

A Voyage to Lilliput

Jon Ullett

Dr Jonathan Swift, Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, set his work of satire, published in 1726, in the most remote part of the known world. He used current popular works on geography, as a modern author might do the same with science.

Lemuel Gulliver, surgeon, educated at Cambridge and Leyden, sailed from Bristol on the *Antelope*, under Captain William Pritchard, on 4 May 1699, bound for the South Sea.

"In our passage to the East-Indies, we were driven by a violent storm to the north-west of Van Diemen's Land. By an observation we found ourselves in the latitude of 30 degrees 2 minutes south. Twelve of our crew were dead by immoderate labour and ill food, and the rest were in a very weak condition. On the fifth of November, which is the beginning of summer in those parts, the weather being very hazy, the seamen spied a rock within half a cable's length of the ship, but the wind was so strong that we were driven directly upon it, and immediately split."

[Gulliver took to a boat with others, but it was
overset and he was alone.]

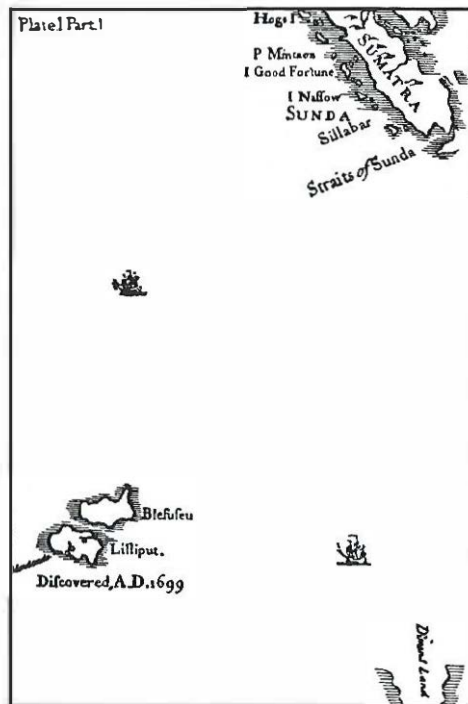
"I swam as fortune directed me, and was pushed forward by wind and tide. I often let my legs drop, and could feel no bottom; but when I was almost gone and able to struggle no longer, I found myself within my depth, and by this time the storm was much abated. The declivity was so small, that I walked near a mile, which I conjectured was about eight o'clock in the evening. ... I lay down on the grass, which was very short and soft, where I slept sounder than I ever remember to have done in my life."

AE Case, in an essay on the geography of *Gulliver's Travels* published in 1958, concluded that Swift placed Lilliput on the Island of St. Peter. - *Ed.*

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We had always wanted to visit Nuyt's Archipelago, but in the past we were con-

TRAVELS BY LEMUEL GULLIVER 211



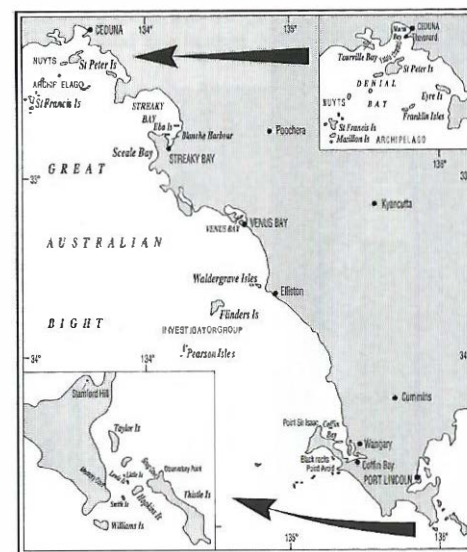
strained by time. It would be a shame to rush such a visit. To give an idea of distance, in the six weeks we were away from the Squadron we covered just over a thousand nautical miles. But it is not the distance which is the vital factor. It is our summer sea breeze, strong from the south-east every afternoon. You can sail there so easily, but coming home can be hard work!

The ideal time for such a trip is at the end of the season, in February or March. This year we picked it just right, so much so in fact that we had to motor for a great deal of the way. It was a bit hard on the pocket, but it was great for exploring.

