

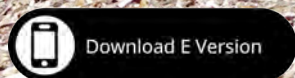


Sailing Australia, New Caledonia, Vanuatu & Fiji

FORMALITIES, CRUISING INFO & MORE!

Feature Articles Include:

- An Australian Circumnavigation with s.v Begonia
- Cruising Queensland with s.v Maia
- Cruising New South Wales with s.v Shima
- Beyond The Barrier
- The Wonderful Whitsundays



GO WEST



Cover Image:
Lucky Bay
Western Australia
Kyle & Maryanne Webb
s.v Begonia



A Circumnavigation of the “Great Southern Land”

Kyle Webb

Begonia anchored off Magnetic Island QLD

Kyle and Maryanne have been living aboard sailboats since 2002. They have lived aboard Begonia (their fourth boat together) since 2012. Together they have sailed over 84,000nm, visiting 39 different countries.

In October 2019 Kyle & Maryanne arrived in Australia intending to stay for the cyclone season before continuing west, but like so many sailors in 2020, their plans inevitably changed resulting in them making an unplanned circumnavigation of Australia.

Kyle & Maryanne record their adventures through their blog:
<https://sv-footprint.blogspot.com>



“As I sit here writing this along with my wife and sailing partner Maryanne, Begonia swings at anchor off Stanley in Tasmania under the looming cliffs of ‘The Nut’, the volcanic plug that dominates the area. The day before, we had finally crossed the line set down by us over a year earlier.

We have now officially circumnavigated Australia!”

This was not our original plan. Like most westbound Pacific cruisers, our choices for exiting the tropical cyclone region amounted to a tossup between heading north to Southeast Asia or south to Australia. There are good arguments for both and picking one would likely mean having to miss out on the other.

The thought of seeing the famous Sydney fireworks from our own boat for New Year’s Eve 2020 was certainly helping us lean towards visiting Australia; we knew it would be something special.

Many cruisers, including us, were greatly concerned about the hassle and expense of the bureaucracy of entering Australia versus taking the northern route. Of particular concern to us was that Biosecurity charges were by the hour

for however long the process takes, with no clear guidance on how much to budget.

We don’t consider ourselves to be “rally people”, but when we learned that the entry cost for the Go West Rally included the biosecurity costs, our decision was made. It seemed the price of the rally would be only a little more than the minimum we could expect to spend on those uncertain Biosecurity fees. It was a big comfort to us to be able to plan the cost of arriving in Australia ahead of time. Also, since it benefits the whole rally to have a smooth clearing-in process, the organisers were pretty good about getting out all of the information we needed for a painless entry.

Add to that the marine industry discounts, possible prizes and the big welcome party, and the deal was really too good to pass up.





After our pain-free arrival and clearing-in at Bundaberg, there was a week of Go West events and parties available to us.

The first time we were able to step ashore and take a riverfront walk we spotted kangaroo and knew we'd made the right decision, there is no place like it!

We had a warm welcome to Australia in so many ways

Eventually, ready to break away from the group we began making the long journey south towards Sydney, via Brisbane and a host of other stopovers.

We arrived in Sydney just before the Christmas holidays began, which gave us time to catch up with the other cruisers who had also made the trip, explore the city and watch the Boxing Day spectacle of the start of the 2019 Sydney to Hobart race.

We even had dinner at the Opera House before partaking in a show!





The fireworks show was truly amazing to see, filling the whole sky with bright color.

Actually there are two great displays, one at around 9pm and another at midnight. Both were spectacular but I don't think we will be volunteering to do that again soon, certainly not if the forecast is for shifting winds.

New Year's Eve indeed turned out to be very memorable.

Boats were packed cheek to jowl within the approved anchorages well in advance. Just after sunset, a strong front blew through, reversing the wind direction and sending the more casually anchored boats skittering. The wind change had been forecast so we were expecting it and knew to keep a good watch on all the other boats out there.

