

practical: crossing the Rip

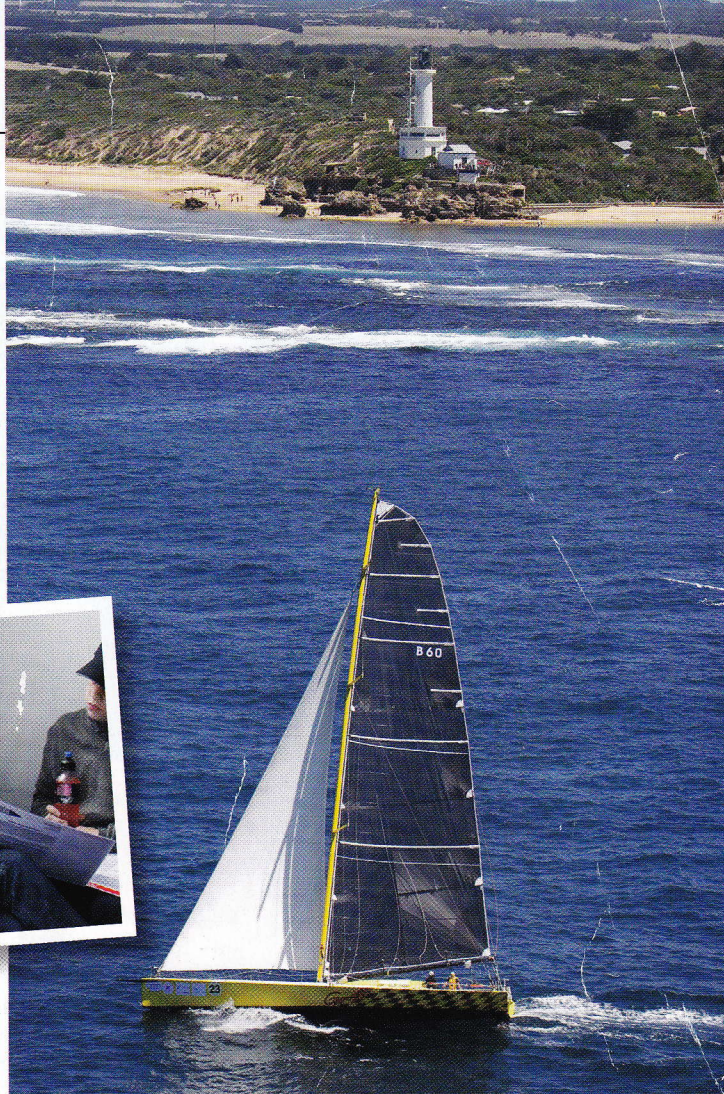


ABOVE: The High Light, that is one of the Four Fingers West, is just one of three black lighthouses in the world.

INSET: During the last ORCV Rip Tour of October 2009, participants eagerly absorbed the material offered by the commentary and the Rip Guide.



RIGHT: The Rip — delightful one day, as seen here — and probably not so flash the next. This is Gusto, the former Open 60, with Point Lonsdale light in the background.



CREDIT: STEB FISHER

Historically (all the way back to the 1800s), the old sailing ships used to have quite a hard time both coming in and going out (no cast-iron main sheets back then, of course) and many lives were lost in and around Corsair Rock on the eastern side and Lonsdale Reef on the west.

Navigating the Rip

As mentioned, the Rip is not impossible to pass and most times it will be fairly docile, which will leave you wondering what all the brouhaha was about. If those are your only memories, then be truly thankful.

What is most important, however, is to pick your weather and suitable time, especially for your first attempt. There are not enough pages for this article to give you a complete step-by-step approach, so it is essential that you have studied the Australian Pilot Vol II and the latest AUS 143 chart.

The Rip is exceptionally well signposted, which ensures a well read mariner will not be presented with any issues. Compass bearings and accurate

counting of intervals of lights will ensure you avoid many of the pitfalls.

If there is any sea at all, recognising the leads from a moving deck is more difficult than you might think. For this reason, it is essential that you approach from the southwest, which offers the best viewing options and mostly has the best seas. Over to the south and southeast is where the largest volumes of water are moving and the current can push you in towards Corsair Rock and other dangers, very quickly. It is in this quadrant that the roughest seas can be found for at least three or four nautical miles, especially in an ebb tide and/or bad weather. You do not want to be here.

Indisputably, slack water is the safest time to traverse the Rip. This is roughly around a half-hour window, some three hours after the high and low water times of the Rip. It is plenty of time to get in or out safely. By way of reference, medium sized racing yachts generally cover the distance from Shortland Bluff to the Heads in about half an hour. The tide signals are displayed from Point Lonsdale lighthouse.

Critical leads on entering the Heads

In terms of leads, there are six that are super-critical, if you have made your approach correctly from the southwest. The Four Fingers West at Shortland Bluff are as important as the ones on your own hand. They are so named because when using this channel, the four leads appear equidistantly from each other, much like holding up your own in front of you. The order of sequence is High Light, Hume Tower, Low Light and Murray Tower. It is just awesome in low-light conditions because the towers themselves are lit and literally jump off the horizon for you.

1 Point Lonsdale Light (Fl[2] WGR.15s) is a white tower, which is open for inspection on Sundays 09:30 to 13:00, please check at www.queenscliffe.vic.gov.au for details. It is red to white over Lonsdale Reef and the western coast, white to the SW, S, and SSE and green in a small SE sector, as well. It is red from SE to E, also covering Point Nepean. For vessels departing Port Phillip, it is also white in a small sector covering the south channel.