

Rain and a night trip

by Keith Murray

The summer of 2025/26 had a difficult start. The spring weather was cool and windy and did not change much through December and the start of 2026. Heather and Robyn wanted us to celebrate Xmas aboard Rose in the Sounds but the weather made that impossible. Instead it was not until the 27 January that Rose poked her bow out of Wellington harbour and headed to the Marlborough Sounds. The forecast was for 20 knot southeast wind with poor visibility in showers.

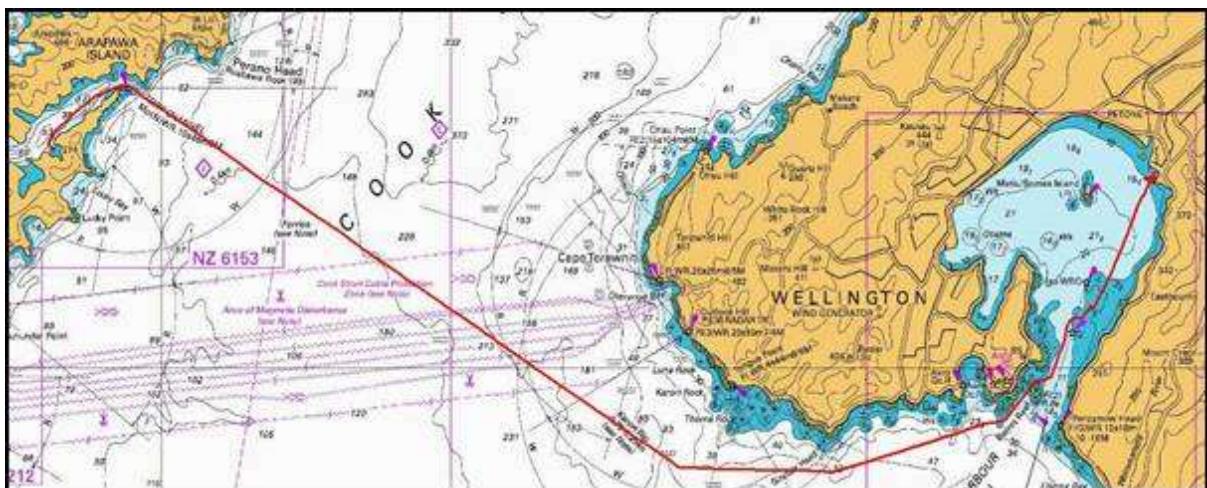
I discussed the weather with Max Myers and he agreed that neither the wind speed nor the rain was a problem. Thus we gathered at the marina on Monday night, slept aboard and were ready for a 0900 hour departure on Tuesday morning. There was no wind in the marina and very little visibility through the low cloud. Being impatient we cast off the mooring lines at 0840 and motored out of the marina. We headed towards Ward Island and soon found some wind.

“Shall we hoist the main now?” asked Max.

“The wind is light and dead ahead; I think we will wait until past Ward Island. We should have a better idea then of the direction and strength,” was my reply.

As we motored by Ward Island, the rain was a little stronger and the wind backed to the southeast. The main sail went up with the first reef tied down. The wind came and went so the motor kept pushing. Near Steeple Rock the wind freshened and the second reef was pulled down. By then the rain was heavy and we were struggling to see Barret Reef. Astern Ward Island was a blur but there was a shape just visible of a Bluebridge ferry. Thus I decided to turn to starboard and use Chaffers Passage to keep clear. Having made that turn we then saw the other Bluebridge ferry appear out of the rain entering the harbour.

The rain persisted but our speed through the water was just fine. There was the usual swell from the southerly wind battering the shore and making Chaffers Passage bouncy. Visibility was limited but the GPS drove Rose on her much practiced safe course. When clear of Westledge we turned more to the west bringing the wind abeam so the engine was stopped and the jib hoisted and set. Rose liked that rig and at speeds over seven knots surged on to Sinclair Head. The sea was not uncomfortable or high and we felt that the wind speed was in the order of 15 to 20 knots.



We arrived at my waypoint south of Sinclair Head at 1103 and that was 35 minutes before the predicted slack water. We did not meet any contrary tide and that did not surprise me. For the previous four days the barometer had been very low and that upsets tide predictions.

The rip was quiet and there was not a lot of swell from the southeast. Altogether it was fine fast sailing. Ahead of us in the murk we could see a large ship about three miles away at right angles to our course. The ship did not seem to be moving. To the south of that was the Kaiarahi heading for Wellington. The unknown ship turned into a log carrier, was almost on our course and was making no way except for wind drift. We sailed by about 250 metres to the north while the ship's heading slowly turned to port. Rose continued on her steady GPS driven course.