In Farm Cove, where we were anchored, fully two-thirds of the boats in attendance dragged. The rest were busy fending to protect themselves

from the approaching fleet. Begonia held for a while, but then one of the dragging boats tripped our anchor, adding us to the melee. We were suddenly forced to pull up our anchor without hitting anyone and then maneuver through the crowd to find a suitable place to drop it, whilst a host of other boaters were trying to do the same thing.

In the chaos, the powerboat nearest to us had an engine catch fire while trying to power out of danger. They were saved by a boat that caught them and then came aboard discharging a big fire extinguisher. Another poor sailboat had their entire jib come unfurled, sending them careening through the anchorage at full speed with the sail blocking the view forward. I don't know how they did it, but they managed to make it through dozens of boats and out of the anchorage zone without hitting anything!



Several Australian cruising friends suggested we go to Tasmania, saying all sorts of wonderful things about the place. We thought about it for a while and then thought, “*Why not?*”



Our initial plan from Sydney was to continue down the New South Wales (NSW) coast as far as we could in the summer weather before returning to the tropics once cyclone season had ended.

In 2020 most of that NSW coast was being badly affected by bushfires and some of the harbors even closed at times. Several Australian cruising friends suggested we go to Tasmania, saying all sorts of wonderful things about the place. We considered it for a while and then thought, “Why not?”.

It seemed to me that if we were going to sail all of the way to Tasmania we might as well sail all of the way around Tasmania. We Had a new plan!

We said goodbye to Sydney and then headed through the Bass Strait to our first stop at Bathurst

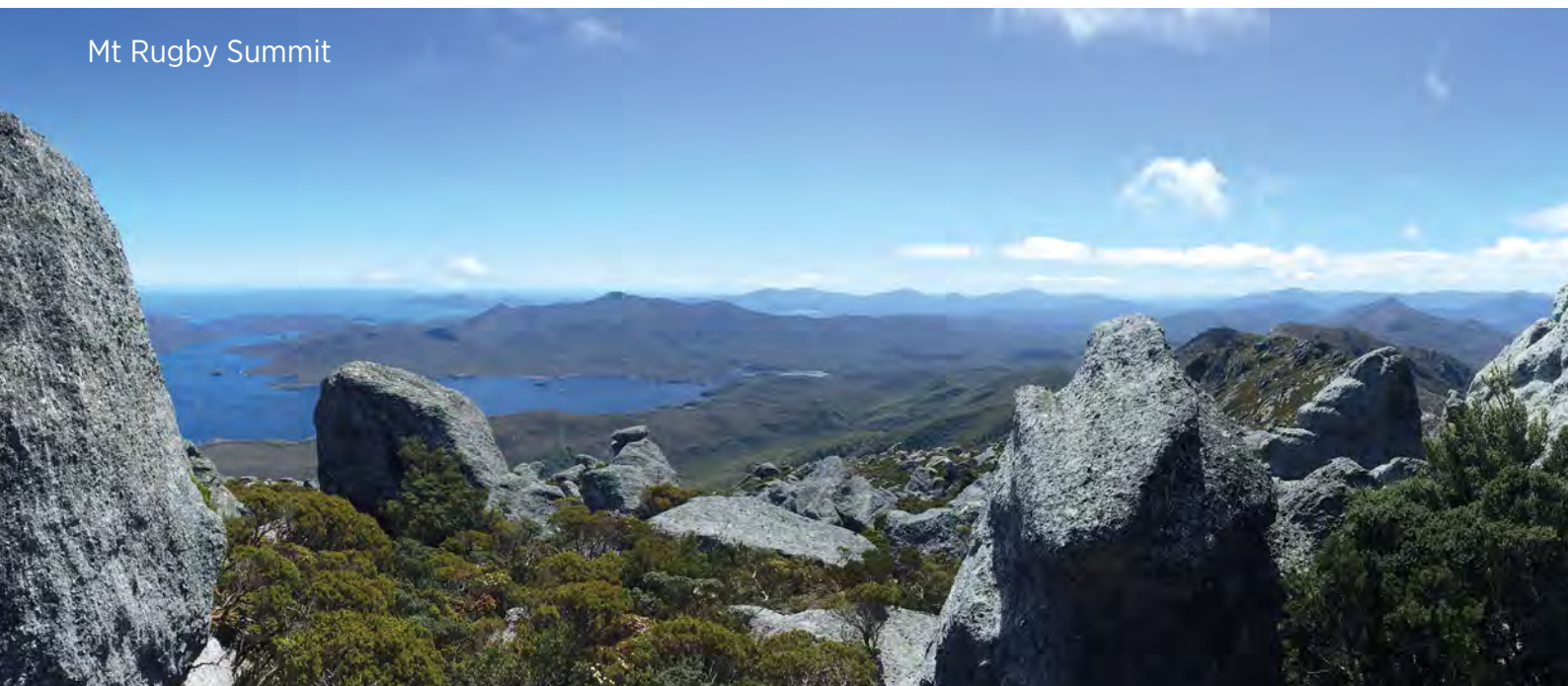
Harbor in the state’s remote southwest (a trip of 7 days, 813nm).

