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How To... Go Cruising – Anchors and Anchorages

Part Two

By Jack Baxter

The holding ground along the WA coast varies enormously from the tight granite sand of the South Coast to the mud of the Kimberley, and these differences determine the type of anchors suitable for different destinations. Before you leave, ensure that the correct ground tackle for your planned destinations is aboard and familiarise yourself with the safe anchorages. Then you will enjoy the adventure with the 'confidence of competence'. To assist with this planning let's look at the cruising destinations of Western Australia. With Fremantle as a base, and the 'WA Cruising Guide' as a reference, the WA coast can conveniently be broken into three sections to help with planning and preparation.

Short Passage Anchorages - Day sails from Fremantle to Rockingham, the near islands (Carnac, Garden and Rottne) and the northern marinas; weekenders to Warnborough, Shoalwater Bay and Mandurah.

Northern Passage Anchorages - from Fremantle north to Kimberley country.

Southern Passage Anchorages - from Fremantle south to Albany to Esperance.

Pre-Cruise Preparation

Let's use a short passage cruise as an example. Before setting sail, the things we can determine at this stage are:

1. Weather:

Know the seasonal pattern to expect, in terms of typical wind direction, strength and changes.

- Summer brings morning offshore breezes (easterlies) and the classic afternoon south westerly sea breeze.
- Autumn weather is typically a mix of milder summer breeze directions, sunny windless days and the occasional fresh blow from northwest to southwest.
- The winter months will bring an increase in frequency and strength to the northwest to south westerlies, but still offers some lovely short cruise weather.

- Spring sees a decrease in the number of gales, some beautiful windless, sunny days and a gradual shift back to the land/sea breeze patterns of summer.

In these broad contexts, check the forecasts and select an anchorage that will be protected for the duration of your stay... and **don't forget** the early morning shift from sea breeze to easterlies!!

2. Selection of protected anchorages:

With the exception of the marinas to the north and at Mandurah in the south, all the good anchorages in the area we're considering have similar features. Typically these are:

- Low land forms, limestone rocks or surface reef to break any big wave or swell patterns; and
- A holding bottom that is a mix of fairly coarse sand and seagrass.

Their details vary greatly, but homework will identify:

- The physical features, buoys and markers that will help your approach and entry;
- The hazards of the approach and within the anchorage itself;
- Any regulatory constraints that apply to the area;
- Availability of moorings; and
- Any environmental protection issues.

And don't forget the easterly change overnight!!

3. Suitable ground tackle:

Any craft that's been based in Fremantle is bound to be equipped with a good west coast anchor, but if your boat is new, or from another locality, take a walk around the marina to see the most popular types in common use. There are many on the market, but the common features for this coast are:

- A sharp entry to penetrate weed;
- Sufficient weight to assist this penetration; and
- A large surface area to hold in loose, coarse sand.

Chain is always better than an anchor rope, as the weight acts as a 'shock absorber'. The disadvantage is the requirement for a winch (or well built deckie!). If you have a rope anchor line make sure that there's a length of suitable chain at the bottom end to take the wear of the bottom and provide the 'shock absorber' if the sea gets up.

And in conclusion:

Enjoy the business of planning, it extends the length and anticipation of the cruise, and remember the six P's:

PERFECT PLANNING

And PREPARATION

PREVENTS POOR PERFORMANCE !!!

