

THE ROYAL
YACHT CLUB
OF TASMANIA



2026 Tidetech VDL-C Newsletter 3

We hope you enjoy reading
this compendium of stories
from past VDL-Cs, event
updates, and useful
information to help you
prepare for the adventure
of a lifetime!

Fixing your boat in exotic locations?



Racing versus cruising?

An introductory observation by VDL-C Communications Officer John Hall

A yacht race is a competitive sailing event where multiple yachts race against each other, following a predetermined course marked by buoys or other navigational aids, or racing over longer distances from point to point, with a mass start, at a given time, more or less regardless of the prevailing or expected conditions.

A yacht cruise typically refers to a leisurely trip on a yacht, often for pleasure or relaxation, where the primary activity is sailing or cruising on the water for extended periods. These cruises can range from day trips to voyages lasting months. The focus is on enjoying the journey, potentially exploring different destinations, and experiencing the amenities of the yacht.

The VDL-C is not a race!

It is a “cruise in company”, there is no start gun, it is not a competition, and if the weather looks unfavourable, we likely won’t venture out until it is favourable. We have no set departure time or date, and no set arrival. There is plenty of flexibility in the cruise plan, which is written in sand, not cast in stone!

As Ratty says to Mole:

“Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing — absolutely nothing — half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats. Simply messing... about in boats — or with boats. In or out of ‘em, it doesn't matter. Nothing seems really to matter, that's the charm of it. Whether you get away, or whether you don't; whether you arrive at your destination or whether you reach somewhere else, or whether you never get anywhere at all, you're always busy, and you never do anything in particular; and when you've done it there's always something else to do, and you can do it if you like, but you'd much better not”. (Wind in the Willows, Kenneth Graham, 1908).

Yes, we get to experience the circumnavigation in the best of weather, sail when conditions are near perfect, and with the help, camaraderie and support that a cruise in company offers.

So, enjoy the cruise for what it is!

Enjoy fixing your boat in exotic and not seen before places, with new mates keen to help, all before enjoying a sundowner on a remote beach - cruising bliss!

Left: John Hall scrubbing his boat in the exotic tranquility of the RYCT boatyard.



Welcome everybody!



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Your departure date is getting closer and, hopefully, your preparations are well underway. Those on the waiting list will be hovering like vultures, waiting for those few vessels who can't participate because they left everything to the last minute. So let's kick off this third newsletter with a checklist of some things you'll need to do before you leave.

Fit Starlink

You must have a working Starlink system to go on this cruise. It's easy to set up and get working but, as with any technology, sometimes it throw up challenges in the early days that need to be solved. In the 2024 VDL-C the author had major issues and had to go without it, but as it wasn't mandatory we could still participate. If it had happened to us this time around, we'd have been forced to pull out. So, get it working properly, early.

Complete your Expression of Interest

Many of you sent incomplete Expression of Interest forms when you put your hand up to do this event. This often happens when you need to fill in details about equipment you haven't yet bought.

Well, the rubber is close to hitting the road and you now need to think seriously about filling in that missing information. Expect to get an email from us fairly soon nagging you to complete this task.

Please note that anyone whose EOI is still incomplete by end of business hours Monday 1st December 2025 will be dropped to the back of the waiting list.

Conform with Cruise Safety Requirements and fill out the Cruise Safety Checklist

This is self explanatory. The Requirements and Checklist are both on line at <https://ryct.org.au/vdl-circumnavigation/> and in the Cruise Manual.

The Manual can be downloaded from https://bang-bang-studios.digitalpigeon.com/msg/u7H0wJnOEFcRqAbk_mWEUw/07rhd7nc99V327lewNGKjQ

Fill out the Event Registration Form

The 2026 Event Registration Form is still under construction, but it will be available soon on <https://ryct.org.au/vdl-circumnavigation/>. You only do one of these per vessel.

This form has a number of functions.

1. It's where you officially confirm who you are and the name of your vessel. Once you've registered, a link to your form will be emailed to you for future reference.
2. It's where you tell us who will be on your vessel during the cruise. To keep you safe we must know this accurately at all times. It needs to be filled out at the start of the cruise and any time you change crew during it. We used to complete this task on damp bits of paper handed to Cruise Officials at the pub, jetty, or from dinghy to dinghy. Now we've got Starlink, you can do it on-line in the comfort of your vessel. Not as quaint perhaps, but a whole lot more accurate.
3. There are two events you pay for during the registration process, and this is because we need to know numbers early so we can pay a deposit and confirm with the venues. One is the Strahan Cocktail Cruise, the other is the Callington Mill Distillery event in Hobart. See elsewhere in this Newsletter for more details.
4. It's where you tell us what size polo shirts you need and how many you want, remembering that you get two for being a part of the Cruise.
5. It's where you tell us how many of you will be coming to the RYCT Cruise Dinner, and where you pay for any crew who wish to attend, over and above the two tickets you automatically get with your vessel.
6. It's where you make your final payment.

Please note that any vessels not submitting this form and paying by end of business hours Monday 1st December 2025 will be consigned to the back of the waiting list.

Australian Sailing SailPass

It is recommended that participants (skippers, crew and guests) be a financial member of an Australian Sailing affiliated club, obtain a SailPass for that part of the VDL-C in which they are participating, or obtain personal insurance for the event. Full details about insurance are the Manual Part A Page 19. https://bang-bang-studios.digitalpigeon.com/msg/u7H0wJnOEFcRqAbk_mWEUw/07rhd7nc99V327lewNGKjQ

Welcome everybody (Continued)

Clean Bottoms

Slip and clean your hull before heading into Tasmania's pristine National Parks. You'll be anchoring in some really special places so please treat your vessel to a shave and a haircut.

Buy your Parks Tasmania Passes

Many of the anchorages you'll visit are in National Parks. In Tasmania you must have a Parks Pass to visit a National Park, irrespective of your mode of transport

One pass per boat will cover up to 8 people. Go to <https://passes.parks.tas.gov.au> to get one.

The VDL-C is dependent on Parks Tasmania to be able to run the event, so please don't forget to get a pass.

Briefing Dates

There are two, with full details on page 5. One is happening via Zoom **SOON**, on 5th November to explain the Event Registration Form, your obligations, and answer any questions.

The second, main meeting is happening on Friday 6th February 2026 at 19:00 hours, at Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania (Marievile Esplanade Sandy Bay) and at Royal Geelong yacht Club (25 Eastern Beach Road Geelong).

It's a great opportunity to meet your fellow participants so please set the date aside and attend in person. Both clubs will also warmly welcome anyone turning up by boat, especially if you let them know in advance. For those who really can't attend in person, a zoom link will be sent.

Book your berths

Summer and Autumn are busy times at RYCT and TYC. Don't forget to book a berth for your vessel or you may miss out. Please don't rock up expecting to be accommodated. Berth Agreement forms are available on

<https://ryct.org.au/vdl-circumnavigation/>

Book your events

The fun stuff. Other than the sailing, the fishing, the exploring of exquisitely beautiful wilderness...

Along the way we are having a series of fun social events. A couple of them you'll pay for on the Events Registration Form (see above) and the rest you'll pay for when you book directly. Full details elsewhere in this Newsletter.

So, to summarise:

1. Fit Starlink.
2. Complete your Expression of Interest, filling in the bits you left out.
3. Conform with Cruise Safety Requirements and fill out the Cruise Safety Checklist.
4. Fill out the Event Registration Form.
5. Get Australian Sailing SailPasses if required.
6. Clean your bottom. Also your boat's.
7. Buy your Parks Tasmania Passes.
8. Put the Briefing Dates in your diary to attend in person if possible.
9. Book your berths at RYCT, TYC, or anywhere else you'd like one.

Bramble Cove Beach Cricket Set transferred to new Custodian in moving ceremony.

The biennial Transferring Of The VDL-C Beach Cricket Set took place on Saturday 18th October 2025. This was a deeply moving ceremony, steeped in tradition and evoking memories of many hard-fought battles in Bramble Cove.

The Transfer ended with a rousing rendition of the Halleluja Chorus by George Frideric Handel, and a tree planting. King Charles III sent their regret at being unable to attend, although a corgi wandered past at some point.

Seen here conducting the ceremony at Ranelagh Reserve in Mount Eliza are (L to R) Stephen Renfree, outgoing custodian and four time VDL-C veteran, and John Hall, 2026 Communications Officer and incoming custodian. "This is a huge honour," said Hall fanning himself and wiping a tear from his eyes. "We can now indeed fight them on the beaches!"



VDL-C BRIEFING DATES

ZOOM MEETING #1 - 29/7/2025

If you missed this meeting, it has been posted on line for your viewing pleasure. Download it here:

<https://bang-bang-studios.digitalpigeon.com/shr/NDLy0KmZEFcbbAl671uSuQ/tgoMaFpngSD5mve7W1Djiw>

ZOOM MEETING #2 - 5/11/2025

PUT THIS IN YOUR DIARY NOW

This meeting, to start at 19:30, will explain the Event Registration Form (right), the information required, and your obligations and deadlines. It will also be a great opportunity to ask the panel any questions about this and anything else about the VDL-C. In case you miss the confirmation email (coming soon) here's your link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81221781494pwd=2NfQkckdZ7MsAlUxe069vtB14MZgD2.1>

FINAL BRIEFING - 6/2/26

This will be held at the Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania and Royal Geelong Yacht Club at 19:00. You are warmly encouraged to attend in person so you can meet your fellow participants. For those genuinely unable to do so, a zoom link will be issued closer to the date.

RYCT's address is Marieville Esplanade, Sandy Bay. RGYC's address is 25 Eastern Beach Road, Geelong.

ON BOARD PRACTICE SCHEDS

There will be two pre cruise practice scheds so that we can all get used to the new protocols and make sure our technology is working. It is recommended you attend both, but you must attend one and you must be on board the boat on which you're doing the VDL-C when you do. These will be held:

17:00 Saturday 13th December 2025

17:00 Saturday 10th January 2026

Further details will be issued closer to the events.

VDL-C 2026 Events Calendar

Friday 20th February 2026 at 5.00pm

Tamar Yacht Club Dinner

Tamar Yacht Club continues a longstanding, much loved tradition by welcoming the VDL-C for dinner.

Location: 1 Wharf Road Beauty Point Tasmania.

This is a great opportunity for Tasmanian and Mainland participants to meet each other in the convivial setting of the TYC.

Dinner is \$60 per person and includes nibbles, choice of three meats, roast spuds and sour cream, salads, veggies, dinner rolls and a choice of four desserts.

Bar open at club prices, not only on the night but a couple of nights before, for boats arriving early.

Link to tickets: <https://events.humanitix.com/vdl-circumnavigation-dinner>

Saturday 21st February 2026 at 5.00pm

Marion's Vineyard

Marion's Vineyard is looking forward to welcoming you for an incredible day of food and wine! Sail in, take your dinghy to our jetty, and walk up the driveway to where your hand crafted lunchtime platters, featuring Tassie's finest, will be waiting for you.

- Casalinga meats
- Southern Sky cheeses
- Fresh sourdough baguettes
- Our vineyard's own marinated vegetable sides.

Prefer dairy-free, or have other dietary needs? Just let us know when you book, and we'll take care of it.

At our cellar door, you can also select from our exceptional wines to pair with your meal.

Location: 335 Deviot Road Deviot Tasmania

Link to tickets: <https://ryct.org.au/vdl-circumnavigation/>

PS: The Bell Bay tides for 21/2/26 work really well for this event. Low is 10:12am, high is 16:06! Woohoo!

Wednesday 4th March 2026 at 5.00pm

Strahan Dinner Cruise

Prepare for an unforgettable evening surrounded by the breathtaking beauty of Tasmania's wild west coast. Step aboard the elegant "Spirit of the Wild" for a slow evening cruise through the iconic Gordon River, deep within the UNESCO Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.

Cost: \$60 per person including formal buffet dinner & canapes.

Book and pay for your tickets on line when you pay your final pre-cruise invoice on the Event Registration Form.

NB: We need two people per boat to attend for this event to go ahead.

Friday 13th March 2026 at 6.00pm

Port Esperance Sailing Club Dinner

Enjoy a slap up meal at the beautiful Port Esperance Sailing Club, where VDL-C Cruise participants will be welcomed to a two course dinner.

Location: 71 Station Road, Dover Tasmania.

Link to tickets: <https://www.trybooking.com/events/landing/1432938>



See next page for more...



Sunday 15th March 2026 at 6.00pm

Kermandie Hotel Dinner

Another fun night with your fellow cruisers at this magnificent and historic hotel in Port Huon.

Address: 4512-4518 Huon Hwy, Port Huon.

