

Log of the *HILDE M²*



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“Almost immediately there was another spell of bad weather that prevented me from sailing North. It seemed like days went by when I hardly had the energy to turn out of my bunk in the morning. I missed B and I missed having wheels to explore the countryside. The windy chilly weather exactly matched my mood.

“Perhaps the thing that kept me going at all was the fact that Hank Toluzzi, our correspondent friend across the dock on *TAKIRI*, was fighting what seemed to be a gradually losing battle against the Big C. He was feeling rotten from the medication and couldn't do much more than drag himself to the showers and to the local clinic for tests. I did some shopping for him and several times bailed out his sailing dinghy during the deluge. He was lonely and so was I. Together we made a fine pair, indeed, but I knew that I was the lucky one!

“On Tuesday, June 28, B called the Yacht Club” (Ed: Actually it was Fritz, who got through on his MCI card easily after I reached Information with no trouble but then couldn't get through to the YC.)

“One of the staffers kindly came out to tell me. I called her back within minutes and found her feeling very upbeat with the news that several people had responded to a trial ad we had placed in *Cruising World Magazine*. One couple in New York State seemed particularly interested in coming to Australia and cruising the Southwest Pacific from here. I was elated, too, and fell to work with a will. I even installed a replacement fresh water foot pump in the head, something I'd avoided for months since it never bothered me to wash my face and brush my teeth in the galley. I knew that both B and Joe Consolo would certainly approve, so obviously any prospective new owners would too. I scrubbed away, picking up where B left off.

“I had planned to depart M'ba ASAP, heading NNW towards the Keppel, Percy, and Whitsunday Islands so as to be further along towards Darwin on my cruising permit itinerary which was due to expire October 15. The changed plan was now to stand by in M'ba in case a sale might develop early. The delay was just as well, because gale force winds were blowing along the coast from Torres Strait to the NSW border. B and I talked every couple days, running up a monstrous international telephone bill, but we did have news to pass (we couldn't discuss business over amateur radio even if I could have gotten phone patches) and it helped us both to talk.

“I checked out possible local boat surveyors and talked by long distance with the Customs Office in Brisbane. As in the past, I found the people there courteous but not forthcoming with helpful information. They would generally provide the answer to a direct question, but one had to phrase the question exactly right to get the desired facts. My cruising permit clearly states that import duties must be paid on ANY sale or transfer by gift of a foreign boat. When I asked if that applied to sale to another

American the answer was yes. Now I asked if duty could be avoided on sale to another American who would sail on from Australia. Answer: yes, but the boat would have to depart Australia within the time limit originally established for me. Even that time restriction was later said not to apply by still another Customs official when I asked in Townsville. That, at least, was very good news since the object of selling the boat was to recoup as much as possible of the savings we have tied up in her.

By Friday, July 8, it began to look as if possibilities with the prospective buyers were fading a bit though they still said they were interested. They were having problems lining up financing and needed to lease out their farm. B sounded a little discouraged and I felt that, with slightly improved weather, maybe I'd better continue in my intended cruising direction, just in case things fell through. I was sorry to leave the good people on the dock, especially Hank who looked sad and said he'd miss me. Generally, cruising departures aren't too gloomy because yachties' paths tend to cross from time to time (almost as many reunions as separations) but I had a feeling I'd not meet this friend again. I've written several times since then, but had no reply. I wish Hank fair winds."

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NORTH ALONG THE COAST. "I departed M'ba harbor at dusk, about 5:30 PM with 50 miles or so to sail to Wide Bay, the southern entrance to the Great Sandy Strait behind Frasier Island. Like most estuaries on Australia's E coast, Wide Bay is guarded by extensive shoaling bars. It's not a place to be caught by strong onshore winds or rough seas. I would have liked to avoid it altogether by sailing outside the island but the coastal weather stations were broadcasting a warning that the Breaksea Spit Light off the northeastern point of the island was extinguished. Those extensive unlit inshore shoals together with a 2-knot southward offshore drift seemed to make the Sandy Strait a better bet for a single-hander.

