

## WESTWARD HO!

### The search for Summer 2026

Here is a record of our January 2026 cruise in *Shardik*, to Queen Charlotte Sound, Pelorus Sound, Tasman Bay, Nelson, Abel Tasman Park and Golden Bay. Most of the following will not be news to the more experienced club cruising folk, but for our own records and possible interest of others - here goes:

After the volatile spring and early summer weather, my wife Vivienne and I were keen to get out of Wellington and the Cook Strait area, to seek warmer and more settled weather further west. As we cruised we sailed, motor-sailed and motored as the conditions and schedule required.

We departed Seaview at 1230 in a light-moderate north westerly on January 2<sup>nd</sup>. Wellington High Water was 1630. We made fast time motor sailing down the harbour under 2 reefs and No. 2 genoa and we were 45 minutes early before slack water at Sinclair. Moderate NW wind of 15-20 kn. The sea state was fairly flat.

We retained the 2<sup>nd</sup> reef off the Karori rip and into half way across the Strait because the unassisted sailing was at 6-7 knots through the water and a comfortable fetch. Eventually I shook out 1 reef as we approached Tory Channel and the wind eased.

We entered on the Arapawa side (East), having been offset by a notable North tide set near the entrance. We encountered a moderately strong ebb at TC entrance at 1800 and further up the channel. This wasn't a problem but surprising. It was evident all the way to Ngaruru Bay. This does not compute with the tidal stream information available to me, especially the PBC almanac which states that TC ebb begins Picton HW+ 15 mins. That should have been 2130.

We stayed in Ngaruru to sit out a SE gale next day, but found it uncomfortable even on the club mooring. So we motored around to Anapua Bay and into Tawa.... A big mistake in a strong south easterly!

A 30 knot+ gust struck from behind as we approached the mooring with no sea room to turn around or 2<sup>nd</sup> chance to pick up the mooring. Fortunately, our new engine and propeller enabled us to back out, and we went to Missionary Bay.



The next day - 4/2/26, in a dying southerly and brilliant sunshine we motor sailed out of QCS and anchored at Alligator head (Punt Rails) for the night.

From 5/1/26, with the prospect of 4-5 days of fine weather we headed to Ketu Bay via Allen Strait, stopping at Whakatahuri Boatyard wharf to fill our solar showers. This derelict facility was quite interesting, especially when the owner soon came alongside his wharf with a fine converted antique double ended fishing boat. The lines were quite beautiful.

Incidentally Whakatahuri is featured in the current (Feb 2026) *Boating NZ*. I hadn't been aware that it was also a boat demolition yard, disposing of some quite large craft. The nearby seabed is apparently littered with scrap from the demolitions. We had anchored close to the wharf without problems, but if we had known, we might not have chosen to stop there.



A pleasant beat and reach in the afternoon took us to Ketu Bay, where there are several club moorings which provide all weather shelter, plus proximity to walking tracks ashore. We remained there for 3 nights, and saw *Sliver*, and Josh and Merewyn Groom briefly before they headed towards Tennyson inlet.

My brother Rob and wife Ket had launched their Double kayak from Clova Bay off the Kenepuru Road, and paddled as far as Ketu Bay to join us.



An approaching front with forecast NW gales saw us head down to Tennyson Inlet ourselves on 8/1/26, to hole up and enjoy the walks ashore. The native bush in Tennyson is really something to behold. Deep Bay (near Elaine) seemed too exposed as the NW wind built over the weekend. We

moved to the club mooring at Penzance Bay but even with the sheltered location, we got thrashed by occasional 40-50 knot gusts on the Sunday night as the storm hit Central NZ (including Wellington). A couple of nearby yachts dragged their anchors during the night.



On the 12/1 the 'dying westerly' saw us heading up Pelorus Sound towards French Pass, expecting a fast beam reach under double reefed main and No. 2 genoa. This lasted until Apua Channel, west of Maud Island, whereupon the wind became NE 25 knots on the nose straight down the Sound, with a fairly rough sea. This underlines how much the wind varies according to the topography within the Sounds.

We really needed the staysail to be able to make acceptable progress to windward at least at 90 degree tacking, even motor sailing, so we ducked into Pohuenui Bay (NE corner of Richmond) to rig it and have a breather.

Rafting up to a Beneteau 38, we were surprised to meet a retired couple who we had met in 2018 when they were running their yacht charter business in BOI.

The wind eased as we headed out of Pelorus, and we then broad- reached around Clay Point to Kapowai Bay on Durville Island for our first transit of French Pass the following morning.



