A whale of a time on Take It Easy

Summer 2012/13 Cruise
We have an extra-long break set aside this year for our Southerly cruise: nearly 7 weeks of adventure, wilderness and discovery. As always we have been preparing for this several months in advance. Planning is all part of the enjoyment: we gear up for the trip, then live it, and finally we reminisce.

Everything we do on Take It Easy is with one eye on the forthcoming expedition, and the other on our long term cruising needs. So the spring 2012 to do list was fairly demanding, at least for Wade, since as usual I was spending my weeks interstate with consulting work. The major item was the remodelling of the spare cabin, turning it from a Queen into a Double, and using the space thus gained for a storage area accessible from the deck through a new hatch. It meant installing a new bulkhead (wall), painting it, cutting a hole in the deck to fit the hatch, moving the down lights and repanelling part of the ceiling. We called on Tim Heaney the shipwright again, and Wade helped as the ‘labourer’. Now that the work is done, you would think it has always been set up this way. Although it might no longer be as luxurious for our guests, it is still a spacious cabin and the ‘cubby’ will be much more practical for us. The main advantage is that we no longer have to store the generator, dinghy outboard, kayaks and diving gear inside the cabin, and instead have it all stowed safely out of the way in the centre of the boat. Everything in the cupboard is tied down with straps and netting so nothing goes flying around when we are underway... And the ‘bedroom’ is uncluttered. Nice job, Wade!

Other tasks on the to do list were just maintenance, but time consuming nevertheless: outboards service, clean-up of the ‘hairy’ bottom and antifoul, installation of jack lines so Wade can clip on and not disappear overboard when on deck in rough weather (I have practiced the MOB recovery, but we can do without the excitement of the real thing). We have repainted the cabin roof with grippy paint, serviced the winches, and polished the family stainless steel... Take It Easy looks good and everything works smoothly.

So now that the boat preparation is done and Take It Easy is provisioned (there will be no starving on this boat, but there goes the waterline), we can turn our attention to charts and guides, and start praying that the weather gods will grant us what we hope for: a dream run directly to the SW corner of Tasmania, to Port Davey and Bathurst Harbour.

We are always craving something out of the ordinary for our sea voyages, and it is even more so this year. This world heritage wilderness area is a challenge because of its remoteness and its exposure to the vagaries of the Southern Ocean. It is also what has protected it. It is a paradise for sailors, photographers and lovers of nature at its pristine best. But being at the whim of the weather, we will relish whatever destination the winds let us explore. The fun is in being able to escape, experiencing the grandeur of the ocean and the exceptional beauty of the wild Tassie coast.
**18/12/12 – Departure from the Gippsland Lakes**

During the weekend before our departure, we checked the forecast. We were due to get to the boat on Thursday night, 20/12/12... But a study of the weather showed we could leave the Lakes and head south if we made a start on Tuesday or Wednesday. So I send an email to my boss, Sam, saying something like “we’ve got a weather window, I am up to date with work, we’re out of here early” and drive to Paynesville after work on Monday night.

As luck would have it, on Saturday our friends Paul and Sjaney Dow get in touch with us to announce they are rounding the Prom and about to come home to the Lakes after their circumnavigation of Australia. This obviously calls for celebrations... A meeting of the cats is arranged for Tuesday lunch time at Flagstaff jetty, just inside the Entrance. They will then occupy our berth while we are away.

We leave Paynesville by 10am on Tuesday, having readied the boat and done the fresh food shopping, and head to the Entrance, arriving at 1pm at the Flagstaff jetty to meet up with Paul & Sjaney. It is quite a momentous event: the two cats, Skellum and Take It Easy side by side - big achievement for Paul & Sjaney and the excitement of the forthcoming voyage for us. Chicken and champagne, a few stories to share, then it is time to climb to the top of the dune overlooking the entrance, to check the conditions. We are right to go! Big hugs and kisses are exchanged, then we cast off the lines and at 3pm we cross the bar, raise the sails and the adventure begins.

The passage starts well: gentle breeze, flat seas, sunny, sailing straight away in a SE breeze. We let it all sink in that we have escaped... We talk to a few friends while we still have phone service. “Are you all packed up and ready?” asks Ann - “More than that, we are out in the ocean, sailing south!”

As night falls, the wind starts shifting to the NE... perfect for our descent south. But the wind strengthens, the seas start getting confused, with two swell lines forming, one from the west and the other from the NE, very uncomfortable. That’s when the dreaded nausea hits me, a constant state for the night and the rest of the passage. Even Wade gets afflicted for a while. Only Bengie seems to
escape unscathed! This is when you think “why do we put ourselves through this?” But we know it passes after a couple of days and we get accustomed to the motion. All we can say is “thank God for George, the autopilot”; at least you can step out into the cockpit, check the horizon and the instruments, correct George’s meanders, have a chuck in the bucket and come back in for a lie down on the couch till the next round of checking, ten minutes later.

We keep sailing all night and into the next day, and are past Babel Island, half way down the East coast of Flinders, by 11.00am. By then the wind is on our tail and we drop the main and keep going on the jib alone onto the Vansittart Shoals, between Flinders and Cape Barren Island. The wind then shifts to the NW, with squalls and rough conditions, so we turn the engines on, roll the jib away and unfurl the little staysail. We are now headed for Jamieson Bay, just around the SE tip of Cape Barren Island. We have a Westerly change coming tonight. Although we have the option of pushing on further across Bank Strait to get to the NE coast of Tassie, it means another overnighter and coming in to Eddystone Point in the dark. It is a rocky area, lots of reefs, and we feel pretty wasted, so decide to take refuge at Jamieson instead. We will wait here for the next weather window in a day or two.

So there we have it: 165 miles from Lakes to Jamieson Bay in 26 ½ hours... 6.2 mph average, very respectable, given we sailed 145 miles of it. We have never had such a quick departure and the right wind conditions to sail down in our chosen direction. We have often had to opt for plan B, C or even D, but this time plan A worked! It seems unreal to be at the bottom of the Furneaux Group already. The boat is swaying at anchor, we have had the compulsory dip over the back, just to confirm we are on holidays, bacon and eggs for dinner – well, breakfast, lunch and dinner all in one, really, and are now ready to crash at 7pm!
It is blowing hard; Take It Easy is yanking at the chain. It rained heavily last night, but now it is sunny. Bengie is up early, miaowing excitedly. “Come on you lazy bones, get up, feed me and let me out, it’s nice out there!” We eventually surface, surveying our surroundings. We smile at the familiar setting: aqua water, orange lichen on the granite rocks, white beach overlooked by Mt Kerford and Hogans Hill. The wind is howling through the rigging at 30 knots. Fishermen say the wind is made in this place!

I am feeling hung over… must remember to drink more water. So I am relieved we are here for the day. The hours pass easily: reading, tinkering, day dreaming. We don’t venture ashore, put off by the brisk wind and choppy water breaking on the beach.

Not an action packed day… only Bengie springs to attention when a dragonfly flies into the saloon repeatedly. She wakes up from her slumber, jumps on the table, then onto the back of the couch, leaps up in a back summersault, and catches the dragonfly. She deposits it in the tissue box, and catches it again as it tries to take off, then drops the battered carcass in my hand… the poor thing is all beaten up, but my pussycat is proud as punch. “Look what I got you!” Mmmm...

The weather is looking a bit doubtful for tomorrow, with strong westerlies making a Bank Strait crossing hazardous. We will see what happens during the night. If the wind abates, we might sneak out in the middle of the night, otherwise we’ll stay put for another day.

On 21/12 it is till windy, although a little calmer between gusts, and the ocean is less ruffled so we will be able to go ashore. Wadie has caught a wrasse this morning. It is not particularly good eating—quite soft flesh—but will make fine bait for the pots.

We have heard the weather forecast from Bryn at Tamar Sea Rescue, and we are here for another day. It was lovely talking to him. We are the only boat reporting position so he is in for the chat. He tells us he is afflicted by cataract and thus is left with poor vision. It is painful and sad listening to him reading the forecast, obviously struggling a great deal to see clearly. We hope he gets operated on soon so he can get a new lease on life.

At least we now know the wind is shifting back to the NE tomorrow, Saturday, which will allow us to head south again and cover some miles. Long Point, Wineglass Bay, or Schouten Island are all possible destinations in these conditions, depending on how we feel.

As we get ready with the pots, we realise that we have somehow forgotten to bring the bait bags and floats. Disaster! Our walk ashore thus turns into a scavenging hunt for the missing fishing gear, which we have often found as flotsam in the past.

On a mission, we start our search at one end of the long crescent beach and walk to the other end: a 6 km return trip. We manage to find half a dozen bait bags, but no float. Still, with a couple of spare fenders for floats, we now have all we need to bait and drop the pots. The wrasse’s head goes in one, the carcass in the other, filets for dinner—we’ll see what they are like—and Wade drops the pots near a reef close to our anchorage.
Back to Take It Easy for a very late lunch, some reading and drawing, then at 6pm Wadie goes back to collect the pots... no luck... Time for sun downers!
22 & 23/12/12 – Down, down we go!

It is a 4.45 am start in calm weather, just what we need to get across Bank Strait, a nasty stretch of water separating Cape Barren Island from Tassie. We have our fastest crossing of Bank Strait, averaging 8.5 knots boat speed in 15 to 20 knots westerly. No mucking around! The sea is choppy in the strait, but hundreds of shearwaters and albatrosses love it! 4½ hours later, in record time, we reach Eddystone Point at the NE tip of Tassie, where conditions lighten and the sea flattens. We then alternate straight sailing and motor-sailing, depending on the wind conditions, for the rest of the day. It is a lazy sunny day, the sea is smooth, allowing us to read, write, check emails, sun ourselves, with no hint of sea sickness.

By 4pm the breeze has swung lightly on our nose, so we are not even pretending to sail, we are just plain motoring. But it’s easy in reasonably flat water, so we have decided to keep going through the night and make serious progress south, until the SW change comes on Monday lunch time. The only down side is the engine noise and petrol consumption, but we can top up on Monday.

We have been going all night, each taking two hour watches. A fantastic sight for sore eyes awaits us at about 6.30am, off the Southern tip of Maria Island, in Marion Bay: whales! Not just one or two, but over a dozen humpbacks, easily identified by their small stubby dorsal fin, together with seals and dolphins. The whales surround us. Everywhere we look, we see them breaching, blowing water plumes, displaying their beautiful flukes as they porpoise, dive, then surface again. In the quiet of the morning, all we hear is their blow and their song. The dolphins are playful, doing summersaults and the seals come right out to take a good look at us too. We are letting ourselves drift ever so slowly amongst them so as not to hit them! It is an astonishing sight. These gentle giants are bigger than our boat, at least 12 to 16 meters long, and can weigh around 40 tons, so it is with a mix of excitement and trepidation that we observe the pod around us. They are so close to Take It Easy that there is no need for binoculars, and we have this spectacle all to ourselves. This is the very first time we have seen whales from our own boat, and this is the best sighting of all the ‘paid’ whale watching outings I have been on. How sensational is this?! What a reward for an all-night effort!
After half an hour of this stunning spectacle, we head off to Blackman Head, since we are taking the short cut to Storm Bay via the Denison Canal, instead of having to round the Forestier and Tasman Peninsulas. As the Denison bridge opens up to let us through, we take a big breath and think ‘skinny’ thoughts – not a lot of room to spare on either side! The bridge guard comes out with his bucket at the end of a long perch and Wade chucks him a few coins and bids him good morning.

Today we are continuing onto the D’Entrecasteaux Channel and intend to make a brief stop at Kettering to top up fuel and water before everything closes over Christmas. We will then find somewhere to anchor for a well-earned rest and proper night’s sleep.

The forecast shows a SW change is due tomorrow afternoon (Christmas Eve), with strong winds till Christmas Day. But then we may have a short window on Boxing Day to get around the bottom of Tasmania. So we will need to be at Recherche Bay, ready to go before that. Oh, this is exciting... we might make it to Port Davey and Bathurst Harbour this year!

By the time we reach Kettering and find our way through the forest of moored yachts, it is 3pm and the fuel jetty is closed. This is a tight little spot at the end of a narrow passage, between berthed yachts, and Take It Easy feels really oversized! Not to be beaten, Wade goes ashore, find a willing helper in the coastguard, who gives him a lift with his five jerry cans to the nearby petrol station back in Snug! We top up our fresh water then I back us out, slowly reversing in the passage, then pivot and we are out of there... and I am going straight to the loo for a nervous wee! Ooh that was tight!
After a day of very light breeze, finally the wind picks up and after checking the weather forecast, we decide to head to Southport for the night, another five hours on, sailing on Big Red for a while, then just the jib.

Southport is the last all weather shelter with communication. We will email friends and call France, before heading down to Recherche, where we will spend Christmas Day and with luck leave on Boxing Day for the “round the bottom” expedition.

We sail into Southport and drop the anchor by 9pm, 40 hours since departing Jamieson Bay. Boy, what a descent! The sunset over the range is a magnificent scarlet... sailors’ delight. We are tired and achy, but pleased with ourselves. It is the first time we have done a long stretch such as this. In calm seas, we found we could read, write, move around without getting seasick while George was in charge of steering. It does make a huge difference to one’s ability to cover large distances quickly. But the interrupted sleep pattern is hard on the body.

We are trying not to get too fixated on “rounding the bottom”, and are quite prepared to go and play somewhere else if the weather does not allow. But we wanted to give ourselves the best opportunity to make it around, and feel happy we have achieved this. We now have six full weeks to relax and explore.
We wake up to a drizzly morning, which is a bit of a bummer, given we want to do a small round of washing while we can replenish our water. It will be a challenge to get things to dry! But we’ll rig up something in the cockpit when we get to Recherche.

For now, we set up the rain awning over the cockpit, get the generator going and put our mighty twin tub to work! Then it’s a run ashore in the dinghy for Wade who refills the water barrels, gets rid of our rubbish, and we are ready for the next instalment of our adventure.

We leave Southport at 11.00am, and arrive in Recherche two hours later. The clouds are slowly lifting, no longer shrouding the tall peaks of Mount La Perouse, Mount Leillateah and Table Top. It is still a grey day, and we feel a little chilly just as much from the weather as from anticipation of the days ahead. A few yachts and a couple of fishing boats are anchored in Coalbins Bay where we drop the pick, and one or two cruisers are in Cockle Bay, at the opposite end of Recherche.

We down anchor close to a familiar looking yacht: it’s Silver Air who was here last year... Nice! In fact John recognises Take It Easy and dinghies over to say hello. They too are hoping to do the jump on Boxing Day. Given their local knowledge and experience, we feel comforted that our reading of the forecast is right. It will probably be a motor in light winds, but that’s fine by us!

We are really hopeful now, and spend some of the afternoon studying multiple cruising guides to get a little more familiar with possible anchorages in Port Davey.

Our planned convivial sun downer with John and De on board Take It Easy is cancelled when De comes on the radio to ask “could we take a rain check – literally”? It’s been raining on and off for a while. So we have a celebratory drink by ourselves, listening to music, gazing out as the boat does its usual catamaran dance in the gusts, and we feel rather content.

We have dreamed of discovering Port Davey and Bathurst Harbour for a few years now... and today it feels within reach: one day of patiently, calmly waiting for the weather to abate and allow us to hug the coast where the wind will be lighter.

It is Christmas! And Santa did find Take it Easy despite the lightning speed of our travels. Down the hatch came a Fortress Anchor for Wadie (the so called world’s best anchor - he’s not dragging away anywhere with that one), a Lumix camera for botanical work for me, and a new diamante collar for Bengie. Wadie had been lusting after the Fortress as a replacement for the plough, our spare anchor. It is supposed to be super-duper for sand and mud, and can be used in tandem with the Manson Supreme if we need to weather a very bad storm. As for the Lumix camera, this is specifically for my botanical illustration course. One of the down sides of the course at the Botanical Gardens is that we are not allowed to take plants in or out of the gardens, and thus have to take lots of macro photos to help record shapes and colours and be able to paint between classes. My Canon would do the job, but is just too big to lug around as well as all the art gear! So this one will be a great tool in my kit bag.
It is still gusting quite briskly, but we take Peasy to the beach at Cockle Creek to stretch our legs and blow the cobwebs away. When we return, I draw for a while and Wade reads till we get visitors: Lee and Glen from Sea Wind, a 43 foot S&S, a nice looking sturdy yacht. The guys have already had quite a few beers and are pretty jolly when they get on board. They are quite funny, but we soon move them on to the beach where there is a get together of all the yachts’ crews for Christmas nibbles and pre Port Davey celebrations. There is Silver Air, Galactic, Gipsy II, Sea Wind and Take It Easy. All but Gipsy are hoping to ‘go around’ tomorrow morning. We have a fire going and it is nice to meet everyone and share our hopes and excitement at the day ahead. We spend a good couple of hours together then it’s time to get back to our respective yachts. We have all got back, except Lee and Glen, who by then are well and truly under the weather and are having trouble getting their dinghy engine going and rowing aimlessly. Wade takes pity on them and goes back with Peasy to give them a tow to Sea Wind, then comes back. We get a shout from John on Silver Air: Glen has fallen into the water as he was trying to climb on board. He is too pissed to climb back into his dinghy! Back Wade goes to pull him out of the chilly water into his dinghy then gives him a big push up the backside into his boat. Boy, there won’t be an early start for those two! Getting drunk on a yacht isn’t a wise thing. Getting drunk before heading to the SW of Tasmania is pretty stupid… Talk about self-sabotage!

We check the weather again and yes, it is looking good. We have been using the BOM grib files. These are very useful as they display an image of the wind direction via arrows and strength via colour graduation around any particular location. You can see the forecast changes every few hours. Where the standard forecast provides information on the highest wind strength and predominant direction, the grib files display the nuances in specific spots, such as close in along the coast Vs. out at sea. So it is an excellent tool when planning a passage. So this is it: 5 o’clock start tomorrow morning. It is exciting and daunting all at once.
26/12/12 – The Big Day!

We raise anchor at 5.15am and leave Recherche, escorted by several pods of dolphins merrily porpoising and leaping out of the water at our bow. Galactic left ½ hour ago, we are next out, and Silver Air follows ½ hour after us. No sign of Sea Wind, but then again, no surprise there!

It is a chilly dawn, but a wonderful feeling. We are leaving the known for the unknown, what adventure is made of. The dream is about to become reality. We are motor-sailing, the sails initially helping our speed a lot. However as we round South East Cape then South Cape, we have a light westerly so it is on our nose. The coast is rugged, with vertical escarpments and tall peaks at the back. The swell is only about one meter, but broad, and the albatrosses are out soaring.

Just after 8am, Radio Hobart comes on with the forecast then calls for position reports. It is a thrill to transmit “This is Take It Easy, Take It Easy; we are off South Cape, bound for Port Davies, two people on board and a cat!”

It is quite comforting in the awesome seascape to have Galactic in front of us, and Silver Air behind us: three little ducklings in the big ocean! The air is crisp, and we are all rugged up, even though the sun is bright and the sky clear.

By about 11.00am we are level with the Maatsuyker Islands. It is an exposed and desolate group of islands and we can’t help but wonder how David and Mary Nicholson (builders of Medina) will go, caretaking there for six months! You cannot get more exposed to the Southern Ocean than this. With the Southernmost lighthouse in Australia, it is the only manned station along the wild Southern and Western Coast of Tasmania.

The coast is absolutely magnificent. The swell gets a little bigger once we are clear of the islands. The ocean is shimmering as we look back towards the land. This coast is so rugged and inhospitable! We round South West Cape by 1.30pm. The ocean is totally calm, there is no turbulence and we thank our lucky star for such gentle conditions. The cape itself isn’t as imposing as other bluffs along the South coast and it is nearly an anticlimax to pass it in such benign weather. But we can imagine it would be a mean place to be in a SW gale... and you would have to give it a much wider berth than we did today!
We were hoping to get a nice beam run for the 15 or so miles back up the SW coast into Port Davey, but the wind switches to the NW, on our nose again, so we keep having to motorsail. As we head towards the Pyramids, a group of 8 to 10 aptly named islets just South of the entrance to Port Davey, the ocean is a bit lumpy. There is hardly any wind, only small swell lines from the SW and W colliding, so we ride the bumps like a cork. The sea isn’t very comfortable and Bengie has disappeared into our bedroom.
The coast is different here: more arid and with low rocky hills along the water’s edge, and really tall escarpments over the back. Wade looks at them and says: “I hope you are not going to make me climb these!” I too hope one of them isn’t Mt Rugby or we are in big trouble! There are so high, rocky and abrupt. One of them is called Mt Misery…. It says it all!

