

# Aboard Sengo



## Port Stephens

Just hanging around



## Port Macquarie to Port Stephens.

One the name of a town, the other the name of a waterway... (although the waterway includes Nelson Bay as the name of a town - it is all very confusing).

We had booked our berth at Soldiers Point for the month-long break over the Festive Season whilst we had been in London in June. Whilst it was an expensive option, it was at the time the easiest option, as there had been lots of other issues on our mind at the time. Of course at the time we were not to know that when we got back from Europe that there would be issues with the boat that required an insurance claim, and all the stress and frustration that went with that. This meant that, in December, we were heading back to a location that had provided us with unnecessary stress and melancholy. To be fair, the damage wasn't the result of the marina, nor was it because of the actions of its magnificent staff, it was just that we really didn't need to be reminded of the stress from the last visit.

Anyway, having not organised anything else, and not being in a position this late in the year to organise anything else, we continued to head south in December. We started December in Port Macquarie, New South Wales. We ended December in Port Stephens, New South Wales, and spent most of the month 'just hanging around.' There was a brief time off boat visiting family for xmas interstate.

## Port Macquarie - the wetland walk

1st December 2024. We tied the tinnie back up to the boat at around 1415. We had left it in the water on the way back from our morning excursion, thinking the day was lovely and we might venture out again. At that time there was little wind and the sun was warm. At 1415 however I noticed some 'interesting' clouds and Andrew said, whilst looking at the rain radar on bom.gov.au, 'yes, there is some 'argy-bargy' on the way.' Well, the forecast was for 'potential' afternoon thunderstorms...

We had made it across to the marina dock around 0930, admiring the young martins being fed by mum on the way in. We then headed to *Kooloonbung*, passing a children's raft race at the Marine Rescue headquarters, and then a few, sadly, homeless people in the park adjacent the *Kooloonbung* wetland area. An encounter with a local 'birdo' had us on the lookout for a satin bowerbird bower (which we didn't spot but I suspect another couple on the path stuck around the relevant area longer to look for it) before we completed a combination of Circuit 1 and Circuit 2 of the Wetland's listed walks.

Bird calls were prolific, but birds were rarely seen: there was no appeal to stand still for extended periods of time to look for them unless we wanted to get eaten by mosquitos!

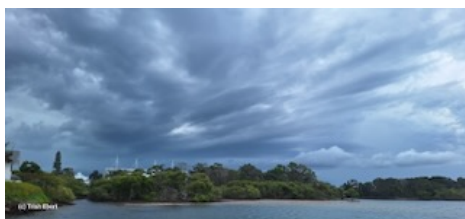
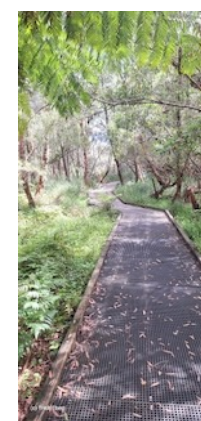
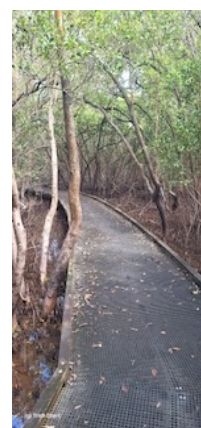
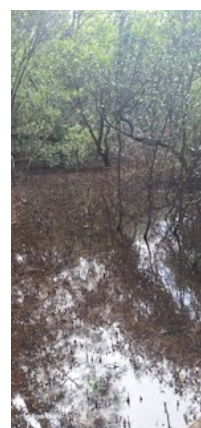
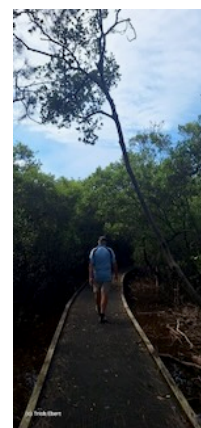
Birds spotted: little wattle bird, lewin honeyeater, spotted turtle dove, kookaburra, little pied cormorant, little black cormorant, mudlark, pelican, white-faced heron, rainbow lorikeet.

Birds heard: willy wagtail, oriole, yellow-tail black-cockatoos, bar shouldered dove.

Animals: grey headed bats were spotted. Koalas were not seen.

Rain started not long after we lifted the tinnie...just a few drops to start with. We could see the storm coming. I probably should have put the panoramic lens on the Olympus to capture the entire view but took a couple of photos with the phone to cover the expansive horizon. The sky had a green tinge - usually a sign of a lot of water (and occasionally a sign of hail). I hadn't moved the towels in the helm from the last shower so that was covered, but I had forgotten to close one side window! The toilet seat was lifted to catch the drips out of the leaking top hatch.

We turned the gauges on. Gusts were up to 34 knots! I had closed the back up but standing in the helm looking out I noted the rain was so thick that we couldn't see anything towards town...it was just a grey wall!





## Port Macquarie to Port Stephens

2nd December 2024. I had suggested an alarm on for this morning but Andrew thought we would wake up early enough... and we did. We didn't however immediately get out of bed. We woke at 0600. We got up around 0630. Andrew was upstairs before I was. 'It's a good thing we are leaving at 0930,' he said as he put the kettle on.

'What do you mean?' I replied

'Come and have a look.'

But when I got up to our living area I couldn't see a thing! We were completely fogged in!

The fog did lift - eventually - and was gone by the time we headed to shore for a last shower and to hand in the gate key.

Pied oyster catchers, lapwings and bushbirds could be heard outside, and a flock of sulphur crested cockatoos (or corellas) flew past.

So after a lovely week at Port Macquarie, exploring near and far localities, by both foot and vehicle, we headed south.

The mooring was dropped at 0910 but we didn't get out the bar with engines off (genoa only) until 1010 because the sum log wasn't working, and we did circles in the river until that was cleaned. It didn't help Andrew's mood that I had given him a leaky bucket in which to decant the water from the bilge. In the end, I decided to leave the bilge water and deal with it tomorrow (when we got to Port Stephens)...we had missed high tide at the bar and getting out soon was now a priority.