We spent over a week safely in the protection of the surrounding mountains as Southern Ocean storms battered the exposed coast.

One of the many highlights was the climb up the overgrown path to the summit of Mt. Rugby, where our efforts were rewarded with a clear view of the whole southern half of Tasmania.

The ripping winds of the Roaring Forties made short work of our eastbound sail around the bottom of Tasmania to Recherche Bay, where we spent another week slowly making our way to Hobart.

Mt Rugby Summit





***“Hobart is such a beautiful city.
We have yet to meet anyone
who has been there who didn’t
love it, ourselves included.”***

**Begonia was just narrow
enough to make it
through the drawbridge to
Constitution Dock, right in
the centre of everything.
We toured Parliament,
visited museums, including
the eclectic collection at
MONA, went to tastings
of Tasmanian wines and
whiskey and spent hours
wandering the streets,
markets, and live-music
scenes, enjoying the
ambiance.**



Hobart-Victoria Dock-



Historic Port Arthur



Henry Jones Hotel



Cape Pillar



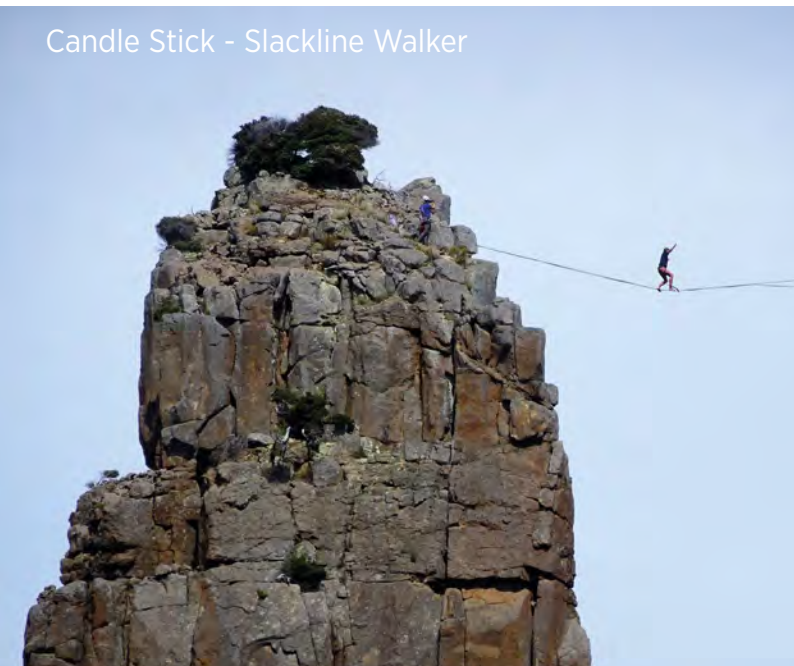
Cape Huay

Moving up the dramatic southeast coast of Tassie, at Cape Huay, we happened upon a slackline walker suspended over the gap between the viewpoint at the end of the trail and the nearby Candlestick sea-stick.

