

# SOLO SEA KAYAK CROSSING OF EASTERN BASS STRAIT

TIDAL RIVER (WILSON PROMONTORY, VICTORIA)  
TO MUSSELROE BAY (NORTH-EAST TASMANIA)  
18<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2011



BY BRETT GREENWOOD

This is an account of my 11-day solo crossing of Eastern Bass Strait via the Hogan and Kent Group of islands and Flinders Island.

Prior to setting off, I spent four months researching which kayak was best suited to the trip, made a list of the essential gear to pack, examined weather patterns, maps and various routes, and studied other people's crossings, not to mention the endless hours spent paddling on the ocean close to home in preparation for what was to be both an adventure and a challenge. Bass Strait or "the Everest of the Sea" as it is known to sea kayakers, was to turn out to be both physically and mentally draining and a true test of my character.

DAY 1 TUESDAY 18 JANUARY 2011

TIDAL RIVER TO WATERLOO BAY (WILSONS PROMONTORY) 25KM

At 11am, after a three-hour drive from Melbourne, I arrived at Tidal River inside Wilsons Promontory National Park. Located at the southern-most point of the Australian mainland, the township of Tidal River provides the main facilities for the entire National Park, and when I arrived, it overflowed with campers who were enjoying their annual summer holidays. Due to its access to the ocean, Tidal River is the perfect starting point for a kayak crossing of Eastern Bass Strait. I unpacked my gear from the car and loaded it into the Mirage 580 sea kayak specifically purchased for the trip. With all the gear safely stowed on board (something I had never done to date!), I set off to buy my last "take-away" meal at the local shop.... a steak sandwich, which I would later regret eating.

At 12:54pm, I set off at mid-tide and floated down the river into the shore break. The fully loaded kayak weighed 50kg and it took some crafty navigation skills and quite an effort to paddle through the choppy water... a near impossible task at low tide.....and one not to be recommended.



Prior to this trip, most of my kayaking adventures involved lightweight craft such as a 7kg K1, so I found the going quite tough, especially when ploughing into a 15-knot south-west wind. However, once I reached the south-east point of Wilsons Promontory, and with the wind behind, I hoisted my sail, which made for a far easier and enjoyable start to my journey.

From the ocean, the southern point of Wilsons Promontory is quite spectacular, and from my nautical position I enjoyed a sea-bird's view of the northern-most chain of granite mountains that continues across Bass Strait and onto eastern Tasmania. Across its profile, huge boulders and pinnacles topped with scraggy carpets of multi-coloured seaweed rise from the sparkling white sand surroundings. Considering I was at the boundary of two major ocean currents, on this particular day the ocean was relatively calm.

After paddling for three and a half hours, I reached a secluded beach on Waterloo Bay's southern corner. Enclosed by a rocky bush back drop, I set up camp for the night on a beautiful beach with squeaky white sand and then proceeded to worry about the possibility of a king tide!

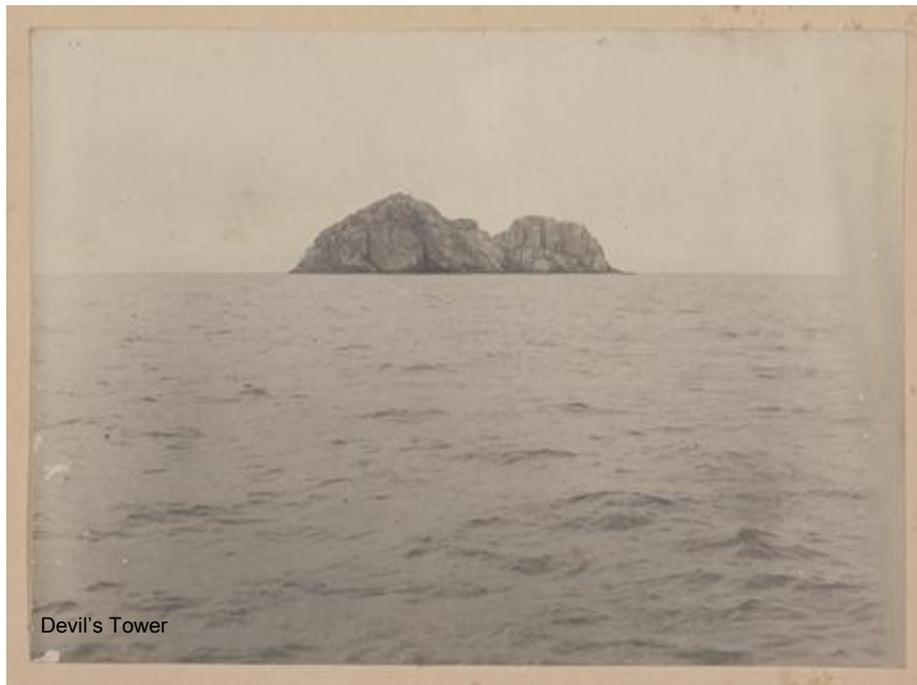


## DAY 2- WEDNESDAY 19<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2011

### WATERLOO BAY TO HOGAN ISLAND VIA DEVILS TOWER 75KM

After enjoying my first night without being washed away, I set my compass bearing for Hogan Island and began paddling at 6:53am into a 15-knot south/south-west wind and half- to one-metre swell. Hogan Island is not visible from Waterloo Bay but I had read that after one-and-a-half-hours paddling, the island literally pops up in front of you... and that's exactly what it did....or so I thought it did. After six hours paddling and totally exhausted, I was confronted with a 90-degree steep slap of granite rock covered in seals. I realized this was not Hogan Island! It was Devils Tower! A wrong compass bearing had put me 26 degrees south-west of Hogan Island. !%@#?! What to do now???