"I had been warned that the only time to attempt an approach through Wide Bay was in the forenoon, just after high tide, so as to have the best light to see the shoals and the leading markers on the shore, and to have the calmest and deepest water possible. That's why I left M'ba in the evening. Accordingly, I approached the channel about 9 AM and all went well though I was a bit appalled by the green curlers roaring on either side of the narrow dredged cut. Fortunately the wind was nearly calm and the swell was less than a meter. Otherwise I doubt I would have had the courage to run that gauntlet.

"Before 10 AM I was inside the bar near Tin Can Creek and the S end of the strait. The near calm persisted inside and I motored slowly up the sometimes winding and mostly shoal channel, dogging it at 2 k or less since the 'crossover', the thinnest water about half way up, couldn't be passed until half tide about 2 PM. I cheated a bit and got over the shallows with a few inches to spare at 1:40. The chart showed just over a meter there at mean low water. With that hazard behind, I poured on the diesel oil to push along at top speed in order to reach a protected anchorage near the N entrance of the strait before dark. At 3:30 PM, faced with a fierce 3 k incoming tide to buck and scarcely more than an hour of good light remaining, I relented and dropped anchor near the 'white cliffs' on the N side of Frasier Island, well protected in the event of a southeaster coming up during the night.

"The whole trip up through Great Sandy Strait reminded me strongly of my days on the Chesapeake Bay with low wooded hills, and the air still and warm, with a heat shimmer on the smooth silvery water. Herons and egrets took time from their fishing in the shallows to watch my passage just like their Delmarva cousins.

“I would have liked to stop awhile and explore Frasier Island. It's the largest all-sand island in the world, they say, and much of it is a park that is well known to Australian nature lovers. It was rescued from mineral mining interests by the Frasier government (no relation) not so many years ago when it seemed that much of the white and brightly colored sands might literally be hauled away. I certainly enjoyed the lovely scenery from the cockpit of the HM² but I felt that I should move on.

“After a good overnight rest from my 22 hr vigil I was up at 6 AM on Sunday the 10th for another leg of the Great Northwestward Coastal Journey. I had the remnants of an incoming tide but departed anyway, eager to get every bit of boost from the outgoing one. Even so, it was 11 AM when I finally passed the fairway buoy and headed on a 310 degree magnetic course across Hervey (Pronounced Harvey) Bay past Burnett Heads and on towards Gladstone. The day was mild, the sky generally clear, with a light SE wind. The coast here swept out of sight to the W and for an hour I seemed to be far at sea again, but gradually a bump rose from the water hard on my Port bow and became 'the Hummock' that marks the site of Port Bundaberg on the Burnett River.

“By 5:50 PM I was off Burnett Heads and the river entrance to Bundaberg but it was nearly dark and I decided to continue on rather than to feel my way into the harbor. The night was starry and the barometer showed a steady 1017 hectopascals (Aussie for millibars) and I still had the urge to make hay, so to speak, while the weather was favorable. Toward dawn the breeze picked up until it was blowing close to 20 k from the S. I welcomed the boost until I rounded Bustard Head (so called by the good Captain Cook because there he and his officers dined well on a kind of a 'down under' version of our wild turkey); and I headed SW, now pushing against the wind into Pancake Creek for a secure anchorage.

“This wide inlet is one of the few in NE Australia that is not blocked by a breaking bar and can be entered at all states of the tide. I dropped the hook in the second anchorage, well up the waterway past a five-foot spot, and was groggy enough not to notice that a departing sailboat was in the process of grounding just out of the channel. By the time I recognized their predicament the HM² was secured and they were heeled over, well and truly stranded. After my 27 hour run I was ready for a mid morning nap.

“That afternoon, somewhat refreshed, I tried the radio and managed to get through to the West Coast for the first time in quite a while. In spite of pretty poor band conditions, B and I each managed to convey the word that things were ok. Feeling better for that, I hustled around the galley and whipped up a tasty dish of eggplant Parmesan. That took quite a while, and after gorging myself, I turned in for a full night's sleep.

