

Wallis Lakes Cruise

Written by Mark Earl – Farrgo. February 2014

Myself (Mark), Corenne and Odette prepared the boat (Farrgo) on Friday night ready for our first visit to Wallis Lakes. We've had our Farr 6000 for about 6 months now and are now starting to get in a bit of a routine for getting ready to go sailing, so the packing didn't take long and we got to bed early. Our sailing history is as long as we have had the yacht, so we are still new to the whole experience.

In the morning we left Newcastle and headed up the Pacific Highway to Coolongolook. We turned off the highway at the petrol station and soon were on the dirt road which took us to the ramp. When we arrived Hart and Pam (and Marty the dog) were launching Farr & Beyond and Gary and Kathy were busy rigging Coconut Duck. Phil and Kim were kicking back watching all the hustle and bustle on Sail Away which was tied up at the jetty. Dougie was there as well and had come up to help Phil and Kim with a flat tyre. The other yachts were down river waiting for us.

We quickly got Farrgo ready and had her in the water without too much fuss. Farr and Beyond and Gary and Kathy had already headed down river, whilst Phil and Kim were still eating their breakfast.

We decided to head down river as well, and catch up with the other's who had launched earlier that morning or the day before. With our 6hp Mercury chugging along we had our first chance to take in the river scenery. The river was much wider than I expected and was dead still as there wasn't much wind and no traffic. It was a little overcast and the forecast of rain crossed my mind and how we might handle that if it got heavy. I didn't pass these concerns on to Corenne who was still coming to grips with my lack of sailing skills. We've had a couple of incidents on other trips which I can talk about another time. "Bonding moments" I call them. Corenne likes to call them something else.

What I was pleased with was the bimini and rubber tube matting we had setup for the cockpit on the boat made the boat feel a little more cosy. I'm starting to understand these things are important when you are out there all day. These little improvements to the yacht are starting to take over my spare thoughts – surely this is normal.

After about 10 minutes of motoring we caught up with the other's. Tom and his daughter's were there. Bronwyn and Jasmine were busy waving at Odette who waved back with a big smile on her face. Brian and Valery were there too with their new Ross "About time". Nev and Judy in "Wanderer II" were in the middle. Steve in the Trimaran and Hans and Anita in their Gem "Gemanic".

We had a little trouble finding a spot to come into shore at and so when our mast hit the tree branches Hart suggested we just wait in the river, as Phil wasn't going to be long. I agreed that was a good idea.

He was right, and Sail Away arrived a few minutes later with Phil yelling out "Let's go" and so off we went as a group.



We were at the start of the pack and were happy to just motor, but other's had their sails out and it was a great sight looking back seeing half a dozen yachts coming down the river behind us.

It wasn't very deep in the river with depths rarely exceeding 3m. We had our keel up most of the way. The fleet quickly spread out with Sail Away leading the way. There wasn't much traffic on the river and it felt like it was all ours as we passed farms, bushland, oyster farms and crab trap markers. Odette kept busy by counting the crab traps and imagining what might have been caught.

Everyone motored without a hitch except for Hans and Anita who having only taken out the Gem for the second time were discovering the limitations of not having an external fuel tank for their motor. Hans sorted it out and they motored in not far behind us.

The first stop was Coomba Park for lunch and a swim. By this stage we were towards the back of the pack and again had to sort out where to come ashore at. Hart guided us in to the jetty where we tied up without too much fuss. We soon discovered the muddy bottom that Wallis Lakes is well known for and adjusted our wading style such that our feet didn't touch the bottom unless absolutely necessary. The sun was out and the chance of rain looked slim at this stage.

The goal for the day was Pacific Palms at the southern end of Wallis Lake and Phil was worried about getting access to the jetty. He was also concerned that if we got there late we might miss out on the opportunity to order dinner at the restaurant because they were too busy.

So the fleet motored away from Coomba Park and headed south at full steam towards Wallis Lake and Pacific Palms. As the lake opened up we motored into the wind. Nobody put up their sails except Steve I think in the Trimaran.

Steve had already recounted stories

of offshore sailing on his Trimaran so we expected nothing less of him. We were happy to motor and count crab traps.

In between crab traps we marvelled again at the scenery. Wallis Lakes is mostly surrounded by National Parks and so has an untouched look about it, similar to Myall Lakes. On the lake there was a major race on with Catamaran's making the most of the conditions. We motored through the race without upsetting anyone.

Depths in the lake were variable, ranging from about 1m to 5m. We had the keel mostly up and occasionally the rudder hit bottom. The sky had turned overcast and the temperature was a little cool in the middle of the lake, however the rain was holding off.

After 28 more crab traps we arrived at Pacific Palms with the sun out and it feeling a little warmer. The jetty had been vacant, but by the time we had all arrived there wasn't a single spot left, with the Trimaran and the Gem rafting up against other yachts to fit in. We had an unorthodox tie up with the bow tied up to Farr and Beyond and the stern tied to the jetty with our rudder down so as not to interfere with Wanderer II and upset Nev.