Phone: (03) 6297 1052

The marina over the road has visitor berths but vessels drawing two metres should only enter at high tide, and then do so with great care.

Otherwise, anchor off in Hospital Bay where there's good holding. Marina Manager: 0439 164320.

Dinner will be charged for by the pub on the night.



Saturday 19th March 2026 at 6.00pm

RYCT Fleet Dinner

This is always an amazing night.

For the Tasmanian Fleet it's a night of triumphant celebrations, as they complete their circumnavigation with awards, fine food, drinks and tall stories.

For the Mainland Fleet, it's the start of the second half of their adventure, and the opportunity to say farewell and strengthen lifelong friendships based on shared experiences.

Full details are in the Cruise Manual.

Your pre-event invoice includes two tickets to this not-to-be-missed event. Others can be purchased on line <https://ryct.org.au/vdl-circumnavigation/>



Tuesday 17th March 2026 at 5.00pm

Callington Mill Whisky Barrel Event @ Macq01

At the event, the barrels we've carried around Tasmania will be tapped and bottled, resulting in numbered bottles exclusive to the 2026 VDL-C, available for you to purchase.

Bottles are \$100 each, and event tickets are \$70 per person. Your event ticket includes a whisky on arrival and delicious finger food. Other drinks available at the bar.

Aim to dock at Constitution Dock between 11am and 12 noon. If your boat is too big, don't worry. We'll find somewhere else for you to park.

Book and pay for your tickets on line when you pay your final pre-cruise invoice on the Event Registration Form.

NB: We need two people per boat to attend for this event to go ahead.



Saturday 18th April 2026 at 6.00pm

RGYC Fleet Dinner

The Mainland Fleet dinner, held at RGYC, is also a night of tall tales and fabulous memories.

It's also a night to catch up and compare notes after what will have undoubtedly been an amazing circumnavigation of one of the world's great cruising grounds.

As with the Hobart Fleet Dinner, there are prizes given out for your photographic skills and many other things. Full details of these awards are in the Cruise Manual.

All participants of the 2026 VDL-C, whether Mainland or Tasmanian, are welcome.

This event is charged for by the club on the night.



Two Pay Up Front Events:

There are a two fabulous events that can only go ahead if we get sufficient numbers and can pay a deposit early.

These are the Strahan Dinner Cruise (4th March 2026) and the Callington Mill Whisky Barrel Event (Hobart 17th March 2026).

We need two participants per boat for these events to be viable.

Please book and pay for these events when you complete your Event Registration Form and make your final payment to participate in the VDL-C.

<https://ryct.org.au/vdl-circumnavigation/>

Pot Luck! Dodging Kelp, Weed & Cray Pot Lines

Tasmania's wild beauty comes with a few navigational quirks. Thick kelp forests, drifting weed mats, and a maze of cray pot lines can all pose serious risks to your prop, rudder, or stabilisers, especially when you're cruising at night or under autopilot.

Kelp & Weed On The Prop

Common symptoms of this are:

- A sudden loss of speed, or the sense that your engine is working harder and is under greater load
- Unusual vibrations
- On Saildrives, an inability to steer properly.

Prevention tips:

- Keep a sharp lookout. Weed is often visible as dark patches on the surface especially in calm conditions.
- Use neutral when coasting. If drifting through thick weed, take the engine out of gear to avoid sucking it in.
- Slow down in weedy areas. The slower the prop spins, the less likely it is to foul.

Fixing a Fouled Prop:

- Stop immediately. Don't power through; it'll only make things worse.
- Try reverse gear briefly. A quick pulse can sometimes throw the weed off.
- If that fails, and it's safe and conditions are calm, you may need to cut the engine and dive.



Dealing With Cray Pot Lines

These are everywhere around Tasmania, especially near shorelines and in water under 30 metres deep. The lines often lie slack near the surface or just below.

Spotting Them:

- Floats may be small and unflagged, sometimes just milk bottles, buoys, or painted jerry cans.
- They often drift in the current, away from the actual pot.
- Look out at sunrise and sunset. They can be harder to spot in glare.

Avoiding Entanglement:

- Stay well clear of inshore waters at night unless you're confident of your route.
- Use a sharp lookout on the bow when entering harbours or anchorages.
- Avoid autopilot in craypot-rich zones. It won't see the float until it's too late!

If You Get Snagged:

- Stop the boat immediately.
- Do NOT try to power free. You can make things worse, much worse if you damage your shaft.
- Try going astern gently to ease pressure.
- If still stuck, you may need to go overboard with a knife to cut yourself free.
- If unsafe to dive, anchor if possible and wait for assistance.

Final Tips:

- Keep a mask, fins and serrated dive knife easily accessible.
- Have a torch on deck at night for spotting floats.
- Always carry a boat hook and floating line cutter if possible.

Stay alert, go slow when unsure, and don't be afraid to pause and check. Knowing what to do before you're tangled makes all the difference.



Rig Checks On The Run.

Your rig is your engine when you're under sail. A quick rig check done regularly can prevent gear failure and keep your boat safe.

This daily rig check will take you five minutes to complete.

- Look up the mast. Is it straight? Can you see any sway, missing pins or cracked fittings?
- Check all turnbuckles. Is there any looseness, rust, or bent parts? Are the shackles nice and tight? The R-Clips? Ties?
- How are the lines and halyards? Have they been flogging? Are they chafing or twisting?
- Is there any fraying?
- Are your boom and gooseneck tight and free of cracks?

A weekly check looks a little like this:

- Feel each stay and shroud. Are any strands broken, frayed or looking fatigued?
- Check your chainplates, especially inside the boat. Are there any leaks, corrosion, or movement?
- Inspect the mast base. Are the bolts tight and free of movement or corrosion?
- Spin the sheaves. Are the halyards running smoothly?
- Check your backstay, especially adjusters or split pins.

Signs Of Trouble:

- A change in tune, that is your rig suddenly doesn't sound like it normally sounds.
- Leaking around chainplates.
- Cracks around deck fittings.
- A "banana" bend in the mast.
- Sails flogging more than usual despite trimming.
- Unexplained movement in the rig.

Quick Tips:

- Use binoculars to check aloft.
- Wrap tape on split pins to avoid sail tears.
- Use a halyard to lift yourself and check mast hardware if needed.

Get into the habit of doing these checks now.

Remember: keep it tight, keep it safe!



**BASS
& FLINDERS
MARITIME MUSEUM**

When you're in Beauty Point, one thing you'll almost certainly need to do is visit Georgetown to top up on supplies. While you're there, head over to the Bass & Flinders Centre, home to an amazing collection of vessels, models and seafaring tales.

The centrepiece is a full scale replica of the tiny schooner, the 'Norfolk', used by Flinders and Bass to circumnavigate Van Diemen's Land in 1798. You could call their journey the first European VDL-C.

We will arrange a boat ride across the Tamar for any 2026 VDL-C participants needing to stock up for the next leg. We'll also bring you back!

Explore the museum, enjoy a trip up the river with someone else navigating, and get ready for the adventures ahead of you.

Tips & Tricks from past VDL-Cs

Gybe Talkin'



One of the 'accidents' most likely to cause death, serious injury or calamitous damage on a sailboat is the dreaded unintended gybe.

Several of us who participated in the 2024 VDL-C used a piece of gear called the Gyb'Easy, made by a company called Wichard.

It uses a specific line called Gyb'Flex, 16 metres of which is supplied. Conventional dynema works well too.

The object of the exercise is to thread the line through the Gyb'Easy to create friction. The more friction, the better the braking power.

Cryovaccing is your friend!

You're going to munch your way through a lot of food in six weeks. Sure, there'll be feasts to scoff when you're ashore, but being able to serve up good and healthy food when you're at sea is as good a morale booster as you can get.

On our first circumnavigation twenty three years ago, we didn't even have a fridge. We ate mostly vegetarian and prepared from dry goods, cans, and the odd fish we caught.

Technology's way better these days. In 2024 we had an Isotherm that was built in, and a Brass Monkey portable that lived in the saloon.

In 2024 we prepared loads of food at home, then froze it in square plastic takeaway containers. In the interests of getting as much in our freezer as possible we avoided food that was weirdly shaped and difficult to stack, like racks of lamb.

Once the cooked food was frozen we removed it from the takeaway container, cryovacced it in bags supplied with the machine, and returned it to the freezer. This saved a little space, but also ensured that the food would last a while even if it thawed.

Another challenge you'll face is where to put your garbage. We chuck as much as possible before putting it on the boat. All the paper and cardboard outer packaging, everything. So we know what we're about to eat, we write on the inner packaging. We buy drinks in crushable cans and, apart from a few bottles, wine in boxes. There are actually some decent ones out there.

Right: TideTech's advanced oceanographic technology gives us access to real-time current data, helping you plan safer and more efficient passages throughout the cruise.

All participants will have access to this data during the cruise – another reason to buddy up and stay connected.

Thief caught on CCTV with Callington Mill Whisky Barrel!



In breaking news, a man has been apprehended red handed stealing a barrel of whisky from Callington Mill @Macq01.

The man, Richard Scarr from Hobart, claimed to be in possession of the barrel to see if it would fit on his

boat. When interviewed by police Mr. Scarr said he was sailing around Tasmania in an event known as the VDL-C, and that he was taking barrels of whisky with him.

A magistrate released Scarr on bail, on condition that he joins AA, and employ human crew to accompany him on his journey.

The barrel was unhurt.

TideTech VDLC 2026

CRUISE IN COMPANY WITH CONFIDENCE

Access Real-Time Current Data Thanks to Our Sponsor TideTech.

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Applied Oceanography



Cruising Port Davey - A Life Changing Event

To try and describe Port Davey is to find yourself perpetually lost for words.

You can borrow the accolades bestowed upon it by the United Nations and many conservation groups that describe it as one of Tasmania's most revered treasures. That it is part of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.

Those, alone, should be enough.

But it does it no real justice. There's something completely visceral about being anchored in this vast wilderness.

You need to see it for yourself. Experience all its moods. Bask in its sun. Smell its cool, crisp, clean air. And, indeed, shelter from its storms in one of its many safe hiding spots.

There are many wonderful events organised by the VDL-C committee that are detailed elsewhere in this newsletter. But at the other end of the scale, away from the parties, the vineyards and the dinners, is a simple cup of coffee in your cockpit as you swing on your anchor, wave at your neighbour, and listen to the South West Tasmanian wind.

Most of Port Davey is a marine reserve that enables many species of marine life to enter its sanctuary, breed and thrive, and live the life Mother Nature intended many millenia before the arrival of Europeans. Thus, as visitors, we have a responsibility to care for this precious place.

The Port Davey Marine Reserve deserves our respect. It protects a unique underwater landscape in its dark, tannin-rich freshwater which overlays tidal saltwater.

On the next page of this newsletter are maps that indicate where diving and fishing are not permitted in Tasmanian waters. Please respect these rules so that the Tasmanian Parks & Wildlife Service continues allowing the VDL-C to visit them.

For two videos about the Port Davey Marine Reserve, please follow these links:

<https://youtu.be/iApl8zy7Wbc>

<https://youtu.be/BDAfD96DZMw>

For a detailed map of the Port Davey Marine Reserve, please follow this link:

<https://parks.tas.gov.au/Documents/Port%20Davey%20map.jpg>



Sewage Disposal

This is a summary of an article in Newsletter 2, and applies only to toilets with holding tanks that pump out. The rules for composting heads etc are different. Remember to plan ahead; Tasmanian pump-out facilities are very few and far between.

You can dispose of urine anywhere from a boat of any size provided there's no faecal matter in it.

The EPA stipulates boats with less than sixteen people on board can discharge untreated sewage in most waterways (read on for exceptions) provided that the discharge does not contain "visible floating solids" and that it does not cause "prolonged discolouration of the receiving waters."

