

## Chapter Five

### *Cruising*

#### ***Rainbird's Trip to Africa***

**Frank Talbot**

"Cocos a hundred miles astern. Hydraulics losing fluid, so hand steering tonight. No.2 Genny pulling like a horse in this wild trade wind. White crests in the 3/4 moon. Flying clouds racing past the stars. 1,900 miles of ocean to Rodrigues." (Log: Oct. 18, 1979; 2100hrs.)

After years of modest coastal cruising we set off to sail to Africa and back. Our plan was to take *Rainbird* of Sydney up through the Torres Straits to the trade winds, through the islands of the Indian Ocean to South Africa, and then run our easting down in the forties back to Australia. *Rainbird* was one of Jo Adam's long-keeled forty footers, slightly modified to give us a traditional stern. This change provided a huge aft locker you could put the kind of gear we inevitably carry as collecting marine biologists, like big plastic bins for preserving fish for the Australian Museum, and plankton nets to satisfy Sue's love of collecting and studying minute swimming crustaceans, plus microscopes, bottles and jars. It turned out to be just as useful for Nick's island collecting, Santori whisky bottles, large plastic and glass buoys from Japanese longliners and interesting driftwood pieces.

We are very ordinary coastal sailors. For this big trip, planned over five years, there was a question between us—unspoken, but palpably hanging there. How would we handle long distance sailing? How would we face the problems of real cruising, when you cop whatever comes along and have to cope with it somehow, because there is no port to duck into.

We left the quiet of Tambourine Bay in the Lane Cove River exhausted by kindness. Then I finally opened the undiscussed question with Sue, by saying "Let us just go from harbour to harbour, one step at a time. And we shall turn back if we find it too demanding physically, or become too terrified at the risk". So that is what we did. We finished final things in Pittwater at the RPAYC, and took on board our sturdy middle son Jonathan as crew to Gladstone.

A strong south-east wind picked us up north of Barranjoey. The log on July 3rd; at 2200 hrs reads: "I should have reduced sail at dusk ... no fool like an old fool. Going like the clappers in Force 5-6 in building seas. Then a wild jibe and main sheet traveller off the track end. Much shemozzle." We sped north and waved at the lovely places along the NSW east coast, but did not stay, and found our first coral island, Lady Musgrave, just past midnight 4 days and 12 hrs from Barranjoey. Jo Adams gives his boats the gift of speed, and *Rainbird* is fast, even though overbuilt in 3/16 inch steel and overfilled with too many things.

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*29th August: Several people had boats in the shed who were not members. Registered letters to be sent to all asking them to remove same. (All but one either removed their boats or joined the Club and about four months later that boat just disappeared!)*

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#### **The Great Barrier Reef**

The Great Barrier Reef remains a place of surprises. There are still many islands where there are beaches with no footsteps. Each night we anchored, for we were mindful of Captain Cook's painful episode on Endeavour Reef on a dark night 209 years and one month before our trip. When the sails were furled we would



put the ten foot tinny over and row ashore to stretch our legs for half an hour. Then back to cook the evening meal.

"Do not tow the dinghy!" the log narrative says sternly on July 15th. We had dropped Jonathan in Gladstone and picked up our fellow builders of *Rainbird*, Phillipa and Kevin Bannon of Mosman. They were to be with us to Bowen and we were having a great time moving slowly up the reef. On the day of this log entry we left the shelter of Middle Percy, having had showers on the beach and bought bottles of home made marmalade courtesy of kind Andy Martin's "yachtsman's comfort stop." Clear of the island we found ourselves racing down big seas in a gale of wind with the dinghy, with our outboard motor on its stern, getting up to all sorts of antics, surfing parallel with us, lying side-on to the crests of waves, and generally misbehaving. There was nothing I could think of doing, with the Digby Isles dead ahead, so I stopped looking, expecting to lose it. But as we swept into shelter we still had it in tow, half full of water. I learnt again one of sailings many little lessons.

"One bommie at a time!" (log narrative of August 7th). One evening, just short of Lizard Island, we anchored at dusk in the lee of Rocky Isles. The wind died and we had a peaceful night, but to my horror in the dawn I found I had driven her inside a set of huge bommies which were now showing pale close to the surface, just giving us room to swing to the anchor. I put Nick at the first crossrees to pilot us out. From the cockpit the bommies seemed everywhere, and I called out to him in some consternation. The 11 year old looked coolly down, "Go a little to starboard, Dad. One bommie at a time". This is now a family saying. If life seems full of too many problems, take one bommie at a time!

From Lizard Island to Cape York we ran each day, and anchored each mid-afternoon, fossicking on some island, bay or estuary. A few times we had one or two great sea eagles drifting over us, keeping close watch. In the whole distance (some 400 miles) we sighted only one other yacht, a smaller boat, *Islander*, which we very slowly caught and passed.

I remember leaving lovely Cocos Keeling lagoon as one of the hardest moments of our long trip, with tough questions on my mind. On board were just Sue and me (nearing 50 years old) and our youngest son, 11 year old Nick, and three weeks of ocean to cross.

### The Indian Ocean

"I think I shall remember these nights forever. The wind is a steady, sturdy trade from the SSE, and the boat drives down the moon's path, with reflections of the



*Traffic in the Indian Ocean.  
Believed not to be an SASC  
member*



moon on every wave. Every now and then a bird comes to look at this strange, surging beast, then drifts back into the darkness. The self-steering keeps her steadily on course, with little rudder movement. Under one's feet she shudders as she slides fast down a wave, and one feels from her movement a sense of excitement and purpose." (Taken from the log narrative of October 10th.)

Talking to the 30 or so ocean travelling yachties in Durban, South Africa, most said they loved the Pacific, but the Indian Ocean was too blustery, and gave a hard, wet ride. We feel differently, for we found it, our first ocean crossing, an interesting and restful run. Running down the trades was a delight. No reading had prepared me for what this would be like.

