

The Broughring Forties

By Mark Sundin



“At 20 years of age the will reigns; at 30 the wit; at 40 the judgment.”

Benjamin Franklin

Forty isn't old, if you're a tree”

Bob Hope

So it comes to pass, I've joined the demographic of my paddling mates in middle age. Luckily for me, one of my best mates, Glen Hastings, AKA Stacka the Attacka was born on the exact same day as me, November 7, 1969, and we have a tradition of co-hosting the big milestones in our lives. When we turned 30, we booked out the Icebergs at Bondi, had 250 people, some of whom we even knew, & enjoyed a raging party that went from midday to midnight, with two bands pumping out our favourite music, tanned & healthy people wall-to-wall, a boozy haze of good feelings & optimism & a very blurred recollection of the whole thing. Kind of like the Expedition Kayaks beer & pizza 'Welcome to Rock & Roll' party, except the only people over 40 were Mums, Dads & Aunties, and there was great music, and umm, it didn't finish at 8 O'clock.

So, for our 40th, with that sort of roof-raising legacy to maintain, we thought it might be a good idea to paddle out to Broughton Island for a night & sulk. Stacka is a ski paddler who would find paddling a barge of a sea kayak a breeze, a former Bondi lifeguard who is pretty dark on the fact that the current bunch of imposters are now international household names and he's just a suburban bloke with a bagful of very funny stories.



Stacka.

We also wanted another one of our best mates, Adrian Janschek, AKA the Adonis, to come out & share in the gloom, as he will turn 40 in June. Adonis has absolutely no paddling experience, but is a super fit ex-rower, rugby player & a very determined dude (just how determined we were about to find out). Safe in the knowledge that he earns a crust as an investment banker, we figured if he came to grief among the big water around Broughton, a world with one less bonds analyst has got to be a better world.



The Adonis – looking happy, cocky even....

To round out the safety of a foursome (actually he was really the first bloke we figured HAD to come), we asked Rob Mercer along, to give us some grief counselling about what it's like to be 50 (yes folks, despite all my treacherous rumour mongering, he is actually only 50).

With a forecast promising a 15kn headwind throwing up a metre & a half sea on top of a 2m swell for day one, and similar following conditions for the return trip, we decided to go from Shoal Beach inside Nelson Bay, and run past the beautiful offshore islands on our way out to Broughton Island, approximately 20km to the north east. We were all smiles as we skipped past Tomaree Head and across the Pt Stephens heads to Yaccaba.

The refraction & tidal movement started to produce a little bit of rebound as we neared the end of the headland, and then Adonis took a swim. He had a bit of a stunned look on his face as he popped up, and had given no prior hint of instability; just a misplaced paddle stroke that tripped him up & gave him a bath.



Rescue #5 (photo Rob Mercer)

Quick as a wink we emptied his boat & had him back in, pointed towards Cabbage Tree Island and away. A minute or two later he was in again, back in again, on his way again, then in again, back in again, but this time we thought it pertinent to actually reassess the whole thing. At that point I was thinking a raging party at the Shoal Bay Fisho's might be a better idea, but as Stacka is actually banned from the place after a previous brouhaha, that was quickly discounted. Adrian was adamant he felt fine,

but just wished he didn't keep falling in, so we let him continue in the slightly more unidirectional water between Yaccaba & Cabbage Tree.



Heading across to Cabbage Tree Island

One more capsize on the way there had us in earnest discussion in the lee of Cabbage Tree Island about the wisdom of continuing.



Weighing up our options in the lee of the island.

We took into account the distance to go to BI – about 11km. The wind had eased to about 10 knots on the nose, and once clear of the islands we would be in open water with much less confusion in the sea & swell direction. Adrian was well kitted out, physically strong, warm despite the swims, well fuelled, in the company of two sea instructors (one of whom is actually very good) & another very solid paddler who typically was thinking the whole thing was a piece of p-ss (keep reading folks). We decided to push on.



Rescue #4 (photo Rob Mercer)

With the distant silhouette of Broughton in his sights, the Adonis then sucked it up, gingerly driving his boat through the head-sea conditions, with a phalanx of attentive newly middle-aged blokes taking turns at watching his every twitch.



Adonis setting out for Broughton

Halfway across he had another unplanned bath, so we hooked up a V-Tow with support to give him a bit of breather. Stacka thought it was clever to point out that my line was a bit less slack than 50 years old Mercer's after about 30 minutes of load hauling. Never mind that the old bugger was in the Rockpool GT and is, well, bloody faster than me...! After the outburst, Rob & I figured we'd give Mr Frustrated Bondi Rescue a go on his own for a while.



Stacka (towline not visible, sorry champ, no photo evidence)

He did so well (this time with the Adonis back swinging his paddle & looking as strong as ever), that we didn't think it was necessary to relieve him until one last capsize near the infamous 'Commodore's Cleft'.



The beautiful Commodore's Cleft.

Rob hooked in & towed alongside the now chastened and pleasingly fatigued Stacka until it was calm enough to remove the towlines & allow Adonis to breeze past everyone & claim line honours at Esmeralda Cove.



Adrian after rescue #7.

