

“Hawk” – 47’ Van De Stadt Samoa – 7’ draft  
Oct. 31, 03  
Subject/Area: South Australia and Drogue usage  
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After spending the winter in Fremantle we got underway again heading south on Sept. 24<sup>th</sup> toward Tasmania. This entailed three quite different legs: (1) a coastal cruise down around Cape Leeuwin to Albany, (2) a 1400 miles passage across the Australian bight, and (3) a coastal cruise around the S end of Tasmania.

The prevailing fair weather winds along the West coast of Australia are SW so the trick to getting south is to leave port just as the NE winds start ahead of a frontal system, sail as far as possible while the winds shift to the NW and make port before the front passes and the SW winds start blasting. Our first stop South of Fremantle was Bunbury. We anchored off the sandy beach in front of the Yacht club just to the east of the mooring field (33°19'S 115°38'E). This is very comfortable in all except strong N winds. In those conditions you can pick up one of the empty moorings in the small harbor to the west of the anchorage between the two breakwalls. The moorings near the entrance of this inner harbor are sized for fishing trawlers. We had friends who safely wintered on a mooring here. From the anchorage you can take your dinghy up a small channel just to the west of the yacht club directly into town. There is a small public dinghy dock to the west just after passing under the second bridge as you enter the inner lagoon. There is a Coles supermarket to the left of the dock and internet, restaurants, and a multi-screen movie house two blocks straight across the street. Bunbury is known for its Dolphin Discovery Center where tourists can swim with the dolphins several mornings a week during the summer months.

From Bunbury, most of the locals would anchor off the beach at Quindalup (33°38'S 115°08'E), a summer holiday town much like Cape Cod. We sailed across to Bunker Bay (33°32'S 115°02'E), a more isolated anchorage. Both of these are well protected in W to S to SE but not in northerly winds.

If you encounter unexpectedly strong headwinds as you approach Cape Leeuwin, you can tuck into Hamelin Bay (34°12'S 115°01'E) just north of the Cape. This is well protected from SW and SE winds. You can anchor or pick up one of the fisherman's moorings. Cray season starts in November and the area will be covered with fishermen and cray pots during the season.

From the Cape to Albany there are basically no good anchorages for strong southerly winds. Albany is a pleasant little town and the place to wait for weather to cross the bight. There is a good Laundromat just across the railway tracks from the town pier. You can get a fuel truck to come out to the town pier if you need more fuel than you can jug from the gas station in town. The only problem with Albany is where to park the boat. There is a yacht club across the bay from town, but it is a 7km walk into town from there and 6 feet is about the maximum draft they can take. The anchorage just off the town jetty is quite convenient, and safe in Northerly winds, but uncomfortable with a long fetch in SW to SE winds. The holding throughout the bay is the worst we have ever encountered, with about two feet of soft mush over either flat rock or impenetrable sand. We and the two other cruising boats there with us all had big anchors (65lb-

110lbs, Bruce, CQR and fishermen) and none of us could get them to stick when the wind rose above 30kts. We finally found a solution, shackling our 40-pound Danforth on 6-feet of chain in front of our 110lb Bruce, but I am not sure if even that would have held in a really strong Southwester.

The best time to cross the bight from (west to east) is about mid-October to minimize the possibility of continuous easterlies. Crossing the other way (east to west) is much easier and can be done anytime during the summer southeasterlies (December to March). From Albany there are two basic routing options for getting across the bight: (1) sail due east 900nm to Port Lincoln, with perhaps a stop at Esperance. Boats taking this option face the strong possibility of SE headwinds for at least half the way. Or (2) Sail on a reach south into the westerlies (perhaps to 40S) and then carry them on a run to Tasmania (about 1400nm). You can do this somewhat later in the season (perhaps November) when the fronts and lows are further south.