It seems to take for ever to reach the entrance of Port Davey, marked by the Big Caroline rock. We officially enter at 4pm. But we still have some way to go beyond this, as we have decided to anchor at Bond Bay, close to the Davey River mouth, a few more miles northward. It will be protected from north westerlies and allow us to go up the river by dinghy tomorrow, to see the gorges which are apparently quite spectacular.

Now in sheltered water, we allow ourselves a little celebratory glass of wine and biscuits at the nets, enjoying the stunning scenery and our achievement, while George steers. We even warm up and dump the sea boots, the Musto jackets and pants and the polar fleeces. Bengie too is relaxing, now that the rock and roll is over. We have opened the hatch to our cabin. She is stretched out in the sunshine on our bed, belly up. That’s what I feel like doing!

We have had to work hard, but we have made it. We have been very lucky with the weather: a one day window, and we were there at the right time this year. The next days will not allow anyone else in.

By 5pm, we are in front of Bond Bay and by 5.30 we are anchored – a passage of just over 12 hours. It is time to get ashore, visit the Clayton’s Hut and go for a stroll to the lagoon to stretch our sea legs.

We go straight into foraging mode as we spot mussels amongst the rocks. The lagoon is quite pretty, but shallow and acts as a funnel in
SW winds, so not a good spot to take Take It Easy. We do find some derelict hut, but aren’t convinced this is the one mentioned in Deny King’s book. By the time we get back to the dinghy, go and say hello to Galactic who is anchored here also, and come back aboard Take It Easy, it is well after 7pm. We clean the mussels, but they are really rough and not particularly good eating. Still, it was fun collecting them! Too tired to bother with a decent meal, we resort to a tin of baked beans and ham for dinner with a glass of wine to numb our aching bodies. I comment to Wade: “there is one thing wrong with this holiday so far – my body is wrecked every night”. We have been pushing pretty hard to get here.

The tension, the lack of sleep and the physical demands of sailing the long passages are making themselves known in my back and neck. Wadie responds: “Well we are here now, so the pace is going to slow right down, unless of course you insist on making us climb every bloody hill around!” “We will climb a few… I want to see the panoramic views this place is famous for and take lots of photos!”

For now, we look around our bay: Take It Easy and Galactic look so small in this immense scenery. Galactic is from Kodiak in Alaska. These guys have been travelling with two young children for 5 years and have made the US to Australia crossing twice! We feel like babes compared to them.
Port Davey, the Bathurst Channel and Bathurst Harbour
27/12/12 – Davey Gorge, Bramble Cove & Schooner Cove

We wake up to a dead calm morning. It is totally quiet, not a ripple in Bond Bay. The sky looks ominous though, with some dark cirrus and lenticular clouds indicating there is a lot of wind up high. The forecast on HF confirms the wind will pick up significantly today: WNW to 25 knots ahead of a SW change tomorrow. We have been incredibly lucky to get in to Port Davey. If we were trying to make the passage from Recherche today, we would be bashing in to winds and sea too strong to make progress. It just shows how flaky access to this spot is. People who have been here a few times comment that you have to be ready in Recherche, wait for a light day, of which there are few, and be prepared to motor-sail all the way. There will only be a short one or two day window. If you miss it, it could be weeks before another opportunity presents itself. This is one way of limiting the number of yachts in here at any one time!

We find you also have to learn the weather patterns in this area, which are totally different to what we get on the Victorian coast. There, we expect lots of NE/SE in summer, which if we got this here would be perfect for a sail “around the bottom”. Trouble is, they don’t get this here: at the bottom of Tassie it seems to be NW/W/SW with the seas to go with it. If you wait for a NE/SE to go, you will wait for ever!

Anyway, we learnt another thing yesterday. Having run on one engine all day, we now know that we can motor-sail at 5.5 or 6 knots, using just under 3 litres of petrol an hour... a good reason to only use one engine at 4000 revs, rather than two, particularly since we gain very little speed by turning the second one on, just better steerage.

Today we feel a bit weather beaten, with very red faces. We both look like panda bears: white eyes where the sunnies were, and red nose, forehead and cheeks... very becoming!

We leave our anchorage at 9am and move up Payne Bay to Carvers Point, where we leave Take It Easy, then take a dinghy trip 5 miles up the Davey River to the gorges. Payne Bay is a huge bay. It is flat water today, but being oriented North/South, in a SW blow it would act as a funnel for the fierce winds and become very unpleasant. The water here is incredibly dark, tea colour, and you cannot see anything beyond 20 cm, so a working depth sounder is rather essential! As it turns out later, Payne Bay is also very uncomfortable in a strong NW!

It is a long dinghy ride on Peasy to see the Davey River gorges. The river which gave these waterways their name is really broad and meanders for miles. There are a lot of swans and the younger ones struggle to take off as Peasy approaches them. It is actually somewhat pitiful to see them paddling like crazy, flapping awkwardly and exhausting themselves without having been able to launch... After a while we realise they must be youngsters running scared. They try to get away in any direction, and haven’t quite worked out you need to face into wind to take off, otherwise you become water logged and knackered! It is strange to see so many swans. Somehow, we don’t associate them with a wilderness area.
I read a beautiful aboriginal legend about the creation of the black swan. It goes like this: “Mitaweena the whale became stranded in the shallows of a lagoon. As his heavy body crushed down, he blew spurts of black mud into the air from his blowhole. In his last struggles the muddy jets flew higher and higher until reaching the rarer atmosphere, they turned into great black birds flying and trumpeting above the body of their dying creator. They were as black as the mud from Mitaweena’s grave and their eyes and beaks were blood red from the bursting lungs of the great whale. Their wings were tipped by the clouds as they soared high above his last resting place in a sad salute of farewell. And this was the coming of Pickerdas the black swan”. There always seems to be a duality of emotions in aboriginal myths, a little like our feelings as we observed the cygnets: amused at the funny sight, but sad also.
When we eventually reach the gorge, it is quite impressive: sheer cliffs with angled slabs of sedimentary rock on either side of the now narrow river. We go through a couple of little races where we have to lift the outboard out of the water and Wadie walks us through... The water is very chilly and ink black, so you have no idea how deep it is, whether rocks or tree stumps lurk underneath. It is a bit spooky. At the third set of little rapids, we turn back. They are too hard to negotiate. As we make our way back, the wind picks up from the NW. It is now on our back quarter, cold and the water is very choppy, making it hard going to return to Take It Easy.
We make it back, raise anchor and head off South to Bramble Cove, behind the Breaksea Islands, going great guns on the jib alone, half of it rolled like a little handkerchief. We soon reach the anchorage, well protected by the aptly named Breaksea Islands. Bramble Cove is stunning, with Mt Berry towering over its tea stained waters. This anchorage is not good in a SW which is forecast for tomorrow, but we are here to do the walk up to Mt Milner. There are sensational views of the entrance to Port Davey and Paynes Bay on one side, and the start of the Bathurst Channel on the other side, a passage linking Port Davey to Bathurst Harbour. It is not a long walk, but arduous enough as our first climb for this trip. It is however rewarding. Take It Easy looks great, if tiny, in this grandiose landscape. The views are breathtaking and panoramic, even on this grey day. We have read a lot about Port Davey and Bathurst Harbour: articles, reports from other yachties, Deny King’s book about his life in this wilderness, we have seen photos on the internet, so we had an idea of what it might look like, but nothing prepares you for the grandeur and scale of this place. You feel miniscule. Deny King who spent 50 years living self-sufficiently in the rugged Tasmanian South West describes this beautifully: “an eternity of ocean, an infinity of mountains, endless swatches of impenetrable bush intersected by a multitude of rivers”.

As we reach the summit of Mt Milner, we spot a sail; it’s Galactic. They have left Bond Bay, come down Payne Bay, pass North of the Breaksea Islands and head down the Bathurst Channel. We take lots of pictures, then start our descent back to Take It Easy. The wind is gusty and the sky menacing. By the time we get back on board it is after 5pm.
We debate whether to stay here or go, but decide it will be quite uncomfortable in a SW. We therefore raise anchor, bound for Schooner Bay at the start of the Bathurst Channel.

Silver Air contacts us on the radio. They are hidden further down the channel in Casilda Cove. We could go and join them, but it is a fair way down. Schooner will do for tonight. We will move to their spot later.

Schooner Cove is much quieter in these conditions than Bramble Cove and we anchor snuggly right against a little sandy beach. The view east from our saloon towards the channel and the mountains is stunning. I might have to get up at dawn tomorrow morning to witness the sunrise.

What a busy and wondrous day we have had... Wade cooks us a nice barbecue, just before the rain comes. It feels like it is set in for a while.
28/12/12 – Walk to Mt Nares

It is wet and gusty this morning, having rained all night, but we are sitting comfortably, enjoying a lazy morning. By lunch time the rain has stopped and the wind calms down. Wade has finished tinkering and is standing around looking for something to do.

There is an aboriginal midden and ochre cave to visit in the cove, and Mt Nares to climb. I can tell the rest day is going to be short lived. Down goes the dinghy in the water; yes, there is ‘going ashore’ activity happening.

Before lunch we go to the other end of the beach in search of the ochre cave. We think we might have found it, or it might be a wombat hole! We come back to Take It Easy for lunch, then decide to forego the rest day for another climb up hills. There is no marked track, so we sort of follow a ridge line to a saddle. It is hard going through low scrub and button grass when we are lucky, and head high bushes when we are not. You cannot see where you are putting your feet and have to take big steps to make progress. It is exhausting. We then follow another long ridge to another saddle between two hills. One of them is Mt Nares, but which one? We start with the one we think is right and are rewarded with 360 views, towards Spain Bay and Hannant Inlet on the Southern side, the entrance to Port Davey to the West, Bramble Cove and Mt Berry to the North West, Mt Misery and Bathurst Channel to the North, and Joe Page’s bay and a snippet of Bathurst Harbour in the distance to the East. It is quite windy, gusty and cold, with rain showers alternating with very short lighter spells when the sun tries to shine out of a little hole in the clouds! But this view is so worth the effort. We climb down from our hill, look across to the rocky escarpment on the other side of the saddle. “We are here, we might as well” I say.
So up we go again, get to the top and wouldn’t you know it, there is another summit close by. So not knowing which one is actually Mt Nares, we climb this third one for good measure, to be sure to be sure. It gives us a view a little further towards Bathurst Harbour itself and Mt Rugby, a very mean looking escarpment some 800 meters high. I say to Wade “this is what we are training for”. But all I get back in response are disapproving moans.

Even though the day is very overcast and squally, the scenery as soon as you gain height is magnificent. The waterways are so extensive, the escarpments go straight up, towering over secluded bays with tea stained beaches. It is a little like fjord land in New Zealand. Matthew Flinders in his diary described these mountains this way: “the most stupendous works of nature I ever beheld... They are the most dismal and barren. The eye ranges over these peaks with astonishment and horror”.

Another pleasure for the eyes is the variety of wildflowers, some which we know like the Boronia, yellow parrot pea, ti-tree, swamp honey myrtle and the lovely pink trigger plant which looks a little like a tiny orchid spray. But some very beautiful ones we have never seen before. A particularly striking one has a set of a dozen or so trumpet like flowers, bright red on the outside and yellow on the inside. We will have to buy ourselves a book on Tasmanian wildflowers.

One of the advantages of getting to the top of hills, is that we can check out other anchorages. We spot a yacht in Spain Bay. Wadie looks through the binoculars and reckons it is Sea Wind. They must have woken up from their drunken stupor after all! It is good they made it in, but they must have had a rougher passage than us!

Having left Take It Easy at 1.30pm, we are back at 5pm just in time for another radio call from Silver Air. They are still at Casilda Cove, a little way down the Bathurst Channel. We will probably go there tomorrow. It is nice they are keeping a look out for us. They are much more experienced sailors than us, having done a world circumnavigation and have also been here quite a number of times. I guess this is their cruising grounds, like Flinders is for us.

It has been another physically active but very rewarding day. As we sip our Gin & Tonic and Bundy & Dry, all rugged up like it is the middle of winter, the wind picks up and the clouds descend on the surrounding hills. But we are feeling snug in our little cove.
t rained again during the night and the wind has shifted more westerly. There are sunny spells and some blue patches amongst the billowing clouds. Colour, we have got colour today, less of the many shades of grey. It is so much brighter when the sun is out!

The forecast is for continuing strong winds for the next few days. The wind is shifting away from the SW, back to W/NW, but still roaring at 30 knots, so an all-weather storm anchorage is called for. We are intending to join Silver Air in Casilda Cove. They have offered “valet parking”. Casilda Cove is a deep but narrow strip at the head of Horseshoe Inlet. There is no swinging room, so you have to throw a bow anchor, back your stern into the shore and tie yourself to some trees. It requires taking two ropes ashore with the dinghy. Last night they offered to do that for us, which would be very helpful.

It will be good to catch up with John and De, exchange our impressions and get a few tips from them. And of course, there is another hill to climb, Balmoral Hill, which is not very high, but apparently offers the best value for effort views of the whole Bathurst Channel. And if it is sunny, our photos might be somewhat brighter!

So we leave Schooner Cove a bit after 10am, and motor down the channel, buffeted by the wind gusts. Unfortunately there is no valet parking on arrival. We drop the anchor then it is a fiddle to ‘reverse park’ and keep the boat square to the shore when the wind wants to put us alongside! I look after that, while Wadie gets into the dinghy and ties two lines to tree trunks; we then pull back on the anchor, tighten the ropes and we are set. Definitely a two person effort! There are now three yachts neatly lined up: Silver Air, Galactic and Take It Easy!

We can see two red and blue raincoats coming down Balmoral Hill and soon John and
De dinghy over to us for a cuppa and a chat. “We saw you coming in and hid behind a rock” says John. Cheeky buggers! They confirm the walk up Balmoral Hill is worthwhile, invite us over for dinner tonight and go back to their yachts.

We have lunch and ready ourselves for another scramble. But before leaving, the wind picks up and we find we are not particularly well protected, with the gusts hitting us broadside. So Wade puts the Fortress to work as a second anchor to our beam, to ease the strain on the port rope and he pulls us closer to shore.

It is a short climb up Balmoral Hill and once again we have stunning 360 views of the entire Bathurst Channel. We spot a couple of deep bays on opposite sides of the Channel: Ila Bay to the North and Clyte Cove to the South, and another further down called Iola Bay, which looks excellent. Our study of the guide book on our return aboard suggests there is a lot to see there, so Iola Bay might be our next anchorage. We are here for tonight though, hoping to check out Balmoral Beach and climb Mt Rattenbury, behind us. We are keeping fit on this voyage!

We haven’t talked much about Bengie, the sleepy cat. She is getting a lot of snoozing done and pretends to guard Take It Easy while we go on our bush bashing expeditions. She puts up with the boat. It is better than jail, but I think she gets quite bored.

We are now doing an impersonation of a monohull at anchor: rocking from side to side in the ripples formed by the strong gusts. I think in a storm, the only tenable position in this anchorage would be where Silver Air is, right against the little headland, to be protected from the gusts.

It is raining again and it is cold. Gee, I don’t think we will get a tan on this holiday, but we might get chilblains!

We have never made so much use of our winter gear on a cruise!

We dinghy over to Silver Air for dinner. John and De are great hosts and their boat feels just like a cocoon: lovely mahogany timber throughout, adding to the sense of comfort and cosiness. We share a gourmet dinner, talk about our respective lives and hopes for the future. They live an active life in their community, are involved as organisers of the wooden boat
festival, travel overseas for huge bicycle tours, and of course sail. Sailing for them is around Tassie rather than the world, as they once did, as John was operated for a brain tumour three years ago and has lost some balance in the process. We try and entice them to Flinders Island. We must show a fair bit of enthusiasm for Flinders, as John reckons Wade is employed by their Tourist Bureau to promote the place!

We also find out more about Mike and Alisa on Galactic, whom John and De know quite well. They are both marine biologists which is how they finance their life aboard. Mike has written a book about their travels from Alaska to Australia. So we will try and buy a copy and read about their adventures.
Sunday 30/12/12 – To Iola Bay

We have a quiet night, but the wind picks up again at dawn. It is another grey and chilly start to the day and the daily morning dip is rather refreshing, but you do feel better for it afterwards, as you hug a hot cuppa in your hands!

There is some entertainment for breakfast as we watch Galactic extricating itself out of the anchorage. You certainly don’t want to be in a hurry to leave when you have three ropes to shore to retrieve and two anchors to winch up... that will be us later today, hopefully not in the rain as those poor buggers have to do. They really struggled to get their second anchor up, which they could not retrieve from the dinghy. So they had to winch the boat up to it and use the sheet winches to bring it up. It took them over an hour.

As this morning looks somewhat gloomy, we opt to give the dinghy ride to Balmoral Beach and the walk up Rattenbury hill a miss and instead try to free ourselves from our cat’s cradles, before the wind picks up to 30 knots. We are lucky, it is a reasonably straight forward affair, over and done within 20 to 30 minutes. We are glad our second anchor was the brand new aluminium Fortress, much lighter to handle from our dinghy. By 10.30 we have said goodbye to Silver Air and motor off, with Peasy in tow. It is interesting following the Channel. Some of the valleys, particularly in Joe Page Bay, look glacial, with the distinctive U shape of the hill sides into the water. And when you look at the chart plotter and the water depth contours, the Channel seems to be like a river meandering through the hills, with an obvious deep stream in the centre, varying from 15 to 30 meters. The Channel itself is about one kilometre wide and goes for about 12kms, becoming quite narrow – hence the name “The Narrows”, before reaching Bathurst Harbour, a shallow but extensive basin of about 5 to 7 meters in depth. We soon reach Iola Bay. It is a tiny diamond-shaped cove with a bottleneck entrance, under the mighty pyramid of Mt Rugby. There really is no room for any other yacht in here, particularly now, with a ‘dancing cat’ bang in the middle of it! John described this as a bullet proof
anchorage... just as well with the 35 knots WNW forecast till Tuesday! We will be snug in here. We so much prefer swinging at anchor than being spider webbed against the shore.

We tidy up all the ropes, spare anchor and chain, then sit back for a cuppa. Wade comments “we’ve done quite a lot already and it is not even next year!” And we have. We seem to be such a world away from anything familiar, and feel like we have been gone for ages. It is fantastic. It is a world where weather and tide count more than calendar and clocks. I just wished we could let friends and family know right now how great an adventure we are having and how arrestingly beautiful this place is.

Today might be a rest day. There is an interesting walk up Mt Beattie, behind us, and down the other side to Clayton’s Corner, but the return trip will take at least four hours, so we will need to make an earlier start than one in the afternoon! We therefore settle down to reading, writing, dreaming, and I make us some bread in the afternoon, since we have now exhausted our ‘bought’ loaves. I don’t know how successful it will be though, as it is hard for the dough to rise in the cold conditions.

I read up a bit more about Port Davey and the Bathurst Harbour waterways. A very unusual marine environment has been created by a deep layer of dark red-brown, tannin-rich freshwater, which overlies tidal saltwater. The fresh water layer is so dark that it lets no light penetrate. It is too dark for the normal variety of fish to live there. Instead, some ancient fish species that normally live in the ocean at great depths and total darkness have been found to live in the underlying salt water layer. Plants like sea fans, sea whips, sea pens and soft corals can be found here, whereas in Port Davey, further from the source of the rivers, the waters are clearer, enabling the usual variety of marine plants and fish to thrive. It is fascinating. And all this tannin is coming from the large among of rainwater leaching through the buttongrass moorlands, into the numerous rivers that feed the estuary. When we walk through the hills, the soil is damp and peaty underfoot, with small streams and soak holes forming in the hollows. It is strange though how the freshwater stays on top of the salt water and the two layers remain separate. Normally salt and fresh water just blend into a briny mix. I wonder whether it is the amount of tannin that makes a difference.

The wind song through the rigging is getting louder as the wind really picks up and our dancing around is more pronounced. I ask: “are you happy we are going to stay put?” — “We have got 35 meters of chain out in 2.5 meters of water. We are not budging, just swinging around!” — 14/1 ratio... Yap, that should do! Actually, it is good we are on board all day today. We will be a lot more comfortable leaving the boat unattended tomorrow when it is forecast to blow at 35 knots. Gale warning!

As we swing around, I gaze at the barren hills encircling us and the billowing grey clouds. I listen to the roar of the wind and wonder how on earth one could live here through winter. It would be so cold, so violent, with fierce storms and driving rain, and no possible escape. And Deny King spent 50 years at Melaleuca, just a few miles from here! We are here in summer and it is cold and blowy. John, from Silver Air told us last night they were here last year in March with their diesel heater on non-stop for four days and three inches of snow on the deck! It is a wild place indeed.

