

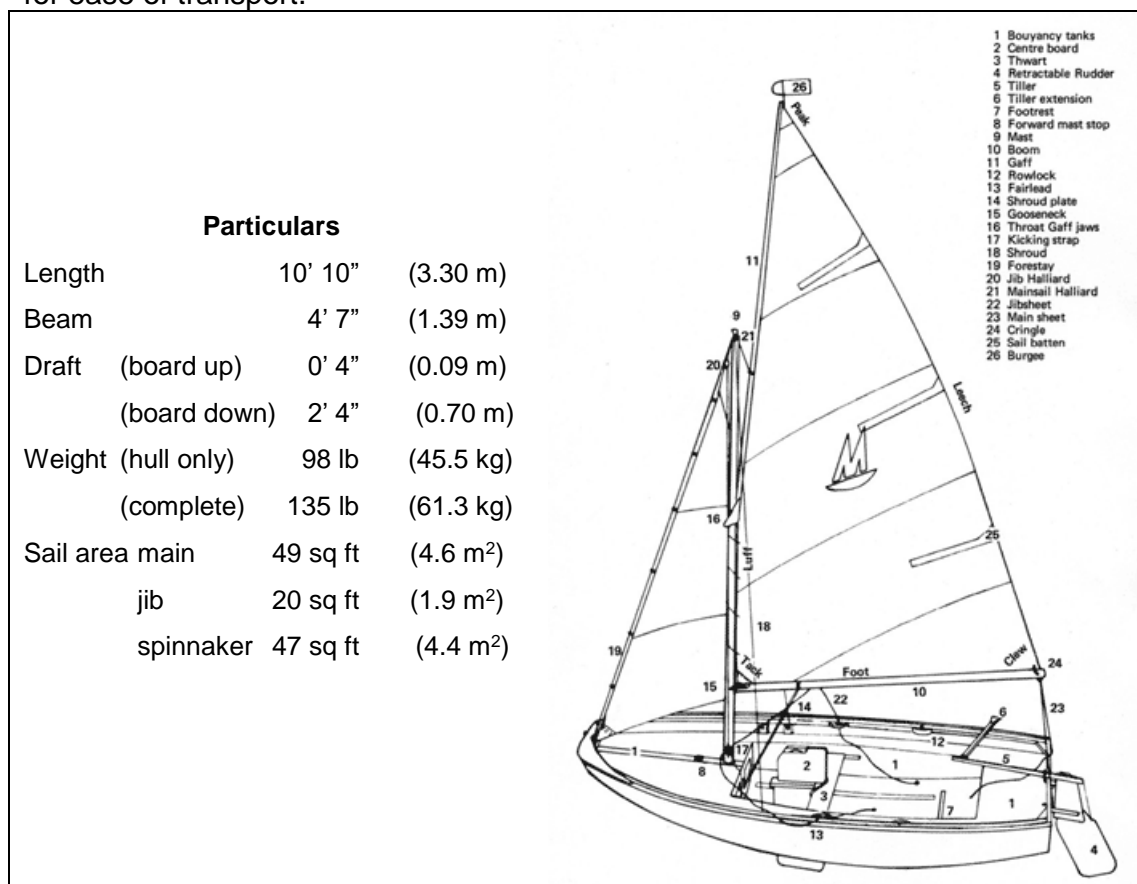
Voyage of LA SIRENE and LUNA Lake Cootharaba, January 2017

The Mirror class dinghy

The Mirror is a one-design class racing dinghy designed by Jack Holt in a design competition run by the London *Daily Mirror* in 1962. The design specified the then-novel 'tack-and-tape' or 'stitch-and-glue' construction method. It was intended to enable home builders of modest experience and accomplishment to build an affordable and practical boat from simple materials. In those days, the materials were sheet plywood, cloth tape and polyester resin. The construction method has now become commonplace, and nowadays uses lightweight marine ply, glass tape and epoxy resin.

Holt's design met its aim: the Mirror craze swept the UK, Australia and other countries in the 1960s and early 1970s. The Mirror class now has a more cult-than mass-following, but the racing rules have been modernised in some respects and there are still many vigorous clubs and racing associations.

As the particulars below show, the boat is beamy and capacious and is therefore stable and seaworthy. It carries a simple, conventional, relatively low-aspect gunter-sloop rig, designed so that when unrigged all spars could fit inside the hull for ease of transport.