So it was lucky for us the jetty had been vacant, but not so fortunate for the couple who had been just about to have their wedding photos taken on the jetty with an uninterrupted backdrop of the lake. Little did they know the idealic shots they had planned would include a fleet of trailer sailers. Could have been worse – it could have been a fleet of Careels. Just joking – I like Careels.

After everyone got settled at the jetty, some of us had a swim and tried not to touch the muddy bottom. Not long after we headed over to the Recreation Club for dinner. There was plenty of room at the restaurant for us. Marty wasn't allowed in however – being a dog and all, so Hart and Pam ate out on the grass, which kept Marty happy. Dougie came for dinner too. A tip for ordering at the Recreation Club. When the restaurant opens at 6pm make sure you are in the line as it quickly gets long. Phil was right to not get there too late.

Tom and I bought tickets in the Seafood raffle and Tom's ticket no. 78 won. Tom picked the platter of Blue Swimmer Crab, which Tom shared back on the jetty. Neville didn't want any, as he was happy with his jelly and custard. Thank's Tom for winning and sharing.

At the jetty there was lots of discussion about boats and politics with a small group camped around Sail Away. Refugees and immigration policy came up which was interesting to listen to. We could have been considered boat people at Pacific Palms – luckily the navy wasn't there to tow us back to Coolongolook,

Phil had the largest box of Malteser's ever seen which went well with the late night drinks and stars. Most of us went to sleep early and some of us even slept through the Wedding music, and the "bar closed" broadcast over the loudspeaker at the Recreation Club. We did have one strange visitor in the night as one of the patron's at the Recreation Club attempted to be picked up by a friend/partner on a tinny. Because trailer sailer's surrounded the jetty there wasn't much room for a tinny to tie up and receive passengers. After nudging our boat a few times and cursing the existence of all the yachts the couple managed to figure out a way to get on. Good thing, I slept through the whole event.



In the morning the sun was up and we weren't far behind. The Pacific Palms markets were on which were really good. Tom's girls Bronwyn and Jasmine had a pony ride. Odette had an ice cream and then complained about not getting a pony ride. Most of us contributed to the local economy and took home a few mementos. We got some fig jam and plants.

By mid morning Steve was getting itchy to get going in his Trimiran. Whilst he was waiting patiently Gary and Phil were getting a tour of Brian and Valerie's new Ross 780 yacht.

Finally we got going and most of us had our sails up. We waited until we got past Booty Island before raising the main and headsails as supposedly the wind was more predictable. We had the wind behind us and it wasn't long before Gary and Kathy were poling out their jib. The racing Catamaran's were out again too. We had a close call with one of the Catamaran's as I had to change course into the wind to fix the rudder which had come up for some reason (probably hit the bottom). After turning we soon realised a Catamaran was heading our way and that someone was going to have to change course so we didn't hit each other. Kathy later said it looked like we had a near miss with one of the Catamaran's and that they were ready to come back and offer assistance. I thought as long as we don't hit each other then it's ok. I think it was ok. Corenne said it wasn't OK, so I think it was OK.

Anyway, we adjusted the rudder and headed back downwind behind everyone else. As we approached the navigation markers most of us took down our sails and motored. The infamous "step" was to be navigated next that Phil had warned us about. As we approached we followed Hart's lead and lifted our rudder and steered with the motor. As it turned out it remained quite deep. It was a great site as we all motored through this section in procession.

We headed towards the lunch resting spot and then discovered a pod of dolphins not far from us. This was the first time we had seen dolphins sailing. Odette recalled there being thousands. None of them jumped over the bow of the boat, it was a great to see them in the lake.

At the lunch stop Phil organised a star formation for tying up the yachts. Some of us anchored off the shore so we could play on the sand. Tom started out on the shore but after Bronwyn had hurt her toe and got her thong stuck in the mud he joined the star. Odette and I swam out to the star where Odette was happy to be the centre of attention. Steve swam out too and was more reserved, enjoying a cup of tea on Garry and Cathy's yacht.

Phil began throwing his Malteser's across to the other yachts. His throwing skills were a little off aim and we had a few in the water which then inspired the usual floating poo jokes. Phil then moved on to Minties and his throwing skills were still a little off with a few landing in the water. Lucky Odette was in the water and happy to retrieve any wayward missiles. No sharks appeared, despite Phil's warnings to Odette.



The final leg home was a motor up river. Nev and Judy had their sail up for a little while before also motoring. The sun was out and there wasn't much wind - an easy trip back. We also spotted some more dolphins right up near the shore and more crab trap counting. In the trees we saw the hawk's nest that Kim had said to keep an eye out for.

As we got closer to the ramp we could see that Sail Away was already out and Gary and Kathy were next. Our car was in the way of a number of other cars so we got ready to retrieve our yacht. All went smoothly with Nev and Judy last. Nev already had the mast down and everything tied away in its spot before retrieving Wanderer II.

We quickly packed up and said our thankyou's and goodbyes.
It was a safe trip home.

Mark, Corenne and Odette
Farrgo