Where you can't pump out:

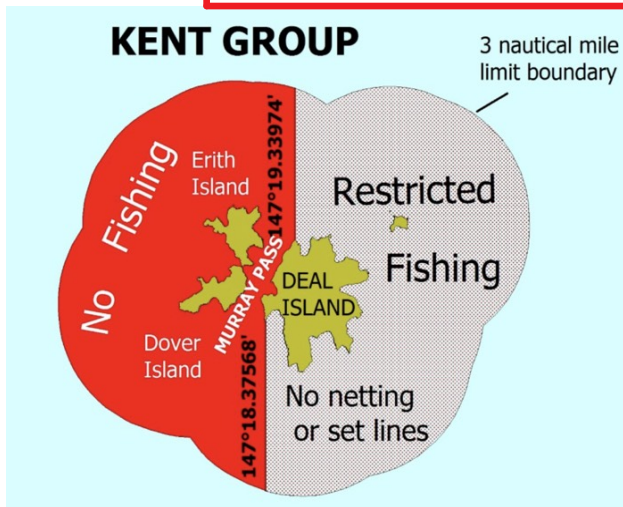
In some areas, you can't discharge anything untreated at all. These are inland waters, marinas, designated mooring areas or canals, marine resources protected areas established under the Living Marine Resources Act 1995, waters less than 5 metres deep, within 500 metres of any shellfish farm, the Tamar Estuary upstream of the Batman Bridge, the Derwent Estuary upstream of the Bowen Bridge, Payne Bay north of a line between Curtis Point and Woody Point, James Kelly Basin, south and west of a line between Garden Point and Larsen's Rocks, Bathurst Harbour and all bays and inlets within it, east of a line between Hammond Point and Forrester Point, Macquarie Harbour east of a line between Coal Head and Steadman Point, any other waters less than 1 nautical mile of any land including islands and within 120 metres of any person in the water.

For more information, including maps etc, visit

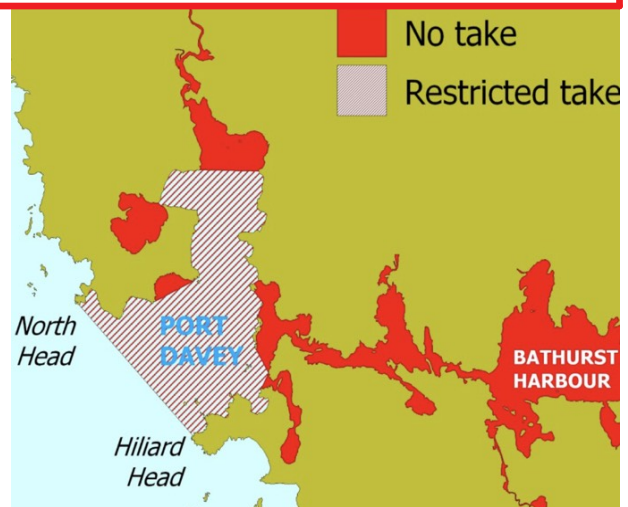
<https://epa.tas.gov.au/environment/water/boat-sewage-management>



Tasmanian Fishing No-Take & Restricted Zones



The Kent Group (Deal, Dover & Erith)



Port Davey Marine Reserve



Bicheno



Huon River/Verona Sands



Maria Island



Tinderbox

2024 VDL-C

Lakes Entrance to Lakes Entrance



Above: Northern Deal Island at dawn. (VDL-C 2024)

Friday 16 February 2024

We sail out over the Lakes Entrance bar at 1230 hours. There are a few lumps, and we crash and slew around a bit but, after no more than twenty minutes, we are out in open sea and heading towards The Kent Group.

If you were to sail a straight line between Lakes Entrance and the mouth of the Tamar River in northern Tasmania, you'd pretty much crash into The Kent Group. It's a pretty little archipelago of three main islands, Deal, Dover and Erith. Erith in particular is a very vibrant penguin rookery and a happy home for the modest population of Cape Barren geese who don't live on Cape Barren Island to the east.

There's virtually no breeze and we motor all the way, just happy to be going somewhere. It's been a while since we've done an overnigher and, whilst we love sailing at night, the first one is always a bit rough on the constitution. And it's cold. Really, really cold.

We make a welcome landfall to our chosen anchorage on Erith at about 0600 and drop anchor in West Cove, thoroughly looking forward to a couple of days in this pretty place.

Except...

The anchor is nicely dug into sand and we motor gently back to make certain we aren't going anywhere. And we aren't. We are beautifully stuck. And so is Pipe Dream. In reverse gear.

After some nervous investigation we confirm that the cable from cockpit to gearbox has snapped. We don't have a spare, so we disconnect the dud cable, and install what we call the Voice Activated Gearbox, a sophisticated piece of gear requiring two people. Person A performs calisthenics over a hot engine to the gear-change toggle on the gearbox, while person B bellows instructions from the steering station.

Reluctantly, we raised the anchor, and set off again towards the Tamar River and Beauty Point Marina where there exists all sorts of helpful people. Yippee. Another overnigher. The last thing we feel like.

Saturday 17 – Sunday 18 February

something breaks mid cruise. It doesn't matter how well prepared you are; things still break. Pondering this, we hoist sails and head for the Tamar River. We head south from Murray Pass and The Kent Group and discover a joyously wonderful sailing breeze, and we cruise at anywhere between six and eight-plus knots in a steady westerly.

We realise that, at this speed, we'll arrive at the mouth of the river at about 3:00am so we furl the headsail completely and slow down, needing to time our arrival for when there is the least amount of tidal movement. This will be at about 7:30am tomorrow morning. We'll also need some help coming in for a landing at Beauty Point marina and we won't get much sympathy if we start calling the cavalry in the middle of the night.

At about 6:30am we arrive at the river mouth, start the motor and drop our sails. It's now light, but it's also foggy. We reckon visibility is down to about 100 metres, tops. We slowly pick our way down the river, one marker to the next, until we're adjacent to Georgetown when it lifts a little. Coming down the river in the dark would actually have been easier.

A rubber crash boat piloted adeptly by (the legendary) Ron Chandler and marina manager Andrew push and shove us into a pen. We tie up and hit the lovely facilities of the Tamar Yacht Club for a clean up, followed by a sleep. We'll be here until the end of the week.

Sunday 18 – Friday 23 February

After two overnight sails, Sunday truly is a day of rest.

So, pretty much is the rest of the week. Chris the mechanic turns up with a gearbox cable and fixes the problem. The rest of the Hobart fleet arrive, a couple of them on Tuesday and the rest on Wednesday.

On Tuesday night we dine on the radio relay vessel Wingarra II. John needs to replace his terminally faulty VHF radio. So the next day we do a quick trip into Launceston courtesy of a lovely local called Neville who took pity on us as we were walking to the bus stop.

Two expeditions leave Tamar Yacht Club Friday morning. One is to the Seahorse Museum which is very interesting



and draws a fair crowd. The other is a trip into Georgetown by fishing boat for shopping (there's no supermarket at Beauty Point) where participants get to take in the Bass and Flinders Museum, and enjoy a tour of the upper reaches of the river courtesy of local expert and boating guru Rowlie Walker.

Everyone gathers on Friday for dinner, put on by Tamar Yacht Club. The night finishes on a slightly sour note; our forward head (toilet) has sprung a leak and is generously depositing seawater everywhere. Not what we want the night before a ten hour passage starting at 6.00am. So rather than go to bed early, we dismantle the system, clean it, smother it in petroleum jelly, and reassemble it. It's such a glamour sport sometimes!

Saturday 24 February

We wake up at 5.00am after a fitful few hours sleep and check our repairs. Dry as a bone. Phew.

We head up the river (above) to the mouth of the mighty Tamar. The tides really hoon, hence our early start to take advantage of conditions favouring those of us heading out into Bass Strait. Our destination is Rocky Cape, about ten miles east of Stanley.

We are mostly able to sail the whole way, although we keep the motor ticking over to charge the batteries (we are chewing through the power now we have two fridges on board) and to maintain a steady speed, necessary if we're to arrive and anchor at a reasonable hour.

The only negative for the day was the wind instrument suddenly ceased to get a signal from the sensor at the top of the mast. We'll just have to look at the flags and feel the breeze on our face. It'll be Hobart before we can fix this.

Sunday 25 February

Rocky Cape is gorgeous, but we pitch and roll all night as the tide changes. We're up several times to strap things down on the deck, and to check we're safe. In the end we give up, weigh anchor, and make our way to the Hunter Group of islands, situated on the northwest tip of Tasmania.

It's a passage that's magnificent in its uneventfulness, and ends with us anchored in East Telegraph Bay on Three Hummock Island in the company of several other vessels. There's now a good breeze blowing from the southeast, cold and determined, and we hang back on our anchor chain. It's beautiful, wild, and exactly what we came here for.

Monday 26 February

The 'good breeze' freshens and shifts to the south at some stage in the middle of the night. It puts us on a lee shore and it doesn't make for a comfortable night's sleep. So just before dawn we thread our way out between the remaining vessels, past Three Gullies Bay, and turn west, eventually dropping anchor amongst several other vessels at Rape Bay on the northern shore of Three Hummock Island.

Later in the day everyone raises anchor and heads around to the southern end of Coulomb Bay in anticipation of an incoming strong north-easterly. The idea is to hold the traditional Hummocks BBQ so that the Hobart and Victorian fleets can meet and get to know each other. It becomes apparent that the safest option is to abandon the barbecue idea and take the north-easterly to Strahan and the delights of Macquarie Harbour.



Tuesday 27 February Above: Hell's Gate at dawn

What a passage!

It's lumpy heading west across the top of Hunter Island, but once we had turned to the south, we had a stunning sail with a fiery breeze. Best of all, we had Hunter Island to our east giving us some shelter from the waves.

We upped anchor at 1030am. At a six knot average speed, we'd get to Hell's Gate just after dawn. Perfect. Entering Hell's Gate in the dark is easier these days with the modern chart plotter navigation gear, but daylight removes one level of stress. Also, entering Macquarie Harbour when the sun is rising is a stunning experience.

For a while – many hours, in fact – we surfed, sailing at a steady 7.5 to 10 knots. If this kept up we'd appear at Hell's Gate at 2.00am! We only had a tiny amount of

headsail out and no main, and we wondered how we could slow down.

Eventually the wind made the decision for us, dropping out altogether at midnight. We started the motor and tried to furl the sail but the furler jammed. The problem was at the top of the mast and impossible to diagnose in the dark so we manually wrapped the unfurled part of the sail around the forestay and motored south.

Wednesday 28 February

Calm, oily-looking waters surround Hell's Gate as we finally approach just after dawn. It might be a challenging harbour entrance, but it's exquisitely beautiful this morning. Sparkling seas, muted pastel colours, and absolutely no swell. It was perfect.

It's a two-hour journey from the Gate to Strahan itself and, with repairs to be made, we tie up firstly at the fuel jetty where we refill with diesel (186 litres) and then to the repair jetty, the next one along. We've been told by local legend Trevor Norton that we could stay there as long as we like and this is great news because here we have power and water, and the entire VDLC fleet is scrambling for space at the town jetty.

We took advantage of the kindness of Peter 1 from Corinthian, and Peter 2 from Oasis, who came over and helped sort our furler out. We'll need a proper fix down the track, but this one will get us to Hobart. For the rest of the day we wandered around Strahan catching up with the fleet and swapping war stories.

Peter Lewis from Charlie's Dream visited for a drink and we ended up on board his boat for a quick meal before they headed off to the play that's been running at the Strahan theatre for so long that it's second longest season for a play in the world, just behind Agatha Christie's "Mousetrap."

We'd seen it before, so elected to go to the pub.

Thursday 29 February

In the morning Lee took a walk to nearby waterfalls, where Paul from Halcyon Days gave an impromptu poetry recital.

In the afternoon we trudged up Heartbreak Hill to Trevor Norton's place where he gave a talk on the Gordon River, something we all intended doing, and something everyone should do at least once in their lifetime. That evening, most of the fleet gathered together for a barbecue at the Macquarie Harbour Sailing Club.

Friday 1 March

We awaited the impending arrival of Simon, our crew that we're calling The Cabin Boy. Then we did touristy things, like wandering through the Huon Pine shop and workshops, buying things we didn't need. We met Simon, and then wandered down to the wharf to meet up with the Charlie's Dream folk and head to the restaurant at Risby Cove where we dined and drank for hours with some delightful folk.

Saturday 2 March

With Simon on board, we untied the boat and headed down the harbour to Kelly's Basin for the night, finally arriving at about 4.00pm. We've been lucky with the weather, and today continued the pattern. It was warm

and sunny, through a thin veneer of cloud. We were also lucky enough to grab a mooring, meaning no mucking about with anchors and the stinky mud that inevitably comes up with them in this area.

Sunday 3 March

What were we saying about the weather? Sunday dawned cold, wet and windy. Nevertheless we took the dinghy ashore and headed for what remains of Pillinger, a town created for the mining of copper. Not much remains of West Pillinger - just a few jetty piles and some rusted old boiler bits - but there's a hut (Reindeer Lodge) that many a bushwalker would be very pleased to see in bad weather.

A longer dinghy ride to the other side of town took us to what had been the industrial end of Pillinger. Brick kilns, jetties, and the crumbled remain of a railway carriage offer modest clues to what life had been like in this unforgiving landscape one hundred years ago.