### The cyclone season

Below Madagascar, on November 24th, the log reads: "A huge waterspout is close, hissing on the surface and lifting water as a white mist. It must be spinning at 50 knots or more. Moves slowly past us at 5 knots, and at its upper end where it reaches into cloud it has that hollow look with thicker sides. Quite awe-inspiring! We stood by to drop sails, but its course was steady and slow, and it passed us by." In late November a waterspout like this is telling us that the trades are breaking down. Our Mauritius friends had said "Stay longer, the cyclones never come until January." We left because the South Indian Ocean Pilot says otherwise, and within ten days we found it to be right. We also carried new passengers from Mauritius, our first cockroaches, which we never got rid of, and whose progeny may still be on board.

Cyclone Albine, the first cyclone of that year in the Southern Indian Ocean, developed east of Mauritius on the 3rd December, as we were getting towards Durban. The yacht *White Wave* with Queenslanders Steve, Jenny and Garry on board, was caught. Over the ham radio we hear the wind is force 10 or more, the waves are huge. She has been rolled more than once and is dismasted. They later reach Maritius, but their circumnavigation is over. A few days later a Californian yacht, *Drambuie* with an American physicist and his wife on board, disappeared entirely southwest of Mauritius. We understand why the Chinese call cyclonic winds "the devil winds".

### Africa

The thousand miles of South African coast from Durban to Cape Town is said to be the most difficult bit of sailing in a trade wind trip around the world. We had



Rainbird in Cape Town





Farewell to Cape Town

lost our Volvo engine two days out of Mauritius with injector trouble, and could get no spares in Durban. So, engineless, we learnt cautious ways of entering and leaving harbours. *Rainbird* and its cheerful holiday mob on board, took this robust coast in famous style, by turn ghosting south in light northerlies, having a good time in the hospitable harbours, and shouldering into the heavy weather when it was necessary.

*Rainbird* reached Cape Town in a wild southeaster (the normal summer wind, called the Cape Doctor), rounding Cape Point in a mass of white gannets dive bombing pilchards and a feeding frenzy of dolphins. Then a sleigh ride down the grand Cape Peninsula mountains, the Twelve Apostles, to rest and be refitted in the Royal Cape Yacht Club which gives a welcome to all cruising yachts.

### The Southern Ocean

"We start the long trail. Wind dropped. Start engine, which is now running well. Going south to clear the Agulhas Bank." (log on 18th April, 1815 hrs.) We ran three hundred miles straight south of Cape Town to clear the huge shallow bank, made a port turn, and were off along the fortieth parallel, hastening back to Australia. Sue and Nick were back on board, plus a 27 year old South African, Ivan Cave, a very experienced sailor and one of our Durban crew. For this long run *Rainbird* is more heavily laden with food and water than ever before.

"This ocean is immense. We reach 2,000 miles in a few hours and we are not nearly half way." (log narrative on the 4th May, sixteenth day out of Cape Town). On the 24th day at sea, we "sight Amsterdam Island in the cloud ... Hooray!"



We anchored in an open bay below the French weather and satellite tracking station, occupied by 29 Frenchman and 2 Russians for the coming winter, and by their waves and beckoning it seemed the natives were friendly and wanted us to land. The last supply ship for the season to the station had come and gone, so we carried a bag of hastily written letters, and were paid in gallons of fresh water, long crusty bread, beef from wild cattle on the island, green vegetables, and some wine in plastic jars. The anchor came up at 8pm, and we set off to the east.

"Heavy water on deck and in cockpit. Staysail dropped. Storm jib up. Turn to run south before the wind. The sea is now a wild sight, with great sheets of white as waves break. Wind 38 knots, gusting 40." Thirty nine days from Cape Town, and getting close to Albany, we were hit by a three day gale. Steering became more difficult as the seas built up. The bigger, steeper waves looked dangerous, sometimes toppling, with white water then racing down the wave at what looked like 20-30 knots. We tried to avoid them, sliding to port or starboard when we saw them rearing. Occasionally we could not escape them, and the speeding, tumbling water would strike *Rainbird* heavily, shaking the crew below and soaking the helmsman. We had one dorade box broken off, but suffered no major damage. Ivan and I were now finding that steering tired us quickly, and in the worst of it took one hour watches, trying to rest or have a hot soup in the alternate hour, but were steadily getting very weary. Sue cooked hot dishes three times a day which was wonderfully sustaining.

43 days out of Cape Town and with just under 5,500 miles logged and close to land, we passed two vigorous sperm whales, the first we had seen, with blunt heads coming half out of the water as they drove past us and welcomed us to Australia. We entered King Georges Sound at dusk, and crept into Albany. For a tired crew it was good to have *Rainbird* lie against solid Australian wharf timbers, and to realise we were back home again.

### Knockdown

Bass Strait gave *Rainbird* the worst moments of her 18,000 mile voyage. We sheltered from gales in the peaceful America's river in Kangaroo Island until the Adelaide weatherman we phoned said "Go, no strong winds about". The crew was now Ivan, son Jonathan and me, for Sue finally had to take Nick away from his roving life and back to school in Sydney.

Our weatherman had been optimistic, and as we approached the entrance to Bass Strait the wind strengthened, and we were finally surfing at 14 knots down relatively low swells before a following force 9 gale with only the No.2 genoa. The noise of our revolving prop reached a scream as we raced down each wave, and I went up to change the genoa for the storm jib. I had resistance from Jonathan, who was having a ball. "She is easy to steer, and we are going fast in the right direction" was his comment. But the going just seemed too wild, and after calling Ivan to get his wet-weather gear on I left the cockpit and started to move forward, clipped on to the port safety line running down the length of the boat. Too late! The first big wave we had seen in this gale lifted the boat high and she shot down into the trough, Jonathan actually giving a youthful yell at the huge fun of surfing. But things, particularly big waves, often come in threes. The next wave was higher, steeper, and she sped down into the trough, put her nose down, and gave a small broach. Jonathan cranked her straight. Then came our nemesis – a giant of a wave. From half way along the boat I looked up at a vertical wall of water a good deal higher than our forty foot length. The stern shot up, and for a few seconds we were vertical, plastered against the fast moving monster, until it toppled and threw us over and to one side like a surf breaker tossing a dinghy.

