

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU DREAM PART 5

STEWART ISLAND

LAND OF THE GLOWING SKIES

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Part five on the journey of the MV Strannik, Rodney Russ takes to Stewart Island.

Stewart Island has something for every cruising yachtsperson. Many international yachts include Stewart Island as part of a southern itinerary along with Fiordland. For NZ based yachts it is often and should be a destination in its own right.

On his first voyage to NZ in 1769 Capt. James Cook anguished over whether it was an Island or whether it was connected to the South Island, he finally convinced himself it was a peninsula and drew it on his map as such. He was wrong, one of the few times he was. The Maori had discovered it long before Cook, they called it, Te Punga o Te Waka a Maui later it became known as Rakiaura (land of the glowing skies). The Maoris survived by exploiting its abundant natural resources, birds (especially the muttonbird), fish and marine mammals. These items were traded with northern tribes for the likes of pounamu or Greenstone and obsidian used in making stone adzes.

The English name, Stewart Island, is in honour of William Stewart, first mate on the sealer Pegasus, who charted Port Pegasus in 1809.

Sealing gangs were amongst the first European settlers to arrive they were followed by others looking to exploit the rich natural resources including timber, fishing and to a much lesser extent farming. Today, fishing is the only one of those industries still surviving, albeit in a much more managed fashion. Lobster or cray fishing is important and to a lesser extent so is Blue Cod. In the sheltered waters of Paterson Inlet both Salmon and mussel farms have been established. The Island was declared a National Park in 2002 to become NZ's 14th National Park.

*Strannik moored in Port Pegasus
(image Scott Sinton)*

The old tramway from Port Pegasus is a great walking track



Author, Rodney Russ on Trig D above Port Pegasus



At Trig D on the Southern Tin Range



STEWART ISLAND

FRIENDLY LOCALS

There is just one settlement on the Island, the small township of Oban in Halfmoon Bay where there is a permanent population of ca 440 people. The Islands have a regular ferry service from Port of Bluff and Stewart Island Air Services offer regular flights from Invercargill. It is a popular tourist destination for both domestic and International visitors.

The cruising yacht should plan on spending at least a month, that could easily be extended. You will need NZ charts NZ69 and NZ6912 and the author suggests that Mana Cruising guide to Stewart Island is indispensable, but it should always be used in association with the charts. Local fishermen are friendly and if you encounter them either in the pub or out working their pots/lines they will give you plenty of advice.

On arrival in Halfmoon Bay, you can, if you work around the local charter boats, come alongside the wharf to top up water tanks, you can also purchase diesel, petrol and top up gas bottles. (understandably its more expensive than in South Island ports). The local Four Square supermarket has a great range of product and produce.

The best all weather anchorage in Paterson Inlet is Little Glory Cove. From Little Glory anchorage you can walk to Ocean Beach to see Kiwi. It is an easy 30 min walk from the jetty (don't tie alongside the jetty as commercial kiwi watching vessels tie up here regularly) You want to go just after dark, take a torch and once you reach the beach just walk slowly along the high tide line looking for the kiwi that will (should be) feeding along the upper edge of the beach. Just remember it is an offence to disturb the birds, so just watch them. (call into the DoC office in Oban to collect a permit before doing this walk, there is no cost) Another great anchorage in Paterson Inlet is Prices Inlet. This is an historic anchorage used by the Norwegian Ross Sea Whaling Company as a wintering maintenance base for the whale catchers used in their Ross Sea (Antarctica) fishery in the 1920's . It is a fascinating story, check it out at the local museum when you are in Oban. There is an easy walk and some remains of the workshops and slipways to explore.

