

## THE 2015 CHOICES FLOORING VAN DIEMANS LAND CIRCUMNAVIGATION CRUISE

Not even the most unseasonable summer weather could dampen the enthusiasm of the eager participants who gathered for the pre cruise briefing at the RYCT on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> February, in preparation for the bi annual Van Diemans Land Circumnavigation organised by the RYCT in conjunction with the RGYC.

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 relentless southerly Strong Wind and Gale Warnings.

The timing of the cruise has been set for February and March as this period usually has the most settled weather patterns for cruising in Tasmanian Waters, but early 2015 was exceptional in that the High Pressure systems that normally move quickly across Southern Australia, were stationary in the Bight for days on end, resulting in the strong winds.

On the morning of Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> February most of the thirty six boats starting in Hobart were heading down the Derwent in warm, sunny but windless conditions, with most bound for Port Arthur.

The organising committee, who meet once a month between cruises, have historically set a limit of forty five vessels, as this is deemed to be the maximum number that can be effectively managed as well as fitting into sometimes crowded anchorages. This year there were sixty nine Expressions of Interest, which caused the committee some angst as to how to deal with the excess interested numbers, however, due to natural attrition there were forty five actual starters.

One early entrant was injured whilst waiting in Eden and was forced to withdraw just before the start, but was quickly replaced by a couple who are circumnavigating the world and who just happened to be in Kettering the week before the start.

Several of the participant vessels had been in the Wooden Boat Festival the long weekend before the cruise, so had an added incentive to be in Hobart in February. As the weather was forecast to be unsettled for the first few days, about half the crews decided to bypass Port Arthur and headed through the Hole In The Wall at Tasman Island and went straight to Fortescue Bay, with at least one heading directly to the Furneaux Group.

The cruise is organised so that the boats don't have to "follow the Herd", but are free to do their own thing, and are encouraged to meet up every few days for a BBQ on a beach, or other social function. As the fleet had fragmented early, the initial gatherings weren't as large as usual, with the first BBQ on the beach at Deep Hole at Chinamans Bay. It isn't practical to meet everyone, let alone cruise with every other vessel, so loose associations are usually formed early and often continue for the rest of the cruise.

The first "official" gathering was a BBQ held on Hazards Beach, which is directly opposite Wineglass Bay on the Freycinet Peninsular. Many crews walked across to look at Wineglass Bay, which was being subjected to thirty knots of North Easterly breeze and looked nothing like the pictures in the brochure, with a two metre surf dumping on the beach. The BBQ was a great success with the threatening rain clouds

holding off, although it did blow forty to fifty knots during the night resulting in two boats finding themselves five hundred metres further offshore than they had planned.

The next leg saw the fleet scattered along the East and North Coasts as well as in the Furneaux Islands, finally coming together again at the Tamar Yacht Club Marina at Beauty Point in the Tamar River. Ron and his offsidiers did a magnificent job of accommodating all the boats, ranging from a 72 foot motor cruiser, a 60 foot Maritimo, a mixture of yachts from a Swan 65 to a thirty one footer. The TYC made everyone feel very welcome, with an early bar opening, showers and general good will. Many took the opportunity to take the bus to Launceston, with some making a beeline straight to the Pinot Shop, others supermarkets and general retail therapy. The Tamar Yacht Club held their usual VDL C cruise dinner, catering for about 150 people, with a welcome by their Commodore Bill Griffith who gave a thoughtful speech where he skilfully managed to weave a story comparing Mathew Flinders' voyage with that of the current cruise.

The leg across the North Coast saw the fleet split once again, some opting to head directly to The Hunter Islands, while others visited the Mersey, Wynyard, and Port Sorrell, where one yacht fell over in the middle of dinner, showering at least one crew member with several plates of food and glasses of red wine. Turns out the yacht swung on her anchor with the change of tide, and ended up over a sandbank, and as the tide dropped she remained upright in the soft sand, until someone stood up and moved and she gracefully lay on her side until the next rising tide. Needless to say there were some red faces as well as red shirts.

By now the Hobart fleet were joined in the Hunter Islands by the boats from the mainland who had started their cruise at Queenscliff with the Geelong fleet. Again the weather played a merry game, rain and wind shifts resulted in boats shuffling between anchorages around Hunter Island and Three Hummock Island, trying to get out of the relentless swell and rolley nights. A number of boats visited Stanley and sampled the local delights before heading out to Three Hummock Island where there was another 'official' BBQ held between rain showers on Coolumb beach. The numbers were down as a contingent took an early weather break and bolted south for Macquarie Harbour, enjoying a brisk sail of 125 miles, whilst the remainder had varying conditions over the next week or so. Hells Gate, the entrance to Macquarie Harbour, was sufficiently benign to allow everyone safe passage, several boats opting to enter in the middle of the night rather than doing circle work outside or anchoring in Pilots Bay, but there were no reports of misadventure.

Once inside, most boats spread out, some heading to Strahan whilst others went directly to explore the many inlets including the Gordon River, and it seems that just about everyone experienced many of the attractions. Trevor Norton from West Coast Yacht Charters was generous enough to hold several highly informative lectures to very attentive audiences, and his self produced mud maps proved invaluable. 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. Three boats that were rafted together and tied to trees in the Gordon above St Johns Falls were visited by a wedding party that had hiked in and then rafted on inflatable rafts down the Franklin, stopping on a sandbank to get married, in the full regalia, white dress from a waterproof barrel, hair and makeup

person, Celebrant, family and guests from as far afield as Norway. The bride and groom, as wet as shags, shared a bottle of celebratory champagne with the three crews.