I had learnt of this happening to another poor paddler on a previous trip who unluckily had arrived late in the afternoon and had to cling to the side of rocks all night holding his kayak! Luckily for me, I had left early in the morning and arrived at Devils Tower at 1.30pm. Knowing there were still enough hours in the day to get to my intended destination provided some comfort but it was a scary feeling. I was lost in the middle of the ocean, was physically drained after paddling 43km and still had another 30km to paddle before nightfall. The swell had risen to two meters and the wind gusts hit 25 knots. Thankfully, a tail wind enabled me to use my sail and arrive at Hogan Island at 4.30pm. I'd covered 75km and paddled for 9 hours and 45 minutes in one day. Not a great start I must admit...but the feeling of total relief on arrival was indescribable!



Devil's Tower

On Hogan Island, I met a group of four kayakers and was invited to join them for a feast on fresh fish which they had caught on the same day. Hogan Island is used for the grazing of cattle and the group of islands marks the state border between Tasmania and Victoria. The island is home to many breeding seabirds and wader species including Little Penguins, Mutton Birds, Pacific Gulls, Silver Gulls and Sooty Oystercatchers and unfortunately rats!



Hogan Island Campground



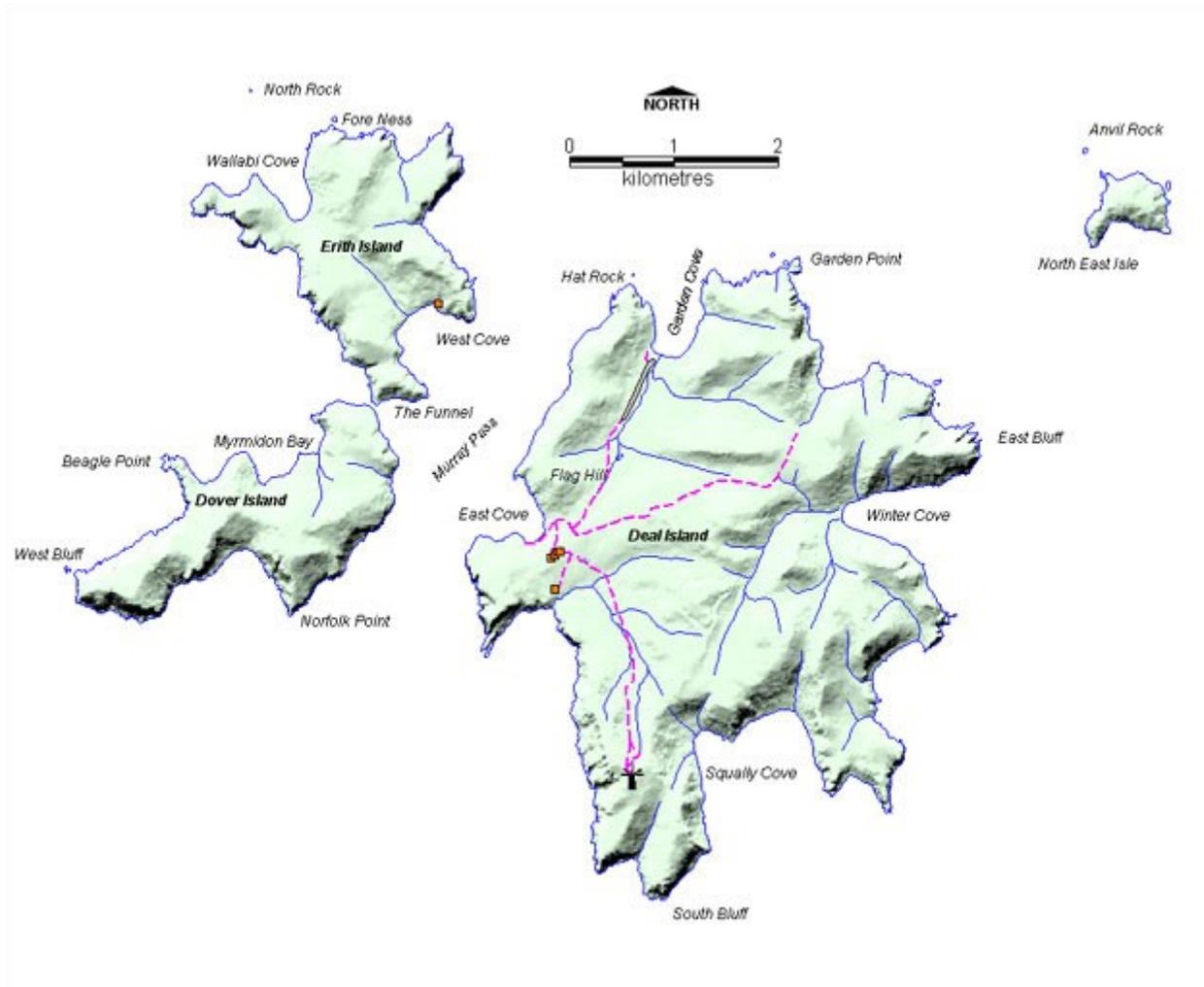
Hogan Island Lighthouse

## DAY 3- THURSDAY 20<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2011

### HOGAN ISLAND TO DEAL ISLAND (EAST COVE) 43KM

I woke before dawn to be greeted by a light, eight knot easterly wind and westerly swell below one metre and decided to make a move to Deal Island. I paddled for some time with the four fellow adventurers but eventually we were separated. Compared to the previous day, this 42km paddle was quite slow due to wind hitting my front port side and turned out to be my slowest paddle of the whole trip, averaging only 6.5km/h. It was a true indication of how the previous day's paddle had taken its toll.