I will start the story of our journey from Memory Cove. In a light south-easter and with a bit of help from the Perkins, we were anchored by late afternoon at Point Sir Isaac, known locally as Seasick Bay. The Coffin Bay folk who head out into the Bight for a day's deep sea fishing

usually end here. Daylight saving mixes you up when you travel this far west. At the time that we were there, it was barely daylight at 0700, with full darkness by 2100. One can understand why the West Coast farmers and mums with children catching early school buses consider daylight saving a bit of a pain.

After a perfect sailing day we arrived at the Pearson Islands in the early afternoon. Much has been written about the beauty of this group and its friendly fauna. It is undoubtedly one of the gems of our coast. The weathered granite boulders form unique shapes. One looks just like a koala. Pearson is well described as Australia's Easter Island. Wildlife is abundant. There were families of seals on the beach and rocks a few yards from where we anchored. We watched a bull defend his harem from the challenge of an intruder. Unfortunately Pearson has poor anchorages, and the weather must be settled. With a change forecast we stayed only one night, choosing the anchorage on the eastern side close beside the beach and with a crayboat for company. Here we caught a couple of BIG whiting, together with trevally and a large squid. We didn't go ashore this time, but we have in the past. The wallabies which abound there have no predators and readily eat from your hand. [Theo Modra introduced some on to



Thistle Island. They were well established at Fossil Point when we were last there. Take bread or apples if you walk over to see the wonderful view. - Ed.]

The threatened change was very mild when it came, but we weren't to know that in advance. Accordingly, we bypassed Flinders Island to go the 76 miles to Streaky Bay. We have been to Flinders before, but in all honesty it's rather dull compared with the other superb anchorages in the area. We arrived just on dark, and anchored behind the spit at the entrance to Blanche Harbor. At Streaky Bay the locals were friendly and helpful. [See the article by John Hookings - *Ed.*] Four miles north of this is Eba Island. This is a great anchorage, with beautiful sandhills on the mainland. When we returned a second time the wind had sculpted them into subtly different shapes. The island is joined to the mainland by a sand-spit. A long hard beach stretches to the north. We were intrigued by structures at the northern end, which from the boat looked like the ruins of an old jetty. Close up they turned out to be the horse yards, judges' stand and betting ring of the beach racing carnival held here. At low tide the horses race to turning marks on the sand. It must be a fun event, and we hope to see it one day.

From Eba we went to Franklin Island, our first in the Nuyt's Archipelago. Two lovely islands are joined by a sand spit which covers only at the peak of a high tide. Our anchorage was close to the spit, in transparent clear sparkling water. You could watch the anchor bite and sink as it settled back on the chain. We were warned not to venture off the beach on any of the islands, as they are the home of black tiger snakes. We don't share Pep Manthorpe's herpetophilia, and we didn't go looking for any. Incidentally, the clear water is very cold, so we didn't have long swims either.

After Franklin Island we headed to St Peter Island in search of little people. There is no doubt that if this is where Swift set Lilliput he did so on the basis of a very inaccurate description. We found a low featureless knob of an island, which I guessed to be not much more than a hundred acres in area. We couldn't see a single tree, and the only ground cover was low shrubs. It is now a National Park, but was previ-

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ously grazed by the family of Fay Cook (*Airborne*). We came in as close as we could to the only beach on the north-east corner to look closely through the binoculars for little people. From what we saw, Lemuel Gulliver would have perished quickly from hunger and thirst if he had not been captured by the ingenious but disputatious Lilliputians.

From Lilliput (St Peter Island) we entered upon the great surprise of the trip. This was recommended to us by Richard Clarke and Ian Birrell (*Quiniva*) and Ray Partridge (*Medina*). Davenport Creek is a land-locked inlet in Tourville Bay. It is entered by a narrow channel, which required me to con us through the entrance from the spreaders. After three miles skirting a bank we turned sharply to port into a narrow creekbacked by extensive sandhills. It is bordered by the most westerly mangroves in our waters, and is a completely sheltered haven, quite unexpected from what we had otherwise heard of the wild West Coast. We had only the mosquitoes (not many) and a few fishermen to keep us company. The latter tackle the sandhills in their four-wheel drives to stay in three or four caravans. It's a superb and almost unspoiled spot. We hope that it stays like that for many years to come.

