

Hunter River Cruise -

8th to 10th June 2019

By John and Carol on "Liquid lunch"



** Rafted up on Stockton Wharf awaiting the return of skippers delivering their trailers to Morpeth*

Friday afternoon and the weather was holding nicely as Carol and I arrived at the North Stockton launching ramp to be greeted by Rob and Sybil, (Scallywag), who had already explored Stockton down to the ferry, taken a ride across to Queens Wharf and back, then strolled back again to the launching ramp. John and Dot (Jocimo) were next to arrive with Phil and Kim (Sail Away) hard on their heels, closely followed by Graeme and Charmain (Crosswind).

Dusk was upon us, but it didn't deter 3 boats from launching and rafting up to the dogleg pontoon for a reasonably restful night. Whilst alcohol could not be blamed, Rob, unfortunately misplaced his footing and fell through the aluminium frame on the end of the pontoon, skinning his shin and leaving his brightly coloured red signature on the pontoon frame. At this point, the starry sky and the brightly lit industrial side of the Hunter River mouth presented a magical fairyland for all to gaze at and fall asleep by.

Cars and trailers needed to be moved to Morpeth for Monday's retrieval and many thanks to Glen and Andrew for their support ferrying total strangers from Morpeth to the launching ramp on Friday night and Saturday morning. Saturday morning brought more sunshine with the arrival of John and Lisa (Humm Along) and Hart and Pam (Farr & Beyond) and our departure from the ramp on the incoming tide.

I guess our silence, as we gazed round us, was because we were all gobsmacked by the enormity of this waterway. A full-blown yacht race could be held right there from the launching ramp. Push on we did, under the middle arch of the Stockton Bridge (4 – 5 m deep) and into the North Channel of the Hunter. With the width of the river dwarfing the boats, the Kooragang Island Nature Reserve wetlands lined by massive growths of bamboo, and the man-made rock river-training walls,

*The magnificent
wide Hunter River*



There was plenty to gaze upon as we made our way to the Ash Island wharf where rafting up and a picnic lunch on shore was the order of the day. Thence on under the Hexham Bridge (15 m depth of water) and on to Raymond Terrace. I, and many members of the fleet, have never tied up to pylons. Fortunately, under the expert guidance of our tour leaders, Phil and Kim, we all learnt this much needed art, as when we awoke next morning, we found ourselves safe and soundly moored, but 1.5M below the level we were at when we retired to bed.

Saturday night at the Junction Hotel can only be described as fabulous; a pleasant way to relax and get to know a great bunch of sailors. Sunday morning and an incoming tide again sent us on our way to Duckenfield and lunch.



Bygone eras along the way.

Surprise! Surprise! A new way to moor! Aim at the shore and the 1 metre plus high reeds thickly lining the bank, open the throttle and charge. When the boat stops you are moored. Then take a bunch of reeds and a rope and tie them together with a REED knot. (This will definitely have to be added to the Scouts and Guides list of knots.

The Reed Knot



Lunch over, our next stop was the Hunter Rowing Club riverbank and lawns where this time it was stern into the shore (with a strong outgoing tide and lots of attempts by everyone). This is where we really needed our Princess Planks to access the shore. Then hot showers, courtesy of the rowing club followed by “Happy Hour” on the lawn covered banks under a full size outdoor gas heater which somehow Phil managed to conceal in his boat till this moment.



On shore camp fire!

Monday morning, amidst teams of rowers (I have never been close up to these sculls, they are longer than my boat) we pulled away for the final leg of our journey. Liquid Lunch had hit the bottom with its motor, again!, the night before and couldn't return the engine to its rightful place. So it was Hinton Wharf for us to try and fix it whilst the fleet pushed on towards Paterson and the shallows, which eventually turned them around before reaching Paterson.

After about 1 1/2 hours tied up to the Hinton Wharf, and a lot of frustration with the engine mount, I decided to read the engine owner's manual and my problem was fixed in 5 minutes! A walk ashore revealed Hinton has a very pleasant pub with covered seating with well-manicured park lawns right beside the wharf, which we must visit again and stop for lunch.

*Update from the rest of the fleet whilst Liquid Lunch had time out.

We continued up the Paterson River, slowly winding and dodging obstacles such as dead cows, sticks & the odd log.

Water depth was reasonable until we got the launching ramp at Tocal, where just after that we found depths around 700 to 1 metre, so our paced slowed and the gaps between the boats was extended for safety reasons. We got under the bridge just before Paterson, before running aground and coming to a sudden stop. With the water so muddy it was hard to see the bottom but Jocimo found a way through and we continued. We got to around 200 metres from the old wharf, scaping our bottoms as we went with a falling tide. Not wanting to risk being stranded for the night we made the decision to turn around and have lunch just under the bridge south of Paterson.

After a brief lunch, each boat continued with a staggered start so we didn't all arrive back at Morpeth ramp at the same time. The talk on the radio was Jocimo warning others of a submerged log that he hit.

It took us from our overnight stop at the Rowing Club almost 3 hours to almost reach Paterson with a 2.5 return trip.

'Sail Away'

As the fleet passed the Hinton Wharf we commenced the last uneventful but picturesque stretch of the homeward journey to Morpeth. The retrieval of boats was easily accomplished with many hands making light work of the retrieval process.

I would not have missed this great experience for all the tea in China and credit goes to Phil and Kim for the meticulous planning of 3 days on the water with sights we will never see from the road.