The islands of the Kent Group were discovered by Mathew Flinders in 1798 and are named after William Kent. They were extensively used for the fur seal trade for a period of about 50 years. A lighthouse station was built on Deal Island in 1848. The lighthouse was completed with the help of the then New South Wales, Victorian and Tasmanian governments, with the aim that it would enable more free trade through the waters of Bass Strait. Constructed on a hill 288 meters above sea level, it is the highest lighthouse in the southern hemisphere. Today, its flashing light is sometimes visible at night from Wilsons Promontory, some 80 kilometers away. No-one has inhabited the island since 1992 when the lighthouse was deactivated, although volunteer caretakers have since taken up residence mainly to monitor illegal fishing practices in the area.



On reaching the Kent Group of islands, I was lucky enough to arrive at high tide and managed to pass through a channel known as 'The Funnel' between Dover Island and Erith Island. Within 30 minutes of high tide, the channel of water becomes a rocky bridge – making for a long paddle around the islands to get to East Cove in Murray Pass. I felt excited that I was able to make it through 'The Funnel' as very few kayakers have succeeded.

After six-and-a-half-hours paddling, I camped the night at East Cove on Deal Island, protected from the strong easterly wind, with Simon (one of the group I met on Hogan). Simon had become separated from the others in his group at Murray Pass and was unable to join the rest of his party on Erith due to a raging current and outgoing tide. That night, both of us were invited to dinner with the current volunteer caretakers of Deal Island, Lyn and Tim from New York. We enjoyed a fantastic meal of fresh fish and island-grown vegetables from the 100-year-old veggie garden followed by apple pie!



Murray Pass and "The Funnel"



East Cove Deal Island

## DAY 4- FRIDAY 21<sup>ST</sup> JANUARY 2011

### DEAL ISLAND (EAST COVE) TO DEAL ISLAND (WINTER COVE) 9.5KM

Overnight, the wind had swung from an easterly to a westerly...a common occurrence on Bass Strait. This made our campsite at East Cove very unpleasant. I was running on empty and in desperate need for a rest day so I made the plan to paddle to Winter Cove on the eastern side of the island to get out of the wind. This would cut down my paddling time to Flinders Island by about one hour. I waved goodbye to Simon at 9:20am who set off to find the rest of his group. I headed in a clockwise direction around Deal to Winter Cove, arriving at 11am. This was a very scenic paddle but would be my last stint on the water for two days.



Guest Cottage



Museum

I set up camp at Winter Cove under a cluster of pine trees at the western corner of the beach. After enjoying a double-shot espresso (a DIY brew using the Handpresso I received for Xmas, and far better than anything BK's could provide!), I headed on foot to the caretaker's house in the hope of receiving a weather report for the next few days.

The four-kilometre walk from Winter Cove to the caretaker's cottage is steep but quite picturesque with plenty of opportunities to view the Kent Group of Islands from all angles. The islands are home to a menagerie of wildlife including Cape Barren geese, wallabies, possums, penguins and mutton birds which are guaranteed to ensure a lousy night's sleep. Luckily my campsite was not home to any rats, unlike the hut on Erith Island.



The forecast was not good: an easterly head wind at 15 knots for the next two days. My campsite would become the most exposed on the island and I would be stuck there for the next two days! Thankfully, Lyn gave me the keys to the lighthouse and I set out on the two kilometer steep climb to the highest lighthouse in Australia and the possibility of phone reception on my Telstra G pre-paid phone card (No, Telstra was not a sponsor!) I was able to talk to Jill from the balcony of the lighthouse. To avoid using up too much battery power, it was a brief chat but very comforting to make contact. That night, I tucked into a plate of dehydrated Moroccan Lamb and cous cous care of Back Country foods. I must admit, dehydrated food has come a long way since my childhood Sea Scout days but

strangely I felt somewhat dehydrated after eating it and it left me with a hangover the next day! After this culinary delight and with earplugs firmly in place to drown out the chorus of penguins and mutton birds, my head hit the 20mm mattress at 9pm.

DAY 5 – SATURDAY 22<sup>ND</sup> JANUARY 2011

DEAL ISLAND (WINTER COVE) NO PADDLING



Winter Cove is a beautiful bay surrounded by two rocky headlands and is normally a sheltered beach; however on this day I was woken by the sound of big surf and strong wind. The weather bureau's prediction was correct: two- to three-metre swell and east/south-east wind at 20 to 30 knots. I was disappointed that I had chosen this location as it was now the least sheltered on the islands. The big surf break made it impossible to move from this bay so I had to stay put. There was a fresh water creek on the northern side of the beach which I used to have a shower and collect water for cooking. Purifying and boiling water had become a ritual with me and was one of the most time consuming chores during the trip. I had purchased a Steri-pen (water purifying electrode stick) prior to leaving Sydney and would collect water, purify it before boiling water for cooking and drinking. After enjoying a breakfast of Granola with powdered milk and canned fruit, and a welcome shot of espresso, I headed back to the caretaker's residence for a weather update and morning tea.