At 1100 we gybed. The wind had dropped and we were wallowing around 3 knots. We gained 30 pc speed after this manoeuvre - we were now travelling at 4 knots! But the angle wasn't



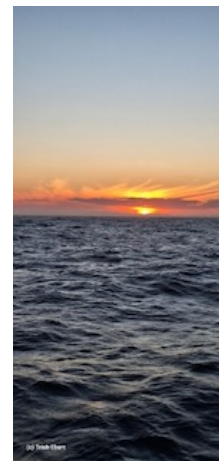
brilliant - and we needed to gybe again to get around the point.

The sky was blue and there was hardly a cloud - and it remained like that all day. Some clouds were noted to west and south-west just above the horizon near the setting of the sun, and the rain radar indicated a few showers, but they were a long way away.

I had an afternoon snooze and Andrew slept from 1930 to 2230...not our usual shift times but given the impending 'middle-of-the-night' arrival into Port Stephens we thought it better this way.

The sail was smooth. Wind speeds behind us got up to 20 knots. A catamaran which came out of the Port Macquarie entrance after us eventually overtook us, but it had all sails up. We stayed with genoa only.

Wildlife noted on the trip: one lone shearwater.



# Port Stephens

## Tilligerry Creek

3rd December 2024. At 0140 we furled the genoa south of Boondelbah Island and motored into Port Stephens. There were two pink dots on marinetraffic.com in the anchorage we were heading to. And as far as we could see, three navigation anchor lights; one very close to the water. We anchored-off, further out than the other boats - we didn't know where the public mooring was so didn't want to run into that. 'Anchor was down 0215. There was a slight side swell.

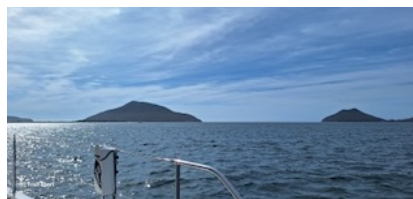
Andrew went to bed around 0300. I went to bed, to a gentle roll, around 0330 - after checking we weren't dragging.

I got up at 0845. Andrew 15 minutes later. Two boats could be seen . I wonder where the smaller light was. Or, had it been campers on shore? The light had, after all, been fairly low 'on the horizon.'

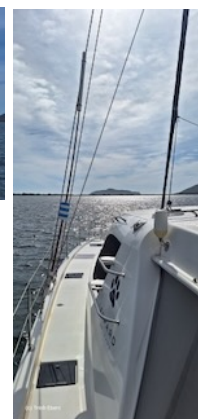
My first task was to start hanging wet towels out...they were soaked either from acting as rope protection on the deck for the last week, or helm absorption through the small gaps from the storms we had had. There was a mostly uniform thin cloud about and the outside temperature was warm.

The forecast for Nelson Bay had high chance of showers - 'most likely in morning and afternoon.' But they weren't here yet! Whilst we hadn't been at this anchorage before, and I knew it had access to a walk I would like to do one day, we were looking to move to somewhere we could settle in for a while. The last anchorage we had been at in September would fit the bill, but given the width and depth of the channel to get there, a high tide would be best. At 0930 we determined we wouldn't make our desired anchorage with the timing of the high tide, so considered an alternative; we would try Fame Cove in the interim.

In the end we went for Plan C. We still headed for Tilligerry Creek, but anchored in the larger area, before having to navigate the thin channel near Lemon Tree Passage. This would make a shorter tinnie run to Lemon Tree Passage dock when we wanted a walk, and was close to Taylor's Beach, if we ever tried to go there again (See Aboard Sengo September 2024)..to be compliant there however, I



think we would need to land the tinnie on the beach.



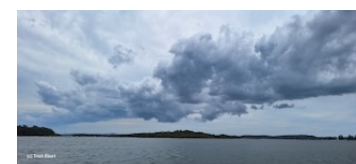
The anchor was raised around 0950, and the anchor was down again a little over an hour later (on the second try because on the first try the anchor didn't hold - it had hooked onto someone's discarded toilet hose! I didn't look too closely, and only hosed the mud off it. It had clearly been there for a while...it was covered in barnacles!).

I had put all the wet towels out to dry before we left Jimmy's Beach. I left them there during the motor over..there was practically no wind and therefore less chance of them getting covered in salt. The longer out the better - and hopefully they will dry before the predicted rain.

A few birds were spotted: pied cormorant, silver gulls. And two dolphins swam past us before we anchored.

Planes were noisy overhead for most of the rest of the day (including jets that had us rattling). Williamtown airport with the RAAF base, is after all, not too far away.

By evening we had seen and heard swans, gulls, cormorants. We had heard (only) mopoke and kookaburra. A shore bird on a sandbank was too far away for us to be confident of Identification.



4th December 2024. Our bodies must have needed a catchup as I went to bed at 2130 last night and Andrew at 2200 and we both woke up at 0830. All was calm outside. Forecasts were for no wind, then 10 to 15 southerlies, and then an increase to 15 to 20 in the 1100 tranche. At 0855 the southerly suddenly came in. We saw over 17 knots on the gauges.

Planes were heard. A silver gull was seen as well. A fisherman was out...hopefully not to move the crab pots closer.

It was a grey day and the clouds looked like they would bring rain. However it remained dry. After the morning gusts, the wind calmed down again. I spent the day cleaning up - mostly odds and sods as well as a bit of a rust run.

Heard were kookaburras, channel billed cuckoos, koels, and yellow-tailed black-cockatoos

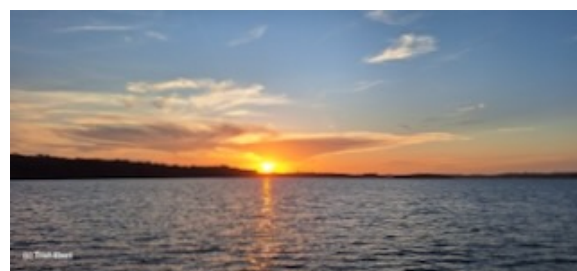
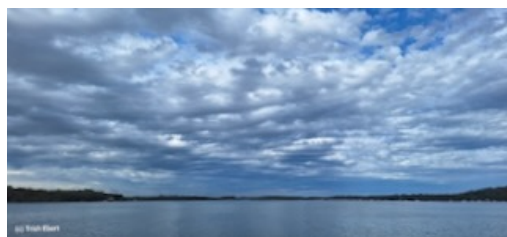
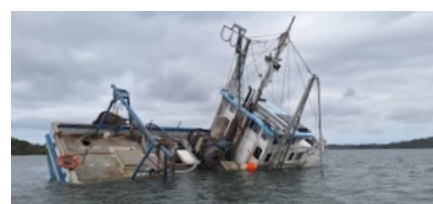
## Lemon Tree Passage stroll

5th December 2024. 'Grey morning again. But this time it was raining...just. There had clearly been rain overnight. We hadn't heard it. There were no leaks into the helm

This afternoon's walk along the shore always has nice surroundings but animals don't seem to do too well when we traverse it. In September it was diseased rabbits. Today it was a murdered loggerhead turtle. The poor animal had clearly had a prop strike. I spent some time trying to get to the right government department to report it - I am not sure I succeeded.

