

The Melbourne Whitley Cruiser Club

Port Stephens & Nelson Bay – Cruise Report

Not everyone has the luxury of TIME! Yes some of us have to work! That meant our planned trip to the Gold Coast for the 2018, Queensland, Whitley Regatta was restricted to two weeks of annual leave. This had to include, 3 days travel to get to the gold Coast, arriving at Couran Cove on the Wednesday 25 April, one day before the Regatta started to enjoy the Resort, we had 5 nights at Couran Cove, before heading south for a night in a caravan park in Arrawarra just north of Coffs Harbour. On Tuesday 1 May, 5 boats arrived at Port Stephens for a 4 night stay.



Figure 2 -Horizon Shore to Port Stephens - Nelson Bay

In the weeks before the Regatta we had contacted Angie and Alex Munz from the NSW & now Queensland, Whitley clubs and asked their recommendations for a cruise destination above or below Sydney to break our trip about half way home. They strongly recommended Port Stephens for its clear waters, great sheltered coves, wide rivers, safe accessible entrance, good boat ramps, good Marinas and great places to dine.



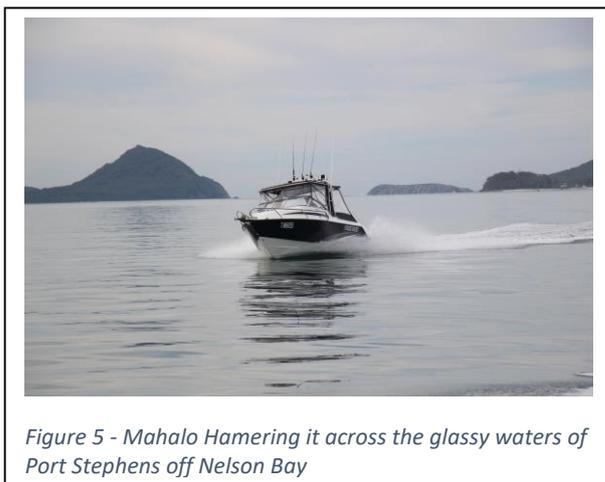
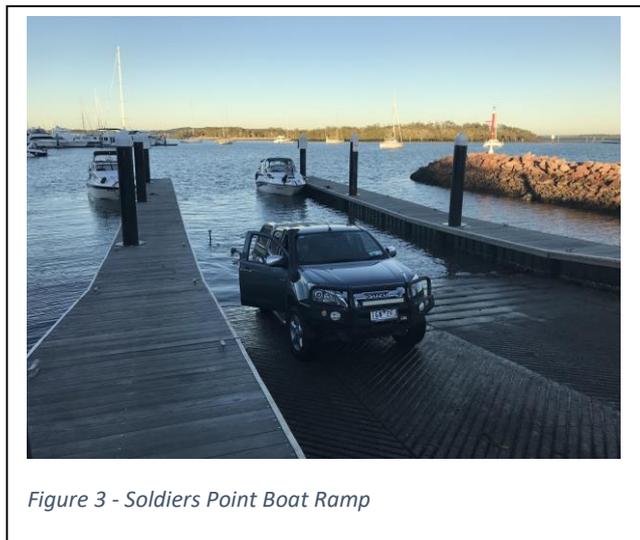
Figure 1 - Thumbs up Dael. Here to a quick recovery. We will miss you in Port Stephens.

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Unfortunately, we had lost two crew members from the 5 boats that planned the cruise on Port Stephens. Marisca Seinen had to fly home on Sunday 29 April to work and Dael Jackson had broken her hip while riding a bike at Couran Cove the day before the regatta. Dael missed the entire Regatta but we saw before we left for Port Stephens, at her sister's house on the Gold Coast, where she spent the following week recovering from a Hip replacement.

So we launched the boats at Soldiers Point boat ramp. It is a very good ramp for boats our size. Deep water, protected from the wind, with floating pontoon jetties on each side of the double ramp and a safe, well light vehicle and trailer parking area.

- Mark & Eva D'Alterio in Gottago – CR 2180
- Laurie Jackson in Mahalo – SL 22
- John Beckman in JB Squared – CR 2600
- Wilco & Eric Seinen in Ruby Tuesday – CR 660
- Gary & Lee Honeychurch in Lucky Us – CR 2380



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We cruised about 10 kms from soldiers point to Nelson Bay Marina, where we had reserved berths. Port Stephens is quite deep in places but has a shallow area in the middle of the bay. It is very well marked and corresponds to the maps we had purchased and the GPS. It is fed by 11 rivers, three that are navigable for our size boats, the Tilligerry, the Karuah and the Myah.



