

CRUISING TO THE GIPPSLAND LAKES

Following on from Sapphire's participation in the 2011 VDL circumnavigation Marian and I discussed with Chris Williams the potential of having an RGYC event of a cruise in company for Geelong boats into Bass Strait potentially to Lakes Entrance.

We have all heard about the notorious bar at the Entrance but after some research and discussion with John and Kerryn Peirce and Gippsland Ports we decided that this would be a good trip for the Cruising Group to have as a first organized cruise.

The fleet of Sapphire of London (Marian and Grant St Quentin), Elixir (Chris and Anthea Williams with Greg and Denise Smith), Happy Hour (Brendon Lee and Mark Berry), Connected (Peter and Karen Stow and Mick Cameron), Serenity Now (Dick and Melanie O'Hanlon with Sue and Paul Douglas) and Windjammer 2 (Steve Westhead with daughter Lucy) met at Queenscliff Cruising Yacht Club on 31st January 2012. There were sundowners on the deck at QCYC and discussion of the proposed departure, forecast weather and radio scheds for the next day which was followed by an informal evening at the new outdoor BBQ at the club. Perfect!



As the weather gods are prone to do, the forecast N-E turned easterly and picked up during the day making for a few uncomfortable hours before the fleet finally arrived at Oberon Bay between the hours of 22.00 and 23.00. A few anxious moments of anchoring at night was an added experience for all with the now

consistent 30 knot easterly that had established itself.

The next morning the winds had abated and we had a leisurely cruise to Refuge Cove calling into investigate Waterloo Bay en-route. A very pleasant day in Refuge followed with many exploring bush tracks and taking the time to view the "boat board" ashore with a few brave souls having a refreshing swim in the chilly, clear waters.

The next day, following a very lazy morning at anchor, saw the fleet decide to depart for Lakes Entrance as the weather was in our favor for an over night sail to arrive at the entrance for 08.00 slack water. Elixir, looking very impressive, was leading the way with her new parachute spinnaker until dusk. They then had some fun retrieving the new



toy! The night sail was a great experience for all as we had fair winds and flat seas for the trip.

Prior to our departure Gippsland Ports had offered to lead us over the bar, so at 0700 we contacted the Port's workboat about our impending arrival and they met the fleet outside the bar and escort us through. (Remarkably the fleet all arrived within less than an hour of one another) The escort was very reassuring to the fleet, particularly as the front lead light on the sea wall had failed the night before.



The photo (left) of the 6 yachts crossing the bar was taken by a rather excited local historian who has not seen this many boats lined up to cross the bar in the 30 plus years she has looked over the bar. We were greeted by the manager of Gippsland Ports and provided with maps and

brochures to help us explore the lakes. The Ports staff were very excited to have us visit as they are making a concerted effort to keep the bar dredged. We were interviewed by the local media, making the second page picture-story for that week.



The fleet remained at Lakes Entrance for two days enjoying the many restaurants and cafes before heading up to Metung. The journey through the Narrows to Metung, whilst uneventful, was challenging as there are a number of shallow points along the way and we all

played "follow the leader" and came through unscathed.

Once at Metung the fleet managed to berth either outside the Hotel (very convenient) or in Chainman's Creek. We had arranged to meet local boat builder Peter Blake prior to our departure from Geelong. He enjoyed meeting the group at the Metung Yacht Club where we were welcomed enthusiastically for the evening by the Commodore and other members.

The next 7- 10 days were spent exploring the various lakes and for some, a bit of time on the mud, but no damage, only fun. We visited beautiful anchorages of Picnic Arm, Duck Arm, Bunga Arm, Sperm

Whale Head, Loch Sport and Box's Creek to name a few.

Elixir, Sapphire and Serenity Now managed to bump over the entry in to the Tambo River and travelled as far as possible berthing at Swan Reach for a couple of days to enjoy a river swim and of course the local fare at the hotel. This was one of the few places that swimming was possible due to much of the Lakes having a blue-green algae problem.