Birds heard: channel billed cuckoos, yellow tailed black cockatoos, and terns.

Birds spotted: black swans, sea eagle (with fish in talons), pied oystercatcher, pelicans, kookaburras, cravens, koels, silver gull, noisy miner, eastern rosella's, galahs, short billed corellas.





6th December 2024. It was already hot when we got up around 0730. Blue skies. Insects calling from shore were loud. A couple of tinnies motored up and down the creek.

Breakfast was egg wraps at around 0830: whilst they were more successful than my attempt yesterday, only one came out in an acceptable shape.

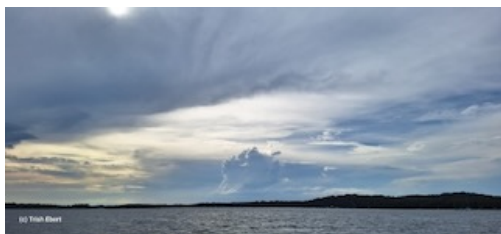
Kookaburras called from shore. A silver gull took an unsuccessful dive for breakfast.

We walked to Coles. If I had wondered yesterday how 'old' the new boardwalk was up toward the holiday park, That question was answered today..we had to take a detour as workers were replacing the boardwalk to the east of it. We could smell the new timber. The detour took us on a short fire trail and came out at the house adjacent the dead loggerhead... which was still there so I guess the Environment Department didn't want it. I guess it will get smelly and someone will have the council remove it eventually, if it fails to float away on the next high tide.

The day was hot. Bird life however was plentiful...kookaburras, eastern rosella, galahs, one female koel (which was temporarily misidentified as a cuckoo), red wattlebird.

Our destination was Coles at Tanilba Bay for eggs (which was delayed whilst we rang the owner of an escape-artist dog that had jumped out of the window of its owner's houseboat and was entertaining Andrew with dog cuddles). Technically the walk was shorter than yesterday but we travelled further away from the tinnie... we got the bus back (this needs to be timed as busses only run every 2 hours). Lunch was had in the homewares store at Lemon Tree Passage before heading back to boat.

The afternoon was spent reading and on domestics and boat jobs.



7th December 2024. 0630. Channel billed cuckoos, kookaburras, magpies - all calling. A boat went past. Grey stratus clouds. It was too hot - predictions were for 33 degrees - we stayed on boat

I read a bit and published November's diary notes. A mopoke was heard after dark and noise from shore late at night turned out to be the Christmas Carols at the RSL in Tanilba Bay - we saw some of the fireworks over the top of the nearby hills



8th December 2024. I woke up around 0230 to lightening all around. Jumping out of bed - I rescued the washing and put dry scrappy towels back in helm station. In the end we didn't get the storm - although we may have got some rain as the hatch in the head was dripping - in a spot other than normal!

We got out of bed really late (around 0900) and as such it was already hot. Windy.com had afternoon showers in the 1400 tranche so I wanted a walk as soon as possible. It wasn't the one I was originally hoping for, and I felt flat and uncomfortable starting the stroll back at Lemon Tree Passage. The township was busy; with quite a few boats getting launched, and people enjoying the parkland facilities. Several groups were on the track we followed. I was thinking this was quite boring following one of our usual tracks but we ended up chatting to one of the ex-boaties who live in this area. That was the highlight of the walk - bird life was less than normal although we did see a few kookaburras, an eastern rosella, several noisy miners and spotted doves. One mudlark, a couple of gulls and several pelicans were also seen.

The turtle had been removed (or floated out to sea, but I suspect removed because there were two star picket-type posts in the sand to mark the spot).

Channel-billed cuckoos were heard from the boat. As well as paratoids and bush birds.

The lightest of mist came down at around 1730. The rain radar had threatened oncoming storms throughout the afternoon but none eventuated.

A Leopard 48 came into our anchorage - moving from threatening weather out in the main part of the Port.

I started a final pack of the hiking pack for NZ.



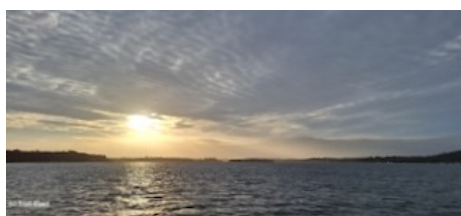
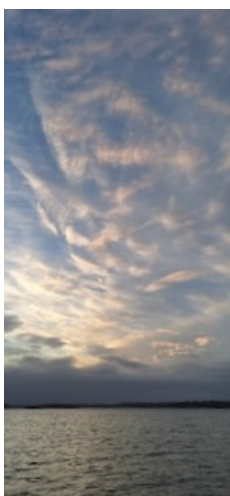


9th December 2024. Grey morning. Really grey morning! Andrew picked up the mood. Actually his grey mood had been brewing - our head wasn't flushing well, and hadn't been for some days. So steeling himself for a messy job, Andrew reluctantly pulled the pump area of the toilet apart... to find out what was clogging the works... As it turns out, it was my hair. Again! Grr... The ultimate fix is to shave the hair off my head, but I'm not going to do that. On the plus side, the new cap that we had ordered for the toilet pump was put on.

Our Leopard 48 neighbour left us this morning after a brief chat from the back steps. Hopefully we will get some more time to meet them early next year.

I wanted a walk but given the clouds we couldn't guarantee we wouldn't get wet so we stayed on boat.