He saw Begonia hovering around below and mugged for our telephotos, including an 180° jump and a faux stumble followed by a big wave to show he was just joking



Candle Stick Seastack



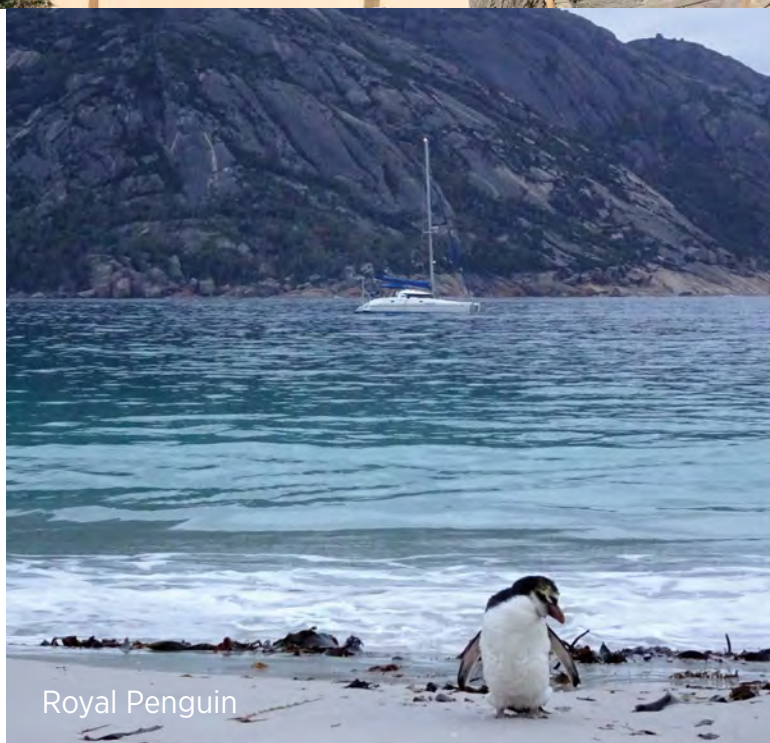
Candle Stick - Slackline Walker



Hazards Beach

At Wineglass Bay, we spent a few days anchored at the quiet end of the beach under the watchful eye of a moulting late-bloomer Royal Penguin.

He stood looking longingly seaward while he waited for the last of his down to be replaced with sea feathers with which he could swim and hunt.



Royal Penguin



Wineglass Bay

Bush fires and contrary coastal winds had us favouring the far offshore route back north along the east coast of the mainland.

We figured that since we were almost there anyway, we should go check out Lord Howe Island via the impossibly high spire of Ball's Pyramid.



Lord Howe Island NSW

“Lord Howe is amazing!”

“Over 300nm offshore, with just 350 residents, it’s a UNESCO World Heritage site and visitors are strictly limited to protect the environment and wildlife, and to ensure tourism is sustainable”.

Lord Howe has a very welcoming feel and is teeming with tame wildlife. On our first shore excursion, a White Tern flew right up to me and landed on my hat and then started chattering away at me like I could understand Tern.

Everywhere we looked, the island is breathtaking and we made a point of hiking every trail that didn’t require a guide.



“With our first cellular service in weeks, we learned that the Covid-19 outbreak, which had been a footnote about a few isolated cases when we left Tasmania, had been upgraded to front-page news about a global pandemic. By our second day at anchor, all of Australia’s state borders were closed and many other restrictions were being implemented.”

We returned to the east coast of the mainland at the Wide Bay Bar (Queensland). Our plan was to haul out Begonia at Bundaberg Port Marina for a few weeks while we flew off to make long-overdue visits with family and friends.

The weather was not good for crossing the bar when we arrived and was looking set to stay that way for a few days, so we diverted to Rainbow Beach to wait it out at anchor. Once conditions allowed us to finally cross the bar, we were able to stop to hand-feed the dolphins at Tin-Can Bay (something Maryanne had been especially wanting to do).

Over the next few days, it became clear that leaving the country pretty much guaranteed that we would not be able to get back to our boat anytime soon. We decided to cancel our air travel plans and hunker down in Queensland. We still needed to be lifted out to refresh our antifouling paint. We were concerned the yard would go into lockdown while we were out of the water and we might be separated from the boat. With the help of the staff at the yard at Port Bundaberg, we raced through about two weeks worth of work in only five days, before being splashed back into the water.

