

Chapter 4

Preparations

In the morning Tom agonised over whether to send his message to Mark in Morse but decided in the end that there was just too much to say.

Mark,

I have spoken to Dad about sailing up the Myall River. He has discussed it with Mum and we think she will be agreeable provided the weather forecast is OK and we do not sail at night. Dad says he will talk to your father. Have you spoken to him about it yet?

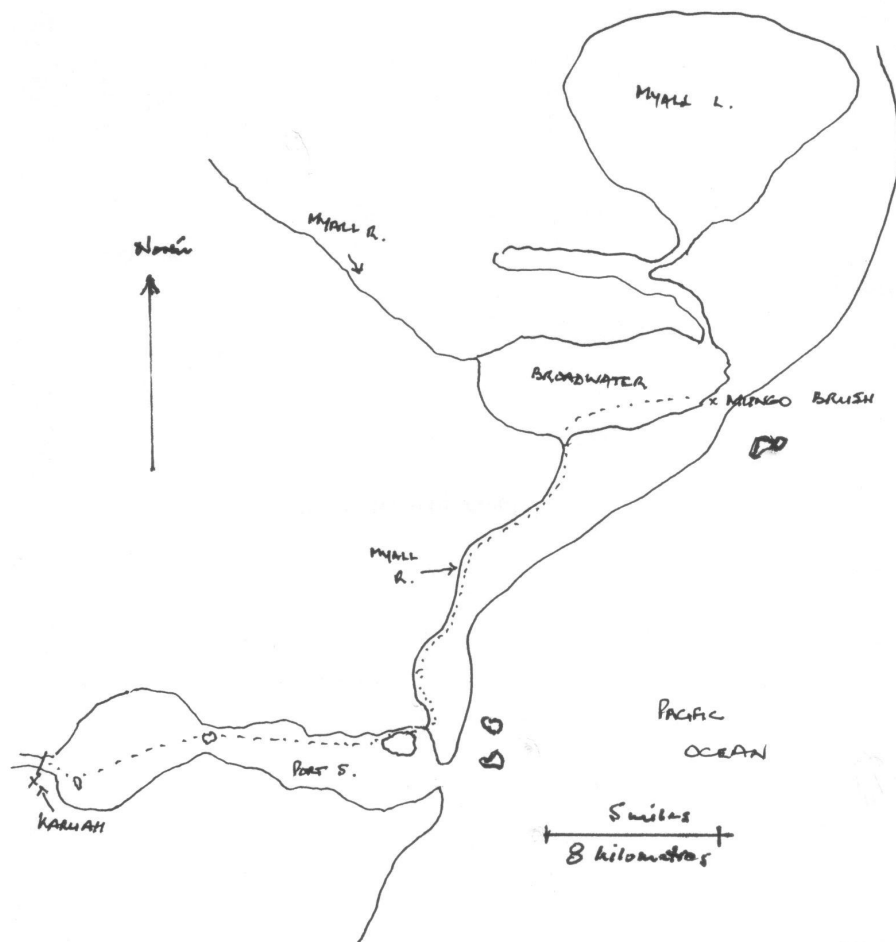
Dad has suggested we leave from Karuah rather than from Nelson Bay. What do you think? It would add another 12 miles or so to the trip but, what fun to sail the length of Port Stephens before we go up the river! Dad has also suggested we think carefully about tides as there is a big tidal movement in parts of Port Stephens and in the Myall River. You must use the tides to give you a boost along. If you find the tide is against you you might as well sit and watch till it turns. Dad says sailing against the tide is a mug's game.

Tom

At the same time Cate wrote to Liz.

Dear Liz,

Mark has suggested to Tom a cruise in our boats from Port Stephens up the Myall River to the Broadwater. Mummy and Daddy took us up the river in a sailing cruiser a few years ago. Here is a rough sketch of the route.