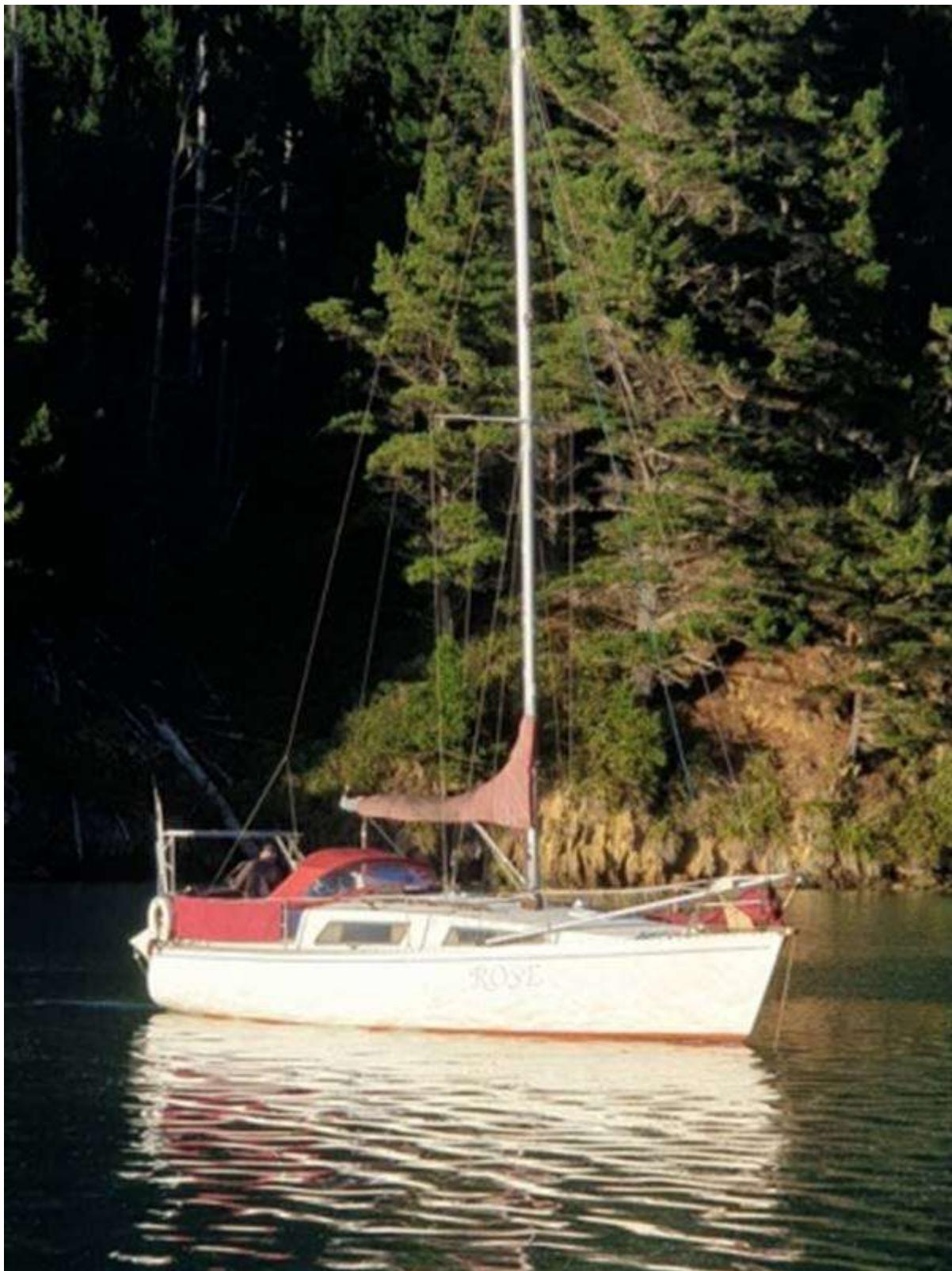
The sea had become calmer by then, the rain eased to a spotty dribble and the wind seemed to also have eased a little. It was impossible to see any of the South Island and the North Island soon faded into the rain.