John and Kerryn on Esoterica joined the cruise in Paynesville where we all congregated at the Motor Yacht Club to enjoy the friendly banter of the members regarding boats with "sticks". We enjoyed an evening meal at the club with Ron Earney (Past Commodore of RGYC).

During our stay in the Lakes we saw a few crew depart and some new crew arrive. Simon Stow travelled from England to join Karen and Peter on Connected. Dee, with her children and Robin Berry, joined Brendon and Mark on Happy Hour for a few days.

As with all events, the end was approaching, as was the first of our grandchildren, which saw Marian depart Sapphire not to miss the event. I was lucky to have Harry Farnell join me for the trip back to Geelong. David and Carmel Radbourne joined Serenity Now and daughter Gayle joined Steve and Lucy on Windjammer 2.

We departed Lakes Entrance early morning for the sail back to Refuge Cove, anchoring late that night. The next morning, after another sojourn ashore, saw us leave for a boisterous trip across Waratah Bay. We arrived at Walkerville South late in the afternoon, some having fun anchoring in weed, but dusk saw us all safe in a very sheltered picturesque bay.

The weather conditions were ideal for Sapphire and Happy Hour to leave early the following morning to make Geelong by the following night. The remainder of the fleet: Connected, Esoterica, Elixir, Windjammer 2 and Serenity Now had a more leisurely trip to overnight at Cleelands Blight (San Remo). They had a great afternoon swimming with 30 degree temperatures before enjoying a spirited trip to Queenscliff and later that weekend on to Geelong.

The 2012 Gippsland Lakes Cruise proved to be great fun and an outstanding success in developing the skills and confidence of skippers and crews, many of whom were new to sailing in Bass Strait and open waters.

The Cruising Group is planning a January 2013 trip through the islands along the east coast of Tasmania to visit the Hobart Wooden Boat Festival and the southern anchorages.

Grant St Quentin

CRUISING ON

The 2011 - 2012 season was a period of continued growth in Cruising Group activities. Our aims of increasing numbers of members at Cruising Dinners and increasing the amount of sailing for RGYC members have been achieved. The Cruising Group also aims to create opportunities for members to learn and have fun as part of their sailing. By bringing all these ideas together we offer new members another way to become part of the Club.

We have regular Cruising Group Dinners each month, commencing in April, and attendances have been in excess of 40 happy guests each time. Each dinner features a guest speaker or two. Tony Bull explained the intricacies of sail construction, selection and care. Ian and Jenny Baxter took us on the journey from Perth to Port Moresby on a yacht delivery with Tom Smeaton, Bill Parker and Jack Findlay.

A Christmas progressive dinner was held on yachts moored at the RGYC pontoon - 28 very well fed diners ended the night with a fine whisky tasting aboard Arctic Wolf. Who would be anywhere else next year?

The Cruising Group were pleased to be part of the Wooden Boat Festival as the joint hosts of the opening night dinner with special guests Lyn and Larry Pardey. The next dinner's guest speakers were Murray and Chris Jones, owners of "Casablanca" a fast wooden yacht formerly part of RGYC's racing past. The story of "Casablanca's" rescue in Queensland and restoration in Gippsland was remarkable. The participants in the cruise to the Gippsland Lakes in February 2012 gave a colourful presentation about the trip and the warm welcome they received in the Lakes.

Steve McPhee, Ranger in Charge, South West Port Phillip from Parks Victoria, explained the role of the organisation and the resources they manage in our region, particularly the facilities on the bays. Rod Hagebols, RGYC Sailing Manger showed us some of the areas of his experience sailing and racing in Europe and the USA.

The Cruising Group provides opportunities for less experienced members to sail beyond Port Phillip Bay as cruising in company events develop. There is a Geelong to Tasmania cruise in January 2013 - the Ten Island Tour - and the participants will be in Hobart in time for the Wooden Boat Festival and then cruise the D'Entrecasteaux Channel before returning by mid-March.

