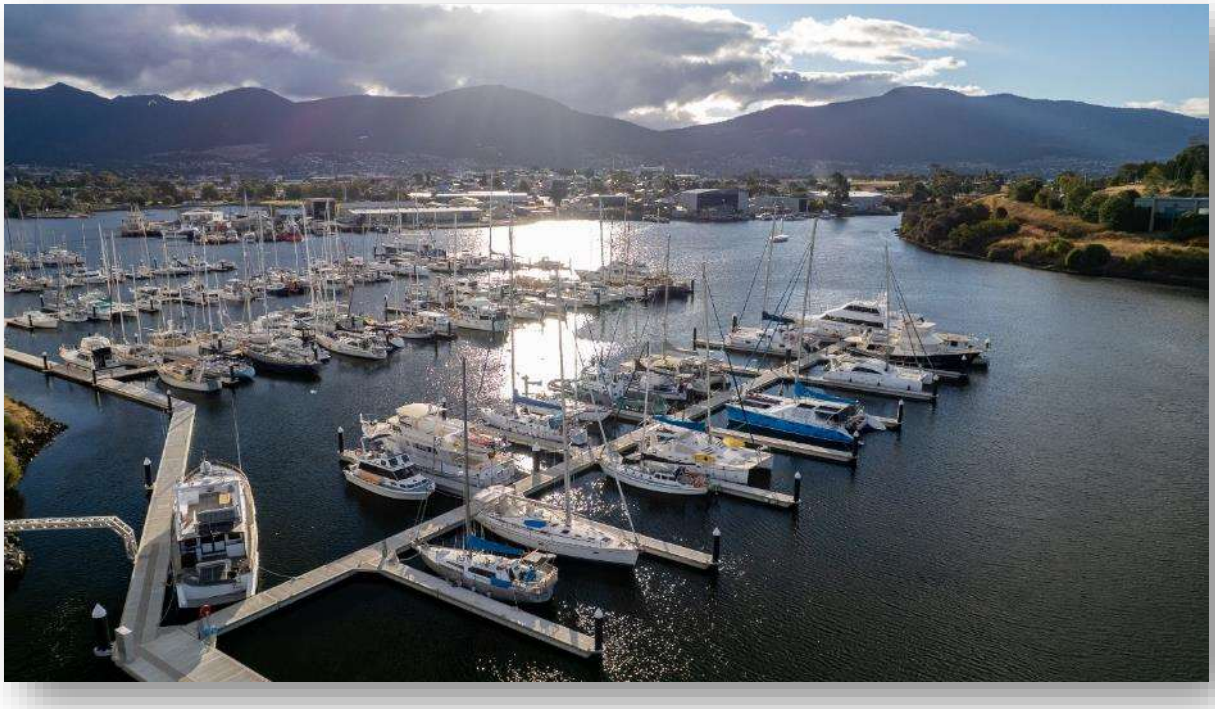
We don't often stay in marinas… it's expensive, stressful to come in and out of and not exactly secluded, so generally something we avoid! But it is handy when we have spent several months cruising in the wilderness, have trades coming on board and are picking up guests!

It took a bit of searching around, but finally we got a spot for a week at the Prince of Wales Marina, 9kms NW of Hobart, the only place that could fit us in. Marinas in Tasmania are very well set up for monohulls, but big cats are more awkward. Our length and especially our width are challenging, particularly during a busy period. There are still lots of boats around after the Wooden Boat Festival.

All around the Prince of Wales Bay is an industrial hub – shipbuilding, metal fabrication, zinc processing, so it is not very scenic and there aren't many interesting walks!

But we have to be fair, it is the cheapest marina we have ever stayed at, and we had a nice 20mx12m berth which made life easier to come in on a windy day, especially when a fellow cruiser gave us a hand catching our lines! We were on their Z arm, a new extension.

Only one complaint: the surge created as motorboats and the MONA cats go up and down the River Derwent. Fortunately that stops at night!

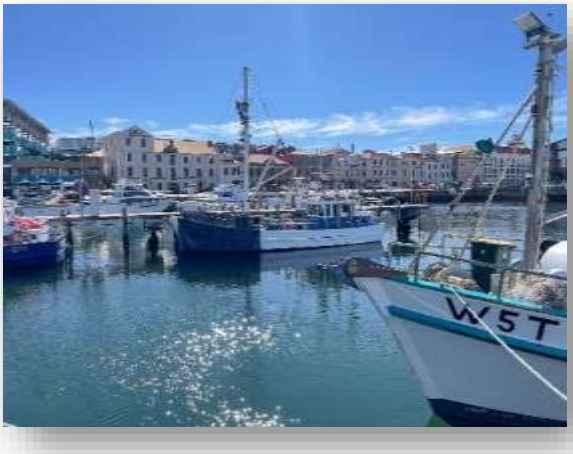


Now and then you have to stop exploring and do some chores and we are afraid this week was one of these times: tons of laundry, major boat clean up inside and out, overdue medical tests for both of us. We thought mould builds up in the tropics, more than in colder climes, but not so! We guess condensation is the culprit! The boat is now squeaky clean and smells of clove oil!

But the big one was the fridge/freezer repair. Chris Mundy diagnosed the problem: the circuit board that tells the fans to cool the condenser was no longer working properly. The fix: new 24v fans to replace the 12v ones, new refrigeration control unit and a relay that acts as a switch to manage the operations of the fans. Given the age of the unit and the fact you can't get new parts, this is the best our fridge man could do, but he is confident this will be a durable repair.

We loaded both the freezer and the fridge with our stores and were thankful this was now working properly – a day before our guests arrived!

We did the touristy thing to give ourselves a treat before the family arrived and a break from work on the boat: Saturday in Hobart. The city is dominated by 1,270m-high Mount Wellington and its harbour forms the second-deepest natural port in the world, a photogenic part of town. We wandered around the harbour.



At Hobart's fashionable Salamanca Place, old sandstone warehouses host galleries and cafes and Saturday is market day with a diverse range of distinctly Tasmanian items for sale.

While we were downtown, we descended on the Mountain shops too. Chris's super comfortable La Sportiva hiking books had taken their last steps on the West Coast, after an emergency Sikaflex patching of the soles and sides... She had them for at least 10 years, so they don't owe her anything and have now been replaced by the updated version! We both splashed out and bought some warm gear. After nearly 8 years of living in the tropics, we find Tassie Summers aren't exactly tropical! Gotta stop that shivering!

We even saw our favourite musician: Cary Lewincamp, who makes his own instruments, notably the Huon Pine seven string guitar in this photo and composes his own music. He regularly plays on Saturdays at Salamanca.

Once we were ready for visitors, Wade's brother Murray and his wife Maree joined us from Melbourne. We would have them on board till we got back to the Gippsland Lakes – 3 or 4 weeks. They have been with us on *Anui* four times, but always in the tropics, so it promised to be quite unlike past cruises for them. No swim or snorkel in that cold water, but shore walks and sightseeing were on the cards.

While still at the marina we had a lovely catch up with Wade and Murray's aunt Fay, cousin Ollie and his partner Bridget for a dinner in town. And our guests went to MONA – Museum of Old and New Art, one of those well-known draw cards when in Hobart. We had been before and were not tempted to go again.

Instead, we did the food shopping for four people for a month, now that we have a functioning fridge/freezer, and managed to store everything away – no small feat! Most landlubbers used to large house fridges and freezers and huge amounts of storage space struggle to understand the dilemma of managing food supplies and stowage on a boat. It is hard enough for two people for a month, but for four... So, the on-board briefing instructions were: 'if you are looking for something, don't just open fridges or cupboard doors and rummage – Ask!'

Another aspect we find we have to mention to guests is that we can't just dash out to the supermarket on a cruise if we run out of something, so whatever food we have on board is it, until we can make a stop in front of a large town. You can be greedy, pig out and run out of goodies really quickly, or be a little restrained with the portions and make it last. Your choice!

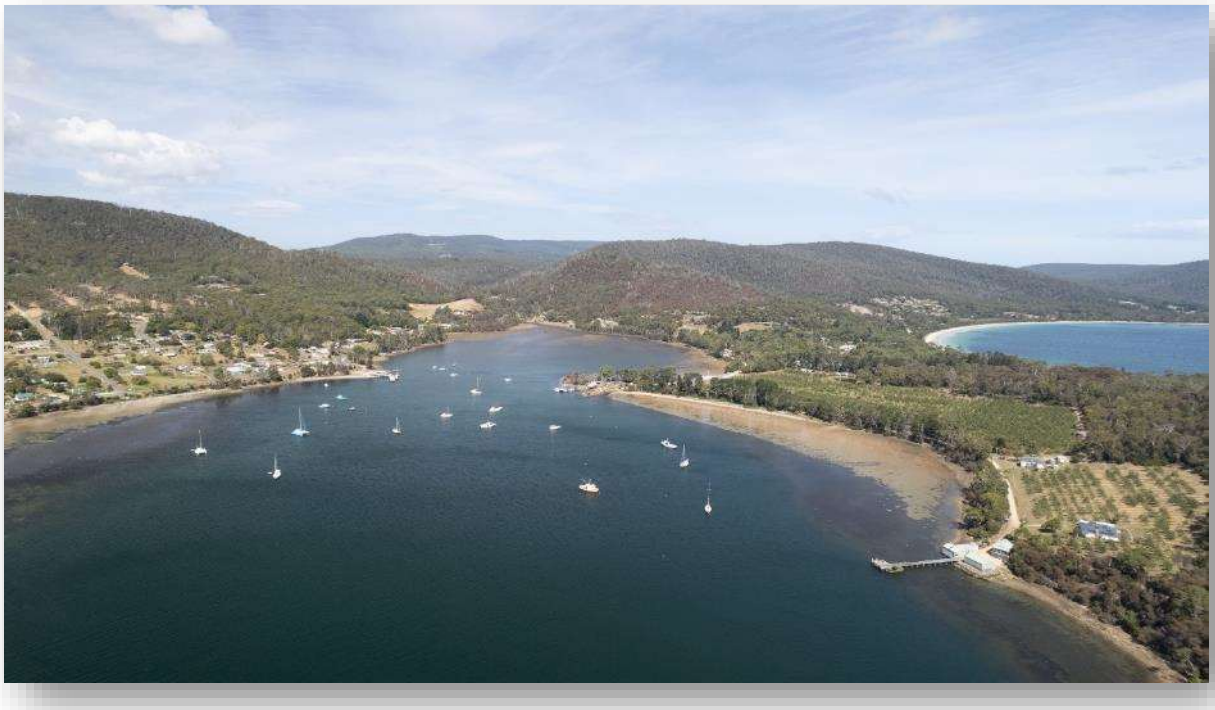
This time around the menu and provisioning was a challenge, since Murray had decided he was on a vegan diet, not a very boat life or cook friendly choice.

