

Cruise Report

Four Winds Marine QCYC Westernport Cruise, 17 to 25 January 2009

Ventura G139 VKV7115

Skipper Jonathan Crockett

Crew Sandra Crockett

Saturday/Sunday 17&18/1/09 Queenscliff to Hastings via Flinders

Ten yachts assembled from various clubs and skippers and some crew attended a comprehensive briefing by Darryl Morrison, Cruise Director in the QCYC Clubhouse from 1800. Most crews rested after the briefing as the scheduled departure time was 01:15 on Sunday. Two of the yachts were from Flinders YC and had sailed to Queenscliff on the Saturday to return in company with us to Flinders.

At 00:45 on Sunday, the Cruise Director called yachts on channel 73 to confirm who was departing and reminded them of safety rules for exiting the heads and radio procedures for the Cruise. Yachts departed between 01:00 and 01:30.

A 1.5 to 3 m swell from the south made for some pitching on passing the heads. All yachts motored as there was no wind and a clear sky. As there was no shipping around most turned east onto a course for Cape Schanck before the advised 2 nm distance south of the heads. Ventura went on to a heading of 118.5 C for a way point 1.2 nm south of Cape Schanck. From there her course was 16.5 C for a waypoint 1.8 nm ESE from West Head to avoid the rocks off Flinders.

The wind was generally under 5 kt from the SE so we motor-sailed under the mizzen sail only at 2200 rpm making around 5 to 5.5 kt through the water and up to 6.5 kt with the tide. A 1 to 1.5 m swell from the south made for some rolling. The wind strengthened from the south just before Cape Schanck but unfortunately dropped and swung to the east on rounding.

Of interest was the pattern of the Cape Schanck light. Whilst from a distance it can be seen as a Mo N (long-short at 22 sec interval), closer to the Cape the light pulses due to its rotation and the Mo N is not easily recognised. I double checked my way point as we approached as I was unsure it was the Cape Schanck light I was looking at.

The eastern sky lightened as we rounded the Cape and we had a fine view of the breakers breaking on the coast as we headed for West Head. There were many cray pot buoys along the route.

We dropped anchor north of Flinders jetty at 07:45. The log read 31.9 nm.

After a rest, we rowed ashore we had a shower in the Flinders YC clubhouse. Then we were served a delicious lunch by the Flinders YC people. Steak, sausages a multitude of salads, strawberries and cream were in more than ample supply, as was a selection of drinks.

We were looking forward to an afternoon swim and inspection of reported leafy sea dragons under Flinders pier but as the Cruise Director thought a strong northerly was likely on Monday, the schedule was altered and the fleet set out for Hastings at about 15:00 instead.

The wind was at around 10 kt from the SE and strengthening. Ventura made good time under mizzen, main and, once in the shipping channel, cruising spinnaker. With the flood tide of up to 3 kt

helping us we did up to 9 kt over the ground and were tied up, with help from the Vice Commodore Michael Bowe, in Hastings Marina by 18:15 having covered a further 13.6 nm.

Unfortunately Ventura's crew had suffered from sea sickness from the heads and although she enjoyed her lunch at Flinders, this was deposited in the channel on the way to Hastings. There followed several days of nausea triggered by this so, for the crew, our stay in Hastings was not at all pleasant. Fortunately the weather was only warm rather than hot.

Sunday night was our first proper sleep since assembling at QCYC on Saturday evening.

Monday 19/1/09 to Wednesday 21/1/09, Hastings Marina

The skipper found the stay in Hastings very relaxing. It was spent having some breakfasts and lunches as well as coffee breaks at the Marina Cafe, a pleasant evening meal with the fleet crews at the Marina Restaurant on Monday, warm showers and walks around the town and to the shops. The Hastings Chandlery was found to be a good source of fasteners and a bronze cleat to match an existing fitting. One afternoon was spent fitting a cleats and the ordered matching cleat arrived by post soon after getting home. Other activities whilst at the marina included deflating Ventura's trusty tender, adjusting shade covers, filling the water bladders and working out where I had gone wrong on leaving Flinders and missing the advised rounding of Buoy No 2.

Wednesday 21/1/09, Hastings to Yaringa Boat Harbour

By Wednesday morning the crew was slowly recovering and taking chicken soup and we made a short re-provisioning trip to the town.

The fleet set out for Yaringa Boat Harbour at 16:15 on Wednesday and were tied up there by 18:15. On the flood tide with about 10 kt from the SE it was a comfortable sail under cruising spinnaker alone. 8.2 nm was recorded on the log. To the south of French Island we could see what appeared to be an oil rig.

