

2018 SUMMER CRUISE OF AVANTI

The 28th Voyage Dunedin to Nelson

Bill and Margaret McIndoe

Chapter Two

Careys Bay to Akaroa

Before sailing from Careys Bay we still had lots to do to stow all the recently prepared and purchased food and our own gear. Then the best plan was to close up the house and sleep aboard the boat with two alarms set for 04:15.

When both the alarms went off at the same time we leapt out of our bunks like startled elks and were straight on with the last jobs before departure. Still dark outside Margaret continued stowing away the food and Bill prepared all the electronic navigation equipment ready for the first section of the passage. The iPad was set up with its new Bad Elf Pro GPS, which transmitted the GPS ships position wirelessly (by Bluetooth) to the iPad with its iNavX navigation programme. This arrangement had not been test before and seemed to be working. The Acer laptop, with its own chart plotter programme and GPS set formed another complete self contained navigation system, as a backup to the iPad plus its Bad Elf GPS.

Bill then secured everything on deck and by the time Craig and Gae Wilson arrived at 0515 we were ready to stow Gae's gear and partake of tea. Gae was all ready to go with us and Craig stoically ready to return to work for another month before joining us in Nelson on 6 February.

At 06:00 we said farewells to Craig as from the wharf he helped cast off the lines. In the overcast morning light we did a stern-board to clear our wharf, swung to starboard and quietly steamed off down the main shipping channel, heading for Tairaroa Heads and the vastness of the Pacific Ocean.

Storm in the Offing

The decayed tropical depression, causing havoc in the north Island, by now had its centre over Cook Strait and was expected to move south engulfing Marlborough and Canterbury as far south as Christchurch, bringing high winds and heavy flood rain. It became apparent that the forecast indicated that between Otago Peninsula and Banks Peninsula there would be light winds from Thursday morning to noon Friday followed by gales in many areas and storm force winds in a few. My intention was to leave Careys Bay at 06:00 early enough on Thursday morning and to get 150 nautical mile through to Akaroa in 26 hours before the big winds, associated with tropical depression arrived at Banks Peninsula. Once into Akaroa Harbour on Friday morning we planned to pick up the booked Akaroa Yacht Club mooring ready to ride out the gales.

Please Sir are we sinking yet?

At midnight I was coming off my First Watch (20:00 to 24:00) and Gae was coming to stand the Midnight watch (00:00 to 04:00) when I heard a croak from the bilges but took little notice. An hour later I heard Steve Carey's advice - "Bill, keep checking the bilges" and I wondered why it had come into my head when I was supposed to be asleep. Because it was my old friend and sailing mentor Steve Carey who was talking I listened. I moved the carpet and lifted the bilge floor board. Peering down into the one meter deep bilges with my torch I was shocked at the depth of water. It was 300mm deep and the pump was making no progress in reducing it. I tasted it with a sponge and confirmed it was salt from the ocean not fresh leaked from our fresh water tanks.

I suspected we were sinking 40nm out to sea in the Canterbury off Timaru. It was important to locate the leak because I don't like swimming at night and if batteries became discharged or the electric bilge pump failed we would be back to hand pumping to keep pace with the inflow. And you can do that only for as long as strength lasts.

Avanti was still belting along at 6.25kts through choppy seas and with no wind. The standby 12v electric "last drop pump" was running but it is a slow reciprocating type pump designed to completely dry out the bilges, not to move large amounts of water. I searched the whole ship below

the waterline, forward and aft of the engine room, trying to locate a leak but all skin fittings and valves were tight with no sign of a leak.

Did we really have a leaking skin fitting or valve? Was the engine pumping cooling water into the boat instead of over the side? Was the fresh water from the tanks leaking into the bilges?

Was the main electric bilge pump recycling water (round and round) instead of pumping it over the side to sea? Was the bilge pump discharge blocked? Was the pump running the wrong way? Did the comparative high speed through the water for 18 hours pushed the stern deeper in the water allowing sea water to enter one of the three goose-necked pump discharge ports?

I tried all sorts of ruses to slowing the egress of water. Slowing the boat down helped; taking it out of gear and revving up the motor made no difference. By trial and error, using all the artifice I could muster, I did clear the water from the bilge but without really knowing where it came from. After thirty minutes of watching and fiddling with the pumps the bilges were dry and I put thoughts of our life-raft and a Mayday emergency call aside.