We sent him off to buy extra supplies of pulses and cereals which is apparently what happens at home. Evidently Maree and their adult kids aren't following his diet and she is not cooking different meals to accommodate him. Chris would do her best to adapt the menu, but we were not becoming vegan either!

The last day of February saw us leaving the marina, and heading towards Nubeena on the Tasman Peninsula.

Lots of dolphins escorted us – something we will never tire of!

Nubeena is a small fishing village on the western side of the Tasman Peninsula. We picked up a MAST mooring (Marine And Safety Tasmania) and stayed there overnight.

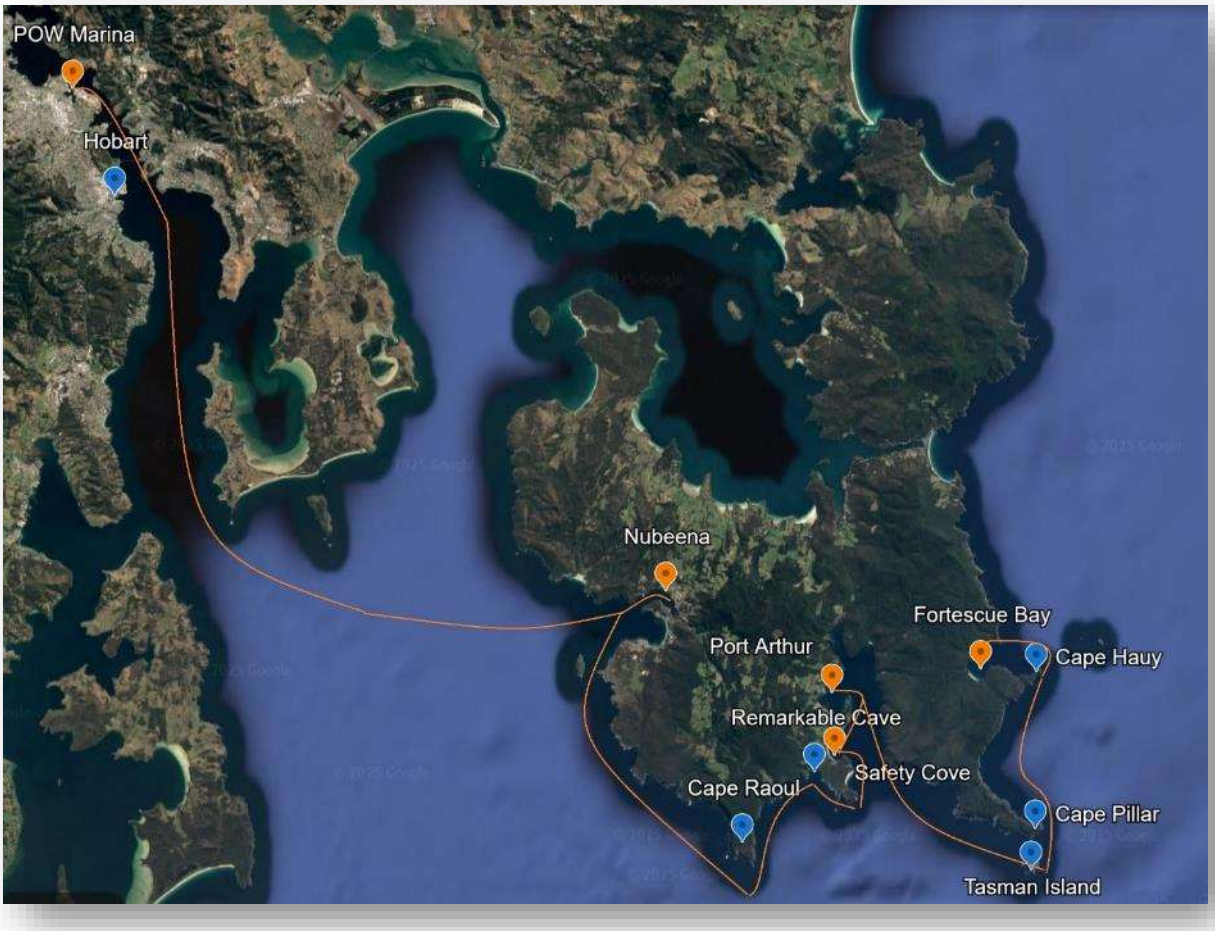


There are several large salmon farms in the bay and outside.

Tasman Peninsula

The Tasman Peninsula is such a spectacular part of the Tasmanian East Coast! With its high dolerite cliffs and capes, its numerous caves, its history, there is much to explore and enjoy.

We spent a week following the coastline of the peninsula while the weather was calm and allowed us to get close to the towering cliffs and around the three capes: Cape Raoul, Cape Pillar and Cape Hauy. But we also explored on foot, taking in Port Arthur and its historical site.



Near the capes, the birdlife was plentiful, with lots of shearwaters, but also different species of albatrosses soaring: the Shy Albatross and the Indian Yellow-nose Albatross, a smaller and distinctive one with its yellow beak lined in black.

Cape Raoul

The first of our Three Capes Sail was Cape Raoul with its 253m Dolerite cliffs straight down into the ocean. Its characteristic fluted pillars were once used for target practice by naval vessels until people protested against such vandalism. With calm weather, we were able to cruise close to the towering cliffs and even spotted two pairs of rock climbers!

Just before you reach Cape Pillar, you pass a globally renowned big-wave surfing location: Shipstern Bluff. You can see why it got its name, but the day we were there, no impressive wave was to be seen!

If you look closely, you will see one rock climber standing at the top of one of the pillars, with his companion further down.

We spotted another two climbers on the other side of the Cape.

Deep into the bays, the geology changes from vertical dolerite columns to horizontal layers of sedimentary sandstone. Strong southwesterlies generate pounding waves that attack weaknesses in the rock and erode the coastline, so caves are numerous.

A notable one, the tunnel-shaped Remarkable Cave, was formed through years of torment from crashing waves, eventually causing a wall of the sandstone cave to collapse and create the tunnel that stands today. We saw it both from the ocean and from the shore as we walked to it from our anchorage at Safety Cove.

A few kilometres further was the Maingon Blowhole, which was not very blowy, but interesting nevertheless.

All around were wildflowers and bumble bees!

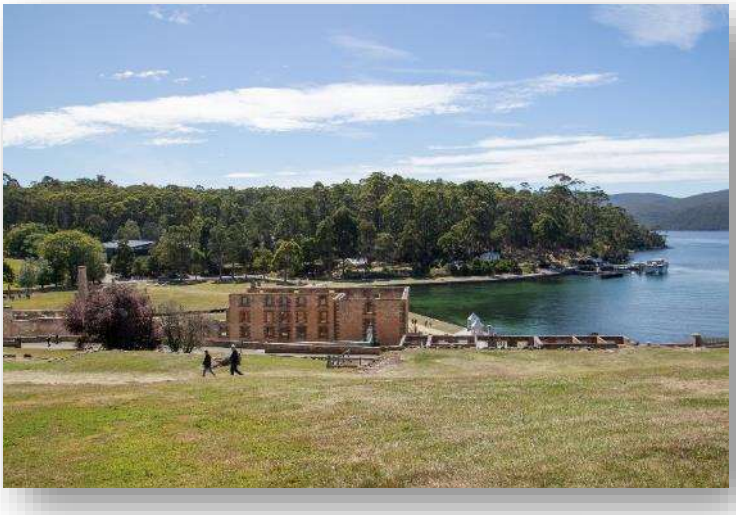
Our anchorage at Safety Cove was comfortable and a good spot from which to walk across to the ocean and the Remarkable Cave. We were there over a weekend and purposely stayed until the weekend had passed, so nearby Port Arthur would not be as crowded.