A short time later, I left Lyn and Tim brewing their own beer and set off for another hike to Garden Cove on the northern side of the island. After walking for about half an hour, a thunderstorm rapidly approached from the east and I found myself bolting back to the old school house to seek shelter. The old school desks eerily resembled the classroom scene from *The Blues Brothers*! I stayed in it for three hours (no nuns arrived) as the building was pelted with rain and the wind meter on the wall reached a maximum 33 knots. I was glad I was not on the water!\_

DAY 6 – SUNDAY 23<sup>RD</sup> JANUARY 2011

## DEAL ISLAND (WINTER COVE) NO PADDLING

I woke after experiencing another uncomfortable night – mainly due to strong wind and rain – only to be greeted by even worse weather conditions: the easterly wind was gusting to 30 knots and the swell was three to four meters. Adding to the pain, my left wrist had ceased up – a nagging injury as a result of being hit by a car while cycling in 1997. I was getting sick of this very “windy” beach and was running low on gas and needed to boil water for supplies which took me most of the morning!. After a bath in the creek, I decided to walk to the caretaker’s cottage again to get the latest weather report in the off chance I would be able to paddle to Flinders the next day.

I couldn’t find Lyn and Tim so I used my UHF radio to get the forecast from a yacht moored in Murray Pass. Predictions were for a better day, so I decided to head back to camp and pack for a possible departure to Flinders. I HAD TO GET OFF THIS ISLAND! BY NOW I WAS GETTING VERY BORED!

DAY 7 – MONDAY 24<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2011

## DEAL ISLAND (WINTER COVE) TO WHITEMARK (FLINDERS ISLAND) 95KM

At 5am I poked my head out the tent to view a semi-clear sky and calm conditions in the bay. I decided to make tracks to Flinders. My plan was to paddle to Killiecrankie on the northern side of Flinders Island and to reach it before the predicted increase in wind later in the day. The forecast was for a 10- to 15-knot West/North-west wind increasing to 30 knots by late afternoon and a one- to two-meter swell increasing to three to five meters later in the day. An early start was critical. I set off from the beach and rounded the bay into a direct 25 knot southerly. After hovering around the bay for some time, I conceded and returned to the shore.

By 7am the wind appeared to have dropped and changed direction to the west, so I decided to make a second attempt. Once outside the bay I was met by a steady westerly wind blowing between 12 -15 knots and low swell. This put the wind on my starboard side and as it was predicted to blow West/North-west, conditions could only get better from here and I would be able to hoist my sail. I set my course to Killiecrankie but with visibility limited due to passing cloud and showers, I paddled mainly on a compass bearing.

By the time I reached Wright Rock, approximately half way, the wind had increased to 25 knots and the swell had increased to two meters with breaking sets of three to four meters. Bass Strait had lived up to its mighty reputation and wasn’t going to let me pass without dishing up some fury. It was unbelievably scary especially when I was literally “spat” out of the kayak by a rogue wave. At this point I realized just how vulnerable I was: a mere blip on one of the most treacherous stretches of ocean in the world. Despite my predicament and with the instinct to survive being front of mind, any thoughts of fear had to be eliminated. I was impressed at just how quickly I had managed to get back in my boat and even more impressed with the fact that I didn’t get wet. My specially purchased immersion suit (Paddling Cag) had kept me dry but I HAD TO GET OUT OF HERE FAST!

I was paid a visit shortly after this by a lone albatross that appeared out of no-where. This massive sea-bird made several graceful passes over the top of me before we locked eyes for what seemed to be an eternity. Was he seeing that I was ok? Or was he sizing me up for a meal? Either way it was one of the truly special moments of the trip.

The rough conditions remained for the next 20km, with breaking sets every few minutes. For fear of letting go of my paddle, I hadn't had a drink of water since leaving Deal Island. On one particular wave, I noted the GPS clocked me at 18.5km/hr. This should have been fun but in a boat weighing some 50kgs, it brought back memories of speeding down the steepest hill as a child on your skateboard and the death wobbles kicking in!

On nearing Killiecrankie, I was concerned that the westerly wind and swell would make a beach landing impossible, so I decided to make track down the western side of Flinders and land on the back of one of the small islands south of Cape Frankland to rest and enjoy a well-earned drink. On landing at North Pasco Island after paddling 50km, I reflected on what was an incredibly challenging crossing. I refueled my tired body and took some video footage and photos. I am not sure whether it was the serene setting peace at this sheltered spot on the island, the fear of being stranded again, or the thought of enjoying a juicy steak and soft bed on Flinders which made me decide to jump back in the kayak and paddle another 45km to Whitemark. **MAYBE I WAS JUST DILLUSIONAL!**



North Pasco Island

I arrived at the door of the Whitemark pub at 7.15pm, still dripping wet in my paddling gear, after a 95km stretch from Deal Island, trying to attract the attention of the publican and order my meal before the kitchen closed at 7.30pm. I booked a room for the night, then sat at the bar and devoured a steak. My New Year's resolution meant I

had to wait until I arrived in Tasmania before I could wrap my hands around an ice-cold beer. Surprisingly, I didn't sleep at all well that night, probably due to the massive amounts of adrenaline running through my veins after surviving an incredibly challenging day!