We are in Iola Cove for a couple of nights at least. We will walk up Mt Beattie tomorrow
on what will again be a very windy day. There is a gale warning from the West. Although Take It Easy is swinging around a bit in the gusts, we are in totally flat water and the wind feels like it is passing high over us, rather than hitting us full on. We are actually a lot more comfortable here than on the outside edge of Casilda Cove. The forecast over the next few days is for a continuing westerly gale. We suspect Silver Air, Galactic and Take It Easy are the only yachts inside Bathurst Channel or Bathurst Harbour. Galactic is the furthest in, having left us this morning to head for Melaleuca Inlet, at the bottom of Bathurst Harbour, to pick up a friend arriving by plane. We heard and saw the small plane flying over two hours later than scheduled because of the strong winds. Silver Air is staying put in Casilda Cove. They are in the most sheltered corner of the cove, nice and snug. As for Sea Wind, they had indicated on Christmas Day that they would stay in the Port Davey area, to be able to go fishing, so stay outside the marine park and dark Bathurst waters and also because they were on a tight schedule, due back in Hobart by 4/1/13. I can’t see them being able to get out in time! We are in no hurry, having allowed ourselves a couple of weeks to explore, with extra time available to wait for the right weather to get out. Willingly trapped in the wilderness... that’s us! And that really is the thing with Port Davey: it is hard to get in, and then once in, you can get trapped for much longer than you hope because of fierce winds. More than anywhere else, you are at the whim of the weather.
If it keeps raining like this, the dinghy will fill up, says Wade. “It might not, it’s raining horizontally” is my response. It is blowing a hooly too for a change... There won’t be much walking up hills today!

We tuck in to the boat baked bread for breakfast. I thought I might have made a brick, but it is pretty tasty, just did not rise as well in the cold weather.

The tides are really strange here. It looks high now, but it was low all day yesterday. It is as if they are 12 hour long, not 6. There is not a lot of height difference either, may be half a meter between high and low water.

It continues to howl and rain all day. We can’t even see the summit of Mt Rugby, so we are confined to the cabin. Wade reads, wrapped in the orange polar fleece blanket and Bengie nestles on his lap for an extended cuddle. I do some crosswords, then get my watercolours out and make some progress with the Moreton Bay fig started in class.
1/1/13 – Mt Beattie twice!

It is a new year and slightly different new day: still howling, but a few patches of blue sky have appeared, changing the appearance of our surroundings from greys to bright greens. We even see a group of kayakers paddling in the channel past the entrance to our bay. They are like a mirage. Here one second, gone the next! You wonder whether you’ve dreamt it. They have probably come from Melaleuca. But it is a good enough indication that we should get out for our walk up Mt Beattie, down to Clayton’s Corner and back again. We study the hills with the binoculars to work out a path that will avoid the many streams and heavy scrub areas. The ridge line to the East seems to be the best option.

We tidy up, get the backpack ready to go by 11.00. Not exactly a quick and early start... Our first challenge is to find a way out of the bay onto the bottongrass. We manage that relatively quickly, then starts the long and steep climb to a saddle then onto the ridge line leading to Mt Beattie. That is hard yakka: no track, lots of big clumps of grasses, banksias, ti-tree bushes. Every step is a big high step and you can’t see where your foot is landing. It gets easier once we reach the rocky ridge. As usual, the views are superb and we get some sunshine on the way up. We can now see the whole of Bathurst Channel towards the West and Bathurst Harbour to the East. Things get even easier once we reach the summit and meet a made track from Clayton’s Corner. The wind at the top of Mt Beattie is fierce. It is even hard to stand in one spot to take photos. We get buffeted but the sun is out, so it is not too cold. Wadie spots the most beautiful orchid: burgundy petals with pale yellow stamens. We have never seen anything like this before. Vero would love it!
We now can see Melaleuca’s Inlet where a fishing boat is anchored. As we start the descent to Clayton’s, the track quickly turns into a stream. The rain of the last two or three days is pouring down the mountain following this convenient path... not so convenient for the walkers though. It is soggy and slippery, but we’d rather this than the bush bashing! The views towards Melaleuca are stunning and you can even see the ocean at the end of a valley. The path descends into a paperbark and eucalypt forest. It is a lovely change of scenery and at last we can hear the chattering of birds, something we haven’t heard since getting into Port Davey. I spot a couple of parrots that look different to what I have observed before. A check of the bird book shows they are Swift Parrots, a new sighting indeed.

We reach Clayton’s hut by about 1.30, have a look around, write an entry in the visitors’ book, and check the rooms. It’s funny, there is a bath with a stick from the plug hole to the edge, with a sign “leave stick in bath for quolls to escape”. They must get in the bath, find the edges too slippery to get out and meet their demise unless some kind soul leaves them an escape route. We walk down the water’s edge where there is a white jetty.
There are a few sign boards put out by the Conservation group. They provide some useful explanations. For instance one says “the Bathurst Harbour – Bathurst Channel region is often mistaken for a glacial fjord. However the channel was a river valley, while the harbour was once a large button grass plan – both were flooded when the sea level rose at the end of the last ice age, about 7000 years ago”. So there we go, we were wrong!
After a small break and a munch on muesli bars, we head back up for the return trip. The legs definitely feel like we have gone up this sucker once already today! However it is much easier and quicker up a path, even if the sky clouds over and the rain starts. By the time we reach the summit, we are soaked and muddy, and the wind is strong and icy. We retrace our path down the other side of the mountain, now off track of course. It is much easier going on the way down than the way up, although we are careful, as a sprained ankle would be a painful thing to get back to the boat. I look at and feel the angle of the slope and wonder how I climbed it this morning. We are tired, getting cold from the rain and wind; our feet are squishing water in our boots as we are no longer fussing about walking through the streaming water down the hill! We finally reach Peasy by 4.30. We get back on board Take It Easy, change into dry and warm clothes and tuck into a hot bowl of noodle soup. It soon stops raining and the sun reappears, now that we are safe and sound inside our boatie!

My thighs are seizing up; even walking up and down the steps between the hulls and the bridge deck is hard. And I am pleased it is not just me: Wadie too is feeling stiff and weary. I keep looking at Mt Rugby. I would like to climb it, but I don’t think I have the fitness and stamina, and besides, the top of Mt Beattie is about the height of the saddle at the base of Rugby’s crags, not even half way up and the last bit is vertical slabs! So I suspect it will remain unchallenged. In any case, it would be a treacherous place to be in 30 knots of wind.

We listen to the forecast on HF at 7.30pm: continuing strong winds from the West at 20 to 30 knots for the next three days. It was supposed to start abating slightly, but now it is no longer! We might move tomorrow and motor to Melaleuca Inlet to see where the King family settled for so many years. There is now a South West Conservation Area base, so as well as visit this iconic spot, we might also pick up some useful information. This is not a National Park because of the small tin mining lease still being operated. We probably won’t stay anchored in the inlet for the night as the sand-flies are supposed to be abundant there, although in this wind, we might be spared. Kings Cove, just before Clayton’s Corner, might be a pleasant and protected option, or even Ed’s Cove, further up North in Bathurst Harbour.

As the sun goes down, the clouds become pink and the surrounding hills take a golden glow. It is quite beautiful and I get out on the front deck, followed by Bengie, to take a few pictures. She is rather brave and goes right to the bow, peering down at the water through the nets. But then all of a sudden, a few rain drops come. Scaredy cat rushes up the cabin roof, onto the boom, realises there is no shelter up there and tumbles back down into the cockpit, all fluffed up. “Don’t like that rain!”
We wake up early – 6.30. Something is different: it is totally quiet and sunny. I get up to have a look around, reach for my camera and get out on deck, starkers... There isn’t a ripple in the water and Mt Rugby is perfectly reflected in our bay. It is stunning.

I come back into bed excited, tell Wadie and suggest we should go now to Bathurst Harbour while it is quiet, to get a shot of the whole range reflected in the glassy water! “But there are lots of things to do before we can go: put away the outboard, lift the dinghy up, warm up the engines, and we haven’t had breakfast yet“. I get up again for a dip, to encourage my man to move, but by the time I have dried myself, the sky has clouded over, a rain shower comes and the wind picks up a little, rippling over the reflections. Well that was short-lived! By then, Wadie is up and dressed. “You are too late, missed it!” We do get ready anyway, listen to the forecast: no real change. Sunny breaks alternate with showers, but it is still a calm day.

We motor off just after 8am. As we get out of the Narrows into Bathurst Harbour and turn South toward the Melaleuca Inlet, we notice Galactic ahead of us. A quick chat on the radio: they are dropping their friend off at the airstrip. We agree they will anchor in Clayton’s Corner and we will pick them up. They have too much draft to enter the inlet on an ebbing tide and would have to dinghy to Melaleuca, quite a few miles upstream. Take It Easy becomes the rescue shuttle. Mike, Alisa, Marianne and the two kids Elias and Eric all pile up on board. It is a novelty for them all, and the kids and girls have a relaxing, fun time at the bow in the nets, while Mike, Wade and I are in the cockpit. Melaleuca is a long, winding, narrow passage, three to four meters deep in places, down to two towards the end.
when we enter the tiny Melaleuca Creek. It is very narrow and Take It Easy feels rather oversized. We reach the small jetty. As I bring the boat to it, the wind and current drift me into the bank and I am not quick enough to correct. I end up scratching the hull along the ti-tree. Bummer! I am crossed with myself, but it will hopefully go with some polish. It will be tricky turning the boat around, but we will deal with this later.

We wander ashore, follow a boardwalk (my god, civilisation!) and reach a shed and the tiny airstrip. It is odd in the wilderness to see a small airstrip with a couple of four to six seater aircrafts, and some tourists who have obviously come by air. The airstrip is only about 450 meters long, and Deny King built this himself in the late 1950s. He levelled the ground with a bulldozer, laid down crushed quartz, layers of ti-tree, then more crushed quartz. In places where the ground was too soft for machines, he levelled it with pick and shovel. He could only work on this when the ground was relatively dry, typically in late summer. Over several years, it took months of back breaking, herculean work. And all this was initially undertaken to reduce isolation and provide easier access to medical help for himself and his family. Nowadays, in summer, when weather conditions allow, 4 to 6 small aircrafts use the strip for tourist drops and pick-ups.
We check out the bird hide, but have no luck with the orange bellied parrots nor finches... probably too late in the morning. We also walk down to Deny King’s home. It is set nicely on the edge of Moth Creek. There is a pleasant stroll on the boardwalk: The Needwonnee Walk. The Needwonnee people were an aboriginal tribe who lived in the South West thousands of years ago. Members of the aboriginal community have recreated examples of their culture along the walk: domed huts, framed with long intersecting branches and thatched with long grass, reed baskets, a canoe built from short pieces of paperbark tightly bundled. These were sturdy enough to go sealing and mutton birding on nearby offshore islands like Maatsuyker and De Witt! On that walk, we spot a couple of new birds: the grey shrike and the striated field wren.
Mike gives us a hand to turn the boat around. It is a bit tricky in this narrow creek, but with the help of the engines, we manage to pivot and face the boat downriver for an easy escape. Their friend Marianne is catching a flight out this afternoon, so while we wait, Wadie borrows Mike’s dinghy which we towed on the way up the inlet, and polishes off the scratches. Mike, Alisa and the kids see Marianne off and we then leave Melaleuca for the return trip to Galactic. When we emerge from the inlet back into Clayton’s Corner, Silver Air is anchored next to Galactic. We drop the little family off, say hello to De and John, then continue on to King’s Point which will be a lot more sheltered from the strengthening NW. Soon after, Silver Air comes along. We invite them over for a roast dinner in the barbecue. They are willing guinea pigs... “Could be good, or could be a disaster!”

We reflect on our trip so far and our impressions of Port Davey/Bathurst Harbour in particular. We are experiencing something so unique: landscapes without people, air and water without the slightest hint of pollution. It feels like we are getting a rare glimpse of how the Earth might possibly have been if mankind had never existed. This is a place of extremes in weather and terrain, and that alone is worth the journey! It is a sensational spot if you enjoy bushwalking. The best way to appreciate the scale of the scenery is to climb up those hills. The views are amazing and far reaching, the skies and cloud formations are like nothing we have seen before. It is also special to be here with so few yachts. You can enjoy beautiful coves on your own, but it is fun to get together with your buddies from time to time. From a sailing point of view, once you are in the Channel, it is a bit restricted and we end up motoring everywhere anyway, to recharge our batteries, as with the grey conditions, the solar panels struggle to produce power. If you enjoy long strolls along deserted beaches as we do, there is nothing of the kind here, and no fishing, since fish don’t live in the dark waters. We have not used the diving gear (too dark to see anything) nor the banana boats (the yellow kayaks – too windy to paddle).

As for the weather, you’d better like it strong from the West and cold! One surprising aspect of the region is the lack of fauna. Although there is evidence of wombats, and we are told there...
are quolls and wallabies, we haven’t seen any at all. Birds are not numerous either. One disappointing feature as far as Wadie is concerned is the lack of ‘kiosk’ at the top of hills, ready to serve hot chocolates to weary bushwalkers. “It’s just not right... you make me climb these mountains and not one of them has a little man serving hot drinks and spaghetti Bolognese”. So would we come back here? Probably only if we came down the West Coast and circumnavigated Tassie that way. But we would not do the trip from Recherche again. But are we pleased to have come here? Absolutely, and there are still a number of anchorages to explore and hills to climb for next time!

Dinner on board with John and De works out beautifully and we spend an entertaining evening together. It is lovely to get to know one another and we really enjoy their company. And as usual, the sky is spectacular, with distinctive clouds which we identify as Altocumulus Undulatus.
3/1/13 – Sunny rest day at King’s Point, Bathurst Harbour

We wake up to a brilliant sunny day, still strong winds but this time from the NW, so warm. We have our usual brief dip in the black water first thing in the morning. It does not feel quite as cold in the sun: 12.1°C ... still horribly chilly though. The coldest we have seen was at Melaleuca yesterday: 11.3°C in the middle of the day, so probably 10°C early morning... brrhh...

We decide to stay put at King’s Point and enjoy the sunshine. Bengie too is relishing the weather change. She is laid out in the cockpit, warming her belly, looking pretty relaxed, then retires on the settee for her nap, again belly up.

Silver Air calls us over to mark their charts of Flinders Island over coffee. We go through our suggested anchorages. They may go there next summer. John teases Wade over the ‘kickbacks from Flinders Island Tourist Office’, and me over returning to work after a trip like this one. “When you get back, call me and I will give you some retirement counselling. You just bring the wheelbarrow to work, get the ‘corporation’ to fill it up with your redundancy package, and get back here!" It might just happen anyway!

We were discussing the tides in Bathurst Channel and Bathurst Harbour and John gave us a plausible explanation. There is little difference between high and low water, but one of the reason tides appear to go on for 12 hours is that with the strong and sustained westerlies, a lot of water volume is pushed towards and kept in the harbour. That makes sense; a similar thing happens in the Gippsland Lakes with Easterly weather!

Back on board: time to make some bread, enjoy a lie down in the rare sunshine on the cockpit cushions. The afternoon passes pleasantly; we read, I draw a banksia picked up along the pebbly beach earlier.

Galactic radios in. They are anchored behind Eve’s Point at Frog’s Hollow and Mike is wondering whether we would like to climb Mt Rugby tomorrow! Oh my, now there’s a challenge! We accept the invitation, with an ‘escape clause’. I don’t know that I am fit enough, so we may not go all the way up, but will give it a try at least. We will motor to
their anchorage first thing and dinghy over to Starvation Cove – how ominous – for the start of the track by about 8.30am. At least there is a small track, although the guide book advises to take trail markers for the top section as it is apparently easy to get lost amongst the huge boulders.

Before we know it, it is sun downer time. De and John come over. We talk about Mt Rugby, and the milder westerlies expected on Saturday. John won’t climb Mt Rugby. He is fit, but his balance is not good enough for this climb and particularly the descent, a side effect of his brain tumour. De might, but we will see what the forecast looks like. We are expecting to ready ourselves for a return to Recherche on Saturday when the westerly is 15 to 20 knots or Sunday if it continues to abate.

As we are chatting and sipping our drinks, we can smell fire and notice the smoke haze around the hills. The sky looks ominous. We wonder whether a storm is coming and lightening has struck somewhere in the hills. All of a sudden the sky really darkens and the wind picks up. It’s action stations! John and De get into their dinghy and row back to Silver Air in a rush; we clear the cockpit and put out the rain awning, just in time for thunder, lightening and rain to start! Twenty minutes later, it has stopped. Weather changes can be swift and vicious in these parts. But at least with the rain, the fire has been put out. We later find out that the eerie clouds we photographed were in fact cumulonimbus mammatus, their downward protuberances due to turbulent downdrafts and updrafts.

With the Maatsuyker Radio broadcast coinciding with the thunderstorm, we miss half of the forecast transmission, so are not sure what Friday (tomorrow) is looking like, but it sounds like Saturday is 15 to 20 knots, and Sunday 10 to 20 westerly, e.g. better conditions than Saturday for our departure. Big swell though, 3 to 4 meters, but an assured sail back this time. It would work out perfectly all around if we could leave on Sunday. A later forecast on HF fills the gap: strong wind warning tomorrow: NNW 20 to 30. We will make our way back to Port Davey after Rugby, and hope to anchor in Spain Bay on the Saturday. Woo ooh… the big mean hill, then we will be ‘released’. It is a bit like a rite of passage, isn’t it! Wadie was hoping we would get a chance to continue up the West coast to Macquarie Harbour and Strahan, but the weather won’t allow it this time. I must admit to preferring a return via the East Coast. I am over the strong and cold weather and am not keen on spending our whole cruise rugged up like it’s winter! The Tassie circumnavigation will be a challenge for another time.
We had a restless night: thinking about the climb, the rounding of the three capes in big swell, work... and it was hot - unbelievable, isn’t it, after a week of wintry weather. In the end we get out of bed and up anchor by 6.00am to move up the channel into Frog’s Hollow before the wind picks up. It is a nice roomy anchorage with plenty of space for several boats to swing around happily. We ready the back pack, dinghy over to Starvation Cove with Mike, and start the walk up at 9.00am.

Well, the Mt Rugby ascent and descent, where do I start? The numerous trips to the loo before we depart to empty my bowels (I thought only work gave me the shits, but it turns out the thought of climbing the tallest rock in the region does the trick too), the unrelenting steep climb of 772 vertical meters, the bushes scratching legs and arms as you fight your way through them, the mud sucking your boots, the fierce wind coming across the ridges, the last 100 vertical meter climb straight up the big boulders we had to heave ourselves over, the 35° heat once we reach the top after noon, the 45 knots wind blowing so hard through the crags we could not stand without bracing ourselves, the running out of water on the way down because we guzzled so much in the heat, the descent killing off our tired thighs, and then to top it all off, the smoke billowing over the ridge line from a nearby fire fuelled by the insanely strong gusts... The thought of the fire reaching the ridge top then descending on us made us pick up the pace on the steep descent along the razorback ridge, when I thought I had no energy left to run. Somehow, when it is a choice between getting trapped by fire or running on empty trying very hard not to sprain your ankles, you find the reserve you did not think you had. Seven hours for the return trip to the dinghy, including an hour at the top, done on will power for me, definitely not fitness! But I climbed the sucker, the views were amazing and we have the photos to prove it. The views during the climb and at the summit were everything I had hoped for: the open, vast South West laid before our feet. Views of plains, waterways and inlets, of rugged hills and indented ridgelines, and of endless ocean. And although we still did not see any wildlife, the wildflowers were plentiful with many red and yellow trumpets (I will have to find their name) and burgundy orchids standing bright on the hillside.

The dinghy trip back across the Bathurst Channel in 40 to 45 knots wind is a wet and bouncy affair, but such a relief. Silver Air has returned. They had attempted to anchor at Bramble Cove and then Schooner, but were blown out of both anchorages, so fierce were the westerlies, and thus came back to Frog’s Hollow to take refuge. “Unbelievably strong – never experienced anything like this before! Did you make it?” they ask. “Yap, but I am knackered” I respond. “You picked the hottest, meanest day of the year to climb it!”

Why did we do this? Well, it was not forecast to be that strong, and we did not know it was going to be so hot. And apart from that, because it is there, omnipresent, dominating the region, appearing in just about every photo you take. So we just had to!
The sky over Rugby and our bay is a burgundy colour with billowing red clouds. It looks eerie and apocalyptic, but we are safe. The fire started on the other side of Joe Page Bay, so it would have been difficult for it to spread this way, and we were never in danger. But it looked to us as if it was just behind us and was a little frightening. It probably is the same fire that was started by lightning yesterday. Although it rained enough to douse it down, it probably kept smouldering in the peat and started again with the strong winds and extreme heat. That is the trouble with peat. A thick layer covers those hills and valleys. For years it has been dug out and used as a fuel source all around the world. So once fire starts in this, it just keeps going and it takes days of rain to put it out.

