

Just Cruising on Just Jane



Jo Capel

Finally, no more work or school commitments, no mobile phones, no cars and with a very limited and meagre income, the three of us left the Squadron to sail to the southern latitudes of New Zealand and its Fiordlands. After two years of preparing *Just Jane* we decided to go, even though the job list was still endless.

Just Jane is the original name of our 13 metre centre-cockpit fibreglass ketch, which was built in Hong Kong in 1976 to a design by Ted Brewer. We bought her in Mooloolaba and trucked her to Adelaide. After getting over our initial shock at buying what seemed at the time such a huge yacht, we started the long process of checking, upgrading, maintaining and thoroughly preparing the boat for the cruise we had in mind.

On 19 October 1996 we quietly slipped out of the Squadron pool and headed for Portland. Well, we tried to do it quietly, but with Tim, aged eleven, these words have never registered highly on his priority list. The fact that in our excitement at actually leaving, we still had a bow line attached as we backed out of our berth did not go unnoticed, due to Tim obligingly informing everyone. The weather forecast was favourable, and with hardly any wind we headed to Kangaroo Island, playing a game of cards with Tim on the way.

From Backstairs Passage to Portland, the wind varied from SW 30 knots to NW 40-50 knots. We sailed mainly with a triple-reefed main and had to dodge many cray pots on the way. Arnold and I continued three hour watches, and Tim dutifully monitored the visual and sound effects of our seasickness, as well as timing and quantity. This, of course, we decided was part of his schooling and fitted into the language and maths curriculum. It took us 47 hours to do the mainly downwind sailing of the 362 nautical nm to Portland. There we spent a few days sight-

seeing, catching up with old friends and getting Tim to do his correspondence schooling.

From Portland to Port Fairy is only about 32 nm. The entrance to this delightful spot is fairly shallow in places, and we momentarily touched bottom as we motored in. There we waited for what we thought to be a sensible weather forecast before setting out across Bass Strait to Stanley Harbour at the NW corner of Tasmania. We left with a comfortable 20 to 25 knot NW, which towards evening picked up to 30 knots. During the night, when we were off King Island, the wind howled through between 40 and 60 knots and provoked four to five metre swells, so once again we were down to triple-reefed main. We were pleased with how the boat was handling the conditions, and as we were using the TMQ helmsman, we didn't have to spend our entire watch on the helm. It was bitterly cold sailing through the night, and thermal and wet weather gear did not alleviate this problem.

At 0700 and after 220 nm of very unpleasant sailing, we reached the fishing town of Stanley and tied up at a berth between two trawlers. What we thought would be a peaceful little harbour soon became crowded with people and yachts. Over the next few days about 48 yachts of the Melbourne to Stanley Race arrived. Parties, food festivals and music surrounded us. Tim was delighted at the ongoing activity, but was disappointed that the music blared everywhere was Country and Western and not Hard Rock or Nirvana. We told him to look on this as an educational experience and part of his correspondence music curriculum.

As we wanted to be in Hobart for the wooden boat festival, we moved on. We soon became used to gale force winds, as if we waited for perfect weather forecasts, we would never get anywhere, and the forecasts usually gave gale or storm warnings. Our daily hops along the north and east coasts were usually downwind at 30 to 40 knots. Some of the anchorages were fantastic and well protected, like Wineglass Bay. In dubious ones, like Skeleton Bay and Binnalong Bay, we were prepared to move out quickly if the wind changed. Our favourite was a tiny

place called Canoe Bay in Fortescue Bay, where we motored through masses of kelp to anchor behind a huge old wreck which lay three-quarters across the narrow entrance.

We intended to go from Fortescue Bay straight to Hobart, but the barometer was dropping rapidly as an intense low approached and gale warnings were issued, so we decided to try for Port Arthur. It seemed to be bordering on almost impossible to go round Tasman Island in head winds, and a large tack out to sea made us think that our next stop was Antarctica. Tim decided that there was no sense in him getting wet, so he tucked himself in his bunk, informing us, 'It wasn't my idea to go to Tasmania.'



