

MORNING HUSTLER'S NEW ZEALAND CRUISE

The following is an account of MORNING HUSTLER's cruise from American River around the North Island of New Zealand and back between 30th December 84 and 30th March 85.

The idea of a cruise to NZ first came to us in 1978.

In February and March of that year we made our first major cruise outside SA waters; a circumnavigation cruise of Tasmania. From the east coast of Tasmania we listened daily to Auckland and Wellington Radios and realised that they were only 1200 miles away. We were even then more than one third of the way there. To sail to NZ from Kangaroo Island was only twice as far as sailing to Sydney and much closer than Queensland and the Whitsunday Passage.

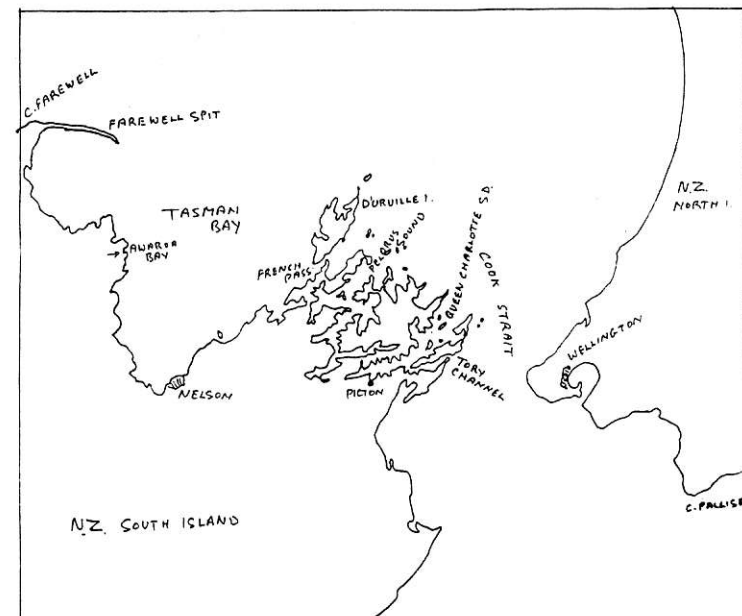
Furthermore, the tropics is a winter cruising ground and our business (wool growing) doesn't allow us to go for the length of time required in winter. But a summer cruise to NZ for three months seemed perfectly practical.

It was to be another seven years before all the factors which govern our lives allowed us to go.

By then we had sailed MORNING HUSTLER, a stock production S&S 34 built by Swarbricks in Perth in 1971, 27000 miles offshore including two Sydney-Hobarts and one Melbourne-Hobart Race. We felt we knew her pretty well. She was well equipped, had good sails and came up to Ocean Racing Category 1 Safety Standards. In spite of this, preparation for the cruise to NZ was, I like to think, meticulous.

We fitted new cap shrouds making all the standing rigging less than six years old. Norths made a second

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TASMAN BAY, MARLBOROUGH SOUNDS AND COOK STRAIT

mainsail and a new storm jib. Both mainsails have an extra deep third reef which reduce the sail almost to trisail size. Our existing radio had only 2 and 4 MHZ frequencies so we replaced it with a ten crystal Codan which included 6 MHZ calling and working frequencies and 4419.4 KHZ for working NZ coast stations. The latter was to prove invaluable both for receiving weather reports and for sending and receiving telegrams. Many items of small detail were attended to over the months before our departure, and finally two days before Christmas, we fitted an Aries wind vane self steering and we were, but for final provisioning, ready to leave.

Departure had been set for 30th December, and after a rushed trip to Adelaide for a family Christmas, we

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completed the provisioning and sailed from American River at 1515 hours on that day. We spent that night anchored in Antechamber Bay. This gave us all a chance to settle in and have a good night's rest. My wife Anthea and I were tired after the hectic final days of preparation and the crew, John Hamlyn and Peter Wilkinson, were quite happy to have this last undisturbed night for a while.

Our plan was to clear out from Portland. I had already warned the Portland Customs Office of that intention, and the passage of some 300 miles from Antechamber Bay took two and a half days. It was not a particularly happy passage - at least not the first part. We were all seasick (except Ann - she never is!), especially me. I was the sickest I have been in 25 years of offshore sailing. I put this down to the tension and tiredness of getting away. But by the afternoon of the second day we had recovered.

We tied up in Portland at 1445 on Wednesday, 2nd January 85. This was our last opportunity to stock up with fresh provisions and ice, which we did. Customs came aboard next morning at 0930 and we eventually departed at 1435.