Domestics included a bit of clothes washing - t-shirts mainly. Most of the day was spent recreational reading.



## Stretching the legs....

10th December 2024. For want of nothing else to do we trundled off along the shore on our usual Lemon Tree Passage shoreline walk this morning (running into a local bird0-watching group). Instead of reversing our steps when we got to the mid point however, we turned north toward the main road, and then turned right again when we got there. Taking Kawarren Street past the wildlife corridor kept us off the busy road for a while, before we met it again opposite the road to the industrial area. We turned left up Vera St, headed up the hill, and then back down the other side to come out at the end of the walkway on the opposite side to the jetty that we normally take. A white-faced heron and a white ibis were foraging at low tide - as were quite a few shore birds - too far away to be identified but they looked like they had short, straight beaks. Pelicans were also around



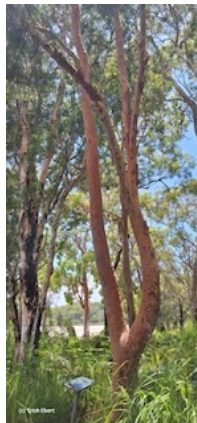
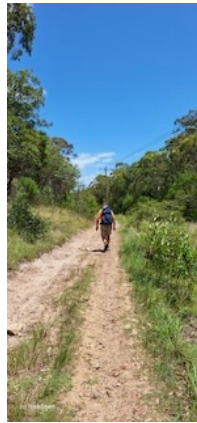
## Tanilba Bay and back (and a tree watering me!)

11th December 2024. MetEye this morning had suggested that the range of today's winds wouldn't extend beyond the 10 to 15 knots. At 1800 it was clearly blowing more than that, and the updated MetEye suggested we should be getting 5 - 10 knots. I turned the gauges on. I saw 19 plus but it had been windier.

Thankfully the stronger wind had not come in until after we got back to boat around 1500. We had got up late. Very late, pulling ourselves out of bed around 0900. Skies were blue. The forecast temp for the day was mid twenties. Forecasts for the next few days were due to get hotter.

Where are we walking today?, I asked Andrew. There are not a lot of areas to walk within easy reach of us that we have not done, but we ended up finding a partial new track. At around 1115 we left the tinnie at the floating jetty at Lemon Tree Passage, walked up the main road, turned into Industrial Crescent where, funnily enough, the industrial buildings are, and continued past the barrier gate up Lemon Fire Trail. This Fire Trail extends to be named Tanilba Road on a couple of sources we have, but it is not a useful road for most of its length. The Tanilba Bay end is dirt and graded up until a driveway (bordered with large pillars) but after this its condition downgrades to a lovely 4WD track. Because we had walked the Lemon Fire Trail/Tanilba Road section to where we think the turnoff to the Newcastle Rain Radar station is

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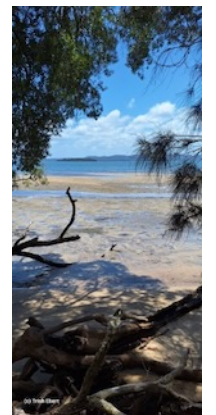
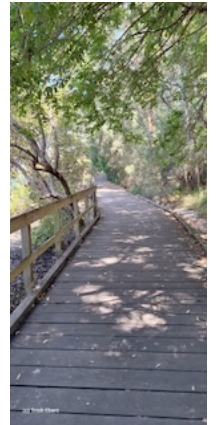
before, we didn't know what the condition of the 'track' would be. The track from the station turnoff is exposed as the powerlines also run down the easement - there was no shade to be had. Exiting at Mallabula we made our way to the Tillegerry Habitat, taking the coastal boardwalk into Tanilba Bay. The boardwalk has had some patching since last we walked it, 9 years ago, including some new steps to the beach at periodic stops along the way. Upon stopping to admire the view at several spots along this walkway I felt water being 'spat' down on me. I thought it was the trees spitting at me. Upon later research we think it was cicadas ejecting excess water. Eww.

Upon approaching the shopping area of Tanilba Bay I realised we had 30 minutes until the bus was due. Usually when we walk to Coles here we take the bus back. We wanted a Coles shop and if we missed the bus we wouldn't see another one for a couple of hours. I gave Andrew the choice - if he wanted the bus we could rush our trip into the supermarket - otherwise we would be walking back. Given the days are getting hotter and for at least one of the next two days we would not be getting off boat Andrew elected to walk back.

Unexpectedly we ran into C in the supermarket - we had been a bit slack and not let him know we were back in the area.

We noted Maritime authorities checking out the beached trawler on our way back to the tinnie but they had moved on by the time we motored past.

Birds: magpie, lapwing, white-faced heron, silver gull, black swans, pelicans, noisy miners, common mynah, small wren (too quick to identify), white ibis. An eastern koel was heard.



12th December 2024. A mopoke was calling around 0400 this morning but it was the twitter of bush birds and a kookaburra that were the outside noises at 0510 when I got up. It was starting to get light. A male whip-bird and channel-billed cuckoos called somewhere around 0520 and again around 0630.

We spent the day on boat not doing much. A game of scrabble was had.

13th December 2024. On boat. Reading. Scrubbing rubber with the eraser. And playing a couple of rounds of an old German game.



14th December 2024. It was around 0245 when I woke up. My subconscious was probably looking for 0300 for the gemelids, but my eyes were slit and the fuzzy indication on my phone, and the rock of the boat made me decide to stay in bed. I must have worn myself out yesterday because I didn't get up until 0750 - while the rocking of the boat encouraged me to do so — wind over tide - south west -we have a fair fetch here.

No work - no walk - not a lot of enthusiasm. Reading mostly. Washing a bit.



15th December 2024. It was supposed to be blowing 15-20 knots in the afternoon - which it didn't. Which meant we could have stayed for the music afternoon at Lemon Tree Passage - which we didn't. We were prepared for it - I had been carrying our portable camp chairs. But we made the decision, after our six or so kilometre circuit, and seeing that the event was a bit smaller than we expected, and given the forecast, that we would head back to boat rather than stay on shore for the next few hours.