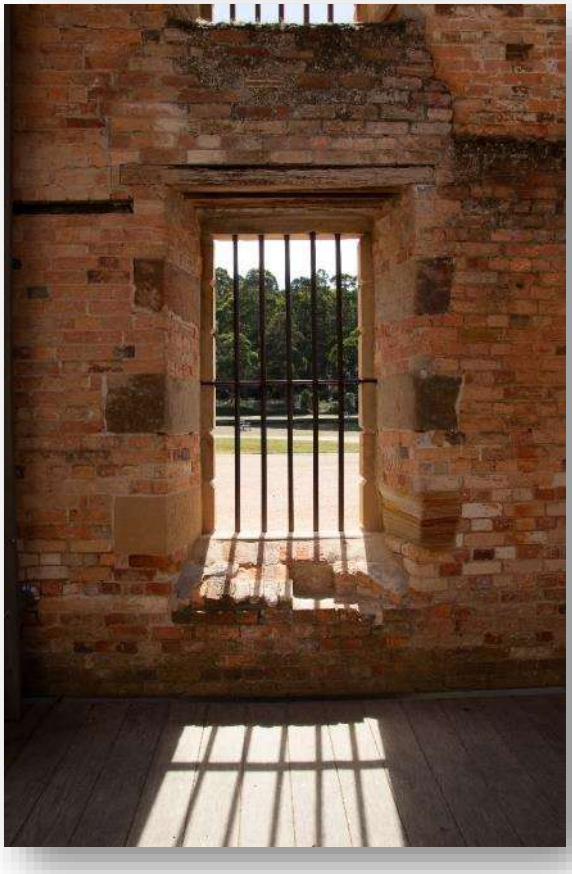
Port Arthur

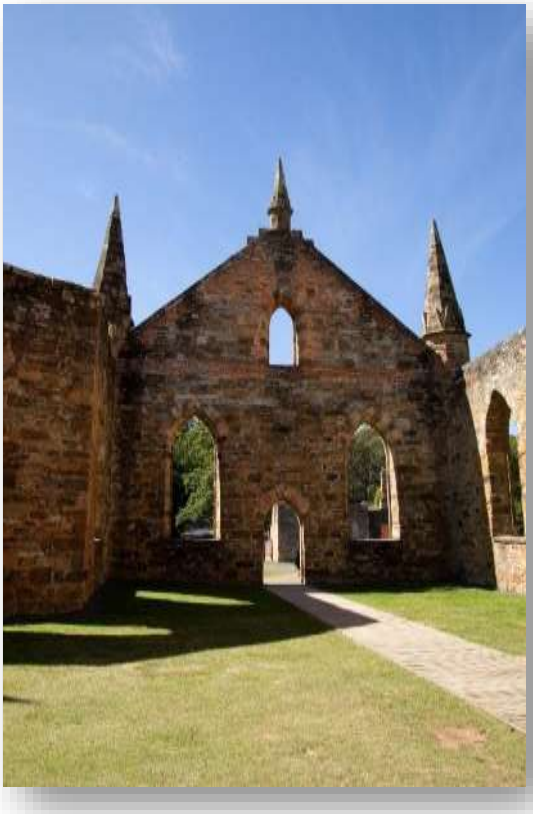
The arrival at Port Arthur is quite impressive, with the Penitentiary dominating the bay. We took the boat right in for the obligatory photos but did not anchor there. It is a busy spot for commercial tour boats and also very shallow.

We anchored at Ladies Bay, just around the corner, a lovely cove with lots of terns flying. It is a handy spot to land the dinghy and walk to the Port Arthur site.

Port Arthur is a place of duality: on the one hand the beauty of the sandstone and brick ruins, the well tendered gardens of the open-air museum we visit nowadays, but on the other hand the brutality of its history as a 19th-century penal settlement of the most severe kind. The site includes the huge penitentiary, the remaining shell of the Convict Church built by inmates and the Solitary confinement cells in the Separate Prison building which were used to inflict mental punishment in place of floggings. We spent two days there enjoying being tourists while imagining what life would have been like for the poor souls who ended up there, and we filled our backpacks with apples and pears from the orchard, left there for the picking.

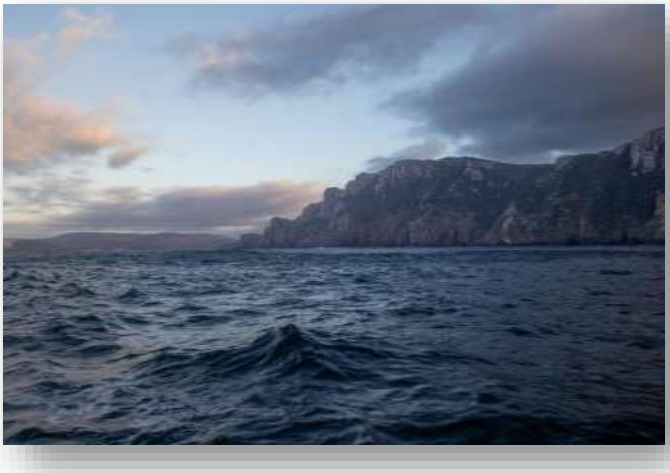






Cape Pillar

Our passage from Port Arthur to Canoe Bay, inside the large Fortescue Bay was an early morning affair before the strong wind set in. Along the way were the magnificent 300m high cliffs of Cape Pillar and Tasman Island. It was a little rock and rolly around the narrow passage between the Cape and the Island, and the seals must have still been asleep as we did not see any, but the dawn light was interesting and the silhouetted coastline imposing.

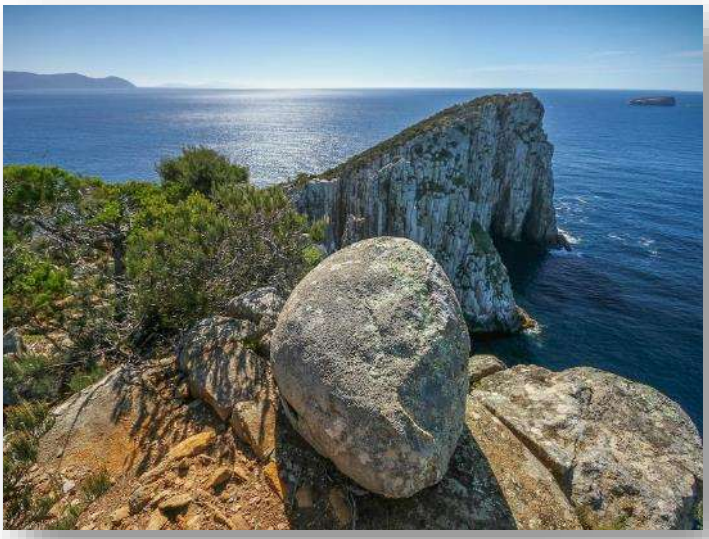


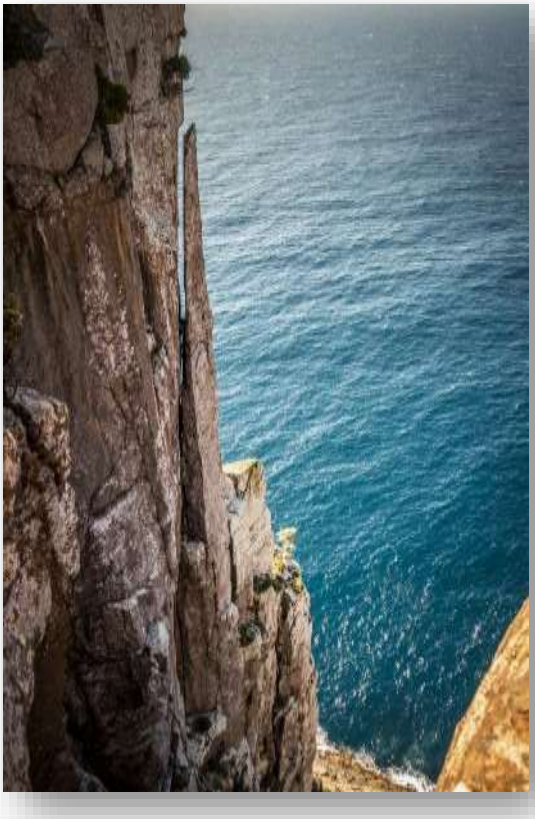
Cape Hauy

Our motor-sail took us around the third cape: Cape Hauy with its distinctive dolerite columns jutting out of the sea. Directly in front of the Cape are more sea stacks: the Totem Pole, Candle Stick and the Lanterns which are popular with rockclimbers. We came close with *Anui*, then rounded the point into Fortescue Bay to see the cliffs from the northern side.

We anchored just outside of Canoe Bay, a small cove within the large Fortescue Bay, just around the corner from Cape Hauy and the Lanterns. Two other yachts were inside of the wreck, making it a bit tight for us to get in.

For heady views vertically down and across the entire coastline, we hiked to Cape Hauy the next day, a 9.5kms return trek. During the first three kilometres or so the track undulates through woodlands and heath, before opening up to spectacular views. This is when the steep sections begin, with stone steps taking you down, down, down, before ascending up and up, and down and up again towards the cape. Apparently there are 4500 stone steps along the trip there and back! It is hard yakka but worth it. Cape Hauy plunges into the restless ocean, with breathtaking views on both sides. It is quite exposed. All you hear up there are the sounds of seabirds and whistling wind.





Maria Island

With light southerlies blowing, we set sail for Maria Island. What should have been an easy downwind passage ended up being a bit of a drama. We had the screecher out, and one engine ticking along as we were charging batteries, and the breeze was very light. Suddenly we heard a bang and all hell broke loose: the prodder pole flipped up, the screecher consequently became loose and flogging. We initially tried to furl it up, but the sag in the halyard prevented that so we had to get ourselves organized to drop it on deck by loosening the halyard and lowering the big sail down.

Chris took the wheel and turned the boat into wind, while Wade loosened the halyard and with help from Murray bundled up the huge sail. It was windy, so we then had to bring it into the cockpit to prevent it from bellowing in the wind.

We could have raised the main and unfurled the jib to continue to Maria Island, but with the mess in the cockpit, we just turned the engines on and motored to our anchorage in Riedle Bay.

Next was the process of figuring out what happened. As it turned out, a lashing to keep the prodder in place had given way, which was thankfully straight forward to replace as we had spare Dyneema. Another lucky break was to use one of the photos we happened to have taken while dolphins were at the bow. It showed the set up! We blew it up so we had an idea of how to put the pulley system back together!