We hear later that today was really the hottest day ever in Hobart: 45°C! What wild weather: within a week, it snowed on Mt Wellington, then baked the whole island! The wind is so fierce now that it whips plumes of water up in the air and swirls them around like willy willies. The shrieking of the gusts in the rigging is deafening and the whole boat shudders. But we are all staying put. Three hours after our return, the howling suddenly stops and it all becomes quiet. Only the smoke still hangs over us in the orangey grey sky. It is odd: so violent and then nothing! Laid out on the couch, completed exhausted, I think about our climb. I really struggled up and down that hill and am now totally spent. Extreme heat and steepness are not a good mix with me, and my left shoulder was killing me (I fear it is going bad like the other side did). I ask Wade: “Aren’t you sore?” “Not really, I had lots of rests waiting for you”. He kept a close eye on me the whole way, pretty well coaching me along. I was determined to get up there. The sense of achievement often demands a high degree of effort, struggle and even pain. It is hard going during, but so rewarding afterwards.

Tomorrow, we are heading off early to Spain Bay at the entrance of Port Davey, for an easy exit on Sunday. And wouldn’t you know it, there is a walk Wade wants to do, which links Spain Bay to Stephen’s Bay, an ocean beach with sand dunes, exposed to the South West, and thus a possibly good flotsam spot; 2½ hour return, not including scavenging time. Man, he is trying to kill me! And he is not doing too badly for a man who does not really like bushwalking!
We ready ourselves for our departure to Spain Bay. Alisa and Elias dinghy over from Galactic, to bring us a copy of the book Mike has written about their trip from Alaska to Australia: “South from Alaska - sailing to Australia with a baby for crew”. A published author we have met, sailed with, bush walked with... how wonderful is that!

We wave everybody goodbye, but will all probably meet up at Spain Bay, since we are all heading off tomorrow. We motor off, a knot of tide helping us along, but as we reach the end of Bathurst Channel, we meet the incoming tide. This place really is odd.

On our way, we check out Waterfall, a spot along a cliff opposite Bramble Cove, where a waterfall comes down, and someone has rigged up some fenders, mooring lines to bring your boat alongside, a jerry can and long hose so you can top up your water. Great set up! We still have enough fresh water on board and don’t want to taint our tanks with button grass tea water, but it would be fine as laundry water or for camp showers.

As we reach Breaksea Islands and look north towards the Davey River, we notice smoke and when looking through the binoculars the parched hillsides. If this was the fire, it was a very long way from us. We run along the Breaksea Islands, so true to their name; there are a couple of arches through the cliffs. As soon as we get away from their shelter, the swell picks up... not used to this bouncing up and down anymore!

On the way we take the opportunity to check Hannant Inlet, just neighbouring Spain Bay. There is a long skinny island – Loumah Island – barring the entrance to the inlet. It is a narrow and shallow gap to get inside the inlet behind the island, where it is beautifully calm. But with only 1.5m depth in this inky water, it is a little daunting and we don’t like the depth sounder beeping at us. There is another anchorage on the outside of Loumah Island, with 3 to 4m depth and nearly as calm, so it is probably a better place to be if it gets too uncomfortable in Spain Bay with the swell. However a read of the guide book advises to treat it as a lunch spot only... questionable holding!
Having completed our reconnaissance task, we head for Spain Bay and anchor next to Galactic... no sight of Silver Air yet. They may have gone to Bramble Cove. This is a scenic spot, with a wee bit of swell rolling in, but not uncomfortable. As long as the wind stays from the West we are fine here. If it goes NW it won’t be tannable and we will have to be brave and move inside Hannant Inlet.
After lunch, we ready ourselves to go ashore. I look through the saloon windows and yell: “oh my god, people on the beach, where have they come from?” until I realise it is Mike, Alisa and the kids. We did not even see them nor hear them go ashore!

We catch up with them along the track. It is a flat walk to Stephens Bay, still bushy and muddy in places, but not too much strain on my aching body. We have a great time fossicking on the only beach around; we are back in our element. Wade finds a huge bundle of ropes which he untangles and eventually coils: 70 meters of clean, strong rope. “Don’t know what I will do with that, but I am sure it will come in handy”. As for me, I find a few aboriginal middens and bring back a couple of gorgeous shells that have lost their outer layer, revealing beautiful mother of pearl.
We are back by 5pm; it is time to ready Take It Easy for an ocean passage: Wade puts the jack lines back on, removes the side plastic windows in the cockpit, lifts out the dinghy and stows the engine on the side of the aft railing. We tidy up inside, putting away what might go flying in the swell. We have our usual sun downer drinks and nibbles, quietly sit and read and muse about the day ahead.

The next two days are gentler NW and Westerlies, 15 to 20, as it was today... perfect for a sail all the way back, instead of a motor. We should see South West Cape and the South Coast in a different mood, particularly with the 3 to 5 meter swell resulting from over a week of Westerly gale. But swell does not matter, Wade says, you just ride the swell lines up and down, it is ‘sea’ you worry about, the breaking white water on top of the swell; and that, according to the forecast, should be no more than a meter. Given we have a couple of days of usable weather, we are thinking of possibly making an overnight stop at New Harbour, a deep bay just West of Cox Bluff. From there, if you follow the valley North between the ranges, you get back to Melaleuca!

We will see what the day brings. It would be great to anchor along the exposed South Coast. Regardless we need to be back into the shelter of the D’Entrecasteaux Channel by Tuesday night, before the next round of Westerly gale begins on Wednesday! SW, W, NW, W, W... If anything it is consistent and predictable. But you just have to wait for that small window when the wind eases enough to let you escape. And still, no other yacht has been able to get into Port Davey, and probably won’t over the next two days, since today was the lightest and no one came through!

I am really looking forward to our sail tomorrow, but a bit daunted by the size of the swell. What an experience!
We weigh anchor at 6.30 from Spain Bay. This time we are in reverse order to our incoming passage: Silver Air is first, Take It Easy is next, and Galactic is at the rear! As soon as we get out of the sheltered bay, the sea is choppy and confused, reflecting off the rocks. We are going into wind to start with, so we climb up the waves and slide down the other side like on a mini rollercoaster. Some of the waves are steep and close together as we make our way through the rocks and islets. The boat climbs, peaks at the crest of the waves, then drops sharply down the back onto the next set. It is quite confused for a while but settles as we get into open waters. Once headed South, we unfurl the jib and the sled ride starts. Wade’s fantasy of flying Big Red down the West coast does not eventuate. It is too windy for that and the spinnaker set up on a bouncy deck would be scary too! With the fires still smouldering, the hills around Port Davey are enveloped in smoke and disappear from view, and an acrid smell fills the air.

The swell is properly formed now and varies from three to four meters, with lots of white caps, but Wade was right, nothing to worry about, particularly when you go with it. Just a fairly bouncy ride. Johnno was quite correct in his message to us when we first headed off: “Hang on to your hats!”. There is a multitude of sea birds: albatrosses, fairy and Antarctic prions, petrels, gannets. Bengie stays up for a while, but then the rock and roll and the noise get too much for her. She miaows disapprovingly and disappears into our bedroom, hiding under the quilt.
We make our way southward to South West Cape, give it a wide berth, then once at a safe distance, we jibe, round it to the East, with the Westerly now on our tail. The cape looks so much more impressive in these conditions than on the way up, more like you imagine it would be. It is a fast ride: 8 and 9 knots with a couple of turns in the jib as the wind gusts increase to 25 knots. Woo ooh! We edge towards Cox Bluff, the obvious land mass that marks the entrance to New Harbour, but the effect of seas and wind strengthens as we have them on our beam instead of our stern. We are not comfortable approaching the bluff and entering into the bay, which is covered with white caps. Cox Bluff can produce sail splitting bullets and the wind is already strong. So we decide to give this anchorage a miss and get back on a heading for the De Witt islands. It would have been a good adventure to stay at New Harbour overnight, but the little voice inside both of us said “You know what, I don’t like the look of this”. And sometimes, whether the doubt is rational or not, you just have to take note of your gut feel. We enjoy a rollicking sail for 12 hours, some of which we hand steer, when George does not do the job right. Following seas with the wind on our bottom tests George’s capacity. Downwind runs demand a fair bit of concentration for the one at the helm. The angle for the sail to set is small and it is easy to drift off course and have it back winding and then filling with a whack. It is a great sensation, charging through the ocean, leaving a big wake behind us, and all this in manageable conditions and brilliant sunshine. It is chilly though! The swell and wind increase as we pass South Cape, then South East Cape. I try to take lots of pictures as the ocean and coast are quite spectacular, but it will all probably look flat on photos. It always seems to, unfortunately. But the seascape is etched in our memory.
It is only 4pm when we sail past the entrance to Recherche Bay. No need for us to go and anchor there again. We can see a few masts through the binoculars. Some will be waiting for their turn to do the dash to Port Davey. It probably won’t be possible for a while. We could tease them and brag, but that would be nasty! So we continue into the D’Entrecasteaux Channel and at about 6.30pm the anchor chain rattles over the bow roller in Mickeys Bay, having come across Great Taylors Bay at a smart speed. Take It Easy comes to rest on Bruny Island, 12 hours and 100 miles later, our speediest passage yet.

There are a couple of large motor cruisers at one end of the bay and a small yacht. We are at the other end. No sooner have we anchored there that the small yacht comes rushing over to drop the pick right next to us. “Man, don’t you know we have just escaped from the wilderness and can’t stand being crowded?” The return to busy anchorages is going to take some getting used to. That is the thing with spending time in a unique, grandiose sanctuary, where there has been no significant human impact. It sets you up for a let-down when you return to more ordinary surroundings.

We might not remain in the D’Entrecasteaux Channel for too long. This is Hobart’s play pen; every man and their yacht is out and about. So our antisocial behaviour, sharpened even more after 12 days at Port Davey, will lead us to find less frequented anchorages further afield.

I feel good about our voyage so far. We have seen so much in a couple of weeks it seems we have been gone for ever. And we have discovered a unique, pristine wilderness area that few people get to see. I feel so lucky to have an adventurous but conservative partner in Wade. Together we sail to such beautiful places and experience the right mix of discovery, elation, anticipation, excitement, as we explore and get away from our ordinary life, but always feeling safe even if at times out of our comfort zone. I feel really contented. I have this feeling that everything, not only in our cruising days, but in life in general, is working out just about perfectly, thank you very much. And we love Take it Easy. It sails well, feels secure, is a comfortable nest for us, spacious and welcoming when cruising friends come aboard. It looked so amazing in the middle of the fjords from the mountain tops.
A few tasks this morning: first, Wade commits to a boat wipe down while I make us pancakes for breakfast. And after breakfast we tidy up inside; things always get a little topsy turvy during a passage. Secondly, we give sign of life to friends and family since we are back in a phone and internet service area, and Wade does his BAS Statement of all things! Thirdly, it is time to put the twin tub to work. We have amassed a lot of laundry whilst in Port Davey. So on goes the generator – which also scares other marauding yachts away and charges our batteries. Fourthly, we have run out of bread. So I start a loaf for us, while multi-tasking with the rinse and spin cycles of the washing machine. Since we are back in ‘civilised’ country, we turn on the radio and listen to the news for the first time in three weeks. We find that a major fire around the Forestier and Tasman Peninsulas erupted on the hot weekend. Extensive damage has been done and people in Port Arthur and Donnelly had to be evacuated. The Donnelly canal is closed to navigation, the sheds to operate it having been totally wiped out. Power lines are down, roads are closed, hundreds of homes have been burnt down. A state of disaster has been declared in the South East. It is unbelievable! We listen to the forecast and a Westerly gale will rage later this week with rain falling as snow on the ranges!! The weather patterns are incredibly wild.

But today is a warm, calm, sunny day. The water here is so clear: a teal colour, and you can actually see the bottom underneath our hulls, 3 meters below. We can even spot a skate lying on the sand! It is such a change from the black waters of Bathurst Harbour, and so salty too!

It is well after noon by the time all the chores are done and Take It Easy is turned into a Chinese laundry. On a boat everything always takes three times what it would take at home. We go ashore for a walk across to Cloudy Bay, a huge bay with a beautiful sandy beach facing the Southern ocean, and a large lagoon over the back.

Cloudy Bay is true to its name, very moody with low clouds, shrouding the hill sides and the ocean crashing on the beach. The lagoon is fringed with rocks covered with oysters and mussels. We have omitted to bring a bag with us, so can’t carry anything back, however Wade has his pocket knife, so we resort to feasting on the spot. The oysters are very tasty, especially the smaller ones, and we gorge ourselves: one for you, one for me, another one for you, another one for me…. And so on till we have eaten our fill. The iodine flavour lingers in our mouth on the return track. What would have topped this off would have been a little lemon juice and a glass of bubbly! We’ll know for next time! By the time we are back on board, the bay is deserted, the skies grey and the water a mill pond… the calm before the storm. We will stay here tonight, but will need to move very early tomorrow morning before the beast awakens. We won’t have far to go: 12 miles across to Port Esperance.
We have a fitful night and are both wide awake at 3.00am, listening to the wind picking up from the North. It is not uncomfortable yet, but we are concerned the crossing over to Port Esperance will become more difficult as the wind strengthens. So we decide to up anchor and leave right then, at 3.30am, knowing that the dawn will rise as we near Port Esperance, thus we will be able to see where we need to go.

Middle of the night departures are never very pleasant, and we could have avoided this one by making the crossing yesterday, after our walk. In hindsight we were silly. Wadie enters a couple of waypoints in the GPS to get us out of Great Taylors Bay and avoid the fish farms. We put George to work as he does a far better job than I do at holding a steady course in the dark. The delayed effect of the boat position displayed on screen compared to the course I actually steer makes me meander!

As is turns out, it is a stress free and easy motor across. The smells are strong at night, as if all our senses are sharpened. Ocean scents waft in, in the midst of strong bush fire smells. At 5.30 it is daylight and we enter Port Esperance, a very large bay with the little town of Dover at the NW end of it. It is still very early, so we check a couple of possible anchorages before tying up to the Dover wharf. One is called Stringers Cove, a little slot amongst the forested banks, too narrow to swing a cat, but people generally tie themselves to the trees on one bank. It becomes shallow quickly. Wadie, who thought it might have been perfect, is not so impressed. It is very pretty and alive with the sound of birds singing and the smells of the forest are lovely. However it would be a fiddle to spider web ourselves in there.

The next spot we check is Rabbit Island, a little nook in between two islets. This one will do nicely once we have replenished fuel and water at the jetty and done some basic shopping at the Dover IGA.

We tie up to the wharf. There is water there, so we fill up the tanks, get rid of our rubbish, then it is a 10 minutes’ walk up the hill to the petrol station and the IGA. The owner of the servo offers to drop us off with our jerry cans
and supplies back at the wharf, which is very helpful. “All part of the service” he says. As he drives along the jetty, Mama Bear, a cray boat, is unloading its catch. He was working the South coast and passed us as we were rounding SE Cape. “I saw you go past!” he says, looking at Take It Easy. We can’t resist buying a small crayfish from him.

The wind has picked up considerably by the time we are ready to leave the wharf. We are glad we disappeared from Mickeys in the middle of the night. It would have been hard punching into this wind later in the morning. We anchor at Rabbit Island at the SW end of Port Esperance, in the company of two small cruisers rafted up together. The one requirement to anchor here is to have a blue boat! It is all quiet, very smoky. The smell of fire fills the air. The sky is a dull beige colour, reflected in the water in burnt umber tones. It all looks and feels odd and eerie.

We have spotted some oysters on the rocks fringing Rabbit Island. These might go rather well with our crayfish tonight! Having started at 3.30am we are sitting quietly, feeling as if we have had a full, busy day, but it is only 11.00am. Now what shall we do? Another cuppa, a look at our photos – yes, it has really happened, we have been to the wild South West.

I have a chat on the phone to Joey, my friend from Hobart I used to work with many years ago. We are organising a boat meeting for Thursday when the weather abates and she and David can get away. We are likely to meet in Barnes Bay at the Northern end of Bruny Island. How exciting! They are rather jealous we have made it to Port Davey. David has never been there and kept saying to Jo “they will never make it, it’s the wrong time of year to get there”. So words like “bastards”, “bloody lucky visitors” were coming out of his mouth... But as I said to Joey, we had to work for it!

Later, we hoe in to the new loaf of bread I baked yesterday. It did not rise all that well and had to be retrieved from the barbecue cum oven rather quickly for fear of it being turned into a lump of charcoal. So although the outside is dark and crispy, the centre could have done with a bit more cooking time. It is still tasty, but Wadie is not very respectful of it: “Do you want some pudding with your ham?”... cheeky bugger... He tries to redeem himself: “I like pudding bread – you can’t get that in the shops”... His attempts aren’t working. I should retaliate and make some disparaging comment about his lack of skills with temperature setting!

De rings to say they are home and hoping we stop over to see them in Kettering before we head off. We will see how the week’s weather develops. May be we can catch up on Friday if the weekend conditions allow us to start heading North. It would be nice to be able to say our goodbyes. We will miss out on seeing Wade’s uncle and aunty, however we can’t be everywhere at once. We are not
pushed for time, but feel we need to keep moving.

The afternoon passes slowly: reading, napping, rugging up as the temperature drops with the roaring SW. By early evening, the smoke has been blown away, the sun comes out and things seem a little brighter. It is dinner time. Watching us eat our sumptuous cray proves very trying for Bengie who struggles to keep away from joining in at the table. Stern shouts of “no, off the table” intersperse the “oh, this tastes so sweet” commentary from the two of us. Having nibbled every bit of the white flesh from every little nook and cranny of the beast, we chuck the carcass overboard to take the temptation away from Bengie. She erupts into a frenzy of jumps, runs and rushes from one end of the boat to the other with chirpy little miaows... the mad hour! I burst out laughing as Wade says “come on Bengie, go and sit on your litter box, we’ll all feel much better for it!” This crazy leaping from one spot to another with frantic rabbiting of the scratch pole on the way is the sure sign she is building up for a very big dump!

Today being my sister’s 50th birthday, I try to call her but only get the answering service. So I ring my folks for a chat instead. They have been googling Port Davey and marvel at the images they have seen on the internet. “No wonder you wanted to get there!” They have also followed the news of the Tasmanian bushfires and probably know more about them than we do. The communication is crystal clear and I marvel once again at the wonders of modern technology, allowing us to talk to France from a small anchorage in South East Tasmania where we are hiding from the storm.
It rained on and off during the night. It is quiet with sunny breaks when we emerge from our warm nest... a chilly day, yet the sun sparkles on the rain drops beading on our awning. We are swaying gently, we can hear forest birds chirping amongst the trees which come right down to the banks. It is very peaceful. Where is that gale that was supposed to blow today? But wait, ten minutes later, the rain and howling start again!

We take stock of what we have done so far, and how life aboard Take It Easy has been:

- A few months ago on the advice of a friend, we downloaded Anchor Watch on my iPhone. This is an application allowing us to set a radius where we drop anchor and an alarm to chime if we stray out of the ‘watch’ area. This has worked beautifully and allowed Wade to feel more relaxed at night when the wind blows hard or the anchorage is confined.

- The solar panels have barely produced enough power. With the lack of sunny days and the fact that we have been sitting in one spot a few days at a time without running the engines, we have to be a little careful with power consumption. We have decided that a wind generator is a must before our next big cruise.

- With all the rain we have had, it would have been great to rig up a water catcher system. May be some sort of gutter at the back of our awning would do the trick, just so we are not needing to come back into port to fill up our tanks, and can be less frugal with our freshwater use.

- We need to rig up something to store the oars on Peasy. At the moment they are too hard to store and move in and out of the cabin. As a result, we tend to always use the little outboard, when it would be nice to just row to shore or to visit other yachts.

- The ‘cubby’ has worked beautifully. Mind you, the only bit of gear stowed in there that we have accessed to date is the generator! Too windy to get the kayaks out, and no diving yet!

- We need to re-glass the starboard engine cover, there is a crack in it and if water gets in, rot will develop... We would not want that!
When we think about it, there is not a lot on the to-do list, which is testament to Wade’s preparatory work and our growing experience with cruising. One or two things to purchase is a reference book on Tasmanian wildflowers and some gaiters, to avoid the leg shredding scratches during bush walks, but that’s very easy to attend to!

Given the gale warnings, we are staying put today. So we amuse ourselves as best we can. In between rain showers, Wadie tries his luck at fishing off the back steps. This sparks the interest of our pussycat who just loves fishing lines, hooks, and anything dangling from them! Play time! A few little flatheads get lured, but they are too small to keep and go back in the water. We haven’t done very well with fishing to date.