The wind was WSW about 15 knots ie a nice breeze on our starboard quarter. We set the Aries to self steer and were off. By 1000 the next morning, it was cold and overcast. There was a strong wind warning for our area and a gale warning for eastern Bass Strait. At 1245 the log entry read "Wind WNW 30 knots. Put in two reefs No 4 jib. Forbidding looking weather and forecast." By eight o'clock that night we were 50 miles west of Wilson's Promontory.

The wind had freshened and we put in a third reef and changed to the storm jib. The Aries was steering well provided we prevented the speed from exceeding

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about 7 knots. We rounded Wilson's Prom at 0330 on Saturday morning with the wind at forty knots from the west (we have no wind instruments on MORNING HUSTLER, but this was later confirmed by the coastal reports), and tore up towards Refuge Cove in the lee of the land. The wind screamed out of Waterloo Bay, enough to put our lee rail down with storm jib and triple reefed main - and we were thankful to anchor in Refuge Cove at 0600.

There were seventeen other yachts sheltering in Refuge Cove. Many more were at Deal Island, the Hogan Group on the east coast of Tasmania and others heading south down the NSW and Victorian coast. All were trying to get home after the Sydney and Melbourne-Hobart Races and it was quite entertaining to listen to the radio and hear the reports of high winds and high seas and frustration! On Sunday morning 6th January 85, the weather was better but still quite fresh from the west; not good for those heading west, but not bad for us heading east and at 1100 with one reef in the main and our old No 4 jib we sailed, this time for Nelson in Tasman Bay at the north end of the South Island of NZ. We really felt we were off at last.

We took bets on our time of arrival in Nelson. First prize was to be free dinner at the Nelson Hilton! Even before we had finished writing down our various predictions we knew they were too optimistic but, what the hell!

By 1400 we had a second reef in. The wind was west about 30 knots and this was to be pretty much the pattern for much of the passage. The yacht MYSTIC SEVEN reported their position 60 miles south of us and said she'd had 50 knots all day. In fact the wind moderated for two days and veered to the north, but by Wednesday morning, 9th January 85, with the barograph down to 1000 mb, it was freshening from

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the NW. We changed to the storm jib and put in two reefs and later a third.

At 1435 I wrote "Log 408 miles (from Refuge Cove), wind West up to 40 knots. Grey overcast. Heavy showers. Wave broke into cockpit and 1/3 filled it. Seas getting big. How long before we have to do something else. 1730. Cockpit half filled again when we broached to windward. Hand steered for a while then altered course to bring wind more onto starboard quarter, course 090-100°M" In fact MORNING HUSTLER was handling the conditions very easily indeed, but I was apprehensive about how much worse it might get and just what action I would take if it did.

Later that evening we spoke for the second time on 4483 KHZ to VH7TC Tascoast Radio in Hobart. We had spoken to them quite by chance the previous evening and they were to prove a most valuable and greatly appreciated line of communication. We spoke daily to them all the way to Nelson and they relayed messages between us and family in Adelaide. During this second communication we were visited by a group of about twenty pilot whales. They played around the stern of the boat for about ten minutes like a school of dolphins and were a spectacular and rewarding sight. In spite of their size, may be 20 feet long, and closeness, they caused us no alarm.

By 0145 next morning, Thursday 10th January 85, the wind was back in the NW again and the barograph stood at 990 mb. At 0330 the wind backed to WSW quite suddenly and freshened in excess of 40 knots. The connecting rod between the Aries wind vane and its servo rudder was washed off its spring loaded ball joints by the sea and we were momentarily out of control (this happened a number of times during the crossing in very rough conditions and was not serious, but until it was reconnected, the Aries was not steering). At the

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same time it started to pour with rain so we took the storm jib off and hove to with just the triple reefed main and the Aries set to steer us about 50 degrees off the wind.

In this position the boat lay very peacefully. We closed the hatch and all went to bed! For 5½ hours we lay hove to listening to the wind and rain. There were occasional violent squalls of rain and wind and from time to time a breaking wave would thud against the topsides and send a shower of spray over us. The barograph read 989 mb. We were just about 500 miles east of Refuge Cove. At 0900 we were sailing again with triple reefed main only and later the storm jib.

For most of the crossing the wind was dead aft or nearly so, so that a jib would not draw. But we frequently sheeted the storm jib or our old high cut No 4 flat amidships. It seemed to help the Aries to keep her on course. It was difficult to steer the rhumb line course with the wind dead astern so we gybed fairly frequently.