Finally it was all hands on deck to bring the screecher out on deck and roll it roughly to be able to hoist it back up, another challenge which required Chris to winch Wade up the mast for him to untwist the halyard!

In the end it all worked out well, the job was done and we had our working prodder pole and screecher operational again!

Our guests were impressed with our ability to work together and recover from mishaps. We do make a good team!

The next day we were able to enjoy our surroundings! We had been there before and were hoping we would get to see different aspects of this interesting and varied island.

Maria Island is a special place where long sandy beaches, turquoise water, mountaintop vistas, abundant wildlife and a convict past come together to create a perfect island destination.

We anchored in Shoal Bay, in front of the McRaes Isthmus. Weather allowing, we would love to see the northern part, but it might be for another trip... again!

A walk along the ocean beach of Riedle Bay was a delight: shells, lots of birds. The Double-banded Plover entertained us with its behaviour, standing up right then hunching down and running speedily. The Pied Oystercatchers were fun, trotting around in pairs till we got too close and they flew off, even Pacific Gulls with their immature chick bigger than mum!

The next day we moved over to the other end of the bay, as the NE had picked up. The beach was not empty as is in the aerial shot below, with at least a dozen boats anchored for the Labour Day Long Weekend! But we dropped the pick there and dinghied to the beach to walk around the headland where the ruins of the Long Point Probation Station remain, a convict penitentiary dating back to circa 1846. It was not a particularly scenic walk, but a bit of exercise and something to do! There was not a lot to see, just a few tiny cells. In one of them was a wombat who seemed to have chosen it for its last sleep. Sad and very recent.

Ile des Phoques

On our way to Schouten Island, we decided to break our slow and tedious motor-sail with a lap of the rugged granite island called Ile des Phoques, a French name which means Island of the Seals! It was fun slowly idling in front of the islet, watching the colony up close, with their loud calls sounding like moans, barks and moos. Many were sunning themselves on the rocks, several were lulling about in the water, others were investigating us. Although when we were approaching we got a strong whiff of guano, it quickly dissipated; either this or we were too busy watching their antics to be bothered by the smell.

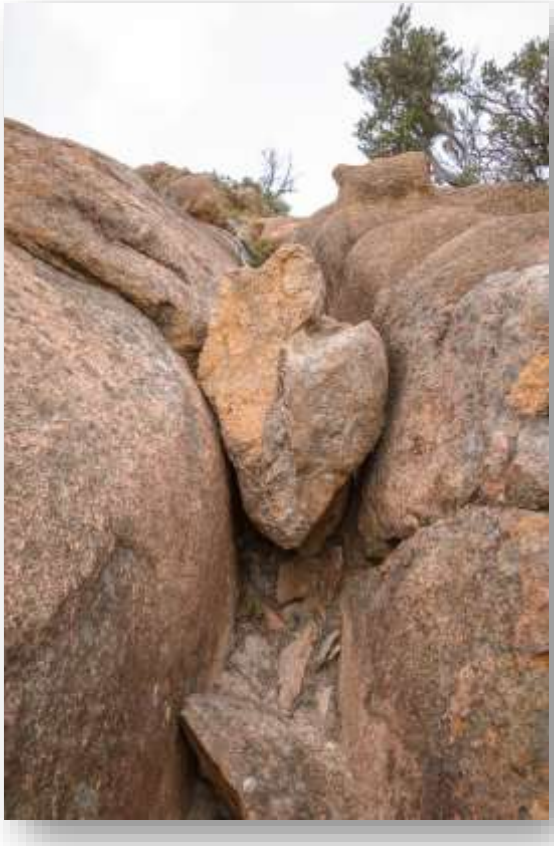
Schouten Island

With the wind forecast to shift from the NW to the SE and back to the NW, we decided to enjoy a walk on Schouten Island then hop across the Schouten Passage to Bryan's Corner and the Freycinet Peninsula once the wind shifted back to the North.

Unfortunately a few vessels had the same idea and a group of about a dozen boats were huddled together, having moved that morning from across Bryan's Corner... They were doing the Schouten Shuffle as the wind shifted from North to South, a common tactic here! Having arrived last, we had to be happy anchoring off the little headland you see in the photos, which separates two coves. We much prefer not to anchor near others with the wind suddenly blowing at over 30 knots! We have been hit by dragging boat a few times too many, so are understandably shy about being anchored in close proximity to others.

We were intent on climbing Bear Hill, the granite hill which overlooks the anchorage.

The next day, Murray, Wade and Chris climbed ‘the bear’ while Maree stayed on board. The track up Bear Hill starts gently but once you reach the base of the granite rocks, it is straight up, scrambling over steep boulders. The views are sensational as you climb. Can you spot the koala?



Once at the base of the rocks, it is straight up and more akin to rock climbing than hiking! But it's okay, it gives you something to focus on instead of what bits of your body hurt!

It was a bit chilly at the summit, but what a view!

Down we went again, an ‘interesting’ hike down the steep boulders. You’d better wear some grippy boots and would not want to do this on a wet day!

Freycinet Peninsula

The Freycinet Peninsula is a beautiful part of the East coast of Tasmania, famous for its pink granite cliffs and hills. It is also very popular with yachties and land-based tourists alike, which means crowds and more crowds!

You cannot come to the Freycinet and not visit iconic and much photographed Wineglass Bay. However the weather did not allow us to anchor there, with easterlies making it very exposed. We did the next best thing: we anchored at the beach opposite Wineglass Bay, at Hazards Beach on the other side of the isthmus.

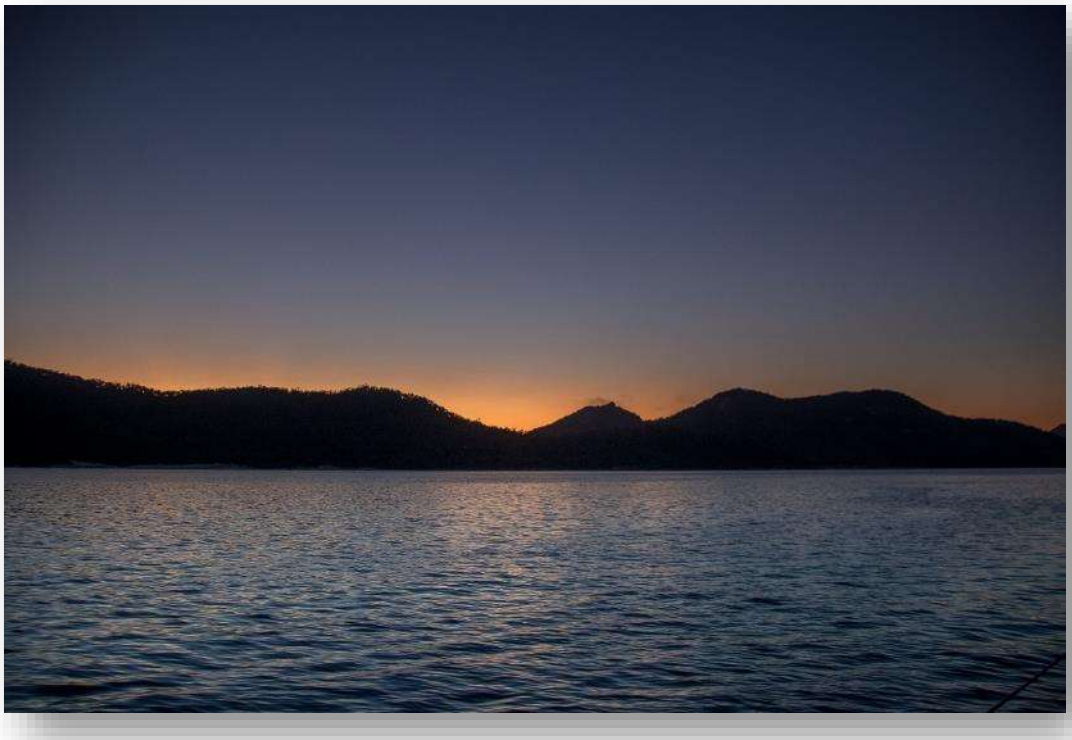
We were briefly on our own there, then two other boats came in.

We managed to get two panoramic shots, although in very overcast conditions: the first shot is of Wineglass Bay, and the second of the Hazards Beach. They look similar, don't they?

The next day, in grey, drizzly conditions, we went ashore and walked across the isthmus to Wineglass Beach. You would think the weather would deter the tourists, but no, this flat walk was popular, with hoards of people ambling along the track and board walk.

Maree, Chris and Wade then walked back to the boat. Murray was keen to walk up to the Lookout; we had been there a few times before and weren't keen on walking there in the drizzle for not much of a view. So he went there on his own and walked back across the isthmus, and Wade picked him up with the dinghy later. As soon as the boys got back to *Anui*, we left for Bryan's Corner ready for an early morning departure the next day.

The next morning saw us depart Bryan's Corner, near the Schouten Passage at sunrise, bound for St Helens. The advantage of this dawn departure was seeing the pink granite cliffs of the Freycinet Peninsula in the early morning light.



One of the pleasures of being at sea again was the many pods of dolphins who joined us. They are always a hit with us and our guests.

St Helens

11 hours after leaving Bryan's Corner, we were in front of the St Helens bar, ready to go in. St Helens is not an easy spot to get to by boat. It is 9kms inland, nestled on the edge of Georges Bay. Not only do you need to safely cross the bar, but you must also negotiate a narrow and shallow channel for several kilometers.

Wade had talked to the Volunteer Coast Guard the night before to get some information on the state of the channel and its depth, deciding the best time to arrive was at about 5.30 pm, at mid tide rising, with enough time to meander our way through the shallows in daylight and arrive in front of St Helens to anchor before dark.