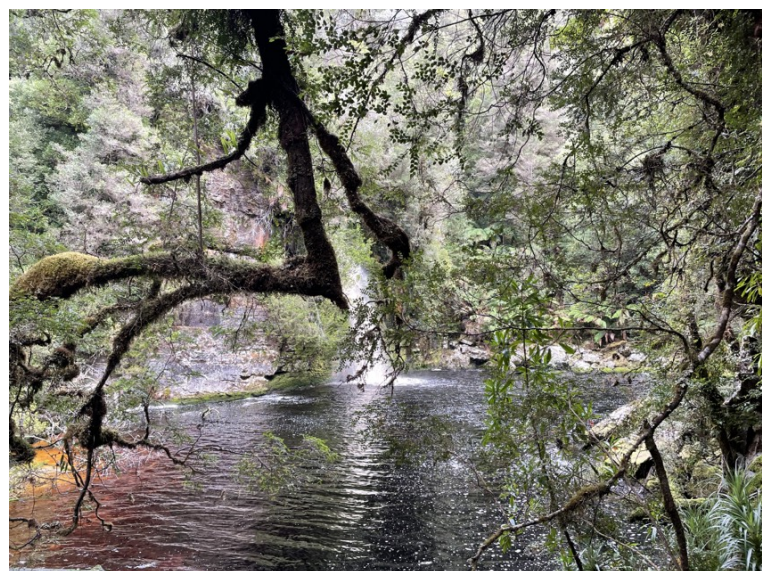
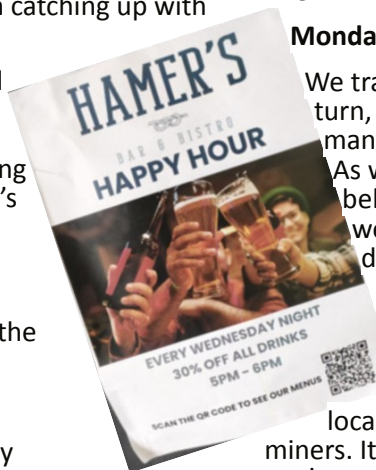
We returned to Pipe Dream and dried ourselves out, dropped the mooring line, and headed towards the Gordon. It's difficult to find the words to describe the experience of quietly ambling up this most beautiful of rivers, but amble up it we did, eventually anchoring (successfully after one false start) a mile or so upstream of Heritage Landing. Here, east of Hairpin Bend, we spent a wonderful night in the quiet, still, comfort of the river.

Monday 4 March

We travel further upstream, around every twist and turn, through steep valleys of trees, wondering how many variations on lush green colours there can be. As we slowly creep past Sir John's Falls (picture below) waiting for Hitchhiker to vacate the jetty, we enter into yet another deep forest in an even deeper valley.

Hitchhiker announces their departure on radio and we reluctantly turn around and tie up. The waterfall is a very short walk away and it's not hard to see why it was so popular with the locals back when the population was swollen with miners. It's very gorgeous, but by the time you get here you're so bombarded with relentless gorgeousness it's almost anticlimactic.

Our buddy boat Atmospheric arrives and we head back downstream to the mouth and around to Hawk's Nest in Birch's Inlet.



Tuesday 5 March

The weather seems to be pushing us to head down to Port Davey. It's either now or Friday. We meet and agree that now would be wise, a pity because we wanted to do some dinghy adventuring down Birch's Inlet.

We weigh anchor and head back to Strahan, top up with fuel and water, have a (cold!) shower, buy wine and food, and motor out Hell's Gate. There's an anchorage just outside the entrance (Pilot Bay) and we all stay here for the night, the intention being to get up at 3.00am and head south.



We travel down Melaleuca Inlet towards Deny's house (his daughter Janet now lives in it) and the airstrip that Deny originally built. There are some lovely walks in the area as well as a pair of Quonset huts built by Deny in the early sixties to give shelter to passing bushwalkers. Simon remembers staying in one as a teenager during an epic trudge across the south west.

We wander around the boardwalk, a beautiful journey of a few kilometres, through tunnels of trees that suddenly part to reveal stunning views of the inlet. We then dinghy back past Pipe Dream, climb Clyde's jetty and walk up to the house. It's all still exactly as it was, including the huge bath. How on earth did they get that in here?

Miraculously Tracy from Halcyons Days has a Sailright sewing machine on board and she and Paul lug it over to Pipe Dream so we can temporarily fix our main sail. How good is cruising in company?

Wednesday 6 March

There's a breeze, although not nearly as enthusiastic as the one we enjoyed coming down from the Hummocks. Nevertheless we put some sail up, the main this time, and loll and lope our way across the Southern Ocean to Port Davey. This is an eighty mile, fourteen-hour passage and our intention is to anchor in Schooner Cove in daylight.

The swell, coupled with a breeze that's initially not consistent, makes for a challenging morning. There's not enough wind to power the boat through the slop, and we do a couple of gentle gybes as the sea pushes us round. It's as though Pipe Dream can't make up her mind. The wind picks up a bit and it starts to become fun. Except – there's always an 'except' – about a third of the way up the mast our main sail (which is only a bit over three years old) starts to come adrift from the mast. Further investigation reveals that a couple of the plastic 'slugs' holding it to the mast track have actually broken.

Very quickly, we drop the sail. It comes down much more easily than we expect and soon it's safely in its bag. We then roll out some headsail and continue on in a sprightly north-westerly breeze that somehow appeared while we were fussing around with the main. It's fun sailing. We forget about our problems and enjoy the journey to Breaksea Islands and into the wondrous cruising wilderness that is Port Davey.

Thursday 7 March

We up anchor and head down the channel to Clayton's Corner. A bloke called Clyde Clayton and his wife Win lived in a little house up a short hill from the jetty for many years. Win died in the 1990s and Clyde moved back onto his fishing boat until he too passed away in the 2000s. They first built their house further to the west in Port Davey but, realising it was too exposed to the crazy weather patterns to be reasonably habitable, they moved it piece by piece to its current location. And there it still stands, unlocked and welcoming to anyone needing shelter.

Win's brother Deny King lived up at Melaleuca, a few miles away up a winding inlet. Deny was a legend about whom books have been written. That there is a small, but thriving, population of Orange Bellied Parrots in Melaleuca is down to Deny and the band of volunteers who came after him, who championed their protection.



Friday 8 March

Very exciting. It's the day of the traditional VDL-C fleet Cricket Match and barbecue. Tasmania versus The Rest Of The World.

Both sides have people who have hitherto believed that 'cricket' is actually a ground-dwelling insect. Both sides also have an equal mixture of men and women. The rules are that each team has ten overs in which to make their score, any batsman making twenty runs must declare, you can't go out for a duck, and that you can only bowl one over. This last rule is a problem because we only have three people capable of flinging a ball down a wet beach any distance.

One of them is Simon the Cabin Boy. In fact, he manages to take several wickets but none of them are valid because all his victims are yet to score. My crowning achievement is to eek out three runs, drop a catch and cop a wet ball in the face from an over-enthusiastic fielder, much to the raucous amusement of the "crowd" in Bay 13.

It was windy, and forecast to get windier. Our boat, Pipe Dream, and Wingarra II retired to Frog Hollow on the southern side of Bathurst Channel for the night, and the three Wingarrans came over for dinner. We hit the sack at about 10pm. The wind was still increasing and turning to the south-west. This wasn't a problem; if anything it was a better wind direction for the anchorage. It was blowing 20-30 knots with the odd nasty gust, but our anchor was comfortably holding. So far.

Saturday 9 March

We were woken at about 2.00am by a huge blast of Port Davey's finest. The boat was pitching around on the chain, and the noise of the wind was huge. There was absolutely no moon, so outside it was complete darkness except for Wingara II's anchor light in the distance. It looked like they had either dragged anchor or had decided to move.

In fact, it was us that had dragged. Right out of the anchorage, past the stern of Wingarra II, and across Bathurst Channel, finally coming to a stop on the northern side of the channel in ten metres of water. We'd dragged about two hundred metres without setting off the alarm.

The only place to be in conditions like this – which we subsequently calculated to be fifty plus knots – was Kings Point where the holding is exceptional. We'd sat out sixty to seventy knots there in an earlier circumnavigation, so fifty should be a doddle.

But first we had to raise the anchor, always a challenge in high winds which could overload the winch and trip its circuit breaker. We motored up onto the chain to reduce the load on the winch, with Simon stationed at the breaker in case it did trip. Lee stood at the bow with her foot on the up button, somehow giving hand signals and hanging on like grim death.

There was considerable urgency in all of this because we were metres from rocks and shallow water. A boat with an anchor half out is very vulnerable to the whim of the conditions, and the conditions were terrible. Eventually, the anchor was back in its roller, and we were on the move.

It was so dark all navigation had to be done by instruments. In the old days we'd have been flailing about with a paper chart, compass and a spotlight. Now we have chart plotters, bless 'em. Still armed with spotlights, we motored gingerly east up Bathurst Channel and turned to starboard around Kings Point.

Here we were greeted by the incredibly reassuring sight of three anchor lights belonging to Hitchhiker, Oasis and Vitesse who looked to be sitting comfortably at anchor. We dropped ours a respectful distance away, had a cup of tea to calm down and, when completely satisfied we were stuck fast, set an anchor alarm, made sure it was working, and retired for a lousy, stressed-out night's sleep.

Sunday 10 March

After last night's journey backwards across Bathurst Channel, very little happens today. We're a bit zombie-like, and spend the day inside the boat licking our wounds, snoozing, pottering, and eating. A quick look at the weather makes it clear that tomorrow is the day to escape this beautiful place, and head around the bottom of Tasmania and past Maatsuyker Island.



Monday 11 March

We motor the whole way through rolling swells. Coming out of Davey, out past Breaksea and into the Southern Ocean we bounce and loll around like a drunk on a moving footpath. Our newly repaired main sail is put to good use, hoisted only to a second reef to protect it. It steadies Pipe Dream and gives us aboard a more comfortable ride.

There's a mist that hovers over the distant capes like they've been airbrushed. We pass the imaginatively named South West, South and South East Capes as well as Maatsuyker, and eventually drop anchor at Recherche at about 6.00pm, anchoring down the Cockle Creek part of the bay.

Tuesday 12 – Thursday 21 March

We're up and away early. There's a 20 knot south-easterly wind forecast that'll be perfect for us heading north. We've got an overheating exhaust and it'd be great not to motor too much under the circumstances. It's dead calm with no wind at all and it stays that way for the whole day so we motor harder than we'd have chosen, but nonetheless arrive safely at RYCT at about 3.30pm.

From this point until the end of the following week we have an army of tradies on board fixing everything. We rent a car and head south to spend a weekend at the Kermandie Hotel with the fleet. On the Friday night we have a great evening at the newly rebuilt Port Esperance Yacht Club in Dover, and on Saturday we have a final, wonderful bash at the Kermandie Pub itself.

On Thursday 21st we enjoy a final dinner with the whole fleet at RYCT in Hobart. And we wake up on Friday morning to the news that over the next few days Tasmania is going to be bombarded by gales. Oh well; having completed most of the big jobs, maybe we can have a rest!

Wednesday 27 March

At a fleet meeting convened last night to discuss the weather, all but three of the ten heading north wanted to leave today. The weather has been very windy, with days of gale warnings, and the feeling amongst those reluctant to go today is that the seas will still be very lumpy even if the wind has calmed.

But contrary to the forecast, this morning dawned very still. To not go today would be a wasted day. It turns out that one of last night's reluctant boats has come to the same conclusion and has already left. So suddenly we're off again, heading down the Derwent in a light breeze that can't quite make its mind up where its coming from. Still, we hoist sails, including the newly repaired main.

Most of the fleet is heading to Port Arthur and will tackle Tasman Island tomorrow. Halcyon Days and Pipe Dream are going around Tasman Island today and a short distance up the east coast to Fortescue Bay. Maggie Mae and Vitesse have done a big jump and gone straight to Shoal Bay on the western side of Maria Island.

The seas start to build as we get closer to Tasman Island and we make the decision to go around it rather than going between it and mainland Tasmania. We head out to sea in an attempt to find water that's less lumpy. Days of gales have whipped up some fabulous seas.

We're surfing down most of them, and screaming along in 30-35 knot wind from behind the boat. It's incredibly exciting with one of us helming while the other 'plays' the sails, letting them out to spill the wind when there's too much power and pulling them back in again when conditions abate. Meanwhile, with the seas marching up relentlessly

from slightly starboard of rear, care must be taken to ride over each wave so it doesn't tip the boat over, or to follow the direction of the wave and, literally, surf.