By now the seas were huge and MORNING HUSTLER had a tendency occasionally to broach as she ran down the fronts of them. The Aries servo rudder is connected to the main part of the gearing with a fail safe sleeve. This sleeve is designed to break should the rudder foul any solid object. The rudder has a safety line so it will not be lost. In one of these broaches the stain was so great that the rudder broke off and again we were momentarily out of control.

The weather continued rough with strong winds and huge seas. We sailed mostly with a triple reefed main, but still averaged 6-7 knots. The cockpit was frequently partially filled with water and we had to keep the companionway dropboards in and the hatch shut. The cabin became very stuffy. To go on deck at all required

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full waterproof and of course safety harness; so much of our watch keeping was done from the chart table seat!

But it was a pleasant change from the stuffiness to sit outside for a while. Navigation was not easy.

The poor horizon and the motion of the boat made sure of that. On one occasion I was sitting on the cabin top trying to get a sunsight. Peter was hand steering to help reduce the motion when the boat gave a violent roll to windward which nearly unseated me. At the same time Peter momentarily lost control, the boat gybed in spite of a main boom preventer and the boom vang caught me across the back of the head as the boom slammed across. Fortunately it did no more than raise a squashy lump on the back of my head, but I was very close to going overboard.

"Sunday 13th January. 1610 log 997 miles. Still two reefs in main and old No 4". But the weather at least was improving.

"Monday 14th January, 0730 log 1101. Shook out both reefs, full main for the first time since last Wednesday morning."

"Tuesday 15th January. 0930 log 1256. Sighted land on starboard bow."

✧ What satisfaction it is to the navigator to have a landfall exactly as expected. By 1030 it was calm and sunny - great opportunity to air the blankets and the whole ship. John and Peter waxed all the deck teak. Now we were motoring. The land on our starboard beam was all topped with white cumulus cloud - the "land of the long white cloud". It really was.

In the afternoon we had a breeze again from the west and we ran down along the length of the Farewell Spit,

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a great sand spit running some 20 miles east from Cape Farewell across the top of Tasman Bay. Late that evening we felt our way into Awaroa Bay - a small cove in the west side of Tasman Bay where we dropped anchor at 2345 hrs. We celebrated our arrival with our only bottle of champagne. We had sailed 1338 miles from Refuge Cove in 9½ days at an average of 140.8 miles per day or just under 6 knots.

I had sent a telegram to the Harbourmaster at Nelson requesting entry and customs the following morning, Wednesday 16th January 85. We left early and motored the thirty miles or so. The formalities were quick and easy, except for a difference of opinion with the man from the Dept of Health over our pain killing drugs. There followed a two day wrangle about them and in the end they confiscated 75%. The remaining 25% was put under Customs Seal but remained on board.

✧ Peter and John left us in Nelson and went their respective ways. We were sorry to see them go. They were a great crew to have on board and we had enjoyed their company. Jack Gamlin joined the ship on Thursday morning and on Friday morning we were ready to leave again.

We had spent Wednesday and Thursday reprovisioning, washing clothes and doing a multitude of tasks which needed attention. We found the people of Nelson most friendly and helpful; for example a complete stranger who we met in the Post Office spent all Wednesday afternoon driving us in her car to the various places we needed to go. Then before we left on Friday morning she delivered to us a cake, a cabbage and a pot of jam!

We had planned to spend the next two weeks cruising in the Marlborough Sounds - that maze of waterways between Tasman Bay and Cook Strait in the north east

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of the South Island. It is an area of strong tides and strong winds; of many miles of fascinating waterways and lovely secluded and sheltered anchorages; of high hills and deep gullies, some barren looking (thanks to the efforts of man!) others covered with dense rain forest; much also planted with pines.

The area can be thought of in two parts or perhaps three if one counts D'Urville Island as one and Pelorus Sound and Queen Charlotte Sound as the other two.

D'Urville Island is an interesting cruising ground itself, but we did not visit it except to anchor in Panganui Bay on its southern side close to French Pass - the very narrow passage separating the island from the mainland. Tidal streams run up to seven knots through the Pass with dangerous eddies and overfalls so we heeded the warnings and went through at slack water. Panganui Bay yielded some fish and also a quantity of large mussels given to us by Ken Hope, a fisherman who lives in the bay.

This was Saturday, 19th January 85, a warm sunny day with little wind, so we motored and sailed deep into Pelorus Sound and anchored in Ngawhakawhiti Bay in Tennyson Inlet. The bay is almost completely land locked and surrounded by steep forest covered hills rising to 2000 feet in parts. The next day Anthea and I followed a walking track through dense forest to the top of an 1100 ft ridge from where we had a lovely view both ways across different parts of the Sound.

