

West Coast Cruise-in-Company 1999

Ion Ullett

On 16 February 1999, following the Adelaide to Port Lincoln Race, the yachts participating in the West Coast Cruise-in-Company anchored together for the first time in Memory Cove. They were *The Bottom Line*, *Carrick Roads*, *Piping Shrike* and *Fine Romance*, with *Gemini 4* delayed by engine trouble and planning to join us in Coffin Bay.

A SW change set back our departure until Friday 19 February. We left at 0700 with very little wind, but a nasty swell was left over from the change. This subsided as the day progressed, and we motor-sailed to Point Sir Isaac. Saturday morning saw the fleet fishing off Farm Beach, waiting for the tide. We shouted to a passing fisherman, 'Where's the spot?' to which he replied, 'Off Gallipoli Beach, where they made the film.' It is a most impressive spot, well worth a visit, although you would have to see it from the water to get the real feel and, of course, let your imagination run free.

[Those who would like to see the real Anzac Beach in colour, should go to the best Anzac Day site we have found: www.anzacday.org.au/ — Ed.]

Don Malcolm in *The Bottom Line* led us into Coffin Bay, and no-one bumped! We spent a pleasant time in the township provisioning and refuelling, before heading out to an evening BBQ at Black Springs. Coffin Bay, and particularly the outer area around Black Springs, has got to be one of the most magnificent scenic spots a yacht can ever visit. As we anchored, we looked down the channel, and there was *Gemini 4*, so our fleet was now complete.

In the instructions for the C-in-C we set up a system for yacht visits of BYO grog and nibbles.

This was already such a practice that rarely a day was missed when we did not get together for a 'social', and some of the 'specials' were quite memorable — the *Carrick Roads* pizza, *Gemini 4's* lemon meringue, *Fine Romance's* hot muffins... I am sure none of us lost weight on the C-in-C.

We now started to head N up the West Coast. Our first stop was at Hill Bay, Point Drummond, which is a real pirate's cove formed by a small bay which is protected from the W by a reef awash, and from the E by cliffs and sandhills. It's a remote and exciting anchorage for the prevailing SE summer winds, but it's no place to be caught in a strong W change.

[The chart designates Hill Bay, which is not named in *Australia Pilot*, but we have heard it called Hall Bay. The former is correct. — Ed.]

The SEs were now really in, and we tramped our way out on a broad reach to Flinders Island, having to by-pass Pearson Island because of the strong winds. This was a disappointment, as Pearson is one of the gems of the West Coast, but it requires peaceful weather for a safe visit. We rounded the NE corner of Flinders Island with the wind well into the 30s, and with the help of *Gemini 4*, who had read the instructions and mud map, we anchored between the reefs off the windmill.

A very large crayboat came on the VHF and invited us all to a cray BBQ on the next night. This was to be held at the corner of the beach where he had a grill etc set up. In due course we all turned up, but he didn't! Fortunately Rob from *Carrick Roads* caught some beaut KG whiting off the beach, so we didn't do too badly. The owner of the Island arrived in his battered

ute, and gave us a great tour of his remote farm.

The SE still blew with gusto from dead astern, making great sailing, but we did start to wonder what the return passage would be like. Our next anchorage was Sceale Bay, and then on for a quiet night in the beauty of sheltered Streaky Bay. After provisioning, it was a short sail to Eba Island, just N of Streaky. In the morning we said farewell to Rob and Michelle of *Carrick Roads*, who were unable to spare more time.

The fleet then broad-reached out to Franklin Island in the Nuyts Archipelago. This is a nature reserve and is another perfect gem. Two islands are joined by an awash sand spit, where *Gemini 4's* crew had some great sport with the salmon. It was a shame to have to leave beautiful Franklin Island, as a few more days here would have been great, but we must move on.