*Rainbird* had been thrown up and then over to starboard, lying for a second or two with her mast deep under and cracking both port cross tree base fittings (heavy aluminium castings) as she speared the water. Jonathan had been catapulted



upwards as her stern shot high, over her nose, then knocked back to the deck as she rolled to port and buried herself. Finally he was washed overboard out below the port lifelines – breaking a lifebouy as he went. His personal safety line traced this crazy movement ... back under the lifelines, up 5 ft to where he had gone between the two safety jacklines attached to the backstay, and then down to the attachment point. The helmsman's wooden chair was broken and gone, and minor damage included broken windows in the open cuddy, a dorade box and the shade awning gone, and down below the wine locker had opened and six bottles of red wine had shot upwards, embedding glass into the western red cedar ceiling, and making a cocktail with all the music tapes. The big aluminium dinghy was badly crushed, caught between 10 tonnes of boat and an unforgiving sea as she slewed over and sideways ... and hit the water hard.

How did it happen? The Southern Ocean is full of different swells, which may coincide to make big waves. I should also have been aware of the danger of shoaling water potentially causing big waves to break as we approached Bass Strait. Speed finally held us with the last wave until it did break. Going slower, even towing warps, might have helped and the big wave could have broken after it had passed us. Any boat would have been in a dangerous position if it had been in the spot where that monster vertical wave was finally breaking, but our fast sailing into shallowing water helped to make certain we would be in the wrong spot.

We shared our stories and showed our bruises anchored in Refuge Cove behind Wilson's Promontory. Then had an uneventful trip back to Sydney, finally to bring *Rainbird* back to her mooring in Tambourine Bay. After a year away, we looked at everything with fresh eyes. As the poet T. S. Elliott says:

And the end of our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started,  
And know the place for the first time.

## The wrong way home from Hobart January 1996

Dal Wilson and Keith Radford

Skipper: Hugh O'Neill, Navigator: Keith Radford

Crew: Dal Wilson, Charlie O'Connor, Tony Krakowski

After enjoying a marvellous race to Hobart, the owner-skipper of *Mark Twain*, Hugh O'Neill, decided to get serious and do some real sailing. Hugh felt that the best way to get home was to take a cruise around the west coast of Tasmania.

After an extremely pleasant lunch at the Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania, we departed for a leisurely sail down the D'Entrecasteaux Channel with an overnight stop at Kettering. The next morning after checking the weather we decided that we would make our way to Port Davey. This part of the voyage was extremely exciting; it took us past the most southern part of Australia, Maatsuyker Island, which we rounded at first light the following morning. Whilst this part of Tasmania is notorious for its bad weather, we experienced a light southeaster and smooth seas (even Bill Gale would have enjoyed it).

We arrived at Port Davey and entered Bathurst Channel at midday. We then cruised up into Bathurst Harbour. All of us were amazed at the huge expanse of water that opened up before us. The whole area is now part of a national park and supports no permanent residents. Anchoring in Clyte Cove in the company of two other yachts, we met Eric. Eric was a cruising sailor who was single-handing his 24ft steel sloop around Australia. He was obviously in no hurry as he had been there for some time. He came aboard *Mark Twain* for a chat and drink and did not stop talking for at least three hours. The next day we motored up to Schooner Cove where we inspected an aboriginal ochre cave and midden. Mount

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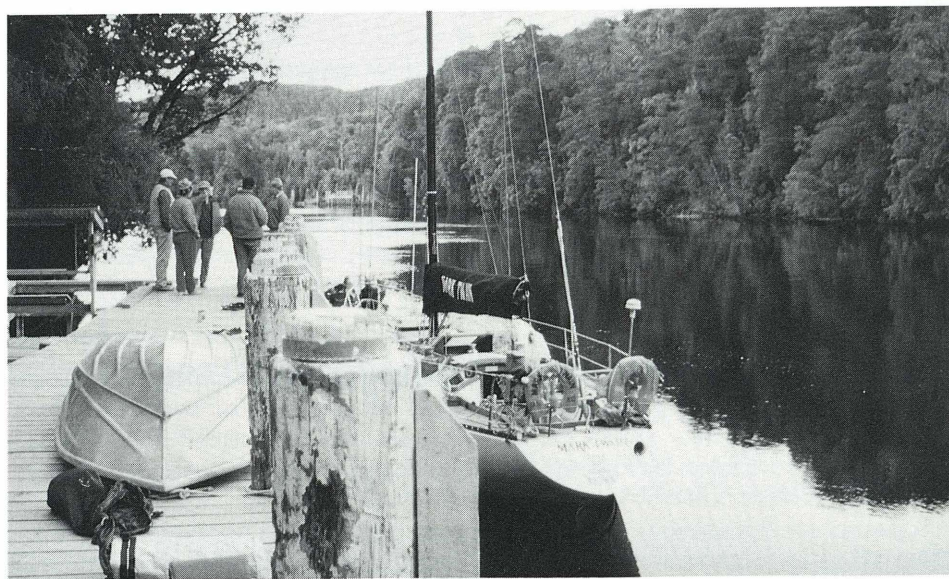
*Club reported a speedboat that was weaving between the yachts at and over the Starting line and MSB took action and notified us of same.*

