

By Trevor Hamlyn, Grey Nurse

Narrung and waters into Lake Albert



Narrung Jetty

IN late October Lorraine and I in *Grey Nurse* were joined by four other Squadron boats at the Narrung jetty which lies between Lakes Alexandrina and Albert. The other members were Roy and Mignon Martin in *Dazza’s Heaven*, Anne and Steve Lewis in *Odette*, Annette Rogers sharing life aboard *Ruby Louise* with John Phillips and also Rob Hutson with his sister Vanessa in *Silver Gull*. Our group of 36 adventurers occupied an additional ten trailer-sailers, three caravans and one car-topper, the latter group utilising the camping area immediately east of the jetty or the caravan park at Meningie. Is it possible to mix land and sea activities? Of course it is, just think of the Tassicker’s Weekend cruise and other similar Squadron events.

The area around Narrung is the homeland of the Ngarrindjeri People, some of whom live in the Raukkan Community 3 km to the west of the town. Their traditional lands and waters extended 30 km up the Murray from Lake Alexandrina, the length of the Coorong and the coastal area to Encounter Bay. It’s hard to imagine how plentiful and pristine those lands must have been before European settlement. One could be forgiven for blinking and therefore missing Narrung while driving through the town, but it was once a thriving outpost between Milang and Meningie, as part of the Royal Mail route to Melbourne. The mail travelled by stagecoach from Adelaide to Milang, then by paddle steamer for the 30 nm voyage to Meningie before being reloaded onto a stagecoach for the long haul to Melbourne via Kingston, Naracoorte and Mount Gambier.



Narrung Lighthouse

Our five days in the area commenced with a Friday night dinner in the Narrung Hall which was built in 1911 by local volunteers. In recent times the Narrung Progress Association has once again volunteered their labour to maintain and restore the building. It was this group who cooked us a magnificent meal of freshly caught Coorong Mullet, topped off by chocolate brownies, as a fundraiser for their community. We thank local resident Kate Andre from the Goolwa Yacht Club, who is a Member of the above Association, for organising this event.

The wind was blowing from the wrong direction to overnight at Meningie the following day, so we based ourselves at Narrung, then motor-sailed or drove to Kate Andre and Joe’s waterfront home at the southern end of the Narrung Narrows. The native gardens and wetland on their property have been their labour of love for many years, the former in full bloom, demonstrating that pastures can be turned back into bushland but not without considerable effort and patience. One of our group was lucky enough to spot and photograph a Gould’s Monitor or sand goanna (*varanus gouldii*) foraging during the day.

By Sunday the wind had swung from west to south-west and was then predicted to go south to south-east overnight, making Meningie a safe overnight destination. The long fetch across Lake Albert made for a choppy and unpleasant sail (or motor-sail) headlong into a strong breeze, which built during the afternoon due to our nearness to the coast. The Meningie Yacht Club jetty was still somewhat exposed, so we nosed into tall reeds overnight, adjacent to the Fisherman’s Wharf at the eastern end of the lakefront caravan park. Happy hour on the council lawns followed.

Light conditions the next day allowed a few of us to venture into the south-western corner of the Lake, known by locals as ‘The Arm’. After motoring slowly and rather tentatively under the power lines at Warringee Point we entered through a narrow channel to confirm that all-round protection was indeed available for a future cruise. A brilliant 17 nm sail in light airs back to the Narrung Jetty ensued.

Overnighting at the jetty is not recommended if there is any north in the wind so you need to anchor off, as we did on this occasion.

The Narrung jetty was built in 1877 to accommodate paddle steamers and small craft, prior to the introduction of a ferry service in 1928 to cater for motorised traffic. Navigation across Lake Alexandrina from Milang, Point Sturt or Wellington in those days was difficult in bad weather and especially at night, so the lighthouse that overlooks the jetty from Point Malcolm was completed and first exhibited in February 1878. Although it ceased to operate in September 1931 it remains the only inland lighthouse not only in Australia but the Southern Hemisphere.



Private landing in the Narrung Narrows



Tied to the reeds at Meningie

It’s important to note that Lake Albert is shallow so care needs to be taken to avoid running aground, especially around its shores. We updated the Navionics Chart on our plotter immediately before the trip and proved the details to be reliable, with water depths between 1.5 and 2.0 m and channel markers accurately positioned. Sailors beware: one navigation hazard that wasn’t marked on our paper chart or on the electronic equivalent was a pylon mounted weather station at 35°40.560’S 139°14.972’E. I also viewed aerial photographs of the Lake that were taken during the millennium drought and plotted by hand to show all sand bars that were visible when it was at its lowest level. While on the subject of water levels, Lake Albert was 200-300 mm above its normal level during October which obviously assisted our crossing.

Also worth noting is the condition of the boat ramp at Narrung which is located adjacent to the western approach to the ferry. It’s



Crossing Lake Albert

one of the least friendly ramps in SA, with a slimy concrete apron that drops off suddenly at around 6 m from the waterline. It has a rocky shoreline on both sides, making arrivals and departures tricky in all but the best conditions. Thankfully many of our group decided to launch and retrieve using better facilities at Hindmarsh Island, Goolwa, Clayton Bay or Meningie. The rest of us made do at Narrung by placing some pieces of carpet (thanks Roy) over the slime and by using our own ladder and plank for boarding. Hopefully this public facility is nearing the top of the list for expenditure from our State Government facilities levy.

Despite the need to be aware of any local hazards, the area has a beauty of its own, including spectacular bird life and will remain high on our list of options for future cruising.

Acknowledgement: Some of the historical information in this article has come from the photographic display inside the Narrung Hall.

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Dr NIGEL WILSON
CHAMBERS

- Australian commercial and dispute resolution lawyer with over 28 years’ experience
- Maritime, cybersecurity, technology, insurance and governance expert
- Training and education specialist
- Author of *Teaching Professionals* - available online at Archway Publishing Bookstore

Contact

M: 0413 807 585
W: www.australischambers.com
E: wilson@australischambers.com

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