

Chapter 3 Further Exploration Essential

3.5 An attempt to survey Tortoise Head and Churchill Island.

"Hi, Phill, I'm ready. I have an old pair of sneakers and another jumper in case we get wet."

"Hi Chris, the weather's looking good! It should change later in the morning and get a bit easier. Let's go and pick up Tristan."

Can you believe it? Chris and Phill arrived at Tristan's home to find Tristan had just got out of bed, and was walking around looking like a stunned mullet.

"Come on, Tristan, get the lead out, otherwise we will lose the advantage of high tide at Tortoise Head."

"Umm," was Tristan's only response. Both Chris and Phill gave him a bit of chivvyng. Finally Tristan was mobile, and they headed for Hastings marina.

On arrival, Chris was pleased: "At least the boat is launched, Phill," he said. "Last time we had to wait half an hour."

What was the day all about for the Discovery Club members?

Their intention was to carry out simple surveying and draw simple maps to achieve a basic understanding of nautical mapping.

This was to be in Westernport, around the southern portion of French Island, on Melbourne Cup day. The schedule was to launch the big boat at

Hastings marina, tow the aluminium dinghy to be used for close work, and arrive at Tortoise Head at the top of the highest tide of the day

The idea was to experience the spirit of adventure and to some extent the accompanying hardships before this modern age, and thus capture a sense of the past.

A little imagination was required to use modern maps, existing depth soundings (at low mean tide), a boat's compass and depth sounder.

All this depended upon the weather conditions. Several basic plans were discussed:

Plan A.

1. Upon leaving Hanns Inlet, draw a line on a modern nautical map to the southernmost western tip of Tortoise Head.
2. Using a hand-bearing compass, identify the heading.
3. One person steer the boat on the compass heading. The other draw the land dead ahead, using the bearing as the 45 degree line for a 90-degree right angle triangle. This gives the basic eyeball map area.
4. Every nautical mile, the helmsman calls out the depth. The map drawer writes on his map the location and depth. This was to be done at a high tide; in reality it should be done at the lowest tide so that boats can avoid running aground in shallower waters.
5. At this time a land-view drawing of the shoreline in the 90 degree angle will be drawn. This gives a pictorial view of the shoreline. The view will be: a) the approach to Tortoise Head from Hanns Inlet b) the approach to Cowes from Tortoise Head c) the approach to Tortoise Head from Cowes.

6. With due regard to the risk of running aground at Tortoise Head, align the boat to run to Cowes. Repeat steps 2 to 5.

Plan B.

1. *Locate* Gardiners and Blakes channels to the east of Tortoise Head.
2. Go ashore and climb the peak.
3. On the peak, draw a line to Churchill Island, and 45 degrees on either side draw a pictorial view. This is only a drawing included, not for surveying.
4. Embark on the boat, and follow the channel towards the south-east and Elizabeth Island.

Plan C.

1. Locate Elizabeth Island. Note the time into the tidal pattern.
2. At the southernmost tip of Elizabeth Island, on a nautical map draw a line to Settlement Point.
3. Repeat general Plan A, items 2 to 4.
4. Only one pictorial view is required. Try to include the southern part of Elizabeth Island as well as Settlement Point.

Plan D.

If time permits, find Red Bill Creek on the western side of French Island.

Well, all plans made by the Discovery Club members may change, it seems. The changes might be due to weather, time, tide. But definitely not courage!

"Chris, go a bit easier! I can't erect this card table when I keep falling over," said Tristan laughing.

"I'm not going quick,; it's just that every second or third wave gets a bit big and corkscrews us a bit. Am I going the best speed and direction, Phill?"

"Yup. But it is tough with that wind blowing right in our faces. I reckon the waves are regularly quite big. You are handling the boat well. Look, there is Crib Point off our starboard. When we reach into Hanns Inlet we can get organised out of the wind a bit."

"Even the windscreen wiper gets stuck, I can't see a thing sometimes."

"Good fun, isn't it," said Tristan, who was standing alongside Chris and hanging on to the grab rail when a particularly big wave bashed into the bows and reared up.

Off Hanns Inlet, the channel entrance to the Australian Navy base at HMAS Cerberus, the water seemed to be calm. It was time for Chris to turn the helm to point at Tortoise Head, and for Tristan to pull a chair up to the makeshift chart table and commence drawing.

