



“How’s The Weather?”

One of the things that all boaties and fisherfolk take an interest in is the weather. The knowledge required to interpret the forecast is learnt quite early in our development.

Over the years I have had plenty of experiences that were the result of weather conditions that had turned up when I was at sea and had to be dealt with as best we could.

In the area where I live the predominant winds are from the south/east caused by the trade winds that blow off the winter time high’s as they travel across the southern part of Australia. I have always wondered why even though the winds are south/easters, the weather we have to look out for always comes from the south/west ie against the wind. In the evening, if you see a big black cloud forming in the south/west you can be sure of a storm coming out to sea where you are anchored with sometimes frightening consequences. The dilemma we face is that anchoring is usually in an area protected from south/easters, but the bad weather comes from the west (*and Mike Griffin explains why, in “Weather Wise” this month - PW*) so do we roll around all night in the s/e swell, or do we forget about the possibility of a westerly storm coming through?

One night I was anchored at

Ebb & Flow

with Neil Dunstan

Digby Island which is a well known anchorage at the southern end of the Beverly group of islands, about thirty n. miles east of Sarina Beach. I had noticed that there were some dark clouds forming to the west but they didn’t seem as though they would come to much so I chose to ignore them and anchored in the lee of the island protected from the south/easterly swell.

Nearby was a friend of mine who had anchored up for the night in his forty foot cruiser and was sitting on a large plough anchor with all chain rode. He also had a string of dories hanging out the back in a line so we anchored away from them in case we got too close to them during the night.

After hitting the sack around 11 a.m. we were both sleeping peacefully when we were awoken by a terrible noise. When we went on deck there was a huge storm raging around us and the wind was blowing a gale - but the biggest problem was that we were dragging the anchor at a great rate of knots; as a matter of fact, we were dragging so fast that the Danforth was skimming along the surface.

The biggest problem was that when I went to bed the wind was coming from the south/east and I still had this picture in my mind so that I imagined that we were being driven towards the rocks only a few hundred metres away. Actually the wind was coming from the west but as it was pitch black, I started to panic and tried to start the motor. At the time I had a Dehavilland Trojan alloy half cab (which was a great boat) but it was fitted with a Chrysler 135 outboard, and as usual, when I needed it most, the bloody thing wouldn’t start.

So there we were, being

dragged backwards towards what we thought was certain death on the rocks, when there was a flash of lightning and we realised that we would be okay if we could get the anchor to hold.

Just at this moment, the boat drifted across the tow line of one of the dories behind the forty footer and the outboard leg hooked on the rope and stopped us going any further.

For the next hour or so we were bailing madly as the boat was laying stern to the wind and the waves were washing over the outboard well into the boat till eventually the storm passed and we were able to get the motor going, back off the rope and reset the anchor in a safe place.

When I got back home the next day I dumped that “danforth” anchor, went and bought a better quality one and stowed a plough anchor under one of the bunks for all night time anchorages in the future.

On another trip I was on a professional line fishing boat, and we had been out to the ‘Reef for a couple of weeks fishing for coral trout. The boat was loaded to the gunnels with two tonnes of fillets, and we were on our way home to Mackay to unload the boat. We had decided to anchor overnight in the channel between Eaton and Denton Reefs which is quite a good spot in a south/easterly.

There were also three other pro boats anchored in the area, and as we were listening to the VHF radio, we knew that there were a series of storms coming in from the south/west.

Some of the other boats anchored further south along the reef were reporting gale force winds and large waves in front of the storm. A discussion was held by radio between the

boats in our area and it was decided to (all) anchor in line, with all lights on so that if anybody started to drag, we would be able to check if the lights were still in line.

A little before dark, a huge menacing black cloud appeared on the horizon and got blacker and blacker. Soon it was from horizon to horizon with a flat bottom just above the sea surface. About two hours after dark it hit with a mighty roar and instantly the sea was thrashed into foam with large waves breaking just on the other side of the reef. We started to drag the anchor and let out more chain until we had 600 feet of chain out with a thirty five pound plough anchor totalling over half a ton of gear trying to hold the bottom. This did the trick, and we were able to ride out the storm with waves breaking over the bow and spray flying everywhere. I was amazed at the skipper’s calmness as I was shitting myself. He just said “Let’s get on with our evening meal, and have a couple of beers”.

Eventually it all blew over and returned to a beautiful calm night as if nothing had happened.

The main damage for the night was an eighty foot trawler which didn’t quite make it to the gap between the reefs and was blown onto the reef on the weather side but was able to get off next day at high tide. He reckoned that he made it to the gap okay, but when he tried to turn around into the wind to get behind the reef, his three hundred horse power engine could not make headway against the wind - and he was blown onto the reef.

So it certainly pays to ask the question, “How’s the weather?”

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