Arnold Capel enjoying lunch in Blanket Bay.

Finally we managed to lay a tack into Port Arthur, to anchor directly opposite the convict

ruins. Port Arthur was indeed full of history, but because of the recent massacre and everyone was waiting for Martin Bryant to be sentenced, there was a sinister and depressing aura. The passage through Storm Bay and up the Derwent to Hobart was uneventful. On 18 November 1996 we tied up at Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania, where we were made to feel very welcome.

We now had to make some heavy decisions regarding the next stage of our journey. We wanted to sail directly from Hobart to enter New Zealand at Milford Sound and from there cruise through the rest of the Fiordlands, round the bottom of the South Island and then the east coast. After many phone calls and faxes, New Zealand Customs officials gave us permission to enter at Milford Sound, but at

a cost of AUS\$1,400. As this was way out of the question, we decided to enter at Bluff Harbour,

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the southernmost port of New Zealand at no cost and go to the Fiordlands from there. We felt apprehensive about crossing this stretch of the Tasman Sea, but as two friends from Adelaide informed us they had booked flights to meet us at Milford Sound on 3 January 1997, we felt we had no choice.

Tim decided to go to school in Hobart, after discovering that if he got up early he could have breakfast at McDonalds on the way, so for a week he went off on one of the two bikes we took with us. Our first call was on a Hood sailmaker, because two battens had broken and we had damaged our brand new mainsail. Next on the list was a boom brake, which we ordered from Don McIntyre. Our panic bag was checked and updated, and the recharged hand-held VHF radio was placed securely in it. We reviewed our safety gear; attached a sea drogue with chain and rope so it was ready to deploy; and ensured we met NZ Section 21 safety requirements. The medical kit, which would serve a MASH unit, was rechecked.

We went to the wooden boat festival and caught up with old friends Ruth and John Young, who run a wooden boat building school in Franklin. At Mount Field National Park Tim saw snow for the first time, and at RYCT we spent a delightful evening with well known Squadron member, Lee Sydenham. *Iniquity* also arrived, so much time was spent socialising with Tim Ekins and his crew.

On 30 November the Customs official who came aboard said that Tim was the first child she had cleared for Bluff Harbour in New Zealand. We didn't leave at once, because of a storm warning, but next day set out with only gale warnings for the 900 nm to Bluff Harbour. The seas were still rough and confused, but they soon settled down and we sailed reasonably comfortably in 20-30 knot SSW. Arnold and I again stuck to our three hour watches, but got each other up if any deck

work was needed. For the next five days we sailed across the vast grey ocean with very few problems. In the log I wrote at one stage, 'Sailing well, don't have to do much.' We didn't have to steer, but used our TMQ helmsman. Every day we reported our position to Derek on Sydney Pentacomstat, as we had done since leaving Adelaide. We were fairly lucky, as the wind was favourable, usually behind us, and the conditions were reasonable. The only things we

saw beside the grey sea were a few albatrosses and mutton birds.

Tim became the entertainment officer on board. He seemed to have the incredible ability of not only keeping himself amused but involving the person on watch in various discussions

and general chitchat. He devised games to play, and fell back on old faithfuls like 'I Spy', although this quickly got beyond the use-by date through lack of interest. His joyous sense of humour kept us going, particularly when we were feeling a little under the weather. Many a time I heard his voice yell out to me as I was leaning over the side of the boat, 'Are you having fun now, Mum?' Then he would give a cheerful laugh, because unlike Arnold and myself he didn't seem to suffer too badly at all from seasickness.

On the fifth evening we started to get headwinds, and by next morning the SE had started to pick up. We could now see New Zealand, and as we entered Foveaux Strait we didn't seem to be making much headway against 30-40 knot SE. This wasn't really a problem, because we could comfortably lay the course to the first of the Fiordlands, Preservation Inlet. We anchored there for the night, and at the end of six days felt in awe of this wonderful and remote place, and the pure fact that the three of us had actually made it safely to New Zealand.

