

Adventures with Charlie.

My NIS 23, Charlie Fisher has just sailed from Welshpool in Victoria, Australia, across Bass Strait and down Tasmania's east coast to Hobart, Tasmania, and back.



NIS 23 Charlie Fisher charges across Bass Strait en route to Hobart, Tasmania.

My sailing companion was BoatCraft Pacific's Director, Ian Philips, a tough, calm and resourceful companion on such an adventure. Ian is a very experienced navigator, both in the two dimensions of sea and the third dimension as an experienced pilot of light aircraft. In addition he has since childhood been sailing on Bass Strait, albeit in much larger keel boats.

This last experience has been invaluable, both in the careful planning and preparation that went on before this adventure and during it.

I am only now starting to realize how much I have learnt from him.



BoatCraft Pacific Director Ian Phillips. 'tough, calm, resourceful..'

We sailed down non stop, taking 3 days and three nights, in early February, with a highlight of one glorious charge, running 10 miles out off east coast Tasmania, from St Helen's to Maria Island with 40 knots behind us for eight hours. Our max speed (hull over ground, GPS) was 17.5 kts with Mizzen struck, main deeply reefed, 30 m of warp out and under total control. One hour of trepidation, the last seven hours delirious pleasure realising that A we were not going to die and B this really was fun!

We never looked like broaching, surfing down 4/5m swells and across confused seas. We tried bare poles, found a steady 7.5 kts, Ian decided it was not brisk enough so up with the jesus reef rag. Then, because we could we tried all sorts of things like lying a hull, board up with sheets slack. Amazing. Quiet, even though seas were breaking round us. Just like the old Egret stories.



17.5kts. Face of swell, 40 kts behind us. Note warp on port side.

The very best 3 days and three nights.

Then Hobart. Midnight. Warm welcome from the Royal Hobart Yacht Club. When we woke up in the morning we heard through sleepy ears, from the dock above, 'They came from where, in THAT?'

Then the superb Tasmanian Wooden Boat Festival.

The festival was a great success, with one NIS 31, one 29 two 23s and mobs of owners from other parts of Australian present.



NIS 23 Charlie Fisher and friends in Hobart

The return trip was every bit as exciting as the trip down. The Tasmanian East coast section, Hobart, Dunalley Canal. Marion Bar to Wine glass Bay, solo because Ian had other commitments, and then on to St Helen's with a non sailing but high in local knowledge passenger, Malcolm 'Bushy' Murfit.



NIS 23 Charlie Fisher, Lagoon Beach, Tasmania, before the long journey home. Late Feb 07.

On the seven hour Marion Bar to Triabunna leg I was observed to be sailing safely to windward in 40 to 60 kts of NNE wind and around 5m swell; the boat steering herself with her 1.5 meters of string and making good 6.5 knots, GPS.

Ian Phillips rejoined the ship at St Helens, and for the return across Bass Strait to Welshpool

Now, three more storms, and many wonderful experiences later we are back home!

I have just opened my emails after nearly a month of sailing Charlie Fisher, four gales, eight hundred open sea miles and even more indelible memories.

I admit to amazement at the activity on the forum, and delight! We had been buoyed through it all by the generous acts and warm wishes from so many of you, before we left, wind under our wings and strength in our hearts when winds built, reefing down as we beat off lee shores in inky darkness.

Delight also to reflect just how good citizen Kirby, as Geoff Heriot has titled him has been in interpreting 200 years of American workboat evolution into such a gutsy range of yachts.

Bass Strait, and the Tasmanian east coast are characterized for me by two words, majesty and menace, And, add to that, nowhere much to hide when the menace shows its teeth.



'...nowhere much to hide...'

The boat has to be good. And we had to be at our best, to match it. That these boats are very good is evident in our safe return!

I will, as dear Petrea has suggested, be writing in more detail and sharing the photographs about the experiences and lessons drawn from this journey as soon as life returns to what passes for normal around our home.

We are very conscious of the big footprints we were following in, especially Bass and Flinders, who had such a tiny boat, virtually no safety equipment such as we know it, non of the comforts, radio weather forecasts and modern navigation that we take for granted.



Winging home, 9 kts off St Helens Tasmania. Pic taken from 'Jo Jak' 35' Wittoltz cutter.

As Ian pointed out as we said our goodbyes at Tullamarine yesterday, 'It has been a hell of an adventure. There are a lot of lessons in this for all of us.'

Thankyou all for being with us, on that adventure and bon Kirby Sharpie voyages all.

Robert.