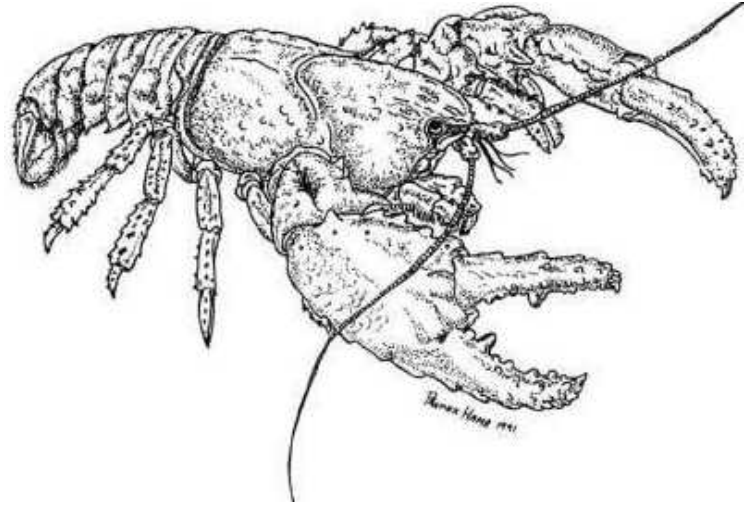


Disjunct Naturalists

WEBSITE OF THE CENTRAL NORTH FIELD NATURALISTS



Winter Sojourn on Deal Island, Kent Marine Group, Bass Strait

by **Alison Moore**



View from vantage point

Angus and I agreed to be the volunteer caretakers for winter 2008 and suggested to the Parks & Wildlife service that we rebuild the vegetable garden as our project over the three months. With alacrity Parks agreed to Angus' comprehensively drawn plans and so on June 1st we flew out of Launceston and headed for Whitemark, (Flinders Island) laden with a brand new laptop, aerials to connect to the outside world, a sparse but practical wardrobe and the essentials: wetsuit, cameras, field guides, beanies and sheepskin lined sleeveless jackets (without which we would not have survived!)

We were greeted by Wayne Dick, the Ranger on Flinders Island, who left us with his vehicle after showing us to our accommodation with the brief instruction, 'Enjoy the island, see you tomorrow and if the weather is good we will be leaving for Deal Island around 11 am'.

The weather was brilliant the next day, perfect for my kind of 'sailing' – flat dead calm, like a mirror. After loading our gear on board the *Strait Lady* we headed out across a glassy bay, the only difference between our experience on One Tree Island, on the Tropic of Capricorn, was the air temperature, the clean, clear waters looked very similar.

Deal Isle loomed up out of the distance, about 3 hours after leaving Whitemark. First impressions were; 'it's quite big', 'can't wait to explore' and 'thank goodness we've arrived'. Angus is an 'old sea dog', a merchant seaman since 15 years of age and had visited Deal Island many times as Skipper of the *M.V. Bluefin* (the Australian Maritime College's training vessel). I am the original 'landlubber' hence my relief at the calm conditions. We were introduced to Dave and Mary, the autumn caretakers, who showed us the ropes: the all important generator, workshop, water tank pumps, batteries, house radios, keys etc. and then it was time for a BBQ down at the jetty, a traditional first meal for the changeover of caretakers. The night was gloriously bright and calm, a possum jumped up onto the BBQ plate and helped him/herself to a sausage and the stars filled the sky – an excellent start for the next 3 months.



Possum with sausage



The Museum
Museum.

The next day saw us farewelling Wayne, Richard Koch, Jim Luddington (*Strait Lady*), Dave & Mary and then we drove 'Herbie' (our yellow 6 wheeler Cub Cadet) back up the road to our new home and thought, OK, weather's great, let's explore ... and so we set off to Garden Cove, a beautiful sandy beach on the north east of the island and site of a former pump station to bring freshwater to the Lighthouse superintendent's house, which is now a

Expectations:

An adventure, hard work (building a vege garden after demolishing the old one which had seen better days), new plants to see and photograph, my first 'lighthouse' island, lots of bushwalking, to bring a personal project to fruition and enjoy this wonderful opportunity, a 'once in a lifetime' experience.

Surprises:

The ferocity and duration of the wind and the continual noise in the house during these storms was hard to bear. It was a very windy winter and we experienced Gale Force 12 or hurricane winds (102-120 kmh) on two to three occasions. Quite often, apart from our first week, the wind was around 56 kmh (force 6/7) and building in these winds was exceedingly trying at times and required a very healthy sense of humour. On one occasion I had my arms full of old fence palings and was transporting them to the fire pile when the wind caught one end and twirled me around several turns of 360° - what can you do but laugh and roar into the wind – very good stress buster I find.

Good things to remember:

The opportunity to observe the wildlife at close quarters – Cape Barren Geese chicks hatching, Bennett's wallabies



with their pink new born joeys peering out of the pouch, seeing the Sea Eagle on bushwalks flying above us, almost accompanying us as we set out on yet another track, traversing forested gullies, full of ferns and small creeks, before climbing another gentle slope of granite, or not so gentle(!), to be delighted by the vista unfolding before us of wild seas, Australasian gannets and pacific gulls wheeling and diving for fish and steep cliffs covered in bonsaied coastal ground covers and shrubs, amazed at the tenuous hold on life they have on these wild islands. Watching sunsets of course, through the swashway, looking through to the mainland of Oz, and the outline of Wilson's Promontory.



Cape Barren Geese

The occurrence of visitors: fishermen sheltering from the fierce storms in Murray Passage or tucked into West Cove of Erith Island; the AMC vessel, *Bluefin*, called in twice with relieved students who were happy to get off the boat and have a quick guided tour of the museum or Barn Hill before returning to the ship and their marine studies. A yacht called in from Eden for the night and invited us to join them for dinner onboard – a night out! It was great, someone else's cooking, fine wine and good company.

The best times on the island were setting out for a bushwalk, pack filled with tasty cheeses, fruit and cake and the obligatory thermos of peppermint tea, cameras hanging off our belts to ensure that quick photo could be taken and coming back at the end of the day; tired, happy and with a full photo card of images of orchids, birds, plants, views to transfer to the computer that night.

I would encourage anyone who is thinking about being a volunteer on a remote island to do it, trials and tribulations excepting, it was a fantastic experience which we will remember a long time after our return to 'civilisation'.



At Pulpit Rock



Sunset



Vegetable garden

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