The forecast temperature for Nelson Bay had been for 31 degrees. The idea had always been to get off boat early this morning to get a walk in before it got too hot - even though we had avoided walking for the past three days because of the high forecast temperatures. Our departure was delayed by fog; our surrounds went from an almost white-out to blue sky on the way to the jetty, to the incoming grey clouds (and I suspect sea fog on the other side of the land) when we got back to boat.

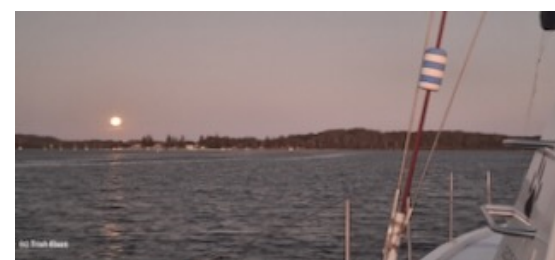
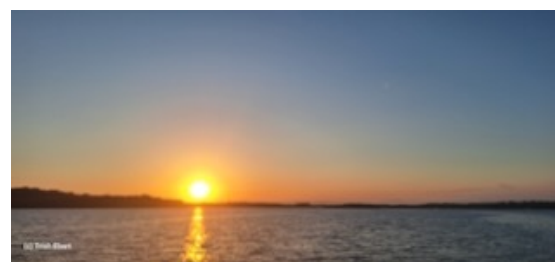
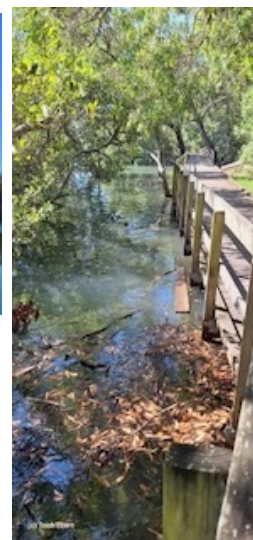
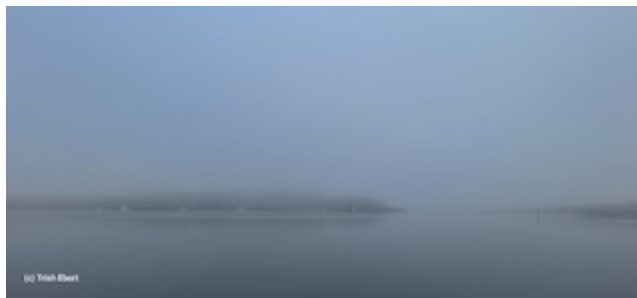
Lunch was mozzarella toast on board. We spent the afternoon reading - it was too hot for any boat jobs. I had managed around 10000 steps, Andrew slightly less.

Birds: black swans, galahs, noisy miners, whimbrel, silver gull, tern (species unknown), mudlark, lapwing, eastern rosellas, pelican, wrens (too quick and too hidden for species to be positively identified).

We heard: ring necked dove, kookaburras and lots of insects from the southern shore!

The tide was very high, and water was under the boardwalk. It was a day for walking and quite a few walkers were out. There were also a few fishers, and plenty of kids on bikes.

We said hello to a modified Seawind on the jetty. C came to say hello off our back step as he was going out for a solo sail on his boat.



## Soldiers Point -Into a pen - early

16th December 2024. Firstly - moving early into a Platinum rated marina early is not what you would do if you wanted to save money. In fact, moving into a Platinum rated marina anytime is not what you want to do if you want to save money. And especially not at Christmas. But... weather is fickle.... And we have a plane to catch. So, whilst the MetEye predictions for Friday morning to move into a pen we have had booked since late June still looked okay, the grump that was due to come on Wednesday and Thursday was a bit concerning - and had it extended - as is the sometimes want of weather systems....

So, after cleaning some dead cicadas from off the deck- some in pieces - and getting some ropes out (we were going to shift to Fame Cove if nothing else eventuated) we rang the marina; they juggled some bookings, and we were tied up in the pen (a few steps down from the pen where we had copped the overspray) mid morning. After settling in and an early lunch we headed to the office to pay the extra bill - and organise a car for shopping mid-afternoon.

The day was hot. The carpark at the shopping centre was busy. Clearly xmas is coming!

Back at boat - it was reading and the internet that kept us amused.

Birds: pelican, lapwing, silver gull, swallows.



17th December 2024. Bloody Hot! (Predicted expected top temperature for Nelson Bay - 35 degrees). We borrowed the car again this morning, popping into Bunnings, Harvey Norman, and then back down to Woolworths at the shopping centre to drop off soft plastics. I also managed a blood test at the local medical centre - 11 days earlier than the date on the order but convinced the phlebotomist to take it anyway - it was a progress report more than having to have an exact date. I gave up on trying to get us Covid shots due to the queue in the pharmacy. The car told us it was 32.1 degrees outside - at 1100! I have no idea what it got to but it was hot - and there was little wind relief for most of the afternoon. I ended up with a mid afternoon snooze... Andrew tried for relief in the front cockpit. In the end we spent half an hour or so in the dying light on the tramp. The heat had died down and the breeze was still a bit north - the boat was facing north. Storm clouds could be seen to the west - and the rain radar indicated that potential storms were coming from that direction. When it got dark, lightening could be seen in the distance. Fortunately we didn't get the full brunt - although we did get rain. The southerly wind however turned up around 2130.... And it wasn't a gradual increase in wind - one minute we were enjoying under ten knots - the next minute it was high twenties... Andrew saw 33 - it may have got to more....

18th December 2024. Wind. Rain. A very grey day. 80 pc chance of showers - which turned into 100pc as it was drizzling on and off all day. The wind had died down - for a time - and there were bouts of stronger (say 10 plus) gusts during the day - we didn't turn the gauges on. I can state that the wind did threaten to blow the umbrella I was carrying inside-out at one stage, to the extent that I held it horizontal (the shaft - this made the actual umbrella bit vertical) and struggled to move forward with it along the jetty.