The Mirror one-design class dinghy

La Sirène

LA SIRENE is my Mirror dinghy, built by a friend of my uncle Charles Clark in Brisbane in the late 60s. Building plans have never been published, and the class rules only permit boats to be built from officially supplied kits. But La Sirène is a 'bootleg'. Charles' friend was a resourceful fellow, and took the lines off someone else's legitimate boat to produce what transpired to be a remarkably tough and long-lived dinghy.

The builder sold La Sirène to Charles in the early 1970s and she lived at "Rooftrees", my grandparents' beach house at Redcliffe on Moreton Bay, for the next four decades. Over that time, she outlasted several other Rooftrees vessels, including a Manly Junior my Dad had built in 1967, a canoe, a tinnie, a Windsurfer and a surfski. She taught my cousins, sisters and me (among others) to sail in the challenging waters and weather of northern Moreton Bay. She was well used, as a good boat should be, particularly on school holidays. She sailed up and down the Redcliffe peninsula from Deception Bay to Hays Inlet, and on occasion as far as Cabbage Tree Head.

By 2006 when Rooftrees was sold, La Sirène had been grounded, stranded, capsized, holed, scraped, dismasted, repaired, patched and painted more times than anyone could remember. Her original timber mast had snapped at the halyard sheave, and a replacement aluminium mast had disappeared. The hull had deteriorated to the point that she was unseaworthy and hadn't floated for several years.

But landfill or immolation were beyond contemplation, so I took her to my house in Brisbane for restoration. My main aim was to get her seaworthy and useable again, so the job was more workmanlike than craftsmanlike. The job consisted of stripping many layers of paint, fibreglass patchwork, cloth tape, polyester, epoxy and other adhesives; repairing a few holes and rotten areas; fibreglassing the entire outside and parts of the inside; painting; restoring the original timber mast; varnishing the spars; and re-rigging. She was relaunched in Cabbage Tree Creek one evening in July 2009.



Luna (red) and La Sirène (white) at La Sirène's relaunching, July 2009

Luna

LUNA is my brother-in-law Scott Adamson's Mirror dinghy. In the early 2000s, I saw an ad in the *Trading Post* (when these things were still done in hard copy) for a Mirror and a Manly Junior on a two-up trailer. The fact that one seller was offering both a Mirror and a Manly was a remarkable coincidence, so Scott and I went to inspect it (at Park Ridge!). For reasons that escape me now we didn't buy the boats then, but a couple of years later it turned up for sale again (this time at Luscombe), and this time we didn't let the chance go by.

Since then, our families have made good use of having two Mirrors. The design is ideal for kids and young people, particularly learning to sail, because it is light and easy to handle while being stable, buoyant and seaworthy. I have often dreamed of bigger boats, and even owned one briefly (a 25' 6" Bolger Red Zinger), but Ross Lillistone reminds us of Phil Bolger's own axiom: a boat must be either small enough to take home with you, or big enough to be your home. The Red Zinger fails both those tests, but the Mirror passes at least one.

Luna has had her fair share of adventures in the family, including when my nephew Josh and I ran her onto the reef outside the Lazaret Gutter on Peel Island, shearing off the centreboard and smashing the centreboard case open. We couldn't recover the severed lower portion of the blade, but left its stub in the case to minimise splashing, jammed the after end of the case back into position, and ran downwind back home to Cleveland without further incident.

After a few years use, both boats needed some maintenance and prettying up, so in January 2015 Scott and I got the two Mirrors and the majority of our (then) seven children to work under his house in repairing and repainting both boats. Ross Lillistone has always advised me to keep it simple and practical, so I've forsaken two-pack in favour of exterior house paint: cheap, readily available, unfussy to use, hard-wearing and easy to touch up.

