

Brisbane Waters Cruise

2015 Tale of Two Cruises

*Written by John Avery on Windsor Castle
("You take the muddy creek and I'll take the shallow creek ...")*

Jenny and I arrived at Woy Woy ramp a couple of hours late, but, we had made it! Against all the odds, health, work, busy-ness, we were here. And what a lovely spot "here" was. A fabulous ramp, great jetty, free electric BBQs, fish cleaning tables, nice leafy Moreton Bay Fig trees in the tidy park, new amenities, easy trailer parking, not too busy, and everything so clean. Teeming with water-birds; after all, Pelican Island lay just across the narrow Woy Woy channel, and although the park was called "Lion's Park", pelicans ruled here, with one perched on each and every mooring pile and sagging light post.

As arranged with Hart, we called once we were on the water, as the others had headed off to explore the narrow channels to the east. As we were previous Gosford Sailing Club rascals, so knew every Brisbane Water current and wind-shift by heart, we only half-listened to Hart's instructions. The words "Broadwater", "Saratoga", "Kincumber", "channel", etc, we swiftly misinterpreted into a totally different location to that where the other NHTYA cruise attendees were enjoying themselves.

Other attendees? Yes, we were later (much later as it turned out) to join up with Wanderer II, Farr & Beyond, Coconut Duck, Macnifique, and Moonlight. For, whilst they were enjoying the tight little channels, tides and mud-banks around the Cockle Broadwater, via Saratoga (south), and looking at Kincumber from the south-east, Windsor Castle sailed north up Paddy's channel into Brisbane Water, looking for the NHTYA fleet off Kincumber from the west.

Saratoga is also accessible from the north, and there is another Broadwater off Gosford Sailing Club. Now I know why Woy Woy is not just called Woy; because there are two ways of doing things in this part of the world, and hence the subject of this report.





Cruise Leader Hart and Pam Peters on Farr & Beyond

Hart and I worked out at about the same time why Windsor Castle could not find Wanderer II, Farr & Beyond, Coconut Duck, Macnifique, and Moonlight off Kincumber in the Broadwater; because we were sailing in a totally different place!!

But we were still having lots of fun, and we bumped into our old sailing fleet from Gosford SC (so to speak, no damage done), and even saw some Fireballs, just like ours, only newer.

We headed back out of Brisbane Water, tacked like fury down Paddys channel between Pelican Island and Saratoga, and turned left into the Lintern Channel past Davistown. Here it became more difficult to sail, and after running aground twice as the channel narrowed, we finally dropped sails and resorted to the two-stroke 5hp. Some call it the Iron Sail, but ours is more like nails rattling around in a Tin Can (but very reliable). In any case, no damage was done, and we putt-ed around the narrow Lintern Channel, turning to port into the Cockle Channel headed for Empire Bay.

Along the way we saw many fisher folk, both shore-based and in their little tinnies, bringing home the evening meal. We also met up with the "Saratoga" for the first of several sightings, the local catamaran ferry, which is quite wide when passing in the narrow channels. I decided later that a job as the Captain of the Saratoga would do me very nicely, thankyou.

It was about this time that my understanding of green-starboard and red-port markers (when travelling upstream) was severely questioned, as I realised that "upstream" in this part of the world was not easily defined. Some channels just go around and around, so it was nice in some places to have locals to follow, and to have a boat that could, if necessary, cruise in very little water indeed.

We were enjoying ourselves immensely however, and the call from Hart that the NHTYA Fleet was now at anchor in the Woy Woy channel just gave us a new direction. Downwind, and with a following tide, we cruised quietly under the #3 back through the Cockle Channel, then found our way under sail slipping down the narrow channel between St Huberts Island and Riley's Island. How sublime!

St Huberts Island is well populated by a similar breed to Sylvania Waters, those who relish a front door to the street and a rear yard backing directly onto the water, with jetty or boat ramp at the back fence. More about that tomorrow.



Rileys Island is a nature reserve, a quiet and peaceful spot, surrounded by mangroves and muddy shores. Still with a gentle easterly pushing us along, we coasted across the main Paddy's Channel into the westward leading Woy Woy Channel, where we finally met up with Wanderer II, Farr & Beyond, Coconut Duck, Macnifique, and Moonlight, captains and crews already enjoying a happy hour, and the kids chasing crabs and enjoying the sand. We threw out the anchor and backed onto a lovely private beach just west of the boat ramp. In front of us lay the narrow Woy Woy Channel and Pelican Island, behind us the narrow beach, then a park that stretched from the eastern point to the Woy Woy baths and township to the west. A really nice spot.

Now for a roll call:

Wanderer II, Sabre 25, Judy and Neville;

Farr & Beyond, Farr 7500, Pam and Hart;

Coconut Duck, Sonata 7, Cathy and Garry;

Macnifique, McGregor 26M, Leanne and Warren;

Moonlight, Sonata 7, Eleshia and Tom, plus Bronwyn and Jasmin;

Windsor Castle, Castle 650, Jenny and John.