“At 8 AM on Tuesday the 12th I upped the anchor and headed out under wing and wing on the still-fresh S wind with the thought of another long run up the coast. A 10 AM weather forecast on the HF radio convinced me, though, that the wind would increase from a more easterly direction, possibly to gale force. I immediately jibed and headed N for the entrance channel to Gladstone. Granted that the tide was ebbing, but it seemed to take forever to cross the bay and work my way up into Port Curtis. When I finally got there about 3:30 PM I was delighted to find a spanking brand new marina with floating docks and full facilities for yachts. I was glad to tank up with fuel and tie up for a couple nights to wait out the 25-30 k winds outside.

“Ashore I found everything you'd want in a marina except easy access to the town. The facility is built on the N bank of Auckland Creek, while everything else lies to the South. It was a matter of a long walk by road and bridge or a 10-minute dinghy ride. I'd about decided to do make do with the tiny shops and snackbar in the marina when George Galbraith showed up. He's an electrical engineer who's taking his retirement in chunks from Rockwell International and single-handing his way around the Pacific in *SUNDEE*, a 33 foot Herreshof sloop. We'd met in NZ at the ham fest and he offered me a ride over in his inflatable dink, pushed by a prehistoric Evinrude. He had developed a no-fail method of starting it on the first pull. All it took was a vigorous thump on it's cowl with an oar. He seemed glad to have the company and I was pleased as well.

“The town was pleasant, perhaps about 40 k in population, and primarily a bulk shipping terminal for coal, bauxite, and sorghum. We checked in with the local customs office - a requirement stipulated in our cruising permits where offices exist. Otherwise a postal card form must be sent to Brisbane from each port visited. Later we poked around the town a bit and we each bought a few perishable groceries at the local Jack-The-Slasher supermarket. Back at the marina I took advantage of the brand new washers and driers to process a couple loads of laundry. With full tanks and full larder and lots of fresh smelling clothes, I was well fixed for another week or so before seeking another port.

“Stan, the dock-master, was a retired trawler captain. He provided me with lots of good information about navigating the area. He provided interesting yarns about how the local fellows used to 'dip' or 'bob' and range various mountain peaks and coastal lights to determine the exact location of offshore reefs and fishing banks in the 'good ole days' before Omega and Satellite navigation. I'm sure that kind of local knowledge still works more reliably than high technology - except for when there's no visibility.

“Thursday, July 14 I left the dock at 7 AM, just in time to catch the half tide across the middle bar, and headed out through the narrows of the N harbor entrance between Curtis Island and Facing Island. The wind had settled down to 18-20 k from the SE after two days over 25k. The seas were still a bit bumpy, but smoothed out as I went N and came increasingly under the protection of offshore reefs. I had some concern about this stretch of coast because there are no navigation lights on which to triangulate. Therefore I wouldn't be able to check on dead reckoning position and would have to rely on SatNav fixes for that at night. SatNav is wonderful offshore, but it has severe limitations for coastwise work since the fixes can come as far apart as several hours and some fixes can be a mile or more off. Likewise, celestial navigation is no help on a dark night with no horizon and is seldom accurate enough for work around reefs and rocks.

"As often happens where possibility of problems exist, Murphy's Law was operating. As night approached the sky clouded over, blotting out the stars and the new moon. It became black as pitch and to make matters worse some of the Sat fixes were obviously off to one side or the other of my track. The islands and coast were all obviously uninhabited and no light shone anywhere. Strong currents were said to exist in the area but I couldn't be sure how or whether to adjust my course. I just continued to plow along under reduced sail on my nominal 325 degree M way, and kept a sharp lookout while praying a lot.

“Just before 10 PM as I stared blindly ahead I imagined I could see something blacker than the rest of the sea and the Sky. It seemed to have two parts - a big lump and something much larger to port. Down below I turned on the small chart light and gauged my distance run with an arc, trying to match

up some feature with what I thought I could see. And then it dawned on me with a rush of adrenaline. I was nearly two miles off course to the W and I was looking at - was on a collision course for - a huge unmanned rock islet lying just off Cape Manifold. The SatNav fix W of my course line had been correct.