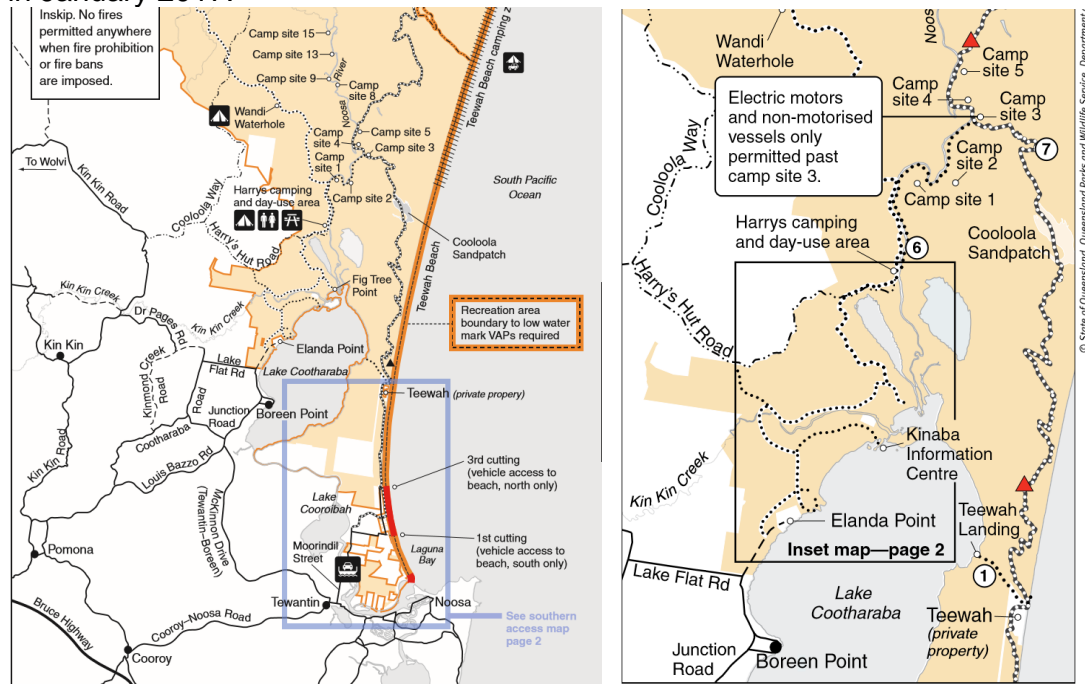
Lake Cootharaba

Lake Cootharaba is a wide but shallow lake on the upper Noosa River in the Cooloola region about 130 km north of Brisbane (see map 1). It drains the Upper Noosa River, Teewah Creek and Kin Kin Creek to the north and empties into the lower Noosa River to the south, which in turn meets the sea at Noosa Heads. The catchment of the river and its lakes is close to but separated from the Coral Sea by the watershed of the Cooloola sandmass.

The lake is a popular recreation area for sailing, canoeing, sailboarding, kitesurfing, bushwalking and camping. There are steady, reliable breezes, sandy beaches (easy launching) and shallow waters, to say nothing of the mild climate and scenic beauty of the unspoiled environment, much of which is protected by the Great Sandy National Park.

The lake is an average of only 1.5 m deep and in many places is much shallower. That precludes larger keelboats and noisy power vessels. Conversely, the concentration of sensible and decent boats is much higher than on other Queensland waterways. I've spied a Bolger Otter, several Oughtreds including a Caledonia Yawl, a Drascombe Lugger, two (!) Bolger Micros, my own Bolger Red Zinger as well as a few Mirrors other than La Sirène and Luna. The lake is also

popular with multihulls: for example, it hosted the Nacra national championships in January 2017.



Map 1: Lake Cootharaba area

Cruise of La Sirène and Luna, January 2017

My son William (13 years old) and stepson Kerry (15) had been for a daysail in La Sirène on Lake Wivenhoe in December 2016, and landed briefly on an island in the middle of the lake. That prompted ideas of an overnight camp-cruise, but my subsequent researches showed that camping on the lake or its shores (outside designated campgrounds) was not permitted.

We canvassed other possible cruising grounds around south-east Queensland before settling on Lake Cootharaba. It was generally familiar to them, because we have often camped at the Boreen Point caravan park during summer school holidays and visited other spots in the Cooloola region. Because of various logistical constraints, we were limited to one overnight on 12-13 January 2017. A couple of days before departure we started preparing in earnest. A quick trip to the supermarket yielded a load of canned and packet food that required no refrigeration or cooking. The boys' previous ignorance of such camping staples as spam and condensed milk was corrected.