We stayed in Pelorus Sound until the following Friday, 25th January 85, and visited one lovely anchorage after another. The water is deep and it is often convenient to take a stern line ashore and tie up to a tree. The weather was often windy at that time, but the high hills made sailing impossible and savage

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squalls would tear across the water with little or no warning. But there was always a choice of completely sheltered anchorages and it was not cold. Nor was the water cold. Even though it is the same latitude as Bass Strait where the water is very cold, I swam every morning without discomfort. We had heavy rain on several nights and were able to fill our water tanks with rain water caught in the dinghy and wash our clothes in fresh water.

Pelorus Sound is secluded and we saw and spoke to only a few other yachts. It was different when we moved into Queen Charlotte Sound at the end of the week and tied up in Picton. Picton is a very busy port to which the Cook Strait Railway ferries run from Wellington on the North Island five times a day. And there is much other activity as well with yachts and fishing boats coming and going all the time. The P & O cruise ship CANBERRA anchored off while we were there and disgorged her passengers by the hundred in lifeboats to visit the very attractive town and countryside. Queen Charlotte Sound is smaller than Pelorus with much more activity and more populated. Each little cove has its house with gardens and lawns to the waters edge and very likely a jetty and yacht moored off it.

It was all very attractive, but after two days of exploring it was time for us to move on. We planned only one stop between Picton and Auckland, some 600 miles or more up the east coast of the North Island. So again we prepared the ship for a few days at sea - this time the Pacific. At 1100 hrs on 29th January we sailed out of the almost carnival atmosphere in Picton. CANBERRA's passengers were there in large numbers. There were sea plane and helicopter rides and an ancient steam traction engine in the main street. LION NEW ZEALAND (NZ's hopeful for the Whitbread Round the World Race) was there on her round NZ fund raising

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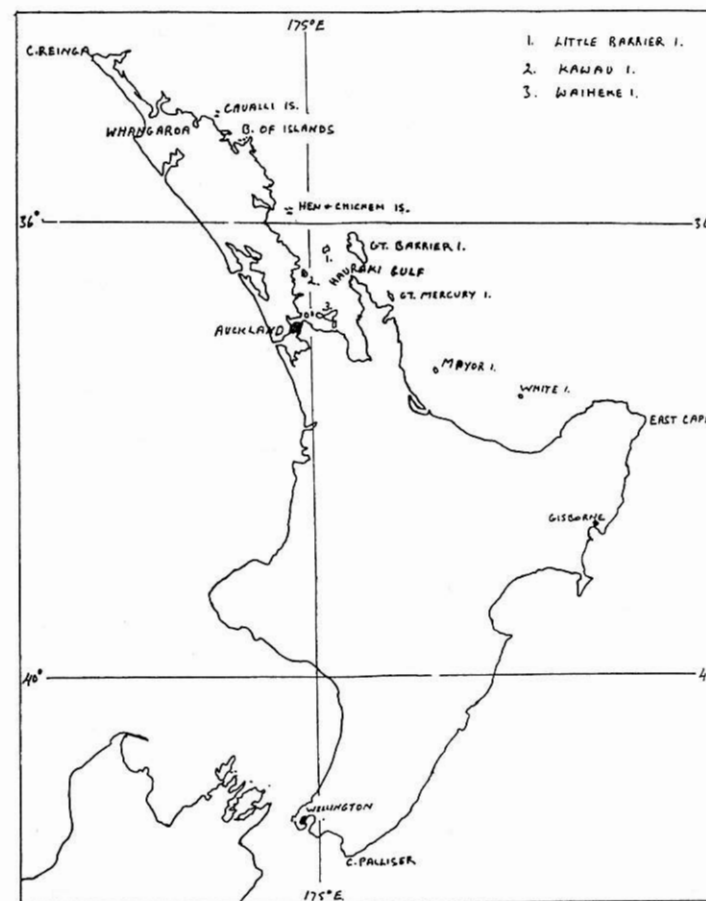
jaunt. All this in a delightful bay surrounded by tree covered hills and a lovely sunny day.

The wind was ahead and light so we motored down the Sound and into Tory Channel. Tory Channel provides a sort of short cut from Queen Charlotte Sound and opens into the southern end of Cook Strait. It is used by the Cook Strait ferries and its entrance is narrow and is set at right angles to the main channel. In addition the tide runs very strongly through the entrance, so small craft can only go through at slack water. But the ferries come through at any time and at high speed so it pays to listen on 2182 KHZ as they give warning just before they go round the otherwise blind corner! But we went through with no dramatics. The tide was slack and the notorious Cook Strait was flat glassy calm!