“With my heart in my mouth I leaped back into the cockpit and tacked sharply to the E, away from the black masses; unconcerned, for the moment, with Peaked Island, another unlit off-lier a couple miles E of my intended course. As the Cape and its outer bastion faded behind me I breathed easier, readjusted my course, and gave thanks to the Lord who had kept me alert and who had made the rock in my path a large enough one to see in the darkness. Truly I felt 'in the flow of His power' - and also just possibly my dad had helped me once again on this voyage.

If I hadn't already been made aware of the tremendous currents off this headland and Port Clinton to the N where the tides range to 7 meters, I'd have soon found out. It took from midnight until past dawn to work my way past the white flashing 10 mile light on the Clara group of islets, sailing at times up to 50 degrees E of my intended course to avoid being swept toward the coast. I was overjoyed, though, to have even that one light as a benchmark of progress in the early morning hours.

I can certainly see now why so many of the Australian cruising boats are equipped with radar. The government just doesn't have enough aids to navigation along some of the most dangerous stretches of coast.

MY BLUE FUNK IN CRUISERS' VALHALLA

"I continued on my course, with good visibility and lots of islands and mountain peaks for piloting reference. By 1:30 PM I entered the secure, if lively, anchorage on the W side of Middle Percy Island. The curving white sand beach and palm trees make this picturebook island a mythic destination of cruisers from around the world. I could see why, but privately felt that others I had visited were at least as glorious.

"I had wanted for years to see it for myself, and now here I was too pooped to do more than glance at it and flop on the bunk for a good sleep.

“Needless to say, I stayed put on Saturday relaxing and enjoying the scenery. For some reason I didn't feel the need to unleash and launch the dinghy to go ashore. It was enough just to drink it all in from the cockpit and watch the people from some of the other boats playing on the beach. There were a half a dozen yachts there and if there had been none I might have felt more like exploring. I felt a bit under the weather anyway, maybe even feverish, probably as a reaction to my irregular hours and the tension of my last passage.

“On the beach is a picturesque shack built said to have been built by a hospitable family that lived here. Over the years countless yachts have left their names on plaques and mementos around the walls. Alas, the visit of the *HILDE M²* went unrecorded there.

The bay was roly. It seemed a lot like some of the uneasy anchorages I recalled in the Marquesas Islands. The SE swell appeared to be reflected off nearby Sphinx Island and back into this otherwise protected place. I probably should have set a stern anchor to keep the HM² headed into the small waves but somehow couldn't work up the energy. I pattered around on deck, took some photos, and basked.



A recent view at Percy Island

“Some folks on a *SPRAY* replica named *OYSTER MAN* invited me ashore for a Sunday evening multi-boat barbecue but I had already planned to shove off just before dark for the run to the Whitsunday Islands. This time there were several 12-mile lights on islands near my course so that I could check my position at any time. The weather was good and I wanted to move on before it might deteriorate again.

“Of course since the potential problems were few my course was 'spot-on' and, since I had no need of extra checks, the Sat fixes were frequent and accurate, but I was glad to have them all. I was thankful, too, for the good breeze that let me go under full sail and to make the 130 mile run all the way up the Northumberland and Cumberland Channels to Cyd Harbour on Whitsunday Island before dark on Monday.

It was glorious to have a perfectly calm anchorage for a change, and picture-perfect surroundings, and nothing to do but enjoy then. The Whitsunday scenery was much like that of the Virgin Islands. I could understand why this area is considered to have the best yachting on the Australian coast.

“For the first time in many months, I was surrounded by charter sailboats. I reflected back and recalled that charter boats had been available in most of the really nice cruising spots I'd visited in the past two years.

Maybe sometime in the future, health and finances permitting, I'll pick an interesting area and try to entice B or some of the kids along for a charter - but that will be pretty far down my list during the next few years. In the meantime, I was looking forward to a bit of cruising in this pleasant area, and then pushing on to Townsville and/or Cairns to do some sailing with prospective buyers of the HM² and to heading home.”