Light and variable winds saw us motor sailing to Nelson where we stayed for 4 nights and encountered some significant rain. The Wellington to Nelson race fleet came in while we were there.... *Sliver* was prominent in the results, which was impressive - especially since they couldn't have had much time to turn around, after their cruise to Pelorus.

A number of Wellington boats and crew were sighted at this time, including a sizable EBYMB contingent, and *Wild Cherry*.



The Nelson Regatta got underway as we left on Saturday 17/1, bound for Torrent Bay. The fleet came into Torrent a couple of nights after we arrived and provided visual and aural entertainment.

The weather was so cool, windy and changeable with a couple of rainy days, we stayed at Torrent Bay and did local walks for most of the time.





The exception to this was motor sailing in light Northerlies for a 4 day visit to Port Tarohe in Golden Bay, primarily to visit family.

The marina is very convenient with a new facilities block – to be recommended.

I can't say the same for the local sailing in the prevailing West to NE winds however. Any sort of a breeze, kicked up a nasty short steep sea in the shallow water.



We picked a calmer day to head back around Separation Point.

A changeable forecast again with rain saw us deciding to just return to Torrent Bay for several nights before returning across Tasman Bay. The north easterly breeze settled in and the sailing was pleasant.

We returned across Tasman Bay to French Pass on 30/1.

This was a beautiful sunny day with 10 knot northerlies, but again, rather tedious motor sailing was required to meet our schedule.



Waiting for the tide at Punganui Bay (west of French Pass)

Once through the Pass, Cherry Tree Bay in Catherine's Cove was our overnight stay. As mentioned in the Central Cruising Guide, this is a potential wind tunnel and not the best place to stop, however we rested and planned the return to Wellington in the volatile weather forecasting.



Saturday saw us head to Punt Rails as the Northerly built. We had a rather lurchy but pleasant time rafted to a Davidson 35 from Mana CC on the mooring.

An improved forecast next day (Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> Feb) led to decision time - 10 am at Cape Jackson: Carry on home past the Brothers Islands or head down QCS to Punga Cove to wait until Thursday 5/2?



My preference is normally not to cross in a rising Northerly above 20 knots, nor in a swell above 1.5m. The Cook and Windy forecasts were for Northerly 10, rising to 15-20, then rising by 1600 to 22-28, with the swell under 1m.

We expected to be well into Wellington harbour by then, so having wind and tide behind us, we decided to press on. The Koamaru to Terawhiti sea state was a bit steep and lumpy on the port quarter, but under 2x reefs and No. 2 Genoa we were comfortable and making 8-9 knots over the ground. The tiller pilot was a bit lurchy, but hand steering was easy, and the sailing without engine was enjoyable.

Approaching the Karori Rock to Sinclair Head section, the conditions were fairly flat as one would expect, but we progressively reduced sail anyway; Genoa reduced, then rolled up and changed to No 1 Jib staysail. Near Sinclair head, the 3<sup>rd</sup> mainsail reef was put in and all seemed under control.



Around Sinclair we went in the bright sunshine and a moderate northerly wind forward of the beam, thinking we'd got away with it and planning to shake out a reef and take off our foul weather gear.

However – a rising Northerly forecast often comes earlier and stronger, as we found from Owhiro Bay all the way into and up the Harbour as far as Matiu Island. Combined with wind gusting into the 30s against a flood tide, the sea was short and steep. Motor sailing close hauled with 3 reefs and stay sail was the go-to option, with spray everywhere. (The heavy weather racing prevalent in this current LBYC Season provided good preparation for these conditions).



Tacking multiple times in the harbour entrance abeam of Barrett Reef looked like very hard work even with no ferries in sight, so with the aid of the chart plotter, 2 favourable tacks were made through Chaffers Passage. The flood tide and backing wind angle in the Passage gave us a massive lift out past Steeple Rock.

Alligator head to Sinclair Head took 5.5 hours. We were very appreciative of our new 30 hp motor and geared propeller which boosted our speed to 7 knots up the harbour. Another 2.5 hours saw us to Seaview marina, somewhat exhausted but pleased to be home.

We didn't really find summer – not in January anyway. There was one day at Tarakohe over 23 degrees, otherwise conditions were cool (under 20 deg) and windy, interspersed with short periods of light and variable. However, the holing up in and walking around beautiful bays, and sailing in new places had been enjoyable and the best sailing was during the Strait Crossings.

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