Next morning the sky was overcast. Even from the cross trees the exit point was not visible. I had pressed the button on the GPS on the way

in, so with total confidence we motored briskly for the way point. Bang! We hit the sand bar! So much for GPS! [No allusion to others with similar recent problems on rocks, not sand - Ed.] After backing off we tried a bit further to the west and shot into Yatala Channel to follow the labyrinth of over thirty port and starboard beacons leading to Thevenard. Then it was across Murat Bay to join three local keel yachts moored off Ceduna jetty. It's a bit rusty and neglected, but feasible from the rickety steps at the seaward end.

After provisioning at Ceduna and bidding farewell to Jenny Last, we set off for St Francis Island. This was another example of an attractive island in sparkling clear waters. It was the only anchorage where we rolled, and not too badly at that. It was enough to set us going fairly early next morning to move a whole five miles to Masillon Island, the most westerly feasible anchorage in the Archipelago. Here we found, as we did with Pearson, another gem of our coast, but utterly different. Masillon is a small and somewhat forbidding island, quite steep to. On its north-western face a small entrance brings you into a crater-like bay, suggesting an old volcano. There is no beach, only rock which turns a lovely orange-red in the afternoon sun. It provides total shelter from all but the west, and is impossible in a heavy swell. Pep Manthorpe told us that he looked at it once in these conditions, and went elsewhere. We had a gentle south-east-



The fantastic rocks of Pearson Island. (Margaret Ullett)



Tanya Modra feeding Pearson Island wallabies at Fossil Point on Thistle Island. (Jenny Last)

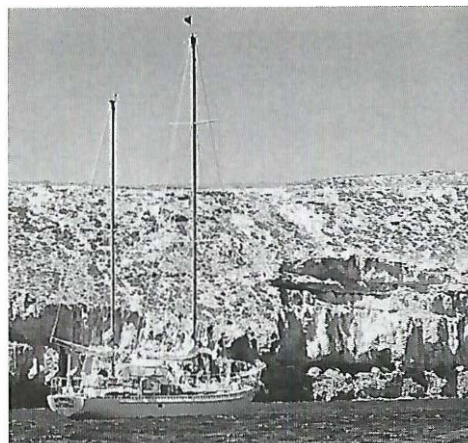
er and virtually no swell. Inside the crater it was like the proverbial millpond. We were close under the cliffs in what we could only describe as a memorable anchorage.

After that high-water mark, we returned to Streaky Bay to refuel and to socialise briefly with Rick Halliday in *Pronto*. Traumas in the Port Lincoln Race had delayed them, and this was as far as they had time to go. A tame seal played about begging for fish, so it wasn't a place to set the squid lure. In hot weather ashore (pleasant afloat) we went on to Yanerbie at the northern end of Sceale's Bay. Tucked in behind the point there is an anchorage providing all-round shelter in anything except a strong southerly gale. There were convective clouds about, with strong squally down-drafts. Some of these came straight from hell, with a rush of wind at 45°C or more. Fortunately they were only brief. There was a spectacular willy blowing sand from the sandhills high in the air.

Next day we had a screaming northerly to give us a glorious sail under reefed main and no mizzen, with smooth water to Venus Bay. What a great spot! But I would not try to go in if there was much of a westerly swell. A break would soon rise on the bar to make the entrance very dangerous. Several lives were lost here a few years ago when a fishing boat came to grief.

At Venus Bay we went out for most of the day with a friendly shark fisherman named David

Cornish. The net is 3 km (1.6 nm) long and sits nine feet above the bottom. David set it in 35 fathoms, twelve miles offshore, laying it over the stern strictly downwind, in a fresh breeze. He tried to pick a good spot from the echo sounder. Sharks have no bone. (The Editor says they are the cartilaginous group called elasmobranchs.) Accordingly, they do not appear on the echo, but David tries to pick the fish on which they graze. Then he anchored for two hours, during which we watched, of all things, a video of a windjammer going round the Horn. He produced fresh prawns, which we cooked and ate. They were large and delicious. Raising the net is an exacting business, pulling it over the bow as the boat slowly makes its way dead to windward. It's difficult and dangerous for two men alone. When they have a good catch, the decks become slippery with blood and offal. David put me on the controls. His deckhand Denis fed the net on to the reel – a tricky business, with a significant risk of arm injury. David stood at the bow to direct and to gaff the sharks aboard. This took over an hour. After all that, we scored only a single shark, called a thrasher. It has a long tail and a tiny mouth. Not being of commercial value, it was thrown back. David loves dolphins, which he rarely catches inadvertently. They, of course, are surface feeders, but curious and friendly. If they sniff round, they may be flicked into the net. When a pod appeared David suspended activities briefly



Fine Romance in the crater of Masillon Island (Margaret Ullett)

while he tried to shoo them away. That was about the most violent motion I have ever experienced at sea. It's just as well we are all good sailors. None of us felt at all sick.