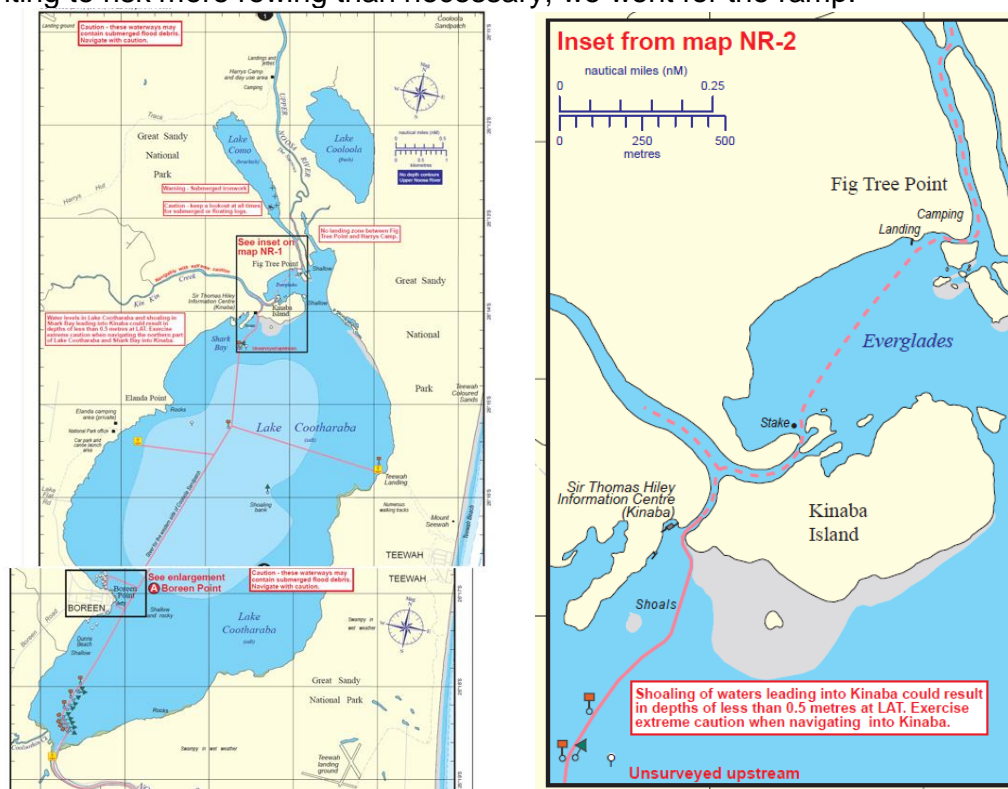
At home, we rigged the boats in the backyard and mocked up the stowage and sleeping arrangements. Food, clothes and sleeping gear would be stowed in either crates or plastic bags. The boys would sail in La Sirène and I would sail in Luna with the majority of the



gear. We planned either to camp ashore in tents (most likely at Fig Tree Point in the Everglades: see map 2) or sleep aboard at anchor. For the latter scenario, we would lay two sheets of plywood along the side buoyancy tanks in one boat as the boys' berths, and I would sleep on a collection of crates and centreboards in the other. At a stretch, the tents could be erected on board if mosquitos or rain intervened. On the Wednesday night, each man's kitbag was packed and loaded.

On Thursday 12 January 2017, we managed to make a reasonably early start by school-holiday standards, hitting the road shortly before 08:00 hrs. Noosa is usually a one-and-a-half hour run from Brisbane up the Bruce Highway, but despite the antique tyres on the boat trailer, we made good time, reaching Pomona about 09:00 and Boreen Point before 09:30. The little village was a lot sleepier than during the Nacra nationals the week before, but the store was open. We stopped in to pick up a loaf of fresh bread (too extravagant for the ship's company, but they wanted it for fish bait) and a bag of ice for the esky.

We canvassed three possible launching spots: the caravan park (on the south side of the point); the main beach (facing east) and the official boat ramp (north side of the point). The day was hot as forecast and the wind was still calm. Not wanting to risk more rowing than necessary, we went for the ramp.



Map 2: Lake Cootharaba and Everglades

The mate failed in his duty to note our departure in the ship's log, but I estimate that by the time we had launched, rigged and stowed, it would have been 11:00. By then the nor'easter had arrived, and I reckon was blowing above 10 knots. The boys had previously done a bit of crewing for me, but had never skippered in anything but very sedate conditions. I envisaged that for this voyage I would sail

close on their windward quarter, well within hailing distance. We had not previously sailed in company in that way, but nothing ventured, nothing gained.

My daughter Juliet happened to be camping with friends at Elanda Point, and we had loosely foreshadowed a rendezvous with them. Given the proximity to noon, we set a course for Elanda, mile and a half (2.8 km) distant close-hauled on the starboard tack. Again, no one kept a note or even turned on the GPS, but we must have made Elanda in less than half an hour.