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BACK AT THE RANCH. With my great vacation over, things got busier and busier, doing the follow-up errands for K such as getting the printer repaired (which sounds simple but wasn't). I talked several times with Lynn Odendahl and Henry Law, the folks from Walden, NY who want to buy the HM² and begin their own Voyage in a year or so. Lynn and Henry have been steady as a rock with their intention

to buy the HM²; but there've been so many complications along the way that it's been a real roller-coaster for me (and for K, too, except easier for me since I have family and friends around and he's by himself).

One adventure involved taking a day off work and driving to Norfolk to consult with the Coast Guard about properly recording the fact that we paid off the boat mortgage two years ago. Lots of proof in hand, but to no avail. Must have certain forms, certain wording. No written instructions available. They very politely answer, with absolute technical accuracy, any question you ask -- period. Surely no third-world country could be worse. It was a good thing I went in person, for eventually I got the forms and information I needed, so that only a couple of weeks later my purpose was accomplished. Clearly the CG needs more funds for routine work.

Since so many of you have asked why K is not continuing westward, see page 10 for his essay on Concluding the Voyage. And, on behalf of us both, please know that we have deeply appreciated your interest and support while he's been away. In many respects, it hasn't been easy for either of us -- though it's definitely been rewarding -- and each of you has helped us more than you may know. We hope this is the last Log of this Voyage, but we don't want to lose touch. So, until the next communication of whatever sort, please take care of yourselves.

Love, B and K.

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ON COMING HOME

I've decided to come home, finally, after nearly two years of what I originally planned could take three years and be a circumnavigation. This is not by way of an apology for a cop-out, because it's in the nature of cruising to change one's plans based on realities of weather, equipment, health, finances, and a host of other considerations. So I'll just try to tell you what's in my mind.

The *HILDE M²* and I have come roughly half way round the world together and we're both in pretty good condition as far as I know. We could probably make it the rest of the way but there would be a cost involved, monetary and otherwise, that I no longer feel is justified in terms of personal commitment and satisfaction. My dreams originally involved following the wake of others to the South Pacific. I was lucky and was able to make it happen with much backing and support from my wife. I suppose I thought it might be a circumnavigation because that seemed reasonable to end it up.

Now I feel immensely satisfied. There would be some further fulfillment in continuing, but the returns would diminish, it now seems to me. Summing up my experiences to date, I find that there were times when I felt stretched to the limit of my capabilities, and these were worthwhile tests. Once or twice, frankly, I've been in situations beyond my ability, and then I was frightened and very very lucky. There have also been times when I was quite bored and lonely, and wished heartily that I could be back in the bosom of my family. On the whole, though, it's been a delightful mind-expanding growth experience and one I wouldn't trade for the world.

There is a wonderful freedom manifested in the "cruising lifestyle". At the same time a very real discipline is imposed -- at least on those who survive. Maybe that is why nearly every cruiser I've met

has been a very special attractive human being. Even the children have been outstanding and I tend not to suffer childishness easily. Perhaps the special qualities can be described as independence, self-sufficiency, humility, and caring for others.

Having said all these things, two facts persuade me that I should finish my cruising adventure here and move on to more family oriented challenges: First, I have become convinced that single-handed sailing is not a seaman-like thing to do. Not only is there real danger to myself and potential loss to my family, there is the possibility of damage to others, either directly through an accidental collision or indirectly in the event of a search in case I went missing. In spite of the fact that I'd never ask others to put themselves at risk or expense that way, I know that some would.

Second, while cruising can bring a family closer together than any other lifestyle I know, it hasn't been possible in my case. Barbara has tried mightily to please me in this way and has logged a couple of thousand miles offshore in the process, but it has been a constant battle against fear and seasickness for her. Facing that, not only has she let me go -- she has aided and abetted my escape -- and in doing that has bound me closer than ever before. I've missed her companionship every moment and know she has missed mine. I feel that for her sake and for mine we need to be together.

Most cruisers have severed mainland ties and made their boats their only homes. Unlike them, I've always seen the *HILDE M²* as a shelter and a means of travel. My home is in southern Maryland. I'll be sorry to sell the *HILDE M²* and I'll miss her, but now I'm looking toward more adventures at home with Barbara.

Karl Edler, August 1988

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