

## Across the Ocean with our Trailer Sailer

On **Feb 11<sup>th</sup>** this year we joined our friends Sue and Peter Rochford and Sue Graham on Soni-a-tu to take our trailer sailers across Bass Strait on the Spirit of Tasmania to enjoy the beautiful inland waterways of the D'Entrecasteaux Channel and Macquarie Harbour. (Our return trip cost us just under \$2000 with a cabin both ways - booking is easy on the internet at [www.spiritoftasmania.com.au](http://www.spiritoftasmania.com.au))

It had been a warm and windy day and the forecast for Bass Strait that night included a gale warning with winds 35-40 knots. I must admit we were a little apprehensive when we arrived at Port Melbourne that evening, queuing for the ferry with the waves thumping against Station Pier. (I had decided to buy travel sickness pills at the last minute and I was hoping they had a good method for tying vehicles down!!)

After waiting in line for about an hour we were directed through a couple of checkpoints before driving onto the ferry through the front entrance. We were asked if we had any containers carrying fuel or gas cylinders and our flares were inspected to ensure they were in date. (They confiscated our out of date spares). The other regulation to be aware of when planning a trip to Tassie is that strict quarantine restrictions are applied to taking fruit and vegetables into that state.

Our departure from Station Pier was interesting with a powerful tug "Flinders" taking 35 minutes to pull us free and set us on our way down the channel. The trip over was surprisingly calm with a vessel that size not being too affected by wind and sea. After observing our passage through the Heads and enjoying a few drinks at the bar we collapsed into our bunks in our comfortable cabins. (We knew the wind was still blowing as we were experiencing spray crashing onto our cabin window on the seventh level.)

**Monday 12<sup>th</sup>** - We landed on schedule at 7am in Devonport on a calm sea and after an easy exit through the rear door of the vessel, experienced a slow journey through quarantine before we were finally on our way to Strahan via Bernie where we enjoyed a Mac's breakfast and found a supermarket to buy our fruit and veggies. Strahan is on the west coast and the launching place for Macquarie Harbour. The

road was typical of those we found throughout Tasmania - windy, mountainous, and usually single lane. You just have to take your time. The scenery was beautiful but towing a two ton boat required total concentration.



**En route to Strahan.**

We finally arrived in Strahan around lunch time and after enjoying a picnic in a local park sought the assistance of the very friendly and helpful people at the tourist centre to locate the best launching ramp in the area. The ramp at the end of Meredith Street was excellent with a jetty alongside and the only other boats that shared the parking lot with us were a couple of big cruises used for abalone diving. There are no facilities at the ramp but toilets and a shower are available at the car park adjacent to the tourist information centre in town. We also sought the assistance of the Nat. Parks people and Peter bought a local chart of the Gordon River. We stocked up with fuel and water at the local BP service station and rigged the boats ready for launching next morning. We enjoyed a lovely meal at the local hotel deciding then that a return visit might be in order after retrieval in four days time.

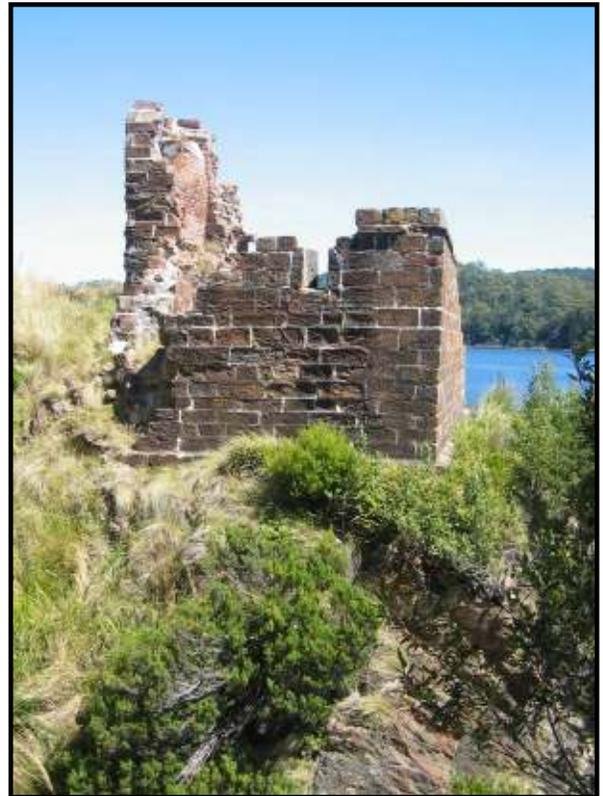


**Ramp & Jetty at Strahan**

**Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup>** saw us launching our boats and enjoying a beautiful warm Summer day in calm waters surrounded by scenic mountains. Because the wind was on the nose we motored to Sara Island arriving about 3pm. This was a good time to arrive as the last cruise boat for the day had just departed so after tying up to a jetty we had the island to ourselves. From 1822-1833 Macquarie Harbour Penal settlement served as one of the first places in the British Penal System to use behaviour modification techniques to "root out moral depravity of the criminal classes"! Hard labour, cruel and vicious punishment and deprivation of all comforts were the order of the day and made Sara island a place to be dreaded. There was a ship yard, which used the harvested huon pine to build ships and at that time was the most productive yard in the Australian colonies.