An hour out from Tory Channel we were brave enough to let out the second reef in the mainsail. The wind eased further about three miles from Tory Entrance, our speed dropped to five knots and the sea became a bit wobbly. The engine was started, put in gear and that pushed the stern firmly into the water. The speed rose to a little over six knots and steadied Rose on her course. She entered Tory Channel at 1424 where the sails were soon lowered. We motored down to Te Rua Bay and at 1500 in the calm anchored for the night. We had covered 37 nautical miles for the day. I had started the cabin heater at the same time that I started the engine so the cabin was very snug and the damp that can come in during rain had been driven out. We basked in the warmth while the outside temperature was no more than 12C.

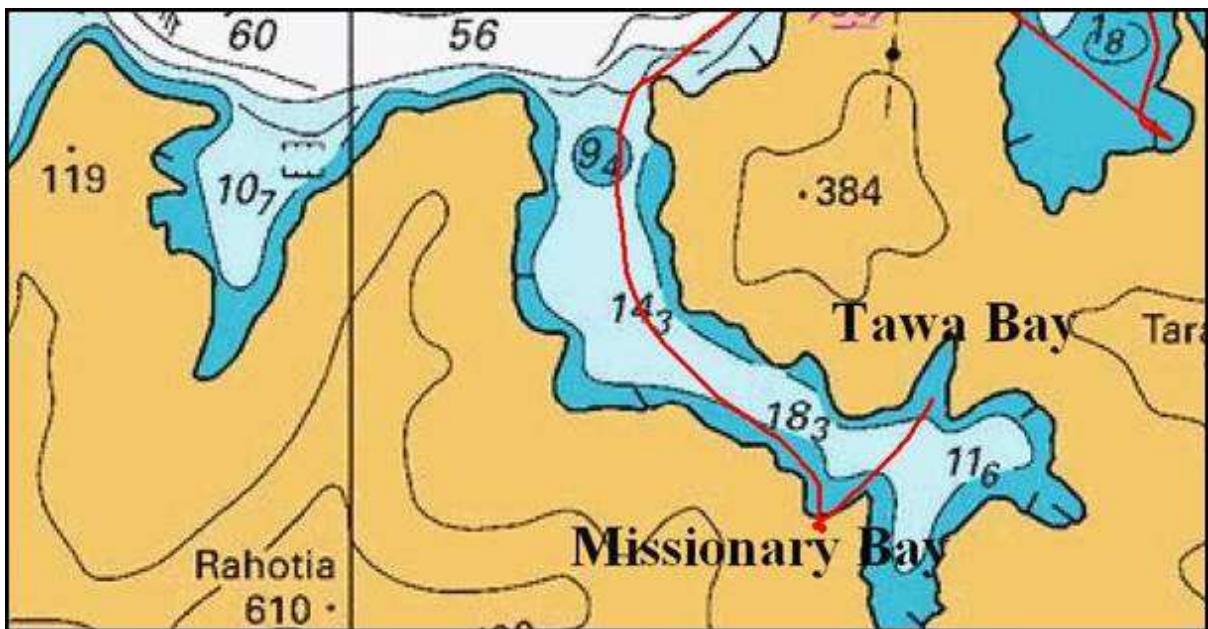


The clouds cleared overnight making Wednesday a lovely warm sunny day. In the morning, while the tide was falling we motored back toward the entrance of the channel nosing into each bay and pausing at Jackson Bay for a long morning tea. By then the current had weakened and turned to take us up channel as far as Erie Bay for lunch. I tried to convince myself to have a swim but the water temperature did not encourage me to let go of the boarding ladder. I got wet and that was enough. After the lunch break we circled Erie Bay, then the outer part of Oyster Bay before anchoring back in Te Rua. Then heat encouraged me to again try a swim and although I did let go of the ladder it was not for long.

Towards the last of the afternoon the wind changed from North to West bring a small sea into our anchorage. We ignored it while preparing and eating dinner and then decided that Deep Bay would be a better place for the night.



By 2000 we were anchored adjacent to Vesper. Gillian and Anna had arrived there in the afternoon after a satisfactory crossing using headsail and motor. We joined them for a chat.



Thursday we headed up to Onapua to find where Guenter and Ulla had moored Amour. The yacht was on the Missionary Bay mooring but despite making a couple of circuits there was no response aboard. As there was a small sea coming into the bay we went to Tawa Bay on the opposite side of the main bay. The sea there was flat calm and we enjoyed a pleasant sunny day. The water temperature was an improvement on Te Rua and I managed to swim the length of Rose. In the late afternoon we lifted the anchor, returned to Missionary Bay and tied alongside Amour. Ulla and Guenter joined us for pre-dinner snacks. The wind had changed to the south by that time and Missionary Bay was then calm.

