

Chapter 1 Westernport

1.6 First activities.

Following a discussion about the aims of the Discovery Club, all three members admitted not knowing much about the historic parts of Westernport or the men who explored it about 200 years ago.

The idea of doing some quick research on the internet about the early explorers was soon put into practice. Using various search engines, the guys came up with several names. Of course, as with all searches, many other names were crossed-linked. Too many in fact, so it became necessary to limit the time scale. George Bass discovered Westernport on 3 December 1797, and that was the start for the club members. French Island was circumnavigated by the French in April 1802, which provided a cut-off date for the club members.

The explorers of interest proved to be: naval doctor George Bass; naval lieutenants James Grant and John Murray; Francis Barrallier, a French-born ensign in the NSW Officer Corps; Pierre Milius, a French naval lieutenant commander; and Leon Brevedent, a French naval midshipman.

The guys worked out some ways of enjoying exploring and also seeing the bay from the perspective of those men. Perhaps that way, what the 'object' was, and how it got there, could be worked out.

On this particular day, the fellows were in the Land Rover Discovery on their way to several places that Bass and his crew would have visited.

"There's the turn off to the Bass Village, Phill," exclaimed Chris.

"Got it. Looks like the village is tucked off the highway."

They parked the landrover discovery 10 metres from a wooden bridge and 40 metres from the pub.

"Hey, I can see the creek Tristan," Chris called out.

"Yes, I think those posts sticking out of the creek are supports for an old jetty. There's not much water in the creek" Tristan replied.

Phill called out: "Remember the tide. Didn't we calculate it was 20 minutes before low at Stony Point? If that's the case it must be getting close now to stopping for a while before it runs out."

The picture of the creek on Bass's map has a lot of squiggles. The *Mariners Atlas* shows many a long way past the highway bridge.

"The fresh water could be kilometres away in that direction to the hills," mused Tristan.

"That's okay, we can walk it along the banks. Probably get chased by a bull," laughed Chris.

"You have to be kidding! Later maybe, because we have to drive to Ricketts Point at San Remo after we decide where to launch the boat on this river," Phill commented.

They drove the disco over the highway onto the south-western side of the highway bridge.

"That was a great rough track, just as well we are in a four-wheel-drive." Tristan had enjoyed the bucking of the discovery.

"Great place to do monos, hey Chris."

They stopped about two metres from the edge of the very wide creek. Small trees with their branches overhanging the wide creek lent over to brush the

tops of metre-high rushes, which extended all along the banks and several metres towards the middle. The inevitable thickets of blackberries made access very difficult.

To the left the creek appeared to meander towards the bay in the west. To the right it snaked along until it went under the highway bridge 40 metres away. The sky was quite gloomy, a sign darkness was not far away.

"Launch the boat here? We would be crazy," exclaimed Chris.

"Awesome," Tristan agreed.

"Where else then?"

Chris spread his arms and pointed. "I have an idea. Look, we could push it over the edge of this steep bank, then push it into the edge of the creek."

The steep bank was a vertical drop of three metres. At the bottom was a one-metre-wide stretch of muddy sand, with lots of reeds sticking up, and a few branches half-submerged.

"I reckon we could. Then you and Tristan could pass down the gear."

'Looking good," nodded Phill, "but let's scout along the bank towards the bridge. It looks like the bank is decreasing in height."

Under the bridge the creek was about nine metres wide. The bank was lower but the reeds extended at least three metres towards each bank.

"Hey what are all those small white shells doing there?" asked Chris

"Looks like-'

Kersplash! All exclaimed loudly, then a grin spread slowly over Chris's face.

"You got us. Let's all have a go!" Tristan suggested.

At this point all the guys frantically searched for rocks and bits of wood they could throw in. They found plenty, and stood throwing them in for quite some time. Finally exhaustion set in and they stopped.

"I don't think this spot is as good as the cliff, because we are going to get very muddy and wet dragging the boat over the reeds. I reckon my first spot was best."

"Yep, it's going to be tough, but we can handle it!" muscle-man Tristan agreed.

Together they nodded their heads wisely, got in the discovery and headed for Griffiths Point at San Remo for more site previewing. It was about 45 minutes before dusk, so on the way to Griffiths Point it was only possible to get a passing view of the Bass River entering the bay through mangroves.

Inquisitive Tristan asked, 'What are we going here for again?'

"To see where George Bass climbed a hill to look at the entrance, before rowing in," answered Chris, recalling the aim.

"I think we need to take that bush track over there to get to the actual point. Hang on, hope the four-wheel-drive works," said Phill as he manoeuvred the discovery.

The point offered a 270-degree view, taking in the opposite foreshore, the estuary width and length. They could see across Phillip Island towards the Knobbies, and there were views to Corinella and Cape Patterson. It was awesome.

" Okay, fellows, time to do a survey." That was Phill reminding them what they had come for.