Tom says Daddy will talk to your father about it. Make every effort to persuade your Mum, won't you. It will be

such an adventure. There are tons of preparations to be made. We will be camping two or three nights on the way.

Cate (dah dit dah dit)

“What’s for breakfast, Mary?” Mr Ryan asked his wife as he came into the dining room.

“Eggs, scrambled,” she answered from the kitchen.

“I thought I could hear clucking noises. And coffee too, if my nose does not deceive me.”

“Sit down. The toast is on the way. Here Cate, take this in to your father.”

“Daddy,” said Cate as she carried a plate of hot buttered toast into the dining room, “would you post a letter for me please?”

“Certainly my dear,” he replied. “With whom are you corresponding?”

“Liz. Urging her to make every effort to join us in our cruise up the Myall river.”

“You presume you will be going then?”

“I am *fairly* confident,” said Cate looking at her mother as she came in.

“Oh yes,” said Mrs Ryan. “You can all go—provided certain rules are adhered to. No sailing after dark and you will all have to wear buoyancy vests.”

“You anticipate that there will be opposition to Elisabeth accompanying you?” asked her father.

“Yes.”

“Yes, she’ll have her time cut out if I know her mother,” he replied.

“It will be terrible if she can’t come.”

“Nonsense. She’ll be at the lakes. You can have a wonderful time with her then.”

“But she’ll feel so left out of all our adventures.”

“Oh. And what adventures are those?”

“I mean the fun of being in the bush and camping under the stars; listening to the night sounds. *You* know.”

“Cate. You’re a poet!”

“No. I’m not. But Liz is and she’ll be disgusted if she can’t come.”

“Here, Dad,” said Tom as he came into the dining room. “Will you post a letter to Mark for me?”

“That’s two letters I’m to post. Are you presuming that you will be able to sail up the Myall River too?”

“Er. Yes.”

“Mary. These children have got your measure. Here Bill, have you got a letter too?”

“No, Dad.”

“What about you Mary Rose,” he said as he bent over her. “Have *you* got a letter you want me to post?”

“Srambledeggs,” she replied showing him her plate.

“I take it that that was a negative. Alright, I will be a postman before I resume my vocation as a surveyor.”

“When are you going to speak to Mr Parfitt, Dad?” Tom asked.

“It’s more a matter of when Mr Parfitt is going to speak to me. Queen’s Counsel call the shots as to availability. I left a message with his secretary last night,” he added with a grin.

That was a school day for the Ryan children who did their schooling at home with their mother as tutor. They worked diligently at their schoolwork so as to give them more time to deal with what Bill called “the more important stuff”.

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Dear Dah dit dah dit,

I’m on a lee shore with shoals all about me! Mummy has dug her toes in and won’t consider me camping out in the bush. We will be staying at Hawk’s Nest while you are camping on the Broadwater and will have to drive up each day, drat it! I have put in an application to the Court of Appeal (Daddy) with pages of submissions. Keep your fingers crossed that he will find a way out. Better still, you Catholic, say some prayers!

L. (Dit dah dit dit)

“Don’t look so depressed, Cate,” said her mother after she showed her this missive. “If Liz is meant to go she will be there. If not, she won’t be.” To which observation, Cate thought, there did not seem to be any ready answer.

“So. It’s *Yes* to Mark but *No* to Liz,” said Tom. “That’s annoying.” “It’s awful.” Cate wrote back to Liz—

Dear Dit,

I’m praying like mad. Expect some help from your end!

luv, Dah

That evening after tea Mr Ryan said to Tom: “You and I had better sit down and have a long talk about tides. Come upstairs to the Den and we will talk of many things—of shoes and ships and sealing wax, of cabbages and kings.”

“And why the sea is boiling hot?” asked Tom.

“Yes. And whether pigs have wings.”

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Five days later Cate received a short letter.

Dear Dah,

I don’t know *how*, but Daddy has swung it. Mark and I will be embarking with you from Karuah on Sunday week. Yippee!!