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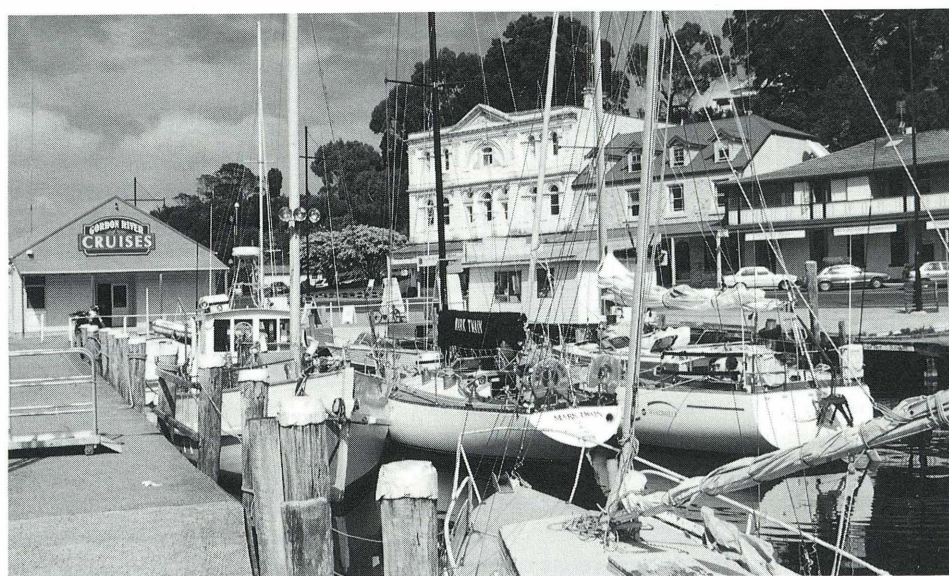




*A quiet little drink on the pier*



*The tranquility of the Gordon River*



*Mark Twain at Strahan*



Nares (995ft) was climbed by Keith, Dal and Tony, basically because it was there, and enjoyed the superb views over Port Davey and Bathurst Harbour.

At six o'clock that night we departed Port Davey for Maquarie Harbour. After a pleasant night sail under spinnaker we arrived at 11.30am the next day. Stories have been told about the notorious "Hells Gates" but when we arrived it was no worse than entering Mosman Bay. After following the leads through the shoals we tied up alongside the wharf at Strahan. As the hotel was only 50 yards away, we did the right thing and went and paid our respects. The next day was taken up with leisurely sight seeing.

Tuesday morning came with mild hangovers and we thought "why not go up the Gordon River as far as we can go"; so we did. There is a landing called Sir John Falls 22 miles from the mouth of the river, where the protests over the Franklin Dam occurred. This is about as far as a keel boat can go. Stemming about 2 knots of current we arrived at 8.30 that evening. As we approached the landing the younger members of the crew took a sudden dive below grabbing for combs, toothbrushes, clean shirts and deodorant. Lo and behold on the landing were nine young, nubile, female white water adventurers. Greetings were exchanged from both sides and we settled down to dinner and a quiet little drink before retiring in preparation for an early start the next morning.

Wednesday morning arrived with a heavy mist and after breakfast we prepared for our trip down river. For the girls, having completed the Franklin River part of their trip, the rapids and white water were over. They faced a day and a half paddle to the mouth of the Gordon to meet their pick up ferry. *Mark Twain* being a very liberated boat offered to ferry them down to their pick up point. For once women actually outnumbered men on the mighty *Mark Twain*. The trip back down the river was memorable. Entertaining ladies and seeing the Gordon River at its best, a mirror-like surface, huge hills covered in huon pine and the most fantastic reflections on the river itself. In fact, it became difficult at times to gauge distance from the shore and to the next bend. We dropped our cargo at the ferry pick up point, then sailed the length of Macquarie Harbour to Strahan. We were met at the wharf by our new-found friends and an extremely pleasant evening at the Strahan Pub ensued.

Time was getting on and we needed to make our departure for King Island. Once again we passed through Hells Gates in very calm weather and set course for Grassy Harbour. Oh No, we've got to set the spinnaker again! Thirty hours later we dropped spinnaker and entered Grassy Harbour on King Island. We spent a very pleasant 24 hours sampling lobster, grand steaks and cheeses before setting sail for Wilsons Promontory.

Arriving at Refuge Cove, a delightful all-weather anchorage, we spent the night before setting off for Eden and the long haul up the NSW coast. Five days later battling adverse currents and headwinds we arrived back in Sydney. This was a small price to pay for the delights of the west coast of Tasmania and Bass Strait. It is impossible to do justice to the trip in a short narrative like this; you had to be on the boat to fully appreciate how wonderful it really was.

From a very lucky crew, many thanks to Hugh O'Neill for making it possible.

## Sailing in the Greek Islands. August 1986

### Bob and Val Skinner

In July 1986 my wife Val and I decided to combine a trip to Canada with a sailing holiday in the Greek Islands with our friends Dick and Shirley Downes. Val was an enthusiastic member of the crew of our two boats, *Mehitabel* a Thunderbird and *Aleena* a Compass 28, sailing and racing with the Amateurs.

Dick and Shirley who had been members of the Club's Cruising Division had acquired *Catriona* a 31 foot cruising catamaran, which had been built in England



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*Club to sponsor Thunderbird Class and if sufficient starters a Championship to be held.*

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for his brother. It was designed for cruising French canals. The Downes for several years avoided Sydney winters by sailing on *Catriona* in the Mediteranean. Friends were invited to accompany them on legs of their voyages and we were offered the leg from Kos to Samos, islands in the Aegean Sea. *Catriona* was a very sturdy craft, fitted for comfortable cruising, complete with a library, a modest sail plan, and two 20HP Bukh Deisels.

It was arranged that we would meet at Kos on 4 August 1986. This of course took some doing as we had been touring in Canada and the Downes had to arrive at Kos on that day after sailing in Turkish waters. Nevertheless we managed it, much later than scheduled, arriving at a very touristy town with a long crowded quay. I had innocently expected a smallish resort, but this place was crowded with discos, and noisy holiday makers, many riding smoky two stroke motor bikes.