## DAY 8– TUESDAY 25<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2011 WHITEMARK (FLINDERS ISLAND) REST DAY

Flinders Island is the largest island in Bass Strait and was named after the English explorer Matthew Flinders who discovered it in 1798. The coastline contains numerous shipwrecks, the most famous being 'Sydney Cove', the first shipwreck of a merchant ship in Australian waters. Flinders is also the site of the first European settlement south of Sydney. About a third of the island is mountainous and rugged with ridges of granite running the length of the island. Mount Strzelecki in the south west is the island's highest peak. In the 1830s, Flinders Island was used as a place of internment for the last of Tasmania's Aboriginal population. Today, the island's main activities revolve around farming, fishing and seasonal mutton birding. The island overflows with wildlife, especially birds, the most famous of which is the Cape Barren Goose (honk-honk!).



Swapping modes of transport, I hired a car in Whitemark in order to explore Flinders by road and by foot. After visiting Lady Barron and Trousers Point, I conquered the five-hour return climb up Mt Strzelecki which provides a breathtaking 360-degree view of the whole island. I rate this as equal to the Cradle Mountain Climb and one not to be missed if you are visiting the island.



Mt Strzelecki

Returning to Whitemark, I went shopping for supplies and started packing in readiness for the next leg of my journey. My sincere thanks must go to Peter the publican for his warm hospitality during my stay. Peter's grandfather built the pub and it has been run by his family for the last 65 years.

## DAY 9– AUSTRALIA DAY WEDNESDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2011 WHITEMARK TO PRESERVATION ISLAND 44KM

Up at 5am, I tucked into my last hearty breakkie at the pub. The weather forecast was for calm seas and light winds but from this point in the journey, the main emphasis is on the tides. I left Whitemark at 6.15am on a high tide. It was just as well because for the first eight kilometers I could see the ocean floor! This was probably the best day (weatherwise) of the whole trip. I had a nice westerly breeze on my starboard side and it was very calm and peaceful as I paddled past the Strzelecki peaks watching the sun rise. What a contrast when compared to the previous days on the water.



As I passed by Franklin Sound, I noticed the wildlife that had kept me company for most of the trip – mainly penguins, dolphins and albatross – were no-where to be seen today and I wondered why? After rounding Cape Barren Island I stopped for a short time at Thunder & Lightning Bay with the intention of finding a campsite. The end of the beach was covered by a wall of tuffet grass and thick dune vegetation, so I decided to continue on. After six hours paddling, I found a great spot to set up camp on Preservation Island but after setting up my tent and gear I was confronted by a herd of very 'curious' and 'pushy' cows! After 30 minutes of heated confrontation that involved bagging pots and pans, throwing rocks and yelling four letter words, I had to retreat back to the beach. Not content with my move, these bovine beasts followed me onto the sand and even walked with me into the water! The cattle were obviously intent on preserving the island for themselves, so I was out of there, especially when a bull started sniffing my kayak! I hope livestock buyers for McDonald's visit this island!

I paddled to a small insignificant outcrop of rock about 50 metres away and spent the night. From there I could see the mainland of Tasmania and was sure I would, with favorable conditions, be able to reach my final destination tomorrow.



## DAY 10– THURSDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2011

### PRESERVATION ISLAND TO SWAN ISLAND 37KM

From Preservation Island only the crossing of Banks Strait remained. This relatively short crossing (23km) has a notorious reputation for being the worst section of the trip, mainly due to the channelling of winds and tides from Bass Strait that have been known to create seven-metre breaking waves. I could see the Tasmanian mainland clearly and hoped that the weather and the tides would provide an opportunity to cross.

I hit the water at 7am with a five to eight knot South-west wind and a westerly swell of half a meter but with an outgoing tide of three knots running port to starboard. This meant that all the elements were pushing me east. I had to work extremely hard to try to keep on track. At the 20km mark, I was in the middle of Banks Strait and the wind picked up and it became apparent that I wasn't going to make my landing point of Little Musselroe Beach. I changed my course to Swan Island and only just got there as I was almost blown straight past on a due course to New Zealand! The wind had increased to 18 to 20 knots which had pushed me past the back side of the island. The leeward side of the island offered me the protection I needed to be able to land on the beach.

Swan Island is privately owned and it contains an automated lighthouse, several houses and an airstrip. I walked up to the lighthouse and had lunch on the balcony of one of the vacant cottages hoping the conditions would change enough for me to complete the final 5km to the mainland. By the time I finished lunch, the tide had changed to an incoming tide from the east and the wind had increased to 25 to 30 knots from the west. I was going no further today.....the water in the strait looked like whipped cream!



Swan Island Lighthouse & ruins

After lunch, I paddled along the sheltered back of the island to a small beach on the eastern side and hoped for the wind to drop. Unfortunately it didn't and I spent the night in my little tent in what felt like a sandstorm. I found this a very frustration night knowing that I had completed 340km and been stopped in my tracks with only 5kms to go.

**DAY 11– FRIDAY 28<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2011**

**SWAN ISLAND TO GREAT MUSSELROE BAY 13KM**

After waking to find the wind had dropped to 10 knots from the west and with an outgoing tide in the same direction, I skipped breakfast and was out on the water at 6.30am. The weather conditions would make the five kilometer run to Little Musselroe Bay an unpleasant slog, so I chose my landing point on the mainland to be Great Musselroe Bay, a further 13km down the North-east coast of Tasmania. The one-and-a-half-hour paddle was quite enjoyable and I had no problems navigating my way through the entrance to Musselroe Bay, landing next to the local boat ramp which turned out to be the busiest place in town.

