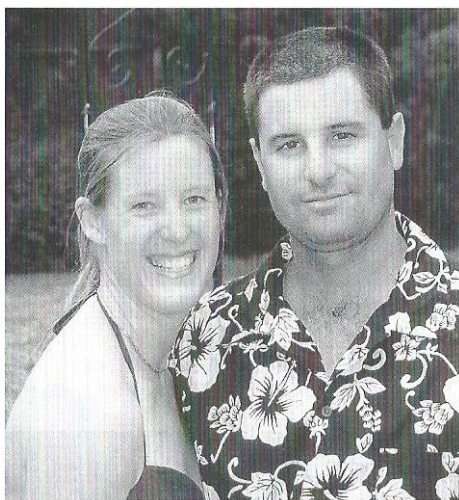


News from Legs Eleven

Anthony and Alexandra Gates, hereinafter to be Gatesy and Ali

We are grateful to Gatesy, Ali and Doug Castle (Ali's father) for a good start in keeping us in touch with their movements. Some of the E-mails will quickly lose currency, so, with Gatesy's agreement we intend to publish only edited extracts for so long as they keep coming.



30 December 2002

Southern Ocean/Bass Strait
S 40.04°64', E 142°32.14'
172 nm NW of Macquarie Harbour
Wind 5 kts on the nose

We are yet to make landfall in Tassie, but we are slowly progressing in the right direction. We finally dropped lines at RSAYS on the 21 December 2002, with Chris joining our crew. We spent four days at anchor in Eastern Cove KI, happy for having lots of chain holding us securely in place. We pulled the pick on Boxing Day and again it was blowing a gale directly on the nose as we tacked and tacked, trying to find one which headed SE but finding only headers all the time. Our next port of call was Robe, where we found *Ninja Go* swinging after their rough passage, in which I believe they hove to. *Legs* handled it well, even though she was loaded down to her lines.

'Onwards ho' the crew yelled, so we set sail (or at least started the motor) into a light SE breeze. The log read 1st reef; 3rd reef; shook both out; then back to 3rd and round we go again, so much that we now know we can put a reef in whilst asleep. Then guess who forgot to turn the auto bilge seacock off! Swinging down below to fill in the log, I found myself shin deep in water. Rectifying the problem damaged my pride a bit, but we now have a very clean bilge.

But all is not woe. Have you in the black of night seen the dolphins weave phosphorescent patterns in the water around your ship and seen fish that seem to glow in the dark? We watched albatross circle effortlessly just above the wave crests waiting for a feed, and had a baby seal and penguin come to inspect the ship. These are the things we happily sit in the cockpit in light drizzle for, and then at four in the morning you don't seem tired but awake and alive.

Our Sat-phone number is 0011 8816 3142 5923 and we will be switched on at 2000 hrs Adelaide time. Email address agatesysails@hotmail.com — No attachments, please, and keep messages pretty short. Post Address: 177 b The Esplanade, South Brighton, SA 5048, Australia. We still need some people's Email address, so send them to dcastle@seol.net.au if you want to keep in contact.

4 January 2003

Kelly Basin, Macquarie Harbour
Anchored off the old jetty at the now abandoned pioneer town of West Pilling.

We finally made it to Macquarie Harbour, Tassie, and arrived at Hells Gates on the morning of 31 December 2002, with a 30-knot squall reducing visibility dramatically. At one moment we could see vast mountain ranges and the next they had vanished into the clouds! We had read then re-read the sailing instructions on entering the Harbour and even made our own notes, but several things concerned us:

Why did they call the Entrance 'Hells Gates'?

The caution on the chart warning not to enter in a NW gale as seas break across Entrance, but luckily the wind was NNW at 30 Knots.

Not knowing whether the tide was flooding or ebbing. There are no tide tables, as the tide ebbs and flows to the barometric pressure and the flow of the Gordon River.

How actually big is a cable (a tenth of a nm.) and is it wide enough to fit us between the rocks and breaking shallows?

Could we find the leads in the rain?

And why did the GPS want to send us ashore?