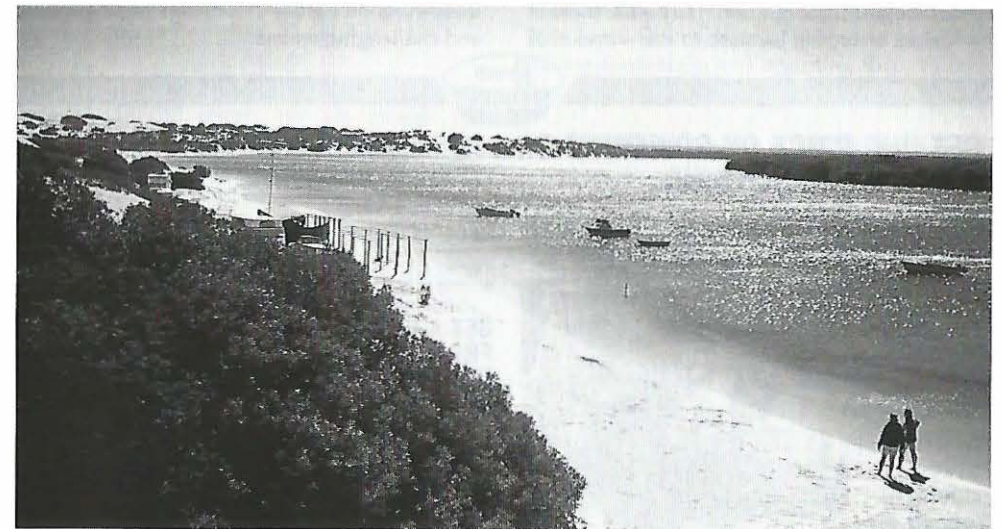
From Venus Bay we spent a comfortable night off the beautiful beach of Waldegrave Island. From there we sought out the pirate's cove of Hall Bay. It's inaccurately recorded on the chart, and is not visible a mile out to sea. If this is your first visit, I advise a call on 16 VHF for directions from a local fisherman. You enter on the northern side and sweep right round close to the perimeter to join the fishing boats sheltering behind a natural breakwater. One experienced cruising yachtsman who tried to cut the corner a few years ago stopped with a fearful crash. Jenny Last happened to be on the helm, but it wasn't her fault. She merely followed his instructions. It's another 100% shelter in reasonable weather, but not a place to ride out a westerly gale. Here we scored a crayfish generously thrown aboard for good luck. It's one of those remote and lovely anchorages which make cruising the West Coast such a memorable experience.

From Hall Bay we went in and out of Coffin Bay. With the new channel beacons it's no longer the navigational nightmare it once was. Even so, the shallowness of the bar is still a test of the nerves.

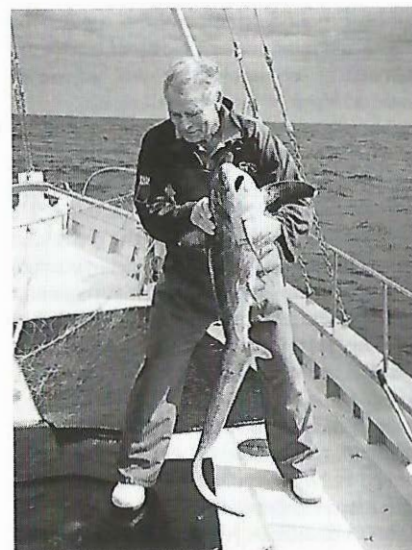
We came out in a fresh south-easter with just the main up and the Perkins helping to push against a strongly flooding tide. With depths dropping to six inches under the keel, Peter Last's few remaining hairs stood to attention as he worked the helm and I called the shots from the bow. Too much of this sort of thing turns old men into pensioners!