Musselroe Bay turned out to be an excellent choice to finish my journey. I was welcomed by many of the locals and invited home to join them for a BBQ of flathead fish fillets washed down by unlimited icy-cold bottles of Crown Lagers. You guessed...I slept very well that night!

The next day, Jill arrived to pick me up.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Trip Itinerary	From	To	Distance (km)
Day 1	Tidal River	Waterloo Bay	25
Day 2	Waterloo Bay	Hogan Island (via Devils Tower)	75
Day 3	Hogan Island	Deal Island (East Cove)	43
Day 4	Deal Island (East Cove)	Deal Island (Winter Cove)	9.5
Day 5	Weathered in		
Day 6	Weathered in		
Day 7	Deal Island (Winter Cove)	Whitemark (Flinders Island)	95
Day 8	Rest Day (Mt Stzecelecki Climb)		
Day 9	Whitemark	Preservation Island	45
Day 10	Preservation Island	Swan Island	37
Day 11	Swan Island	Great Musselroe Bay	13

There are many people that I would like to thank for their help, support and extremely valuable knowledge that without I would probably still be floating in the ocean.

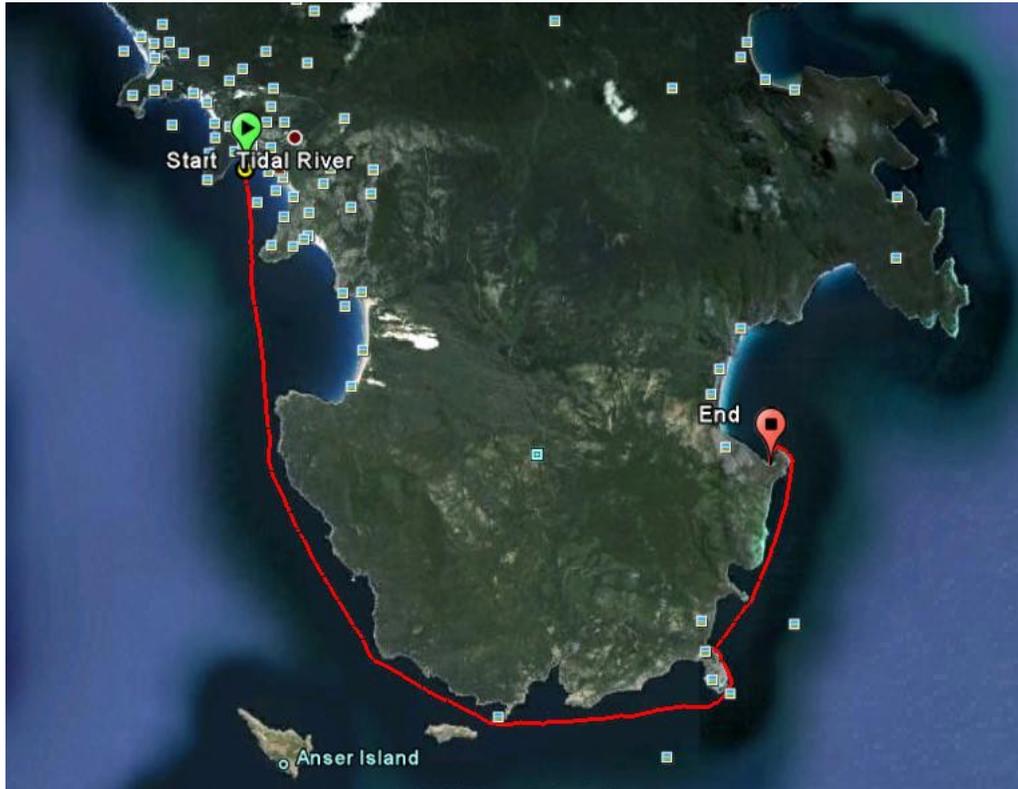
My wife Jill  
 Mike Eggleton  
 Rob Mercer  
 Lawrie Kenyon  
 Buzz Powell  
 Stuart Innes  
 Andrew Watkinson  
 Peter Mitchell  
 Peter Brennan

Simon Dean  
 Tim & Lyn (Deal Island Caretakers)  
 Peter (Whitemark Pub)  
 Cliff & Sue and the gang at Musselroe Bay  
 GPS OZ Mona Vale  
 Mirage Kayaks  
 Prokayaks