A couple of boats who had left Bryan's Corner before us were anchored outside: *Sarisha* and *Liquid Insanity*, who upon seeing us ready to go in, radioed us and asked if they could follow us in rather than wait for a couple of hours. We led the way, Wade at the wheel, Chris relaying depth and position on the radio for the other two.

We had waves breaking at the back of us as we started across the bar, but did not get pooped, then it was a matter of keeping an eye on the chart, sat map, depth gauge as we got to the rock wall and slowly made our way inside the shallows. It certainly is not the easiest port to access, but once in, it is quite protected.

We stayed at St Helens for a few days, waiting for the next weather window to open up and allow us to head north to the Furneaux Group and back to the Gippsland Lakes. It was a good opportunity to replenish the fresh food supplies, do masses of laundry, top up the fuel… the usual list of chores.

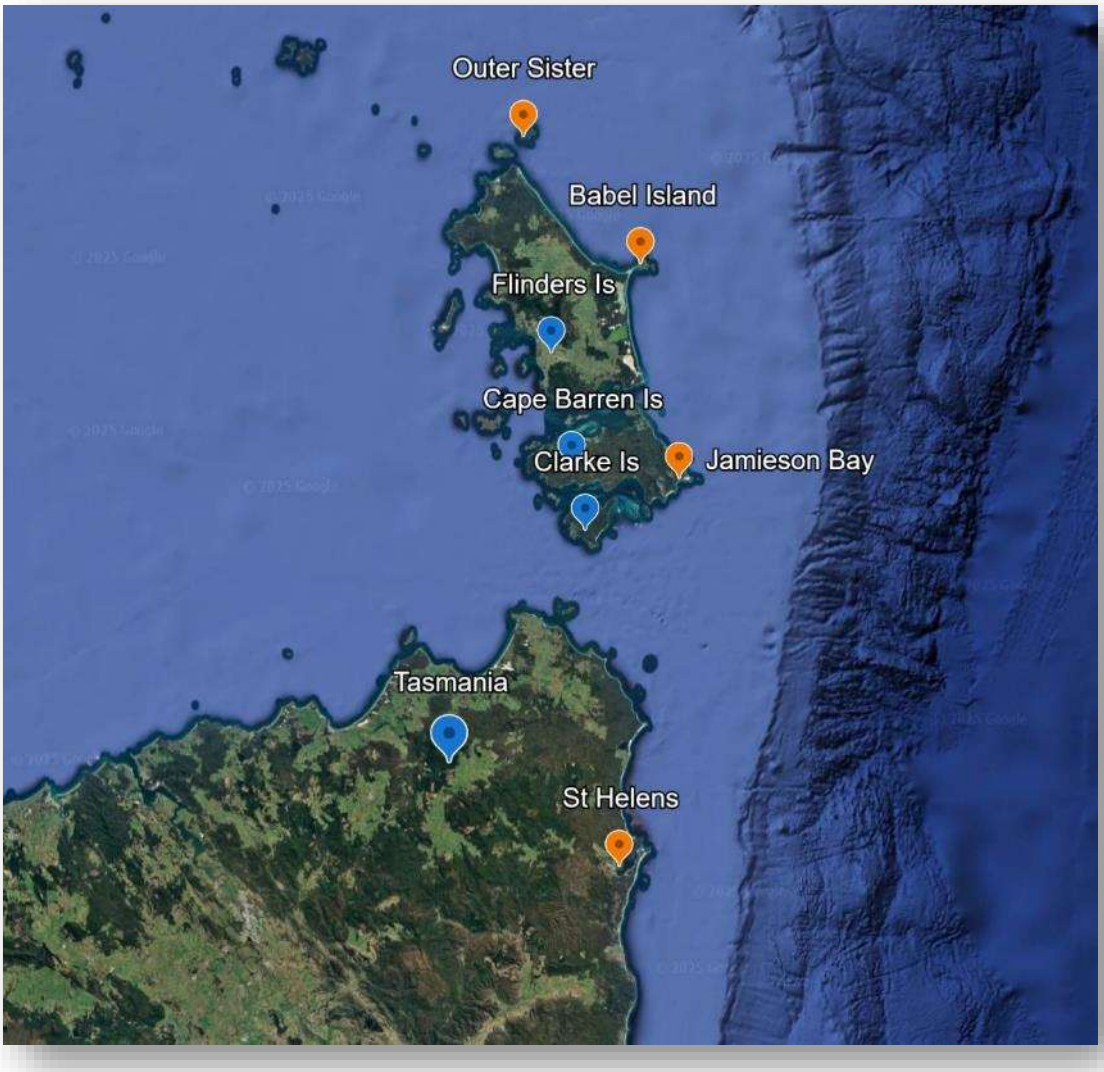
There is not a lot to do at St Helens, but we had dinner out a couple of times, were social and shared a meal with the crews of the other two boats which followed us in, wandered around the market and walked along the shoreline.

Since leaving Hobart, we have been feeling a little less enthused about this part of the trip. The need for a break from cruising seems to have become more prevalent. It all feels a little more difficult, less fun; there is a kind of impatience with 'waiting' for the weather, putting up with the many compromises of life afloat which are even more highlighted with guests on board.

But finally, three days later, the weather enabled us to move on. We left the shelter of Georges Bay, motored along the shallow and narrow channels with the outgoing tide, reached the bar which was a lot flatter than during our arrival with no breaking wave at all, raised the main and jib, and slowly sailed north.

Back to the Furneaux Group

Having completed our circumnavigation of Tasmania, it was now time to head back north, via the Furneaux Group of islands.



We needed to drop our passengers off back at the Gippsland Lakes before the end of the month, so they could make their way back to Melbourne for their commitments, and we needed to keep going north to get back to the Gold Coast for our medical appointments by the third week of April.

With mainly Westerly weather for the next few days, we opted to sail along the eastern side of the Furneaux Isles. There would be less choice of anchorages to stop at than on the Western side, but we were not prepared to wait for another window and since we had seen the Eastern islands on the way south, we were happy to go this way. For the family, it really did not make much difference. It was all new to them.

Cape Barren Island – Jamieson Bay

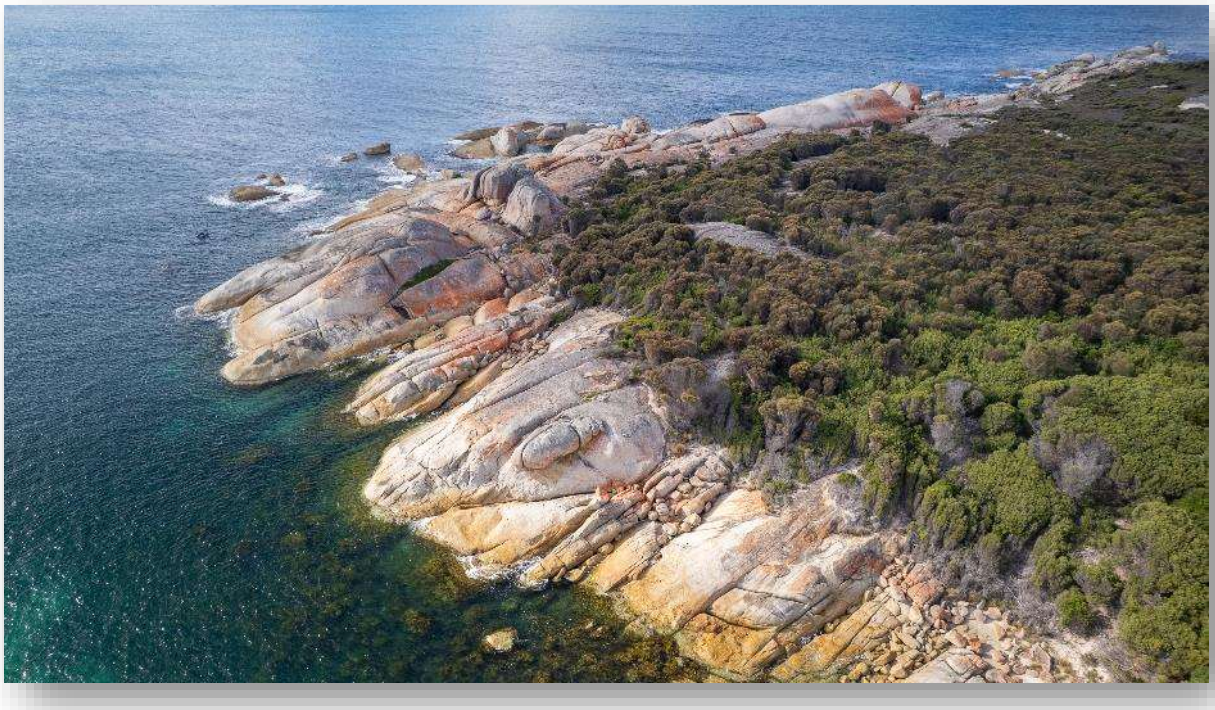
We had a lively 30nm sail north to Jamieson Bay, a favourite anchorage of ours at the SE end of Cape Barren Island, having timed our exit through the bar at St Helens, the outgoing tide at Banks Strait, to ensure as kind a passage as possible.