Daddy has had *Sapphire* fitted out by the boatbuilder at McCarr’s Creek for the cruise. I get home from school on Thursday and Mark and I will be packing like mad from then on.

Lots of love, Dit

As the days of the holiday approached Tom wrote to Mark—

Dad thinks we should launch from Karuah on Sunday at about 3.30 pm (1530 hrs). High tide is at 2.00 pm at Fort Denison. Adjustment for Tea Gardens is 1 hour 30 mins late and we anticipate it will be the same for Karuah which is eight and a half miles further away from Pt S. heads but over open water. We'll have the ebb to go down to Snapper Is. first night. Moon is on the wane—third Q. Doesn't rise till 0108 hrs Mon.

Dad and I have discussed all possible tides within the two weeks. The problem is that the tide which will help us sail towards Pt. S heads (ebb) will hinder us going up the river when we will need the flood. So a compromise is necessary.

Tom

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Tom

We will have to get a pair of rubber rollers to assist in dragging the boats up the beach at Snapper and any other islands we camp on. Can you do something from your end? Will phone you when I get home Friday lunchtime.

Mark

Tom and his father sat discussing the various preparations that would need to be made for the trip. Tom showed his father Mark's latest note.

"Mm. That's a thought," said his father. "That boy has foresight. You will need to have the boats hauled well above high water mark overnight. Plastic pipe might be simpler than rubber rollers. Let me think about it."

“We will need an anchor, won’t we?” asked Tom. “In case we can’t get ashore somewhere.”

“You should have a small fisherman anchor on each boat,” he said. “It is the best all round anchor and not very heavy. Also some good quality marine line. Say three lengths of fifty to sixty feet between the two of you. Better if each boat had two lengths. Then if you have to tie off to the shore with an anchor down you have flexibility and can let the boat out on the line.”

“There’s not much to tie to on our boats, is there?” Tom remarked.

“No,” said his father. “These modern dinghies are so light that they don’t put in king posts or fittings which will take the whole weight of the boat. You will need to secure any anchor lines or other mooring lines to points that can take the strain.”

“Like the main sheet block?” asked Tom.

“And the tack fitting for the jib at the bow, said his father. Also you can tie off around the mast but you must lead the line through a fixed point at the hull of the boat like the point where the stays are fixed to the hull. Then you will have to protect the hull by wrapping the line so it doesn’t chafe the varnish or the paintwork.”

They were joined by Cate and Mrs Ryan who had been talking in the kitchen.

“We’re discussing cooking, Pat,” said Mrs Ryan to her husband.

“Shall we take a stove, Daddy,” asked Cate, “or will we just rely on a campfire?”

“I think a stove as a back-up would be advisable. I’ve been meaning to get one of those new portable methylated spirit stoves. That should do the trick.”

“But in good weather we can light a fire,” said Tom.

“What about a frying pan?” said Mrs Ryan.

“A small one,” said her husband. “You’ll have to watch every item or the boat will be loaded below the plimsoll line.”

“You can make do with bushwalking fare like porridge and dehydrated farmhouse stew. It won’t hurt for three days. We can feed you on steaks and chops and fresh veges when you arrive at the Broadwater.”

“So, do we carry bread?” asked Bill.

“Yes. Never fear, Bill,” said his father. “You won’t starve.”
“And plenty of spreads—peanut butter, vegemite, cheese, jam, honey.”
“Tea and sugar,” said Tom.
“What about milk,” asked Bill.
“Condensed,” said Tom.
“Or powdered,” said Cate.

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“Tom. You’re wanted on the phone,” said Bill coming into the garage the following Friday afternoon. “It’s Mark.” Tom dropped what he was doing and headed for the house. He climbed the stairs to the living room and picked up the phone.

“Mark. Is that you? It’s Tom.”

“G’day Tom I’m home at last.”

“How has it been at school this term?”