GOOD ANCHORAGES

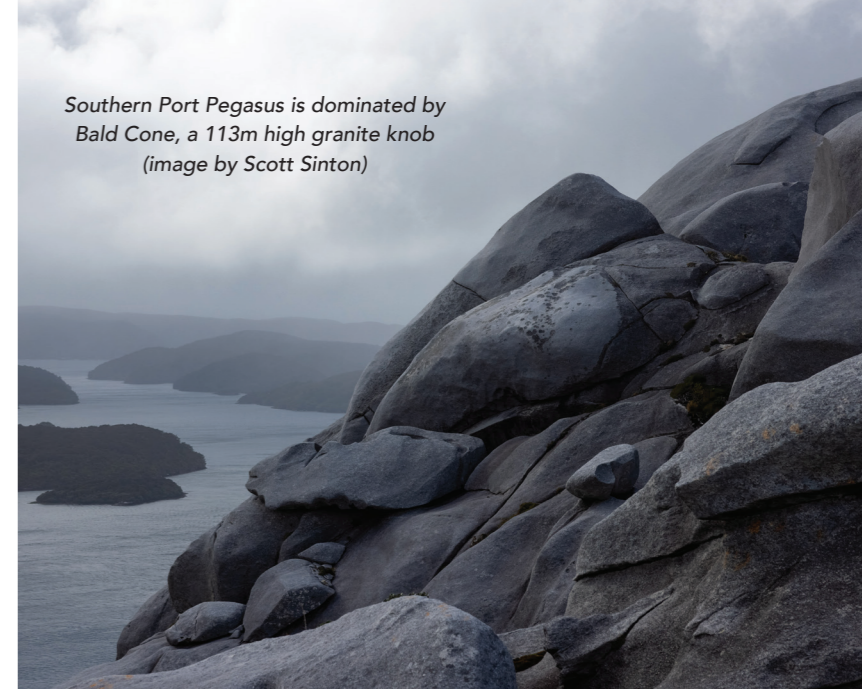
Make sure you set aside a day to explore Ulva Island. There is a good anchorage, in Sydney Cove. The Island was declared predator free after an extensive trapping and poisoning campaign in 1997. Today it is home to some of NZ's countries rarest birds like the saddleback and yellowhead however a recent reinvasion by rats is threatening these species and the Island predator free status.

There are other anchorages in Paterson Inlet like Sailors Rest and Kidney Fern. Which ones you can use will depend on the size and draught of your vessel and the prevailing weather conditions. Check the Mana cruising guide and/or ask the locals.

Port Adventure lies some 9nm miles south of Paterson Inlet. If the weather is out of the westerly quarter it is an easy trip. It is worthy of a couple days' exploration. There are two great anchorages Oyster Bay and Abrahams Bosom. Take your tender and explore the Heron River then drift downstream and enjoy the peace and quiet.

While it is not far from Port Adventure to Lords River you need to choose your weather (and if you get the tide right it helps, see the Mana Cruising Guide). It is possible with some local knowledge to take a more sheltered inshore course, otherwise you will have to go around the eastern extremity of the Breaksea and Horomamae (Owen) Islands and you will catch the full force of any S - SW weather that is coming up from Antarctica. There is a great anchorage just inside the river at Deep Bay and the weather can do what it likes while you are there because nothing will affect you. Again, take your tender and explore up the river it is navigable for a couple miles. The end of the navigable water is very obvious .. there is a waterfall. Just downstream of the waterfall on the south bank there is a hunter's camp. This is popular site and there could well be

Southern Port Pegasus is dominated by Bald Cone, a 113m high granite knob (image by Scott Sinton)



deer hunters in residence. Back at your anchorage there is a short walk to the south coast, it will give you a preview of what lies ahead. It is 17 miles from Lords River to Port Pegasus and it can be a little lumpy, pick your weather and tides. There is almost always a Southern Ocean swell rolling up this coast. It is not difficult or dangerous unless there is a strong S-SW winds. N -NW weather is ideal for a run south. The local fishing and charter boats stick close inshore, to take advantage of the tide. If you do this watch out for craypots as you don't want a rope around your prop. There are four entrances into Port Pegasus, all are navigable but Blind Passage is not recommended.

Cooks Arm, Port Pegasus
(image by Scott Sunton)

'There is no right or wrong time to visit Stewart Island'

Miners Dam in the Tin Range



head of Cooks Arm. A warning this is tidal but you have about 1.5 - 2 hours either side of high tide, to get there and back. There is no obvious track from the head of Cooks Arm, you have to head almost due west through dense scrub until you pick up the route from Evening Cove. Depending on the time of your visit keep an eye out at the head of Cooks Arm for the NZ Dotterel, a rare wader that breeds on the mountain tops of Stewart Island, but winters in the estuaries.

GREAT WALKING TRACKS

The most popular anchorage is at North Arm. It is a sheltered, safe anchorage with good holding. Best of all it gives you access to a great day trip to trig D on the southern end of the Tin Range. There are two options the old tramway, built between 1912- 17 at a cost of about £9000 to facilitate the development of tin mining in the area, (which incidentally was a huge financial disaster) The tramway departs from Diprose Bay. The alternative is the Surveyors track which is more direct (steep) it leaves from close to the anchorage. There is a sign stating that this track is no longer maintained, but it is still relatively easy to follow. The first few hundred metres of this track traverses the old Port Pegasus township which included a hotel, post office and houses which were built in anticipation of the mining boom, which never eventuated. All that remains are some flat areas and stone hearths where the buildings once stood. On the opposite side of the anchorage is a large concrete slab, the remains of a fish factory.