The end of the boom spends a little time in the water. Everything is dislodged in the V Berth and ends up somewhere else. There'll be an explosion the next time we open a bottle of bubbly! After several hours we gybe round Tasman Island, and are eventually sufficiently north to enjoy some shelter from the seas. It's been fabulous fun, surfing in a fourteen tonne boat, but we're knackered.

The good news is that the patched up mainsail survives and pulls its weight. If it can live through what we've thrown at it this afternoon, it'll live through anything. We have a beautiful, gentle sail up to Fortescue Bay, stooge around while we do the 6.33pm radio sched with the fleet, and then anchor for the night just up from Halcyon Days.



Above: Chinaman's Bay (VDL-C 2002)

Thursday 28 March

Good Friday Eve. The 'Weather Situation' that begins today's forecast includes 'a relaxed high pressure system moves east across the bight...' and we ask ourselves what the heck a relaxed high pressure system would look like. Is it sitting on a deck chair in loafers with a margarita? Or perhaps it's enjoying a port and cigar at its club. I think my late brother who was a meteorologist would have laughed a lot at the idea of a relaxed high-pressure system. He had a very good sense of the ridiculous.

We head in the general direction of Maria Island. The conditions are in marked contrast to those experienced down south yesterday and this is welcome as we're both a bit sore. We motor-sail in the sun whilst enjoying the company of a few dolphins.

At about 3.30pm we anchor in Shoal Bay. The northern end of it is better known as Chinaman's Bay but this is slowly being erased from the history books I'm told. Down where we are is a white sand beach and water so clear we can see our anchor chain snake its way along the bottom. It is exquisitely beautiful.

The longer range forecast that promised a heavy south westerly wind on Wednesday will now arrive mid afternoon Tuesday, and be gone twenty four hours later. This deals up a conundrum we spend that afternoon and the next morning trying to figure out.

The conundrum of which I speak is simply when do we head north? The next bit is a short jump around to Wineglass Bay (beautiful but very roly and

uncomfortable) and then a long passage up to Eddystone Point on the north-eastern tip of mainland Tasmania.

Good Friday 29 March

We've got some internet here, so we spend the morning discussing various scenarios. What would we do if we had to get home quickly? What would we do if we had all the time in the world? And, in both hypotheticals, where would we hide on Tuesday night?

It would ordinarily be a simple discussion between the two of us, but on this VDL-C there's a whole fleet for which we are responsible to consider. We lunch on Halcyon Days and pick their experienced brains and agree on a strategy. So, the plan we're taking to the beach picnic tonight is that we leave this lovely place tomorrow, go around to Wineglass Bay for the night, and then head north on Sunday.

It's a longish dinghy ride to shore for the soiree because the shallowing happens very gradually, meaning Pipe Dream is anchored miles out. We haven't all seen each other since Hobart, and this has been a very close bunch of people who love to share their experiences with each other.

We watch the sun go down, drink wine and eat food. It's very special.



Above: Patternmaker anchored at Wineglass Bay as the heavens open. (VDL-C 2013)

Saturday 30 March

Another delightful day motoring, this time around to Wineglass Bay. This tourist jewel in the Tasmanian crown is a land of contrasts. Only kidding...I just wanted to see how many travel clichés I could squeeze into one short sentence.

Actually Wineglass Bay, as I have muttered before in previous circumnavigational musings, is utterly beautiful, like that really hot potential partner you meet up with. You're convinced this is the one. The forever person. They are so gorgeous and charming and perfect you wonder how they haven't been snapped up before.

You get to know them and, bit by bit, it becomes apparent that beneath the cosmetically beautiful exterior lurks the soul of a psychopath.

This is Wineglass Bay. It's the Ted Bundy of anchorages. A handsome body of water that lures you to your doom like Ulysses to the sirens.

Well perhaps doom is a little strong. You roll backwards and forwards, and sleep dreaming you're a rotisserie chicken. Eventually you give up, get up, and piss off. You discover that the people who are besotted with this overrated puddle have either walked in with walking poles and big teeth, arrived by cruise liner, or sailed in on small boats with sufficiently shallow draft they can get right in on that little beach in the south west corner where there is no roll.

These days I go there under sufferance desperately hoping, just once, to be wrong. But I never am. Drain it and subdivide it I say.

The journey up through Schouten Passage is a sunny delight and we converse with many seals and dolphins along the way.

Sunday 31 March - Arriving at Wineglass Bay

We turn the corner, anchor, and secure anything that might find a way of rolling or sliding over to the other side of the boat. Wine bottles, empty or full. Computers. People. It's going to be one of those nights.

Every fleet has its "lagers" (who wait for a written invitation from God before proceeding to the next destination) and "bolters" (who are obsessed with completing the cruise as quickly as possible). Vitesse (with Michael, Richard and Simon aboard) were in the running for the latter but have returned south to be with us one more night. In circumnavigation parlance, it is considered very poor quality bolting if you keep coming back to the place from which you bolted. It's lovely to see them, however.

Darryl from Final Final puts over in his dinghy with the news that Seconda is bolting up to Flinders Island and will depart this evening. They're nervous about the incoming blow and want to take advantage of the light southerly breeze due at midnight to get north as soon as possible. It's a good plan on the strength of what we know at the moment and we genuinely consider it. We only reject it because there are two of us on Pipe Dream, whereas Seconda has six.

We spend the night in a line along the south west part of the beach, masts swaying port to starboard like metronomes. We sleep sideways across our bed so we roll from head to foot rather than side to side. We actually get some sleep too, although it's constantly interrupted by the clunks and bangs of deck gear thrashing around.

At about 5.00am we give up, hoist the mainsail and the anchor, and leave. It would seem that others have the same idea and are moving about doing all the little jobs necessary for a comfortable departure. There's even a couple who have already fled, no doubt thinking that getting a reduced amount of sleep on a moving boat is preferable to getting none at anchor.

We're heading to Eddystone Point, the north eastern tip of mainland Tasmania and everyone is talking about the incoming storm. It's forecast to be nasty, but short and sharp, arriving mid to late Tuesday afternoon and calming back down again early Wednesday morning. A couple of days ago we plotted a course up through the Furneaux Group, marking out a few likely anchorages. This was highly desirable because it's on the way home for us.

Since then, it has become clear that the wind will change direction a couple of times just before it really ramps up and that the islands will cop the full force of this low

pressure system. This could mean a change of anchorages in the middle of the night when the storm is at its height.

So we abandon this idea and turn our thoughts to going where the wind will be the least damaging, even if it means going in the wrong direction. Two boats set off for the Tamar River and the bulletproof safety of Beauty Point Marina and, although it's a hundred miles in the wrong direction, we consider this too.

On this night, we anchor on the north side of Eddystone at Picnic Point. It's eerie calm, especially since we know what's coming.

Monday 1 April

The decision we make is to anchor at Tomahawk, a tiny township east of Bridport. Tomahawk has a reputation for being a little roly in some conditions, but the holding is good which, of course, is what you need in a blow.

Between the north and where we will be is a large rock called Tomahawk Island. From the north west around to the south of us: mainland Tasmania. The best bit is that the brunt of the storm will be to the north of us. Some weather predictions indicate not much more than 20 knot gusts here. We hope they're right.



We motor north west up Banks Strait (above). It's normally notorious for its stropky behaviour, especially if you don't get the tide versus wind predictions right. This morning it's dead calm and oily. The current shunts us along at nearly ten knots and, in such calm conditions, we do a bit of an explore through the rocks and reefs that dot the southern side, especially up near Foster Island. Nearby Foster Inlet is a great anchorage in an easterly and we took refuge here in a 2002 blow after a long haul around from Schouten Passage. Gee we were pleased to see it.

We're not expecting easterly winds, so we press on and eventually we anchor in about five metres of water with forty metres of heavy chain between the hook and us. We are in the company of Halcyon Days, Maggie Mae and Final Final.

Tuesday 2 April

Now we wait.

And while we wait, we muse on this morning's BOM forecast that, amongst nine weather warnings – mostly gale – around the state, also promises a "95% chance of rain." A culture of weasel words has surely hit The Bureau of Meteorology when it has to say 95% when, clearly, it's 100% going to piss down.

It rains steadily most of the night, revealing a small leak in the aft companionway hatch but not much else. It continues to rain until late morning when, lo and behold, the sun comes out. Lee and Leigh dinghy ashore to try and find bread (square white, frozen) and coffee (none).

It's 2.30pm. The breeze is freshening to 20-25 knots and is west nor-west. The boat sits comfortably, rolling a little but feeling safe and stable. Hopefully when the full blast comes from a south westerly direction the sea will stay reasonably calm.

The noise of the wind is quite haunting and mournful. We've got the wind generator going to keep the batteries charged and this adds to the excitement because it's a noisy beast and the windier it gets, the more intense the sound becomes. Every few minutes it stops when it calculates the batteries are full and its whirring ebbs away to leave just the ghostly wind.

At 4.00pm the breeze has dropped back to a gentlemanly 10-15, although it's still coming from west nor-west. When it pipes up, we're pushed around a little in the swell that comes through the gap between the Tomahawk Island and the mainland. The forecast promises that by 5.00pm there will be south in the breeze and this should be more comfortable. Not that it's especially uncomfortable at the moment. We reckon that being anchored here in a gale is more conducive to a proper sleep than Wineglass Bay in dead calm.

It's 5.00pm and it's freshening again but only to low 20s. And it's heading south. Yay! Way out north off Prime Seal Island the wind's howling through at a boisterous low 40s. Vitesse and Seconda are bang in the eye of the blow. Vitesse is holding well to terra firma on 70 metres of chain. "It's the full experience," Michael says. Laura on Seconda says "Thank God no swell at all...at least!" They'll be hanging out for the breeze to abate, which it'll start to do at about 8.00pm tonight. Tomorrow morning there'll be virtually nothing but a sloppy three-metre sea that's forecast to drop to something more palatable by lunchtime.

At 6.30pm the breeze has finally gone to south west and, as predicted and prayed for, the motion is much more kindly. It's respectably windy though, but gusts are maybe 25, so not too crazy. Up at Prime Seal they're getting gusts nudging 40 knots.

By about 8.00pm it starts to die down and we're getting light winds. Up north it's still windy but it's abating. We go to bed and wake up at 2.00am. The silence tells us it's all over.



**Above: Seconda moored of Prime Seal Island 2/4/24.
Right: Vitesse's windspeed during the gale.**

Wednesday 3 April

It was great to hear that the two vessels up at Prime Seal had survived the night. After a well-deserved sleep-in, Seconda and Vitesse hit the road towards the Kent Group. Vitesse took a while to break free as her anchor and seventy metres of chain had snagged something on the sea floor.

We throw off our shackles too, and head towards Trousers Bay for the night, about forty miles away. On our way, we realise that the breeze has turned to the south west making Trousers Bay unsafe. We end up picking up the same MAST mooring at Prime Seal Island that Seconda had the previous night.

The group has splintered spectacularly. We're at Prime Seal. Halcyon Days, Maggie Mae and Final Final are tied up at Lady Barron and are, no doubt, filling their bellies at the pub. Corinthian and Freestyle are heading towards Port Phillip Bay, with the intention of going though The Rip at about 4.00pm tomorrow afternoon. Finally, Vitesse, Atmospheric, Seconda and Hitchhiker are anchored at Garden Cove in The Kent Group.

Thursday 4 April

As I write this journal, we cross Bass Strait for the last time on this adventure. We started off the day with the intentions of joining the mob at The Kent Group, but there's an east coast low-pressure system forming which means a week of strong easterly winds. This is great for those heading back to Melbourne, but terrible for us who are going to Lakes Entrance. So we motor relentlessly forward in virtually no wind. I think we'll be going though the entrance at about 5.00am tomorrow.

Friday 5 April

We motor all day and all of the night, to trash an old Kinks song. It's mostly smooth, but an occasional little lumpette reminds us we're in eastern Bass Strait. It's a dark old night; what little moon there is doesn't get out of bed until just before dawn by which time we're hovering around outside the Lakes bar waiting for the sun to come up.

It's amazing how slowly that happens when you're waiting for it. We criss-cross backwards and forwards so many times that some of the locals are wondering what we're doing. Eventually we decide to follow a vessel and we radio all ships to advise this. The dredge, Tommy Norton, lets us know we have clear passage and we go for it. Lee, with her remarkable eagle-like sight, pilots while I nervously steer. Once in we turn right towards the town, battle the extraordinary current determined to steer us towards something hard and nasty, and eventually tie up at Flagstaff Jetty.

Given this is the end of an old day rather than the beginning of a new one, we crack open champers and cheese, sit in the cockpit and toast ourselves (and the boat!) on the completion of our fourth RYCT/RGYC Van Diemen's Land Circumnavigation.

