

Port Stephens and Beyond Cruise

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Cruise Leader; Garry and Cathy Chalmers

5-7 August 2016
Day 0 – Friday

Woke up Friday morning at home, plan was for Odette to take the day off school and no work for me – who needs to work anyway? A little cloudy outside and possible showers forecast for later in the day. Middle of winter as well, meaning it was going to be cold. Always the optimist I preceded to pack the boat and be on time at the ramp – launch plan was for lunch or was that a lunch plan for launch?



But which ramp? Garry the cruise captain was going to make the call on the day on which ramp to launch at. A compromise between Little Bay near the marina – but with no jetty and exposed to the North, or Soldiers Point an hour or so from the marina with two floating jetties and generally described as an easy launch. Or even Lemon Tree Passage, which is Warren's favourite.

We headed to Soldiers Point ramp. On the way from Newcastle it really started to come down heavy. Always the optimist, I thought it was only a passing shower.

Arrived at the ramp. Nobody here. Still raining. A phone call to Garry indicated he still hadn't left home. I suggested we launch at Soldiers Point, as the ramp looked good and the wind from the South West wasn't causing a problem. We had lunch and watched the rain.

The rain eased a little and I started setting the boat up. Magnifique arrived at Lemon Tree Passage for launch at Ramp 1. I guessing having a 50hp on the back of the Mac means motoring time isn't such an issue. Warren was in the rain too and loving it as well.



Eventually the others started to arrive - Aquila and Coconut Duck. I had finished setting up by this stage just as the sun started to come out and the rain stopped. Magnifique was soon spotted on the water coming from Lemon Tree Passage and also joined us at the jetty.

The ramp was pretty good for launching. A little slippery in sections, but other than that I would definitely recommend it. Garry had an interesting launching method which involved slamming the front of his Sonata into the side of jetty. He had a bow line attached to the jetty when he launched, which was maybe a little short, as it quickly went taught when the boat slid off the trailer at speed and caused the boat to recoil into the jetty. No damage done. Sonata's are tough as it turns out. Didn't seem to bother the pelicans either who were there for the amusement. And no, I'm not a pelican, these were actual pelicans.



We headed off, around the point and made a bee line to the Marina, except Magnifique which waited for Only Time who was arriving later. Motoring was easy as there was little wind and the rain had settled any chop. Garry almost had us going to the Anchorage Marina. As we got closer I started to think "wow, this looks good", however he quickly realised that wasn't our marina – we had something a little more affordable booked.

We kept going and were greeted by a dolphin at the entry to the D'albora marina. We had a bunch of berths at the marina side by side and everybody had no trouble reversing in.



There was lots of talk about the best way to tie up the boats. One springer line or two - the usual talk at the jetty. There was no talk of three springer lines. Some plugged into power and some checked out the amenities.

It wasn't long before Magnifique and Only Time arrived. Humm Along (John and Lisa) were still on their way and were in two minds as to which ramp to launch at. Eventually they decided to launch at Soldiers Point, but they would sleep overnight with the boat on the trailer and launch in the morning.

A light rain began to fall and it was cold which made it a little miserable. Most of us had a quiet night, hoping the next day would be better.



Day 1 - Saturday

Woke up to clouds and light rain. Wasn't the greatest night sleep. There was a little swell that came through the marina and knocked the boats just enough to be disturbing. Should have stayed at the Anchorage. Everyone had the same complaints.

Cruise Captain Garry made the call after breakfast that there was no planned sailing that day due to the inclement weather. There were no complaints as it really was wet and cold. Instead Garry had organised some on-shore activities which included walking up to Nelson Head where the Marine Rescue centre was located. The plan was to get a special NHTYA tour of the facilities.



Some of us walked, and some of us drove up to Nelson Head. On the way John explained that Fly Point is a nature reserve and a great place for snorkelling. I'll be making a special trip in Summer to check that out.



We made it to the Marine Rescue where we stopped at the café for lunch. The food was really good and we had extra company from the local bird life. Lisa thought she was going to lose an eye when one of the birds came a little close for comfort. Sybil ended up with her hot tea all over her shorts when Lisa did whatever she needed to do to protect herself from the attacking bird. Following this the staff at the café issued water spray repellent to squirt at the birds to ward them off. Sybil got another cup of tea and Brian was armed with a weapon (squirty bottle)



Garry had the cruise quiz in full swing. We already had most of the answers covered and what we didn't have we quickly Googled on our phones. Odette and I received a block of chocolate for our efforts.

Looking out from the Café we could see Shoal bay and the headlands and the possibilities of sailing our boats out there and beyond. Who knows once we got out there where we would stop – NZ, why not South America.



