

Dorothy on Gippsland Lakes

Gippsland lakes were wonderful. We just caught glimpses. We'll be back.



At Steamer Landing

Our plan was to spend a day or so exploring Lake Victoria, based at Loch Sport, and then tow *Dorothy* to Eagle Point on Lake King and spend a few more days exploring – staying on-board one night.

Friday 6th January 2006 At Loch Sport caravan park we pitched our little 2 person dome tent. Ahh. The mozzies! Deal with them later. Let's get sailing! It was about 1600.

We got local knowledge from the Loch Sport Boat Club, which was setting up for the prize night of the catamaran titles they had just held. It was the Mosquito class!

Loch Sport has a neat ramp of the kind we'd seen often in Victoria, with excellent parking. More steeply sloping than the ones we were familiar with in NSW, it had jetties on either side rather than the stretches of sand flanking our home ramp. Fortunately we have two fenders to protect the topsides. It was good to be afloat on the Gippsland Lakes.

We motored away from the jetty and soon hoisted sail for a beam reach along the foreshore of Loch Sport. The township stretches for some two kilometers. We sailed its length and on to Pelican Point before turning towards home, anchoring off Loch Sport to eat dinner in a mozzie-free zone. Another beam reach in the evening light took us back to the ramp.

Will a front-wheel drive Magna pull a TS16 up a Victorian ramp? This ramp wasn't as steep as some we'd seen on our travels (nothing like the one at Port Welshpool for example). It turned out fine.

In our tent, by the light of our head torches, we planned our passage for the next day. We would explore Duck Arm, about 8 nautical miles from Loch Sport.

Saturday 7th January 2006 Was it the mozzies that distracted us? We discovered that the night before we had forgotten to retrieve our step ladder in the car park. We never saw it again.

The same launching procedure saw us afloat and sailing by 1100. In a moderate easterly we sailed full-and-by towards Point Turner, the sentinel off Duck Arm. Assuming 4 knots through the water the passage would take a couple of hours. After a little over the two hours we passed the Point Turner navigation structure with its signposts and distances: "16km to Loch Sport". With hints from the compass, we found the entrance to Duck Arm and soon we were anchored fore and aft on the end of a row of assorted power and sailing vessels.

Before lunch we worked out one of our ways of using a tarp to provide shade. We're new to cruising, and this was the first of many variations.

Time was short, so our delightful drifting exploration of Duck arm under jib alone was abbreviated. Near the main lake it was down with the jib and up with the main for a close fetch in a brisk breeze back out to Point Turner. Once round the point we set the jib too; our five-mile broad reach must have been how it felt to be in a clipper ship in the trade winds. Afternoon tea was in the lee of Pelican Point. Then it was back to the ramp at Loch Sport (and the mozzies).

Sunday 8th January Eagle Point is about 25 km or so from Loch Sport by water. It is some 150 km by road. So we took it easy and arrived at Eagle Point in the afternoon. We found our spot in the Lake King Caravan Park on spec', and we certainly struck lucky. We set up our tent 50m from the site's jetty and boat ramp.

We didn't launch that day, but drove to Painesville, which we took an immediate liking to. Next day we would explore the McMillan Strait between the mainland and Raymond Island as part of our plan to sail to Bunga Arm – the 7 nautical mile stretch of water separated from Bass Strait by a sand spit. We would sleep there on board and return the following day.

Monday 9th January We launched at the camp's boat ramp and at 1030 motored into a light headwind towards McMillan Strait. Painesville was just as attractive from the water. By 1130 we were anchored just inside Montague point for morning tea. This passage was about 4 nm, confirming our speed at about 4 knots.

At 1200 we set out for Ocean Grange Homestead in Bunga Arm, clearing Montague Point under motor, then working our way under sail to Pile Number 1, the starboard-hand pile at the entrance to the Aurora Channel that leads through the shallows to Ocean Grange. We negotiating the first part of the Aurora

channel under main alone. Vision is so much better without a jib. Shortly we dropped sail and motored along the Grange Channel, getting the classic view of the strange tower of Grange Homestead. We anchored just past the larger yachts moored at the jetty and walked past a series of holiday homes to get a closer look at the Homestead (private), use the composting toilet facilities in the parkland, and walk across the spit to take in the 90 mile ocean beach.

