

---

**Cruising New Zealand – Summer 2018**

---

**Jackie Zanetti**

I want to address right up front the question we were frequently asked when we mentioned our plans to sail to NZ this summer: “Are you going up to the Pacific islands/Fiji/Tonga/Vanuatu... after NZ?” As odd as it may seem, we are really not hot weather people and so returning to Australia the long way, by way of the tropics, didn’t appeal. Also, we wanted a trip that could be contained within one summer season, so we focussed on South Island, NZ. Alex had hoped to go to Fiordland and Stewart Island, but I have to admit that my lack of enthusiasm, combined with poor weather in February (including two cyclones!), led to our decision to hang around the northern end of South Island and explore Abel Tasman National Park and the Marlborough Sounds. We’re glad we did as they are both delightful areas that can easily occupy a cruising boat for months. This article is just a taste of what the area has to offer.

But first, a word or two about Nelson

Nelson doesn’t seem to feature high on cruisers’ bucket lists, but it’s actually a very convenient place to check into NZ and a pleasant place for a stopover, with a sheltered marina with good facilities and a reasonable size town centre only a 15 minute walk from the marina. We weathered Cyclone Fehi here in late January, only a few days after *Rusalka* arrived. It was forecast well in advance, so we were securely moored when it hit. We awoke to sultry, blustery weather and the wind gradually increased to the mid-30's, topping out at 42.5 knots. It really wasn't too bad, so we were a bit surprised later to find that there had been a lot of damage in Nelson, mainly due to flooding. The biggest concern we had was watching the wooden pile that was holding our finger pontoon in place gradually disappear as the king tide rose. We wondered what would happen if it went under, but the flood water stopped about 30 cm from the top.



Low tide and cyclone affected king tide at Nelson (images Jackie Zanetti)

---

Abel Tasman National Park (ATNP)

We visited this small park twice, once at each end of our stay in NZ. It's a popular tourist destination, famed for its golden sand beaches, warm water and pleasant weather. It is only a four hour sail from Nelson, making it a popular weekend destination. On the way to and from ATNP we sailed through the Astrolabe Roadstead between the mainland and Adele Island. It was very crowded with kayaks, water taxis and pleasure boats, but it looked like a pleasant place to play and there is a good anchorage in the lee of Adele Island. Nearby Fisherman Island is a lovely spot to stop for lunch and a swim in delightfully warm water. On both visits we chose to stay in the all-weather anchorage called, most appropriately, "The Anchorage", on the eastern side of Torrent Bay. This beach and bay are very, very popular – the Abel Tasman walking track runs past the bay and walkers, kayakers and day-trippers are brought in by water taxis and tour boats. At one end of the bay is a large Department of Conservation campsite and at the other end are a cluster of limestone rock stacks covered in names and dates carved by visitors over the years.



Torrent Bay carved sea stacks (image Jackie Zanetti)

## Marlborough Sounds – Queen Charlotte Sound

The Marlborough Sounds, which are drowned valleys, are often very deep right up to the shore, making anchoring a challenge. Three of the local boating clubs, Mana, Waikawa, and Pelorus, jointly own about 100 moorings scattered about the Sounds. Before leaving Hobart we joined one of these clubs, and enjoyed using the moorings and meeting local sailors on boats with which we were occasionally rafted. The moorings themselves are a fantastic design, comprising of a sphere with a plastic tube running through it. The plastic buoys are soft enough not to bang



or scratch the boat. The mooring line is threaded through the tube and a loop spliced on the end that prevents it being pulled out, but allows the rope to slide freely through the tube. The loop (usually) stands clear of the water, keeping it clean and easy to pick up with a boat hook and lift onto a cleat. The only time we had trouble was when there was a build-up of mussels below the waterline that prevented the line sliding freely and we had to lift the weight of the rope, buoy and mussels all together! This would be a great design to consider for Tasmanian conditions.



NZ mooring innovations: well designed buoys and prepared stern lines tied to trees (images Jackie Zanetti)

The most scenic of the sounds is Queen Charlotte Sound, which abounds in lovely quiet bays, fringed by native bush and echoing with birdsong. We visited quite a few nooks and crannies. The highlight was Ship Cove, which Captain Cook enjoyed so much he stayed there on 3 separate voyages. On shore there is a monument to Cook and walking tracks, including the multi-day Queen Charlotte Track. The bush is very lush, with vines climbing tree trunks, ferns, palm trees and waterfalls.



Cook's monument and a waterfall at Ship's Cove (images Jackie Zanetti)



Another lovely feature of the sounds is the resorts that are only accessible by boat. Typically, the resorts have moorings that they allow visitors to use for free, with the expectation that you'll have a coffee or meal in their restaurant. They will even ferry you to and from your boat in their dinghy. We enjoyed the hospitality of Furneaux Lodge, Bay of Many Coves Resort and Lochmara Lodge to name a few. We picked up a mooring at Bay of Many Coves Resort and got a lift ashore for a late light lunch. Alex really got into his cider!



