

# ***Chapter 2 Under Weigh***

## ***2.3 Exploring Hastings bight.***

"That was a big one!" exclaimed Chris. "That last wave was a bit dangerous."

"Sure was, better go steady. The wind is pretty strong, creating a lot of slop," replied Phill.

"Coming from the SSE at about 25 knots?"

"Yep, from the SSE, could be 25 knots. Anyway, it is a lot stronger than the usual southerly summer winds of about 16 knots."

The boat was in the north-west corner at the top of Hastings bight, at 3.15 p.m., Sunday the 17th at the top of high tide. The weather was blowing very strongly about 20 knots from the south-east.

The open part of the bight that was not protected very much by Sandstone Island, the circular shore line to the Marina harbour wall protrusion to the pier area, had waves bordering on a metre. Further out to the end of the channel, it was very confused white water. There were occasional hard gusts of rain.

Chris and Phill alone formed the crew today. The objective was to motor around the top end of the bight, explore around the mangroves looking for inlets, and take a few high-water soundings. They were to proceed very carefully, with due regard to the boisterous conditions. They had life jackets on. The crew were using Tom Thumb junior, the trusty portable boat.

Tristan could not make it but Chris, who had played footy earlier in the day, with Tristan, for Tyabb Yabbies against Beluera at Dallas Brooks ground in

Mornington, was raring to go. The fact that he had a broken finger strapped up was not going to stop him. Maybe it was so cold he couldn't feel the finger.

The guys had followed the earlier method in loading the porta boat onto the roof-rack: lift up the boat and stand it on its stern; tip it towards the roof-rack and heave it up and on. They made sure to put in the back area the big red plastic box containing the small bailing bucket, two life jackets, outboard motor tools and registration papers. They included the 20-litre white bucket with the anchor and several joinable 30-metre lengths of anchor rope. They checked to ensure they had the oars, motor and this time full fuel in the internal Tohatsu five horsepower and spare five-litre red jerry can, rain jackets, beanies and apples in pockets.

At the Hastings boat ramp, Chris had said: "Phill, here is the \$10. I don't think the trailer parking meter is working, it won't take the money. There is no one else here."

"Okay, stand clear, I'll back the disco to the top of the ramp, we can slide the Tom off and lift it down to the water and load all the gear there."

With both guys on board Chris started the motor and slowly guided the boat between the yacht club and the first row of boats attached to the jetty moorings.

"Where to?"

'Let's just slowly motor around the outside of the jetty, and go in close to Pelican Point. Stay about 20 metres from the shore, and follow it around as it bends to the right.'

Chris occasionally stopped, and Phill swung the lead to read of the depth, especially when both thought that where they were the mud flats were normally exposed during lower tides.

Without Tristan there, the guys decided not to write up the log book and copy the appropriate maps. When Tristan was available they would carry out the exercise again in the agreed manner. Also Tristan's shoreline surveying sketches were important additions to the log book, plus some cross-bearings.

With the wind astern and occasionally riding a wave, Chris had to ease off a little for fear of something disastrous happening.

"That looks like a parting in the mangroves. Shall we go in?"

### ***On Hastings bight***

The parting appeared about three metres wide and the closer the boat got the better it looked.

"You can see better than I can. I have my back to most of it. You are the captain, Chris."

The guys had discovered a channel among the mangroves that snaked around for about 750 metres. Sometimes the mangroves towered over the boat. In the channel proper out of reach from the wind the water appeared very slack, meaning the tide was about to turn, and only being kept high due to the very strong wind in the bight.

After about 600 metres, Phill said: 'I don't think we should go any further. It looks only as wide as the boat just ahead.'

"Lucky no saltwater crocs live here, or we could be goners. Two hundred years ago, you could hide a whaleboat in here forever, once you got past the middle of the mangrove swamp. it's a bit hard to see in the middle of the mangroves," Chris stated.

After another half hour the guys re-entered the bight, driving into the wind, and they motored past the Marina entrance. However, the waves were rougher, the wind stronger and the showers of rain becoming miserable. It was quite a relief deciding to call it quits. They set about beaching the boat on the slipway, stretched their legs, reloaded all items on and in the four-wheel-drive and headed for home.

Home meant food for Chris, who was always hungry.

Unloading and stowing the equipment took time. While they were eating, Phill asked, "Chris, what about looking through a few photos to see if there are any we could include in our journals?"

"Good idea."

"What do you think of them? Particularly the ones showing high and low tides?"

"Good photos, but nowhere near as rough and dangerous as it was today. The whaleboat pictures are good. Lots of nails to keep it together."

"Yes, imagine being in an open sea and the nails started loosening. I don't even want to think about it."

"George Bass's whaleboat would have handled the bight okay today, but in the middle of the ocean it would have been dicey."

The fellows chatted a bit, and made plans to explore the creek and bight with Tristan. This time also to go across to the point south of the oil refinery. Maybe they could go ashore and scout around a bit.



***A whaleboat built by Bern Cuthbertson for a re-enactment. Many nails used. GMM.***



***View of the cramped interior. Dangerous going, in an open sea with men and supplies. GMM.***



***Kings Creek-part of the bight, empty, very calm***



*At Hastings bight looking east, with a dangerous wreck in the foreground*



*Shallow waterways make navigation difficult: they could protect a fort*



*Sandstone Island*



***Top of the tide ... and calm***



***Still calm ... the wreck just about to go under***