We then sleep for a couple of hours before heading back to Metung via the Riviera Nautic diesel pump. We'd motored most of the way back north of Tasman Island so the fuel bill is substantial.

We're back, and it's a good feeling, tinged with a little sadness that those special bonds set up over seven weeks of shared adventure and endurance are coming to an end. But it's lovely here, and we head over to the yacht club for a few drinks.



VDL-C History

1992 - 2022

This is the 19th Circumnavigation Cruise of Tasmania conducted by the Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania. The original Cruise was the initiative of Dr John (Joe) Cannon in 1992 and has been held every two or three years ever since.

1992

The event started in late February and experienced quite windy conditions on the west and south coasts.

1994

The Cruise started on 15th January and concluded with a Parade of Sail at the Royal Hobart Regatta in the second week of February. There were hard northwest winds on the east coast, and apart from a strong and unexpected nor'easter in the middle of the night on the leg out from Hunter Island on the west coast, the weather was predominantly good.

1996

The event started on 20th January with an impressive parade through Sullivans Cove. The fleet experienced a hard wet northerly along the North Coast. A hard nor'easter caused some concern on the overnight run to Macquarie Harbour, with a number of yachts standing off Hell's Gate in uncomfortable conditions to await daylight to enter the harbour.

The weather was then fine until, near the end of the cruise, a south easterly gale forced the majority of the fleet to seek shelter in The Pigsties at Recherche Bay before continuing on to participate in another Parade of Sail at the Hobart Regatta on 13th February.

1998

There were sixty five entries, including twenty five from interstate and a number of Tall Ships that had competed in a race from Sydney.

The start on 8th February coincided with the departure of the Tall Ships fleet in a fresh sou'wester with showers, but despite the weather it was a great spectacle. The winds quickly eased and the fleet enjoyed a good cruise along the East Coast in light to moderate nor'westerly conditions. Fresh westerly conditions once again set in and continued for five days with the fleet spread between Eddystone Point in the east and Hunter Island in the west. On 18th February the breeze eased a bit and veered north west.

Most of the fleet was able to reach Strahan in Macquarie Harbour on 19th February but those still in Bass Strait on 18th February had hard head winds to Hunter Island, and then fresh south westerlies as they headed down the west coast. For the trip south to Port Davey the winds were

predominantly variable westerly but, on 26th Feb, another fresh southwesterly set in and those still in Port Davey stayed put.

After thirty six hours the wind veered to the west north west, and the stragglers came home across the south coast with free sheets and big seas to enjoy the post-cruise festivities at Port Huon. This cruise in particular demonstrated that conditions can be quite variable in the summer months in Tasmanian waters.

2000

There were only twenty participants, including seven Victorian boats, a Queenslander and a New Zealander. Local activities such as the Wooden Boat Festival reduced the local fleet. After a few good days the fleet experienced strong northerly winds followed by a south-westerly gale on the east coast which delayed many of the participants.

After a good trip along the North Coast, another period of strong winds delayed the fleet in the north west prior to a good passage to Macquarie Harbour. Everyone enjoyed a memorable visit to Port Davey and the south coast as the fleet made its way back to Hobart. All agreed that the cruise had been a most enjoyable experience.

Above: Wineglass Bay (VDL-C 2002)

2002

Again saw a relatively small fleet depart Hobart on 26th January. Twelve boats participated from Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland with a few Tasmanians thrown in. The weather was perfect with a light sou'westerly to enable the fleet to get down the river. Although hard on the wind, it was very pleasant.

The next four weeks saw the fleet experience variable winds and associated sea conditions. The fleet avoided a nor'westerly gale by spending some time in either Port Arthur or Fortescue Bay. Some had a brisk ride up the East Coast in a hard east south easterly, which helped many to slide quickly through Banks Strait before taking refuge at Foster Inlet.

After a pleasant trip across the North Coast, three days were spent either at Stanley or Three Hummock Island waiting for fresh sou'westerly winds to abate before tackling the West Coast.



Later, the fleet avoided some storm-force westerly winds by anchoring in the Recherche Bay area. One vessel, a Salar 40, dragged harmlessly. It was jokingly remarked upon by an adjacent vessel that the Salar's skipper should leave the anchor down all the time, such was the impressive turn of speed achieved.

Above: The 'One And All' in Schooner Cove, Port Davey (VDL-C 2002)

Overall, while fresh winds were experienced from most quarters, no rough weather was encountered while at sea. In fact the sailing conditions for the entire time were hard to fault.

The time spent in the various ports was enjoyable and most anchorages were idyllic. Macquarie Harbour again saw the participants go their separate ways, some up the Gordon River, and others to Strahan. Port Davey was again an experience not to be missed and the four days there provided all participants with enjoyable memories.

The fleet returned to Hobart, with 23rd February marking the end of another successful cruise.

2005

For the first time, the cruise was run in conjunction the Royal Geelong Yacht Club. It began on the morning of 12th January with a nor'west gale which scattered the Hobart contingent on the first day. Some sought shelter in D'Entrecasteaux Channel, others didn't leave until things had moderated later or until the next day. One unfortunate suffered rig damage and withdrew from the cruise before reaching the John Garrow Light, one mile south of the RYCT in Hobart. In the end, sixteen boats representing all Australian states, USA and Germany, congregated for the first fleet barbecue at Bryans Corner in the Schouten Passage.

The passage round the north east corner of the island was marred by the loss of one boat at Eddystone Point after she was caught by a sudden southerly change in the middle of the night. Fortunately no one was injured.

The voyage west along the North and North West Coast was a relatively gentle affair with time for some river cruising in the Tamar and visits to various ports to the west. Social events were generously hosted by the Tamar and Mersey Yacht Clubs, and by the Smithton Lions Club at Stanley.

At the north west corner of the island, the boats that left from Hobart were joined by the Geelong contingent to make a combined fleet of thirty one boats for the passage south to Macquarie Harbour.

After some hesitation because of tide rips in the Hunter Passage, most boats made the passage over the night of

30th January (Day 19) in a freshening north wind. Hell's Gate was safely negotiated by most with only one grounding, and that was not a serious one. The fleet then dispersed to visit Strahan, explore the bays and inlets at the south end of the harbour, and make the twenty mile trip up the majestic Gordon River to Sir John Falls and Warner's Landing.

After a function in Strahan, the fleet made its second major West Coast passage to Port Davey without serious incident. Most arrived in time to shelter from a nor'westerly gale that saw some dragging anchors and quite a lot of rain. After the gale had cleared, there were a few days to explore before the fleet took advantage of some moderate north west weather to round South West Cape, traverse the South Coast into Recherche Bay or head directly to the D'Entrecasteaux Channel.

Day 32 was the penultimate cruise function, a barbecue at the Port Cygnet Sailing Club. This was the weekend of the Wooden Boat Show and a bus was used to transport those interested to Hobart.

A final informal gathering at Barnes Bay in the north of the D'Entrecasteaux Channel was marred by the arrival of a strong southerly change in the wee small hours of the following morning.

The Hobart contingent completed their circumnavigation in the thirty five allotted days. After a formal dinner at the RYCT, the Geelong contingent continued their cruise to arrive back in Geelong during the first week in March.

2007

It was decided to hold the cruise a little later in the year, beginning on Tuesday 13th February, immediately following the weekend of the Australian Wooden Boat Festival. This meant the cruise could occur at the most settled time of the year and nobody would feel the need mid-cruise to rush back to Hobart for the festival.

After the now traditional hearty breakfast turned on by the RYCT, the fleet of thirty three departed for Port Arthur in clement weather - perhaps a little too clement - with very little wind.

The fleet spent the rest of the week pottering about on the lower East Coast until it had to take shelter from a nor'easterly gale. By then, most were in the Schouten Passage at the southern end of Freycinet Peninsula. On Saturday 17th February, things had calmed down sufficiently for the fleet to assemble for a beach barbecue at Bryans Corner.

The barbecue came in two parts, bisected by a 180 degree wind shift in the form of a violent squall from the south



Some of the fleet at Stanley. (VDL-C 2002)



Above: Casilda Cove, Port Davey from Balmoral Hill. (VDL-C 2007)

which turned a hitherto idyllic beach into a dangerous lee shore. When the squall hit there was a mad scramble for the dinghies. Only one boat ended up aground; she was promptly pulled off by the vigilant skipper of an eco-tourism launch who used his powerful engines to timely effect. After half an hour things calmed down again and the party could continue.

The passage from the pink granite mountains and cliffs of Freycinet Peninsula along the northern part of the East Coast and through Banks Strait to the North Coast is the first tricky part of the cruise because there are no entirely safe anchorages between Wineglass Bay and Foster Inlet (inside Cape Portland) over one hundred miles away.

The fleet is therefore encouraged to make a single overnight passage, timing their arrival at Swan Island on the south side of Banks Strait to take advantage of a favourable flood tide which can flow through the strait at anything up to six knots.

The east weather continued along the North Coast which made for some pleasant downwind sailing. Traditionally the River Tamar with Launceston at its head provides the opportunity to fix things that have gone wrong since leaving Hobart.

The passages along the North Coast passed without incident except the radio relay vessel had temporarily to drop out of the fleet because of mechanical problems. The barbecue at Three Hummock Island at the north west corner of Tasmania to celebrate the Port Phillip contingent joining the fleet was brought forward a day because the weather looked to be coming right for the trip south to Macquarie Harbour.

The fleet, now at full strength with over forty boats, had a

pleasant overnight passage to Hell's Gate and were safely tucked up in Strahan before the next cold front passed through. This arrived with the usual copious amounts of wind and rain.

After a week of exploring Macquarie Harbour (one of the best kept cruising secrets on the Tasmanian coast) the fleet departed for Port Davey amidst a different kind of emergency. A pod of whales had beached themselves on the Kawatiri Shoals just outside Hell's Gate at the entrance to the harbour; indeed some were trapped in the Kelly Channel inside the harbour.

As is often the case on the West Coast, conditions are either impossibly rough or too calm for sailing. The weather window most used for the sixteen to eighteen hour passage south to Port Davey was one of the latter with most having to motor most of the way.

Port Davey was a little damp for most of the time but was still a most wonderful place. Shallower draft boats made the trip up Melaleuca Inlet to the settlement with its bird hide and airstrip; others travelled by dinghy. There were some crew changes. There were many walking expeditions. Some made the dinghy trip five miles up the Davey River to its magnificent gorges. The more energetically inclined climbed Mt Rugby, even though the weather wasn't conducive to sightseeing from its summit.

Too soon it was time to start thinking about a suitable opportunity for the final ocean passage around the formidable South West Cape then east along the south coast with its spectacular views of the steep headlands, the mountains behind, and of the desolate islands and rocks of the De Witt Group.



Maatsuyker in full flight on Storm Bay. (VDL-C 2007)

The seventy mile trip from Port Davey to Recherche Bay takes a long day. A westerly front was forecast to be about twenty four hours away on the day most of the fleet chose to move.

The trick with timing your departure on this leg is to leave late enough in the weather cycle to be able to ride prefrontal northerlies for the forty miles from South West Cape, but early enough to be in the sheltered waters at the southern end of D'Entrecasteaux Channel before the sou'west change makes conditions too boisterous for comfort and safety.

After the last organized social function at the Port Cygnet Sailing Club in the Huon River and a barbecue in Barnes Bay, the thirty three boats that departed five weeks earlier completed their circumnavigation by Monday 19th March 2007.

There was a formal dinner at the Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania. Then the remaining eleven boats who started from Victoria took another three weeks to return to Port Phillip and complete their circumnavigation. This passed off without incident, except for one boat that made a navigational error and ended up high and dry on a reef in the River Tamar. She was refloated on the next tide with no serious damage except possibly to the skipper's pride.

Because of the nature of a cruise-in-company, everyone's experience and memories of their five week adventure is different. Your editor's favourite one from this trip is of meeting Rosie on a lead being taken for a walk by her owner, the manager of the Low Head Historical Precinct. Pretty normal for a fine summer Sunday afternoon, one would think; except Rosie is a little black pig.

2009

There were forty three boats on the final entry list. Thirteen of these would join the fleet on the North West Coast, so it was a thirty strong fleet that left Hobart on 11th February 2009.

This group enjoyed clement weather on the way north along the East Coast. Indeed, for the first time for several cruises, the excellent weather at the north east corner of Tasmania enabled many to spend time exploring parts of the Furneaux Group.

As the fleet moved west along the North West Coast the weather deteriorated and was set into a pattern of successive low pressure systems with embedded cold fronts. This meant the journey south to Macquarie Harbour had to be undertaken in a very narrow weather window. It would prove to be the toughest of the cruise.