Figure 6 - Port Stephens

The entrance is wide, deep and quite accessible. There are four islands just outside the entrance, Shark, Little, Boondelbah and Cabbage Tree islands, which provide shelter when fishing. There are three large Marinas, Soldiers Point, Corlette and Nelson Bay. The biggest is at Nelson Bay and this also has the largest shopping centre, the most dining areas and shore accommodation.

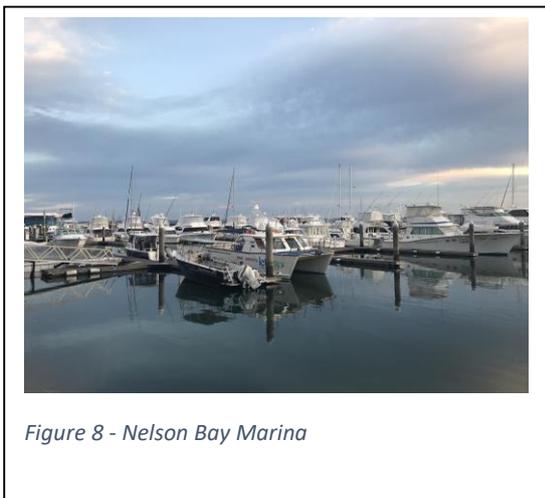


Figure 8 - Nelson Bay Marina



Figure 7 - Our Favourite "Local" bar & Restaurant right on the Marina

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Eric was extremely excited by the prospect of fishing, probably fuelled by stories told by Ray Mantle and other NSW club members that were encouraging Eric to catch a bull shark in the Marina during the Regatta. Once we had settled in at the bar overlooking the Marina, Eric was off in search of local knowledge and more fishing equipment. He found both, at the local game fishing shop. That set the agenda for the Wednesday morning, not that it impressed Wilco too much, with planned, live bait catching, close to Tomaree Head rock just outside the entrance, before sunrise, then to be fishing just to the west side of Little island at sunrise. That's how to catch the big ones they told Eric!



Figure 10 - Found Ruby Tuesday just off Little Island.



Figure 9 - Eric & Wilco on Ruby Tuesday fishing for Calamari in Shoul Bay

That's where Lucky Us, found Ruby Tuesday, just after sunrise and they already had caught some great fish which Eric cooked for all of us as an entrée that night.

We came back to Nelson Bay in time for breakfast and a much needed coffee before heading off on our first cruise through Port Stephens and a kilometre past the Pacific Highway bridge up the Karuah River where we had some lunch. It is a very wide river but you have to be aware of the Oyster lease racks on the edge of the rivers and in the shallows of Port Stephens. They are everywhere and you must be carefully not to mistake the oyster rack poles for channel markers.



Figure 11 - All Happy Faces here in Nelson Bay!

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Figure 12 -Sunrise over Nelson Bay Marina

Over the next three days we cruised up the Myall river to the small town of "Tea Gardens". We caught Calamari in Shoul Bay, we snorkelled off Jimmy's beach, we cruised up the Tilligerry creek and stopped at the small town of



Figure 13 - Fame Cove

"Lemon Tree Passage" and did the short board walk along the fore shore.



Figure 15- Cabbage tree Island



Figure 14 -Cabbage tree Island

We cruised into the extremely sheltered Fame Cove, followed Dolphins in Salamander Bay, caught flathead off Shark Island, Cruised out around Cabbage Tree Island, checked out the other marinas, watched some beautiful sunrises and sunsets, dinned out each night at the pub and restaurants all in easy walking distance from the marina in a climate where we could be in shorts and T-Shirts.



Figure 16 - Salamander bay

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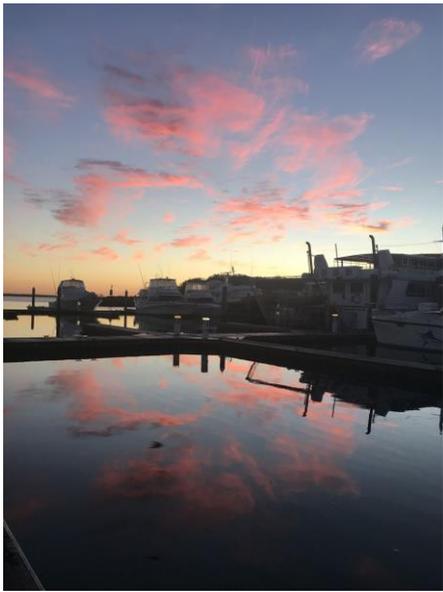


Figure 18 - Sunrise over Nelson Bay



Figure 17 - Sunset over Port Stephens

Port Stephens is a beautiful waterway, it is big, calm, and easily navigable and there is so much more to see and do in this area, in your boat, on foot and in your vehicle. It is a place that definitely requires a second and maybe even a forth visit! We have just scratched the surface.

We will be back,

Cheers

Lee Honeychurch