I manage to transfer the banksia sketch I started in Bathurst Harbour onto water colour paper and start the slow process of painting the colourful green and burgundy leaves. I struggle with the veins and the rendering of the colours. It is not very good, however I spend a couple of enjoyable hours. I guess at this infantile stage of botanical illustration, I need to focus on the process rather than the end result, so as not to get disheartened!

I finish reading Mike Litzow’s book about their sail from Alaska. It is an epic tale of the huge ups and downs of sailing around the world on an 11m yacht called Pelagic with his wife Alisa and very young first son Elias. It is an honest, from the heart, ‘warts and all’ book. I am in awe of Alisa’s courage and toughness, and can relate to Mike’s single minded pursuit of his dream. It is even more special to read this very well written account, having met them and shared some time with them in such an awesome setting as Port Davey. I could possibly envisage long distance cruising, but I most definitely could not do this with a tiny baby; not much chance of this happening now anyway! I can’t help but think of our friends Tom and Lou and Tom’s daughter Sharon on a world tour with husband and two kids, who left Hobart last year, initially bound for New Zealand, then distant shores. What a tough job it is: one is ‘below deck’ caring for the children, the other runs the boat. I so much prefer to share the task of running and maintaining the yacht, but that is easier to do of course as a couple, when you just have each other to worry about, and it is so much more liveable on a catamaran than a monohull.

We read reports of all the Tasmanian fires on the iPhone… So much destruction and no doubt so much fear. Our minds drift back to our rushed descent of the last ridge line on Mt Rugby, when we thought the fire was raging on the other side of the hill and any minute, flames could cross the saddle and descend on us. We both talk about what was going through our mind then. Wade says: “Fuck, this is getting close, if we see flames, we are in real danger. We need to pick up the pace and she is exhausted”… And I share my thoughts: “My god, if the fire jumps the saddle, we are goners. The water, we’ve got to reach the water, but it is still so far… I have got to pick up my pace and run down”… At one stage, Wade picks up my hand and we tumble down the rough wombat trail, holding on to each other tightly. I remember noticing and finding reassurance in this warm, firm handhold of ours, and thinking this is pretty scary but we are holding onto each other tight. Then further down, as I was so out of breath and aching everywhere, needing a one minute stop, Wadie saying: “take the backpack and I’ll give you a piggy back”. “No, I will keep walking.” And me thinking “no way, I am getting out of this myself”, looking up the hill worryingly and saying: “there is no flames yet, I am getting down, keep going and I will follow”. We also talk about the arrival at
the dinghies a few minutes after Mike and our quiet and focused untting of the painters, dragging the dinghies out in the water and starting of the outboard. I remember thinking it’s going to take several pulls before the blasted thing starts, but it started first go...

“Good boy” says Wade as we motor away from the shore, and wait away from the edge for Mike to start his. It is not until we were in the madness of the Channel with 45 knots gusts blasting our bows that we felt relief and started relaxing, even though it was a wet and wild ride back to our boaties... We were never in danger as it turns out, but it sure felt like we were!
10/1/13 – Meeting Jo at Barnes Bay

It is a 25 miles trip from Port Esperance to the Northern end of Bruny Island, where we are meeting Jo and David in Barnes Bay on their motor cruiser Artemis. We leave by 7.30. It is a motor to start with in light variable winds and under grey skies - a rather boring, chilly start to the trip. Whilst one engine is going, we check our emails. It is nice to see a few friends have looked up Port Davey and Bathurst Harbour on Google and comment on how amazing it looks. Wait until you see the photos!

We are struggling along the D’Entrecasteaux Channel. For some reason, Wade lifts the cover to the starboard engine to check... and what do we find? A great big branch – that’s not supposed to be there! So he stops the engine, lifts it out of the water then drops it down a few times, and the forked branch dislodges itself and floats away. We are now going a knot faster, thank you very much!

Later the wind picks up, so much so that we not only stop the engine, but also put a reef in the main and a roll in the jib as gusts peak at 22 knots. But the wind is all over the place! We have a fast sail and end up arriving in Barnes Bay by 11.30 and anchoring in Alexanders’ Bay. The guys arrive half an hour or so later. Joey is jumping up and down waving like a little kid. We go over to them to check out their palatial 50+ foot cruiser. They have had it for 2 ½ years after owning a 45ft Beneteau David used to mainly race. Very impressive!

We decide to slum it for lunch back on Take It Easy. Joey has spoilt us with a seafood plateau and Moet... very tasty. It is lovely to catch up, celebrate her new job, celebrate being together on the water... just celebrate, and in style.

They retire back to Artemis for a bit of a break and we each attend to calls. They lost some gear in the bushfires and are talking to insurance companies. We are lining up a catch up over coffee with John and De of Silver Air in Kettering. They have invited us to their home tomorrow. “Come and raid our vegie garden, we’ll pick you up at the floating jetties and have coffee at home”. We are sure to be spoilt once again. We really wanted to say goodbye to them after sharing such an amazing experience at Port Davey together.

Tonight, we are going over to Artemis for a barbecue and more fine wine. We feel full already! We are social butterflies over these two days!

We are sitting on the back deck of Artemis having nibbles as the dusk comes. This is when we notice that our mast head light is so dim it looks like we have forgotten to turn it on. That’s bad! As the night darkens, things improve a little and we can see the light, but it still is not bright. However the garden lights come on and are reflected in the water. At least that saves us! It is actually quite funny: Take It Easy goes from not being visible, to being lit up like a Christmas tree. But we will need to attend to that mast headlight when we return.

We talk a lot about sailing over dinner with Jo and David, but a very different kind of sailing: competitive ocean racing. These guys were heavily into it: Sydney to Hobart, Hamilton, etc... and sunk an insane amount of money in their 45ft Beneteau, the gear, the 12 man crew, and marketing. It is all frightfully
expensive, super competitive. A race campaign would cost them each year half the value of the boat, about $200K! My god, it’s like buying a new boat each year for us!

David obviously enjoyed the skippering and strategic planning of the course. But he had many stories to tell about the crew and navigator not sticking to the plan whilst he was off watch, and losing precious advantage and placement. When you spend so much dough, you want to place well! And I would have thought the crew does what the skipper orders!!

Anyway, we had a good evening in plush surroundings and were spoilt rotten with Tassie delicacies, bottles of wine that Joey insisted on gifting to us.
We depart from Alexanders Bay at 8.00am, leaving Artemis and another yacht in the sleepy bay. As soon as we come around the point with the jib out but motor-sailing, John phones us: “if you let the sheet out on the jib a fraction, you’ll pick up a knot in speed”… I respond laughingly “there is no going stealth across this bay with you watching. Where is that house of yours?” John retorts: “I can’t tell you, but I am watching your every move… See you in half an hour!”

We are not 100% sure where we are supposed to tie up. John told us about the floating jetties, but when we come into Kettering, we look on the wrong side of the congested bay and pull into an awfully tight spot, squishing between a pontoon and a fishing boat. John comes over and re-directs us to the other end of the bay near the marina…. There it is, and so much more space to come in, how did I miss that?

We drive up the hill to their beautiful home on some six acres of bushland, with superb and extensive views straight across Barnes Bay and along the D’Entrecasteaux Channel to the East and West. It is magic and their home has a peaceful feel, decorated with beautiful landscape photos, art work and the many gorgeous shells and artefacts collected along their years of cruising around the world. It is fascinating.

De, knowing my interest in Botanical Illustration, takes me to their friend Anika, who lives next door to them, while John takes Wade to his wood work shed. Anika is an accomplished botanical artist and is French! It is a special treat chatting to her, looking at her studio set up, watching her paint, giving me a demonstration of how to do the veins on leaves, which is something I find really difficult. Her advice is to practise a little every day. I pick up a few tips just watching her.

Back at John and De, they ask us whether, once we have more time, we would be interested in cruising around their region. Absolutely, we respond. They then follow with “would you be interested in a house swap? You could base yourselves here for a while and we’d come up to Melbourne”. “What a brilliant idea, and you could move between Jan Juc and Brunswick!” At the very least, whilst we still are working, we would love to welcome them if they came up our way. It is lovely to feel this bourgeoning friendship. De loads us with fresh vegies and herbs: snow peas, beans, lettuce, onion, garlic, zucchini… it will be nice. Fresh produce is one thing we miss on board. As the wind picks up, we leave them with the
promise to meet again in Flinders next summer or in Melbourne if they come and visit earlier.

Our departure from Kettering with 30 to 35 knot westerly gusts is an exhilarating affair, sailing swiftly downwind on the jib alone. We have a fun and fast exit out of the D’Entrecasteaux Channel. The wind eases once in Storm Bay to 22-25 knots. Lunch of leftover seafood is very tasty and we enjoy a beautiful, easy sail. This is such an enjoyable day!

By 3.30 we are anchored in a tight and very well protected little nook at Parsons Bay, Nubeena, for the night, Wadie having peered at “Wade’s Corner” on the way, but that little spot was too exposed to the strong westerlies.

As we come in, what do we notice? Sea Wind rafted up to another boat against a small jetty. “Oh God, let’s just sneak past, maybe he won’t notice us” – I could not stand having Glen drunk on board again. Wadie replies “I think we are a bit conspicuous in this little bay”. And yes, we are by far the largest boat around.

It is sunny and warm, so we set ourselves up for some relaxing lying about, me in the nets, Wade on the cockpit cushions. It is such a nice change from the overcast, rainy weather which has dominated the last few days. We lap it up!

In the evening, a fisherman hollers at us from the small jetty. He thinks a strong Northerly is coming during the night and suggests we might drag where we are as the holding is not very good. We check the forecast and can’t see anything untoward, but we’d be silly not to take advice from a local, especially when he offers a mooring. The only trouble is there is a tinny tied to it, so when we do move we have to get the dinghy out of the way and hook on Take It Easy. It is more fiddly than we thought, but eventually we get it done. As it turns out, we could have stayed where we were as it was totally calm all night!
12/1/13 – Sail up to Pirates Bay

We are awake super early, so end up getting up and slipping the mooring by 6.30am. It is very peaceful and sunny now, but for a change, it is going to blow quite strongly by lunch time, so we will see where we get to. We are headed ideally for Pirates Bay, between the Tasman and Forestier Peninsulas on the East coast. This means rounding Cape Raoul and Cape Pillar, then sailing North. We have a couple of escape options along the way: Plan B is Port Arthur, between the two capes, and Plan C is Fortescue Bay, half way between Cape Pillar and Pirates Bay.

As we exit Parsons and Wedge Bay along Wedge island, a crayfish boat is picking up its pots, shining bright in the sunshine. The end of Wedge Island has spectacular organ pipes, characteristic of the dolerite cliffs along the Tasman Peninsula. The passage East from Cape Raoul to West Arthurs Head, which guards the entrance to Port Arthur, is most spectacular, with towering dolerite pillars and honey comb shaped ridges.

With grey clouds filling the sky, it becomes quite chilly. I decide it’s time to move from shorts and Uggs (good look) to bib and brace and Uggs (better look). Wade just puts his jeans on but stays bare feet. Brgh… It is also time to get some fresh air and stare at the horizon as with waves reflecting off the sheer cliffs, the sea has become rather lumpy.

By 9.00 am we have reached Arthurs Head. With the wind from the North at the moment, if we keep going further, once we round Cape Pillar, we will have the wind on our nose. So we decide to seek shelter just inside the Head and wait to see if the wind shifts to the West as forecast. If it does, we will get out again, otherwise we will go right into Port Arthur.

We anchor at 9.30 just inside the Head. We are in a half moon beach with big sand dunes, which is rather unexpected. It is a little swelly, but as a place to wait, it will be fine. Wade makes us second breakfast – bacon and eggs – just as we run out of gas… One bottle in four weeks, we have done well. We switch to the other one!
By noon, after some persistent staring at the wind arrows on the laptop to will them to shift to the West, Wadie decides WNW is close enough and we weigh anchor. We pass through the “hole in the Wall” between Tasman Island and Cape Pillar. It is especially interesting going through the narrow gap today as with little wind and sea, we can get right close and peer at the big fur seals on Tasman Island. It is also truly spectacular on the Cape Pillar side where vertical organ pipes jut out of the ocean: with a tall cave and towering pillars on either side, it looks like the front entrance of a cathedral, which is in fact what it is called when we check the chart!

As we round Cape Pillar, the Lanterns marking the entrance to Fortescue Bay appear in the distance. I make a request to Wadie: “With these calm conditions, I would like us to motor right under the Totem Pole, I mean right underneath, closer than we have ever been”. Wadie’s response is: “I have registered the Admiral’s request, we will see what the conditions are like as we approach”. Fair enough! I would actually love to stay at Canoe Bay, inside Fortescue, but we have been there a few times, whereas we have never anchored at Pirates Bay, and thus Wadie would rather go there. So the Totem Pole up close and personal is my trade off.
As we near the Lanterns, the wind picks up and I fear we might not be able to get close, but my skipper takes us right in there, where the Candle Stick and Totem Pole fill the frame... impressive... the rocks and the steering! It is magic to be right next to those imposing pillars.

Once past Fortescue, the cliffs change from dolerite to sedimentary strata – siltstone it is called – often tree'd down to the water in places. It is not as grand as before, but there are lots of caves, especially when we near Pirates Bay, with Tasman Arch (now collapsed) and the Blow Hole. It is funny to see these features from the ocean rather than the inland way.

We get into Pirates Bay and are anchored just before 4pm. At the Southern end, the bay is peppered with moorings used by fishing vessels and cray boats. We are the only yacht. It is rather rolly, but quite scenic with a broad sand beach going for miles. In the hills on the North side of the bay, there is smoke... the fire is still smouldering over the back. I don’t think we will get too many visitors here as the area is still cut off. Yet it normally is quite a touristic area with Eaglehawk Neck in the centre of Pirates Bay, forming an isthmus between the ocean to the East and Norfolk Bay to the West, and linking the Tasman Peninsula to the South and Forestier Peninsula to the North. We will go for a long beach walk tomorrow, since we are here for two nights, until the SW abates.
B

lowy night last night! Wade checks
the BOM files for wind direction and
strength. We could go again today, it
should not be too windy in close. But we
need to recharge the batteries and I don’t
want to have to motor. So we opt to stay put,
set up the genie and we will go for a walk
along the beach to escape the noise. We have
been struggling with power on this trip. A
wind generator would certainly solve this
problem! We have let the batteries get too
low and are now at critical recharge level. In
these constantly overcast conditions, we
redundant, we’d take an early departure for
our full time cruising life, which would be
wonderful. I just wish I could block out all
thoughts about work and simply relish what
we are doing now. But today, for some
reason, it just sits like a dark cloud. May be it
was Murray’s email asking us when we are
due back... I felt like answering NEVER, but
Wadie responded with a brief “End Jan”... We
really don’t need to be reminded our cruise
will soon come to an end!

We console ourselves with pancakes for
breakfast, and
then commit
to a boat tidy
up. We listen
to the news
as we can see
one spot at
the back of
Eaglehawk
Neck
smouldering
and larger
than
yesterday,
and billowing
clouds behind
the hills on
the Forestier
side of the bay.

should have systematically turned the
generator on whenever we anchored! Now
we know!

We have another three weeks left before we
go back to work on 4/2/13. Thoughts of what
it will be like are creeping in, especially for me
who is going back to an unknown quantity as
far as boss, structure and job role. It is a bit
unsettling. In some ways, although it would
be better financially for me to keep working
for another 4 ½ years, if the AMP made me
These are building too and the amber
coloured smoke is drifting out to sea with the
NW wind. The radio news update says the
fires are burning out of control in the South
East and small villages are on high alert.
These include Doo Town, which is nestled just
above our anchorage, and Eaglehawk Neck,
half way down the beach! God, maybe we
should have moved on!

We set up the generator and abandon ship to
walk the entire length of the beach.
The return trip takes us four hours, attesting to how big Pirates Bay is. We check out the Blow Hole and Tasman Arch at one end, and the Tessellated Pavements at the other. These are quite fascinating. They are formed by the erosion from salt crystals and water which infiltrate along cracks in the rock. Over thousands of years, the salt crystals eat away at the rock on either side of the network of cracks, forming ‘loaves’ in some parts. It looks a bit like a cobble stone pavement. In other parts the water and salt collect on the surface of the rocks, eating them down to form pans that become deeper with time. The effect in this case is a series of criss-crossing little ridges with square pans of water. See the photos! The straightness of the cracks and regularity of the patterns created are amazing.

We also check out the isthmus on the way. This used to be a dire place in the late 1800s. Convicts from Port Arthur would try and escape and cross here to hide in the bush in the Forestier Peninsula. But a watch line was set up with savage dogs guarding the whole isthmus to intercept the poor souls.

Along the way Wade finds a small treasure: it looks like it could be the receptacle for the eggs of some small marine creature. It has the consistency of paper nautilus, with a very fine sea star like pattern on one side and tiny little dots on the other. We don’t know what it is and it does not appear in our shells book nor on our internet search. It is fragile and precious, and is a mystery!

I find a Wedding Cake Venue shell, with tiered layers, like a wedding cake — not so precious.

We finally make it back to Take It Easy and grab a very late lunch. The rest of the day is spent lazing around. I am nursing a sore shoulder and arm. I fear the left side of my neck is going to go the same way as my right did a few years ago. I have been getting pain radiating down my left arm a few times on this cruise. There must be pressure on the nerve building up from the arthritic deposits. We will see how things develop.
Today is not a very nice day to go sailing. The coast is shrouded in clouds, it is raining, the cockpit is soggy. But it could clear, as at sea it looks brighter. We have done Pirates Bay now, we are moving on! Full Musto gear and sea boots on, we are ready to go by 7.30 for our 60 miles passage. It is chilly, but very pleasant out there, sailing gently with the breeze on our stern. We are following the coast at a distance to keep away from sail splitting bullets. Trees come nearly all the way down to the water in places, with only a small strip of cliffs showing along the water’s edge. There are many small caves “where marine hobbits live”. Well, that’s Wade’s imagination anyway!

We can see the fires are still burning, right to the edge of the cliffs with the smoke drifting out to sea. It is a bit spooky. Here we are, having fun sailing along, while there are blazes on land.

Our pace has slowed right down to 4.5 knots, thus it is with some fear and trepidation that Big Red comes out of the locker. It always takes a while to set it up, so we have time to consider. There is a nice little swell from the SW rhythmically making us rise and fall. Wadie is at the front on the heaving deck and I am watching him like a hawk. “Don’t you give some MOB practice now!” He is talking himself through the steps, aloud... “This is the port clew, this is the starboard sheet, this goes here, that one goes through that!” A last look at the state of the sea behind us, yap, all good to go, and we launch the beast. Take It Easy instantly picks up speed: 7.5 knots, that is more like it!

George does not cope very well with the swell and Big Red, so we take over and hand steer. I am at the tillers for a while. We are doing 7s and 8s, sometimes picking up a wave and surfing at 9.5 or 10 knots. That gets a bit exhilarating: you feel the back lift and see the bows pitch down, and the boat accelerates with the increased noise of the water rushing along our hulls... Whoosh! To hand steer under spinnaker demands concentration to keep your heading, whilst constantly correcting the effect of the swell trying to push you off course. You can’t afford to let the sail deflate, otherwise it re-inflates with a whip cracking sound, which is not good for the gear. It is active and thus tiring. So after an hour, Wade takes over.

Once we pass from open waters to sailing along Maria Island, although a long way out from the shore, the sea becomes lumpy. The SE swell is less well formed, there is a secondary small SW swell, and as the wind...
drops, our motion is more akin to wallowing than charging through the water. It is a challenge for Wade to keep Big Red inflated. By noon, we give up, sock Big Red and turn one engine on. It is sunny though, so we put George in charge of steering, take off the Musto gear and go and sit at the front for a while in our shorts. There is a seal sunning itself, belly up, all four flippers out, looking pretty relaxed. By about 1pm we reach Mistaken Cape and sail away from Maria Island. The wind picks up again, this time from the South East. So off the engine goes, and we raise the main and roll out the jib. 15+ knot wind, 7 to 8 knots speed, zooming along, but very stable. So we go back on deck. Our lie down at the front in the sunshine degenerates into naughtiness; we are keeping an eye on George though, as he oscillates between Ile des Phoques and the SW end of Schouten Island. “George, don’t put us on Iles des Phoques... George, more right please...” says Wadie. A French pronunciation lesson then ensues. Iles des Phoques means island of the seals. Wadie says “Iles des fook”... “No, not fook, foc”. “Iles des facs” – “no, foc”. “Iles des fuck” - “No, not really, foc”.

