

THE NEW ZEALAND CLASSIC YACHT JOURNAL



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River outing recalls the past

By Chad Thompson

Auckland's classic launches headed inland in the season's first rally in early November.

The city of Auckland almost completely surrounds the Waitemata Harbour which, in reality, is the largest river in the region. In the early colonial days, the trip north, if it were not to be made by sailing up the coast, commenced with a voyage to the far reaches of the Waitemata River and the township of Riverhead.

After resting at the hotel, travellers continued the journey north by coach (and

later by train) to Helensville and then beyond on the Kaipara Harbour.

The Classic Yacht Association has been running up to Riverhead now for the past two years and this season's outing was the largest yet with over 14 vessels, 70 members and their friends making the pilgrimage to one of New Zealand's oldest hotels.

Early timber-millers and farmers clear-felled the surrounding shores and silted up the river with the consequent topsoil runoff, so the journey is now highly

tide-dependent. The 1117 hours high tide was one of the biggest of the season and, much to everyone's pleasure, it did not actually commence its ebb from the upper reaches for more than 1¼ hours after the official high.

Departure of the flotilla from Westhaven was timed for 0830 hours thus allowing arrival at Riverhead at around 1030. While there are no official charts of the upper reaches of the Waitemata River, the Outboard Boating Club have a great little map and

if you ever move out of the channel, the mud banks are very sympathetic to the keel and bilges of older vessels. The only yacht making the voyage, Loloma, was the only one we saw finding the soft stuff.

The sun-drenched deck out in front of the hotel overlooking the river was a great spot to enjoy conviviality with the members of the Association and their friends. It was also great to have Jack Allen and Don Harland,

cont. overleaf



Meteor rises from an overgrown

My obsession with old boats began while I was a teenager. The year was 1989 and I was staying at a friend's bach at Lake Tarawera. Hidden in the bush close by the bach was a run-down boatshed with toitoi and lake weed growing right up to the door. After much peering through lifted roofing iron gaps and holes in walls I spotted hidden inside my prize, an 11 odd foot wooden clinker dinghy belonging to my friend's grandmother.

The boat had been at Tarawera since 1952. But when it began to leak, their son built a catamaran at school, cannibalising the poor dinghy for parts including the mast, bronze fittings. Her death knell was sounding and for 20 odd years she lay on a bare earth floor slowly rotting away. Piles of old wood began to be stacked on her. Possums died and became mummified in her and she slowly died.

After a few hours with a



slasher and spade, we had cleared enough of the weeds to open the doors and pull her out into the daylight. "Not so bad," I naively thought, looking with a bit of trepidation at her condition and at the 100m of open lake we had to cross to get her to the boat ramp and safety.

We set out with buckets at the ready, paddling furiously as she settled lower into the water. After a few minutes of frenzied paddling, we arrived at the boat ramp, out of breath but with a good dose of feel-good factor. Loading her on the trailer, I headed home stealing the odd look in the rear vision mirror at her gorgeous curves.

What we had found was a frostbite dinghy. Hanging on the side of the bach was her mast. The sail with the number 13 sewed on it turned up in a shed along with a nice set of bronze rollicks. The rudder had made it as far as the home farm in Matamata, stashed in a disused milking shed. We never did find the centreboard.

As you do when you are young and stupid, I

proceeded to breath life back into the old girl by judicious use of silicon, automotive filler and house paint. I launched her into Tauranga harbour a few months later and had two uninterrupted years of fun sailing her, the odd trip to Matakana Island with my brother.

I then started what at the time I deemed to be a fairly ambitious project, replacing all her ribs. I had no idea how to do this then knowing no-one in the trade. I liberated some kahikatea from a stash at my grandfather's place and got it milled down to the right size. I also purchased a heap of copper nails and roves from a chandlery with my "hard-earned" student allowance.

At this time my family lived in Maungatapu, Tauranga and getting to the

Riverhead trip ...

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senior members of the Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron, who joined the party, recounting the early days of sailing to Riverhead pre-WWII.

The time to depart became very apparent when the tide had turned. The run back to Auckland was over far too quickly with the 1.5-knot tidal ebb sweeping the little ships down the river at a great rate.

The event is becoming more and more popular with the fleet already having doubled in size. Don't miss next year's inland adventure, or organise your own run up the river sooner.

Kaylene & Peter, the managers of the Riverhead Hotel will be most welcoming.

shed to new life on the water

boat was a mission in itself. Most afternoons after tech, I would load a backpack with six large flasks full of hot water for my home-made immersion steamer, and proceeded to head over the cliff down to the frostbite to steam in the new ribs and rivet them in place. I took the opportunity of a well-placed birthday to beg my parents for a new sail, as the old cotton one was in very sad shape. (About as sad as mum's sewing machine after I managed to run over a wooden batten while trying to repair said sail and totally bugger it).