It was ideal weather for experienced sailors, and to their credit the lads did well.



The water off Elanda is very shallow (less than 0.5 m) for a long way out, but they got the board up in time, and we brought up quite elegantly on the beach fronting the camp ground. We met up with Jet and her friends, and after a while returned to the boats. There we settled in to a luncheon of tinned tuna on crispbread, apples and oranges, all washed

down with long-life fruit juice, and in the case of the commander, a cold beer.

Over lunch the wind continued to breeze up towards 15 knots, and I debated with the boys whether we should camp ashore at Elanda, or push on for Fig Tree Point. I was nervous: a capsize would not be fatal or even injurious, but I was dubious about how much of our gear would stay on board and dry.

But the boys were unconcerned, so off we went. Again, poor record-keeping beset the expedition, but I'd guess we departed Elanda about 13:30. There was no question of a starboard tack if we were to clear Mill Point just to the north, so we set a course for Teewah Landing, close-hauled on the port tack. At that point, the Lake is about three miles (5.5 km) across, so it was a long leg and the wind was steady, if brisk. I reckon we were averaging four knots. In Luna, I sat close by La Sirène's port quarter, intermittently shouting gratuitous advice at the boys. Being lighter laden, I was making ground on them and had to round up or ease sheets frequently. But the only risk to navigation was the tendency of La Sirène's skipper to let the mind wander, and with it the ship's head. Both boats carry weather helm, so any inattention tends to bring head to wind and consequently wayward and slow progress.

On the way to the eastern shore, I debated with myself whether we should 'do a granny' and just land at Teewah and camp there, or try and sail up the entrance channel to Kinaba. From Teewah we could get to the entrance in a single starboard tack, but getting up the channel head into wind would be a big challenge. Then, from Kinaba, we'd have to get up Kin Kin Creek a way and then across Fig Tree Lake, again dead to windward.

We got pretty close to the eastern shore and it was shoaling, so we tacked a couple of times into the unnamed north-eastern bay of the lake. The lads botched one of them, backing the jib too long, leading to an unintentional gybe. There were no injuries, but by the time the ship was got back on a steady track we had lost a good quarter- or half-mile to leeward, which is bad news when you're trying to get to windward.

The situation recovered, it occurred to me that we had a third option open. The mouth of the Upper Noosa River where it meets Lake Cootharaba (east of Kinaba Island) is commonly taken to be non-navigable to anything other than kayaks and pelicans. The national parks and waterways publications exclusively direct traffic through the marked channel at the mouth of Kin Kin Creek (west of Kinaba Island) and across Fig Tree Lake (north of Kinaba Island), and only thence into the Upper Noosa. I'd never entered the mouth of the Upper Noosa, but I reasoned that either our shoal-draft boats would make it, or in the worst case we would disembark and walk, or turn back.

So off we went close-hauled on a starboard tack, heading for Kinaba Island. The water calmed as we tacked closer and closer to the island, and sailing conditions were perfect. About half a mile off, our centreboards touched the sandy bottom, so we raised them slightly and pressed on. The sense of modest wonder and adventure reminded me of Nicolas Baudin entering Shark Bay. The bottom was even and sandy and the water crystal clear. Although it was only knee-deep, with boards up it was easy sailing.



Finally we anchored in the lee of an unnamed islet at the eastern end of Kinaba Island. Having only one anchor, La Sirène's bow was tethered to Luna's stern.



We skylarked in the shallows for the afternoon, and after establishing that there was nowhere to camp on the island or islet, decided to camp at anchor and pray for no rain.

In the late afternoon the lads wandered off across the shallows with the fishing rods. Suffice to say that we dined on tinned meat washed down with apple juice. In keeping with the lunar theme, it was full moon, and we watched the full moon rise over the Cooloola sandmass in the early evening.



The mozzies arrived at sunset, but in modest numbers in the circumstances. The nor'easter calmed a little but kept us cool in the evening. We turned in not long after sunset-moonrise. We slept in sleeping bags on thermarests, the boys on the buoyancy tanks in Luna, and me on a couple of sheets of ply laid out across the thwart in La Sirène. I hadn't bothered with any real waterproofing, and paid for it in the form of a wet sleeping bag. We didn't set up the mozzie nets or rain flies.

