

# Chapter Six

## 2018 SUMMER CRUISE OF AVANTI

The 28th Voyage Dunedin to Nelson

Bill and Margaret McIndoe

### French Pass to Nelson

#### French Pass Hazards

There was only one noteworthy occurrence when approaching French Pass on Thursday 25 January. I was standing off waiting for a 13m yacht to battle its way east against the west flowing current. Through the binoculars I could see he was on the turbulent north side of the channel. When approaching the beacon the 12 ton yacht was suddenly turned a complete 90° to starboard by the violent force of the water. If he had been swung to port he, like many other vessels that came to grief in French Pass, could have hit the large concrete beacon marking the rocks on the north side of the channel. He was possibly unaware of the power of the swirling currents of French Pass and how essential it was to hold the boat firmly on course with aggressive wheel adjustments. Or possibly the skipper had left the self-steering engaged thinking that it would react fast enough to steer the boat safely through such a dangerous stretch of water. After that experience I could see that the yacht was held firmly on course even though making six knots through the water but only creeping along at one knot over the ground against the current. No further aberrations were observed as he slowly made his way through the pass. I know from experience that the skipper has to fight the ship through and apply his full attention and strength to the steering until out into clear water.

#### Shoot the Pass at Speed

When the pass was clear I committed Avanti to the "river in the sea". We galloped through in the racing 6kts water plus our own speed of 5kts through the water, touching on a total of 11kts over the ground, according to the GPS reading on the iPad chart plotter which Margaret noted. I could see that the flow went downhill at the 120m wide fastest section between the lighthouse on the south side and the beacon on the north. It was neap tides which meant that for French Pass this was a slow run. It would be much faster and more aggressive at spring tides in a week on Thursday 1 February. Then the water would be ripping through the deepwater channel and foaming and roaring over the reefs that form the major part of the 508m gap between D'Urville Island and the north of the South Island. At neap tides it is safe to shoot French Pass at the maximum flow but not so at spring tides when it would be prudent to make the pass one hour either side of slack water.

#### Mooring Among the Rocks of Coppermine

At Coppermine Bay, on the south coast of D'Urville Island, I edged in among the rocks seeking the Mana Yacht Club mooring that I remembered. I was mistaken, there was no Mana mooring but the just below-the-surface rocks there certainly there. They were well charted and could be seen on the chart plotter and visually under the surface if the light was right. However there was a big blue mooring buoy belonging to Tasman Bay Boating Club in Nelson that was tempting. As with all the moorings in the Sounds we two ancient mariners had difficulty in lifting the heavy mooring rope through the fairlead and onto the boat's mooring bollard. The water was always deep and the long length of rope, reaching down to the mooring weight on the sea bed, was heavy. I would bring the boat up to the mooring buoy, while on the bow Margaret would pick up the mooring rope hanging out of the big mooring buoy with her long boathook. I would then rush forward to help. The end of

a prepared rope, with one end already tied to our mooring bollard, would be quickly passed through the eye-splice of the mooring rope and back to the electric winch. By heaving in on the winch I could pull the mooring rope up on deck and finally secure it over the bollard. Not however without a struggle but we usually managed.

Avanti lay at the Coppermine mooring all night without a movement or a murmur. Quietly she lay, watching, while peacefully we slept.

### **Entering Croissiles Harbour**

In the morning we slipped the mooring, negotiated the rocks and moved out into Current Basin heading for Croissiles Harbour. To have look at the south of D'Urville Island I kept close to the coast then before reaching the dreaded Beef Barrel rocks I swung back to the South Island coast.

Croissiles Harbour is big and apart from the many mussel farms with their thousands of buoys there is little traffic and few people. Approaching from the French Pass and Current Basin direction we entered through the narrow Kakaho Point channel. I lined up on the entry course of 180°T looking for Symonds Point light (white post on a 12m rock on the shore) 2.6nm across the harbour and steer for the light. It is small and difficult to see and is 300m east of the actual point. In the channel the reefs and isolated rocks are scary but locate that light on a post and steer 180°T for it; depth should be 3m or deeper, watch your chart plotter, and sounder, keep a sharp lookout. It is a safe entry. Oh yes, and hold your nerve.

### **Shopping Trip to Okiwi Bay**

A re-victualing stop was required, especially for bread. I headed into Okiwi Bay where we knew there was a camp store. It was an half an hour after low water, the approaches to the landing beach were shallow and there was no usable jetty. Watching the sounder I ran the yacht slowly in towards the beach until we nearly ran aground. Margaret dropped the anchor and the boat swung too facing back into the wind, and then did run aground. It was a sand bottom which would do no damage to the keel. The tide was making and we would float free in 15 minutes. Our anchor and 15m of chain that Margaret had let out would prevent us moving any further. The boat was safe and it was alright for us to leave in the dinghy to go ashore for the shopping.