By the time the Hobart fleet left the north west corner of Tasmania for the passage south, it had been reduced to twenty six vessels. Of the thirteen boats that joined from the mainland, five withdrew before reaching Macquarie Harbour.

Thus, the fleet that reassembled in Port Davey was thirty four in number.

By now the weather had settled down again. A fond memory of this cruise was a game of cricket (Tasmania vs. The Rest of the World) at low tide on the brilliant white quartzite-sand beach in a corner of Bramble Cove.

2011

There were forty two starters, made up of thirty two mono-hulled yachts, four motor-sailers, four motor vessels and two sailing catamarans. Of these, two were international entries (from Denmark and New Zealand), eighteen from southern Tasmania, thirteen from Victoria and nine from other parts of Australia. All but one made it all the way round.

Thirty three boats left from Hobart on 16th February 2011. One joined the fleet at the Schouten Passage, having been delayed in crossing Bass Strait and one retirement occurred there also. The remainder of the fleet from various parts of Port Phillip Bay joined the fleet at Beauty Point on Saturday 26th February, Day 11 of the cruise.

Conditions were relatively clement until the fleet arrived at Freycinet Peninsula where it sat out a north easterly gale without major mishap. Many took advantage of settled weather on the way round the north east corner to explore the southern part of the Furneaux Group on the way to the first major stopover in the Tamar River. As always, this stopover provided an opportunity for repairs and maintenance, as well to explore the Tamar Valley to Launceston.

The remainder of the fleet arrived from Port Phillip in time for a dinner hosted by the Tamar Yacht Club on Sunday 26th February (Day 12).

A bout of strong westerly weather split the fleet along the North West Coast with the various ports and bays providing individual shelter. So it wasn't until the 8th March (Day 21) that the fleet came together again in Macquarie Harbour.

Once inside the Harbour, there are few navigational obstacles. Fortunately only two boats managed to find one, both running aground on the only protruding shoal on the direct passage from Strahan to the Gordon River entrance.

Apart from another westerly change, one highlight of the stay in Port Davey was a fleet barbecue on Thursday 17th March in Schooner Cove in somewhat indifferent weather. By Sun 20th March the fleet was in the sheltered waters of D'Entrecasteaux Channel in time for an evening barbecue hosted by the Port Cygnet Sailing Club.

2013

Of the sixty six boats who expressed interest in joining the 2013 cruise, forty made it to the final entry list. Of those, thirty one would leave from Hobart and nine from the mainland.

Most of the mainlanders joined the fleet on the North Coast. There were five withdrawals from the Hobart fleet and two from the Geelong fleet for various reasons including illness, business commitments, crew inexperience and lack of preparation.

There was nearly a third withdrawal from the Geelong fleet when one vessel suffered a broken forestay chainplate crossing Bass Strait in fresh conditions to meet the fleet. Miraculously - and due in no small part to the skill and dedication of Northern Tasmanian tradespeople - this boat was rerigged, had major structural repairs completed, and was fitted with a new furler and genoa in time to meet the fleet at the Hummocks two weeks later.

Meanwhile, the rest of the Hobart fleet was quite fortunate with the weather. Apart from having to pause in the Schouten Passage on the east coast for a couple of days to await the abatement of some fresh headwinds, conditions were remarkably clement nearly all the way.

More or less fresh easterly weather continued for most of the first half of the cruise enabling some exhilarating downhill slides along the North East, North and North West coasts. Indeed, there was some mock concern among cruise officials that those new to cruising in Tasmanian waters might get all the way round without the character-building experience of a genuine roaring forties' gale!

This was rectified in the Bathurst Channel in Port Davey on Day 29 courtesy of a westerly change that arrived with considerable enthusiasm. The Bathurst Channel between outer Port Davey and inner Bathurst Harbour runs east-west. A 45-50 knot gale funnelling between the mountains on each side becomes 50-60 knots, even more in gusts. It rained and blew hard all day. Those who had not chosen their anchorage wisely had a busy time with dragging anchors, capsizing tenders, drowning outboard motors and disappearing life rings.

The fleet departed Port Davey on Day 31, bouncing its way through the considerable slop left behind by the storm. Another fresh westerly wind was forecast, and it was decided that putting up with the swell for a few hours was preferable to copping another strong westerly on the way to Recherche. Fortunately, the swell abated quickly once out of the funnelled opening to Port Davey.

The fleet would go on to complete its circumnavigation in relatively good shape, arriving in Hobart on time. A couple of days after the Hobart fleet dinner, the remaining seven boats in the mainland fleet set sail to complete their circumnavigation via the E coast, Flinders and Deal Islands. They were joined by several of the Hobart fleet returning to their home ports on the other side of Bass Strait. This fleet enjoyed several spontaneous barbecues on the way back, the most memorable being at Trouser Point on Flinders Island in glorious sunshine.

2015

The tone of the weather was set well before the start of the cruise, when many of the vessels from the mainland were delayed in Eden, Queenscliff and Lakes Entrance by a series of relentlessly strong southerlies and gale warnings.

On Wednesday 11th February most of the thirty six starting in Hobart headed down the Derwent in warm, sunny but windless conditions. Most were bound for Port Arthur.

As the weather was forecast to be unsettled for the first few days, about half the crews decided to bypass Port Arthur and head through the Hole In The Wall inside Tasman Island and go straight to Fortescue Bay. At least one bolter headed directly to the Furneaux Group.

The first official gathering was a barbecue held on Hazards Beach, across the isthmus west of Wineglass Bay



Above: Foredeck shenanigans in spirited weather off Maatsuyker Island. (VDL-C 2002)

on the Freycinet Peninsular. Many crews climbed the hill for a view of Wineglass Bay. In a 30 knot nor'easterly gale, it looked nothing like the pictures in the brochure, with two metre waves dumping on the beach.

The next leg saw the fleet scattered along the east and north coasts as well as in the Furneaux Islands. They would finally reassemble at the Tamar Yacht Club Marina at Beauty Point.

The leg along the North West Coast saw the fleet split once again, some opting to head directly to the Hunter Group, while others visited the Mersey, Wynyard, and Port Sorrell. At the Hunter Group nine boats joined from Victoria, who had started their cruise at Queenscliff.

The fleet, now numbering forty five, took an early weather break and enjoyed a brisk one hundred and twenty five mile passage south along the west coast to Hell's Gate at the entrance to Macquarie Harbour. Again, the weather was largely unkind, with lots of rain and wind, but it didn't seem to deter too many from taking dinghy excursions ashore or expeditions up the Gordon and Franklin rivers.

Port Davey and Bathurst Harbour were beckoning. The trip south for many was uncomfortable as the wind dropped and the beam on swell continued, but everyone eventually made it safely. Rain, grey skies, grey seas and grey coastline were for many their first impressions of their entry to this magnificent and special part of the world, and for many, the subdued colour palette didn't change their impressions.

More intrepid crews ignored the rain and ventured up Melaleuca Inlet, climbed mountains, explored rivers and bays and generally made the most of their time in this unique wilderness.



Above: Heading for the Hole In The Wall (VDL-C 2007)

The notoriously wild and woolly South West Coast was kind for most, and more than twenty vessels rounding South West Cape in close company was a rare sight to behold. The grey vistas of the mountain ranges between the southern capes were a spectacular accompaniment to the iconic places they were passing, including Maatsuyker Island, with its lonely lighthouse catching bursts of afternoon sunshine between rain squalls.

Arriving in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel with ample safe and comfortable anchorages allowed an opportunity for the fleet to spread out once more.

On Sunday evening the Port Cygnet Sailing Club hosted their now traditional Dinner for the VDL-C Cruise. The final leg for the Hobart fleet was just that, with the local boats ensconced in their various clubs and the RYCT Marina accommodating most of the visiting vessels.

After the RYCT Cruise Dinner on the Thursday night, there was a flurry of activity and last minute provisioning. The RGYC fleet left Hobart on Saturday to complete their circumnavigation, accompanied by a number of boats returning to the mainland. They stopped at Port Arthur, Maria Island, and made for Triabunna to wait out another strong wind warning and south westerly change, before heading to Schouten Passage.

Several boats headed directly to Wineglass Bay, which this time was picture-perfect. Binalong Bay beckoned, before a long day sail to Badger and Prime Seal Islands. Here the fleet separated for the last time. One trekked across to Eden, several opted for Deal Island and the Kent Group before crossing to Refuge Cove and Port Phillip Heads, whilst the Gippsland Lakes locals and visitors stayed overnight at Royden Island before enjoying a benign crossing of Bass Strait.

2017

Good weather was the dominant feature of the 2017 VDL-C because it allowed most participants to set their own pace and go where and when they pleased.

The Cruise Committee was faced with over sixty expressions of interest, but at the start (on Wednesday 15th February) the fleet was down to forty one definite starters. Thirty one of these left from Hobart, seven started from Queenscliff, and three joined in the Tamar River at Beauty Point.

The first leg began with a mixed day of 5-25 knot nor'easters. Most crews settled for the first night in either Port Arthur or Fortescue Bay. The conditions for the following four days were generally benign, except for a sudden rain squall that hit the southern end of Mercury

Passage. Boats already in Schouten Passage missed it all. This was short lived as the following day during the first scheduled BBQ at Bryans Corner, a heavy rain and wind event left everyone sodden and scrambling back to their boats. This experience reinforced advice given at the briefing about sudden wind changes and the importance of anchoring safely and securely.

The north-east coast was mostly windless, with the weather ranging from sunny periods to heavy showers, leaving motoring the only option. Many opted to overnight in Binalong Bay before an uneventful passage through Banks Strait and to Fosters Inlet for a not completely comfortable night in a northerly breeze but beam on to a westerly swell.

Most crews chose to make an early start as they headed to join the faster motor cruisers already at Beauty Point. Several of the larger vessels visited Flinders and other islands in the Furneaux Group before assembling at the Tamar Yacht Club.

The stopover in the Tamar gave everyone a chance to re-provision, hit the laundromats, and visit Launceston, wineries and numerous other attractions in the area. A number of owners were able to indulge in another common experience of cruising life – fixing your boat in exotic locations, and pumping quite a few dollars into the local economy!

All this was a lead up to a very enjoyable dinner for one hundred and twenty five hungry and thirsty sailors hosted by the Tamar Yacht Club, followed by some of the fleet exploring further up the Tamar River, some pressing on to Devonport, Wynyard, Port Sorell, Stanley and other ports, before heading for the Hunter Group on the north-west corner of Tasmania. Here the fleet was now fully assembled.

Eventually, all vessels headed south and were safely in Macquarie Harbour. Fortunately the aptly named Hell's Gate at the entrance proved to be anything but, and was for most an anticlimax and a huge relief. Many enjoyed the train to Queenstown, the local theatre, pub meals, re-provisioning and re-fuelling, laundromats, et al, before heading for the Gordon River and the numerous other bays and inlets at the southern end of the Harbour.

The weather was unusually helpful. Strahan is reputed to have only six rain free days a year, but this year there were at least 14 continuously, all sunny and warm. Many took the opportunity to make an early break south to Port Davey. Those crews who remained in Macquarie Harbour enjoyed a quiet midday BBQ at the local sailing club before they too headed south.

The expectation of the West Coast complete with gales, huge seas, wild weather, was not forthcoming, and for most crews the voyage south was in bright sun and glassy calm conditions. This leg is usually an overnight trip, but this year many took the rare opportunity to stop overnight at Sandy Cape or behind Hibbs Pyramid, some taking three or four days to arrive in Port Davey.

Port Davey and Bathurst Harbour are the ultimate attractions of cruising in Tasmanian waters. The weather was outstanding, with most crews able to explore Melaleuca, the Davey River, and everything in between. A number of intrepid climbers climbed Mt Rugby in ideal and clear conditions, and a *Choices Flooring* sponsor's flag was carried aloft to be later signed by all who made it to the top.

One group of boats sheltered at Claytons Corner during a day of 30+ knots, and about twenty five people were fed a selection of roasts cooked in the wood stove at



Above: Bramble Cove cricketers prepare for action (VDL-C 2024)

Clayton's Cottage, whilst being entertained by wandering minstrels from a New Zealand boat also sheltering in Clayton's Corner.

By now the Cruise Commodore had decided that managing this group was akin to herding feral cats, and an incentive to retain some semblance to the published cruise plan was required, so a beach BBQ was organized for Bramble Cove. This fortunately coincided with a low tide, enabling an international one-day cricket match. All but one boat were present in Bramble Cove so the numbers were sufficient to field two teams complete with vocal supporters. This year the match was between a strong team from Queensland against the rest of the world. After a seriously enjoyable afternoon in full sun, the

Queenslanders etc were allowed to believe that they had won, but in reality every player was a winner, even if they batted for the other side.