Our next problem was provisioning. Leading up to our haul-out, with the expectation we’d be leaving the boat unattended for weeks while we flew back to the USA and UK, we had been eating down all of our stores to nothing.

With the Health Minister making statements telling all foreigners to return to their home countries as soon as possible, we needed to stock up for what could possibly be a multi-week sail on short notice, maybe even as far as California.

That was of course right when all of the grocery stores were limiting each customer to one package of pasta and two cans of vegetables, etc. It is very hard to provision for a potential ocean passage and not look like hoarders. We ended up with plenty of time to stock up as all of the mail we had sent express delivery pre-pandemic took well over a month to arrive.



Hand feeding the wild dolphins at Barnacle Dolphin Centre - Tin Can Bay QLD



Sailing north in the protection of the Great Sandy Strait



Boat jobs at Bundaberg



Burnett River Sunset - Bundaberg Town Reach Anchorage



Snorkeling Fitzroy Reef
The Bunker Group
Southern Great Barrier Reef



Exploring the Sandflats
Pancake Creek



Lady Musgrave Island
Southern Great Barrier Reef



Begonia on Anchor
Fitzroy Island Lagoon
The Bunker Group
Southern Great Barrier Reef

“Changing our plans to fly out of Australia also left us with an unexpected visa issue and a lot of uncertainty regarding our status and the likelihood of getting a new visa granted.”

Thankfully, John Hembrow (organiser of the Go West Rally) spent months of effort acting as an advocate for all the international boating community.

John helped in so many ways including getting reassurances and clear directions from the officialdom that were already so busy with the new chaos Covid-19 had wrought on so many. Thankfully, no boaters were forcefully ejected from Australia (unlike the visiting boaters of some pacific countries).

When we did finally get moving, Queensland was now allowing travel within the state, with the exception of its remote communities. We were keeping a close eye on the international travel

situation. It still didn't look good, but we decided to continue northbound in the event things started opening up.

“We were so exceptionally lucky to be “stuck” in the giant state of Queensland, and with the tropical Great Barrier Reef as our isolation playground. “

How privileged we were to have so many magical cruising highlights while much of the world (even within Australia in some places) was in full lock-down.

The amazing sand-flats of Pancake Creek, meeting wild koalas on Magnetic Island, snorkeling all day long as the lone visitors to reefs that would normally see a constant stream of tour boats disgorging masses of snorkelers every daylight hour, etc. Naturally some attractions were closed, but we were never short of things to do and places to explore.



The Summit Forts Circuit Trail Hike-
Magnetic Island
Townsville North QLD

“One special experience was at Bushy Islet”

Whilst we were hiking around the island, peering into tide pools and looking at croc tracks, a juvenile osprey landed on Begonia. The winds had been strong over the past few days and, unable to fight his way against them back to the nest, he had taken refuge on our boat. When we returned to the boat and Maryanne jumped at something thrashing about in the cockpit, I was concerned that a crocodile had made its way aboard (thankfully not).

At Cairns, we applied for and received a permit to transit through the remote communities between there and Thursday Island.

The permit seemed like it was worded more for cars taking no more than a day or two, so Maryanne sent off a letter to the appropriate shire council explaining our situation.

They wrote back saying we could take as long as we wanted on the proviso that we didn't go ashore anywhere inhabited. They even signed off by telling us to have fun. Well, okay then.

Whilst in Cairns we rented a car to explore inland a little and were thrilled to spot a wild Cassowary bird in the remote and spectacular rainforests of Daintree and Cape Tribulation.

It was looking less and less like the Northern Territory (NT) was going to open its border soon so we took our time sailing up the QLD coast. We hopped from island to island and from reef to reef and in six weeks saw no other cruising boats.