We spent the next day checking out the town, endured another noisy night and set out next morning for Vathi on the Island of Kalimnos. Our introductory sail was in rough seas in a force 5 wind. Val and I soon settled down to sailing on a catamaran which was much different to our experience on monohulls. Even though the trip was only about 13 miles, the smog requires careful navigation. The islands are mountainous. As we approached I expected the wind on our nose to ease but it became very boisterous due to the chilling downdraft offshore breeze from the mountain tops.

Vathi proved to be a very interesting place. The approach is into a narrow deep fiord like harbour. There was a strong cross-wind which made steering and berthing difficult. Shortly after berthing, a caique, a small local boat, came in and moored at the quay. We were amazed when it disgorged about 120 goats, which on release expressed their relief on the quay very liberally. Vathi is a pleasant non touristy small village set in a fertile valley behind the rocky port entrance.

We left early the next morning to miss rough seas but were unsuccessful. The trip to Port Alinda on the island of Leros was about 15 miles.

Next morning, 8th August, we had a glassy run to Lipso which turned out to be a typical Greek island resort having a long quay lined with well patronised tavernas. We injoyed surveying the shops, had a walk and swim and a typical Greek meal of calamari, veal chops in tomato and oil with fresh baked bread.

The next day we had an easy sail to Patmos, which is a tourist town and port. Patmos to Arkiwas sailed in force 6 head winds, which later dropped to force 5. This time our navigation was slightly incorrect. We went into a delightful apparently deserted inlet. When we were mooring our ladies noticed nudist frivolity on the beach; we were in the wrong inlet! Our destination was just around a small headland and proved to be a great spot with a small local population and a big rock to tie up to. Close by a very small friendly taverna manned by a woman saw that the local males were kept supplied with tobacco, food and grog for long lasting and earnest discussion whilst their wives were 'properly' at home caring for the screaming kids. We were made very welcome and enjoyed a meal she had prepared. A local man observing the Australian flag became very sentimental. He had lived at Maroubra, had returned to Greece, but wished he had stayed in Australia.

11 August. We left for Gaideros which was only a two hour run. Time and distance were saved by sailing through very shallow water between two islands. Clear water, sharp observation, together with the shallow draft of a catamaran made this possible. Gaideros proved to be a very pleasant place, an uncrowded quay and a pleasant taverna for a typical meal.

12 August. Early next morning we heard Dick letting go the lines and we were off to the port of Pythagorion on the island of Samos. The trip of about 10 miles was through rough confused water, requiring concentrated steering and careful navigation. The Turkish shore was nearby and Greek/Turkish mutual distrust could cause us difficulties if we strayed in Turkish waters. Our navigation was



spot on and we tied up at a quay with room to spare. After some time we realised that a raw sewer was discharging directly under the boat but it was too late to move. A spot is a spot after all in a crowded harbour. The port was the home on the ancient despot Praxilites who developed the harbour, built a temple and built a tunnel eight feet wide and eight feet high 1200 feet long to convey water to the port from the other side of Samos island.

We spent the night on board but as the Downes wanted to leave on 13th August for Kusadasi in Turkey and thence to the Dardenelles and our flight to Athens was on 14th August we attempted to find accommodation for the night. All beds on these islands are booked months in advance, but by dint of meeting a friendly Greek who had a pizza restaurant in a mountain village well out of town and who had spent some years in Australia, accommodation for the night was arranged with a couple of "old blokes." They turned out to be a very aged old man and his wife who spoke no English. They were kindly disposed as well as a bit fearful of us. Their home was in a tiny village house off a steep narrow roadway. It was built of stone rubble with very low headroom and was extremely stuffy. When we retired for the night we were locked in the bedroom behind a substantial iron gate. Our pizza friend had arranged for a taxi to pick us up early the next morning for our flight to Athens for our return trip via Yugoslavia and Canada.

The tensions in Yugoslavia were palpable compared to the friendliness of Greece. We consider ourselves fortunate having the Downes as friends. By cruising under sail they gave us this wonderful opportunity to see some of the Greek islands and to meet some of the people in a way not available to the general tourist.

## Two years on and it's *POLARIS* for me

John Quinn April 1996

People have asked how I like the 25 year old Cole 43 *Polaris* ; she is a true joy. She's not a competitive IMS racer particularly around the "cans", but I never expected her to be. I like Saturday racing, but the sailing I really enjoy is long ocean racing and cruising; yes including Sydney-Hobart. For that she is safe, comfortable and fun. Although, not competitive under the IMS, *Polaris* still won her division in the last Sydney-Hobart race. However, we were not up against the top IMS boats which beat us on the overall result. Some might take the results of the last Sydney-Hobart race and the success of some of the old boats to argue that the IMS rule is working. However, one or two long races are not an indicative sample and you only need look at the results of the RPYC SOPS to see what I mean.

For us, the first real test of *Polaris* was the 1995 Lord Howe race which was extremely fast as we finished the 408 miles in under 59 hours. The conditions were most unpleasant with a 30-40 knot northerly whipping up a nasty chop for 30 hours. On the first night I came on deck to find the Watch had pulled up the spray dodger. Naturally, I castigated them severely, but thankfully mutiny was in the air so the "dodger" stayed and I scuttled under it. Despite the conditions *Polaris* was dry, comfortable, and well ventilated. She eased herself through the seas without slamming and crashing. Lying in my comfortable warm bunk, I remembered how my previous two boats would have felt and sounded as they crashed off the seas.