A little nervous, we tied everything down, prepared the pick, started the motor and gritted our teeth. Surfing standing waves just meters off a rock breakwater in Adelaide is just a normal twilight, so here goes. Yep! Tide's ebbing fast, Yep! Wind against tide. Yep! 2m under the keel, but at least we aren't moving fast. Another squall — no worries. How did they get ships in here without motors and how even did they find this place? It was exhilarating! First lead, second lead — 'Are we meant to be this close to the rocks?' No worries we made it, but others haven't been so lucky.

So up to Strahan for a beer and New Year celebration, as last time I sailed to Hobart in *Reprieve* we watched the fireworks from Storm Bay trying to finish the Sydney-Hobart Race. After more rain we tied up to the NE corner of the wharf between a cray boat and another RSAYS boat *Ayesha*, who had also arrived from Adelaide via Melbourne and King Island. Chris left *Legs* here, and we hope he will join us again, maybe somewhere warmer.

On 2 January, after seeing the lovely architectural and historic sites of Strahan, including the laundry, servo and supermarket, we coiled lines and headed out to explore the Harbour we had both read so much about in books such as *The Men God Forgot* by Richard Butler; *For the Term of His Natural Life* by Marcus Clarke; and *King River to Kelly Basin Archaeological Survey* by David Bannear.

Our first stop was in the uppermost reach of Farm Cove a name from the convict days, when they grew vegetables there for the hardest of the hardcore convicts detained on Sarah Island. After an early dinghy exploration next morning under the peaks of Mount Sorrel (3,748 ft), which at the time was covered in cloud with waterfalls running down its face, it was up anchor for the western reach. There we bush bashed through scrub and 12 ft tree ferns the short distance across to a small sandy beach in our new hiking gear: sea boots, quick-dry shorts and wet-weather jacket. The sea boots, apart from being a bit slippery, at least kept our feet dry (a new experience) and also acted as gaiters in protecting the shins from scratches.

After a birthday lunch on our new cockpit table, which due to the consistent rain we had yet to christen, we up anchored again for the old penal settlement on Sarah Island.

In the year 1822 a penal settlement was formed on the North-West coast of Van Diemen's Land for men convicted a second time in the colony. Macquarie Harbour is 37 miles long and from 5-9 broad. The settlement is upon an island 2 miles in

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circumference, and 25 miles from the heads or entrance. One mile from it is a small island, which is a perpendicular rock 50 ft above the level of the sea, about 40 yards long and 8 wide. Rude stairs cut into cliffs is the only road to a truly wretched barracks built with boards and shingles, into which 70 men were often confined in too crowded a state as to scarcely lay down on their sides — to lay on their backs was out of the question. Thomas Bryan

Governor George Arthur to Commandant —

You will consider that the constant active unremitting employment of every individual convict in very hard labour is the grand and main design of your settlement. You must find work and labour, even if it only consists of opening up cavities and filling them again.

And labour they did! Flattening and reclaiming land, making bricks and constructing buildings, mining coal and felling the famous Huon pines, celery tops and blackwood for building ships of up to 226 tons. All of this was on daily rations of mouldy bread and rotten corn beef in a harsh environment. Floggings were frequent, and many men saw death as their only escape from this hell on earth.

To see the island today from a distance, it is hard to imagine how it must have been during these times. Now the tree ferns and rainforest reign supreme. Broken are the chains, which once held men in the bondage of slave labour. There are, however, ruins and stories of escape and survival, such as Alexander Pearce, who ate his fellow escapees on a break to Hobart, or perhaps the most successful escape, when ten convicts stole the *Frederick* — the last ship built on Sarah Island, and sailed across the Pacific to Chile.

From Sarah Island we headed into Kelly Basin, where we anchored off the old jetty of West Pillinger

At Kelly basin the North Mt Lyell copper company established port facilities — including three wharves, two on the western shore of 400 ft and one on the eastern shore of 800 ft — as well as their railway terminus, with engine sheds, railway station, and so on. The company constructed other substantial works at Kelly Basin — brickworks, sawmill and ore-crushing plant. In 1899, upwards of 600 men were employed by the company on the construction of its railway and works at Kelly Basin.