In all seriousness, think about the scope of what Adrian managed in the context of your own paddling. No prior experience, seven capsizes in what was a reasonably intimidating sea, with a island on the

horizon that never really looks like it's getting any closer until you get right to it's front door mat, into a headwind. We were confident we could get him out there by any one of a number of assists, and could have V-towed him all the way there & back if it was called for. However to do it mostly on his own was entirely dependent on him holding his nerve. Falling in is pretty unnerving stuff in a big bad ocean, and I've seen lots of paddlers with heaps of experience understandably pack it in after a couple of swims. Adonis mate, if anyone ever tries to tell you you're not tenacious, determined & brave, give them my number.



The author enjoying the conditions (photo Rob Mercer)

A typically ungenerous Hastings was unwilling to relinquish the towline saying something along the lines of 'I'm not going to give the bastard the pleasure of landing under his own steam', but wiser & more charitable heads prevailed.



Pondering the day's paddling from the shore of Esmeralda Cove.

The weather had cleared & the island revealed itself in all of its majesty; one hell of a destination for any paddlers out there with a good skill set in an experienced group, if you're wondering.....



We made camp, went for a short walk to the south facing side of the island, a beautiful wind-swept island part Royal National Park, part Outer Hebrides.



The view back toward Looking Glass Rock





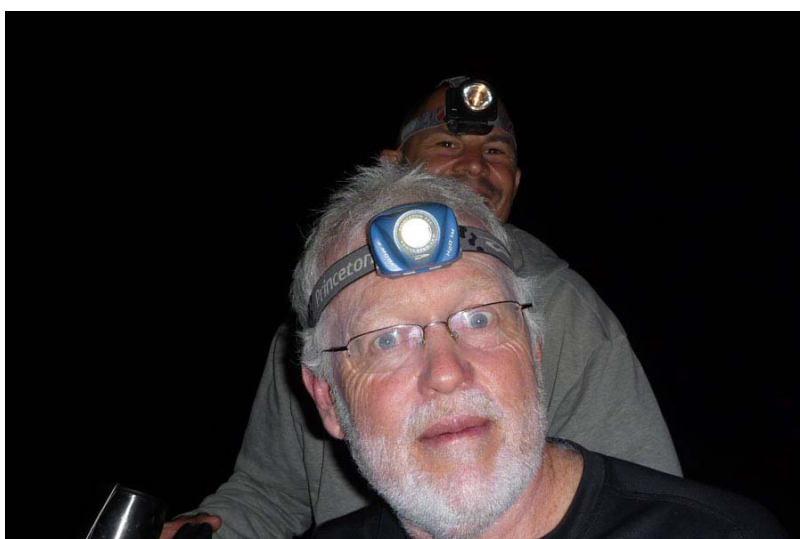
The view north towards Seal Rocks



We then adjourned to Rob's tarp for a spectacular feed pre-prepared & snap frozen during the week by Rob's saintly better half, Sharon Betteridge. You know what they say folks, behind every great man is a great woman, rolling her eyes. The sky was as black as a JP Morgan investment bankers heart and shooting stars & satellites began to reveal themselves, remarkably more frequently as we knocked back the third bottle of red.



Sundo & Stacka, looking a hundred dollars. Red anyone...?



Rob & his little friend

It was great to sit out there, having well & truly earned our miles, with three of my great mates reliving the funniest moments of the times we've all had together. Especially so when we'd all worked so hard & closely to get Adrian out there (none harder than the Adonis himself, of course). The swooping Mutton birds kept things interesting too, with one managing to wing Adrian on a particularly brave sortee. Not that I heard, but the guys reckon the mutton birds were having a convention behind us during the night, showing each other wonderful new things and saying 'ohhh', 'wow', 'ooohhhh'. You've got to have heard the Mutton birds to get the joke.....

The next day dawned bright with sunny skies & a noticeable easing of the sea state, highlighted by a Humpback doing a mighty breach at the mouth of Esmeralda Cove.



Learning the lessons of the previous day, we swapped Adrian over to the Aquanaut HV, a much bigger & more solid boat in the water than the North Shore Atlantic he'd paddled out. We then weighed it down with all of the heavy kit, paying special attention to trim, with a higher proportion of weight in the stern. This would serve to anchor the stern & keep the boat tracking straight in the following conditions. So we packed up, did a quick refresher with Adrian on low bracing & edges, and set off for the mainland.



Adrian getting some low brace lessons.



Leaving Esmeralda Cove.



On our way home.

What a difference a day makes. With the far more challenging following seas picking us up and scooting us along at a cracking pace, Adrian held it together across the entire passage to Cabbage Tree. The rides on offer were marvellous big long surf runs on nicely paced following seas, the one truly exhilarating element of our sport.



Stacka running back past Cabbage Tree



Home in his sights.

We turned at the eastern edge of Cabbage Tree Island & ran with the swell all the way back into Shoal Bay, making the return journey in just over two & a half hours. With high fives all round we packed up the boats & gear & headed to the Marina for a monster feed and a couple of cold libations. My beer was so cold it hurt.....



The hero of the trip, all smiles.



Rob's last few paddle strokes....

A fantastic way to cap off a trip with a top bunch of people to a spectacular & challenging destination, and a worthy celebration.

So, Stacka & I can safely say we've started our terminal decline with a memory we'll cherish for years, as opposed to entering our thirties with a memory we've, ah, what did we do for our thirtieth again....?

Mark Sundin, November 9, 2009.