

WITH "ACHERNAR" TO THE INVESTIGATOR GROUP - PART II

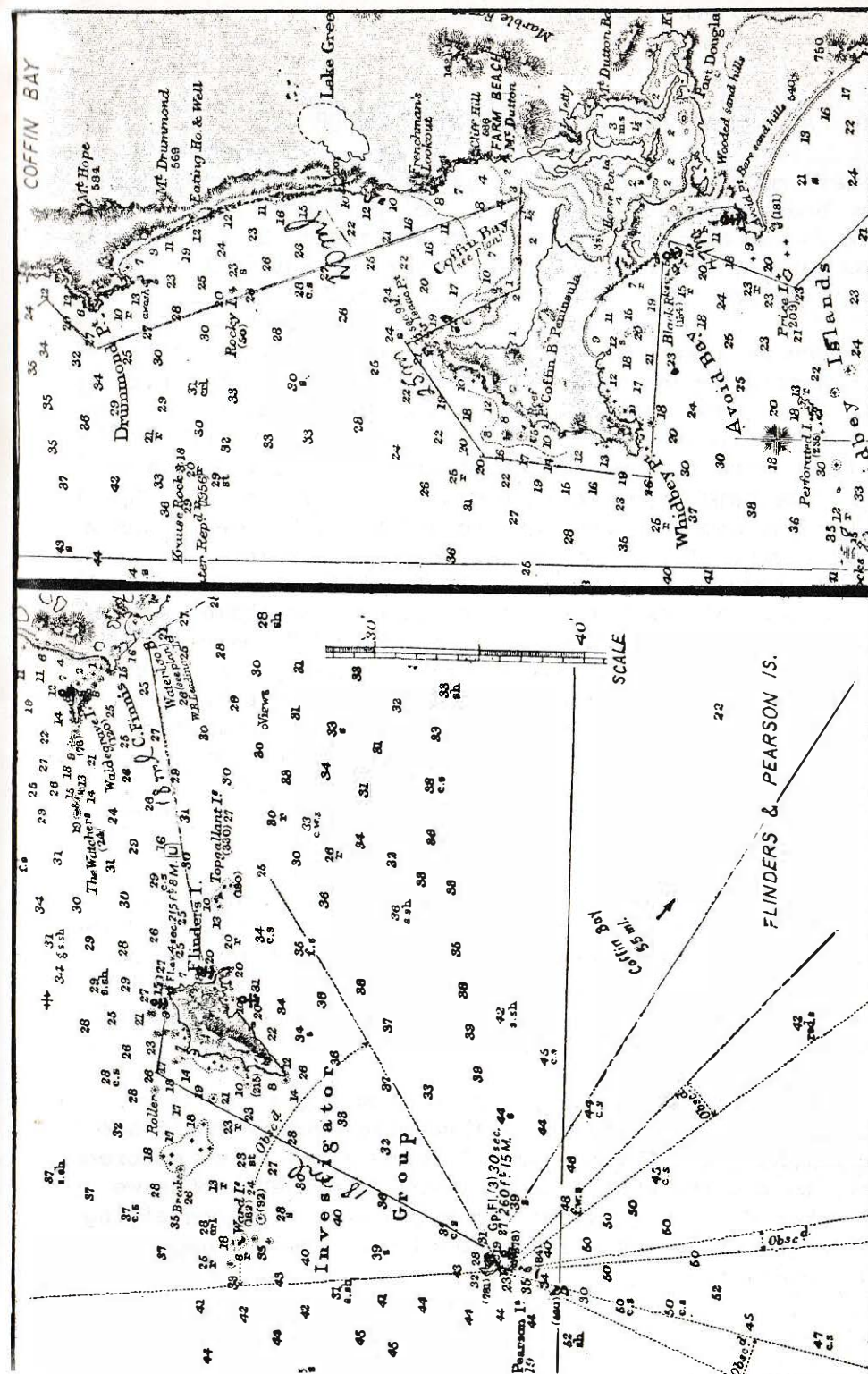
After our wonderful rest and fun in exploring Coffin Bay, we decided to carry on Northward to visit Flinders Island and Pearson Island, the two islands some 60 miles N.W. of Coffin Bay, which make up the Investigator Group.

We spent the night inside the Bay and after breakfast motored through the channel and anchored in the sand patches off Farm Beach, adjacent to the Entrance Beacon, in an attempt to catch some whiting. This being unsuccessful, we lunched and then weighed anchor to sail under a beaut afternoon seabreeze the 28 miles to an anchorage recommended to us by the fishermen, just North of Drummond Point, called Hall Bay.