The activity at Kelly Basin attracted other settlers and, in 1898 the Government surveyed the town of Macquarie, on the western shore. Town lots auctioned that year fetched record land prices. The town expanded greatly over the next four years (although not in quite such an orderly fashion as the Government would have liked) and its name was changed to Pillinger. The main settlement was known as West Pillinger, and was clustered around the railway station. Settlement also took place on the Eastern Shore, near the Company's brickworks and sawmill, known as East Pillinger. The town reached its peak in 1902, with about 600 inhabitants, 80 dwellings and 25 businesses, including stores, tradesmen, three hotels, shipping agents, and a coffee palace.

Pillinger plunged into virtual obscurity when, in 1903, the North Mt Lyell Company amalgamated with another company, and all smelting was done at Queenstown. The railway and port were now practically redundant. The train service, greatly reduced, continued until 1925. The settlement dwindled until the railway closed, at which time only two families remained. The last of these left in 1943. David Barneer (King River to Kelly Basin Archaeological Survey.)

Upon reaching the shore near the old jetty at West Pillinger, we followed the remains of the railway line from the jetty into the overgrown rainforest.



Legs Eleven

It still amazes us at how quickly a town can be overgrown and taken back by nature. Our only guide to a path was the embankment of the railway track, which led us past such relics as an old rail cart from Gawler SA, which has a tree growing through its centre. Without the knowledge of a town once having existed here, you would believe it was pristine. How hard the free settlers here must have laboured, only to have the forest regain its possession of the land.

An hour's tramp along the once existing track, with collapsed and overgrown bridges, brought us to East Pillinger. Here we found more evidence of a town that was. Remains of the old mess hall, an old rail carriage, brick kilns and boilers, with the old jetty still protruding into Kelly Basin.

The tree ferns seem to grow everywhere, even out of the remaining brick walls of the kilns, reminding us of hidden Aztec cities.

The return trip to West Pillinger was much quicker, as it is much easier to find a track from a place than to a place! However we had some excitement when Ali leapt backwards in mid step, because of a baby black snake which crossed her path. After this Gatesy went first.

Further down the track Gatesy heard another scream for help, and raced back to find Ali lying in the mud with her feet in the air. This was due to one of the more challenging river crossings, made all the more difficult by walking in wet and muddy sea boots.

Following the track back to the main jetty, we stumbled across Reindeer Lodge — a fishing shack adjacent to the remains of the ore-crushing shed at West Pillinger near the mouth of the Fysh River (It may be possible to get a boat with moderate draft up to the wharf out the front). The Lodge displayed a fair few trophies of guys with big trout, so the fishing must be good.

It is possible to navigate a yacht safely some 22 nm up the Gordon River to Big Eddy, just below the junction of the Franklin. The big tourist cats only go as far as Heritage Landing 6 nm up, so you have a bit more privacy to enjoy the moment. Looking at the contours on the chart, I was expecting something similar to King George River in the Kimberley, but greener. Slightly disappointed due to being spoilt, we both enjoyed the motor on this beautiful sunny day looking up at the surrounding trees. On pulling alongside the landing at Pine Hut to explore, I



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kept my eyes on the sounder as at 0.2 m it was shallow. The keel however made it; the bottom spreaders didn't as they touched overhanging trees. Thanks to the Greenies, there are no overhead wires here.

We had lunch at Sir Johns Falls tied to the Seaplane jetty, where Alby's Targo bar nearly got taken off by the wing of a plane (This time the pilot didn't tell me off for touching the plane). Others may know another story about Bret and myself in *Kango* getting in a bit of strife in Cairns with the port authorities for tying up to a helipad. Boats and aircraft don't mix. It was then a tranquil motor back to near the mouth of the Gordon, where we anchored for the night.

9 January 2003

Schooner Cove
Port Davey

From Hells Gates it is some 91 nm to Port Davey, so wanting to leave and arrive in daylight we decided on our first real two-hander overnighter. Motoring out of Strahan with forecast winds of 10 to 20 knots from the SW with a 2 to 3 meter

swell sounded like ideal conditions, or at least the best they get down here. It was a beautiful night, a bit brisk, but with so many stars you really felt small, one in particular being even brighter than the masthead light and now I feel a bit sad about not getting out the star finder and being able to tell you its name.