Fog at Akaroa Heads

When we ran into fog during my morning watch (04:00 to 08:00) I estimated the visibility was down to half a mile. If a cruise ship was on a reciprocal course heading directly towards us I had no chance of seeing it until it might be too late to take avoiding action. Our navigation lights were burning brightly but the Officer of the Watch on the bridge of the tourist ship would be unlikely to sight us in this fog. Although we have an excellent radar reflector mounted high in the mast, big ships don't always correctly identify small contacts (vessels). On the radar I set the alarm ring to 2.5nm and range on the screen of 4nm to detect any vessel that came inside that distance. Any contact would flash brightly as it passed through the alarm ring on the screen and an alarm would sound drawing the watch keepers attention. I paid particular attention to the settings of the radar so that it gave the best possible indications of sea traffic in our vicinity.

Land Fall

Through the fog in the dim morning light I sighted the immense cliff of the Tikutiku Head on the west side of the entrance and the Akaroa Light on the east at 0.75nm distance. What a wonderful geographical feature when so close, even more impressive looming out of the fog in the early morning light. Because of the chart plotter and the radar I knew my position so the sighting was not a surprise, but certainly memorable. There was still no wind and by the time we had steamed 7nm up Akaroa Harbour to Akaroa township the fog had lifted.

The Gale Arrives

The gales were expected. The tropical depression heading our way was apparent for days from RNZ weather reports, our weather fax machine and Metvuw on the internet. There was no escaping but Avanti was secured to a good strong mooring off Akaroa Yacht Club 17 hours before it was due. At midnight the wind began to howl in the mast and rigging which wakened me from deep sleep. It freshened to 20kts and then blow 40kts from the SW. Soon the bow started to rise and fall as the waves built up. Although the 800mm waves sweeping up from sea were breaking in the main arm of the harbour the white water didn't reach us, tucked around the corner off the AYC. When the swell turned 30° around Green Point Avanti's bow began to lift and fall 800mm every 5 seconds. Margaret and my bunks are in the forward cabin and it was difficult to stay asleep, tired as we were. The gale blew all that day so there was no possibility of lowering the dinghy or going ashore. Quite happy pottering about the boat reading and writing we stayed seated as much as possible to avoid being knocked about by the movement. Fortunately our sea legs had been restored and seasickness was not a problem - yet. The storm center, which had been trapped by a blocking high, wandered slowly east out into the Pacific and the gale gradually abated.

What's up down below?

Completely recovered from the voyage, the last gale and safely secured to a mooring at Akaroa, I thought it time to really investigate that sinking feeling associated the plumbing or hull leak.

After returning from taking Margaret and Gae ashore in the dinghy to do the shopping, I started on the daunting task of finding out what was wrong with the main bilge pump. With difficulty I removed the pump from the bottom of the bilge, where it resided, and dismantled and cleaned all its parts and associated pipes looking for signs of a blockage. Once re-assembled the problem was to get the pump, mounted on its long wooden stalk, back down into its position in the narrow bilges, confined

by all the other pipes. I could not get it back down, had run out of ideas and was wandering how to proceed. I was stuck.

Help Arrives

Akaroa yachting friend John Milligan rowed out in his tiny dinghy in the still blustery conditions and offered help with my bilge pump problem. Being an invaluable man in a boat it would have been churlish of me to refuse such an offer. Knowing that tea and fruit cake were always a possibility had no bearing on this kind offer. He also invited us to partake of afternoon tea with him and Beverley at their Akaroa *crib* (to those in the south of Scottish descent, *batch* to the North islanders, *shack* to the Australians and *country cottage* to the English).

Two old farts, one 75 years and the other 89 years old, down on their knees, patiently struggling to replace the pump to its proper place. Learned discussions about points of procedure were debated followed by agreed action? John is also a learned solicitor who swears very occasionally but always in Latin. Two hours ticked by until victory was proclaimed and fruitcake and tea rations could be issued. The pump was replaced but the problem of the leak, which did not seem to occur when the boat was stationary, was not necessarily solved. There had been no chance of stopping for lunch so later Beverley's excellent afternoon-tea sandwiches were most welcome.

End of Chapter One
2018 Summer Cruise of Avanti,,
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Best Regards

Bill and Margaret