The Watson Inlet channel just south of No 3 Starboard mark gave us only 0.1 m below the keel (1.6 m water depth) and indeed, Gangajang was grounded near here for a while.

The fleet's crews gathered at the Yaringa restaurant for a pleasant dinner in the evening and we had some interesting conversation with Alan, Commodore of the Yaringa YC and his partner Elizabeth.

Thursday 22/1/09 to Friday 23/1/09, Yaringa Boat Harbour

A strong northerly came up early in the morning and a hot day promised. Soon there was a smell of smoke from a fire in the Carrum/Seaford area. Despite the hot and unpleasant, dusty weather, many of the crews gathered at lunch time for a barbeque lunch with the Harbour staff.

Thursday afternoon was spent resting, drinking tea, and a short walk before a delicious dried pasta dinner on board followed by apricots and rice cream left over from last year's cruise to Tasmania.

We decided that we had seen enough of Yaringa, this being our second visit by sea, and hoped for a good wind on Friday to take us on the next leg of the cruise to Rhyll.

Friday 23/1/09, Yaringa to Rhyll

I arose at 06:30 to catch the HF weather forecast from Charleville which was for light Nw-W winds all day and SW to SE winds strengthening on Saturday and Sunday.

After a meeting over coffee the fleet agreed to stick to the schedule and head for Rhyll via the Spit Channel down the west coast of French Island. The fleet now of seven yachts (Tiercel, the Cruise Director's crew having left him, remained in Westernport) set out in a close group at 10:30 and drifted across past Eagle Rock to enter the Spit Channel and thence sailed down the channel to anchor up in Chilcott Channel for lunch and a pleasant swim. It was an idyllic gentle sail in about 5 kts of wind from the NW. The route required some care with navigation to avoid sand and mud banks and some rocks and Ventura set several compass courses to pre-determined locations which worked adequately. The sand bank on the west side of Chilcott channel extends well to the SSE from the green mark and we passed over it with only around 0.4 m clearance. Most of the fleet anchored for lunch about 0.6 nm north up Chilcott Channel.

After lunch, at about 14:00, we set out for Rhyll. The wind strengthened to 15 to 20 kts from the SE during the afternoon but we were able to sail most of the way until approaching Rhyll. It was interesting passing close to a large jack-up oil platform and its tender vessel, the Pacific Battler. We noticed a crew member walking around and around the helicopter landing platform several tens of metres above us.

Our arrival in Rhyll was eventful. We decided to anchor in the channel as there were already three yachts moored inside the jetty. We proceeded slowly under motor south of the jetty but, rather than staying to the east, we went too far west where only smaller motor boats were moored. All of a sudden the depth below the keel dropped to zero and then the sounder went blank. We were right on the mud which shelves probably at an angle of close to 30 to 45 degrees on the side of the channel. Reversing did not help initially and we radioed for some help. Salt Shaker kindly picked up our line and unsuccessfully tried to pull Ventura off the mud despite its crew having a bad ankle and at risk of going aground itself. I found in the process I was not good at throwing our heaving line accurately. We do hope their valiant attempts did not make this ankle injury worse.

By a combination of heeling the boat using two 20 L water containers swung out on the boom, a rising tide (fortunately) and running in reverse at full throttle we did get off and found an anchorage where, from several rounds of bearings, we did not seem to be drifting. We were anchored by 17:00. The steering gear had made some strange noises as we reversed through the mud and at one stage swung rapidly fully to port with a clunk. Nevertheless we could still steer when we got off.

After inflating the dingy and switching on our anchor light we headed for the jetty and were treated to a gin and tonic by Peter and Jenny aboard Nantucket which settled our nerves. The log recorded 16.7 nm.

We had a pleasant dinner in a large restaurant on the foreshore and returned for a good night's sleep on board, albeit a bit rolly in the south easterly breeze.

Saturday 24/1/09, Rhyll to Flinders

The wind had strengthened from the SW by morning and a clunk alerted us to the fact we were dragging anchor. The clunk was our Bumpkin hitting the mooring buoy of another boat. Thus our breakfast was interrupted by rapid starting of the engine and several attempts to find a better anchoring location. The 06:40 Charleville HF weather forecast was for 20 to 25 kts from the SW for

Westernport and Port Phillip although there was a strong wind warning out for the adjacent coastal waters. We made a decision to head for Flinders as planned and advised the other boats, Gangajang, Nantucket, Zen Sartori, Salt Shaker, Alegra and Tumbling Dice, of our plan.