The trip across the bottom was another outstanding experience. The large ocean swells on the lower West Coast were very impressive, with yachts abeam all but disappearing in the troughs. From South West Cape with its foreboding grey tones, to the sunlit South East Cape, the rugged outlines of the Tasmanian peaks opposite iconic Maatsuyker Island, all provided a unique vista in near windless conditions. Several crews opted to overnight at New Harbour where they were rolled out of their bunks.

Once in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, the fleet quickly spread out, with several heading directly to Hobart, but most enjoyed the superb weather and ideal cruising conditions. The Port Esperance Sailing Club at Dover hosted an informal barbecue dinner and open bar for all participants.

The highlight of the night was the fantastic jam session put on by local musicians. The whole building shook with the music and enthusiastic dancing. A hat was passed around and raised a healthy bonus for the otherwise unpaid performers.

Those that weren't too slow the following morning headed off, once again in perfect conditions to Port Cygnet where the local sailing club once again held their sit down dinner evening. Then boats went their own way, some to favourite fishing spots. A last barbecue was held at Quarantine in Barnes Bay while others continued on to Hobart. The final whole-fleet function was the Cruise Dinner held at the RYCT in Hobart on Thursday 23rd March at which all kinds of prizes were awarded.

The mainland fleet headed down the Derwent on yet another perfect if windless day two days later, on Saturday 25th March. The following morning, still with no breeze, the fleet passed through the Hole In The Wall at Tasman Island and on to the East Coast, stopping for the night at Chinamans Bay, before moving to Triabunna to sit out another south westerly change. As the weather now appeared settled, boats moved north, some to Oakhampton Bay and several to Schouten Passage.

The boats in Oakhampton spend a pleasant afternoon before being blasted out at dusk by a forecast south westerly front that came from the east, resulting in a hurried retreat to more sheltered Prosser Bay. Next day, and back to settled weather, Île Des Phoques was the attraction, with dinghy excursions into the caves, checking out the seals basking in the sun.

That evening, a barbecue at Crockets Beach in the rain was testament to the commitment of everyone to having a good time, before another wind change precipitated the 'Schouten Shuffle' over to Bryans Corner.

Then the fleet took a short hop to Wineglass Bay, where there were already a number of boats, to sit out a brief north west change, before a slow trip up the East Coast to Eddystone Point. An early start and through a flat Banks Strait to Trousers Point, followed the next day by a benign leg to Deal Island. Here, the fleet separated for the last time, the Queenscliff boats left for Refuge Cove and the Port Phillip Heads, the rest headed either to Eden or Lakes Entrance.

2019

In contrast to the last Van Diemen's Land Circumnavigation Cruise where the fleet motored most of the way around Tasmania, in mostly warm, sunny and near windless conditions, this year we had the lot.

The day after the briefing, most of the forty one confirmed starters departed Hobart. After a brisk sail accompanied by large pods of dolphins, the fleet rounded Cape Raoul heading for Port Arthur, with several opting for Fortescue Bay and beyond. A gale warning for the Lower East Coast the next day meant there was good reason to stay and explore.

Shoal Bay on Maria Island, known locally as Chinaman's, was the next stop, with walks ashore to Riedle Bay, the ruins at Encampment Cove, and fishing in the Deep Hole. Unsettled weather over the next few days led to a dilemma as to where to hold the first scheduled beach barbecue. In the end it was agreed on Bryans Corner in Schouten Passage. A good time was had by all, with many crews meeting others for the first time.

Wineglass Bay, which regularly features in Tasmanian Tourist promotional material, didn't disappoint, with many crews staying several days, to relax or enjoy the many walks. With settled weather returning, most of the fleet headed north, with Binalong Bay the preferred anchorage, before heading around the north-east corner, through Banks Strait and to the Tamar River. The Tamar Yacht Club made a huge effort to accommodate the VDL-C fleet. This was shown when one hundred and thirty sailors and guests sat down for dinner and a noisy and fun-filled evening.

Crews were getting restless for the sea. After refuelling, re-provisioning, laundry, repairs and exploring, the fleet headed west. Some pulled up at Devonport and Wynyard, but most opted for Stanley or headed directly to the Hunter Group at the north-west corner.

Those in Stanley Harbour sat out the howling wind,

whilst those out at the islands chased calmer anchorages. By now the fleet from Queenscliff had experienced a very fast sail across Bass Strait, and had joined the Hobart fleet. In spite of the weather, they did manage to hold a well-attended beach BBQ on Three Hummock Island.

By Day 17, the long passage to Macquarie Harbour was well underway. Although the breeze ranged from a low 20 knots to high 30s, it was from the north-east, which allowed many vessels to break the trip in otherwise untenable anchorages on the west coast.

The next day, following a magnificent sunrise, the majority of the fleet were safely in Macquarie Harbour. Once again the fleet spread out. Some went to Strahan, others explored the south end of the harbour, the Gordon River and the many bays and inlets.

Trevor Norton from the charter vessel *Stormbreaker*, once again gave several very informative talks to many of the crews based on his immense local cruising knowledge. Strahan offered many attractions, not the least being the heritage steam train trip to Queenstown. Others enjoyed a night out at *The Ship That Never Was* – the longest running theatre play in Australia, while the pub dinners were well patronised.

A barbecue at the Macquarie Harbour Sailing Club offered the crews a chance to catch up, regroup, and discuss plans for the next leg south to Port Davey.

There was little wind and flat water for boats as they left Strahan, through Hell's Gate to the Southern Ocean with rolling swells all the way from South America. These four metre swells made an impressive sight at Cape Sorell and, whilst not threatening, made for a rolly and sometimes uncomfortable passage south. Several boats stopped for a few hours sleep behind Hibbs Pyramid, whilst others slowed their progress.

Most pushed on, and by early morning the majority of the fleet were safely inside Breaksea Island and turned in for a well-earned rest. Port Davey, along with Bathurst Harbour provided spectacular scenery aided by the diverse weather conditions. Everything from tremendous hailstorms with 40 knots of wind, to glassy calm, warm days.

There were opportunities to journey up Melaleuca Inlet to the settlement and airstrip, to climb Mount Rugby, and to explore the numerous secluded anchorages. Many made the dinghy trip up the Davey River to the gorges. Fortunately a low tide coincided with a warm day, enabling the customary test match and barbecue on the beach at Bramble Cove. It was an impressive sight to see almost the entire fleet nestled beneath Mt Misery in the late afternoon sun.

It was time to leave Port Davey, and the following day saw a dawn patrol sail towards South West Cape, where the swells had dropped from more than ten down to a more manageable three or four metres, still impressive enough for most. Grey skies with generally light breezes made for an uneventful passage past Maatsuyker Island, with its stark lighthouse catching the odd ray of sunshine. Looking north towards the mountains presented a very fine view in fifty shades of grey.

Once all but a few stragglers were safely in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, boats spread out to do their own thing. The next stop was Dover, where, unfortunately due to weather delays, we had to miss the Port Esperance Sailing Club's Friday-night knees-up, which in the past has been a highlight of the cruise.

More than half the fleet made it to a dinner hosted by the Port Cygnet Sailing Club. The last scheduled BBQ was held at the Quarantine pontoon in Barnes Bay.



Above: Nova Vida at anchor in Wineglass Bay (VDL-C 2002)

The RYCT staged the customary dinner at which trophies were presented and stories (some of them already quite tall) were recounted.

After a few days of provisioning, repairs including several boats needing the slip, sightseeing and the usual big city activities, the Queenscliff contingent headed for Port Arthur and beyond.

Once again, gale warnings prevailed and the fleet was holed up for several days, before breaking out for Maria Island. There were a few sunny days before a mad dash to Triabunna to wait out the next westerly front, complete with howling wind, thunderstorms, lightning and heavy rain.

Eventually the conditions eased and the fleet headed north, with most opting for Wineglass Bay. After another howling night, the sou'west gale eased to below 20 knots which meant an early start for points north, although the breeze did build to 40+ knots for several hours. Needless to say, it was a fast trip to Binalong Bay for another stopover, before heading for Eddystone Point and Banks Strait.

Here half the fleet headed into the Furneaux Group and the rest sailed west to the Tamar River. The Furneaux contingent split further, with several heading to Port Phillip via Refuge Cove and others to Lakes Entrance or Port Albert.

Those in the Tamar River spent nearly a week at Beauty

Point, waiting on relentlessly gale force westerlies to abate; however, they did manage to enjoy themselves with the local attractions. As soon as the conditions eased, they made a fast run to Queenscliff before heading to their respective home ports.

The Queenscliff fleet organized their Cruise Dinner at the Royal Geelong Yacht Club for the 11th May,

2022

The 15th VDL-C Cruise, originally scheduled for February/ March 2021, was delayed for a year by COVID. When it did finally set sail, it was a smaller fleet than usual and with Australian borders being closed there could be no International entries.

Ultimately there were 25 participating boats. This made for a more intimate cruise than recent circumnavigations but it was very successful.

With an eye to COVID constraints, the 2022 cruise commenced with a skipper-only briefing before departure from Hobart. Initially, interaction between the boats was tentative because of COVID concerns. The first barbecue event to bring the fleet together socially was held very successfully in Bryans Corner in the Schouten Passage. Gradually, we were becoming more at ease that there was no COVID in the fleet.

Prolonged benign easterly weather made for easy progress around the Island. Indeed, the weather was Tasmanian-atypical. For the entire circumnavigation, the fleet could travel in comfort – often well ahead of the cruise plan.

As we have come to expect, the fleet enjoyed the considerable hospitality of the Tamar Yacht Club at their Beauty Point marina. In the interest of abiding by COVID protocols TYC provided an open air barbecue enabling considerable social interaction.

From here, an unsettled weather system separated the fleet as skippers chose different dates for points west. Some chose to go through to Stanley and the Hunter Group, while others delayed and elected to travel from the Tamar directly to Strahan.

The Queenscliff fleet joined at the Hunter Group. Normally there would have been a fleet barbecue but because the Queenscliff fleet were not long out of a COVID-infected Victoria, it was felt prudent to not hold this event.

The fleet did not really come together until Macquarie Harbour. The conditions were glorious. The only reservation now was that COVID might be introduced with crew changes.

Another fleet barbecue was held at the Macquarie Harbour Yacht Club, complete with huon pine offcuts as firewood!

The decision to move on to Port Davey was made easy by continuing favourable weather allowing a very long window. Many boats chose to pause overnight at Hibbs Pyramid.

Balmy weather continued while we were in Port Davey, Bathurst Channel and Bathurst Harbour with a beautiful 27°C on one day (whilst the East Coast of Tasmania was taking a sodden hammering). This weather allowed a great deal of exploration and discovery in this stunning area. Despite an unfavourable tide, we even managed our traditional 'Wilderness Test Match' on the beach at Bramble Cove.

Again, the continuing good weather made for an easy departure along the South Coast to Recherche Bay and ultimately into D'Entrecasteaux Channel. The next event was a magnificent catered salmon dinner on Dover Beach.

Sadly this outdoor venue was necessary because the Port Esperance SC premises had been razed by an arsonist and



Above: Dinner at Port Esperance Sailing Club. (VDL-C 2024)

was presently being rebuilt. The fleet had a delightful meal and, in turn, the PESC Building Fund benefited from the considerable generosity of the fleet participants.

The next day saw us heading to the Kermadie Pub for another great meal. This was a departure from the normal dinner that is held at the Port Cygnet Sailing Club which was not possible because of a clash with the timing of their Regatta.

Finally, our weather luck ran out on the penultimate day of the Cruise and we were forced to don our wet weather gear for the first time, and the final BBQ at Quarantine had to be cancelled.

The next day, the fleet returned to Hobart with many celebrating the completion their circumnavigation with a very successful combined fleet dinner at the RYCT.

Sadly, Jeremy Firth our Communications Officer for all but one of the cruises since 2002, has announced that this would be his last VDL-C Cruise. What a magnificent contribution he and Penny have made to this event and all the preceding ones since the beginning of the century. 'Thank you' doesn't even begin to cover their expert and selfless contributions over the years.

The Queenscliff Fleet then continued their circumnavigation, sailing up the East Coast and across Bass Strait via Flinders Island and the Kent Group. One of the delights of this trip is the enthusiasm that mainland boats exhibit as they explore and discover this state. It makes us Tasmanians truly appreciate how lucky we are with what we have.

This was a very successful voyage with a wonderful fleet. COVID never reared it's ugly head. The weather was so kind that mainland crews could not be said to have truly experienced all the vagaries of our island climate. Maybe another time?

