

By Faye and Mike Harman

## Heading Home from Refuge Cove

**In this enthralling second instalment, the adventurous Harmans continue their account of the challenges involved in bringing their boat *Sentient* (now renamed *Chablis*) to Adelaide from Brisbane.**

**BY** the time we left Lakes Entrance we had only short weather windows of light winds interspersed between bursts of strong westerly winds ie winds on the nose. While we had resigned ourselves to motoring much of the time, we did not carry enough fuel for us to motor long distances into head winds and big seas. Neither did we want to do this for extended periods nor did we want to just sail by continually tacking in these conditions. All this meant stopovers at Refuge Cove and Apollo Bay.

Refuge Cove is a beautiful anchorage and one we always enjoy visiting. It is a snug, protected bay, nestled in the wilderness of Wilson's Promontory – the perfect place for a stopover when cruising to or from the Eastern States as it doesn't even require deviating from your route. As always, we thoroughly enjoyed our time there and even found plaques left by many Squadron yachts we knew.

However, as soon as a weather window appeared, we were on our way to Apollo Bay. This is a small harbour with significant silting issues. These are now so bad that up-to-date local knowledge is highly recommended before entering. Our experience reinforced this. We found that the leading lights for the harbour needed to be ignored when entering or leaving, and that even with our modest draft of 1.7m, a rising tide of more than half tide was recommended. Even in light conditions the cross swells made entering tricky and there was limited space on the marina and even less for anchoring.

We were very glad we had discussed our estimated arrival time and the corresponding tide with the Harbour Master. He gave us the latest information on entering the harbour and also advised us on where to go once in there.

The township of Apollo Bay is picturesque and a very popular tourist destination for Melbournites. It has many cafes, restaurants and two supermarkets. For yachties, fuel and water are readily available at the marina, so provisioning is easy. As the predicted strong westerly winds arrived that afternoon we were glad to be there; but by next morning they had abated. So we left at first light in the calm.

Our next stop was Portland. Our initial plan was to sail from Refuge Cove to Port Fairy. We have friends there, and it is a very protected,



At Refuge Cove on Wilsons Promontory

pretty and hospitable spot. However, while it is easy to access in the daylight, we would not arrive until dark. So we decided to continue on to the larger, more commercial port of Portland as a night-time entry would be much easier there.

Portland proved to be just as delightful as Newcastle. There is now a marina complete with floating docks and free visitors berth – all easily accessible at any hour of the day. Phoning ahead gave us access back into the marina if we decided to leave before the manager was on duty as well as the information on exactly where to go.

The next morning, when we needed to book in, we found the Manager's office in the brand new Information Centre, conveniently located as you leave the marina. Nearby were two supermarkets, a bakery and a laundromat plus many tourist shops, cafes and restaurants. As the harbour is the hub of local industry there are many services within easy walking distance, including GPs and a hospital.

However the marina has no fuel dock. Fuel has to be sourced from the not-so-nearby service station so we were glad we had invested in a trolley from Bunnings. Neither does it have showers nor toilets. Again we were lucky as we had both on board. It did have water and power, and as we stayed a week, we were allocated a secure pen and a key.

In summer the blue whales visit the Bonnie Upwelling which is about 10 nm out to sea. Seals visit the marina and there is a very large colony of nesting gannets on the headland at Point Dangar as well as at nearby Lawrence Rocks. This colony has a real-time video displayed in the Information Centre, plus trips are organised from the Centre to the colony every afternoon. We believe the fishing and diving are also good around the area. There is also a tourist tram that runs along the foreshore from the Botanic Gardens, so the tourists interested in the harbour and marine life are well catered for, with tours and do-it-yourself information.

While in Portland we were visited by our friends from Port Fairy. They drove us to Bridgewater Bay and also back to Port Fairy. On these trips we were impressed with stunning scenery and the gourmet food. Our companions were excellent hosts.

Since leaving Eden we had only short bursts when either the winds weren't on the nose or the swells weren't over 3 m or both. Plus the temperature was dropping and the daylight hours were now less than 12 and reducing quickly. In fact, we began to think the winter weather pattern of westerlies, swells, cold and very short daylight hours had arrived. We began to lose confidence in our ability to sail home on our own this season. This was only reinforced by a weekend of heavy rain, gale force winds and 8 m swells along the Portland Coast. We hid in a local motel for two nights and began enquiries about long term marina berths in Portland or Robe.

By the following Thursday we had the weather pattern of our dreams. We left Portland cautiously optimistic that we would not need to stop again. Our only concerns were that the weather predictions would become less favourable and/or that we would need to refuel. Into Robe was a back-up plan. (Cape Jaffa could not be considered because of serious silting.) We did not need fuel but the weather was not quite as ideal as we hoped. By the next morning thunderstorms were forecast for Kangaroo Island in the evening. The lure of home was too great to outweigh the possibility, so we continued.

Sure enough the beautiful calm day lost its charm as the forecast thunderstorms appeared at dusk. At first they were off our course to port and we could fondly hope that's where they would stay. Alas, not so. By 2200 hrs, as we approached

Backstairs Passage, the first squall hit us with accompanying rain, lightning and thunder. Luckily we had just reefed and the wind was short-lived. It was not more than 25 kts and the tide was with us. It was the lack of visibility that was most unnerving. We very comforted by Carol's friendly voice when we decided a radio check was in order, and so called VMR American River at about 2300 hrs that night. She was also able to let us know the locations of some of the more imminent thunderstorms.

By dawn the next morning we passed Cape Jervis and the thunderstorms were over. The remainder of our cruise home was idyllic. The winds lightened, the sun shone, the seas smoothed out and the tide was with us.

From Eden onwards we used WindyTy (now called Windy) – a weather app recommended to us by other yachting friends. We also would recommend it for cruisers. We continued to use BOM, but Windy gives you wind, swell and rain information on the same screen. It also allows you to look at a local view in detail or at as wide a contextual picture as you wish. We found this invaluable when trying to decide whether or not there was enough leeway to ensure a comfortable trip when the distances were significant and one's top speed was so low!

We also had back-up charts available from Navionics via the iPad app. We found this was very reassuring as we could use them even if our batteries failed. We also had a hand-held GPS available for use in case of such an event. Of course we could still use paper charts and hand-bearing compasses

but would rather battery electronic devices as a first line of defence. We are after all modern cruisers!

As such we are used to having generous amounts of power, water, and fuel available. Our boat has a fuel capacity of 150 litres but we also carried 60 litres in jerrycans in the cockpit locker. Our water capacity is 500 litres but we also have a water maker, just to ensure copious amounts for showers etc. In addition we have solar panels and a wind generator plus the engine to generate power. So we believed that all would be well. However, the unexpected is always waiting for cruisers.

So we had the very odd experience of too much power! During the thunderstorm in Backstairs Passage our battery alarm sounded, signalling too much power input to the new AGM batteries! We quickly decided it was because our wind generator was whirring away at top speed. But it was the middle of the night and a thunderstorm was booming overhead. It did not seem the time for Michael to climb on the back railing and throw a rope over to stop it! So the most appropriate response seemed using up as much power as possible. We turned up the fridge, turned on all the cabin fans, switched on the TV, ran all the lights, the inverter, and hoped. As we are here to tell the story it was successful. However we are still working on ways to effectively and safely rid the system of the extra power created at such times.

As we have bought a cruising boat this is only one of the challenges left before she is PERFECT.



## *Sentient* to *Chablis* Renaming Cermony

Photography: Gilbert Sare



Gannet colony Portland