

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU DREAM PART 6

# FAR FLUNG FIORDLAND

## LAND OF THE GLOWING SKIES

Part Six on the journey of the MV Strannik, Rodney Russ takes to Fiordland in the first of a two part series.

It was Captain James Cook who first put Fiordland on the cruising map. In 1773 he sailed his ship the Resolution into Dusky Sound; his log for April 26th of that year records the following, “at 5 o'clock in the am the gale abated and we bore up from the land under all the sail we could set, at 8 the West Cape bore EBN1/2N, for which we steered and entered Dusky Bay about Noon in the mouth of which we found 44 fathom of water, a Sandy Bottom, the West cape bearing SSE and the North Point of the Bay North, here we found a vast roll in from the SW, the water shallowed to 40 fathom, after which we had no ground with 60, we were however too far advanced to return and therefore pushed on not doubting but what we should find anchorage.....”

Cook was not the first person to explore Dusky Sound, discovering Māori (he called them Indians) already living in Dusky Sound. How long they had been there and where they had come from, and what happened to them after Cook left, remains a mystery. The logbooks, journals and charts which were published after Cook's expedition returned home encouraged others to venture to this part of New Zealand and it wasn't long before sealers, whalers, and prospectors (in that order) arrived. Fiordland was to become the site of the first European house in New Zealand, the site of the first European vessel built of local timbers in NZ (possibly in Australasia), the first European shipwreck in New Zealand, the site of first land based whaling station and possibly the home of the first European women in New Zealand.

Cook made a fundamental mistake by calling it a Bay; Dusky Bay (also sometimes called Dusky Sound) is technically a fiord, eroded by the advance of the Pleistocene glaciers. There are 14 Fiords in Fiordland, all except one of them navigable by cruising yachts. Sutherland Sound (Fiord) is protected by a bar and is only accessible by Zodiac or similar, and then only in good weather and sea conditions. The navigable fiords have all been well charted, the latest editions being dated 2009. There is also a very good cruising guide published by the Mana Cruising Club and a very helpful book published by the Guardians of Fiordland entitled, “Beneath the Reflections”.

**WORLD HERITAGE SITE**

The Fiordland National Park is a World Heritage Site encompassing all of the Fiords. New Zealand's Department of Conservation manages the land area down to the MHWS, while the Southland Regional Council (local government) administer the coastal waterways. The guiding document for all management decisions relating to the waterways is the Southland Regional Coastal Plan. Within the fiords there are a number of Marine Reserves and "China Shops" (fragile marine eco systems) with special protection, and anybody planning a visit would be well advised to familiarise themselves with these. The Plan also includes the requirement that all visiting vessels (including recreational boats) must obtain a "clean hull" permit before entering Fiordland. Details of how and where these can be obtained can be found on the Southland Regional Council website or in "Beneath the Reflections" mentioned above. This book also has descriptions and locations of all Marine Reserves, China Shops as well as local fishing regulations, with descriptive notes and maps on the most commonly used anchorages.

Almost all foreign yachts visiting Fiordland will have already completed New Zealand entry formalities at a recognised Port of Entry. However, at the time of writing Milford Sound was still listed as a New Zealand Port of Entry, this may have changed post Covid-19. Only two of the fiords, Milford and Doubtful, have road access. There is a public road to Milford Sound, but a permit is required to drive the road to Doubtful Sound. There are at least two local Te Anau based companies who will collect and deliver items to visiting yachts in Deep Cove and Milford Sound. Petrol and diesel is available in both Milford Sound and Doubtful Sound, it does however come at a price. There are no stores in either of these fiords, food and other supplies have to be ordered from Te Anau and arrangements made to have them delivered. There are commercial day and overnight trips advertised for both Milford Sound and Doubtful Sound, with a number of operators offering extended cruises through these and other fiords.

The dominant user of the fiords is the lobster fishery. This fishery has become a lot more sophisticated in recent years with bigger and faster boats, nearly all of the catch is exported live. Helicopters take it from the boats to Te Anau and from there it is flown to either Christchurch or Auckland to be transhipped to International markets. The Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for this area known as Cray 8 is currently 1,200 tonnes per year. If you have a wet suit (at least 7mm) and snorkel it is relatively easy to get a feed of crayfish and paua, and with a simple rod or handline you will be able to catch plenty of blue cod. Important Note: check the boundaries of the Marine Reserves and respect these, as well as the daily catch limit for the inner and outer fiords and familiarise yourself with the size limits for the various species. Remember, ignorance of the law is no excuse.



Author Outside Caswell Sound Hut



Blue Cod for Dinner



Strannik Anchored Gold Arm Charles Sound

**LIMITED ANCHORAGE**

Despite their size and grandeur there is in fact a limited number of anchorages in Fiordland, any vessels planning on cruising here should ensure they have at least 120-metre (ideally 150-metre) of quality chain and a good anchor. It would also be advisable to have a 100-metre strong wrap readily accessible for use as a stern line. There are moorings in most of the fiords, these are used regularly by fisherman and/or charter boat operators. All the moorings are privately owned, but there is no list of who the owners are or how to contact them; if you are sitting on a mooring and the owner turns up, you might be asked to vacate it. Many of these moorings have been down for years and are not regularly checked, so be cautious, especially if wind is forecast. The wind (when it does blow) either blows up or down the fiord, and can be strong to gale force. Local topography can also produce localised affects and only experience will teach you what those are.

Fiordland is renowned for its high rainfall; the mean annual rainfall in Milford Sound is 6,813mm, and it rains there on average 182 days a year. You need to be prepared for wet, though it does mean that filling your water tanks is not a problem. Apart from rain, there are a number of water hoses in or near waterfalls and cascades that you can pull up to; these are marked in the Mana Cruising Guide. The prevailing weather is from the westerly quarter, usually either NW or SW, and can regularly reach gale force. My recommendation is to allow plenty of time, don't be in a hurry.