Bay of Many Coves Resort (image Jackie Zanetti)



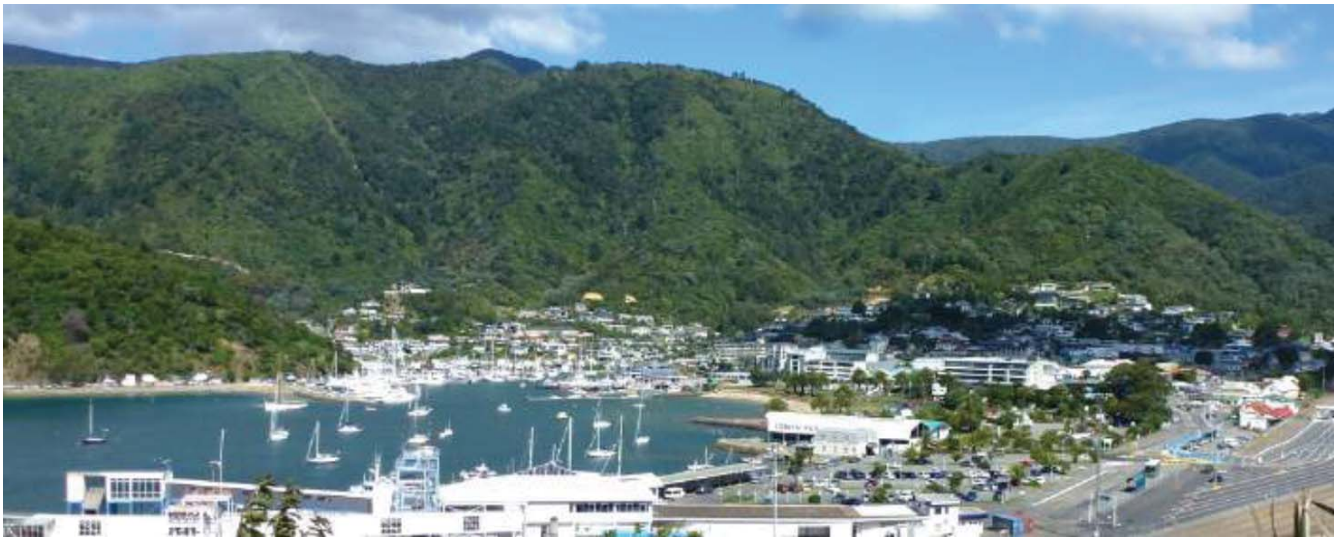
Alex gets into his cider (image Jackie Zanetti)

About 20 nm into the sound is the small town of Picton, mainly noted as the point from which the ferries to Wellington depart. We left *Rusalka* berthed in the marina there while we nipped over to Wellington for a bit of tourism. *Rusalka* rode out Cyclone Gita quite happily without us on board!

Inner Queen Charlotte Sound is more populated, with weekend shacks (bachs, as they're called locally) dotting the shores. Some bays were surrounded by bush, while others were semi-agricultural. Very few had sandy beaches. The water was quite warm and we enjoyed swimming on most days. Dolphins (5 species), Blue Penguins, and stingrays are common sights. Although the guides rave about the blue cod abounding in these waters, I wasn't very successful at fishing, landing only a single small blue cod that was quickly returned to the water to grow up! We also poked our nose into the Tory Channel. This narrow passage to Cook Strait has some pretty strong currents. At one point we had 2 kts pushing us along and that wasn't even the



strongest flow. We checked a couple of anchorages, but found that the hillsides were covered in pine plantations and didn't have that "special feel" to us.



The town of Picton (image Jackie Zanetti)

### Marlborough Sounds – Pelorus Sound

Pelorus Sound is larger than Queen Charlotte Sound, but somehow not quite as spectacular. It's more settled and many of the hills are either cleared for grazing or covered in pine plantation. Still, it has some wild bush areas and has the advantage of fewer boats visiting, allowing us to enjoy some private anchorages. We spent a couple of nights in a tiny cove with a club mooring called Muzz's Cove. It looked protected and had a phone signal (weak). The club mooring is in the middle of the cove, but we noticed another small buoy in a little nook very close to shore. On closer inspection by dinghy we discovered it was holding a line that was tied to a tree on



Muzz's Cove (image Jackie Zanetti)

the shore and is intended to be used as a stern line for boats that want to anchor (in 10 m of water!) close to shore. We also explored Tennyson Inlet (very pretty bush setting) in search of another mooring with fewer bugs and better internet, but the only prospective mooring in Deep Bay was occupied and there was no phone signal. We spent the night in Ketu Bay at the N end of Pelorus Sound, which has moorings on either side offering protection from N or S winds. SE winds were predicted, so we picked up Ketu Onion mooring on the southern side of the bay. As we learned, actual wind direction in the sounds is not very predictable. We had 30+ kt bullets sweep across from the NE of the bay and throw us around all afternoon!

### Marlborough Sounds - d'Urville Island

D'Urville Island is a large, mostly uninhabited island that guards the western edge of the Marlborough Sounds. French Pass is a narrow, sometimes dangerous, slot between the island and the mainland, which requires careful planning as tidal currents can reach 8 kts and whirlpools can knock a boat around. Even though we transited the pass at the calculated slack water, we still had an exciting ride through the pass. While there are anchorages on the north and east of the island we only had time to visit one area, Greville Harbour. The inner harbour area is protected by a natural boulder bank. We carefully nosed our way through a shallow gap in a boulder bank and picked up a club mooring in Mill Arm. It was a peaceful and private bush setting, with birdsong all around and still water the colour of jade. We put the dingy down and went as far as possible up the end of Mill Arm, then back to the boat for a swim. What lovely water! A young stingray kept gliding past the boat, seeming to be checking us out.



An inquisitive stingray and a floating hazard on the return trip to Nelson (images Jackie Zanetti)

After a month of exploring the sounds we headed back toward Nelson. On the way we came across large areas of floating wood debris, most likely from Cyclone Gita. We had to hand steer for quite a while in order to dodge the larger logs. The debris ranged from sticks under one metre long to a whole tree! At least everything was still clearly floating on the surface.

So, if you have a yen to cross the Ditch, consider visiting Nelson and the Marlborough Sounds. You won't be disappointed!

Jackie Zanetti