We are really charging along now at 9 knots, too chilly at the front and even more so in the cockpit, so back on go the long legs and polar fleeces! While we are zooming along, we get down into the galley for a cuppa. Things got a bit wet in there: we’ve got water spurts coming out of the sink as waves rush under the bridge deck. Never seen this before! So we put the plugs on the drains, but they too get blown up by the water sprouting up. Geysers, how funny is that! This is a really good sail... faaast!

As we get past the West side of Schouten Island and in front of the Schouten Passage, the wind switches to ESE. We need the motors to finish off the last little bit into Bryan’s Corner, on the SW end of the Freycinet Peninsula. We are anchored by 4.50. A 9 hour passage, 6.6 knots average... quite satisfactory!

While it is still sunny, Wadie puts the generator on and we do a run of washing – rather domestic, but this way we are free to wander or do whatever we fancy tomorrow.

Well, that was a great day’s sail after a drizzly start. It was very enjoyable even though a
fairly long stretch, our ideal hops being three to four hour sails. But when you are actively sailing, time passes quickly. And there were lots of moments today when I felt life does not get much better: sailing on a nice performing yacht, enjoying the speed without stress, in an ever changing seascape, with the man I want to grow old with... bliss...
Well, Wadie has the distinction of holding the record for the longest time in bed: 12 hours. We were both rather weather beaten and tired after our long sail. Wade was in bed by ten to nine, and I wasn’t far behind. And we slept in this morning, since we are staying put today!

Last night, Wade had rigged up some lines in the cockpit to hang our washing. With the warm morning sun, everything is dry and smelling fresh by the time we emerge. Nicely done!

Bryan’s Corner is a busy little anchorage. There are four boats huddled right in the corner, very close to one another, there is a Miami Vice stink boat further out, and us away from them all further along the beach. Although the holding is not supposed to be as good out where we are, the Manson Supreme has not let us down yet and the anchor watch has not chimed! We give the ‘richoes’ an eye full with our morning ablutions in the positively warm water: 15.7°.

We laze around for a while then go ashore and take a stroll to Cooks Corner, a little beach and campsite for hikers a few miles further North in Great Oyster Bay. It is a very pretty spot with aqua water, ochre rocks and the Freycinet hills in the background. It is rather novel to be able to walk along a made track instead of having to bush bash our way as we did in Port Davey. We see some beautiful, dainty orchids; on a single stem there are well over a dozen pink flowers. We walk back, grab some late lunch, soak up some rays, then we both try our luck at fishing and guess what, we each catch a flathead! Yeah! Dinner tonight!

With the breeze shifting to the SE by 5pm, we move across to Schouten Island, Morays Bay. It is a lovely anchorage under Bear Hill. It is a warm evening, we sip a champers in the cockpit, courtesy of Jo and David, and think “now that’s the sort of cruising we like”: turquoise water, tropical looking minus the
water temperature and palm trees. It is calm; we have had an enjoyable, stress-free day.

As we get our dinner ready, there is the usual hesitation regarding cooking the fish: is it skin up or skin down? We have a bet each way... and it is in fact skin up first! Regardless, the flesh is sweet and melts in your mouth.

We are heading off to Bicheno tomorrow for a brief stop, then onto Long Point for the night as it will turn North Easterly. I like Bicheno: nice little village, good to replenish water and fresh food supplies, and always the memory of my Mum and Dad visiting there.

I have brought back a spinifex seed from our walk... These are quite decorative: star burst like grass seeds that tumble on the beach. It is sitting on the shelf at the back of the seat and is irresistible to Bengie. I don’t know what it is, its spiky texture that tickles her nose as she tries to grab it, the smell of it, the salty grassy taste of it.... Cotton tails do that to her too, and so do everlasting daisies. No amount of “no” will keep her off it. I distract her with a feather and this works for a little while. Then we go to bed... I can hear some happy chewing going on in the dark. I get up to check; she has grabbed my spinifex and is chomping on the starlike seed. She is so naughty, but this magnetic attraction can only be broken by hiding the seed in the cupboard. Out of sight, hopefully out of mind!

We gaze towards the Tassie coast which looks like a water colour: faint hills in the distance, their ridge line sharp, but the hill sides fading down to a misty blue to the water’s edge, then the sea a deep ultramarine at the bottom of the hill, lightening to aqua close to us, Sarah McLaughlan’s dreamy voice in the background. Views and moments like these are special. This is when we feel very privileged, in a different, calmer, more accessible way than Port Davey. It is less overwhelming, but still thoroughly pleasant and something not many people get to experience. There is a simplicity and peacefulness about this seascape that I love and makes me feel so contented.
We wake up at an ungodly hour because of the slap, slop, slop noise against our hulls and the rolling motion. We are sitting nose into the beach, where we should be, but beam to the small swell. To start with I think “change of tide”, it will settle soon. But it does not! “God, we have turned into a mono”.

By 6.30 we raise anchor, motor through the Schouten Passage between Schouten Island and the Freycinet Peninsula, then the SW takes us and the sled ride starts. We are sailing at a good pace on the jib, well away from the cliffs to avoid the bullets, but close enough to admire the beautiful ochre cliffs of the Freycinet.

Shy albatrosses are out, soaring. They skim the surface, then rise in an arc tilting their huge wings one way then the other, then lowering themselves to within a few centimetres of the water... And over and over this smooth rhythm flows. We mostly see grey headed and shy albatrosses around these waters. But the shy, with often over 2m wingspan, are the ones we find most striking. As the wind abates, they sit on the water patiently waiting, and give us a chance to observe them with the binoculars as we pass close to them. There face is chiselled: white cap, grey cheeks, dark eyebrow, greyish beak tipped with yellow and with fine black lines.
As we motor-sail past Wineglass Bay, another display starts: dolphins are charging towards us leaping right out of the water. Soon a large pod is playing at our bows. A very large male is particularly fun to watch, doing full belly rolls, watching us watching him at every pass between the two hulls. They stay with us for ten minutes then all of a sudden, they are off. And just to keep us entertained, two groups of seals appear, sunning themselves, all flippers up.

The breeze picks up again from the South and with it we get a whiff of the fires. It is still competitive, but it looks like you are losing!” A couple of dolphins are slip streaming our wake... never seen that before! This is great fun.

On the strength of our display the other cat puts out its own ‘colourful sail’... Wadie’s bottom lip drops for a brief moment. But we are further out at sea; we keep powering ahead and Take It Easy takes the lead! Yes, go Baby, go! Quick glance at the back to check the sea state... Yes, still good... Woo Ooh! I take a photo of the other cat... Evidence! Wade asks “do they fill the screen?” – “No, we are too far ahead!”

We are going so well that we decide to skip Bicheno and keep heading North to St Helens while the going is good. It is 10.30am. At this rate we will get there in 5 hours, well before the North East comes tonight. It pays to be flexible with destinations. In this instance the stop in Bicheno was not necessary and was always going to be a lunch break only, since in NE conditions it is not suitable as an overnight anchorage. And if we are going to get stuck with NE conditions for a few days, St Helens is a much better spot to be than Long Point: more to do, better protection... just a lot further to go!
As we near Long Point, the wind drops significantly, but we are still stooging along at 6 to 7 knots. Wade raised the main earlier, which we normally never have up with the spinnaker (still learning to manage it). This gives us a little more speed, but partly obscures the clear view of the spinnaker from the tillers. Still, I thought it might blanket Big Red, but it does not. We in fact gain a knot in speed and it balances the boat, which makes a difference to the steerage. We always see other yachts with full main and spinnaker, so I guess we should too. It is just another thing to manage when the shit hits the fan! For now the white caps are gone, we have 10 knots of breeze, cruising along at 6 knots, still way ahead of the other doods... It's all good. 

"They are not catching us, are they?" – “No sweetie pie, they would not dare!"

By 12.30, with only 3 or 4 knots of breeze more and more on our beam, we are going awfully slowly and struggling to keep Big Red inflated. So we put one engine on and motor-sail with Big Red and the main still up. We are past Wardlaws Point at 1.15... another 20 miles to St Helens entrance, at this slow speed it will take forever!

The coast around these parts is not as interesting, especially after the grandeur of the Freycinet and with overcast skies, it is too chilly to sit on the deck for some rays. So I come inside the cabin and lounge on the seat, blanket on. Immediately, Bengie comes for a snuggle and we both take a kip for an hour or so. By 2pm the wind has picked up again and Wadie kills the engine. It is my turn to steer and I relieve him at the tillers. We have sacked George for a lot of this passage. Big Red and meanders in the small swell are a recipe for disaster. We will however need to do something about the auto helm. We will connect it to the GPS and wind instruments when we get back, and see if it does a better job than just using its internal compass. Mind you, on a very tight run on spinnaker, it is hard to steer manually. So it has done a good job overall.

We have an exhilarating run with the wind on our beam and Big Red on our port side with the full main, doing 9s up to 10.4, all the way up to St Helens Rock. It is a really tight run, slightly higher than our beam, and I find I have to put my whole weight against the tiller to hold our course. But it is fast. We are amazed we can do this under spinnaker. By 4.30 we are in front of the entrance, drop the sails and Wade takes over to get us through the bar and inside the rock wall. It is the worst possible time to come in: low tide, still ebbing, wind against tide, but the bar is calm. Once in, the fun isn’t over since the narrow and very shallow channel meanders for miles between sandbanks. We cross paths with a fishing boat on its way out. He passes in between a red marker and a green marker where there is room for only one boat, and shouts “you’ve got 5 feet”... That’s cool, we draw less than that! Wade says: “He passed really close to that red buoy!” – I retort “that’s because he was really close to the green buoy!” ...

When we arrive at St Helens, there is no room on the floating jetty. The choice is to anchor or tie up to another boat along the wharf. Wade is keen to do this, so he picks a very large aluminium yacht – Delphin – and with permission, we tie alongside them. They are an Austrian family that has just arrived in Tassie! We are all settled by 6pm. Just behind us is Paddle Wheeler, the fish and chips barge, so dinner is taken care of.

We will have a wander into town tomorrow, replenish water, fuel and fresh food, shout ourselves a real coffee and may be a treat or two, then go and anchor in a quiet bay.
We learnt a lot about trimming Big Red for different wind angles on this passage and we did quite well managing it. And the performance of our boatie was really very impressive today. For a start, we sailed at one stage in 4 or 5 knots of wind only, when Medina would have long given up. But the best was being on spinnaker with the apparent wind up to 70° and speeding along. We have never done anything like this before. And then of course leaving the other cat for dead!! The advantage of a light build and skilful trimming and steering. But I can tell we have done it for nearly 12 hours... aching body!
The Northerly came in during the night and we both were flapping in bed, sweltering! Not a very comfortable sleep. We surface at 8.30, with lethargic limbs, feeling yesterday’s physical workout.

We open up the cabin door. Bengie wanders out and realises we are not surrounded by water... She is quick to go up on deck, sniff out the other yacht we are rafted against, and is taking a measure of the jump across to Delphin and onto the wharf. We end up having to lock her up before she does a runner into town without us!

Our wander into town and the tourist office in particular comes in handy. We buy a guide to Tasmanian wildflowers, get a free guide to 50 short walks, and discover what that mystery treasure is that Wadie found at Pirates Bay. It is a Burrowing Heart Urchin. They are covered in spines when alive, hence the multitude of little holes, but bare when washed up on beaches.

I check the Native Plants book for those beautiful red and yellow trumpet-like flowers and the orchids we saw at Port Davey and at the Freycinet. The trumpets are in fact Christmas Bells, a form of lily endemic to Tasmania and living in high rainfall areas from sea to subalpine regions. The Port Davey orchid is in fact not an orchid, but an iris-like plant called the Tasmanian Purplestar, which is endemic to the South West. And the pink orchids of Cooks Corner on the Freycinet are Rosy Hyacinth-Orchids.

As we come back from our trip to town, we see the cat we passed yesterday, coming in to pick up a mooring. We get to meet the people, who are locals: an older couple, on their home built 10.8m cat... It was no contest. But funny enough, the first thing they say is “we couldn’t keep up with you. You have a very large spinnaker that flies higher than ours”. “Yes, Wade says, that’s Big Red”. The skipper comes on board for a sticky. He had been on board Take It Easy when Peter Snell first launched it 9 years ago. “It looked different then, all white!” he says. “Yes, we have made a few changes” Wade replies. These guys have not only built their cat, but designed it!

You have got to tip your hat to people who have the guts, fortitude and skills to do this. As the Northerly strengthens during the afternoon, the day really heats up. Wade reads in the cabin, I in the nets for a bit of sun and breeze. It is amazing, we are in a town, at
a wharf, yet the air is clean and sweet smelling of wildflowers. That is Tassie for you! I would have liked to move and anchor somewhere quiet and private, but with the southerly change coming tomorrow, the advice from the Coast Guard is to stay where we are. So on the strength of this, we use the shore facilities and will enjoy another real coffee tomorrow morning! This has worked out as a pleasant enough rest day.

The next day is uneventful. The sky is overcast. Wade makes a few enquiries with local yachties and the Coast guards regarding possible anchorages for today. But all concur that we are best to remain at the wharf.

So we have breakfast in town, take a small stroll along the bay, then return to Take It Easy, wondering whether we will get rained on with the menacing clouds.

Wade reads, while I type the journal on my laptop, since we have shore power. By mid-afternoon, it is all done. It will save me some time when we are back in Melbourne. It is such a big job typing from my hand written notes, selecting the photos we will use from the hundreds I have taken, and getting the layout sorted; so a bit of preparation will help speed things along.
19/1/13 – To Eddystone Point

We are moving on! After three nights at the St Helens Wharf, it is high time to leave. It is a blue day, we have a good sail ahead of us with supposedly WSW, strong to start with, and so at about 8.45 we untie ourselves free from Delphin and depart.

It takes us an hour to motor out of Georges Bay and cross the bar. Once out we find the wind is in fact NE, not WSW, thus on the nose to begin with, but it slowly shifts to North then West, which means it is a close reach up the coast in winds of 20 to 25 knots, so not the easiest of conditions. We angle in as close to the coast as we can to get some protection:

less white caps, a little less wind than further out where the Westerly would hit us full on. For this close reach, Wadie is at the helm. We are running along the Bay of Fires: white beaches and sand dunes, interspersed with orange lichen-covered granite outcrops… looking like fires from the sea... The bay actually got its name from the numerous fires aborigines lit along the beach which explorers could see from the ocean. Our sail in the stiff breeze is a short one, with only about 17 miles from St Helens Point to the Eddystone lighthouse.

As we near Eddystone Point there is a lull that gives a false sense of security and calm, but it soon picks up again. We are in 22 knots of wind, sailing swiftly at 10.5 knots with a reef in the main and a few rolls in the jib. “I think on the next lull, I’ll get rid of the sails!” says Wade. Good thinking, we are a bit too close to the point to keep going at this speed. We had initially thought that we would anchor at the Southern end of the Point, on the Bay of Fires side, but here the wind is SW, thus this anchorage is totally unsuitable. We therefore motor around to the Northern side, negotiating our way through the many reefs, and passing the lighthouse a little close than I would care to see it! I don’t much like Eddystone Point: the whole area is studded with reefs and rocks, some of them uncharted and it is a dangerous area.

By 2pm we are anchored off the beach, with lichen covered rocks on our starboard, sand dunes ahead and turquoise water all around. It is actually a very pretty spot. Erika II, a small yacht we saw at Schouten Island, is hidden in a narrow gulch between rocks just...
North of where we are, with just its mast sticking up.

It would be quite warm if it was not for the strong wind. I try to read in the nets, lured by the sunshine and beautiful seascape. But after struggling to keep the pages of my book under control, I give up and just wait for a lull to beat a retreat with my cushion and towel, and join Wade inside the cabin.

As the afternoon passes and the wind continues to howl, I look around to see how we are sitting at anchor. Wade pipes up: “Guess how much chain we have out?” We are in 4.5m of water, so I think there is a good chance we have 40m out. I respond: “lots”.

“Are you worried I might not have put enough out?” – “Ah, no, that would not cross my mind. I definitely don’t need to worry about this”... “Do you think we’ve dragged?” – “No, we still have the same patch of kelp next to us”. These are the paranoias of the seafarers. “I like their spot better than ours” he says gazing across the rocks at the mast of Erika II, which is nestled between two lines of rocks on our starboard. They would indeed be more protected and have been able to go ashore, something I would like to do. But it is now nearly 6pm, time for drinks and nibbles.

I look at the count of the distances we have covered so far: 850 nautical miles, and we still have nearly two weeks to go and at least 200 miles to cover. I think we might exceed the magic 1000 on this voyage! That is huge! Actually there are a few records on this trip: the number of windy days, the number of grey, overcast or rainy days, the number of new anchorages explored, the most numerous spinnaker sail days, the number of double digit speed displays on the GPS, the number of hills climbed, the coldest water we have swam in, the hottest temperature, the coldest temperature (both in the same week), the furthest South we have been, the most number of capes rounded on one day, the longest non-stop passage... I am sure I could think of a few more records if I tried. It is a good way of encapsulating the essence of our voyage... The longest cruise, the first time seeing whales, the most visitors on board, the first time canoodling on the deck underway...
After a noisy, rolly, windy night, things calm down in the early hours of the morning. We look across to Erika II and we see their mast sticking up from above the rocks doing the pendulum from 11 to 1... just as crappy in their little nook!

We have hardly any internet service here and struggle to get an updated weather forecast, but get just enough time to confirm the wind arrows look right to cross Bank Strait, so at 7.45am, we motor out of Eddystone. In the calm conditions, just out of the anchorage, lots of dolphins are fishing, leaping out in big splashes, briefly checking us, and then roaming further out.

As we motor-sail past Georges Rocks, I remember last year when we were passing here, struggling with Big Red. It is interesting to see how much we have learnt since that first cruise on Take It Easy. We know the boat obviously a lot better, but our all-round sailing skills have developed also. I suspect it is a life-long apprenticeship.

It is a grey morning, with only a few knots of wind. We are doodling our way North in a lumpy sea. We are only 3 or 4 hours from Cape Barren Island, but we can’t distinguish its imposing hills in the distance. It is one of those days when the coast can remain shrouded until the last half hour!

Bank Strait crossings are always a good test for how strong your stomach is: often lumpy, confused seas prevail, with an uncomfortable motion. Wade is at the helm seat, reading, I am inside, reading, then all of a sudden I feel green. Right, time to smell the breeze out on deck!

We keep stooging along. It is an up and down affair with the sails, as the breeze picks up and dies down. By 10.30, the clouds lift, Cape Barren and Clarke Islands appear, the sun comes out and it turns into a blue day. Still not much wind, but it is now warm enough to peel the layers off on deck and sun ourselves. Then half an hour later, the breeze strengthens to about 10 knots. Wade raises the main once again, unfurls the jib and stops the engine. We are sailing nicely at 6 or 7 knots, thank you very much! The sea is still lumpy though. That’s the thing with Bank Strait, it is shallow so swell lines don’t form well, and instead you get chop, sometimes steep and mean, other times like today, just lumpy. When talking about Bank Strait, yachties often say that when you have crossed Bass Strait and you think you are out of the woods on your way south to Tassie, Bank Strait gives you a slap on the backside, as if to say “Go on, get away from here.” When you come back north and leave the Tassie shores, it gives you a great big shove: “Here is a taste of what’s awaiting you in Bass Strait!”

By 12.30 we are nearing the entry point to Kent Bay, between Forsyth and Passage islets. We set George on the Kent Route, half a dozen waypoints linked together to take us through the network of shoals and sand banks between Clarke and Cape Barren Islands to Wombat Cove, where we will anchor for the night.

The ocean colour changes from a deep ultramarine to turquoise as we enter the Armstrong passage, evidence of the low depth. With the sun, the water sparkles. It is a very scenic spot: back to the Furneaux Group, our favourite cruising grounds.

The wind shifts Westerly at 10 to 15 knots, on our nose, as we make our way up the Armstrong Channel. We have one engine on and are hobby horning our way in the chop –
not very pleasant. We are trawling, hoping to catch our dinner, but only sea grass gets captured! It takes us a couple of hours to get through; we forgot about the two knots of tide that runs through these parts, did not we! It is with us, but against the wind. Wind against tide makes for sharp, short chop that hampers progress.

We reach Wombat Cove by 3pm, with the wind SSW. We will sit more comfortably once it switches to the NW as forecast. Let’s hope anyway, as right now we are not at all protected.