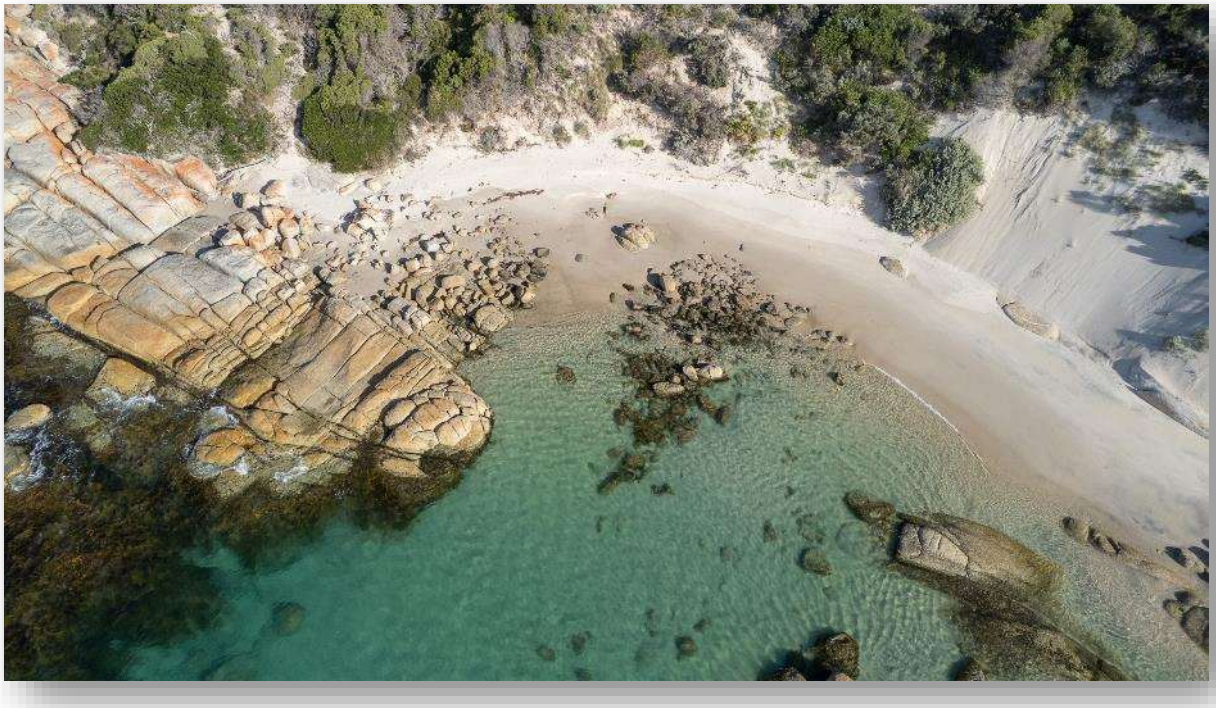
We sailed most of the way at a brisk pace. It was fun if a bit bumpy for our passengers who experienced their fastest sail on *Anui* yet! They realised we had done very little fast sailing up north at the Great Barrier Reef with them on board, typically moving in calm conditions from reef to reef, more often than not motor-sailing ! So it was a different experience for them. We were accompanied by dolphins and Shy Albatrosses.

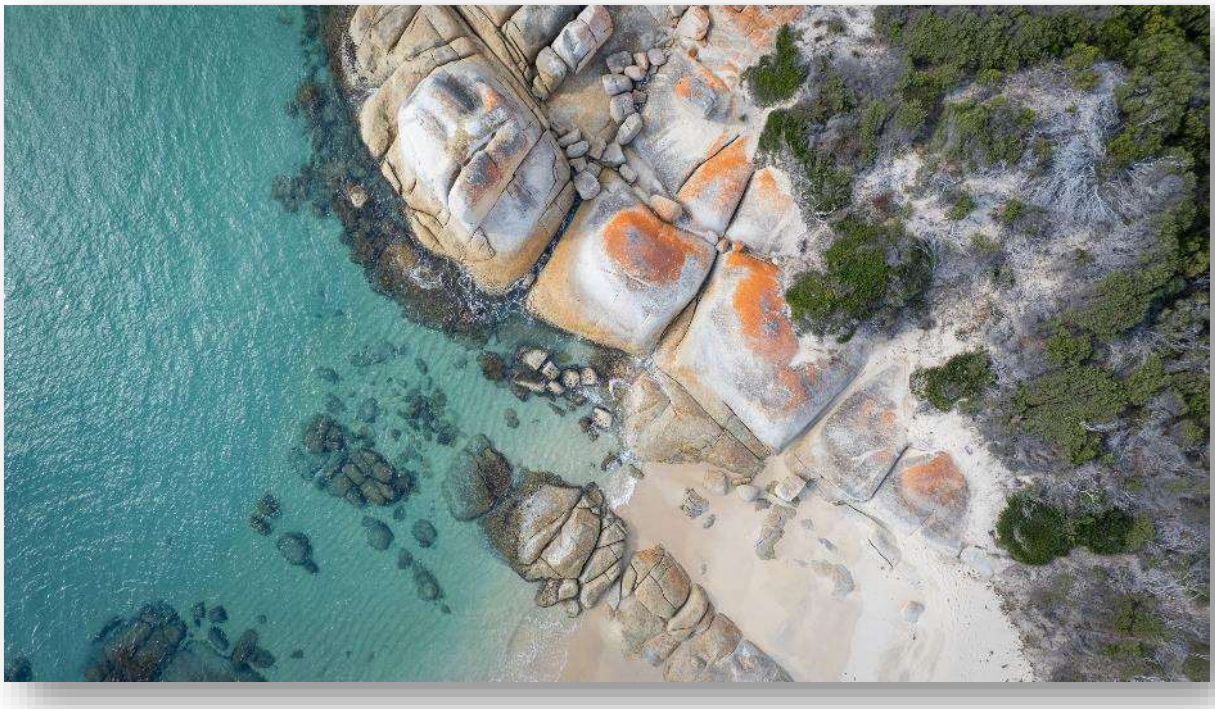
We anchored at the western end of the bay, all on our lonesome. What a beautiful spot this is, with the rugged granite shoreline, the white beaches, the dunes, the nearby hills, and everywhere the orange lichen covering the boulders, so characteristic of the Bass Strait Islands.

Having had numerous phone calls from *Sarisha* along the way, and messages back and forth from *Liquid Insanity*, we knew they had not been able to make their destination. Moriarty Bay, a gorgeous bay on Clarke Island was always going to be too much into wind to reach it comfortably. So we also knew we'd have company in the anchorage a few hours later!

The next morning was sunny and calm, enabling us to fly the drone, go for a walk ashore, even brave the cold water for a snorkel.

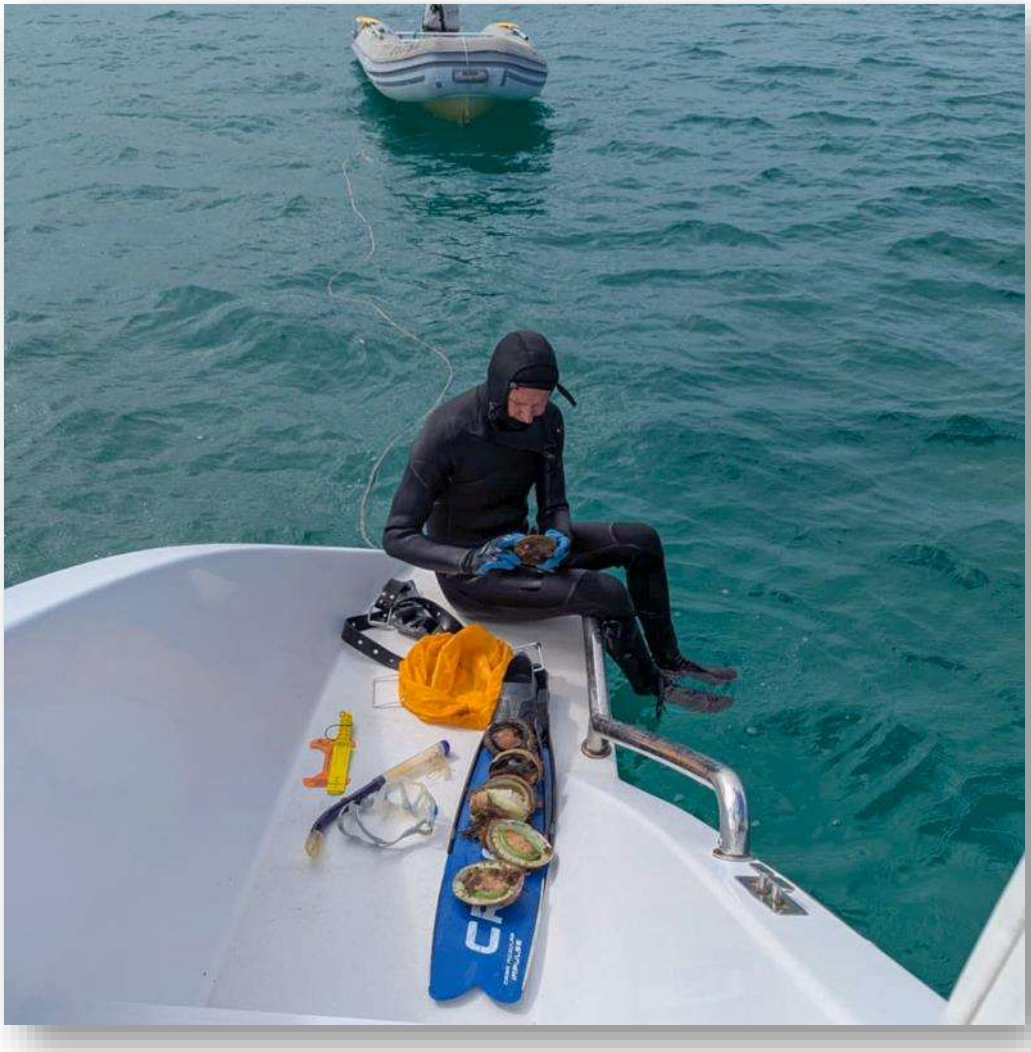






It is always interesting looking straight down with the drone for a very different perspective!