“History and Geography are driving me barmy. Thank heaven for Morse. I’ve enrolled with the Wireless Institute and they have sent me lots of material to study.”

“We’re making progress here. We go out after dark into the bush in front of the house and send each other messages with our torches.”

“I wish I lived in the bush too. The only fellow I can practise with at school went home a week early.”

“Is Liz home yet?”

“Came home yesterday. She is with mother in at the Con.” The reference, Tom realised, was to the Conservatorium of Music in the city. “Some famous pianist is giving a master class and Liz was pressganged into going before she even set foot in the place. She asked me to get you to pass a message to Cate that she will ring her this evening.”

“I’ll tell Cate. Is *Sapphire* ready for the cruise?”

“Yes. Beashels have fitted two removable watertight boxes for our gear in the compartment between the foredeck and the front thwart.”

“We will be using plastic drums—the sort that canoeists use. I’m just fixing tie-down points for them at the moment.”

“How are you going to secure the drums?”

“We will use netting.”

“Have you thought about rollers?”

“Yes. Dad has suggested we use lengths of plastic pipe. They don’t weigh much and we can stow them inside the transom. He is getting some today.”

“Dad has arranged for Beashels, the boatbuilders, to get a pair of rollers for *Sapphire*. You can use them too.”

“Thanks. If that’s the case we might forget about the plastic pipe. Dad tells me your father has been in a long defamation case.”

“Yes. It’s over. And they are expecting the jury to bring in a verdict today. I’m sure he’s looking forward to the Myalls just as much as we are.”

“And Liz is definitely coming?”

“Yes. It’s official. Mother is not saying anything about it and we are keeping off the subject. But Liz will be there.”

“Good-Oh! What are you doing about provisions?”

“I’ve been making up a list this morning. Liz and I will discuss it when she gets home.”

“I’ll let Cate talk to Liz about it. She’s in charge at our end. What about tents?”

“We will have the *Jamet* we used last year.”

“And we will bring our *Paddy*’s. We can put the girls in one and us boys in the other.”

“What about cooking? Do we light a fire?”

“Yes. Although Dad has suggested stoves as a back-up and in case of bad weather. We have bought one of those new metho stoves where the billies come with the stove.”

“We had better get a stove then. I’ll talk to my Dad when he gets home tonight.”

“See if he can get a metho stove too then we will be able to use the same fuel.”

“There’s plenty to think about,” said Mark. “I would write down everything you can think of if you haven’t done so already.”

“Okay. Is there anything else we need to discuss?”

“Probably. We can always use the phone if something occurs to either of us.”

“I had better get about it then. So long.”

“Bye for now.”

Tom went back down the stairs.

“Hey, Tom,” Bill called.

“Ye-es.”

“Come and have a look at the stove. Cate and I are boiling water.”

Tom diverged from his path back to the garage to where Cate and Bill were sitting on the concreted verandah looking out over the bush at the front of the house. The new stove was sitting between them with a billy of water boiling.

“Isn’t it quiet.”

“It hardly makes a sound,” said Cate.

“It’s taken eight minutes to boil six hundred millilitres of water,” said Bill.

“He means a pint,” said Cate.

“That’s pretty fast,” said Tom.

“It’s super efficient.”

Tom told them of his conversation with Mark. “Liz is at a concert, Cate. She will ring you when she gets back this evening.”

“Oh. Good. We’ll need to talk about food.”

The phone rang after tea that evening for Cate.

“Cate. It’s Liz.”

“You poor thing. I heard you were hijacked into going to a concert.”

“Mark only ever sees things from the point of view of his latest project. I was a willing participant. Brendel played sections of Beethoven’s *Pathetique*. It was gorgeous and inspiring. How I am ever expected to play like that I don’t know. Sorry I didn’t ring you when I got home last night. I was exhausted and went straight to bed.”

“Now,” said Cate. “Have you got some paper. We had better talk about food. We don’t want to be stranded on some desert island starving to death...”