The rest of the afternoon passes pleasantly. Wadie takes a nap, I sun myself out on the deck, then retreat to the cabin where we both read, sundowner drinks in hand. By evening, the wind has died down. We are still laying the same way, a long way out, along the beach. But it is absolutely quiet and peaceful.
21/1/13 – To Badger Island

It is totally calm when we emerge from our nest this morning. The bay is like a millpond with lovely reflections of the cloudy sky in the water. We are a little slow to get going: pancake breakfast with blueberries... Yum! Stomach first this morning!

Eventually by 10.00 we are ready to go for our passage north to Badger Island, one of our favourite anchorages. We will have to share the spot with Erika II who has just recorded its intention with Tamar Sea Rescue. There are eventually headed for Beauty Point at the mouth of the Tamar River and we have been shadowing one another since Bryan’s Corner on the Freycinet.

We have a nice little sail out of the Armstrong Channel, but then have a knot of tide against us with a lighter breeze. So we have to turn one engine on to move along, past the Preservation Rocks, as it is not a good place to lull about. As we come level with Key Island Bay, we think: “Mm, it would be nice to go and pick up a few abalones for tonight, and it might give an hour or so for the tide to change and the sea breeze to pick up, which would make our sail up to Badger a little easier”. Done!

By 11.30 we are anchored in our little secret sand hole. I so like this place; the colours are stunning: aqua water over the sandy bottom, darker teal over the weed and seagrass, dazzling white sandy beach and orange granite boulders. We decide that rather than getting the dive gear out, Wadie will be the “hunter-gatherer” and duck dive for the abs. Within a few minutes, he has collected six size ones: five green lip and one black lip. We normally would get two or three for ourselves, but we thought the guys on Erika II might like some and we can finally meet them over a small feed and a glass of wine. I can’t believe how quickly it is all done. Wade is very good at free diving, I am hopeless. But it shows how rich this spot is, and how clear the water is that you can see the shells from the boat at a depth of 3.5 meters. And the water was positively warm: 17.5º!

The seagrass in the water looks like marbling on a malachite stone through my camera lens. I have fun taking a few photos while Wadie shucks the abs. I say to Wade: “When I kick the bucket, you will have to sail here and scatter my ashes at Key Island Bay”. “But we might find a better spot some
day!” - “May be, but for now, this is the
chosen one. I will feed the abs and urchins
and seagrasses here, for ever in my most
favourite bay.

An hour later, reluctantly, we weigh anchor
and move on. We are actually sitting aft to
the beach, so could not have stayed here for
much longer. We raise the main, unfurl the
jib, and sail past Thunder and Lightning Bay
and wave – another favourite, but as with Key
Island Bay, not for today’s conditions.

It is a gorgeous day: we are standing on the
back bench in our underpants, feeling the
warm breeze and sun on our bodies, gazing at
the Cape Barren coastline. It is such a
beautiful, wild place.

We are sailing along well, but the wind is NE,
which makes Lucy Bay on Badger Island really
exposed until the Westerly change comes.
We might see whether the sand spit behind
“Little Badger” is suitable for us. The islet may
give us some protection and we would then
not need to move tonight when the change
comes.

The breeze picks up as we leave the shelter of
Cape Barren and sail across the Franklin
Sound, the waterway between Flinders Island
and Cape Barren Island. We are a long way
out to sea, but
we can still
feel its effect
sailing at 7
and 8 knots,
the tide
helping us
along the way.

By 2.30 we are
anchored in a
shallow spot
between
Badger Island
and the Little
Badger islet in
2m of water at
low tide. We
will be just right here for now. There is no
sign of Erika II. They may well have sought
shelter on the opposite side of the island. No
abs for them then!

I look across to the beach; it is not far to
swim. Quick look at the temperature: 18.1°.
The warmest we have seen! We notice a
small fishing boat just around the spit. It is
anchored right behind a little dune. A tractor
comes along from the local farm, the fishing
boat appears to motor into a tiny inlet, unload
something for the tractor to take, then
motors off towards the Franklin Sound. Wade
decides to investigate: I wonder whether we
could go and anchor there? He dons his
wetsuit, jumps overboard and swims ashore. I
can see him walking across, checking the little
nook and wading out following the sandbank
to check the depth, water up to his waist. He
swims back to Take It Easy. “What’s the
verdict?” I ask… “The one advantage is that
the pick would be in sand rather than weeds,
as it is here, and we would be out of the
current and side chop. It’s a possibility or we could just wait for the forecast and move to Lucy Point, the designated anchorage”.

Regardless of where we end up, Badger is a very pleasant spot, with views to die for. The East side of the island where we are faces the middle of the Franklin Sound. We have the Strzelecki Peaks on the Flinders Island side and Mt Munro on the Cape Barren side, all faint in the heat haze, and then Chappell, a pyramid-shaped island close by to the North of us.

At 4.30 we listen to the forecast which confirms the wind will shift tonight, making Lucy Point the best place to be. With the tide racing through the gap, our little spot has become uncomfortable, so we decide to move, and then go for a walk ashore. And to do so, we swim ashore. We are that close to the beach, with our bows facing out! We have got easterlies and we are expecting the opposite to come soon!

As time passes we gradually swing from the dodgy ‘stern to the beach’ position, to lying alongside then pointing in. Phew! There are wallabies on the beach, eating seagrass shoots brought in by the tide. Erika ll motors in, anchors a bit further out and radios in to say hello. We agree to meet tomorrow morning. There are from Launceston and will be heading back with the Easterlies later this week. It is funny, they tells us about the poor holding in this anchorage on weed. We respond we are actually anchored in sand and have been here before. A discussion on anchors ensues. They’ve got a SARCA, we’ve got a Manson Supreme… Much of a muchness! There is always a bit of one upmanship when yachties first meet: how much experience you’ve got, whether you know the area, what sort of ground tackle you carry…

This has been a very enjoyable and varied day: the typical Flinders days we have grown to love. There is no doubt in our mind the Furneaux Group is still top of the pops!
22/1/13 – To Fotheringate Bay, Flinders Island

The sunshine lures us out of bed early. It is more cloudy and breezy than yesterday, W 15 to 20, and will shift to the SW tonight, so we will need to find a different anchorage then. But for now it is time to go ashore. We are not swimming over this time – too far, too chilly. As we walk towards the sand spit where we were yesterday, we meet up with the three guys from Erika II: three friends together, whose wives don’t like sailing and would rather be watching the tennis; how boring! A conversation on where we have come from follows: “So you are from the ‘mainland’?” “Yes we are from the big island”. “We think Flinders is the best kept secret” says the skipper of Erika II. “We agree; these are our favourite cruising grounds”. “Oh, so you know the area?” - “Yes, we’ve been coming here for 10 years; there aren’t many anchorages we have not been to”.

After our walk, the guys come over. They have a look around Take It Easy, we serve them abalone in ginger and garlic. It is rather tasty as a small lunch. The two friends pipe up: “Well, we like your accommodation much better and we like your speed too”. There is talk of a mutiny on Erika II and pirating of Take It Easy!

It’s about 1.30pm when Wade decides we should do the dash across to Flinders Island. This is at the Northern end of Trousers Point in Fotheringate Bay. The idea is to arrive at low tide, so we can get as close in behind the point as possible, in the curve of the beach, and also to have time to move somewhere else if it does not work out.

As soon as we head off, the wind gusts quickly build to 30 knots. We are committed now, with the wind on our back quarter, a tiny bit of a handkerchief rolled out and our speed 7.5 knots! It is very windy, there are lots of white caps and once out of the bit of protection from Chappell Island, things get really rowdy! You know how they say it is not an adventure unless there is a day when you wish you weren’t there? Well this is it! 25 to 30 knots wind, steep waves breaking as far as the eye can see, getting worse as we get closer to Flinders Island into shallower waters. Time to shut windows and doors: getting pooped is a strong possibility! It is not so much the conditions out there we worry about, but how we are going to manage to skirt around the rocky point into the bay without getting
washed on to the reef, and whether the spot will be any good. One thing is for sure, it will be a horrible beat up into the weather if we end up having to move somewhere else. Our minds are racing: Wade is at the tillers; he keeps the boat under control, keeps steering high so we can then come screaming in with the waves on our tail.

By some amazing stroke of luck, the wind eases to 25 instead of over 30, the seas get a little calmer as we come close to Trousers Point and we can see “a heaven of serenity” in the little curl of the bay. We have turned both engines on, Wade gets rid of the jib and I take us to a flat, peaceful, shallow little cove, totally protected. Truly amazing! “It looked right on the chart” said Wade “but I was fearful it was going to be very rough getting in”, and I was thinking “why did we leave so early at the strongest time of the day?”

Anyway, we feel pretty relieved and happy in this little nook, with the Strzelecki Peaks towering over us. Lucky shmucky! It is whistling overhead, but we don’t feel a thing. It is a great new spot offering protection in W through to NE. I took a few photos, thinking “those waves have got to be visible on the pictures”, but no, it all looks benign.

Next challenge for the day: the starboard sheet winch has given up the ghost all of a sudden; the whole mechanism jumped up after we anchored. Wade spends the next hour fixing it. Don’t know how it happened, why it happened, but it is back in working order. Lucky it occurred when it did!

We go ashore, armed with our rubbish, but there are no rubbish bins on this side of Trousers Point, so we walk down the dirt road to the other end, dispose of it there, then return via the coast track. As soon as we get out of the ti-tree and sheoak forest, we get blasted by the Westerlies, but it is a scenic way to see where we came from, as we look out toward Chappell Island and the tormented sea.

The rocks around the end of Fotheringate Bay are really unusual. They are calcarenite, a product of fluctuating sea levels over geological time. The shells of dead shellfish were deposited on the sea floor when levels were high. Over time the waters retreated, leaving shells and sand over the shoreline. As the sea level rose again, the shells and sand were blown inland. Water percolating down through these deposits caused the lime from the shell fragments to dissolve. Deeper down the dissolved lime crystallised, cementing the sand grains together to form calcarenite, a really rough, abrasive rock. This process has been repeated many times, with wind and waves eroding the rock away to form
beautiful sea sculptures. There is the mouth of a dragon, about to gobble up Take It Easy.

As the evening wears on, the mist descends from the summit of the Strzelecki Peaks, which have been shrouded in clouds all day.

Not a good day to climb the mountain: you would get up there, huffing and puffing, and see nothing at the top. Wade enquires: “Are you going to make me climb this again?” – “Not this trip, I have done enough climbing to last me for a year!” – “Oh, good!”
After a blowy evening, it all goes quiet at 2.00 am: no wind, no chop, no slapping of waves on the hulls, low tide. Two hours later, the wind starts howling again, this time from the SE.

It is sunny where we are anchored and further up North, but there are big grey clouds on the Strzelecki Peaks and the Fotheringate beach is in shadow, looking very bleak.

We have got a plan for today. Wade spotted a big green ‘dragon’ on the beach yesterday afternoon, which he would like to investigate. We will wait for the sun to shine on the treasure, which we suspect is either a net or big bundle of rope. After that, we will head north to Tanners Bay, where we have been in Medina, but never anchored there because it is a weedy bottom. We will get great protection with Mt Tanner from the strong NE forecast for the early hours of the morning. It is a bit of a fiddle finding the right spot to anchor to get shelter from both the SE during the day and the NE at night, so we don’t have to move in the middle of the night. The Tanner anchorage is perfect for a Northerly and offers added protection from South Easterlies because of a large reef a little way off the beach, and we can sneak in between the reef and the beach.

A small yacht comes in and anchors a long way away from us; we meet the man and his dog during our walk on the beach. They have come from Sydney, and like us are on their annual cruise, Flinders being their favourite cruising grounds. We exchange information about great anchorages. Rebecca bay, at the South West end of Clarke Island sounds like an idyllic place to explore during our next cruise! He is interested in the calcarenite
rocks, so we tell him about the Docks, north of Killiecrankie, where there are similar formations.

By 11.30, we weigh anchor. We have a little way to go: about 25 miles. The first 1 ½ hour is fast: 20 to 25 knots of wind on our back quarter, more sedate than yesterday. It is amazing the difference 5 to 10 knots make as far as wind effect on the rig and on the sea state. We are doing 7s and 8s, it is easy at the tillers, just cruising along. Later, the wind lightens; we roll out the jib fully, and are crawling at 6 knots. OK, it’s boring now, George can steer! How quickly we get used to speed!

Half an hour later the breeze picks up again to 20, and so does our speed: back to 8’s... that’s more like it: roll in a bit of jib to keep things under control. I love it when you feel the boat zooming along, spray coming off the bows, and you hear the whistling of the wind, the water rushing along the hulls and under the bridge deck, and Wade, who is trawling on the back steps, screaming “Ah, I got wet” as the waves from our wake wash over the bottom step. He comes up, checks our speed: “9.5 Dear!” Yes, easy peasy! We are going too fast to catch a fish! And we have geysers in the galley again.

Bengie is a good little ship’s cat. It is fairly jerky as we cross the huge Marshall bay, the last part of this passage, with the chop on our beam. But she stays in the saloon, just repositioning herself a few times with a sigh, ears twitching every time the waves slap us loudly.

We get to Tanner’s Bay at 3pm, then spend a bit of time looking for the best spot to be, behind the Marriot Reef. In the end, Wade is not comfortable, so we back out of there and go and anchor along Marshall Beach, on the other side of the reef, thinking we will be bow into the beach. Trouble is, when we get there, having beaten our way in head on, the wind is blowing along the beach, with a horrible chop. It is unpleasant and going to remain so till late evening, by the look of the arrows on the BOM site. We anchor anyway, hoping things might improve, but of course they don’t. I don’t know what is worse, sitting in the wind and chop, quite safe but uncomfortable, or going back behind the rocks. By now it is 7pm. Spending another hour motoring, not knowing whether it will really be any better there does not appeal any more than staying here. What a crappy spot to be in!

It is roaring at 30 knots the next day, but this time it is from the NE, so that counts as a change! At midnight last night we woke up and it was all quiet: no wind, no rolling, no water slapping the hulls. By 2.00 am, the wind had picked up again but shifted from SE to NE, so although we could hear it howl, the boat was at last nose into the beach and stable. By 4.00 am, I was having horrible dreams about overturned hulls and intruders.

We are staying put today. On the programme is a boat tidy up, a walk along the very long Marshall Beach, bread making, reading and playing with our pussycat.

Being underneath Mt Tanner and its radio beacon, we have great internet and phone coverage. Therefore we give sign of life to friends and family: update email number 6... getting near the end! Later Paul & Sjaney Dow, our sailing friends on Skellum, give us a call. They are using our jetty spot at Paynesville and our car. Wade gets a brilliant idea: they actually live in Traralgon, an hour from Port Albert. So we ask them to drop the car at Port Albert. This way, we won’t have to return to the Lakes at all; we can end our voyage at Port Albert. We were intending to bring Take It Easy back down from lakes to
Port Albert for the rest of the summer anyway, thus it will save us a big shuffle. We also won’t have to worry about another weather window to get back to Lakes. More time for fun!

We thought Marshall Bay would be a great fossicking beach, but our stroll along half of it (it’s a five mile beach) does not produce any interesting flotsam. At least it gives the generator time to charge the batteries!

Whilst we have got full internet service, I ring my folks. It is always lovely to chat to them from exotic places, although they seem a little down this time. Mum has lost her sight in one eye, through cataracts, and will get operated in late February. But this is of course limiting what they can do safely and is a source of anxiety for Dad.
We wake up to a slightly different movement of the boat: light bouncing... Sure enough, the wind has shifted more northerly. We move to Roydon Island after breakfast, as the wind continues to shift NW then SW. It is only a short hop around the corner, but it is a good thing we are doing this early; it is 8.00am and already 26 knots on our beam!

By 9.00 am we have anchored off the beach opposite Roydon Island, on the Flinders shore, whilst the wind is NW. We will shift to the Roydon lagoon once the wind has gone SW. The wind is really warm and the sun peering through the clouds. It is a nicer day than yesterday. An hour later, the wind has shifted to the SW and we shuffle to Roydon proper, inside the lagoon.

Everything inside feels damp. After two days of easterlies, we have been well and truly salted: our bed, the saloon seats, our clothes. Easterlies seem to carry a lot more moisture than westerlies.

I announce that I am in grave danger of running out of knickers, so once settled, we put the twin tub and generator to work. The warmth of the sun and SW change are very welcome to dry things out, inside and along the life lines! By early afternoon, a thunderstorm descends on us, together with some rain. We rush to set up our clears over the cockpit. It ends up clearing fairly soon.

We are now sitting in 1.5m of water, with one hour to go to low tide. The depth sounder starts beeping at us, so we switch it off! We need 80 cm to float. We’ll be just fine.

I get an email from Wendy, at the Australian Multihull Magazine. My Deal Island article will hopefully be published in the March/April edition, and she is preparing the two articles on Flinders and the rest of the Furneaux Group for later editions. She loves the photos, but wants a couple more with our catamaran in them! No trouble with that, just about every photo we’ve taken has got Take It Easy proudly starring!

Hearing from Wendy prompts me to write an article about Port Davey/Bathurst Harbour. This keeps me amused while we are waiting for the sunshine to return to go ashore for a
stroll. Once the sun is back, we pack a dry bag with shorts, T-shirts and camera, and can just about walk off the back of the boat! It is quite a fun and novel thing to do. We really could not have brought Take It Easy any closer to the beach while still floating... We check the little hut which has had some great work done to it since we were here last: there are now a couple of water tanks, a comfy bed, a few seats made from drift wood. It is obviously well used by someone from Flinders, and well taken care of. Our rock hop along the shore is very pleasant. We see a few more whale bones, most likely from the same animal whose ribs and vertebrae adorn the nautical wall at Jan Juc! Wade finds a float and I find arty photos to snap. We just love Roydon Island. It is a great setting: pyramid like escarpment, a turquoise lagoon with its white beach, our boat and its colours looking like it just belongs here, with the ultramarine ocean further out and the distant hills back on Flinders Island. Roydon is another one of our favourite anchorages. We have lots of favourites in the Furneaux Group!

During our rock hopping I spot a few birds which look similar to the one we saw yesterday at Marshall Bay: chocolate brown, stocky looking with a beak like the Pacific Gulls. It looks mature and much darker all over than a juvenile. I will have to look it up in the bird book.

We return to Take It Easy and this time Wade walks all the way back, while I have to swim a small portion. We check the depth: 1.1m – still floating, but just!
Tomorrow morning a SE change is coming, which will hopefully take us to Deal Island. I would love to stay another day here, but the weather won’t allow. In a SE, Roydon is not protected. I think this is part of what makes this anchorage special: a fleeting pleasure, a little glimpse of paradise that you enjoy for a brief moment, and then have to leave!

We gaze out towards Cape Frankland, just north of us, looking quite beautiful in the soft golden light of the evening. The tide is in now and the sea is breaking over the many reefs between Roydon and the cape, looking treacherous. I can see how not so long ago, in the 1980s, before the advent of GPS and chart plotters, the Furneaux group would have been a dangerous place to sail through. We rely so much on these navigation aids these days: no more dead reckoning, hoping you know your position in relation to charted reefs and isolated rocks, taking account of tides and drift. It is so much easier nowadays: you look at the chart plotter screen, your boat position is shown, the depth is displayed, and you can navigate through reefs feeling reasonably confident you won’t come undone.

We watch the sunset over Roydon. The island is silhouetted against a soft pink, then orange fiery sky. “Red sky at night, sailors’ delight”... indeed!
We both wake up at 4.45am, having detected the different motion of the boat. The Easterly has come in and we are back to the beach. Just as well we don’t draw much! It is still dark and we have no desire to exit the lagoon and negotiate the Pascoe Rocks in these conditions, so wait till daylight and have breakfast in the meantime.

By 6.00 it is light, the wind is steadily picking up. We raise anchor and go. The passage between Roydon and the Pascoe Islands is relatively smooth, tide and wind working together to spit us out. It is quite windy with lots of white caps: 18 to 20 knots from ESE, so on our back quarter – it’s a job for the jib alone. We give Cape Frankland a wide berth as it can be a turbulent one to pass. We are doing 7s and 8s, keeping a close eye on our backside as we see the wind lines gradually getting tighter together.