Up close with our rescued Osprey



Cassowary Bird



Tablelands, Milfa Milfa Falls

Forbes Island Far North Queensland



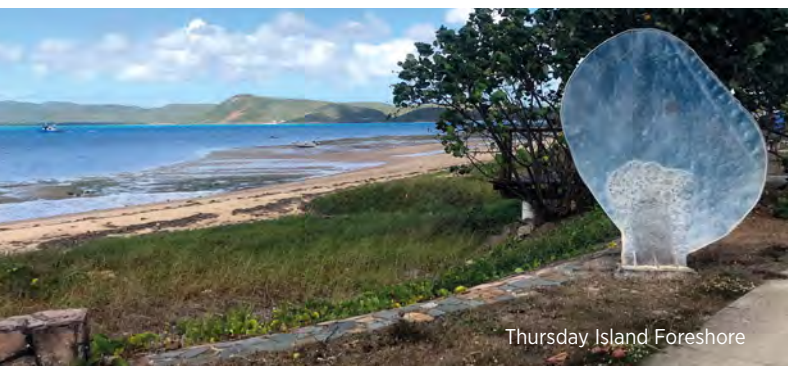
By the time we reached Thursday Island, it was apparent that our options for crossing the Indian Ocean were still not good and would probably stay that way for a while. Our choices became either turning back upwind and heading the way we came, or continuing on and see what happens. It was at this point that the idea of circumnavigating Australia started to take shape.

We applied for and were given a permit to enter the Northern Territory (NT). When we arrived in Gove we learned we were the first visiting yacht they had seen in months. We did some provisioning and then headed out to the remote Wessel Islands. Once again, Begonia was the only boat around as we made our way up the leeward side of the chain. Both islands, Guluwuru and Marchinbar, are essentially miles-long galleries of wind-sculpted rock art interspersed with pristine pink or white sand beaches and rock wallabies hopping around the stunning landscapes. On these aboriginal islands, special permission is required to go ashore beyond the high water mark but we could still enjoy the scenery from the beach (they have 3m tides).

Each time we went ashore, we would walk for miles in either direction, unable to resist the urge to keep going, just to the next corner, then the next and then the next, until we knew we were running out of daylight.

From Two Island Bay on Marchinbar, we sailed via Croker Island and the Cobourg Peninsula and then on towards Darwin where we picked up a hitchhiking bat. There was a bit of confusion with the authorities on our arrival there as again we were the first international yacht they had seen in weeks. They had assumed we had sailed in from Indonesia. It took some convincing and a few phone calls to Gove to convince them that we had already been in the Northern Territory for a month and were not just sneaking across into Australia from another country.

In Darwin we decided to rent a camper van to explore inland a little; aside from the anticipated amazing scenery, giant termite mounds, and relaxing pools of the various national parks, we were also entertained by Guinness Record holding whip cracker (Nathan "Whippy" Griggs) – How Australian does it get?





Darwin Sailing Club



Darwin-East Point Reserve

Our next big hurdle was trying to get into Western Australia (WA). Their border was still firmly closed, even for transits. Cyclone season was approaching and our insurance company wanted us to be south of at least Shark Bay by December first. Also, the longer we waited, the more chance there was that the coastal tailwinds would shift to headwinds.

We waited as long as we could for a change to the travel restrictions, but eventually decided that our best option was a non-stop sail all of the way around the state to Ceduna, in South Australia (SA). The passage would take a little over a month.

Contrary winds were strengthening along the coast, so we decided to go far enough offshore to be clear of the coastal band. We experienced beautiful, but slow sailing in light winds as we headed west away from the continent. Once we made it about four hundred miles out we could slowly start shaping a course to the south once a frontal system passed. We had three rough days and the wind started slowly backing from the southwest to southeast.

“On day sixteen, I had just taken another reef out of the jib and was sitting down to look at the day’s weather downloads when there was a loud bang and the boat started shaking. Our forestay had broken!”

Luckily, the mast was prevented from coming down by the luff of the jib. We doused all of our sail and secured everything the best we could, but we could no longer use the rig to sail. Begonia has a relatively small fuel tank. With what we had as well as a couple of full jerry cans, we were going to be right at the limit of our range to make it the 500nm to the nearest harbour. That was only

if we managed the situation very carefully. We decided to divert to the nearest port, Exmouth, WA. We would need to motor on one engine directly into headwinds and big seas for six days to cover the distance. During that time, we notified the various authorities of our situation and were given permission to enter WA on the conditions that we quarantine when we get there and that we only stay long enough to complete the repairs. Australia’s Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC) were especially helpful and contacted us daily to check in on us, they even diverted a cargo vessel to deliver us some extra fuel just-in-case!