The snorkeling was less interesting than hoped, with mainly crayweed along the rocks, but abalones were about, and Wade came prepared with ab knife, bag and measuring device in hand!



All but Murray enjoyed the feast that night. This is the only time when his restrictive Vegan diet is a blessing: more abs for the rest of us!

He does not eat meat, fish, animal products, or dairy product. We have done our best to accommodate, but not this time!

Thanks, Maree, for these two great shots!

Early the next morning, we got up at dawn, ready to leave for our next anchorage. It was colourful.

Babel Island – Bull Cove

30nm further north is Babel Island, a granite islet off the eastern side of Flinders Island, about halfway up. It is connected to Flinders by a sandspit called Sellars Point at low tide.

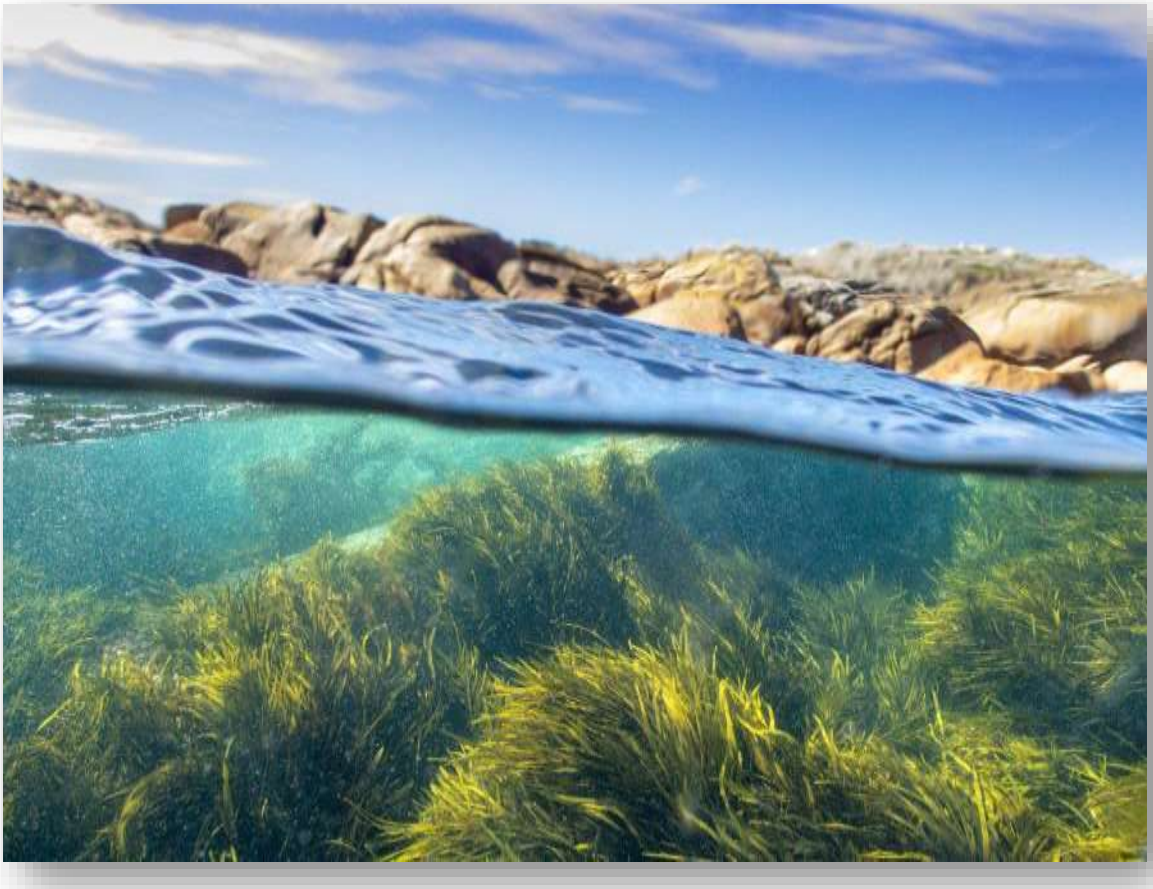
We anchored in the beautiful sandy Bull Cove, initially stern to the beach, but not for long as the wind was due to swing later in the day. The colours were to die for!

Babel is the main island of the Babel group, with Cat and Storehouse islets to the east of it. You can anchor in the sand patch between the islands, but it can get a bit rowdy there as they are low lying!

When you listen to the cacophony of bird calls, you can appreciate how this island got its name: Matthew Flinders named it Babel, like the biblical Tower of Babel where diverse languages were spoken. There are many seabirds roosting there, including little penguins, shearwaters, cape barren geese and oystercatchers.

We could see several cape barren geese as we anchored.

With waves breaking on the beach, we did not dinghy ashore, but instead got ourselves ready for a snorkel. We chose to dive in the neighbouring Cow Cove, where lots of seaweed and kelp promised to offer interesting underwater shots and fish life. Wade managed to catch a cray... another feast coming up... and we all saw many good size abalones.



It pays to have a warm wetsuit when you dive in Tasmanian waters! Wade and Chris were toasty warm, although it was quite an effort to suit up. We love this shot of Wade just hanging in the sun rays. Murray on the other hand was the first out, feeling rather chilly in his surfing wetsuit.

Outer Sister Island

Past the northern tip of Flinders Island, on the edge of Bass Strait, are two islets called the Sisters, Inner Sister and Outer Sister. Our last anchorage in the Furneaux Group was at the Outer Sister. It is a windswept, exposed, rugged granite and dolerite isle. You really feel like you are at an ocean anchorage. The wind was howling, the boat was constantly moving, the breakers on the beach feathering. Both Sisters are what we call 'active' anchorages. It is never totally calm in there, but it is safe.

The granite boulders are quite sculptural. They stand as sentinels and you wonder how they got there in the first place, since the highest point on the island is 187m, a long way away from the headlands you see in the photos below.

The water at the eastern bay is an inviting aqua, but the two meter swell and crashing waves dissuaded us from getting into the dinghy… it would have been a sure way to have a swamping beach landing.

If Wade had two surf boards, maybe he would have gone in with Murray, but he did not and the swell was a bit big for a body surf!

We were boat bound, but we prepared for our last passage across Bass Strait. Chris cooked a big pot of dhal, ready for an overnighter sail.

Bass Strait Crossing

We left the Outer Sister at 2pm on the 22nd of March, planning to arrive at the Gippsland Lakes by dawn the next day, then motor to Paynesville.

Bass Strait crossings are always a bit exciting, particularly for newbies: first time across for our guests, first time losing sight of land, first time on an overnighter for Maree. For us it was our 26th!

As soon as we upped anchor, it was ON! 20-25 knot westerly, two-meter swell, we were averaging 9 or 10 knots speed with two reefs in the mainsail and a few rolls in the jib. It was boisterous, noisy, waves were breaking, splashing against our beam and you had to hang on to move around the boat! Our guests were a little daunted. “Sit down and stay in the cockpit!” We realised this was really their first major sail on a rowdy ocean. Their experience of cruising on *Anui* was for short bursts in the tropics, behind the protection of the Great Barrier Reef!

As usual in these conditions, the albatrosses and shearwaters were active and so beautiful. But the frequent sea spray, strong wind and at times chaotic motion did not allow for many photos underway.

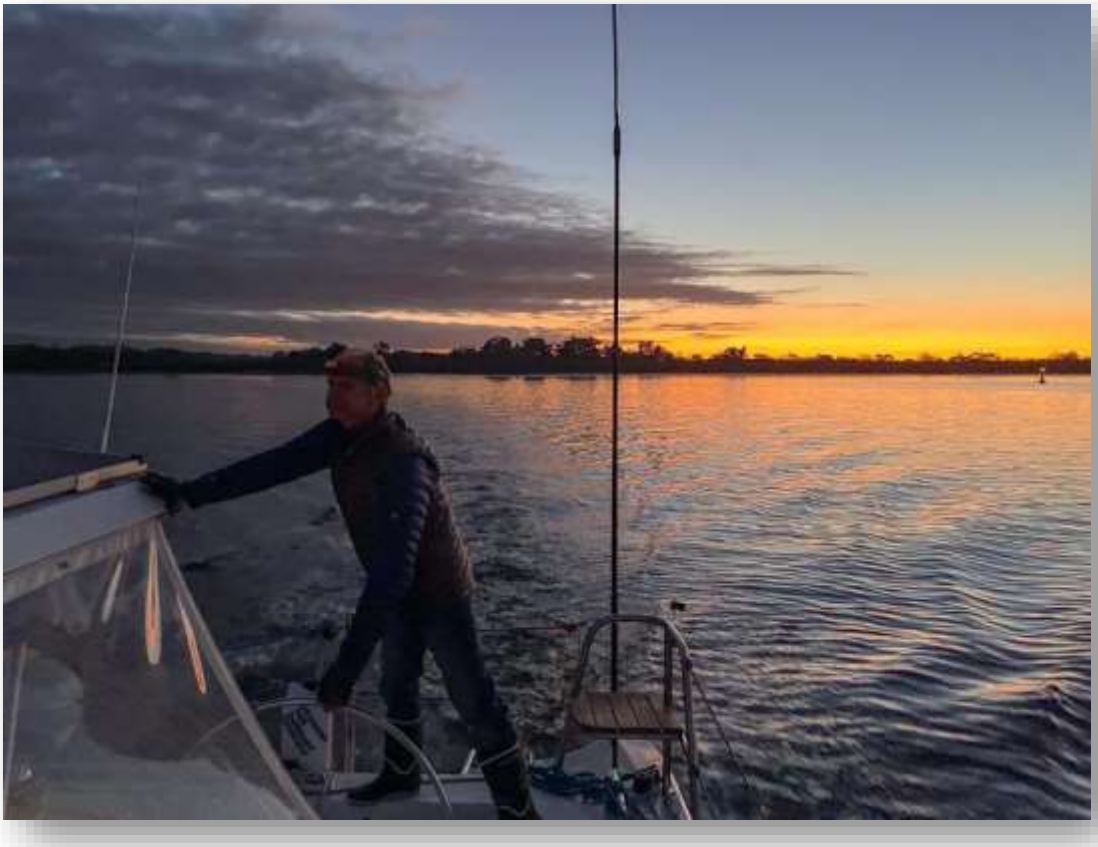
After a few hours, the conditions eased with less swell and wind, allowing us to gradually shake the reefs. The sun just disappeared with no colourful show at dusk unfortunately.

