

Going West with *Solace*, *Minke II*, *Sweet Caroline* and *Megga*



Solace anchored at the rocky Pearson Island

According to Geoff Wallbridge 'There is no really easy way of leaving South Australia by boat. There is Bass Strait one way and the Great Australian Bight the other, and both routes include the edges of the notorious Southern Ocean'.

Sailing from Adelaide to WA is a serious prospect for even the most experienced yachting. So, we invited some in the sailing fraternity to share their experiences and give us some tips on 'Going West'. Sadly, due to lack of space we have had to drastically edit these wonderful stories. However, they are available in their full format on the Squadron website, www.squadron.asn.au

Solace, Across the Great Australian Bight

Geoff Wallbridge

In preparing for my proposed circumnavigation of the Australian mainland I studied the long term weather records for Streaky Bay and Eucla and there seemed to be a good chance of four or five day periods of steady south easterlies inshore in March. In 2002 I ringed 14 March 2005, as departure date with the intention of going west.

Embarrassed by my lack of experience as a long distance cruiser, I always told people that my plan was to 'sail to the bottom of the gulf, turn right and see what happens'. This gave me a chance to pull out if the weather was bad or the sheer enormity of the Bight was too much.

The first few days were spent visiting familiar anchorages at Blanche Point, Emu Bay, Snug Cove to then new territory at the beautiful Williams Island and around the bottom of Eyre Peninsula before setting off for an overnight sail to Pearson Island. The northern anchorage is very steep-to and with big swells and 30 knot "bullets" coming round the headland it was an easy decision to leave after sunset and head for Streaky Bay for

a few days before heading to open anchorage at Ceduna.

After we had sat out a 50 knot front in the protection of Daveport Creek we got a fairly good four day forecast so we set off into the remaining swell and slop. *Solace* had sprung a leak, so we diverted to the only available anchorage with some protection, Fowlers Bay. The southern easterlies we had waited for were blowing straight into the bay so we rolled badly all night while waiting unhappily for dawn.

A canvas tingle filled with silicone, applied to the stern as *Solace* pitched and rolled in the swell seemed to halve the leak rate and as we were in relatively calm water we chose to push on. The leak stayed constant and the promised steady south easterlies kicked in with sunny skies.

The next four days were a dream. The weather stayed light from the south east and we slipped along at about 5 knots over an immense blue sea with huge but benign mountain ranges of swell rolling in from the south west. The nights were full of brilliant stars, meteorite showers and phosphorescence in our wake.

The distance between our waypoints at Fowlers Bay and our intended landfall at Daw Island, just short of Cape Arid in WA, was 427 nautical miles. At the last nightfall, still a few miles short of Daw Island, the weather deteriorated rapidly into a 30

knot north easterly and with an uncertain landfall we were forced to heave-to for the night. *Solace* sat quietly beam on to the rising swell, quite warm and comfortable down below.

At dawn the next day we could just see the peak of Daw Island on the horizon and two hours later we had the anchor down in the sandy bay behind the main rocky peak. The relief, joy and modest pride we felt at having safely cross the Great Australian Bight can be imagined.

Musings on the Path Westward

Mike & Faye Harman *Minke II*

We left Adelaide on 2 March, 2005 to cruise the west coast of SA, the south and west coasts of WA, and through the Kimberley coast to Darwin.

On a prior cruise to Ceduna, we had experienced crystal clear waters, excellent fishing, stunning scenery and the sense of wilderness that makes cruising in this area so captivating.

During this cruise we had noticed that the s/easterlies persisted from late January through February and well into March, and hence sailing west was a lot easier than East. We also observed that anchorages protected from NW, W and SW are hardly ever needed at this time of year because most of the fronts pass under the high pressure systems and hence any westerlies are light and/or short lived.

We chose to go via Ceduna as this gave us the opportunity to have a comfortable shake-down in familiar waters in our recently extended catamaran, *Minke II*. It also gave us the



options of comfortably reprovisioning in Streaky Bay and of waiting for a weather window in Davenport Creek, our favourite anchorage.

When the weather bureau promised a 5 day spell with SE winds and no fronts, who were we to argue? Even though it was Friday, we set sail at 1330 and headed across the Bight with Daw Island as our destination (33 52'S 124 08'E).

Our trip was very comfortable - following seas all the way, light to moderate SE.

Three days later at 1500 we dropped anchor at Daw Island, relieved to find it at the given GPS position as charted (rumour has it up to 5 miles out of position) and easy to enter with protection from all but N and NW.

Fishing in this part of the world (Recherche Archipelego) was all you could dream about. At mealtime you cast a line, catch a squid or two or three, then a dozen tommies if you can get a bait past the trevally which are not bad tucker either.

So we spent most of 2 weeks in the Recherche Group and cruised to Esperance where we were made most welcome by the yacht club and by the local community before moving on to the hospitable Fremantle Sailing Club in early May.

We thoroughly recommend cruising in Geographe Bay - particularly at a time of year when the sea-breezes are

light. The waters are clear, the beaches are clean and white and the local yacht clubs and towns are friendly and of course the fishing is good.

We used the Fremantle Cruising Guide as our first authority on anchorages - but we also had an updated version of a cruising guide by Lane which was sometimes more accurate or contained additional information. We recommend them both.

Sweet Caroline, Voyage from Adelaide to Fremantle

Fred Bicker, Perth

It all started with a web advertisement saying that *Sweet Caroline* was 'reluctantly' for sale by Squadron Member Keith Flint. She looked very attractive, with elegant lines and the grace of the old IOR class racers. After an inspection and a few cold beers the purchase was settled and preparations started to get the boat to Western Australian waters.