Everyone who met us at the dock, from the other side of the caution tape, was courteous and understanding. They all said their main concern since hearing that we were on the way was for our safety.

Since we were planning to be at sea for the next two weeks anyway, being stuck in quarantine on the boat eating down our own stores was no hardship at all. At least we had a phone signal, which allowed us to start coordinating the necessary repairs.

“As there was no rigging services available in Exmouth, our insurance company sent a rigger up from Perth (a 1,300km road-trip, each way) to collect our mast, make the necessary repairs, and then return it all to Exmouth when he was finished”.

Eventually our quarantine was up, our Covid tests negative, and we were allowed to explore this old USA military outpost.

Exmouth was the first place we visited where we found Emus walking down the streets, it seemed so surreal.



Meeting the locals' Urban Emus
Exmouth, Western Australia



Cape Range National Park -
Exmouth Western Australia



Georgie Bay-Rottnest Island
Western Australia

We finally got the mast installed again four days after our December 1st insurance/cyclone season deadline, with only a few minor items left to install in Perth that were delayed in shipping.

The winds had been roaring against us up the coast in the high twenties, but we found a week-long window when they were only around ten knots.

We would still have to beat our way to Perth, but not through anything too uncomfortable. Just before we left Exmouth, Western Australia lifted some of their restrictions. We were now being told that since we were already in, we could stay as in the state long as we liked.

We spent ten days in Fremantle (the port town of Perth), but we were so busy (both getting the final repairs done, and as tourists) that our time seemed to be over almost as soon as we got there.

On Christmas day we headed to the beautiful Rottnest Island famed for its friendly Quokkas.

We were back anchored off the mainland at Busselton for the New Year's Eve fireworks (a little more sedate than our previous NYE in Sydney). The anchorage had more than enough room for those of us enjoying the fireworks aboard. No one dragged and there were no amateurs in rental boats bouncing off of one another.



Fremantle Yacht Club
Perth Western Australia



Bell Tower
City of Perth Western Australia



Quokka
Rottnest Island

Sugarloaf Rock



Canal Rocks

Before departing Western Australia, we decided to rent a car for a couple of days for a very scenic road trip to the Margaret River region where we sampled some of the wineries and explored the spectacular limestone caves.



Lake Cave



Ngilgi Cave

Many years earlier, Maryanne and I had flown in for a road-trip around Western Australia. We had made a point of stopping at Cape Leeuwin because we thought we would never get to see it from our own boat. Well, here we were now, looking at that iconic lighthouse from the other side as we left the Indian Ocean behind and entered the Southern Ocean.