Next day we rounded Puysegur Point and sailed through Foveaux Strait to enter Bluff

Harbour. With a NW wind of about 35 knots and a SW swell of about two metres, this was not entirely comfortable, but it was better than head-on winds. Nothing seemed to faze Tim too much, and as we sailed out of the inlet he sketched the coastline. It didn't seem to matter that the seas were rather standing up and we were getting tossed around a little. Tim simply wedged himself in the cockpit and carried on sketching, while Arnold and I stuffed ourselves with a dose of Quells.

We arrived in Bluff Harbour after a great sail of 90 nm, and the Customs officials were waiting for us as we tied up at the wharf behind *Iniquity*. They couldn't have been nicer, and the paperwork was soon done. We spent the next few days visiting the laundromat (a bucket and hose job at the end of the wharf), exploring Bluff itself and eating the fish which was constantly given to us. Tim rode his bike for miles, and soon became known to the locals.

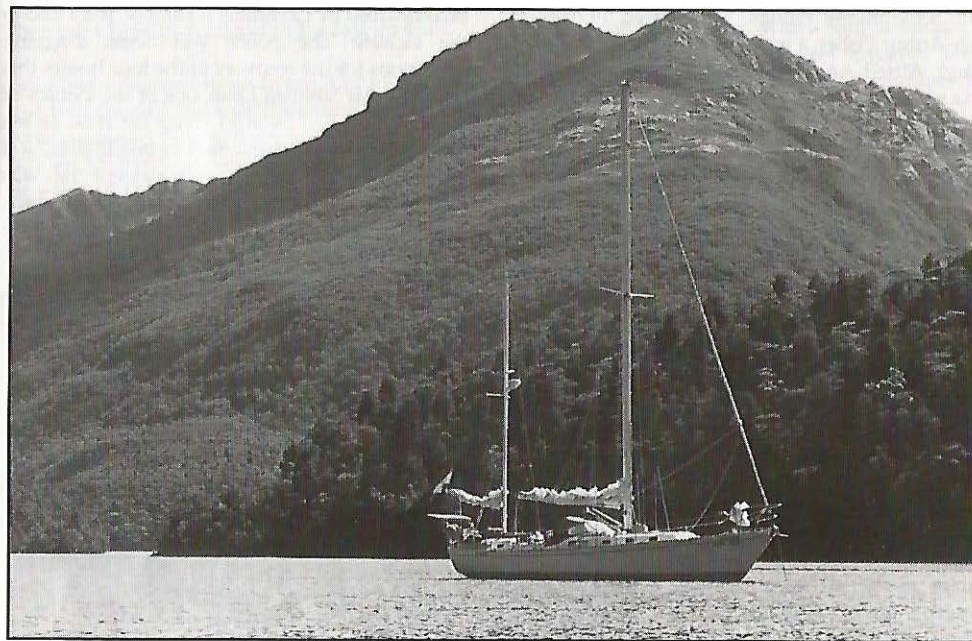
Tim Ekins and his crew set out for Antarctica, and we left a few days later to explore the Fiordlands. Our first stop was to return to

Preservation Inlet, after which we anchored at tiny Lake Cove, at the very end of Chalky Inlet, where a waterfall cascaded into one corner of the bay. We dinghied ashore and hiked to the lake at the top of the waterfall. This was the first time that we have experienced such remoteness. If the yacht dragged or something happened to the dinghy, there was no way of getting back to our boat or contacting anyone. The terrain was dense and rugged, the mountains round the anchorage blocked any radio transmission, and we could not have survived swimming any distance in the near freezing water. In other words, we didn't feel at all comfortable in separating ourselves from the yacht which was now our home. Nevertheless, it was an incredible experience, and it was here that we discovered that throughout the Fiordlands, no matter how lousy at fishing one was, fish were indeed abundant. Back on *Just Jane*, because we had seen 'things' jumping out of the water, we tried hand-fishing. Tim and Arnold cast lures, and in a matter of minutes Tim had his line snapped and his favourite lure vanished. After several more attempts and the use of a net we landed a large barracuda.

To be continued in a future issue



Tim Capel discovers snow in Tasmania.



Just Jane in Lake Cove, Chalky Inlet.