The Marine weather bulletin is broadcast by Taupo Maritime Radio a couple times each day. There are two local coastal radio stations, Fiordland Fisherman's Radio and Bluff Fisherman's Radio, providing local forecasts and information. There is no right or wrong time to visit Fiordland, weather during the winter months can be quite settled, the only drawback is the shorter daylight hours.

The fiords divide themselves naturally (by their topography) into two quite distinct groups, firstly a) the Northern Fiords including Milford Sound to Doubtful Sound and secondly b) Doubtful Sound to Preservation Inlet. In this the first of two articles we look at the Northern Fiords, including Milford, Sutherland, Bligh, George, Caswell, Charles, Nancy, Thompson and Doubtful.



Marjorie Falls Irene River



Strannik on mooring  
Milford Sound

**NEW ZEALAND'S GRAND CANYON**

Milford Sound is to New Zealand what the Grand Canyon is to the USA or Uluru is to Australia; Rudyard Kipling described it as the eighth wonder of the world. For the visiting yachts person, it is a great place to visit, but there are no facilities and limited available anchorages. There are some mooring buoys in Deepwater Basin that can sometimes be used for short term stays; contact the Fiordland Lobster Company for these. Fuel can be purchased at their base and arrangements made to have stores delivered from Te Anau. The famed Milford Track finishes in Milford Sound and it is a great day walk to follow the track up the Arthur River.

Sutherland Sound is only accessible by Zodiac, if you have good weather and sea conditions and somebody to look after your vessel, it makes for a great half day excursion. Anchor off the entrance and take your tender across the bar and into the river that leads to the fiord proper; there are no channel makers so take care at low tide as there are a few blind channels. The Dark and Light Rivers flow into the head of the fiord.

Bligh Sound is often overlooked and underrated by visiting yachts. It is one of my favourites, except for the lack of a really secure anchorage. The nomenclature tells a fascinating history with names like Escape Cove, Wild Natives River and Bounty Haven. The two recommended anchorages are Amazon Cove and Bounty Haven, but both are only fair weather anchorages.

George Sound is popular and is possibly the most frequently visited of all the northern fiords. It has two really great anchorages, Anchorage Cove and below the Alice Falls. It is also the terminus of the tramping track from the SW Arm of Lake Te Anau via the Henry Saddle, known as the George Sound Track. As this is an arduous three or four-day tramp, don't expect to see lots of people. The George Sound Hut can be found near the top of the fiord.

Caswell Sound was the base camp for the 1949 American/New Zealand Wapiti Expedition. The quaint hut built by this scientific expedition still stands on the banks of the Stillwater River, a few hundred metres up from the head of the fiord. There is a secure anchorage on the north side of the river (45° 02.724'S 167° 18.305'E) you will need a good, long, strong stern line. With your

vessel secure there I strongly recommend a hike to Lake Marchant, an hours walk up the true right of the Stillwater River. The track, or more precisely the route, is poorly marked, but you can't go wrong and if you keep the river on your right you will eventually come to the lake. The Caswell Sound mining company was a short lived and unsuccessful attempt to mine marble. The scant remains of this venture can be found on the south side of the fiord near the entrance.

**ALL-TIME FAVOURITE FIORD**

Charles Sound must be one of my all-time favourite fiords. It branches into two arms some four miles from the sea; the Gold arm to the south and the Emelius arm to the North. There is great anchorage in Gold Arm (45° 08.612'S 167° 08.840'E) just a few hundred metres up from the helicopter pad opposite Lloyd Island, use a stern line to warp yourself back into the shore. The charts of the upper Gold Arm are not entirely accurate, as it is possible to pass east of Fanny and Catherine islands by keeping close to the eastern shoreline. Take your tender and explore the upper reaches of Gold Arm as far as the Windward River. Just a word of warning though, there are extensive mudflats at low tide, so don't get marooned. The tide will eventually come back in but it would be a long wait while being hounded by hungry sandflies. The Emelius arm is equally exciting but it does not have as good an anchorage. We have successfully anchored and put a couple stern lines out at (45° 05.846'S 167° 11.604'E). Take your tender and explore the Irene River, it is navigable for several miles through some of the most beautiful primeval forest you can imagine.

Nancy Sound is shaped like a leg and names like Leg Head, Foot Arm, Heel Cove and Toe Cove all attest to this. It is rarely visited by visiting yachtsmen, probably because of its proximity to Thompson Sound (see below) and because the entrance can look a little forbidding, especially if there is any sort of sea running. Anxiety Point at the entrance to this fiord says it all. There is a reasonable anchorage in Toe Cove, but a stern line is required.

if you are approaching from the North, Thompson Sound is the gateway to Doubtful Sound. Near where Thompson joins

Doubtful Sound is the entrance to Bradshaw Sound and at the head of Bradshaw Sound in Precipice Cove are two of the best all-weather anchorages in Fiordland. The Doubtful Sound complex is the second largest fiord after Dusky Sound. In the 1960's a road was constructed into Doubtful Sound as part of the Lake Manapouri hydroelectric project. In Deep Cove, at the very head of the fiord, there is an outdoor education hostel for local schools, a wharf area for tourist boats and the few fishing boats that work out of here. There are also a few moorings suitable for overnight use; it is possible to purchase fuel here and arrange for supplies to be shipped in on one of the tourist buses that come in daily from Te Anau. It's a great place to stock up in fuel, food and water before heading out through the Southern Fiords which I will describe in detail in a subsequent article. ☼



Fur Seal



Upper Reaches of Gold  
Arm Charles Sound



Zodiac  
Cruise  
Irene  
River