After three months, I was ready to sail again, She went like a rocket with her new less square bilge shape and

beautiful new sail.

We'll skip forward a few years now to 1988, when, with the advent of the internet, I was able to search for information on frostbites. I came across an address for the Frostbite Assn. and sent off a letter with all the info I had on my dinghy. A reply duly came back saying they could with some certainty tell me my boat was called Meteor and disappeared off the register in the early 50's. Another letter later I had the name Robert Brooke and an address, so I set off, boat in tow, and headed out to Robert's place for a verdict on Meteor's restoration. After the initial consultation and a "lets burn

it" comment, followed by a mischievous grin, Meteor's proper restoration began.

A few weeks after leaving her with Robert, I got a call asking if I wanted to pop over and talk about where I wanted to go next. I arrived expecting the worst and I wasn't disappointed.

Meteor was now missing gunwales and what looked like about 11 planks! I was horrified! The verdict was, "Well, I've burned all the rubbish, this is what we have left." With butterflies about how much all this was going to cost, I gave the OK to put her back together.

My next trip back was a lot better. She was almost in one piece and I was asked whether I would

like to finish all the paint and varnish. How could I refuse? She was beautiful! Unfortunately for the wallet, I was talked into a new rudder stock, tiller, mast, centreboard, floorboards... etc. It was worth it.

I have owned Meteor now for over 15 years. Last year I toyed briefly with selling her as I wasn't using her, but came to my senses and just recently "loaned" her to my brother to teach his five-year-old son to sail. I expect with a bit of care and attention Meteor will still be around in another 55 years to teach another generation to appreciate a fine wooden dinghy.

Jason Prew



RESCUE TRUST

The Rescue Trust has six vessels awaiting adoption into good homes, all with great histories;

1. COLONIST a 33ft centreboard cutter built by Fred Mann in 1911.
2. NIOBE a 26ft keel yacht built by Bailey & Lowe in 1900.
3. COUNTESS, a 35ft x 7ft 10in launch built by Bailey & Lowe in 1910
4. SWIFTSURE a 14ft [and a bit more] centreboarder built in 1920 and registered as both a T Class and an S Class over the years.
5. MARORO a 32ft x 7ft 9in launch built in 1907 by the Mathieson brothers. Winner of Rudder Cup.
6. A 38ft x 8ft 6in 1892 Robert Logan-built yacht of impeccable provenance but requiring total restoration. Ideal for a serious syndicate wanting a fast, characterful classic thoroughbred.

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16 – 19
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2006

'a celebration of our fabulous classic yachts, launches and small craft'

Based at: Viaduct Harbour, Downtown Auckland
Open to: Vintage, Classic, Replica and Spirit of Tradition
keel and centerboard yachts, Classic Launches

2006 Regatta Programme of Events:

Thursday 16 February: **Race Briefing**
Friday 17 February: **Race One**
Saturday 18 February: **Race Two**
Saturday 18 February: **Launch Log Rally**
Sunday 19 February: **Race Three**
Official Prizegiving

Download Notice of Race and Entry Form from www.classicyacht.org.nz
or contact: Joyce Talbot t: (09) 836-4747, m: 021-818-448, f: (09) 836-4747
e: joycetalbot@xtra.co.nz

Yachties to celebrate Auckland's Birthday in fine style

'Become a part of history – join us in New Zealand's oldest sporting event'

The 166th NZ Herald Anniversary Day Regatta

Classics to lead the way ... to set the scene for the 166th Regatta on Monday 30 January, our yachting heritage of classic yachts, launches and tall ships will form a Parade of Sail.

Commencing at 0930hrs from the Viaduct.

Vessels will head to their start line off Orakei Wharf at **11.15am**, followed by the tall ships at **11.25am**

Pre Anniversary Day events:

Friday 27 January: DYC Night Race to Mahurangi (enter with Devonport Yacht Club)
Saturday 28 January: Mahurangi Festival (enter on the day with Mahurangi Cruising Club)
Sunday 29 January: Mahurangi to Auckland Yacht Race (enter with Classic Yacht Assn)
Berth at Viaduct Harbour (enter with Auckland Anniversary Regatta)
Monday 30 January: NZ Herald Anniversary Day Regatta (enter with Auckland Anniversary Regatta)

Contact details for downloading entry forms and sailing instructions:

Classic Yacht Association: www.classicyacht.org.nz
Auckland Anniversary Day Regatta: www.regatta.org.nz
Devonport Yacht Club: www.dyc.org.nz
Or contact Joyce Talbot: p: 09-836-4747
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