One of the nightmares of sailing the West Coast is the scale of the chart - approx. 8 sea miles to the inch and believe you me, that does not show much detail, and with middle age descending on me, I was forced to peer endlessly through a magnifying glass. If you look at the chart of Drummond Point with the Mt. Stromolo telescope, you cannot find any semblance of an anchorage, so you can imagine we were just slightly concerned, but still had faith in the advice given to us.

Keeping about 2 miles to seaward of Drummond Point because of the enormous westerly swell which was smashing onto the cliffs and breaking about 3/4 mile out, we then, with courage in both hands, altered course to the N.E., and headed in around the Point. I just do not like heading into an ironbound coast free sheeting at 9 knots and with a monster swell lifting your tail and surfing you shorewards.

"Rolly, up to the crosstrees with the binocs, please". Poor Rolly has already spent a fair percentage of the trip up there, and we are indeed grateful for our ratlines. About 1/2 mile off when I was just about to advise everyone we would spend the night at sea, Rolly shouts "You won't



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believe me but I can see the top 3 feet of about 6 large cray boats". At the same time, we spotted a large cray boat coming South, close inshore about 2 miles off. Sails were quickly lowered and under power, we tailed in behind the fisherman to a most unbelievable anchorage!

Hall Bay is just an indentation in the rugged coastline - no expansive beach nestling behind a headland, but more like a man made groin caused by a reef extending from the corner similar to the Outer Harbor Breakwater, and 12 to 15 feet above high water. Following our guide "Mercury Star", we came in close to the cliffs following the shape of the bay around close inshore and there before us was a "Snug Cove". Seven large cray boats were already at anchor in a narrow strip between the 500' cliffs and the natural breakwater, all anchored in line astern, as there is only room for one vessel to swing. We dropped "Achernar's" pick with only 15 fathoms of chain as there is no room to swing with more, however five more boats could have anchored astern of us, so this will give an indication of the length of the cove. At the end of the cove was a sheer wall of sand 200 feet high, with the southerly constantly taking the top off to create a vertical sand drift.

Not a ripple on the water disturbed the bay and to the sound of the swell crashing onto the reef we fortified the inner man with fresh cray and good wine, and around the flagon of port and coffee, we yarned into the night with our hosts, obtaining all the local knowledge possible of the Investigator Group.

At 0800 on the 9th January, we motored out of Hall Bay into a completely oily sea. Four miles out we could see our friend "Butch" from "Aloma" signalling, so we motored over, to receive what I thought would be the octopus we had asked for the previous night. A sugar bag containing two large octopi was thrown aboard plus another bag with four lovely crays.

It is 48 miles from Drummond Point to Flinders Island. 13 miles out you pass on your starboard hand, the 100' "Cap" Island with a shape rather resembling a cap without a peak. I mention this because in sailing these waters, one is constantly aware of Flinders. He named any conspicuous land mark and in a great number of places he must have said, "There is another island - what shall I call that?" "Looks like a cap, Sir". "Yes, we'll call it Cap Island". I am rambling a bit, but the story is to bring us to the next Island, for this one we were anxious to see - why did Flinders call it "Top Gallant Island"? We were not held in suspense too long, for appearing on the horizon was unmistakably the topgallant sail of a Square Rigger, white and with the curved ends of a fully set sail. A terrific name for a perfect identification! This island is only 6 miles east of Flinders and being 330 feet against the highest point of Flinders 215 feet, creates a perfect sentinel.

We had discussed the Investigator Group with Brian Verco at Port Lincoln and also with Preston Manthorpe, both of whom had visited the Islands in previous years, and with the knowledge gained from our crayboat friends, we had a fair bit of "local knowledge" to help us in the area.

The wind was pretty well due south, so we chose to sail around the light and anchor in the North Beach. Four crayboats were already at anchor, so we eased in with them, for care must be taken as there are rocky reefs out from the beach, and again the crosstrees paid their way. The four boats at anchor were the roughest crayboats I have ever seen and the crews were equally as wild looking. I am sure that if I am ever wanted by the police, this would be the hide-away. We were invited over to the largest boat to play pontoon after dinner but tactfully declined, as I did not have my "45" with me.

Flinders Island has three good anchorages off beaches on

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the North, East and South sides, and good shelter can be obtained from any wind by moving around. The Island itself is very similar in scenery to Wedge Island.

All our guides had told us "Don't waste time at Flinders. Get over to 'Pearson Island' - that's the beauty." So crack of dawn next morning, we sailed close in around the shore-line of Flinders and then beam on to a fresh E.S.W., we tramped across the 12 miles to Pearson Island.