Once again, the fleet regrouped for a BBQ at the Strahan Sailing Club, fortunately in the middle of the day, as the evenings were getting considerably cooler, not unusual for this part of Tasmania. Even so, most people were crowded into the compact clubhouse and congregated next to the roaring fireplace.

Port Davey and Bathurst harbour were beckoning, and with a suitable forecast there was pretty much a mass exodus. Hells Gate itself wasn't too much of a problem, but the relentless westerly swell was certainly felt as everyone neared and rounded Cape Sorrell, with a considerable number of crews experiencing green water over their bows and green stomachs below. The trip south for many was uncomfortable as the wind dropped and the beam on swell continued, but everyone eventually made it safely, with a flotilla arriving around dawn. 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 it didn't change. The more intrepid crews ignored the rain and ventured up to Melaleuca, climbed mountains, explored rivers and bays and generally made the most of their time in this unique wilderness. The crews that hadn't already left held an "official" BBQ on the beach at Bramble Cove, and were fortunate that the rain held off, which enabled a game of beach cricket to be held in a rare burst of sunshine.

Unsurprisingly, again the fleet split, with two distinct divisions leaving for Recherche and The D'Entrecasteaux Channel, the first spread out over several days, and the second departing en masse after the Bramble Cove BBQ, with most leaving in the pre dawn patrol. The Wild and Woolley West and South coasts were kind for most, and the sight of more than twenty vessels arriving at and rounding South West Cape in close company was a rarely experienced sight to behold. The grey vistas of the South West Ranges between the Capes were a spectacular accompaniment to passing iconic places, including Maatsuyker Island, with its lonely lighthouse catching bursts of afternoon sunshine, between rainsqualls.

Arriving in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel with ample safe and comfortable anchorages, allowed an opportunity for the fleet to disaggregate once more, although many crews opted for the fleshpots and shops at Dover. The Friday night saw the beginning of a hectic few days of heavy socialising and eating, with the Port of Esperance Sailing club opening their bar at 5 o'clock, followed by a self-catered meal from the local pizzeria. Saturday night was a BBQ prepared by the enthusiastic and willing volunteers inside their clubhouse. Boats were moored and anchored in numerous spots across the bay, and the club provided a water "taxi" service to collect and return crews, all in heavy rain. With about 120 people present, the enormous pile of dripping wet weather gear inside the front door proved to be somewhat of a challenge at the end of the evening, as everyone was looking for their own red or yellow jackets, trousers and hats. A small inconvenience, considering the hospitality, food and good time that was offered.

Sunday morning saw a dash to Port Cygnet, where a general freshen up was on offer, and for many a walk into Cygnet for a visit to the street market and a meal out at one of the pubs or cafes. On Sunday evening the Port Cygnet Sailing Club hosted their now traditional Dinner for the VDLC cruise. The club's volunteers again did a

magnificent job, catering for well in excess of 150 visitors, with a very friendly and welcoming group of members facilitating a memorable evening.

The cruise was now in serious wind down mode, with a number of boats heading towards Kettering, Hobart and other home ports, but the uncommitted remainder again spread out, with one last BBQ on offer at Quarantine in Barnes Bay.

Fortunately, the rain held off and a flathead feast was held around the warming fire pit, with the now dwindling numbers enjoying the last chance to tell sometimes tall stories of their exploits.

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.

The RYCT Official Cruise Dinner was held at the Club on the Thursday night, with an enthusiastic welcome for the representatives of the principal sponsors, Choices Flooring, who received a round of applause when they announced their continuing support, without which the event couldn't continue in its current form.

The Mac Forster Memorial Trophy was presented to Nigel Hill, the Cruise Commodore on Nirvana 1, the Matthew Flinders Trophy was presented to Stephen Spaulding on Sancerre for his sterling effort as Communication Officer.

The Admiral Sir Guy Wyatt Trophy for the "Best Kept" log was presented to Helen and Lester Gabriel on Joule. The Captain James Kelly Trophy for the "Most Interesting" log was presented to Warwick Hill on Adagio.

Glen and Mike Gloster, on board Great Sandy were voted by the fleet as the "Vessel of the Fleet", and were awarded the Francois Visscher Trophy.

After the dinner at the RYCT, and last minute provisioning, the RGYC fleet left Hobart on Saturday to complete their Tasmanian Circumnavigation, accompanied by a number of boats returning to the mainland. They stopped at Port Arthur, Chinamans, and made for Triabunna to wait out another Strong Wind Warning from a SW change, before heading to Schouten Passage. Several boats headed directly to Wineglass Bay, which by now was picture perfect. Binalong Bay beckoned, before a long day to Badger and Prime Seal Islands. Here the fleet separated for the last time, one to Eden, several Port Phillip boats opting for Deal Island before a dash to Refuge Cove and The Heads, whilst the Gippsland Lakes locals and visitors stayed overnight at Royden Island before enjoying a benign crossing of Bass Strait.

The Geelong fleet, joined by a number of mainland boats, held their end of cruise dinner at Royal Brighton Yacht Club on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> May. The luncheon, the hospitality, the people along with the perfect weather contributed to a memorable afternoon, where Circumnavigation Plaques were presented to all the completing vessels. The Geelong Cruise Commodore, Bill Newman was presented with the Mac Forster Memorial Trophy by David Weir who had travelled from Hobart for the event.

Michael Norton, from Bundaberg, was presented with the Captain James Kelly Trophy for "Most Interesting Log", while Independent Endeavour received a special award for tenacity and perseverance. John Kint from Bundaberg received the Francois Visscher Trophy for the "Vessel of the Fleet"

So ended the 2015 cruise, after all the boats and crews separated for the last time, one way or the other, everyone returned to their reality, whatever it was.