On the last day a southerly came in and we finished at midnight. A big stew went on the stove and one forward hand consumed a case of beer, as we waited for morning light to enter the lagoon. In the morning Clive Wilson escorted a number of boats into a holding area where we dropped anchor to await the tide. I had never been to Lord Howe before and couldn't believe my eyes. The crystal clear lagoon backed by the magnificent mountains Lidgbird and Gower with their sheer grey cliffs broken by the green rain forest made me feel as if I was in a

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*June: Directors and two Club members stood guarantors for the Bank overdraft. Old Boatshed demolished by working bee Saturday and builder had commenced work.*

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picture post card. I sat on my beautiful yacht, with a glass of malt scotch, looking at this magic place and reflected that this was what ocean racing used to be about and should be again. After a couple of hours Clive Wilson came back and escorted us across the lagoon to moorings south of Rabbit Island, then the crews were ferried ashore to be met by the bus from Pine Trees.

The second test was the Sydney-Hobart. At the start I stupidly allowed us to get trapped and we were late on the gun, but at the weather end which was the game plan. Then *Polaris* took charge, with a bone in her teeth, she sailed through boat after boat, pointing higher and "footing" faster than we had seen her sail before. She had a mind of her own and was about the fourth boat off the second line to round the offshore mark, ahead of a number of boats that owed her time.

Typically for the Hobart race there were a number of wind shifts and to do well you had to be on the right side of them. The weather forecasts were remarkably accurate. Probably, the critical point in our division was the last day when the forecast was for sea breezes. We were on the rhumb line with a very light SSE wind laying us into the "Sisters". It looked like disaster until the wind backed to the East and allowed us to crawl along the rocks; boats farther to sea would not have been as fast as we changed from sprung headsail to shy 30/20 kite. Looking back at radio "sched" reports there is no doubt that *Polaris* was always sailed faster relative to other boats in her division. *King Billy* and *Mark Twain* were the main threats, but the former was trapped wide on the last day and *Mark Twain* sat with little wind.

Polaris





Hobart was fun and we met up with the other rogues from the SASC. We drank the rum owed by *Mark Twain*. Then met up for New Year's Eve and Day visiting our favourite haunts, singing along with Kate Maclurcan on guitar and telling tall tales but true from our legendary past. Once again I was reminded that this is what Ocean Racing is about.

Nev Fielding and Tom Dawson joined us for the trip home. We intended to do some serious cruising so the drum for the furling headsail was attached to the forestay and the rubber ducky and outboard, which had been freighted down, were stowed. The plan was to sail down the D'Entrecasteaux Channel then slowly make our way north stopping at Lady Barron (Flinders Island). We were unprepared for the sheer beauty of one of Tassie's best kept secrets. The D'Entrecasteaux Channel reminded me of the Fjords of West Scotland with pasture and forest coming down to the water edge and a background of magnificent blue mountains. The valleys holding the morning mist house a mass of small bays in which to hide and protect a number of small villages for the cruising yachtsman to visit. The Huon River which can be explored for many miles, runs into the channel.

We spent our first night in Barnes Bay, a deep and well protected anchorage; a truly pretty spot where a few boats rested peacefully while sheep grazed on the lush green pasture. Here I "wet a line" for the first time but dare not tell the tale for fear of Tommy's wrath.

The following day we motored across to Kettering which has a good marina and bought a few provisions and bait. We set sail for Port Esperance to visit Dover where we had a beer, then sailed on to delightful Tin Pot Bay. This was quite a different landscape to the previous night as we now snugged into the good old Aussie bush. We were sorry to leave the D'Entrecasteaux Channel. Tommy said he thought it was better than the Bay of Islands; it also has the advantage of being a wee bit closer. It's probably appropriate that the only head wind during the trip home was across Storm Bay to Port Arthur. A fascinating place with an entrance guarded by huge cliffs opening into a long deep valley. We could not help wondering what those men and women must have thought many years ago as they sailed into this rugged place. I admit to getting a strange feeling when sailing into the Port.

We motor sailed to Tasman Island. The charts and pilot book indicated that there was navigable water between the island and mainland and we had seen fishing boats go through, but none of us had tried it. Tommy said the Halversons had sailed through so we decided to take the short cut. The crew were silent as we entered what seemed to be a small gap in a huge cliff. A line of white water lay across our path and the depth sounder showed the bottom rising quickly from over 50 meters. It looked like a tide race and were all relieved when we passed through the rough water where the least depth was 8 meters. Safe enough in good conditions but I suspect not a place to be in a big sea. We saw the remnants of the landing stage and flying fox used to provision the Lighthouse Keepers not so long ago. Sad to see the end of an era and I must express a concern about the absolute reliance on electronics; maybe it's my age.

The wind came in from the SE and we had a pleasant fast sail inside Maria Island on to Spring Bay. We motored slowly up the narrow channel to Triabunna and although it was almost low tide we only nudged the bottom once, sliding I suspect over a log. We found *Witchdoctor* beside the jetty and pulled alongside. The friendly publican allowed us to use the shower and this was followed with a few drinks and an excellent dinner.

The sou'easter was still blowing the next day so we sailed across to Coles Bay. The "Hazards" formed from pink granite, rounded by the weather to a beautiful natural sculpture, look over the Southern corner of the bay. We anchored for a short time and the shore party indulged in Devonshire Tea. We then sailed quietly down the shore to spend the night at Bryans Corner where we devoured the best meal of the trip. The two younger members of the crew (Dave and Bjorn) were



dispatched to negotiate the purchase of 2 fresh crays with the fishermen. Meanwhile the anglers caught four nice flathead. We then headed north sailing past Wineglass Bay, one of my favourite places. A minor mechanical problem prevented us visiting Lady Baron and we made for Eden.

After a night in Eden and we were back on the sou'easter that carried us to Pittwater. We took nine days to return from Hobart but only spent three nights at sea. The weather was kind and our marvellous yacht made the cruise enjoyable. Her gear is easy to work. We have a furling genoa and mainsail with full length battens on a Antal mast slide system. Anchoring is not a major chore with an electric winch, deck ware and proper bow roller which keeps the pick clear of the hull, so it can be left in place while moving around in sheltered waters. We always stow the anchor when at sea. *Polaris* is heavy displacement by today's standards (ten tonnes) so she doesn't move around on every ripple and the waves from the neighbours' outboard dinghy don't make you feel as if you're living in an oil drum.