Whilst I was pondering this thought, Garry started telling everyone about his first time outside the headlands and how on the way back from the islands, the side stay broke and the mast, sail, rigging etc. fell in the water (sorry I meant ocean). Definitely, inspiring stuff for heading out. But most importantly I now realised why he asked us in the quiz what the Marine Rescue telephone number was. He used this number when his mast was in the water to call in to say he was in a little trouble – I don't think his radio was working. He didn't need help in the end, but it probably was very reassuring knowing they could come and assist if it all got too hard.

After lunch we got a tour of the Marine Rescue facility. It is run by volunteers and it is voluntary for boaties to call in on your way out or way back when leaving the port. They explained that there is even a phone app that allows you to call in/out, however a radio check is still a good idea. My thoughts are that we should use this service.



Next to the café was a gift shop too. Odette got a dolphin brooch and a magnet for the fridge. Not sure what Lisa and Sybil got, but they spent a long time looking.



The afternoon was pretty lazy. The rain started again. For dinner we all went to the Hog's Breath Café located at the Marina. Tom and the Girls (K-man) came too, as well as Graham and Charmaine (Crosswind) and Phil and Kim (Sail Away).

Day 2 - Sunday

The sun. Oh my god the sun. And calm conditions. Still an average sleep due to the boat bump from the swell in the marina, or was that due to the extra beers and boat talk I participated in over at Magnifique after dinner. Maybe I needed three stringer lines.

Everybody was out on the jetty ready to see what Garry had planned for us. I thought we would definitely try for at least New Zealand. He did say we might try for one of the islands outside the headlands. Surely he meant New Zealand.

Not to be. Garry made the call that the swell period was too short. 9 secs was the forecast and he would prefer 15 seconds. I had never even considered the swell period. Why don't they use the term frequency? So New Zealand was called off and even Cabbage Tree Island was too much. Instead we would head out to Shoal Bay and then venture across the mouth of the port to experience the swell and see what wildlife we could see. Hopefully some dolphins! Maybe an albino whale!



With the sun out and a light breeze in our hair (for those that have it) we left the marina and all its comforts – hot showers, fuel, shops, café's and bars behind us.

Jibs were raised by most. Only Time had both sails out (main reefed) and motor off. We skirted around Fly Point, and were quickly at Shoal Bay where we picked up a mooring. The wind was from the North West and it was a little uncomfortable, however I could imagine in the summer with a North Easterly this bay being perfect for lunch. Garry explained that the swimming and snorkelling here is magic in summer.



We didn't hang around long, before taking off across the mouth of the Port. It wasn't long before the swell was noticeable. Some of the club members were under sail and having a great time. Nobody was dry retching yet - at least not on our boat. The swell was actually quite manageable and the scenery was breathtaking. You really feel like you are out there in the elements. The scale of the Yaccaba headland was amazing. Clouds were still caught in the headland which made it look Jurassic Park like. The birds, the ocean, the waves hitting the headland make this a special place. I can see why it is such a tourist spot. Even with the tourist cruise boats present, it still didn't feel spoilt. I would love to go and visit the islands outside.



We continued onto Jimmy's beach and finally some Dolphins were spotted in the distance next to one of the tourist cruise boats. We then sailed across from Jimmy's beach back to Fly Point and then onto the marina where we all squeezed onto the public jetty.



Humm Along didn't quite have a textbook entry into the marina. The plan was for them to enter between the marina rock wall and the last boat tied on the marina. There was plenty of space however John was having trouble balancing speed and steering capability. All I remember is John about to jump off the boat and onto a submerged rock on the rock wall to stop the boat hitting the wall. Good thing that Lisa had by this stage thrown a stern rope to the

adjacent boat allowing the boat to be pulled to a stop. Someone yelled "Just stay on the boat" to John, which he did and then everything was all good. Great teamwork all-round.



Lunch was lunch. It was extra special for Garry who had a Gaytime from the shop.



The plan after lunch was to head to Fame Cove to show those that hadn't seen it, what it was like. The breeze by this time had picked up and so we all set sail with the wind behind us. It was a really nice sail down towards the channel. Odette even took charge of the rudder and told me what to do. The tide was heading out and taking about 1 and half knots off our boat speed. Later, with the sails down and the motor at full throttle we were still able to achieve 5 and half knots through the channel.



Fame Cove had all the moorings taken by either Sail Boats or Motor Cruisers. We had a quick look and turned around to head back to Soldiers Point. Retrieval at the ramp was pretty uneventful and everybody made their way home in high spirits.



Many thanks to Garry and Cathy from Coconut Duck for organising the weekend and making the call to not try to make it to New Zealand. I didn't have enough supplies anyway.