Three Dutchmen, including myself arrived at the Royal South Australian Yacht Squadron on the 5 February 2006 to prepare for *Sweet Caroline's* first voyage under new ownership. Aad, a

keen Dutch sailor, was told in the Netherlands by his sailing colleagues that he should not join the trip, because 'nobody volunteers to sail in the Southern Ocean'. We did come across twelve commercial vessels, but no sailing vessel between Adelaide and Fremantle!

On the 8 February we departed with a mixed weather forecast. We learnt to pay heed to the little note that 'gusts can be 40% stronger than forecasted'. The wind in the early evening increased rapidly from SW 15 knots to about SW 40-45 knots. *Sweet Caroline* sailed well until all of a sudden the electrical system came to a standstill.

We decided to return to Adelaide for emergency repairs and the next day we left port for a second time at around 11:00. It was a very sentimental moment as the Squadron flag flew at half mast for the funeral of Keith's wife Janet.

We passed Marion Reef before dark on the first day. By the following morning we had passed Neptune Island and were effectively entering the Great Australian Bight, when the wind died on us.

A high-pressure system had moved into the Bight and we were becalmed for most of the day. Progress was absolutely minimal, but the temperatures were very pleasant! The cold fridge came in handy and it was a good chance to do some maintenance. The full moon made for a picture postcard scenery at night - soft rolling aluminium foil, dolphins passing like stainless steel torpedo's with a fluorescent wake, just beautiful.

The wind came back from a SW direction, about 18 knots true wind and we pointed as high as possible towards Albany. The wind went round from SW by S to North then slowly increased to NNE 45 knots. *Sweet Caroline* handled it nicely, the main with three reefs and Genoa no. 5. At night a beautiful and

Minke II at Daw Island anchorage, 427 miles west of Fowlers Bay, the longest single hop on the most direct route



sometimes scary lightshow developed with bolts of lightning all around us. A freighter approaching us from the East appeared like a ghost ship, intermittently illuminated by flashes of intense white light and hidden behind solid driving rain.

We sighted Albany's rocky shoreline on the 18th and managed to sail the boat to the fairway buoy in the King George Sound just at sunset. The final couple of miles were nice and calm, waves and swell dampened by the massive rock outcrops protecting the Sound. What a magnificent natural harbour!

We had a beautiful day sailing on departure from Albany the following Monday. Strong easterly winds, steadily building up to 35 ~ 40 knots true wind with gusts up to 55 knots. The boat behaved very well and surfed in a spectacular manner, throwing the bow wave high into the air on either side and leaving a wake of flat water, deep blue and fresh.

The next morning we were in the Indian Ocean – without wind... The temperature on board went up significantly as if we had entered a different season. The SW swell more or less disappeared, since we now sailed on a water depth of around 70 metres instead of the 3,500 ~ 4,000 metres in the Bight. A final spectacular show of lighting over the continent and dramatic skies over the ocean introduced us to our last ocean day, with the kite up, heading north.

We snuck past Rottnest Island through the well lit Southern Passage and moored alongside in the Fremantle Sailing Club on 22 February at 09:00 WST, 12.5 days after our departure.

We were happy to have arrived safely in Fremantle, but sad at the same time because this wonderful journey came to an end.



Solace refuelling at Ceduna jetty

Some Approximate Distances and times in hours:

FROM	TO	NM	5.5Kn	6.5Kn	7.5Kn
Adelaide	Pt Lincoln	150	27	23	20
Pt Lincoln	Middle Island	655	119	111	87
Pt Lincoln	Coffin Bay	110	20	17	15
Middle Is	Esperance	70	13	11	9
Esperance	Albany	220	40	34	29
Albany	Bunbury	270	49	42	36
Bunbury	Fremantle	85	16	13	11

Passage Making from South Australia to Perth

Geoff ("Megga") Bascombe

I have made the passage from SA to Perth ten times in the last 20 years in a variety of boats all in the 35 to 45 foot range. My trips have been done in the first quarter of the year, with the prevailing winds I have had nothing but good sailing.

It would be rare that you would have to wait longer than a week for a suitable weather pattern. One must always remember when moving East to West that you are moving against the approaching weather patterns and that you must allow enough passage time to get to your next shelter. As soon as the Southern Ocean Highs move to the North your winds will move into the Northwest to Southwest quadrant and your chances of an easy passage will diminish. This movement varies from year to year.

Once you get to the Cape Leeuwin area local conditions tend to influence the wind to a greater degree and you can expect a more Southerly aspect with good Southwest sea-breezes.

Useful websites:

Communications and weather reports:

<http://www.coastguard.com.au/>
<http://www.sasearescue.org.au/flotilla.html>
<http://coastalpatrol.yorke.net.au/>
<http://www.bom.gov.au/weather/wa/>

A list of stations, their phone numbers and radios may be found at:

<http://www.fishsa.com/boatngcg.php>

WA Rescue organisation:

<http://www.boatingwa.com.au/fesa/fesa.htm>

Marina home pages:

<http://www.marinamap.com/en/>

Ports:

Esperance <http://www.esperanceport.com.au/>
 Albany <http://www.albanyport.com.au/>
 Bunbury <http://byport.com.au/>
 Fremantle <http://www.fremantleports.com.au/>

I hope that this is a help to anyone contemplating this trip. If I can be of help with this, or any other voyage contact me at megga_au@yahoo.com.au and safe sailing to all.