Max and I had been checking the weather forecast and there seemed a good possibility to able to return to Seaview on Saturday. To make that easier we returned to Te Rua Bay on Friday morning. There was very little traffic on the water and we made the passage without having to avoid ferries. The sky was clear and the day warmed nicely. Thus I was again tempted to have a swim. It took two tries and on the second attempt I let go the ladder and made about five metres of progress. Max also had a swim and then we thought to use my laser gun to check the temperature. It was just 17 degrees.

Whilst the afternoon passed a young man paddled a sit on canoe out to say hello. His father had delivered him and a friend on Tuesday to the western most house in the bay. After a chat he asked,

“Would you have any cigarettes aboard?”

“No. This would be a good opportunity to give up,” was my reply.

“It’s not for me but my friend,” was the reply.

As dinner was being prepared we again reviewed the weather forecast. Saturday’s wind strength was predicted at 25 to 35 knots in Cook Strait and that was not what we consider to be desirable. Sunday was for 20 to 25 knot northeasterly winds. That would mean a close reach to Sinclair Head and then a wet bouncy tacking duel to get to the harbour entrance. That was also undesirable. So after careful review of the tide tables I announced a departure of 2000 hours that evening. Max was in agreement so preparations were commenced and after dinner and cleaning the galley the anchor chain was washed as it was retrieved and by 1934 hours we were on our way.

There was only a light breeze in the channel and that was mainly from the west. Nearly an hour later we were just outside the entrance to the Channel. There was a bobble on the sea from tide and a very light breeze from our port quarter that conflicted with the previous evening's southerly. The mainsail had been set inside the Channel and was steadyng Rose and after a few minutes I suggested setting the jib. It did not want to hold any wind and unlike the mainsail could not easily be guyed to starboard. The jib was lowered but half an hour later the wind had veered and the jib was flying and helping our progress. The engine was slowed but the sails could only maintain a speed of four to five knots. Just before 2100 the wind had freshened a little and the engine was stopped. I retired below and stretched out on the settee while Max enjoyed the fine sailing, clear sky and puzzled over the lights he could see.

Below I dozed for forty minutes and then got upright to investigate a roaring sound. I soon found it was coming from the plug holes of the sink and hand basin. Their outlets were becoming wind inlets as Rose was heeled and making seven to eight knots over the ground and about the same through the water. I corrected the heeling by easing the sheets and taking in the first reef of the mainsail.

"We are still making the same speed," was the response by Max.

"And Rose is now standing almost upright," was my comment. I pointed out the source of the lights that had been puzzling Max and enjoyed the fast progress that we were making. We were due west of Cape Terawhiti making good a course of 125 degrees true. Inshore was either the cable protection vessel or a fishing vessel, astern one of the Inter Island ferries was approaching and astern to starboard was an almost stationary ship. It could have been a cruise ship waiting for the morning light. The lights on the wind farms flickered, and ahead I could see the light on Karori Rock and Bearing Head. We had made good progress and with the help of the tidal current continued to do so.

By 2243 Rose reached my waypoint southwest of Karori Rock and by then the Rip was at full flow rather than slack water. I changed from the GPS steering to a compass course that for a while remained at 125 degrees true. That took us further away from the shore and decreased the height of disturbed water. Soon enough Rose was rocking about in an irregular sea with the occasional broken water but nothing of any height. I did not start the motor as Rose could take the waves in a more kindly manner from sail power than the power impetus of the propeller.

Twenty minutes later we were south of Sinclair Head and it was time to slowly change our course to 70 degrees true. The wind became fitful and then headed us. The jib was lowered and under mainsail(not setting well) and motor(running perfectly) we came towards the harbour entrance. When we were southeast of Sinclair Head, the wind filled the sail on the starboard side and we saw a long, low, horizontal, green flash. Apparently it was a meteor that exploded near Akaroa.

At the harbour entrance I had intended to leave Barret Reef buoy to port but the approaching Kaitaki made me resolve to again use Chaffer's Passage. That was a good decision as while in the passage the Conemara came out of the harbour and in front of us passed the incoming Kaitaki.

Although there was plenty of moonlight it did not seem to be reflecting off the rocks either side of Chaffer's Passage. Great blessings on GPS as they make navigation in low visibility easy.

Rose was in her berth at Seaview at 0130 all systems operating and despite the slightly different course had again covered 37 nautical miles.