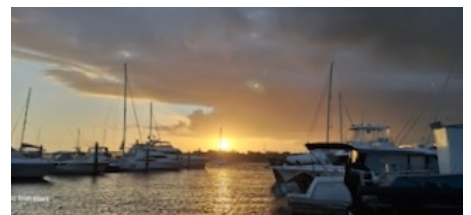
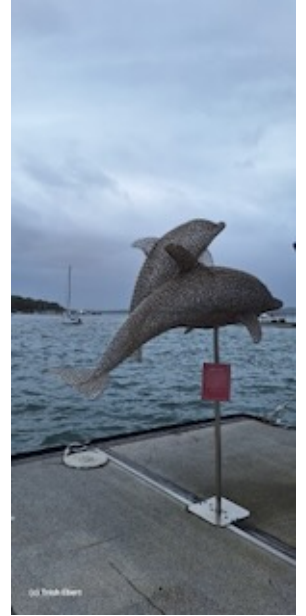
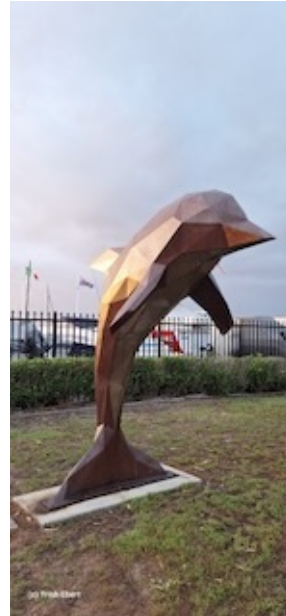
The entertaining interactions of today: I was accosted by people on the dock and the assumption made that I was marina staff - twice. Apparently I looked 'professional' - I will take that as a compliment. The second human entertaining interaction was very brief; I walked in on a man having a shower - facing me full-on - when I saw why the water was running. I had heard the water running in Bathroom 1 before I entered, but as the door was partially open I had assumed someone had left the tap on. I retreated out of there very quickly - I didn't stick around to find out who the figure was. As one staff member noted as we were laughing over this - probably best not to know.....

The only frustrating thing of the day: the doctor wants me to schedule an appointment for a follow up to yesterday's blood test - a bit difficult as I am over 700km by road south of her, and given their preference of two to three weeks, not possible - I will be out of the country. I am waiting on a return phone call to confirm if I can postpone the follow up for five weeks - and to a phone call.

As we spent most of today inside - it was too windy for a walk (and too much chance of getting wet), there was no concerted effort to note birds today. We did see: pelicans, sulphur crested cockatoos, silver gulls and welcome swallows.

The sun came out late afternoon.

19th December 2024. Somehow I've missed a day and didn't write any notes. I have no idea what we did on the 19th December 2025.

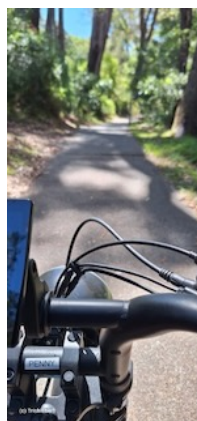




## Enjoying an E-bike

20th December 2024. The morning's winds weren't quite as calm as expected - so whilst they weren't too bad, coming in four days ago was definitely the smoother ride.

We spent the morning around boat. In the afternoon we went for a bike ride. An e-bike ride - And what a strange sensation it was. These e-

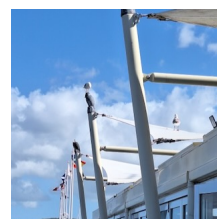


bikes were set up a little like a motorbike - the seat was rectangular and padded and almost enough for two people. After some basic instructions we headed off. The seats were also non adjustable which wasn't so much of an issue for me with short legs, but Andrew had issues and he stopped at Salamander Bay complaining of the ergonomics - this wasn't going to work as his knees were hurting, and we turned around to head back to the marina. Within a few hundred meters however he had worked out how to sit comfortably and we turned around again.

In the end we ended up in Nelson Bay for an ice cream - discovering the shared path about half way into the journey. After an ice-cream at the marina we reversed our trip - taking the shared pathway/ route as far as we could - what a lovely route.

The coastal road takes us along the shore side of the Mambo Wetlands and just as I was thinking we could borrow the bikes at another time and come down here for a bird watch Andrew stopped on the top of the bridge. He was thinking along similar lines - except he had a more immediate goal - he was looking for kingfishers. We didn't see any (small) kingfishers although I did see a kookaburra shortly afterward on a power line.

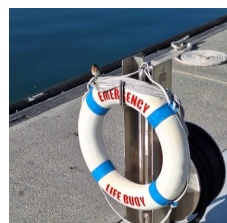
At 1550 we stopped at the barber in Salamander Bay (again, we had stopped earlier on the way out but the barber couldn't fit Andrew in). This time there were only two customers in line - so we waited. We finally got out of there just before 1700. I had called the marina to say we would be back a few minutes after 1700 to return the bikes (they officially close at 1700 but I suspected that the frantic xmas rush would have them working later - the manager confirmed he expected to be working until 1800). Three other staff were still there when we got back. We relaxed in the lounge before having left-overs for dinner. Koels were the last birds I heard calling late afternoon.



21st December 2024. I got up at 0500 and the first birds I heard were koels. As I headed to the marina facilities I heard silver gulls - but didn't see them, instead a pair of pied oystercatchers stood out in contrast to the beach in the increasing light.

I had heard the occasional boat launch from the ramp an hour or so before getting up, but when I looked at the car park at the boat ramp at around 0510 I was surprised to see it looked full.

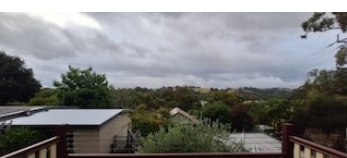
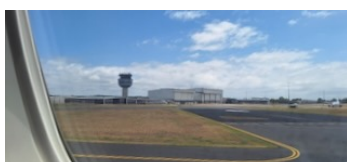
Another hot day. And another day of staying mostly inside. We did our final packing for the upcoming, and short, Christmas jaunt.



## Newcastle Airport to Melbourne

### South for Xmas

22nd December 2025. At 0940 a marina staff member gave us a lift to the airport. Our flight to Melbourne left slightly late but landed on time. Unfortunately this was much earlier than I had booked the car for (the flight had changed) so we had lunch in the airport terminal before picking up the hire car. As it was the car was ready (and probably would have been ready had we tried immediately after landing). The vehicle we got was a Kia Sportage (we had been upgraded) - a large car and great for comfort. However it was not so great when it came to fitting it on the driveway of the aged accommodation that we had.