We shaped a course for Cape Palliser, the SE corner of the North Island some fifty miles away to the SE and later in the day we got a south easterly breeze. Our progress was interrupted late that evening by my confusion over a cyclone warning. As a result of that confusion we turned back before reaching Cape Palliser and went into Wellington and tied up at the Royal Port Nicholson Yacht Club. Although my mistake was quickly corrected and our visit very brief, the whole incident delayed us some 17 hours. I had no large scale chart of Port Nicholson, the bay around which Wellington stands and we'd had to heave to outside to await daylight. On the credit side we'd had a brief visit to Wellington and its senior yacht club!

Our only planned stop between Picton and Auckland was to be Gisborne, some 300 miles from Picton up the east coast. When we left Wellington the wind was south east, dead ahead. When we turned north east round Cape Palliser, so did the wind, dead ahead. When we turned north forty miles south of Gisborne

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NEW ZEALAND - NORTH ISLAND

so did the wind, dead ahead. In fact we motored the last one hundred miles, but it still took us 454 miles of sailing to make good those 300 miles.

I had an old school contemporary living in Gisborne and teaching at the Gisborne Boys' High School. I had had absolutely no communication with him at all

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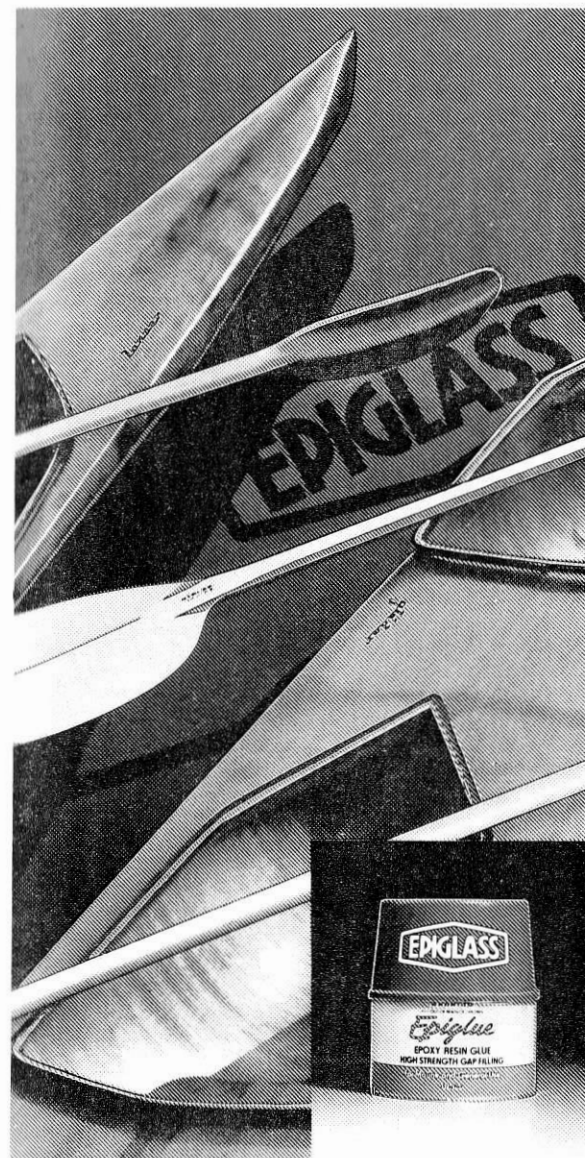
for thirty years so it was quite a thrill to find John McFarlane waiting on the wharf to meet us in response to a telegram sent five hours earlier.

We arrived in Gisborne on Friday 1st February 85, and left again on Sunday morning early. Gisborne lies at the head of Poverty Bay and it was here that Capt James Cook first sighted and landed in NZ in 1769. Actually it was young Nicholas, the 12 year old son of the surgeon of the ENDEAVOUR, who first sighted the sun shining on the white chalk-like cliffs of what Cook named Young Nicks Head, the southern headland of Poverty Bay. As we left Gisborne on that Sunday morning the sun shone on Young Nicks Head and it stood out in a striking way.

The wind changed to the south now and we had a fast sail in the fresh breeze. As we approached East Cape, another area of strong tides and overfalls, the sea became rough and an unexpected wave that flopped on board quarter filled the cockpit. It poured down the main hatch in which I was standing with only head and shoulders out and I got a thorough wetting - it even filled my shoes. But it wasn't so rough - it never is - that Ann couldn't cook dinner; this time a yellow tail that Jack had caught earlier in the day. Once around East Cape the wind lightened off and by 0800 on Monday 4th February 85, we were motoring and did so all the rest of the way to Auckland.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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