We combined the two options, leaving Albany with SW winds just after a strong front passed and headed direct to Tasmania. We had 6 days of perfect sailing with W to SW winds and then got two fronts within three days approaching Tasmania. The first front was weak, but the second was stronger. We had the option at that point of staying north of Tasmania and sailing through the front in Bass Strait with slightly lighter winds or staying out in deeper water heading SW for the bottom of Tasmania with somewhat stronger winds. Our previous experiences have taught us to stay away from current when the winds are over 40kts. So we choose the stronger winds and deeper water to the south over the shallow water and currents in Bass Strait.

As we approached SW Tasmania at 43S the conditions were winds 35-45kts, gusting 50 in squalls, significant waves of 20' with highest waves 40', all driven by a 944-mb low pressure system around 60S. The waves were reasonably well behaved, with big breaking waves being infrequent. This was not a 'survival storm' but one where you could get into serious trouble if not handled properly.

We deployed our Galerider drogue for 12 hours, with an ORC sized storm jib sheeted out to the toe rail, running at about 170 degrees apparent. The autopilot was steering. Our boat speed was about 6kts with spurts to 9kts. We only surfed twice (to 12kts) when we believe the drogue pulled out of wave faces.

The biggest risk came when the winds shifted from NW to SW, as we then had a more confused broken sea and waves from two directions. We were on starboard jibe as this both allowed the bow to pay off smoothly throughout the shift and kept the stern directly into both wave trains. Fortunately this wind shift was a gradual one rather than a sudden one.

Based on our previous experiences with the Galerider we made two changes to our deployment system:

1. Previously we used a 300' rode and the Galerider would regularly pull out wave faces and let the boat accelerate. This time we set it on 600' of rode, which placed it almost exactly 2 wave lengths behind the boat. It did appear to pull out of the wave face twice, but probably would never have if we had dropped the storm jib or gone down to our even smaller hurricane jib. To

make the 600' rode I tied two 300' anchor rodes (3/4" nylon gold braid) together with anchor bends and whipped the line end back to the standing part to make sure the knot did not slip.

2. Previously we set the rode without a bridle and it tended to jerk one corner of the stern around. This time we set it on a 75' bridle, with even bridle legs to each quarter and it kept the steering much steadier. To make the bridle I tied a 75' spare sheet (1/2" Dacron staysetX) to the rode, using an Icicle hitch, again whipping the end of the sheet to the rode.

We recovered the drogue when the wind dropped to 35kts sustained. It took us 1.25 hours to recover the rode and drogue. The peak loads on the drogue were about 3000lbs. We used a manual winch for about half of the rode and then the anchor windlass for the other half. The anchor windlass was much faster and easier. Neither knot had moved or chafed.

With the drogue our boat was stable and entirely under control without the need for hand steering.

The only negative was that the drogue action was a little jerky. Occasionally when the drogue was up in a wave's crest it would get carried forward faster than the boat (the waves were obviously moving faster than the boat). This put slack into the rode. Then when the drogue moved off the crest it would dig in again and snatch the slack out of the rode.

A few hours later the SW breeze and waves built back up a little and the steering got a bit squirrely. We put out 300' of warp with 6' of chain on the end (without the drogue). This settled down the steering and kept the stern into the waves. The action was much smoother than the drogue, with an even strain, but it would not prevent surfing.

We made landfall in Port Davey (outer bay) and Bathurst Harbour (inner harbor), a large fjord-like series of channels and lakes in a completely isolated and uninhabited nature preserve. The outer harbor entrance is open to the westerly swell but they do not break except in storm force conditions. The narrow entrance (43°19'S 145°59'E) to Bathurst is completely protected by Breaksea Island and is quite safe. However, (according to a professional skipper running a charter tourist cat on the Tasmanian west coast) if you have trouble with the Bathurst harbor entrance, Bond Bay (43°19'S 145°59'E) in the northeast corner of the Port Davey can be entered in virtually any conditions.

For cruisers doing the normal westerly circumnavigation, going down to Tasmania then west across the bight and north up the west coast would be with the winds (in summer), a way to keep cruising during the cyclone season and a pleasant, more interesting alternative to going across the top of Australia.