

Saturday 14th January 2017

Dear Peter,,

Getting away is never easy. There were so many things that had to be done. It was not that they had been forgotten. I keep a long list of boat, house and home jobs written in big lettering on huge lengths of paper. These prominent displays are hung up in three locations so I can never escape the reminders. It works on the "nag" principle. Mostly there was just not time to do them all, or any earlier.

Departure

We sailed from Port Chalmers late on Saturday 7th January evening. The start of the 2017 voyage was brilliant with a stiff southerly and we bowled along at 6.5kts with a lot of movement. Nice fresh southerly for a few hours then an unwelcome change to strong north easterly. Sailing conditions against the northerly were so robust that I stayed on watch all night fighting the ship slowly north. I insisted that Margaret stay below out of harms way and for her to concentrate on feeding the brute. All night I battled our way north but at 04:00, when 20nm (37km) off the coast east of Oamaru, decided it was too much for us and turning 90° to port headed towards the coast. Four hours later at 08:30, it was daylight when I got lined up on the two triangular lead marks that took me through the narrow dredged channel and into Oamaru Harbour. Between the moored private craft, of widely divergent states of disrepair, I dropped the anchor and let out 20m of chain. We were out of the wind and the swell, exhausted but all settled.

When I came below Margaret had ready a delicious breakfast of cereal and fruit. The only thing screaming in my head was for sleep which, off and on, occupied the rest of the day. All nighters have never been for me.

Too Old for this Caper?

Margaret and I discussed the burning question - were we too old for this caper. Would it not be a good idea to abandon cruising in these rough weather conditions and go home. I was sure that there was to be plenty of bad weather between Oamaru and Akaroa and on to Picton. Our typical sailors' answers was to put off any decision and look again at the problem on the morrow.

Danger at Anchor

After anchoring, the yacht had swung to her chain facing north. After dinner when it was dark, while preparing to turn in (for about the fourth time that day) the wind changed and began to blow from the south. The boat swung round 180° and our stern ended uncomfortably close to the bow of the yacht 'Aparima', now behind us. Being on a short mooring chain her swinging circle was much smaller than ours on our anchor and 20m of chain. I could see that if the wind freshened we would blow back and hit the Aparima's bow with our stern.

Weigh in the Dark?

I needed to shift our anchored position to be further away from the other yacht. The thought of weighing the anchor in the dark at 22:00 and trying to wash off all that horrible sticky mud coming up with the chain so it wouldn't go down into the chain locker, was appalling. If I did nothing and it came up to blow both boats would be damaged. I was still desperately tired and ached all over. I sat there thinking for a while, wondering what to do. Then the solution came to me.

Solved with 2nd Anchor

I prepared the second anchor for letting go, then started the engine and steered the boat to port, away from Aparima, until the 20 of chain would let me go no further. I dropped my second-best 12kg CKR anchor and payed out the chain and rope rode until the boat was centered on a V held by the two anchors. That positioned Avanti nicely clear of Aparima and the safety issue was solved with no weighing the 17kg best anchor in the dark and no mud coming up on deck on the chain. That would have to wait till the next day when both rodes and their anchors would have to be weighed and washed clean.

We had found shelter, time for a wash, for a long sleep and a recovery period.

We were settled safely at last, held by two anchors in Oamaru Harbour's incredibly gooey mud, for when the southerly wind freshened.

Glorious Mud

Monday 9th January 2017

On awakening we both felt much better than last night. The idea of reversing course and going back home was preposterous. Whoever suggested that?? Breakfast was ready at 0730 and then, kitted out in sea-boots, old oily parker and big plastic gloves, I started weighing the 17kg CQR main anchor chain hosing it as I went. The first five meters of chain came up nice and clean. But then came the mud, black and goeey, requiring patient hosing of the chain to wash it back to the sea where it belonged. The chain rode did have two turns around the unrecovered rope rode but I untangled it without much trouble. The anchor itself was a grand ball of mud that slowly submitted to the insistent jet of salt water from the hose, dropping off back to the sea with squidgy bottom-dwelling noises.

Recovering and hosing clean the rope of the second anchor was easier because mud does not stick to rope like it does to chain. It took more than an hour to weigh both anchors and tidy up all the mess and gear ready to proceed to sea. At 09:30 I lined up the transit marks, as a stern bearing, to take us through the dredged channel out to the open sea, and set course 045° for a position 6nm east of Timaru.

Close the Coast

It is usual to set a course from Oamaru right across Canterbury Bight direct to Akaroa which would takes us 40nm off the coast. It is the shortest route but is out into deep water and exposed to the full force of the prevailing NE wind with no shelter from Banks Peninsula. Many factors influence the weather over most of which you have no control. However the closer to the coast you are the lighter will be the wind and the shallower water will often give smaller swell. After our experience on Sunday morning when 20nm out to sea, I elected to keep only five to eight miles off the coast of the Canterbury Bight and follow it around to pass Timaru and so to Banks Peninsula and Akaroa Harbour. It made a longer distance to travel but we were better prepared for that rather than the battering we had received on early Sunday morning from heavy seas and head winds 20 miles off the Otago Coast.