What of the future? Well I'll be out there in *Polaris* sheltering behind the dodger when things get rough. I have to go back to Tasmania and Lord Howe and there is still so much of this country to see and explore. How much is actually ocean racing is hard to say because I fear my sport is heading for the rocks, in Australia. The Hobart could go the same way as the Montague Island race. My reasons for pessimism are threefold.

First, I remain today as concerned as I was two years ago, about the style of boat that the IMS rule seems to favour and their suitability for long offshore racing in the Tasman Sea and Bass Strait. There are many experienced seamen, writers and naval architects who have expressed similar feelings to mine.

Secondly, I don't believe the IMS rule delivers what it promised, that is a fair handicapping system for all boats. The heavy displacement boats appear to be significantly disadvantaged. These represented over 40 per cent of the IMS fleet in the last Hobart race. I have owned both a Farr 37 and a J35 and know how they can do a horizon job on heavy boats that have similar handicaps. The divisional structure is supposed to take care of this short-coming and so it could if race organisers were sensitive to it. But they seem to split the fleet between "racer" and "cruiser racer" and then use predicted boat speed solely to determine the divisions. No consideration appears to be given the displacement to length ratios. Thus in the Hobart race you find *Polaris* in the same division as a Farr 37. Added to this the veterans trophy was open to boats designed prior to 1986 and therefore included the light IOR boats of the 80s.

Thirdly, sponsorship and professional crews are a fact of life in the sport. I have no problem with this, but I, like many other owners, have no interest in sailing against these super-boats. I assume they have no interest in competing against a 25 year old boat either, it's hardly a contest. I was sad to read that George Snow was retiring from ocean racing. Apparently the fun and camaraderie is no longer there for him.

These represent the risks to events such as Sydney-Hobart. If a major proportion of boat owners cannot afford, or do not want, the boats required to win and there is not an alternative competition for the boats they can afford or want to own, the number of competitors will gradually dwindle. Eventually the publicity falls, the status of the event declines and the super-boats go elsewhere. Perhaps. I shouldn't care because two boats make a race and Hugh O'Neill in *Mark Twain* is a good competitor and always "on for a bet".

I believe the solution could be to form an Amateur Association which forms strict rules on boat type and crew. The boats should be restricted in size (say 29 to 55'). The minimum angle of positive ability increased. Minimum displacement to length and maximum beam to length plus draft to length ratios for various lengths of boat. Exotic materials for hull and spar completely banned along with advertising and sponsorship. The idea would be to create a ball park in which IMS rule can handicap boats fairly and at the same time ensure they are truly all purpose

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#### 1964

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*AW Merrington and JA Middleton to be a committee empowered to collect all available historical records of the Club and to arrange for their tabulation and storage in a safe place.*

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sea boats. Crew swinging can be discouraged by ensuring there is little to be gained due to the design. Crews must be entirely amateur. For this to work it would have to be managed outside the AYF by the boat owners. People from the industry should not form any part of the management committee.

I daresay by now there are readers thinking that I have finally lost my marbles. Probably true but there seem to be others with the same disease.

## Cruise to Thursday Island and back

John Morris

After two years of preparation *Phantom* was ready for our planned cruise through the 1200 NM of the Great Barrier Reef and on to Thursday Island.

We commenced our first leg in July 1985 after leaving Sydney to head north in a 25 knot southerly with obligatory black clouds. The freshening conditions ensured a quick first leg, even under the extra weight of our 1.5 tons of creature comforts, fuel, water, and provisions, loaded on board for the trip.

*Phantom* carried two dinghies, a hard aluminium 2.5m plus a 3.0m rubber inflatable with a 10 HP Mercury motor which proved invaluable for reef viewing later in our cruise.

Following a previous trip to the Whitsundays we made the decision to carry all working sails on deck with only the two storm sails below so as not to clutter below decks. Lillian had designed and made up two special long deck sail bags to be latched along port and starboard bows, so with two sails in deck bags and one on the wire our sail locker was complete.

By the time we reached Coffs Harbour Lillian and I were down to summer dress during the daylight hours and by Mooloolaba for all hours, and also for the remainder of the 18 month cruise. A small diversion while sailing up the NSW coast was our 36 NM trip up the Clarence River to Grafton. At that period we were still able to have the highway bridge at Harwood lifted to enable *Phantom's* 15m mast to pass through.

By the time we reached our first tropical island, Lady Musgrave, 50 NM off Bundaberg, the southern winter was well and truly behind us so we swam and dived on and over the local coral and the unusual reef surrounding this beautiful island, a wonderful first look at the Barrier Reef.