Happy hour was spent with ALL grown-ups present and accounted for crammed into the cockpit of Macnifique (well, the kids had more sense, and delighted in playing on the sand just out of Tom's sight). We will be seeking ratification of a world record for the squeeze attempt on board Leanne and Warren's pride and joy.

With a fine choice of nibblies and drinks to consume, many captains' tales were told (and re-told by crews) of past exploits and adventures.

Before we knew it, dinner time beckoned. Choices included the Bowling Club, the Woy Woy fish & chip shop, or eat on-board. We opted for fish & chips, and we both agreed, the best ever fish & chips.....in the world.

The hoard of ducks that descended on us in the dusk probably thought so too. I heard rumours from the Bowling Club of an evening shared with a bridal party, a buck's party, and a 21st birthday party – I'm told the karaoke was fun!



Later Jenny and I walked along the “Pelican to Point path” towards Koolewong as the sky darkened, but didn’t quite make it to the Spike Milligan Bridge before the showers started. We walked back in the easing sprinkles, which stopped by the time we were back at the anchorage. Bedtime.

Sunday morning dawned, but the energetic paddlers, sweaty joggers and early morning cyclists did it all without Jenny or me providing any contribution at all. We slept in. Maybe the lady with the whip on-board the dragon boat needs to learn more than 1, 2, 3, 4; the paddlers could be thrown into total confusion when “5” was mentioned. Kids played in the nice playground in the park, fish swallowed hooks covered in yummy bait, the waves lapped gently onto the sand; a quiet and gentle Sunday morning for all. Expectant pelicans watched from their white-painted bollards over the calm waters, waiting patiently for breakfast to swim by. And where were those BOM weather experts? Probably locked inside their concrete underground research laboratories, without windows, predicting another gloomy Sunday with clouds, rain, strong winds, tsunami, rouge waves, then add another 40%.... Really, Sunday was lovely, not at all as forecast.



Once we were all well-rested, breakfasted, and at peace with the world, Hart gently suggested that we might like to depart sometime soon, so we prepared, letting go the lines, hauling in the anchors, and putt-ing east out of the Woy Woy Channel across to St Huberts Island, to explore the watery streets, avenues and cul-de-sacs of a different way of living. Not many yachts in sight, mostly trailerable fishing boats, and a few large gin palaces (each about the size of a house). Once we had finished checking out the real estate, we motored north and west around Riley’s Island, then headed north through Paddy’s Channel and into Brisbane Water.

Jenny and I shut down the tin can, and up went the lovely, quiet mainsail, #3 and finally the pink kite. We enjoyed a lovely close reach right across Brisbane Water, and into that other Broadwater, with lunch at Gosford SC the immediate objective. After exploring the options offered at the GSC, lunch was either bring your own, or Monti’s Fish & Chips (also arguably the best ever fish & chip shop....in the world).

Entertainment was provided by a young Kelpie dog, who decided to chase ducks. The ducks went for the safety of the water, and so followed the dog. No-one had told this dog that ducks could swim faster/better than her, so the dog just kept swimming after the ducks, out to the marina, and when the ducks took to the air, well, the dog hadn't heard about that one either. She tried hard to follow, no luck, despite all her efforts. Then other ducks were sighted, and away the dog swam, further out into the Broadwater. Some of us feared the dog would come to an unhappy, watery end, either by meeting up with unseen sea monsters, or just through tiredness. Our fears were unfounded; the dog swam back to land safely, rolled energetically in the sand and shook herself dry, and then ran around the park with great gusto. Finally the dog's owners were able to put a leash on her, and the show was over.



After lunch the plan was to sail back to Woy Woy via Koolewong and the northern Woy Woy channel adjacent to the railway line. I did not see many sails, but Jenny and I again threw up the main, #3 and kite, and enjoyed a lovely close reach back across Brisbane Water. We dropped the kite off Koolewong before entering the Channel, and then the #3, and finally the main as we reverted to the 5hp by Spike Milligan's bridge.

There were dozens of pelicans sitting on the roof of the Woy Woy Fish & Chip shop – I wonder if the roof was designed for the added loads.... Back at the Lion's Park, we joined everyone waiting their turn for the ramp. The tide was going out, and the current through the channel was noticeable, though not a problem at all.

Back on dry land, we caught up with the events. Macnifique had broken her winch strap at the top of the pull, and only stayed on the trailer through smart work by those who noticed her sliding back into the water. Once on level land, Macnifique was encouraged to move forward on her trailer by judicious braking, the result being a winch pillar pushed forward and a small amount of engineering being applied to prepare the trailer to get home safely. Farr & Beyond also was pleased to be back on her trailer, as earlier on Saturday her centreboard cable had let go. Ahhh, the delights of having a yacht you can take home and maintain.



Jenny and I drove back to Windsor without further excitement, hosed off the trailer and boat and put the gear away, keen for another weekend away on Windsor Castle.

The End.