A morning sail took us past Flinders Reef and Goat Island to pause at St Peter Island, which is the site of Lilliput. No little people were to be seen. Then it was across the bay to enter Davenport Creek. A winding channel between mangroves opens into a perfect anchorage, entirely land-locked. There are mangrove creeks to the north and high sandhills stretch to the S to protect you from the Southern Ocean. It's a sort of Sahara of the Coorong — a magic spot.

By late afternoon we were set up for a BBQ, but trouble started as dusk fell. The mozzies arrived, not in tens or hundreds but in millions upon millions, turning our arms and legs black. Were

they hungry! They lapped up Rid and Aeroguard as tomato sauce for their banquet on us. The BBQ was abandoned like Dunkirk for the safety of cabins, with all openings shut and fly spray filling the air. The moral of the story is to visit Davenport Creek by day and anchor well out for the night.

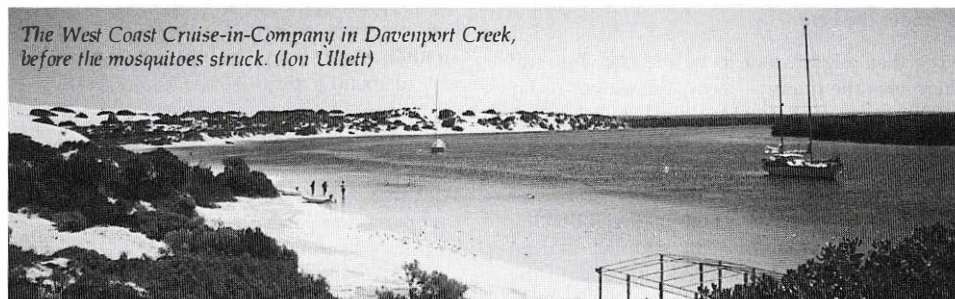
The next few days were spent in Ceduna, with a memorable oyster feast at the local hotel. On Sunday 7 March *The Bottom Line* stayed in Thevenard, after having confirmed the ability of Ceduna Hospital to stitch wounds. [Officially it's Murat Bay District Hospital — Ed.] *Gemini 4* and *Fine Romance* anchored off St Peter Island.

On Monday 8 March, as if in response to our prayers, the northerly arrived. We took full advantage of a free sheet to scurry to Sceale Bay, where we anchored well offshore to escape the hot searing wind coming off the sandhills. The N still held in the morning, but with a forecast of a change by midday, we departed at 0400. We arrived at Venus Bay at 1000 with the change, which caught *The Bottom Line* as she crossed the bar into the sheltered channel. We spent three days there, with barely room to swing and relying on the current to hold us in the deep water. It's a great place to shelter from such a change, only a hundred feet from the beach and with a short walk to the shop and caravan park. There isn't much else. Total population is about a dozen, not counting summer holiday-makers. Each day we walked to the cliff top to see the giant rollers pounding on the West Coast cliffs, and thought, 'I wonder if we'll ever get out of here!'

Eventually we decided we'd have to give it a go. *Fine Romance* and *Gemini 4* with their big diesels just poured on some more power, but *The Bottom Line* made hard work of the head seas. As the day progressed, things improved, and we all made it to Waldegrave Island for a perfect night in this very remote and beautiful anchorage.

Next day it was another 0430 start in an effort to be at Hill Bay before the predictable fresh S sea breeze became established. From there, with the weather moderating, we sailed to Avoid Point, which is another lonely but very lovely anchorage. Then came the final sail along the foot of Eyre Peninsula to round Cape Catastrophe and finish the cruise, after a month together in great company with a group of very fine sailors.

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The West Coast Cruise-in-Company in Davenport Creek, before the mosquitoes struck. (Ion Ullett)



Some of the participants in the West Coast Cruise-in-Company: Don Malcolm; Kay Chase; Murray Chase; Marg Ullett; Marj Smoker; Dean Smoker; Hans Osley; Bruce Malcolm; Jan Malcolm. (Ion Ullett)