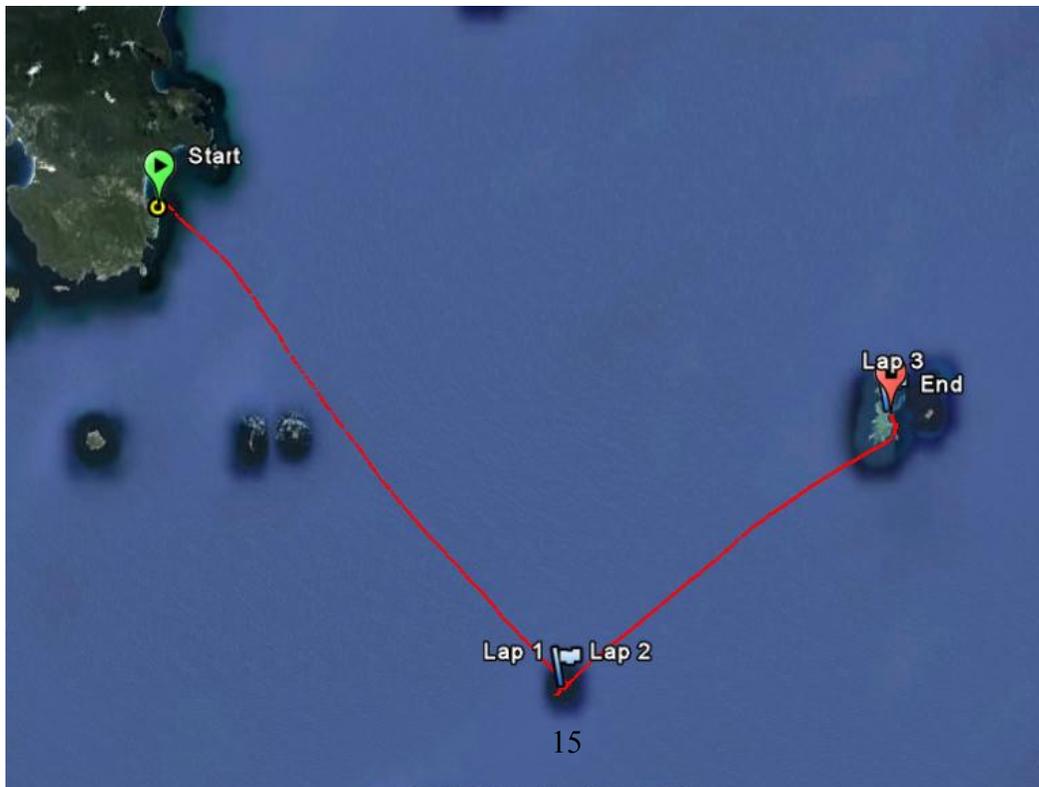
GP

## GPS MAPS

Day 1: Tidal River to Waterloo Bay 25km



Day 2: Waterloo Bay to Hogan Island 75km



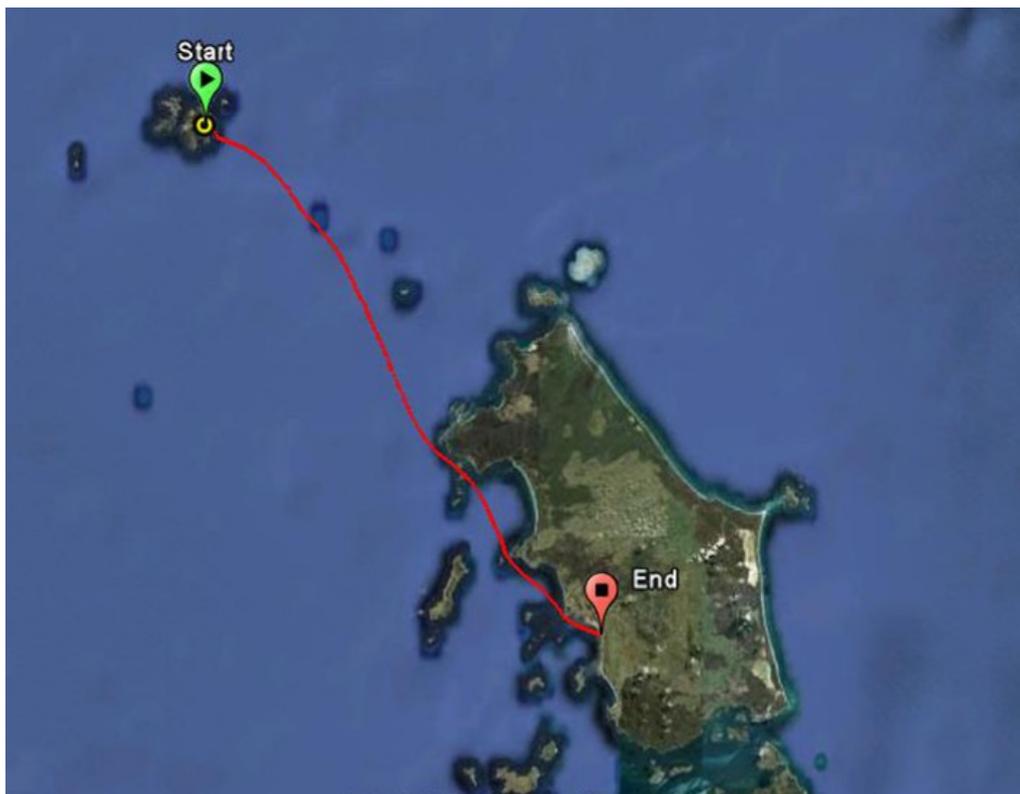
Day 3: Hogan Island to Deal Island (East Cove) 43km