### **Launch the Dinghy**

I removed the lashings that held the dinghy firmly in place and lowered away on the davits. The little 2hp outboard was screwed on the stern and we put-putted 200m to the steep gravel beach. There was no wind and no waves. We had no difficulty in beaching the dinghy, without even getting our shoes wet, and on the wide retractable wheels on the stern hauled her higher up the beach out of reach of the incoming tide.

### **Okiwi Village and Store**

As we wandered around towing our fold-up shopping trolley looking for the store it was decided that Okiwi village houses, verges and roads were beautifully maintained. Friendly Okiwi locals directed us to the tiny store which, we discovered, stocked everything from the traditional needle to an anchor. Charming and friendly owners helped find what we sought. Several locals popped in for the paper or the bread or a chat which included us. I was helped by an 11 year old daughter of one to choose ice creams. She told me they had a crib but she really loved boats and everything about boats. If a holiday didn't include boats she would not bother going. Ice creams in hand we headed back to the beach and returned to Avanti in the dinghy.

### **Mooring at Wairangi Bay**

Now that the tide was further in there was plenty of water under the keel to move off and enjoy the 8nm exploration of Croissiles Harbour as far as Waiangri Bay. Ashley Wagg had kindly offered us the use his mooring lying in front of his crib in a narrow water lane bordering the shore. Further out, the water of the bay is covered with thousands of large black plastic buoys, roped together forming the extensive mussel farming operation. There

are broad open lanes between the different sections of the farm and right around the shore allowing access and anchoring for recreational boats and movement of farm barges and mussel harvesting machinery.

### **A Lonely Place**

Apart from another yacht on a Tasman Bay Boating Club mooring 1.5nm across the other side of Wairangi Bay, a few mussel farm barges and a spat sowing machine there has been no other vessels in sight or moving, nor have we seen a single person; only mussel buoys to talk to. A rather lonely place once the need for isolation is replaced with the need for a bit of activity. What causes the sea water to be a clear bright aqua-marine is a mystery. It is a purer and more attractive colour than the Waitaki Lakes milky glacial silt blue but difficult to capture on camera.

### **a'Musseling we Shall Go**

With so many mussel farms around us I rowed over to the nearest row of bouys to harvest a few for tonight's dinner. They were unused with no dropper lines and no mussels. On to the next row - same result. However on one of the ropes running down to an anchor I found the wily mussels. Lying over the side of the inflatable with both arms in the warm clear water I selected ones of appropriate size and popped them in my bucket. Although not the pristine equal sized bivalves that grow on the farm dropper ropes I thought these would be good enough. Normally on the droppers the mussels nearest the surface are black shelled which the farmers discard and doesn't mind you taking. The green-lipped mussels which are the marketable ones are further down and out of reach.

When it came to cooking I did create a problem. The bigger ones opened readily in the boiling water but the smaller stayed tightly closed and had to be tediously prised open with a knife. When served in a sauce with rice the dish was delicious.

### **The Wind is no Pussycat**

Although warm and calm today I have been in Croisilles Harbour when the wind blew so hard that two keeler yachts on moorings were both knocked down with spreaders in the water. The big gusts, originating from Cook Strait and heading for Pelorus Sound come roaring down from the steep ridges of the high hills above the bays. The wind in Wairangi Bay is no pussy cat. So always be ready for the violence and the claws to come out. Have the dinghy hoisted at night and lashed down on deck, loose gear secured and preparations below with everything stowed away for an unexpected wild ride. If the wind comes in the dark of the night it is all too late to make proper preparations to fight the wild animal in the storm.

Although the sun was setting the temperature was still high; it is calm and peaceful outside but after writing that paragraph with a feeling of guilt I immediately leapt up on deck and with Margaret's help we hoisted the outboard and the dinghy, lashed down everything in sight and felt completely vindicated about giving free and sage advice on the internet.

### **And so to Nelson**

This was another simple trip, like all of them during this voyage. At 08:30 Margaret slipped Ashley's mooring in Wairangi Bay. There was no wind; I started the engine and headed for the heads at Cape Souci, 8nm away and we proceeded for sea. When clear of Croisilles Harbour I left the mainsail rolled up inside the mast and set course 233°T for the 20nm across the glassy ocean for Nelson.

With hardly a moving boat in sight we entered into Nelson Haven through The Cut, the entrance through the natural massive breakwater of the Boulder Bank which forms Nelson Haven and protects Nelson City, the Port and the marina from the sea.

Ashley was waiting on our pontoon to take our lines and secure the boat. With the help of the owner of neighbouring 13m launch Lady Karita, they secured us to the pontoon of berth F14 and Margaret and I could relax.

### **The Stern Bearing**

On Wednesday 7 February Avanti will be lifted out of the water, with the boat yard's travel hoist, and onto a cradle, in preparation for repairs to be done to the propellor shaft stern bearing. Important repairs must be successful otherwise we can proceed no further.

End of Chapter Six  
2018 Summer Cruise of Avanti,,  
Picton to Nelson

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4 February 2018  
Aboard Yacht Avanti  
Berth F14  
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at Nelson