Every few minutes Chris sang out the bearing and depths. "Bearing 122 degrees, 13 metres deep."

"Got it, Chris," Tristan replied.

"Steering 122 degrees, depth 23 metres. Gee, that's getting deep."

Tristan's grunt of acknowledgement and quick pencil markings were sufficient. They continued in this way until they reached Tortoise Head. Then it was time for Tristan to take over and steer 225 degrees, and for Chris to start writing in the depths and bearing towards Cowes. At the 9 metre depth it

was time to stop, turn around and retrace the bearing, then find Gardiners Channel. Shortly afterwards, everything slowly turned into a debacle.

The channel they were looking for flowed north then east in a clockwise direction.

The only way the guys could describe the navigation of the boat (see the maps below) was to say: Bearing accurate-how to go crazy! Tristan was at the bows as shoaling water lookout, Chris was driving the boat, and Phill constantly repeated like a cocky on a fence.

"Bearing, slow, turn, quicker; go backwards even quicker, can you see the bottom? see the direction over there, go, stop."

An hour and half after high tide, and apparent signs of a lower tide, absolute exhaustion set in.

"Hey, Phill, take us somewhere-the prop is throwing up mud and cutting a deep trench," Tristan called out excitedly.

"Quick, Chris, turn to port and gun it."

"Okay, Phill, should I lift the prop?"

"Good idea, just be quick."

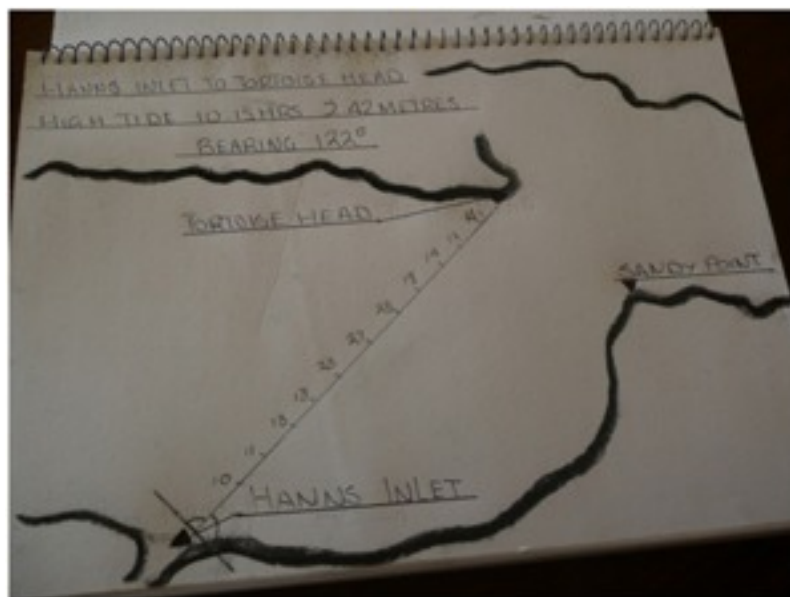
After cutting a trench about 20 metres long, the boat slid into deeper water. Time to eat some sangers and have a drink. Surprisingly in the coolish weather the guys only picked at the food.

The boat just bobbed around south-east of the sandbank off Tortoise Head. All the guys were tired from the constant manoeuvring back and forth, sideways; chart reading, pointing in directions seemed to be of no avail. They could not say with certainty that they had found and plotted Gardiners

Channel. It was disappointing really. The other plans would have to wait for another time. Time to go home.

Heading north-west to Hastings, the guys decided to go close inshore and see if there was a good sheltered spot to go ashore in Tom Thumb junior. They found one spot. Later the guys would use it in an adventure when they spent a night ashore on French Island, with similar shelter and food that Bass, Barrallier, Murray and others might have experienced.

Maybe just a large sheet of canvas that they could all lie on then cover over their heads. A skin filled with water, and some dry biscuits. It sounds a bit hard and rough. Could the fellows hack it?



The first attempt to plot from Hanns Inlet to Tortoise Head. Boat very unsteady in the weather conditions, depths and bearing accurate.



Bearing accurate: how to go crazy finding the channel. The jigsaw-looking segment shows roughly the many directions the boat was driven.