Concerned about arriving too early in the dark, we dropped the mainsail for the last leg to watch the sun rise over mountains with Breaksea Island and the Entrance to Bathurst Channel slowly appearing out of the shadows to the splendour of the new morning light. A relatively easy entrance saw us roll in behind the island and out of the now building swell to be in flat water surrounded by mountains of some 600 ft covered in button grass, strewn with rocks, which gave the appearance of snow. Recharged after a sleep and some hot food, we greeted *Ayesha* who had also just arrived from Macquarie Harbour. The clear skies then had us ashore and donning our walking boots for a tramp up 'Mount Higher Than it Looks' for spectacular views of the surrounding mountain range, which protects Bathurst Channel nestled at its base.

On Thursday 9 January, things did not go as planned. While Ali was raising the anchor with the winch, the chain jumped over the bow roller to crush her foot between the pulpit and anchor fluke. Her other foot remained on the up button raising the pain and the pitch of yells for help. Of course the anchor-down button in the cockpit wouldn't work with the bow foot switch depressed, but it did blow the circuit breaker, thereby releasing some of the tension. We were soon rafted up to *Ayesha*, with Theresa assessing the damage to Ali's foot. Although the pain was intense and the bruising immediately purple, it does not seem to be broken. After three days the sympathy and book reading aloud seem to be assisting in the recovery of the patient.

10 Jan 2003,

Claytons, Bathurst Harbour
Port Davey

Interesting Chart Facts:

- Note: The Island SE of Hillaird Head has been reported to lie about 1nm further south than charted.
- Eight Fathoms, Four Foot (unexamined breaks).
- Caution: the portions of this plan not included in the plan of Bathurst Channel, are from old and imperfect sketch surveys, 1842-50, adjusted to the latest triangulation and are to be used with great caution (1931).
- Surveyed by Lieut. Pasco, surveying ship *Dart* 1902.
- Approximate course of channel.
- Projection gnomonic [Oxford English Dictionary: Pertaining to the gnomon or sundial, or to the measuring of time, etc by means of this. The principle of gnomonic projection is especially used in the construction of star maps.]
- Warning: Whilst every effort has been taken to find and record hazards and obstructions it must be pointed out that the charts do not purport to provide a total coverage of every passage and anchorage in respect of the depths and dangers.

13 January 2003

Louisa Bay, Tasmania S 43° 31.75', E 146° 21.76'

[After the frustration of running aground in mud in a channel], we anchored in Bramble Cove, before we headed for Sarah Island with our snorkelling kit to find the water surprisingly warm. No crays, but abs galore and a great dive through the kelp provided mussels for Colin's green curry mussel entree. Abs quickly fried in butter with lemon and fresh cracked pepper. Abs with coriander, ginger, garlic & lemon grass. Abs slow cooked whole. Too many Abs.

We made a morning assault of Mt Misery (354m). After two hours of hard work, we were presented with an amazing panoramic view of the whole area. N were the peaks of the Western Arthur Ranges; E was Bathurst Channel and Harbour; S was the Southern Ocean with Breaksea Island and surrounding rocks to the W.

We met an Ab diver, who presented us with five crays for dinner (one each!). Anchored in between Lourah Is. and the mainland was a lovely spot, with salmon instantly on the bite and a nice long beach for a quiet walk while contemplating life and the fantastic weather we were experiencing.

It was time to head further south. The forecast winds didn't eventuate and we ended up motoring to Maatsuyker Is. (S 43° 38' E 146° 17'). The diesel after running sweetly all day chose the uncharted passage between Flat Witch and Walker Islands to splutter, but we made it to the very roily 18m anchorage of the main island before it died. Ali went on a dinghy ride with *Ayesha* to get close to the friendly and playful seals, as I investigated the current cough of the donk.

With some hesitation, we decided on Louisa Bay for the night. We went to bed in glassy conditions, laughing at the Bureau, and awoke at 0200 hrs to 53 knots from the SW with a lee shore (They never mentioned SW). After initial panic, two minutes later we were fully kitted up and ready to sail out when we found that the wind was abating and the anchor was still holding.

to be continued

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