

Summer Cruising 2012

This summer I was able to spend a few days here and there cruising and racing in the River Murray and lakes Alexandrina and Albert, and this is a small photographic essay to share my cruising adventures. I have a Lexcen32 with a shoal draft keel which draws about 900mm, and I usually have either my son Tim or daughter Amelia as crew. The cruising grounds around Goolwa are in excess of 800 sq. km.



This story begins with the Milang to Goolwa 'Freshwater Classic' a 50 km race across Lake Alexandrina and down the River Murray to Goolwa which hasn't been run since 2007. Everyone had been eagerly awaiting this day and hoping for plenty of wind and preferably not on the nose.

On the day before the race we had a terrific sail from Goolwa to Milang in company with various other boats making their way to Milang ready for the race on the Sunday. For part of the way we paced Marguerite as she towed a RIB which was to be used as a water taxi for all the boats moored in the reeds at Milang. (Marguerite went on to win her class in the race on Sunday.)





The next couple of pictures are of race day morning. That's my boat with the dress flags.



The race itself is probably well described elsewhere, but suffice to say that there were nearly 200 boats on the water and it was a day of everything. A slow start with virtually drifting conditions across the lake, with finally dead calm before the sea breeze kicked in. These conditions tested everyone's light air skills with whispered commands and boats silently tacking back and forth and changing places on the long hike across the lake. The only disturbance was the occasional European Carp breaking the surface, oh, and the channel 7 chopper doing a surface level fly-by through the middle of the fleet.

We reached the turning buoy just as the wind dropped out altogether and about 100 metres after the buoy my boat simply turned around and headed back the way it had come! I had no control whatsoever for a while until a breath of wind returned. Once around Point Sturt and off the lake it became a single file procession of colourful spinnakers and white sails until the sea breeze kicked in and then it became a drag race for the last half of the race in fine conditions of over 15 knots.

After the Milang to Goolwa you would expect the boats to be packed away and trailered home or to sit quietly in their marina pens, but my son Tim had the week off so we stayed on the boat and had another few days of sailing (and motoring).

We immediately headed back out onto the lake on the Monday for a cruise to Wellington. We had the lake to ourselves – a real contrast to the 200 boats the day before. It was hot and there wasn't any wind and we weren't able to hoist sail until we were virtually off the lake at Pt. Pomanda. As it was we set the auto pilot somewhere between Rat Island and Pt. Sturt and it motored us in a straight line to within a few hundred metres of Pt. Pomanda. After a few hours of admiring the scenery we were getting a little bored, so Tim climbed the mast and I went to the front of the boat to practice my 'Titanic' poses.

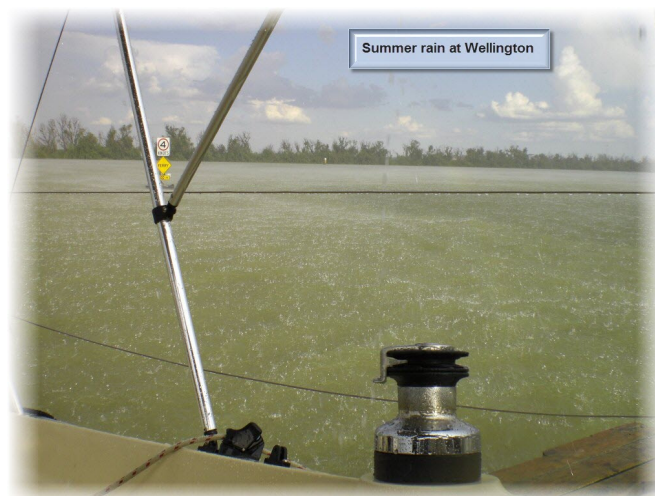


On autopilot straight across Lake Alexandrina



Lake Alexandrina Summer 2012

Once we had the sails up it was a case of dodge the fishing nets and gybing our way up to Wellington. At Wellington we dropped sail and motored into the jetty under the pub for a well earned drink where Tim had no sooner stepped off the boat with the mooring lines than all hell broke loose and he moored us in 25 knots and a torrential downpour. This microburst lasted about 20 minutes, and we know it was a microburst as Tailern Bend up the river a bit didn't have a drop of rain.



Summer rain at Wellington

And here is the boat from the Wellington pub 20 minutes later.