Kakapo, a large flightless parrot was rediscovered in this area in 1977, all the birds have since been removed to safe island refuges as there are rats, possums, feral cats and hedgehogs on the Island. An ambitious predator trapping program hopes to remove these introduced animals. Maybe, if the predator free Stewart Island programme is successful, Kakapo will be reintroduced here.

There are numerous other anchorages in Port Pegasus. Refer to the Mana cruising guide. Just a word of warning though, many of the anchorages described in the guide refer to the use of stern lines. If you plan on using any of the existing stern lines at these anchorages, check them carefully because many of them have been there a long time or else be prepared to run your own.

Another great day out is to visit the striking granite peaks of Gog and Magog. You have a couple options. 1) you can anchor at Evening Cove and find the (unmarked) track that starts in a small gut near the anchorage. The track leads up through the bush and into open ground from where you can see the Peaks, the route is fairly obvious, but it is harder and further than it looks. 2) Check the tides and near the top of tide take your tender into Islet Cove and travel to the

DISAPPOINTMENT COVE IS NOT A DISAPPOINTMENT

Southern Port Pegasus is dominated by Bald Cone, a 113-metre-high granite knob. There is a route/track from a small cove at 47° 13 675 S 167° 35 114. E. There is a fixed rope near the summit to help you get to the top to enjoy the magnificent views. I think one of the greatest anchorages in Pegasus is Disappointment Cove. The name is a misnomer, if you can get in here and tied up to the stern line that is there, you won't be disappointed you will be able to sit out any weather. The anchorage also gives access to two great walks. There is a short walk over the hill starting very close to the anchorage, it takes you across to Communicating Coves in Broad Bay. The other walk leaves from an unnamed cove about 1100 metres west of the anchorage. You either have to get dropped off here or anchor your tender out, because there is nowhere to pull it out. The first 50 metres of the track is not obvious; you have to clamber up a waterfall. Stay on the left hand side (or true right) and follow the creek above the waterfall and you will find a reasonably well defined track that leads to a golden sand beach known as the Settlement, a former whaling station. Allow about 40 mins each way. Depending on the time of your visit you could well have company on the beach. NZ sea lions haul out and in recent years' females have been pupping here. Be careful, keep a good distance from them and be respectful of them, at breeding time the bulls can be aggressive. The rare and reclusive yellow eyed penguin can often be seen in the bush behind the beach, if you see them, enjoy but don't disturb them.



The NZ Dotterel, a rare wader that breeds on the mountain tops of Stewart Island, but winters in the estuaries

Kakapo, a large flightless parrot was rediscovered in this area in 1977, all the birds have since been removed to safe island refuges



BOUNTIFUL BLUE COD

A word about fishing. Blue Cod can be caught almost anywhere but please familiarise yourself with local regulations and the whereabouts of any marine reserves and only take enough for table. The best fishing is on rocky ground of the outer coast or around any of the many of the Islands. Note that almost all of the offshore Islands around Stewart Island are used by the local Maori for harvesting mutton-birds, this was a right extended to them when they sold Stewart Island to the government in 1864. The vast majority of these Islands have huts which are used by the mutton birders and landings are not permitted. If the weather is OK and there is not too much swell (and you have a wet suit) it is on these rugged coastlines you will find paua and crayfish.

From Port Pegasus you have the option of circumnavigating the Island. If you have the experience and your vessel is suitable it is well worth considering but you need to be thinking about the weather all the time, as the prevailing westerly weather makes this a potentially unforgiving lee shore. There are a couple anchorages on the west coast that offer some protection even from the prevailing westerlies, these include Easy Harbour and the Gut or Ernest Islands at the south end of Masons Bay. There is also a reasonable anchorage at Sealers Bay at Codfish Island /Whenua Hou. This Island is a Nature Reserve and landing is not permitted. If you are doing a circumnavigation of the Island there is also a reasonable anchorage at Port William but it is only another 5 miles onto Oban in Halfmoon Bay.

I can't imagine anybody being disappointed with their time at Stewart Island. There is no right or wrong time to visit but late summer early autumn is generally very good. ☼