Cape Leeuwin

Image Credit: justalittlefurther.com

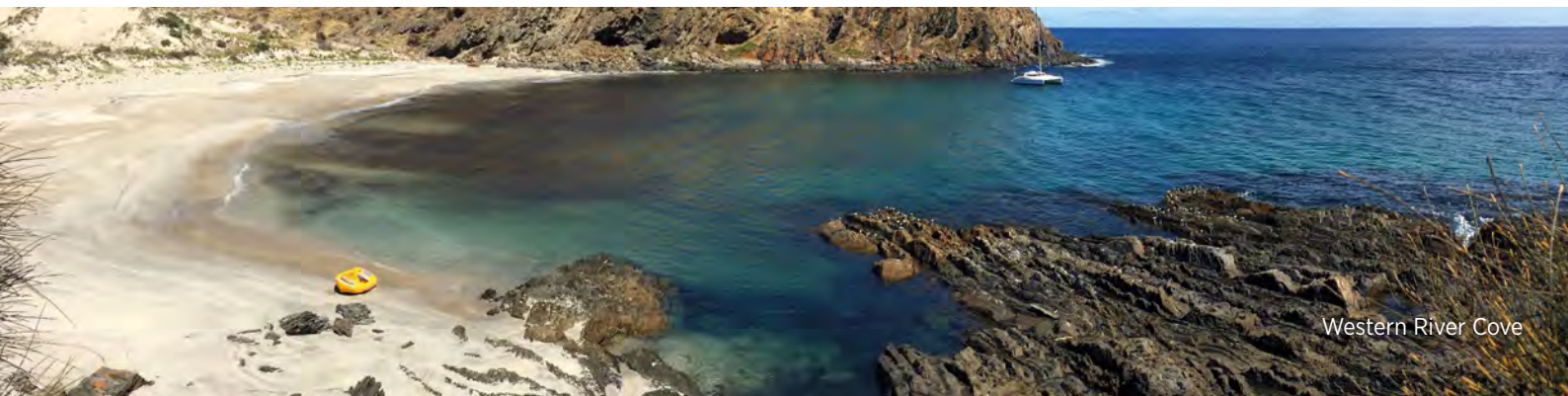


Lucky Bay - Western Australia

Our landfall was made on the South Coast at Lucky Bay, so named by Matthew Flinders after finding safe harbor there just minutes before sunset and otherwise surrounded by shipwrecking rocks and islets.

“Lucky Bay is a spectacular place with lots of hiking trails, amazing rock formations, squeaky sand and even beach kangaroos”.

We explored the coast for a while and then hitched a ride on the next weather window across the Great Australian Bight. A Covid-19 outbreak in Perth caused South Australia (SA) to close its border to arrivals from WA. By then, we were already safely anchored at Kangaroo Island (KI). We had made it in just two days earlier. We stopped at a few spots on the island and were even given a tour by a local. Friendly locals have been a regular occurrence on our travels around Australia and we are so grateful to the many welcomes and kindnesses we’ve experienced. From KI we crossed the Investigator Strait and sailed up the Gulf of St. Lawrence to Adelaide.



Western River Cove



Arid Bay



Shoal Bay Winery



Lucky Bay



Victory Bay



Our stay in Adelaide again seemed to go by in a flash. We caught up on the usual boat chores: provisioning, laundry and minor repairs. We did another two-day car rental to tour the adjacent wine country. We also somehow managed to find time to amble through the city center and to squeeze in dinners with new friends.

When a good weather window arrived for going eastbound, we weren't ready to pull ourselves away. We rarely are. There is always so much more to see everywhere we go. Still, the urge to see what's over the horizon is also strong, especially when there are tailwinds involved, so we bid our friends goodbye and set sail.

We had really wanted to stop in Victoria, but they were still having the occasional Covid outbreak along with lock-downs at short notice. We didn't want to find ourselves stuck in a marina unable to leave the boat. Tasmania would possibly make us quarantine for two weeks if we stopped in Victoria, so we abandoned any Victoria plans and went direct to Stanley on the North coast of Tasmania to check in. It really was a glorious sail, with the last two days being in following seas flying the spinnaker. Only when we made the last turn around the north side of Three Hummock Island did things get like you would expect in the Bass Strait; freezing headwinds that were double the forecast. That was my watch.

When I awoke ready for my next, Maryanne told me that, at 0822 local-time, we crossed our track from our earlier sail between Sydney and Bathurst. We have now officially circumnavigated Australia.

The trip took 402 days and covered 9,745 nautical miles. Since then, we have stopped in over 70 different places (with just a handful mentioned here).

Despite all the places we have managed to visit, there are so many more that we have sailed by (weather, Covid-19 closures, cyclone season, etc. all dictate our anchorages). We hope to fill some of those gaps during our remaining time in Australia, but know for sure we could spend a lifetime here and still not do all we'd want to do.

So what now? Well, now we want to explore the north coast of Tasmania, which we had missed before as well as those parts of Australia's East Coast that we also failed to see. We haven't quite given up on Victoria either and are hopeful we can visit after leaving Tasmania. Perhaps at the end of our second year in Australia, we will finally set off to countries west.

For now, we couldn't be happier than to have spent Covid-19's worst year in the best place to have done so.