This was not a good plan. Those more experienced were right in deciding to stay at Rhyll.

We set out under motor alone at 09:15 and got wet from both spray and rain squalls on our way west past the oil rig and Cowes. By the time we reached McHaffie's and even though the tide was slack to just turning, the tops of the short and steep 3 to possibly 4 m swells were breaking and steering a safe course through these breaking tops required much concentration. By this time we were dressed in full foul weather gear, had the washboards in and were clipped on. The crew was silent and later confirmed that she would be getting a tee shirt with "Terrified Crew" for herself and "Fearless Idiot" for the skipper.

Through the spray we finally saw Channel Buoy 2 ahead, rounded it and headed for Flinders with the sea on our beam. We saw no other boats on the entire trip. By steering into the larger waves we avoided broaching and arrived safely in Flinders at 14:05 with 14.3 nm on the log. After an initial failure to anchor in weed and sand about 50 m NE of the Jetty we anchored on sand 300 m north of the Jetty, dried out our clothing and spent a quiet afternoon. The skipper spent a couple of hours in the Lazarette with tools doing some running repairs to a bend in the yolk on the rudder stock. This was the result of our reversing off the mud at Rhyll.

A spot of fishing, our first attempt with line and bait during the cruise, yielded a flathead which livened up our dried pasta dinner.

Sunday 25/1/09, Flinders to Queenscliff

Despite a roly night we slept well and arose at 04:00 by which time the rolling had subsided. We set off for Queenscliff at 05:15. There was a light offshore drifter much of the way which swung to the south later as we approached the heads and then north easterly when we entered the heads. For much of the way we motor sailed with the main and mizzen but no foresails but were able to sail into the heads under full sail and had earlier sailed for half an hour. There was a 1.5 to 2.5 m south west swell most of the way and it was sunny.

Entry to Port Phillip was interesting as there was a OOCL container ship out at the pilot ground when we arrived at our way point 2 nm south of Lonsdale Lighthouse at 10:40. We called Lonsdale VTS and were advised the OOCL ship would enter at 11:00 and the Spirit would be leaving at 11:48. We initially decided to wait for the OOCL ship to enter but by 11:00, it still hadn't moved and we noticed the pilot launch was just heading out to it. We called Lonsdale VTS again and asked how long they thought it would be before the OOCL ship moved and were advised about 20 minutes. We advised we would therefore cross the channels and enter via the Outer West Channel. We put the motor on to close to full revs and crossed but only cleared the Great Ship Channel a couple of minutes before the OOCL ship crossed our stern heading in.

We got good close up views of the OOCL ship and then the exiting Spirit on our way in under full sail. On idiot in a small motor boat cut across the bow of the Spirit at the last moment and received a non-standard very long single blast.

As it turned out, Tumbling Dice entered before us, we heard this on the radio but had not identified her as she passed us further off shore. We had seen two boats heading off south west to Tasmania for the Wooden Boat Festival and I thought that this must be my aim for 2011.

The other members of the fleet made a very early start on Saturday morning and all were back to Queenscliff by dusk. We saw three of them entering the heads later that evening. We were tied up at QCYC by noon and after clearing out our gear Ventura was back on her mooring by 16:00.

She was leaking more than when she left, possibly as much as 30 L/hr, and mainly from an already suspect seam along the outside of the starboard garboard. Typically, over the past year, leakage rate has been of the order of less than 1 to 5 L/hr although it did increase following the first haul out in the new Travellift at Queenscliff Harbour and the Classic Yacht Regatta in November 2007. Her rudder gear had also sustained damage. Ventura is being lifted out in February for some repairs and hopefully leakage rate will be lower by the time of the March Cruise to Wilson's Promontory. Despite this, she had proved to be a sea-kindly boat in the rough and windy weather from Rhyll to Flinders.

The log read 34.6 nm for the day and the fuel tank was still 5/8 full (consumption of approximately 38 L). The motor had run for 24.9 hrs consuming an average of around 1.5 L/hr of diesel. The log had recorded a total of 118.4 nm for the whole cruise. In total we had sailed or motored for around 29 hours (including weighing and setting anchor and waiting at the Heads) so we had averaged a cruising speed of approximately 4 kt.

It was, for Ventura's skipper, a mostly relaxing and very enjoyable cruise and for Ventura's crew, another interesting experience, at least with one good swim. Our thanks to Darryl Morrison, Cruise Director, and the other skippers and crews for their company, help, advice and conversation.