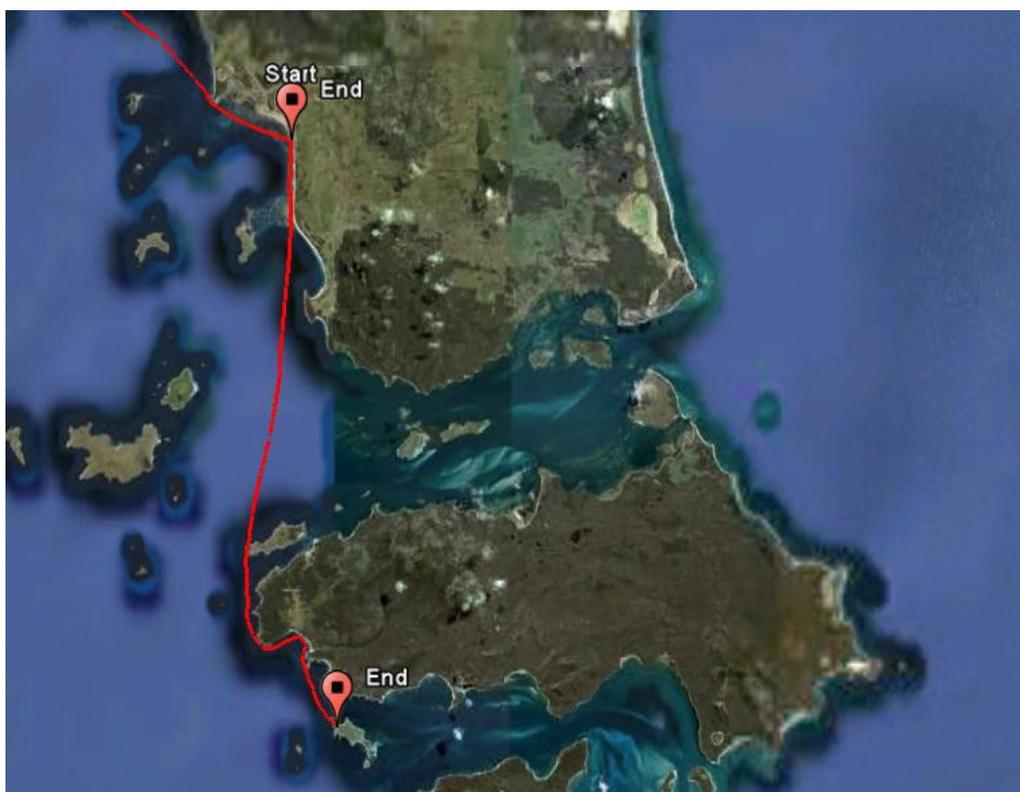
Day 4: Deal Island (East Cove) to Deal Island (Winter Cove) 9.5km



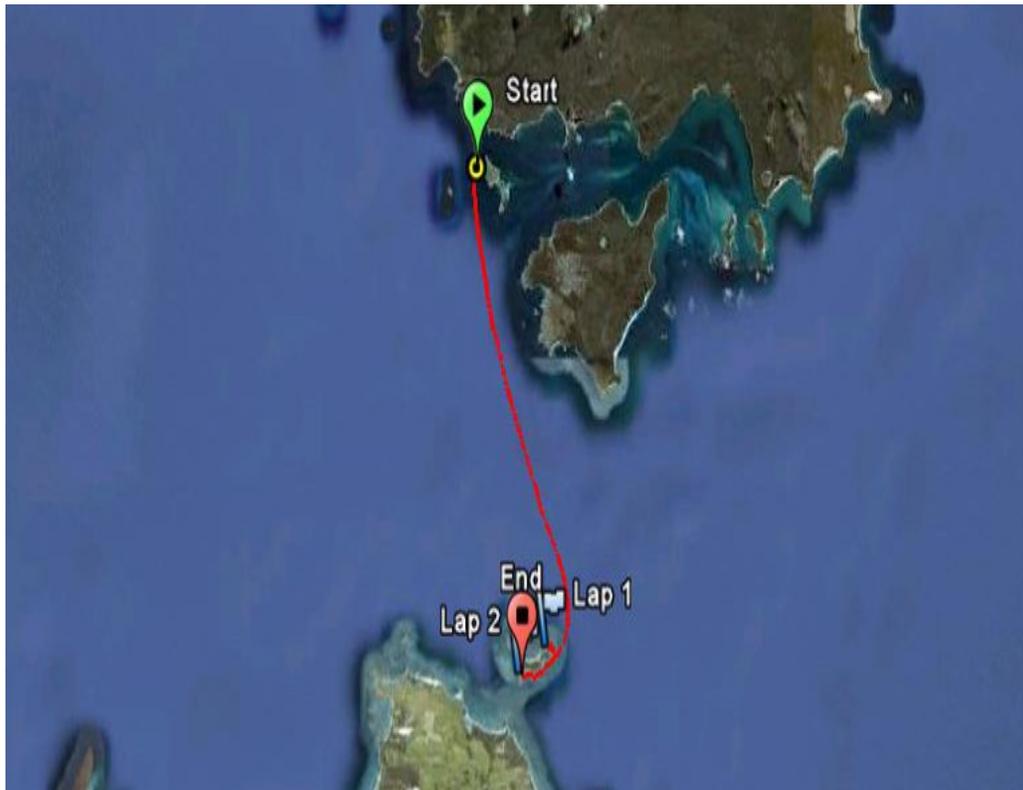
Day 7: Deal Island (Winter Cove) to Flinders Is. (Whitemark) 95km



Day 9: Flinders Island (Whitemark) to Preservation Island 44km



Day 10: Preservation Island to Swan Island 37km



Day 1: Swan Island to Great Musselroe Bay (NE Tasmania) 13km