Kez got to sleep pretty readily, but after an hour of batting mozzies Will and I lit a coil on the bow of the windward boat, and it seemed to repel them.

A very pleasant and peaceful night's rest followed. I found it a little difficult to sleep, but only because of the amazing spectacle of a cloudless, starry, moonlit sky rotating overhead as the boats swung at anchor and the planet swung in the cosmos.

I stirred in the small hours to find that low cloud had blanketed the moon. The sun rises very early in eastern Queensland midsummer (about 05:00), and not long after first light appeared in the east. But the cloud continued to descend, and at dawn had become a heavy fog. Happily, apart from a light dew, there was no precipitation.

I had never even contemplated sleeping aboard a Mirror, assuming the space would be too confined and cramped, but in the event I was very pleasantly surprised at how comfortable our accommodations proved to be.

I was visited by a couple of family groups of pelicans in the early dawn. Luna's crew, being teenagers, did not interrupt my meditation, although they ultimately woke well before their accustomed hour. We breakfasted on muesli bars, juice and apples. During breakfast, to our surprise were visited by a couple on plastic kayaks.



After breakfast the fog lifted and the previously light breeze died. We weighed anchor and rowed La Sirène with Luna in tow northward in search of the true mouth of the Upper Noosa with a view to going upstream a little and then entering Fig Tree Lake north of the islets at its eastern end.

Not having found the mouth after a few minutes' searching, we retreated and entered Fig Tree Lake south of the islets. It was a good thing we were rowing, not sailing, because the lake was thick with reeds and so shallow in one part we had to disembark and drag the boats over the shoal. We arrived at Fig Tree Point (perhaps 08:00) and made fast alongside the timber jetty.

We were curious to inspect the Fig Tree Point campground, and were surprised to find it quite deserted. There were plenty of pleasant, sheltered sites and good facilities. It might have afforded a good camp, but who knows how bad the mozzies might have been? In hindsight, we were quite satisfied with having slept aboard at anchor.



After a short reconnoitre at Fig Tree Point we departed, under oar again since there was still no wind. As mentioned, the Lake is thick with reeds, but tourist boats have cut a channel through them along the route suggested on the map for navigation across the Everglades.

We rowed southwestward following that route across Fig Tree Lake. As with their sailing the previous day, the lads' rowing made something less than a straight wake.

We rowed on through the mouth of Kin Kin Creek to the Sir Thomas Hiley visitor centre which is built on stilts over the water on the margins of Lake Cootharaba. We boarded (or landed on) the visitor centre and said good day to another boating couple who arrived shortly after.

While at Sir Thomas Hiley, we detected the slightest breeze coming up from the north-west, so departing the centre (perhaps 09:15), we set sail and headed through the marked channel out onto Lake Cootharaba. Again the boats came into their own, and we were able to sail in the very shallow water either side of the channel, which most other boats could never do.

The wind was light and variable so things were pretty slow, but that gave us time to get a few photos while under way, which I hadn't been game to do the previous day out of concern for the camera. When the sails were drawing at all, we were reaching on the starboard tack.



The mid-morning sea breeze comes in like clockwork in the south-east Queensland summer. After perhaps half an hour of doldrums, the breeze came up and veered to the northeast, and we started making way nicely, broad reaching on a port tack. Before long it was blowing over 10 knots again. Unlike the continuous beating to windward of the previous day, we were barrelling along on a broad reach, and had some very enjoyable sailing.

By this time the lads had got quite comfortable in command of La Sirène. I gave them a bit of distance, and while I shouted the occasional gratuitous order, they couldn't (and needn't) hear. Again they steered something less than a perfectly straight course, but we weren't in a hurry, and they kept the ship on an even keel.

We came abeam Elanda Point to starboard, but kept on for Boreen Point. The ramp was busy, so we had to pay close attention to the landing. Again, the boys brought her in with skill and poise. Again poor logkeeping practices beset the voyage, but I reckon we landed about 11:00.

Once ashore, we struck the rigs, unloaded the gear, got the boats onto the trailer, and had a quick dip in the lake to cool down. We drove to Elanda, arriving about noon, to pick up Jet and her friend and headed home.

Even though the whole expedition lasted barely 24 hours, it felt like much longer for all the right reasons. Being on the water, self-sufficient and in good company, especially in such lovely surroundings, can have a wonderful effect on the soul.