We picked some goods up at the Diamond Creek Coles but I did a further shop at the Silvan Woolworths after

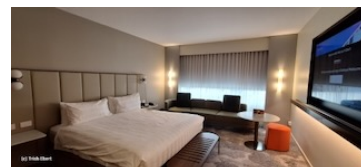
we got to our AirBnB. We had friends (D & J) over for dinner.

23rd to 25th December.

We spent the 23rd and 25th December with family for xmas. We entertained friends (D&W) at our AirBnB for lunch on the 24th.

26th December 2024. Sydney to Hobart. The host of the AirBnB was lovely enough to send me a message this morning to say we could have a late checkout if we wanted it. He had suggested 1100. I pushed the friendship and asked to stay until the Sydney to Hobart race start had finished being telecast. I knew I was

pushing it, and if he had expected a new lot of guests this wouldn't have been possible. However, his next lot of 'tenants' weren't due until tomorrow so we got to watch the start of the race. After that we headed to the airport. I had considered trying to catch up with any one of our myriad of Melbourne based friends but given that it was Boxing Day it was just going to be too hard. We arrived at the airport early, settled into the airport hotel early, had dinner in the terminal and had an early night.



## Melbourne to Soldiers Point

27th December 2024. We woke reasonably early because we had left the blind open. It didn't look all that cold outside (the phone suggested 17 deg) but there was a very chilly breeze blowing when we walked over to the airport for breakfast (the hotel breakfast was just too expensive). The plane left around 15 minutes late (the delay was a problem fault with the airbridge - indicated by an alarm which happened to go off just as I was standing on the middle of it!). We landed at Newcastle five minutes later than scheduled, as did another plane. Grateful that we hadn't checked our luggage in (the luggage belts had been having issues since before we had breakfast at around 0700) we walked straight to our lift, the marina driver was waiting for us in the pick-up zone.

We got to the marina at 1600. Just in time for the roaming cocktail. From this point onwards, we didn't do much but settle back onto boat - and had dehydrated, out of date, hiking meals for dinner.





## Fenninghams Island; Tillegerry Nature Reserve

28th December 2024. Ok. So perhaps the middle of the day was not the best time to go walking in the bush. However, we weren't exactly geared up to go any earlier. Having missed the opportunity to pick up the hire car via bus from the airport tomorrow, we borrowed the courtesy car this morning and drove it to Newcastle instead. It technically cost us a bit more (we contributed to fuel considering we were not driving locally) but we saved several hours. Both Google Maps and whereis.com gave us directions to the car hire mob down zig zagging roads, so we decided we would take the easier (less turns), but slightly longer, route instead. We should have trusted the internet, although trusting the internet for driving directions has led many people astray.

We finally got to the car hire place and picked a car. We had a choice of two; an MG or an i30. We chose the i30 - it is the sexiest i30 I have seen - however Andrew says it is all plastic on the inside. Back at base (eventually - Andrew made a wrong turn on the way back and arrived sometime after me) we planned the rest of the day. First stop was an expensive lunch - only because we were hungry and there was no suitable food in the house. Next it was off for a walk - seeing that we hadn't had one for several days. I chose a route from AllTrails - well most of it.

It was hot - it was around 1330 and the insects were evident; and like they had been on other recent bush-walks - they were deafening. Birdlife was minimal (apparently there are 100 species seen here). Kingfisher, kookaburra and eastern rosella confirmed. Two species heard. Despite written teasers of koalas and echidnas in the area, we saw none. Neither did we see snakes or lizards. A couple of butterflies were seen in the bush but not close enough to identify.

The bush was a mixture of angophoras, swamp gums, grasses, and sedges. There were some trees that looked positively tropical and I thought we may have been too far south for them (the caveat - I am not familiar with the local plant life). Mosquitoes were ever present - some of them helping themselves to our blood!

We got back to base at 1600 - again just in time for the afternoon cocktail.



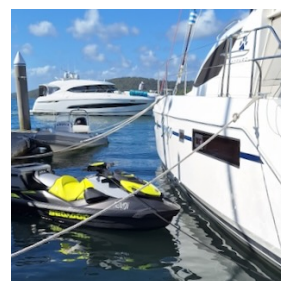
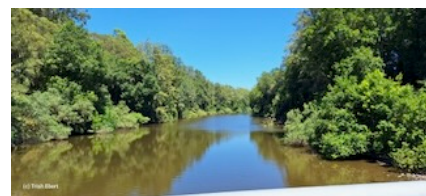


## A Drive to the Hills

29th December 2024. We had planned on a walk - we ended up with a drive. Normally I would be a bit grumpy about this but the change was my suggestion. The forecast for the Port Stephens area was 28 degrees. In the hills the reading inside the car, as accurate as that was, or wasn't, reached 32! Had a walk been feasible we would have needed to have left early before the heat, as the wander I had in mind was partly along an open, exposed, road. Andrew got himself up around 0600. I, on the other hand, didn't drag myself out of bed until around 0730. It was already hot. Hence the need for Plan B.

Given that Andrew is potentially exploring the Hunter Valley in the next couple of weeks I didn't want to impinge on his possible driving geography. So, we headed north-north-east to north east; firstly doing a circle around the centre of Raymond Terrace, stopping for morning tea at Clarence Town (the extent of tidal waters and apparently the first place that an ocean-going steamship was built in Australia), taking some back roads to Dungog and then heading east ish - stopping for lunch at Stroud. We continued on to Gloucester, took a road through the hills to Belahdulah on the A1 and landed back at boat just after 1700 - to discover someone (turns out to be the boat opposite) had added to the 'park in our pen without asking permission' crowd. Apparently it will be gone by 0730. We aim to move the boat across to the other side of the pen, as requested by the marina manager, around 0830 tomorrow.

As we had missed out on the photos of the white necked heron on our Kempsey trip - we specifically stopped to get some shots today.



## Driving through Myall Lakes National Park

30th December 2024. We made it back for cocktail hour - just - the lad dressed in his big straw hat and colourful scarfs serving up plastic shots of alcohol (one only).

Andrew went up to check out the last 50 minutes of play (cricket: Boxing Day Test) just after 1700.