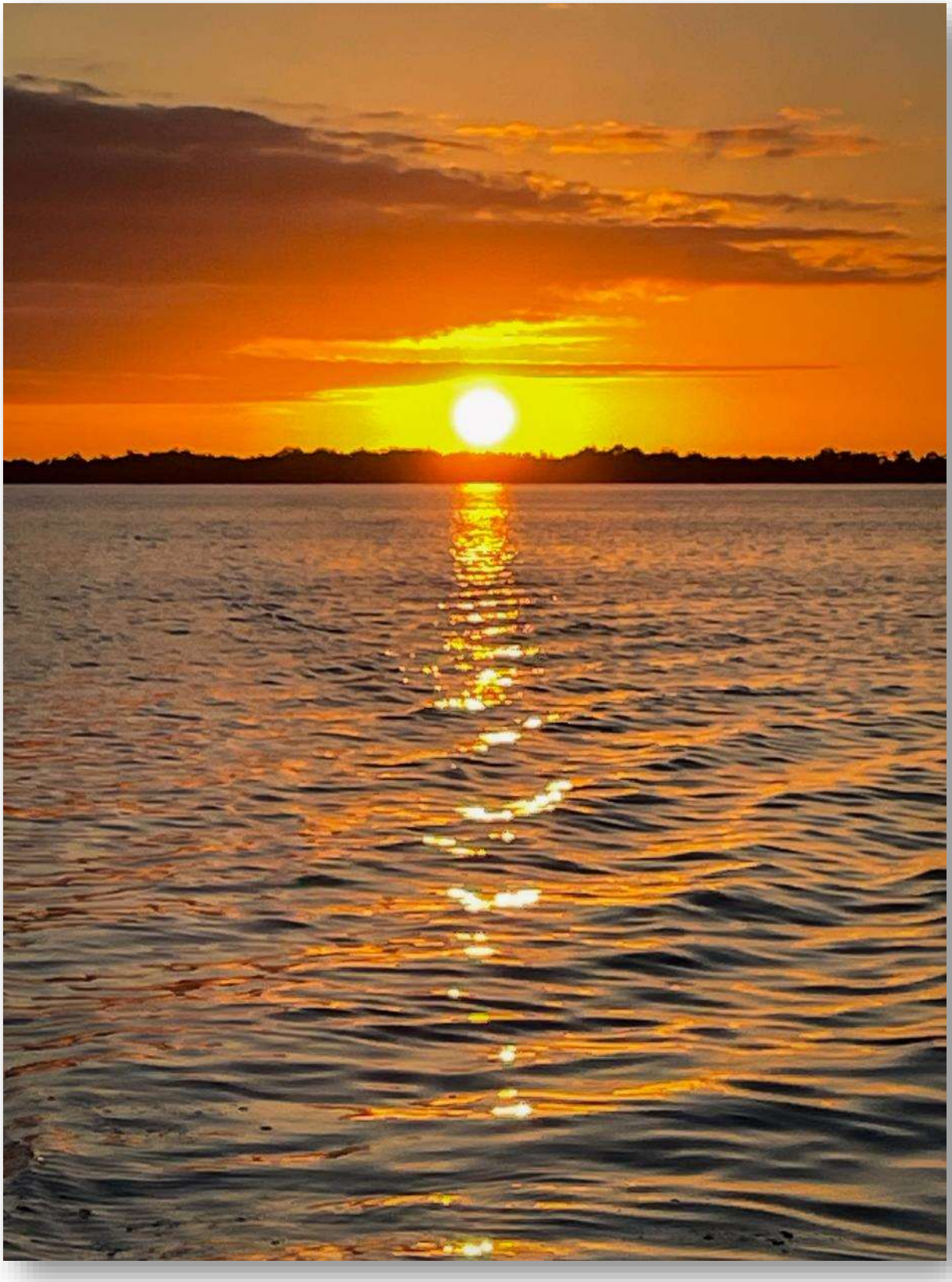
We had dinner then started our two-hour watches. We continued sailing till about 2.00am, although more slowly. Wade took the first shift, Chris the second, Murray and Wade the third, Chris the fourth, Wade started the fifth on his own at 4.00am, but by 5.00am we were in front of Lakes Entrance, earlier than originally planned and it was obviously still dark, so upon hearing the second engine being turned on, Chris got up to give him a hand.

It was calm, with hardly any wind and no swell. Having been through the entrance many times, we were comfortable going in in the dark, but it helps to have both of us keeping an eye on our track, the lead lights, and fishing vessels traffic.

The hard part was not so much coming through the bar and the entrance, but meandering through the Narrows at the Reeve Channel! We really needed to keep a keen eye on the Channel markers, the “training wall”, other vessels, our depth! It does not matter how many times you have motored through this area, it is a tricky part to navigate, made even harder in the dark and the fog that was hanging low over the water!

Murray had got up to witness our entrance into the Lakes, Maree surfaced an hour or so later at first light, as we were approaching Metung. It was chilly, but so calm and flat. The sunrise was colourful.





Stairway to heaven: 7.10am sunrise as we pass Metung and motor to Paynesville.

Luckily our favourite spot in Paynesville, along the floating jetty in front of the Yacht Club was free. We were there by 8.00am and half an hour later we were tied up. It always takes a while to get the mooring lines organised… the skipper likes them to be just right!

Our guests organised their return to Melbourne for the next day, packed their bags, then we went for a walk on Raymond Island to see the koalas. That evening Maree and Murray shouted us dinner at the Pier Restaurant to celebrate the completion of our Tasmanian voyage and the end of their one-month cruise on *Anui*.

Monday the 24th was departure day for the family, and major cleanup day for us. There is always a lot to do to tidy up after weeks underway, especially with four of us on board. But the process is kind of a cleansing ritual to calmly return to our 'normal' habits.

We restocked the boat the next day, then left Paynesville to position ourselves for a dawn departure out of the Lakes on the 26th. Quick turnaround, but we were on a mission to get north and reach the Gold Coast in good time for our medical appointments starting third week of April.

It’s a wrap!

A voyage of just over thirteen weeks, about 1400 nautical miles covered, not including the return trip from Queensland, a mix of weather conditions experienced, guests on board for two months… It has been an epic trip and a demanding one requiring careful balancing of our need for exploration, social interactions and personal time. Managing life on board particularly with passengers for extended periods, while navigating, planning, weather watching, keeping everybody safe and entertained can be challenging.

Did we enjoy it? Overall, yes. It is all about what the weather lets you do which requires flexibility, a preparedness to change plans and go with the flow. Sometimes it is easy, other times it is tedious.

How did the boat fare? Very well, bar the usual collection of gear to fix on the go. There too you fluctuate between dealing with whatever is thrown at you and getting frustrated. But after nearly eight years of living afloat, our skills and teamwork have deepened. Having replaced or repaired just about every system and piece of equipment on board, the practical part of us would hope the rate of the breakdowns would diminish, but the realistic part of us knows it’s a boat and fixing bits will never end!

This voyage reaffirmed our love for Tasmanian waters, their unique and varied scenery, our desire to return and see more of it. It is a place where sun, wind, rain and fog can all make an appearance in a single day. Instead of fighting it, we leaned into whatever came our way.

When it was overcast, grey and misty, we enjoyed seascapes that looked like they were painted in monochrome – stark, beautiful and impossibly peaceful.

When it rained, we enjoyed the beautiful contradiction of being surrounded by cold water under and above us, while sitting in a comfortable, warm, dry boat resting, reading or writing.

When the sun was out and the day was calm we brought the boat close to sea caves we had never known existed, we walked deserted beaches and hiked rugged mountains that had formed over thousands of years.

When the wind was blowing, we relished brisk sails, smiling from ear to ear at the speed of our feisty vessel.

The only thing we missed was seeing the Aurora Australis! Another thing to add to the wish list for next time!

This trip also deepened our desire to discover regions we are not familiar with, such as South Australia and Western Australia, because in the end what really floats our boat is exploration.

And finally, our voyage also confirmed the need to make some changes to our life. After nearly 25 years of boat ownership, nearly 8 of these living on board non-stop, we are tired and not as enthused about continuing full-time on *Anui*. We have always said: “we’ll keep doing this while it is fun.” Well, it is not as much fun as it used to be. The many compromises, the significant increase in yacht numbers out there, the degradation of the many sites we cruise to due to the climate crisis, the increasingly challenging weather, watching our money evaporate, our health issues, all this has contributed to our state of mind. We are not about to give up cruising all together, or sell our beautiful *Anui*, but we need to take a breather and do things differently.

So this is our last year living on the boat full-time. Next year we will take a break for six months, then alternate between spending time on *Anui* and time on land for other adventures. It is an odd and somewhat unsettling feeling to contemplate a change of pace, but we know we need it and it will most certainly make our life easier.