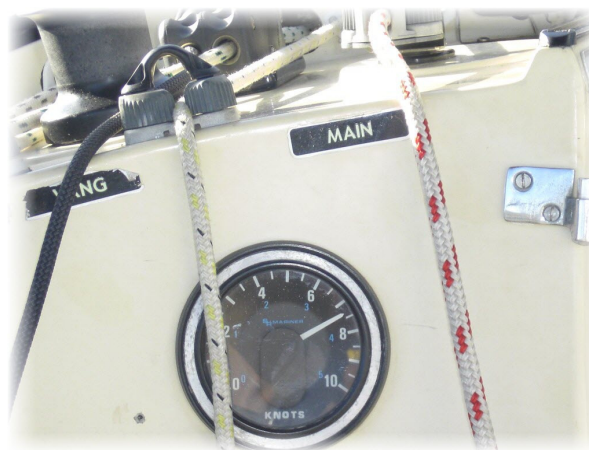
The next morning was another still, fine day, so we didn't even bother with the sails but motored again. Firstly we motored up stream and into the Wellington Marina to check out the anchorage there and to see if the jetty and little shop are as abandoned and deserted as the last time we visited (and yes they certainly looked that way). Then we continued down stream and back onto the lake. Here is a picture of Point Pomanda as we re-entered Lake Alexandrina.



Tim then decided to attempt self rescue with a streamed warp off the back of the boat, and discovered that unless the warp was knotted every metre he couldn't pull himself back to the boat in much over about two knots.



We hadn't really decided where to go, but eventually decided that as we hadn't been to Meningie in the boat that we would attempt the Narrows at Narrung and cross Lake Albert. So we motored to Narrung then followed the channel markers along the winding channel for a couple of kilometres through the Narrows until we entered Lake Albert. At the last red channel marker we finally had a south-easterly breeze and hoisted sails only to find bottom as we manoeuvred too close to the seaward side of the channel. This area is marked as shallow and we can now tell you it is only about three feet deep and we advise all boats to stay close to the red marker! By now we had about 20 knots of wind and decided that we would cross this lake under a single reef. To say we had a fantastic sail with long tacks would be an understatement, but as the wind hit 30 knots we realised that we were not going to be able to spend the night at Meningie as it is totally unprotected. So we did a fly-by and then surfed downwind back across the lake hitting 7 knots on the little waves (not bad for a 5 tonne cruising boat with a crew of 2)!



We spent the night in complete safety tied up to the jetty at Narrung and then sailed back to Clayton the following day with another long tack free sail. The next morning was Australia Day and the Clayton Bay Boat Club put on a community breakfast which we attended and then also had a BBQ lunch with various family members and friends who drove down to Clayton for the day. After lunch with some juggling of drivers all the cars were driven to Goolwa and all the rest had a nice sail back to Goolwa.

Our next few days out occurred a couple of weeks later and coincided with the 'Clayton Regatta' race day. This event encompassed a race to Clayton, a BBQ lunch at the CBBC and another race back to Goolwa. Well we finished last and last, but we were out in good winds with a bunch of other boats which is always a lot of fun. Then on the Sunday we sailed off from Goolwa about lunchtime (there was a club BBQ the night before, so no rush to set sail...) Again no particular destination in mind, so about the time we passed Rat Island we decided that we would turn right when we got near the lake instead of the usual left, and see if we

could get down to the hand operated lock on the East side of Hindmarsh Island. We had another nice sail tacking down this large bit of water in about 6 to 8 feet and with a bit over 20 knots of wind.

As we approached the barrage and the hand operated lock we dropped the sails and motored on slowly with Tim sounding the way with the boat hook as it is very shallow in this area. We were making way in about 4 feet of water and at the lock we turned tail for a bolt hole as it was now late afternoon and there was still plenty of wind, but without realising it we motored off parallel to Hindmarsh Island when we had approached it diagonally and within a few hundred metres we ran hard aground. We tried all the usual things, genoa back out and winched in tight, motor at full revs, both of us leaning downwind, but we weren't going anywhere! So I sent Tim over the side to see where the water got deeper and here is a picture of both of us wondering where we would be spending the night.



After a while it was up to his waist, so that would be deep enough and I called him back and gave him the sand anchor and he trailed out 100m of rope and then came back to help winch the boat to deeper water.

About now we had the brainwave of perhaps trying 2 sails up and with Tim winching and both sails pinned in drum tight we had the boat leaned well over and we were able to winch it around towards the anchor and lo and behold we sailed (bump, bump, bump) off the sand and into deeper water.

We thought we would use Deep creek as our bolt hole but couldn't see the entrance with the late afternoon sun reflecting off the water so we sailed back to Clayton and nestled into Snug cove for the night. Now Tim is a chef and we had a nice bottle of red, and a 2 burner metho stove, so a little while later it was salmon and vegies with rice and a sauce of who knows what conjured out of whatever was in the bilges! You could not have asked for a nicer way to finish an exciting day, and when we woke up in the morning this is the view that greeted us.



For all of you who are not local to these waters, there are comprehensive cruising notes on the Goolwa Regatta Yacht Club website, at www.gryc.com.au/cruising/cruising-destinations which will enable any boatie to enjoy these waters.

Simon Barrow February 2012.