Point Avoid provides another delightful anchorage, after passing the eerie shapes of Black Rocks. In anything less than a gale you would have full protection here. The only disappointment was that a fresh north-easter prevented us from landing for a much needed brisk walk on a long and lovely beach. From there to our starting point was interesting from the weather point of view. Ashore it was a beastly hot day. As we closed the headlands we enjoyed a strong northerly, which was pleasantly warm, not too hot. But once we crossed the wide shallow bays we lost enough wind to sail and were obliged to motor. Another phenomenon that day was a strong mirage effect to make distant swells look like a hazy low coast far away.

In these waters at this time the mornings are quiet and a strong sea breeze comes in most afternoons. We started early to make our passages before lunch under the trusty Perkins, and went ashore for a walk and a swim in the after-



Davenport Creek. (Margaret Ullett)



Ian Ullett Shark Fishing out of Venus Bay (Margaret Ullett)

noons. Reefs abound, so it's essential not to lose concentration on where you are and where you're going. Throughout we were in company with large schools of dolphins. In fact we have never before seen so many rushing towards us, leaping from the water like school kids come to join a fun ride. It may have been the beginning of the mutton bird migration. They were there in profusion, sweeping so close to the waves that

you watch to see one come a cropper – and they never do. They sat on the surface in huge rafts of birds, which got up in a spectacular fashion if we came too close for their liking. Of course there are other places we didn't get to this time and would like to visit again, like Greenley Island, for example. But it's nice to know that there's a good excuse to return to these glorious and challenging waters.

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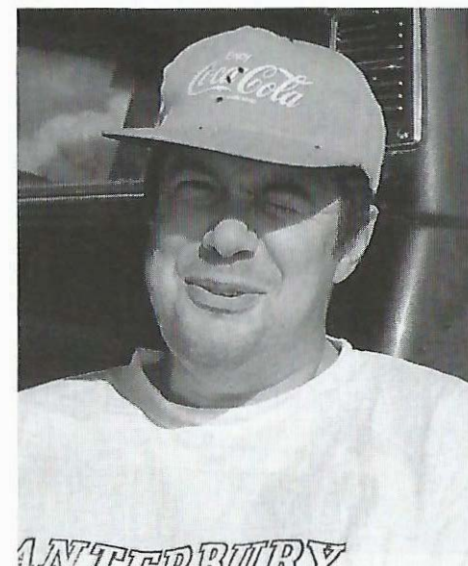
I am that Police Officer you met at Streaky Bay earlier this year. I am also a Member of the Squadron. I am sorry that I didn't have the opportunity to speak to you some more, but work called.

I invite any visiting Members to come and make themselves known if they are visiting this area. We will go out of our way to make you feel welcome during your stay. I have been stationed here for about 2½ years now, and I have seen a recent increase of yachts cruising the area, usually after the Adelaide to Port Lincoln race.

I wish to advise that I monitor HF Channel 4620 mhz, and I am available for weather information, usually between 0830 until 1000 week days during the months from November to May. I can also be reached on Channel 88 on the 27 meg radio during the same period, but with a limited range. Our best radio range on the HF is from Flinders Island to the Franklin and St Francis Island group.

A daily plane service is available from Wudinna to Adelaide and return. We can arrange for Members to be taken to Wudinna for such a flight if the situation arises. There is a mooring available which can be used by Members if needed. It is capable of holding boats up to about 25 tons. Mechanical facilities are available within the town, and sail-making at Port Lincoln. Freight can be received from Adelaide overnight on the bus, and there is a freight service to Port Lincoln. Diesel is available on the town jetty. There is water there, but it comes from a bore and is not suitable for drinking. We use it for washing and watering the garden. We could supply rain water for drinking.

In short, the town of Streaky Bay is not as isolated as people may think.



I have read with interest of the Squadron's commitment to junior sailing. I am certainly trying to do that too. When I came here in October 1992, I was surprised that there were no small boat sailing activities. Blue Light activities were in recession. I became involved by driving bus loads of children to Wudinna for the Le Hunte Blue Light Discos, which I helped to supervise. Taking them there and returning them to their homes involved a trip of nearly 300 km.

In June 1993 I began a School Intervention Program at our local school, which addresses important issues between Police and young people. I believe that prevention is better than cure. If I can educate young people, it won't be necessary for me to arrest or report them. The program involves talking to all the children from Reception to Year 12, numbering about 200. It has been warmly received by the students and the community.

In August 1993 I asked a class if they were interested in learning to sail, and about two-thirds responded. Ross Haldane from Port Lincoln Yacht Club invited four children to accompany me to a sailing workshop there in September.