The wind is increasing steadily to 20-25, the sea is getting rougher; we are thundering along, reaching 12 knots speed as we catch waves, so Wade rolls some of the jib. Then ominous dark clouds develop and the Flinders coast disappears in a squall. We have no rain where we are, but the wind gusts now reach 30 knots, only easing to 26 for brief moments, and the sea becomes very rowdy, with steep breaking waves on our beam. This is another one of our ‘big adventures’, the ones you’d rather not be in. The noise is deafening, with the roaring wind, the crashing and thumping of the waves, and everything waltzing around inside. Wade is hand steering at the tillers, winding and winding in the jib. I stagger into the cabin, put things inside the sink in the galley so they don’t fall over, cover the plug holes to stop the geysers, look at Bengie staring anxiously at the unusual spectacle of big waves rushing past the windows. She is transfixed, eyes like saucers. I cover her up with a blanket, then close the saloon windows and door as I stagger back into the cockpit. This looks really bad, the worst I have seen. Waves are regularly breaking over our side, Wade is fighting at the tillers. He has slowed the boat right down so we are now going at 5.5 knots with only a tiny handkerchief of a jib, but the motion is incredibly rough and chaotic, and the water tumultuous. I look around us, hanging on to dear life, thinking “we’re in the middle of it now, no escape; the only thing we can do if it gets worse is turn and run with it”. But we keep on our course. I am not sure how long this lasts, but eventually the wind moderates back down to 25-26, and the sea improves a little. I think “this is OK, we can manage this”... then it eases further to a comfortable 20-22 knots. Amazing what you characterise as comfortable after peaking at 33 knots! But we are in Bass Strait after all!

I relieve Wade at the tillers. It is still blowy with plenty of white caps, but 18 to 22 is a hell of a lot better than what we have been through. The rest of the passage to Deal is uneventful. We keep an eye on our backside, reducing sail when the breeze picks up, rolling the jib out again as it drops, generally keeping our speed at around 6 to 8 knots.

We reach Garden Cove on Deal Island by 11.30, as the rain starts, having averaged 7.4 knots an hour... a fast run! It is nice and flat in the cove, although the boat seems to be doing a fair bit of swinging around as bullets come racing out. Time for a hot cup of noodles to warm up and a rest!

The afternoon is cold and bleak. We read and nap, wrapped in our polar fleece blankets like two little oldies. It drizzles and blows all afternoon.
I check the forecast we had for today: ESE 15 to 20 in the morning, 15 to 25 in the afternoon. Wade pipes up: “the forecast was not for horribleness like this”. “Yes we got this afternoon’s weather and more this morning”. They do warn “the wind can be up to 40% stronger and the waves up to twice the height”. They got that nearly right – we had over 50% stronger! Tomorrow is forecast to be SE 15 to 20 for Northern Tassie and Flinders, and SSE 20 to 25 then WSW 15 to 20 in Victoria. Deal is somewhere in the middle.

I announce “I don’t really want to be out there if it is like this tomorrow. Port Albert can wait!” Wade agrees “We’ve still got time, we will see what the updated forecast looks like tonight. This is a pretty good place to sit and wait anyway”.

I haven’t taken any photos today: no evidence of our tempestuous crossing. It is a bit hard to hold a camera and keep yourself upright in a heaving cockpit. I bet this time the ocean would have looked like something was going on out there!

Even though we are swinging widely, we are in quiet water and protected in Garden Cove. But with the bleak conditions and roaring wind overhead, you do feel like this is a little island in the middle of Bass Strait: exposed and cut off. We can only get forecasts on HF... no more internet or phone.
A
fter a night of heavy rain and thunderstorm, we wake up to a calmer day. Both of us had the same thought when the thunder and lightning started: the very large yacht that came in yesterday afternoon has a much taller mast than ours, so they might get struck before we do.

The forecast on HF confirms wind and sea will be somewhat lighter and moderating in the afternoon. Later in the week the effect of two lows, one on the East coast of NSW and one on the SE coast of Tasmania will make their presence felt with huge seas and 45 knots winds, so we think it prudent to cross the rest of Bass Strait to Port Albert today, while we still can!

It is a bit of a downer, getting back a week early, however we can play around Corner Inlet and the Port Albert Archipelago after we have checked the mooring.

We leave the shelter of Garden Cove at 9.15 for our 55 miles to the entrance of Port Albert. It is an uneventful, cruisy sail in 10 to 15 knots breeze, forward of our beam, on a cool but sunny day. We see different birds: albatrosses and shearwaters, and also little fairy prions and Wilson’s storm petrels, both with characteristic buoyant flights. The Wilson’s storm petrels were bouncing just above the surface of the ocean, with their head down, their long legs dangling and their feet pattering. They were fun to watch.

We reach Port Albert’s lead buoy with a welcome party of five dolphins greeting us, and cross the bar by 5.15, exactly 8 hours after leaving Deal. We have just completed our 18th Bass Strait crossing! We anchor a little way down the channel. We will get to the mooring tomorrow morning.

Now that we are back within mobile service, we pick up two phone messages from friends, both saying their boat has sunk. We re-read the two text messages, in disbelief, then ring them both. Geoff and Maz lost their catamaran ‘2 Abreast’ last night, when the remnants of a tropical cyclone coming down the QLD coast brought with it devastation and flooding rain once again. They were at the Downtown Marina on the Burnett River at Bundaberg. They already had had a tough time with floods the two years ago. But this time, with apparently very little warning, the flood levels rose alarmingly quickly. They were unable to manoeuvre out and would have risked their own lives escaping at this late stage, in the dark, in 40 knots of wind. So they grabbed whatever belongings they could, and had to walk away and abandon their baby. Apparently 17 out the 20 boats at the Marina were lost. It would be gut-wrenching for them as this is all they had: 2 Abreast was their home, their life.
The other loss is Phil Peacock’s who, although living in Melbourne, had just bought an old steel boat in Bundaberg to do it up. It too sunk, but for him it was just a project, a bit of a wreck to start with, so it is not devastating.

After hearing these horror stories, we feel even more convinced we have taken the right decision to come back to Victoria early and to have made arrangements to not have to go back to the Lakes, as with East coast lows, the bar at Lakes Entrance becomes impossible to cross, and no boat can go in or out for days. We could have had difficulties getting back anyway! So we are safe and sound, and have just clocked up 1035 nautical miles!

For the first time in weeks, we watch TV and get a visual update of the weather havoc: floods in QLD, storm force weather coming down the NSW coast, bush fires in Northern Victoria. It is unbelievable this wild weather! We feel rather subdued for the rest of the night.
28 & 29/1/13 – Port Albert Mooring

The procession of runabouts and tinnies down the channel begins at dawn and intensifies from there. No possible sleep-in this morning! So we motor to our mooring. It is still there, looking a bit gross from all the growth on it. We hook up then Wade gets the diving gear out to go and check the state of the chain links. They can wear out quickly from one year to the next, so it is prudent to check and replace what needs to be, to ensure Take It Easy does not break away when we leave it to go home.

Unfortunately the compressor is refusing to start. We haven’t used it on this trip. So while the tide is still low, Wade has to free dive with mask and snorkel. He puts the full wet suit, boots and hood on though, as the jelly fishes are abundant! Looking like a ninja!

Wadies comes back satisfied the rope and links are fine. I say to him “thank you for braving the jellies and checking our buoy”. He responds: “There was a huge one down there. I kicked it on the head with my flipper!”

Early in the afternoon, Paul & Sjaney arrive with the Fat Ford, a supply of nibbles, and their overnight gear. They are staying on board with us till tomorrow morning. We have a lovely time together catching up. Dinner is a very nice fisherman’s basket at the wharf with a glass of wine.

After we take Paul & Sjaney back to shore the next morning, we come back to the boat to tidy up and work out our rough itinerary for the rest of the week. Unfortunately a SW is blowing fairly hard today: 20 to 30 knots, so Take It Easy does not move from its mooring. We take advantage of having the car to go into Yarram, pick up some fresh fruit and vegies and do a couple of big loads of washing at the Laundromat: multiple sets of sheets and salty beach towels – very domestic. The trade-off is that we pig out on pies and lattes: Oh the taste of real coffee after six weeks on instant and powdered milk!

Back on board in the afternoon, Wade reads and I sort out the hundreds of photos I have taken, to start selecting those I may use in the journal.

Our plan for the rest of the week is to head out to the Prom. We should have a few sunny days, and then with a SW change, we will be able to sail back to Port Albert on Sunday. We will see how things go.
30/1/13 – To the Prom

It is NE when we wake up, so we slip the mooring and motor out of Port Albert. We are headed for Miranda Bay on the Prom. We motor-sail in the light conditions and anchor 3 ½ hours later. It is a bit overcast when we arrive, but soon clears to a lovely, warm day: perfect for a laze around in the nets.

During the early evening, another two yachts arrive. Wadie grabs the binoculars and observes the goings on: the two yachts appear to have a discussion just outside Refuge – Shall we, shan’t we? They come in eventually and head towards the ‘busy’ end. “There you go, says Wade, one of them has made a prick of himself and anchored right in the middle of the other three, the other guy has done the right thing and anchored a little way out”. Some people have a very little space bubble and crowd everybody else. We have a very large bubble around Take It Easy. Watch out if you burst it! The yacht lacking some anchoring etiquette must have been given the evil eye or worse, as we see him up anchor and move out, nearer to his buddy, and awfully close to the rocks. “As long as they don’t notice we are the only boat actually facing the right way in and decide to come our way, we are happy at our little end of the cove! There is talk on the radio of the three yachts leaving at 4.00am. We wonder where they are off to. May be there are late travellers to the wooden boat festival in Hobart.

My sun tanning session is rudely interrupted by Wadie who has another past time in mind. It is so nice to be in the sunshine, in a deserted spot. School holidays have ended, ‘normal’ people are back at work... all the better for us! Eventually the breeze picks up, making this bay unsuitable. So we up anchor and motor-sail further along the Prom. We will check how crowded Refuge Cove is.

As we approach, we see there are three yachts at the normal Southern beach end of the Cove. We do our usual antisocial thing and anchor at the opposite end, on our lonesome in front of the Northern beach. It smells of eucalyptus and forest birds are chirping... very pleasant.
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31/1/13 to 2/2/13 – Tour of the Prom

Sleep in today... When we surface it is warm, we have our stern to the beach, and are bopping along gently. We take one look at each other and laugh: way too much time in the sun yesterday! The bodies are brown, but our faces are bright red with white patches around our eyes where the sunnies were... We’d better pile on the 30+ today!

The sand flies got us around the ankles the night we had fish and chips at the wharf with Paul & Sjaney. With the really warm night they matured and tested our will power to not scratch them like crazy.

We head off at 9.15, hoping to go and anchor at Waterloo Bay. On the way we check out every little sandy cove. Although none are suitable for anchoring, it is fun to explore, motoring slowly. The wind is light and the direction rather fickle: it is as if the wind follows the outline of the coast, putting us every time alongside rather than square on the beach. One minute the breeze is NE, the next it is S, W, SW... all around the compass. There is a fair bit of swell too, from the NE, probably the effect of the East coast intense low. Waves are rolling into the beaches, feathering, so even if we could anchor, we could not beach Peasy in that!

Having completed the grand tour of Waterloo Bay, we head back to Refuge and anchor in the northern part of the Cove by noon. There is a tradition at Refuge Cove which we always abide by. We go ashore and do ‘our duty’, updating our boat plaque with year 2013 at the visiting yachts panel. Medina and Take It Easy are tied together, bearing witness to our annual visits here over the last seven years. We look at all the names: some carved or burnt on a piece of flotsam like ours, others with letters made from thin rope or shells; and yet others obviously made professionally, routed and large, taking way too much room! There are even some burnt into whale bone. Some of the names are funny, like “Femme Fatale”, some of the name we know, like “Snow Petrel” in red letters, to match the colour of the small yacht. We met him last year in Bicheno. He went with his dad to Antarctica on the yacht and we spotted him on a mooring in Kettering this trip.

We enjoy the afternoon sun while it lasts. By evening, the temperature drops and the rain starts. Time to rug up again! It is raining on the end of our summer holiday. Late tonight, the SW change is coming, bringing with it strong winds: 30 knots. We will sit away from the rocks then, which will be more comforting. We will watch how everybody in the cove behaves: the Refuge Cove Dodgem! For now, not only have we got rain, but also thunder, which means lightning somewhere too. “Do we think their mast is higher than ours? I hope so” says Wadie. “Ours is higher than the wooden boat’s one and runabout” –
neither of which have a mast! We are longer
than the two Hanse yachts, but they might
have a taller stick.

I feel increasingly uncomfortable with the way
we sit, stern to the rocks and awfully close to
them. Wade is happy to stay where we are,
thinking we will swing away from the rocks
with the change, but I am not, so before dark,
I exercise my right of veto and we move to the
middle of the cove, behind the other yachts.

After a rainy night, we wake up to a sunny
day on 1 February. During the night the huge
catamaran Pelican has anchored behind us.
They are a research vessel normally based at
Bermagui. We have met them before.

Wadie decides to go visiting. He drops the
dinghy in the water and motors to one of the
Hanse yachts, then to the wooden yacht
missing its mast. He comes back with all the
gossip. The two Hanse yachts are brand new,
on their first trip to the Prom from
Melbourne, so pretty pleased with
themselves. The wooden boat, Nellie, is
actually from Paynesville. It had a major
mishap a few days ago on their way to the
Wooden Boat Festival. Sailing in 30 knot
winds and rough seas across Bass Strait (the
same day we sailed from Flinders to Deal), 20
miles from Deal their wooden mast snapped,
and fell in the ocean, taking with it the sails
and rigging. Having lost radio contact (the
antenna was at the top of the mast) they
launched their EPIRB. A large ship came to
their help, sheltering them from wind and sea
while the Coast Guard and Water Police got
alerted. The police launch can normally
thunder at 30+ knots, rooster tail at the back,
but the conditions were such that they could
only do 12 knots, right into
wind and sea. It would
have taken about eight
hours to reach Nellie
from Paynesville. In the
end, they had to cut
away the rigging and let
the mast and sails float
away. And because the
rope rigging had
wrapped around their
prop, they could not use
their engine and had to
wait all this time to be
towed back to Port
Welshpool at 4 knots,
another 9 hours to safety. It would have been
so uncomfortable bopping around in this
horrible sea, unable to do anything. The three
old guys on board have a sense of humour
though, they decided to motor here for a bit
of a relax before they head back to
the Lakes!

We decide to walk to Sealers Cove to check
the conditions. So in the dinghy we go again,
saying hello to Pelican on the way. The
Pelican crew enquire about the de-masted
yacht, so Wadie tells them the story. “Well,
they say, Coast Guard Paynesville and the
Water Police had a rather busy day, that day.
They rescued a boat that was thrown in the
rocks near Point Hicks, SE Victoria”. So we
were not the only ones who found the
conditions challenging on Saturday 26/1! But we got off unscathed; those two did not!

We land the dinghy at the very end of North Beach, where there is the least swell, and have difficulty pulling Peasy up the steep incline in soft sand. We drag it as high as we can and tie it to a tree. It is an easy walk to Horn Point, the rocky outcrops from which on one side you can see Hogan and even Deal Island today, and as you keep walking further along the corner, you overlook Sealers Cove. It is a scenic spot. There is no one anchored at Sealers, but you can see the swell rolling into the cove, and as it is very shallow, you have to anchor a long way from the shore, exposed to the wind and bullets. We will stay where we are overnight, but might take the boat there tomorrow for a change of scenery.

I would have liked to continue the walk all the way down to Sealers Cove, but it was not on Wade’s itinerary. I might add that in the eight or so years we have been coming to Refuge, not once have we ever completed this walk. We always stop at Horn Point and head back. There is always an excuse: someone’s too tired, we’ve left it too late, it is pointless going down to have to walk back up... This time the excuse is we haven’t dragged the dinghy all the way up to the high water mark. I swear, next time we do this walk, we go all the way there and back!

We return to Take It Easy in the afternoon, swan around in the sunny cockpit and watch life go by: old fellows, lily white bodies, taking a bit of sun in the cockpit of their de-masted boat, people from the two Hanse yachts zooming around on their zodiacs, the Pelican crew sitting in their nets. We add to the entertainment, jumping overboard in the nuddy. All in all, this was a pleasant day.
It’s another sunny day. My god, we should never have left Victoria! The Hanse yachts were gone by the time we emerge from our nest. Pelican soon goes, coming right close to us to say goodbye and looking huge! They are off to Williamstown for a while. Only Nellie and us are left in these beautiful surroundings. It is windy, 15-20 SW, but we are cosy in the Cove.

One of the guys from Nellie rows over to invite us over for scones! So we dinghy over, armed with jam and cream, which is very popular! There are four of them on board: the skipper Bernard, Terry – ex Air force, Tony the chatty one, and Paul the quietest of them all. We have a good chat about different places, about their de-masting, our trip across to Tassie. They are heading back to Lakes tomorrow and need a weather update. Without mast, they have lost radio communication. We invite them over for drinks tonight to get the updated forecast.

In the afternoon, I decide it is about time I got one of the banana boats out of the locker: first time on the whole trip! So I pump and pump away on deck, then hop on and paddle around the bay and out to the other beach. It is easy going out, hard against the gusts on the way back, but fun all the same. Wadie decides he will have a go ‘paddle boarding’, standing up on the kayak. It does not take long for him to end up in the drink at the first big gust. I have another paddle around, then put away the banana boat, and manage to hurt my back deflating it. Bummer!

Later an Adams yacht comes sailing in. We see him tacking outside the entrance. One minute he looks like he is going to Sealers Cove, the next he is back, and this is repeated a few times, until he is in. Nice work! His anchoring however leaves a bit to be desired, as he drops his anchor in front of us and back on us. Wade does a sign with his hands showing there is not much distance between us. I am blunter and shout “You are a bit too close”. Eventually after he puts his sails away and Wade puts fenders out on Take It Easy, he gets the message and repositions himself further away. We thank him and Wade invites him over for drinks with the boys from Nellie at 6pm.

Not long after, Refuge Cove is invaded: three little runabouts and a luxury cruiser! At 6pm on the dot, the boys board us. Take It Easy is the party boat. We spend a couple of hours chatting and it is a very pleasant evening, for our last sun downer of the holidays. They tells us a bit more about their rescue: it sounded like the large ship that came to them a couple of hours after they lost their rig came way too close, bumping into them, damaging the bow spit and their davits. The guys said it was the scariest part of it all, being right against this huge hull, with no steerage! They said they learnt a few things in the whole ordeal: carry a hand held radio and have a back-up aerial, carry wire cutters to quickly get rid of stays and free yourself off the rig, and turn the engine off immediately so nothing wraps around the prop… and avoid Bass Strait in 35 knots of wind!
My back has totally seized up and is incredibly painful. Getting up and moving about the boat is a real struggle, so I dose myself up with painkillers.

By 8.00 am Nellie waves us goodbye. There are off for their 20 hour motor back to Lakes. We are not far behind, weighing anchor by 8.45. It is a drizzly departure, mirroring how we feel! The Prom is shrouded in rain clouds. There is enough breeze to sail on the jib with the wind on our tail at 6 or 7 knots for a while, but then as the weather clears, the wind lightens and we have to turn an engine on.

We manage to get through the bar without problems, despite the fact it is the worst possible time to get in there, low water, wind against tide… We are brave and even dock at the floating jetty to unload. There is just enough water for us to tie up, but we soon sit on the mud for a while. It is certainly a much more practical way to take all our gear back to the car, rather than do multiple dinghy trips ashore. Now we know we can fit!

It is a very sad moment when we move Take It Easy onto its mooring and we abandon her. The cruise is now officially over.
Evidence of a voyage of extremes!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Furthest distance travelled</td>
<td>1100 nautical miles, or about 2200 kilometres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furthest latitude South reached</td>
<td>43° 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest number of new anchorages</td>
<td>22 new hidey holes!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longest cruise</td>
<td>48 days at sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longest non-stop passage</td>
<td>40 hours from Jamieson Bay to Southport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongest wind sailed</td>
<td>33 knots in Bass Strait between Flinders and Deal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongest wind recorded for this trip</td>
<td>45 knots at Frog’s Hollow, Port Davey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of days over 20 knot wind</td>
<td>31 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest water temperature</td>
<td>11.3° at Melaleuca, Bathurst Harbour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest water temperature</td>
<td>19.1° at Marshall Bay, Flinders Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest outside temperature</td>
<td>10° at Iola Bay, Port Davey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest outside temperature</td>
<td>40° the day we climbed Mt Rugby at Port Davey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shallowest anchorage</td>
<td>1.1m at Roydon Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fastest speed reached on this trip</td>
<td>12 knots (Roydon to Deal Island)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fastest average speed on a passage</td>
<td>8.3 knots/hour over 100 miles (Return from Port Davey)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Some speed averages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knots per Hour</th>
<th>Passage</th>
<th>Distance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Lakes to Jamieson Bay</td>
<td>145 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>Return from Port Davey</td>
<td>100 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>Pirates Bay to Schouten Island</td>
<td>60 miles</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>Schouten to St Helen’s Head</td>
<td>68 miles</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Fotheringate to Marshall Bay</td>
<td>25 miles</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Roydon to Deal Island</td>
<td>40 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>Deal to Port Albert</td>
<td>53 miles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>