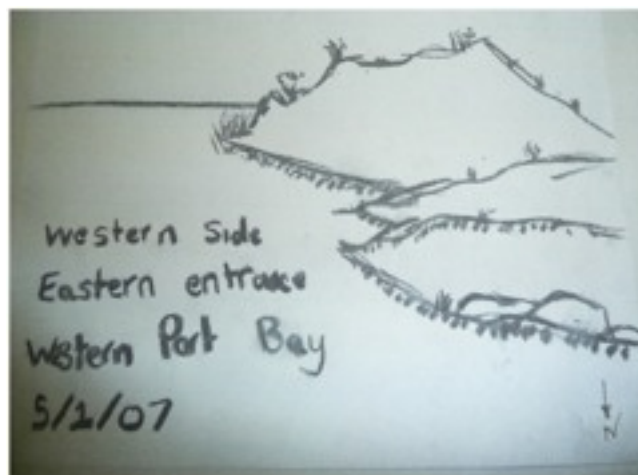
"Chris, your turn to draw a charcoal sketch of the west-north-west part of the estuary, roughly centre at 260 degrees. Make sure you identify the day, time, and weather direction.'

Chris checked the bearing with the hand-bearing compass and set to work drawing.

"Hey, I can see a boat anchored very close to the shore. See all that rough white water. Looks like just about all the channel is made up of hundreds of white waves. I've been on that other side of the estuary with Dad in our boat."

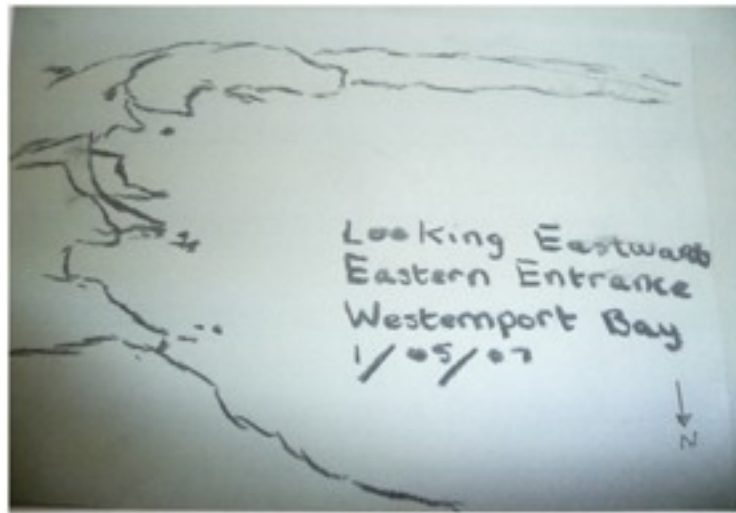
"That must have been pretty good, Tristan. Now you can see why Bass would not have wanted to enter the channel without seeing what was a safe course to steer. Don't forget, if the boat was wrecked, there was no one to rescue them."

"Finished." Chris turned to Tristan. "Your turn. Draw that area to the east where that wind farm is with all those windmills. Should be east-south-east."



A quickly sketched perspective of part of the western side of Westernport

Phill was delighted. "Aha, Chris! You remembered the compass rose directions."



Another quickly sketched perspective from the point

"When you finish, Tristan, we can all go down to the cliff face and look for a landing beach where Bass might have got his crew to put him ashore, so that he could walk up here to study the entrance."

During the walk down to the cliff face, over the old cattle wire fence, Chris and Tristan engaged as usual in skylarking, pushing and shoving until one fell over and could have rolled over the cliff face.

"Cut it out you two," Phill called out. "It's nearly dark now. If anyone disappears or breaks something, we are in big trouble. Look over there towards the east."

'That beach looks a bit narrow, with a lot of rocks sticking up,' Chris observed.

"Could have been that one just a bit further on. It's wide but look at the surf rolling in. I bet he got wet while he jumped ashore. He probably got wetter when he waded into the surf to climb in." Tristan was examining the shoreline closely.

"Yes," agreed Phill. "Remember the tide was running out and a southerly wind was blowing against the tide. It would have been very dangerous. He had to look before committing the boat and crew."

After leaving the point, going over the rough terrain back towards the road, the disco's headlights cut a swathe of light through the dark, bobbing up and down, jerking left then right as the vehicle fought the rough going. All were enjoying the bouncing around.

At Bass Village, they carried out a quick inspection of the river near the bridge. They had planned to see the effects of the tide. However, that proved impossible because it was too dark by now to see the river five metres below the wooden bridge. Time for dinner at the Bass pub.

Phill asked: "What's it to be, fellows-schnitzel or fish, with chips, salad, and a soft drink? While I place the order, why don't you write up our Adventure log, Chris."

"Hmm, let's see, what am I going to say?" pondered Chris



The launching site, looking down the small cliff. About a three-metre drop.