Head Winds Again

It was slow progress motor sailing into 15kts of NE head wind and short heavy seas. The main sail was drawing nicely but with 2000revs on the engine, which in calm conditions would give us 6.1 knots, in the current wind and sea conditions we were only making 3.3 knots. As is normal safety reporting procedure I passed our 19:00 position, course and speed to New Zealand Maritime and my estimated ETA at Akaroa Heads as 09:00 tomorrow Tuesday January 10th 2017.

When Margaret served a delicious fish dinner at 21:00 the sea conditions had eased off. We ate in style and comparative comfort, the the boat rollicking along at 5kts with the mouth of the mighty Rangitata River abeam 8nm. What could have been better? After doing the dishes Margaret turned in to sleep in the sea-berth and I took the watch on deck.

Change the Watch

Tuesday 10th January

At 01:00 I awoke Margaret and I swapped positions. I passed over the watch to her and went to bed in the sea-berth, immediately falling asleep. She busied herself checking out the boat to see all was running smoothly. The the engine temperature and oil pressure of the Yanmar engine, the navigation position, the iPad chart plotter, the position on the paper chart, the radar, the depth, the set of the sails, weather forecast and what was in sight around the horizon. At 04:30 Margaret awoke me with a beautiful hot cup of tea, a biscuit and a handful of cherries as an eye-opener, kindly given us by Don Knewstubb on our departure. It was my turn to take over the watch and she to bed. An hour later the wind died and the sea quietened. With no wind I furled the mainsail and with the calming sea the speed increased to 6.2kts on a course of 068°, directly towards Akaroa Heads. We were doing well! Avanti entered Akaroa Harbour at 09:00 only 30 minutes late on my ETA sent yesterday.

Mooring not Available but.....

As soon as we had cell phone coverage I rang to check on the mooring I had booked. I discovered that it was not available even though I had sent two email requests over the last month. Feeling disappointed at the failure of my attempt at securing a mooring near the Akaroa Yacht Club I remembered the kind offer of Paul and Nicky Edgar to use their mooring in Akaroa Harbour. When

Paul sailed their 12m yacht "Windsong" to anchor in Careys Bay last week we were helpful with information and offers of use of our mooring. He reciprocated by kindly offering the use of his mooring in French Farm Bay in the north west of the harbour. I had never been over to this bay before and was surprised at the number of boats moored. He had given me latitude and longitude co-ordinates and I had no trouble in finding it among the many occupied and unoccupied moorings. The wind was fresh but after several tries managed to hook the pick-up buoy and so the substantial main mooring rope, happy to be secured in Akaroa Harbour at last, after a tiring four days since leaving Port Chalmers. Over many years our usual passage time has been 26 hours so this one was a toughie. Because of health problems it was the first time we had been to sea or lived in the boat for 22 months, were hardly sea-fit and at 86 and 88 years were nearly two years older. I have no doubt things will improve!

John's magic

During breakfast John Milligan, resident of Akaroa and Christchurch, experienced yachtsman and long time friend rang to say that he had located an excellent mooring close to the yacht club that we could use. The owner had his boat up on the club slip and would not be finished the extensive repaint job for a week. Steve was happy that we could use it and John would meet us there in half an hour. We immediately slipped Paul's French Farm Bay mooring and motored the 3nm across to Akaroa Yacht Club.

Busy Akaroa

The main part of the harbour was a hive of a activity. There were two large tourist ships anchored carrying about 5000 passengers and 6 of their motor boats were busy ferrying them 120 at a time the 2nm from the ships across to Akaroa township landing pontoon. The Akaroa Yacht Club was host to the New Zealand National Zephyr Sailing Dinghy Championships with 29 participants plus the officials boats. The Fishers and Swim With The Dolphin boats were out plus all the other touristy traffic. The locals as well were out in their launch and sailboats pottering about. We threaded our way through all this traffic and found John Milligan, in his dinghy, standing by the correct mooring ready to give us help in picking it up. No trouble there and he came aboard for a cup of tea and fruit cake. When together he and I are great talkers but this time it was only for three hours.

Plans for the future

I am trying to leave future plans open because of the inclement weather, especially the frequent strong winds in the north of the South Island and Cook Strait. A "stop and ponder" strategy. If the outlook improves we may go on but if it remains boisterous we would be better to go no further. To enjoy the Banks Peninsula area without the long voyage north to Picton/Nelson and the longer voyage back home to Careys Bay. To make that journey requires us to be fit physically, strong mentally and the weather has to be right. We do have confidence in the boat. We can stay on this mooring for another week and still have the French Farm mooring to fall back on even though it is somewhat isolated over there. There may well be other moorings that John may find for us and there are suitable anchorages for different winds.

However when it blows in Akaroa Harbour you could well wish you were somewhere else. A big strong mooring feels so much cosier to be on than your own anchor.

There is much of Banks Peninsula yet to explore.

Keep in touch.

Best regards,

Bill and Margaret

McIndoe

Avanti

off Akaroa Yacht Club