As we approached Pearson, we could feel its difference - as I said to Margaret - "This is Bali Hi". Its crater like north point is 781 feet falling off through a saddle to the South Point of 260 feet with three other granite islands of up to 460 feet sprinkling off to the South.

There is a tiny beach on the Eastern side which would be a beaut anchorage in westerly weather, and as you guessed, it was a fresh E.S.E. Under power, we motored back along the sheer granite walls to the North Bay. The echo sounder was quite happy dipping away between 200 and 300 feet and we were less distance than that from the shore. If we had not been told that you can anchor in the North Bay, we would not have tried. The chart gives its depth at 28F. Rounding the N.E. point, we entered what could best be described as an amphitheatre with the rock walls to the west towering up to nearly 800 feet and to the east 400 feet. Right at the head of this not too deep bay, we would see that "pot of gold" - those little patches of white sand indicating a sandy bottom, but they sure are close to the rocks. A dinghy of all things trailed off on a long line from one of those patches, which we imagined belonged to a crayboat, so this must be the spot.

We anchored in a small patch next to the moored dinghy in the gentle depth of 50 feet with big anchor and 35F of chain. Rolly and Roger knelt on the deck in prayer mumbling something about "Please God, don't let the anchor winch fail".

This is one of those anchorages you love to talk about after you have left safely. We were hanging back with our stern far too close to the rocks. The wind whistles down off the cliffs and although the wind aloft is from the shore, down under the cliffs it reverses and swings you shore-ward. "Whistles" is not the word - for a few minutes there is silence and no wind, and then a Willy Willy hits the water turning it white, and heads across the bay for you. One time from Port and then Starboard, then astern, each time laying us over and screaming through the rigging. Some anchorage! But it's worth it, for what an Island. Sculptured from solid granite with those wonderful earthy colours of Central Australia. Looking up at the cliffs with giant weather worn caves and rock formations, one's imagination conjures up many visions. Towering obolisks of stone 70 feet high and 12 feet across like giant totem poles, and there, hopping around in complete view of all on deck, was Petrogale Pearsoni, the tiny rock wallaby exclusive to this magnificent Island. We just had to get ashore to see this little fellow close up.

I rowed Rolly and Roger ashore first, for landing is no easy task. At the very head of the bay were some flattish rocks with the swell rolling on and off. The boys jumped ashore and when I brought Margaret and the girls ashore, they held the dinghy so as not to have it smashed against the rocks. This manoeuvre was all going well, then just at the critical moment of the kids getting out, a great bull seal surfaced 12 feet away. The next manoeuvre was like lightning - we all jumped and lifted the dinghy onto the dry rocks in two shakes and then turned to watch our big friend roll over and continue on his way around the rocky foreshore.

On climbing up through the rocks to the ridge of our bay, the little rock wallabies were everywhere. The following is an extract from Wood Jones "Mammals of South Australia" which describes perfectly the beautiful little creature.

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"On such level ground as the Island offers, the handsome animal travels awkwardly with the head low and the tail arched strongly upward; the tail is not used as a lever as in the wallabies and kangaroos, but is carried off the ground in all gaits, with the body clumsily canted forward.

Ungraceful in open bush country, it is a very different creature upon the fantastic granite boulders which form the main portion of its island home. Its movements are then astonishing; there seems to be no leap it will not take, and no chink between boulders into which it will not hurl itself, and it is as much at home on the naked boulders of the surf swept shore as on the lichen covered ones of the summit, where ferns and large casuarinas form a distinctive habitat.

This animal is one of the Zoological treasures left stranded in the Bight and it is to be hoped that it will long remain in possession of its restricted home."

Our stay at Pearson Island was unfortunately to be cut short, for during the night the wind swung strongly into the North and at 2 a.m., the waves funnelling into the bay were sweeping across the foredeck. The hand torch revealed far too clearly the rocky shore close under our stern. We decided to up anchor and have an evening sail. Thank heavens the anchor winch did work well, we wound in the 200 feet of chain and with the anchor still trailing into the depths, motored out till clear of the Island and set our course back to Coffin Bay.

After a few days rest in inner Coffin Bay, we set off on the homeward leg and well armed again with local knowledge, spent a night in behind Avoid Point where there is an excellent anchorage under the cliffs and sheltered from all winds by an outlying reef. Four crayboats were also at anchor and in fact a number of boats use this as their permanent evening shelter, leaving their vehicles ashore

and travelling the short but rugged five miles across the hills to the Coffin Bay township.

The next day returned us to our familiar cruising grounds of Spencer Gulf and all too soon we were home again.

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