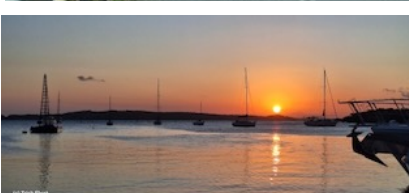
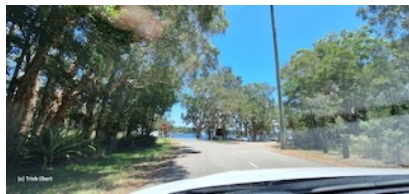
Another hot day. Another driving day. A shorter one. We didn't leave the marina until just before 1000, having moved the boat to the other side of the pen first - as requested by the marina manager. He did want the boat moved before we left for xmas but we didn't get around to it - even after we moved pens - although I did ask the staff member helping to stick around and help us move across after we had tied up on the starboard side (easier for Andrew as the helm is on that side) but he left. I was a bit miffed.

I asked for help this morning but staff were busy so by the time they turned up we had actually moved the boat - a little further forward in the pen because the available cleats on the western side of the pen were not ideal.

We finally left the marina madness and headed out into the heat, firstly to do a bit of shopping at Salamander Bay, and then off into the wild blue yonder - or rather up the freeway a bit before turning east to have a look at Tea Gardens and Hawks Nest. Lunch was on a public seat at Winda Woppa but it was a bit too hot to go for a walk along the exposed paths (there were plenty of people walking across to the ocean to swim). The Mungo Brush Side Road headed north and traversed through sand dune heath and semi rainforest bush - which looked lovely and there are some short tracks that may be worth exploring in the future. The Bombah Point Ferry cost us two dollars more than I expected, the coffee at the cafe at the Myall Shores Holiday Park was terrible (and the banana mango loaf eventually not really a substitute for the scones we had ordered but hadn't been told there were none left).

Once we got back to the freeway the only detour was the old highway into Karuah - just to have a look. Shopping for dinner was taken at Medowie (the Coles Building looking very old compared with its Woolworths competition across the road).

Birds today: pelicans (including on the top of lights on the Tea Gardens Bridge), silver gulls, pacific black ducks, mudlarks, purple swamp hen, lapwing, magpie, pied butcherbird, kookaburra, sacred kingfisher, white ibis, white-faced heron.



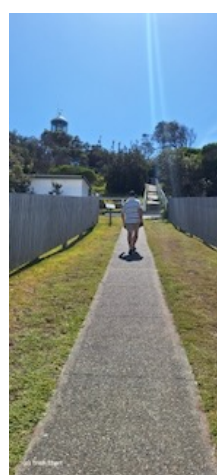
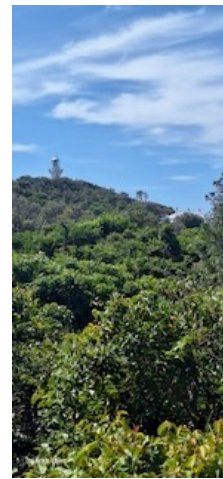
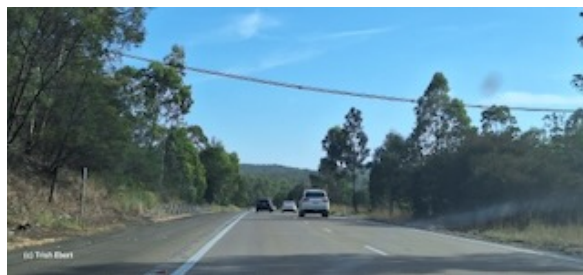


## Smoky Cape - Bagging another lighthouse

31st December 2024. Bagging another lighthouse - by car. Well, technically by foot - we just used a car to get to the car park. It wasn't a long walk - 660m each way. And it wasn't the walk I was expecting to do today - which we didn't end up doing at all.

We left reasonably early. I was expecting today's excursion to be a solo affair but Andrew finally decided he would come with me. Back up the freeway to just past Buledarah and then turn right along the tourist drive to Taree via Forster/Tuncurry. We didn't do all of the tourist drive, turning left a few kilometres past Tuncurry to get back on the freeway further south than expected, but by this time we had had a good day and wanted to get home. The drive toward Forster is windy and bushy and vistas also include some paddocks and filtered lakeside views. We shot past a brown sign that mentioned something about the tallest tree in NSW (I admit I didn't read the entire sign) but we didn't turn back. A drive around the hamlet of Smiths Lake confirmed it was a slightly bigger hamlet than I had realised, and then we took an impromptu trip toward Seal Rocks. The road towards its end, and where the main holiday abodes are, is windy and thin, and opposing traffic has to negotiate both the cars parked on the side of the road, and the wandering tourists. This is a very busy little corner of the world. We continued to the end of the road to the entrance driveway to the lighthouse at Sugarloaf Point. The walk from here to the small, and now automated, lighthouse, is delightful; reasonably short and the first section is through gorgeous bush with prolific birdlife. In fact, even the exposed bit of this walk had prolific birdlife. The lighthouse cottages have been renovated and are available for holiday rent (where the tenants get to drive up the hill!). The final 'up' is steep - but very short. The building itself is squat with only two levels. It is not open to the public but the view from the platform at the upper door down along the southern beach is pretty nice.

Lunch was at the 'Lakes And Ocean Hotel' in Forster, after which we took a walk to the end of the southern break-wall and sussed out where the two public





moorings are if we ever came in. One seemed occupied by an old and skanky, and permanent in appearance, boat.

### Back in Port Stephens

The 2100 fireworks at Nelson Bay was observed from the end of Ridgeway Avenue, along with the odd fireworks from Shoal Bay, Anna Bay, Tea Gardens and anywhere along the edge of the Port that people wanted to let off fireworks. We took our hiking chairs down but Andrew sat on a seat that just happened to be there. We had to both stand up and enjoy the spectacle however when a couple decided they would stand and block our view. Fireworks were still going on somewhere in the Port after we got back to boat.

Birds; olive backed oriole, little corellas (despite the fact my app (and one hard copy old guide)) say they are not on the coast, mudlark, craven, magpie, kookaburra, yellow robin, Lewin honeyeaters, common mynas, blue faced honeyeaters, noisy miners, pelican, tern (sp?), little black cormorant, great cormorants, oyster catchers (we hear them morning and night from boat).

