Ocean Sunrise Kangaroo Island Expedition

A crew of five (David Nelson, Iain Langusch, Hamish Morelli, Tom Wiseman and India Hopkins) set sail from Wirrina with a favourable forecast of 20 knot southerly winds for our crossing of Backstairs Passage. We were able to lay a course for Emu Bay on a shy reach in winds that eventually reached almost 30 knots. David was kept busy with numerous sail changes in the variable conditions. We reached Emu Bay as the sun was setting, achieving an average speed of over 7 knots, very good going in a 32 footer.

Day 2 dawned fine and sunny as we motor-sailed for much of the morning, heading for Snug Cove at the western end of the Island. The breeze eventually kicked in and we covered the last few miles without the drone of the motor. There were a few tense moments as we negotiated the entrance to Snug Cove where the now mostly westerly wind presented a lee shore situation. Something sailors try to avoid. Luckily the breeze dropped soon after our arrival and the students enjoyed a snorkel in this stunning anchorage (although it is not particularly ‘snug’ in W or NW winds). The highlight for the students was seeing one of the semi-tame blue gropers that inhabit Snug. We had picked up a few snook on a para vane on our passage and the crew enjoyed one of David Nelson’s signature fish curries for dinner. Tolerance of hot food is a prerequisite for Ocean Sunrise crews.

We started Day 3 by heading further west to the De Mole River where we had been told that huge King George whiting abound. India did manage to catch one good whiting, but our expected bag limit did not eventuate. Our sail back to Emu Bay started as a motor sail and ended up with the last 3 hours a 25 knot plus beat to windward. This gave the students a true, if a little wet, taste of what it is like to sail when the wind is coming from where you want to go. That evening we witnessed a stunning full moonrise.

We began Day 4 by sailing round to Kingscote where we went ashore to stretch the legs and buy fuel. We picked up a mooring on the southern side of the town jetty and went scalloping. It is amazing that we have never failed to get a feed of scallops, almost within ‘bombing range’ of the jetty. I copped a fair amount of ridicule from David as I managed to lose a fair amount of my catch during the swim back to the boat. He commended me on my ‘catch and release’ approach. After cleaning, we still had enough scallops (and more snook from the vane) to enjoy a delicious Moroccan fish stew for dinner (another Nelson classic). The evening was completely still and the mirror-like surface of the water made for a spectacular sunset. This turned out to be the lull before the storm, for at 3.00am the sound of rain sent the crew sleeping on deck scurrying below. The rain was followed by the sound of wind building in strength until the noise from the rigging as well as the movement of the boat in the rising sea meant that we needed to find a calmer mooring. We managed to grab a relatively calmer mooring off the little fishermen’s jetty in the lee of the main jetty, but sleep was impossible (at least for Dave and me). As the morning forecast was full of strong wind warnings and much of the same for the next day, it was decided not to attempt the crossing of Backstairs Passage (a notoriously rough piece of water). Instead, using a bus, a hire car, a ferry and another bus, we found ourselves back in Adelaide, leaving David to sail back on his own. It wasn’t the ideal end to what was a fabulous trip. I would like to thank David for including me in his crew and the students for their cooperation and good company.

Iain Langusch
Teacher
Ocean Sunrise
April, 2011

India, Hamish and Tom
Skipper and First Mate hard at work, North Coast Kangaroo Island
Full Moon-rise Emu Bay Kangaroo Island

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