Next we explored Bunga Arm. Under sail we drifted to a shallow spit where at 1600 we anchored for late lunch, under yet another variation on the shade-tarp. We need something more permanent! While we ate, the wind swung round to the North-East giving us a headwind for our exploration, so we started the motor again.

We got as far as Reedy Island, which is roughly half way along the navigable part of the arm. With the North-Easterly wind behind us we whispered back under sail and anchored in sandy shallows at Steamer Landing with other boats, and near the toilets. Without our own toilet on board we would need them.

Our mooring lines weren't long enough to use the mooring posts so we anchored fore and aft. When squared away, we cooked dinner with our Trangia camping stove on shore and brought it back to *Dorothy* to eat in the setting sun. Perfect.

Note 1 on mosquitos. Mossies arrived in swarms at about 2100, just as we tried to improvise some screens. In fact our screens just kept them in, and by 2130 there were more inside than out. After removing the screens we were mosquito-free while we snuggled down for the night.

Tuesday 10th January Note 2 on mosquitos. We remained mosquito-free until 0500, when we were invaded for another half an hour. By 0530 they were gone.

We breakfasted at 0700 and by 0815 were motoring along Steamer channel in a glorious if windless morning, passing groups of swans and cygnets floating around us. Back at Pile Number 1 we set sail for Sperm Whale Head and slowly drifted along, reminded of windless days of gravel-pit sailing in England. By 1045 we were anchored at the beach at Point Wilson on Sperm Whale Head, just down from larger vessels moored at the jetty.

Note 3 on mosquitos. At Point Wilson mosquitos are fully active at mid day. We gave up on lunch in the delightful glade we had found and retreated to *Dorothy*.

At 1215 we set sail for Newlands Arm, in a pleasant breeze that gave us a reachy-run all the way. At the entrance we passed TS16 Strawberry Shortcake, looking splendid with her pink gingham check curtains. Newlands Arm was as pretty as the books said.

Next we planned to stop at Painsville for shopping. So far we had avoided mooring at jetties because they

seemed to be built for vessels that were larger, or at least tougher, than our delicate plywood *Dorothy*, but the day before we had seen a smaller jetty and thought we would try that. But when we got there it was occupied, so we looked around and found an alternative, just by the ferry to Raymond Island, that looked as though it might be ok. We carefully moored there, with our fenders, and it might have been ok if it had not been for the wash of passing vessels causing *Dorothy* to pitch and surge. But she seemed to be coping, so with some trepidation we went shopping, before getting take-away cappuccinos to drink sitting on the jetty while keeping an eye on *Dorothy*.

After motoring back up McMillan Channel we set sail at the entrance light structure and scooted back to the Caravan Park, where we moored *Dorothy* fore and aft at the jetty like the other boats. This was new for us and we did it all by walking around waist deep in water. Clearly there are drier ways! We did work out that the bow lines need to be triangulated (or very short) to prevent her from sheering around. As it turned out we had moored *Dorothy* opposite a larger Hartley, *Banyandah*, which was set up for serious cruising, but we didn't catch up with the owners.



Dorothy at the Jetty of Lake King Caravan Park

Wednesday 11th January We planned to sail towards the entrances of the Tambo, Nicholson and Mitchell rivers, but it was pouring with rain in the morning, so we left our tent early and went to Bairnsdale for breakfast and lunch and didn't set sail until 1500. Half way to our destination we hit an awkward quartering sea and an unexpectedly brisk breeze, and seeing a cloud-bank behind us from the West – the direction we were warned that trouble might come from – we turned around and motored back to the caravan park. We got there just as the wind died to the predicted light breeze. Still it was time for us to pack up anyway, ready for our trip back to Sydney.

We packed up in the company of the ex-Commodore of the Karam sailing club who had just come to the caravan park. When this builder of three TS16s, cruiser on Gippsland Lakes, and racer in Port Philip Bay saw a TS16 his eyes lit up and he greeted us with: "Hello. TS16 – best boat on the lake." We all agreed on that.