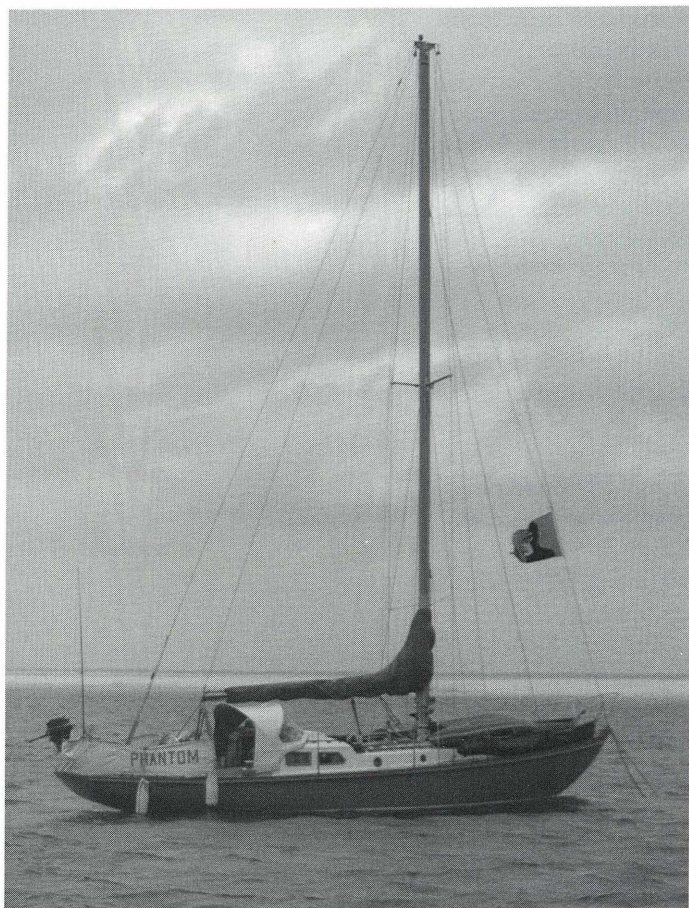
A stopover in Gladstone enabled us to meet fellow club members Mick and Cathy Earl who organised a welcoming roast dinner; it was a great night. Mick and Cathy owned a sister yacht to *Phantom*, named *Canimi*. Their yacht was built in the UK and sailed from Canada to Australia by Mick, Cathy and family. *Phantom* was built at the Royal Brighton Yacht Club in Melbourne.

Mick who had sailed *Canimi* through the narrows at Gladstone helped us with our preplanning for *Phantom's* trip through the same area. Mick estimated we would pass over the lowest point with 300 mm clearance at high tide. We were lucky and cleared with 500 mm. During low tide this shallow point becomes the road on and off Curtis Island. The main navigation problem in the narrows is two different tide times as you pass through. We were now in 6 m tide country once on the Great Keppel side of the narrows.

We sailed on to holiday brochure type locations, the months slipping by hardly noticed as we visited many islands including Great Keppel, Percy, Lindeman, Brampton, Hamilton, Hayman, Magnetic, Hinchinbrook and Fitzroy. With the arrival of the cyclone season we were reminded it was time to stop and look for a safe haven, so turned south passing Dunk and Hinchinbrook Islands to a safe berth located in the Ross River at Townsville.

During our stop in Townsville Cyclone Winifred formed and hit the coast 70 miles north at Ingham. It was a busy night for all boat people. We stayed on board. The wind peaked in Townsville at 70 km; at our anchorage it reached 50 km and it was lucky that the cyclone struck at low tide.





Phantom at "Morris Island"

We had already unloaded our motorbike in Mackay so took the opportunity to tour and look around while waiting for the new season. We sold the bike before leaving Townsville so we were now down to a pushbike to travel inshore; later this was given away to a mission at Cape York.

With the new season we sailed on to Port Douglas and were able to borrow a car from friends to visit the tablelands. Cooktown was the last chance to pick up supplies and fuel before reaching Thursday Island some 500 NM north so we carried spare food, fuel and water for two months. The stop at Lizard Island 60 NM north of Cooktown was without doubt the highlight of our cruise. We stopped for ten days travelling north and another ten days later on our return trip. At the peak on this island one can view the outer reef 12 NM east; Cook's and Cormorant Passages are also easily seen. On the home trip we sailed into Cormorant Passage to swim and dive among the giant Potato Cod, some estimated to be 70 years old and 3 m in length and friendly enough to eat from our hands.

Two months passed as we cruised on to Thursday Island from Lizard stopping at Flinders and Stanley Islands to view Aboriginal burial caves and paintings. Further north we stopped at a famous historical home built by the Jardine family which is preserved at Somerset in Albany Passage.

We had reached our goal, Cape York, 15 months after leaving Sydney and were excited cruising the area for three weeks. Our return sailing plan was to be home in

three months, while revisiting some of our favourite locations as we headed south. We arrived back in Sydney within 30 minutes of the start of the 1987 leg of the Sydney BOC around the world race and it was a thrill to see our Aussie yachtsmen heading out to sea.

It was a time to break out our last bottle of Champagne saved for this moment as we lowered sails, slowly motoring *Phantom* the last mile to the Club's wharf in Mosman Bay. Our dream cruise was complete; Lillian and I together with *Phantom* had covered 6000 NM safely and without mishap. We had prepared *Phantom* with loving care and she had looked after us both throughout all the prevailing conditions experienced during our 18 months cruise.

The dream goes on.

## SASC and the Coastal Cruising Club

The Coastal Cruising Club was founded in 1969 by live-aboard boat owners who had formed a lobby group to oppose State government legislation to stop people living aboard their boats. Harbourside landowners were tired of having their million dollar views spoilt by washing hanging in the rigging. They were not successful although some concessions were made when legislation was finally passed which at least allowed boat owners to stay aboard their boats overnight for some days in a month.

Members continued to meet and from those early beginnings a club made up of boat owners whose common interest was the enjoyment of their boats, flourished. The association with the Amateurs began 18 months after the formation of the Coastal Cruising Club when they commenced having their meetings in



the Amateurs Clubhouse; and what better clubhouse is there on the Harbour? Coastal Cruising Club members have long enjoyed the perfect nautical ambience of SASC on the shores of Mosman Bay. The SASC and CCC have had quite a number of joint members over the years who have enjoyed both racing and cruising.

Very early in its history the Coastal Cruising Club encouraged its members to undertake long coastal and ocean voyages. Every year members head for the Whitsundays and the Great Barrier Reef or Lord Howe Island. Some go further afield with two recent voyages to Alaska and another in progress. Members have sailed to many parts of the world and several circumnavigations have been made. At monthly meetings in the SASC Clubhouse, often packed with 80 people, the screen is often up whilst slides are shown and members regaled with stories of swaying palms, tropical islands and distant lands. Of course any members of SASC are always welcome.

*A popular raft up of the Coastal Cruising Club in America Bay, Broken Bay, 1997*