We enjoyed our tour of the island following the walking guide available for purchase there. Leaving the island we sailed around the corner to Birch's Inlet where we enjoyed a very quiet and beautiful anchorage for the night.

**Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup>** - the morning was again warm and we motored to the entrance of the Gordon River. It is one of Tassie's mighty rivers and has the largest flow of all Tasmania's. It's most famous tributary is the Franklin.



**Ruins on Sara Island**

There are some shallow areas near the entrance but a safe channel is well marked. The water in Macquarie Harbour and the Gordon River is the colour of weak tea. This results from the roots of the button grass leaching tannin into the water before it flows into streams and rivers. The tannin has a mild anti bacterial effect and is apparently good for fish farms. We heard that it is safe to drink. (We saw our first of many Tassie fish farms in Macquarie Harbour) After traveling for a couple of miles up the river against a knot of current we started to think about fuel conservation as we hoped to navigate the river as far as possible (Gould's Landing) which was about 40 kms upstream. We decided to raft up and use Silhouette's four stroke motor as it was more economical than the 2 stroke on Soni-a-tu. It made the trip that much more enjoyable to share the beauty of the mirror glass waters, mountains and stunning reflections. It is a truly beautiful place which was made perfect by the glorious weather we were experiencing.

We arrived at Heritage Landing in the early afternoon and as we saw a tourist cruise boat depart we thought it would be OK to tie up and enjoy the walkway which had been built into the forest there.

Not so .... About 5 minutes after we had secured the boats and begun our walk we heard the loud horn of another cruise boat asking us to move so it could deposit its paying passengers ashore. It was unfortunate that we no longer had all our passengers together so had to leave the landing and return later in the dingy to collect Sue. It gave the tourists an extra bit of entertainment for the day! We thought it may have been a nice idea for the National parks to provide a smaller jetty for individual vessels like us!!



**Sue being rescued form Heritage Landing**

Continuing on our way, still marveling at the heat Tasmania could turn on; we arrived at Gould's landing at about 5pm. We anchored stern on shore on the lovely little beach opposite and after happy hour on the sand decided to walk the short track behind us to Sir John Falls which is a landing point for the float planes that bring tourists in regularly. We saw quite a few landing and taking off during that evening and the next day. The falls with the surrounding rainforest were beautiful and we tried to capture its peace and tranquility with our cameras but we were not helped by the fading light. The site for the proposed Gordon below Franklin dam was very near to this area. We have a lot to thank the protesters for, allowing us to still enjoy this unspoilt river.

**Thursday 15<sup>th</sup>** - After making sure our boats were secure we packed our dinghies with cameras and snacks, donned life jackets and continued up the river hoping to reach the junction with the Franklin. It was a magnificent trip with tall cliffs on either side of us, beautiful little grottos with all types of ferns and lichen, a sulphur pool, water fall and an occasional sea plane with paying tourists flying low over us.



**Anchorage opposite Gould's Landing**

After three miles we reached some strong rapids and unfortunately our motors were not strong enough to get us over them to reach the Franklin, just around the corner! After morning tea and refueling, we motored back to our anchorage stopping to chat to the loan sailor tied up at Gould's landing. He was from Williamstown and gave us a current forecast from his weather fax indicating there was a strong NW change to 30 knots, forecast for Friday afternoon. We decided to head back to Macquarie Harbour that afternoon allowing us to get back to Strahan on Friday morning before the change.



**Motoring on the beautiful Gordon**

Macquarie Harbour regularly experiences strong winds and rough seas similar to Port Phillip Bay, but unlike Port Phillip has a choice of safe anchorages. Our trip back was a little faster with the current now in our

favour. We spent the night in Kelly Basin, another protected and peaceful anchorage where we shared an enjoyable meal on Soni-a-tu on another warm evening.

**Friday 16<sup>th</sup>** dawned; another very warm day and we left our anchorage early in order to be in front of the change. Our only wind problem for the first couple of hours was that there was none. We managed to make some progress with the help of the spinnaker. The wind finally came in late morning but mostly from the wrong direction so we motor sailed back to Strahan to retrieve in a very hot and windy 37 degrees! (who said Tassie was cool!!) After alternating dips in the cool water with packing up, we enjoyed a meal at the hotel before returning to our boats ready to drive to Hobart the next day to continue our holiday at our next destination - the D'Entrecasteaux Channel.

- Anne & Steve Holligan (Silhouette)

See the next newsletter for the continuing story!