

# ASTO Exchange



Young Endeavour 2012

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Sitting at home looking out of the window at a bright, English autumnal day it's hard to believe it's been nine months since I got the call to say I'd be going to Australia. Having completed my interview a mere five hours earlier, and expecting to wait around a week to hear, I was – to say the least – both surprised and excited when my phone rang that evening. I was sat on the sofa next to my, very heavily pregnant, best friend at the time and it's a relief that our joint bouncing up and down and squealing in excitement didn't bring on early labour: her husband would never have forgiven me!

I'd decided shortly after applying for the exchange that I wanted to give myself the opportunity to experience more of what sail training has to offer here in the UK, regardless of whether my exchange application was successful, and had therefore made the terrifying decision to hand in my notice at work before I even knew if I'd reached interview stage! As a result, a little over two weeks after receiving *that call* I was leaving my job to work on UK sail training vessels full time: and fifteen weeks after that I was sat in my room surrounded by piles of clothes, toiletries, bedding and other miscellaneous bits as I tried to pack everything I'd need for the following three months into a bag that I'd be physically capable of carrying. That was over five months ago now and it's been quite a journey...

My first two weeks in Australia were jam-packed, as my boyfriend and I enjoyed a holiday together in the form of a whistle-stop tour of the south east coast; Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, driving the Great Ocean Road and Melbourne were all on the agenda. Following this I spent a few days catching up with an old friend now living in Melbourne and we travelled to Tasmania together - a must for me as the town of Bicheno on the east coast is named for one of my ancestors, James Ebenezer Bicheno.



The 25 June was the first day I was really on my own in the Australia part of my adventure: but it didn't really feel it. Thankfully boat people are often a wonderful sort and, after a very brief introduction the day before, I had lined myself up a few days maintenance on the Windeward Bound. After a very enjoyable day spent mainly whipping, splicing and talking boat geekery with the full time volunteers; they very kindly invited me out for dinner that evening.

Whilst there I actually got back on the water and did some day sailing with both Windeward Bound and Lady Nelson, both beautiful vessels situated opposite each other on the same pier in Hobart. After a few days of catching up with photos, blogging and washing the entire contents of my bag, I was packed and ready for the flight up to Townsville to join Young Endeavour; almost exactly a month since I left London.



My first night on board Young Endeavour was filled with the joy of being able to unpack properly; lots of yummy food; my first experience of drinking squash that looks like it's just been poured out of a glow stick (a green one in this particular instance); and a fair amount of nerves about living up to the amazing opportunity I'd been given. Thankfully I didn't have time to worry about that kind of thing for too long, as the next day was 'day 1' and into the full swing of departing, going to anchor and lots of training! At anchor in Horseshoe Bay (Magnetic Island) we donned our harnesses and got ready for our first-night climb. Prior to laying aloft, every member of the new crew were required to first clip themselves to the man overboard davit and hang upside down in their harness; some achieved this more gracefully than others, and I spent some time trying to convince Sail Master Matt that 'balletic' is a word! This exercise was successful both in ensuring that everyone trusted their harness, and in dissuading most of us from ever wanting to fall into it... *not* comfortable! The first-night climb saw us climb up to the

t'gallant (the highest of the three yards), cross over and climb down the other side. It was interesting, as ever, to see the different reactions amongst the youth crew to this particular challenge and I wonder what my reaction might have been if my first experience of climbing the rigging of a tall ship had've been in the dark and at a roly anchorage!

Young Endeavour voyage 12/12 can honestly be described as a baptism by fire, with the first few days of beating to windward in 25-30 knots making for quite a bumpy ride. Unfortunately, something about the way she was cork-screwing didn't agree with me and I suffered my first ever real bout of seasickness. My chosen way to deal with this was to carry on and ask someone to take over the helm/lookout/whatever job I was doing, when I needed to visit the leeward rail. Unfortunately sailing is quite hard work so, whilst this plan worked well for the first 24 hours, as it got closer to 36 and with nothing in me to provide energy; exhaustion was making it more and more difficult to be a useful member of the crew. Needless to say I was very grateful when we got to our next anchorage, at Upstart Bay, on the morning of day 4; particularly with the wind now gusting over 40 knots. The rest of the voyage continued in much the same vein; with a mixture of driving, persistent rain and strong winds. One particularly exciting watch saw us

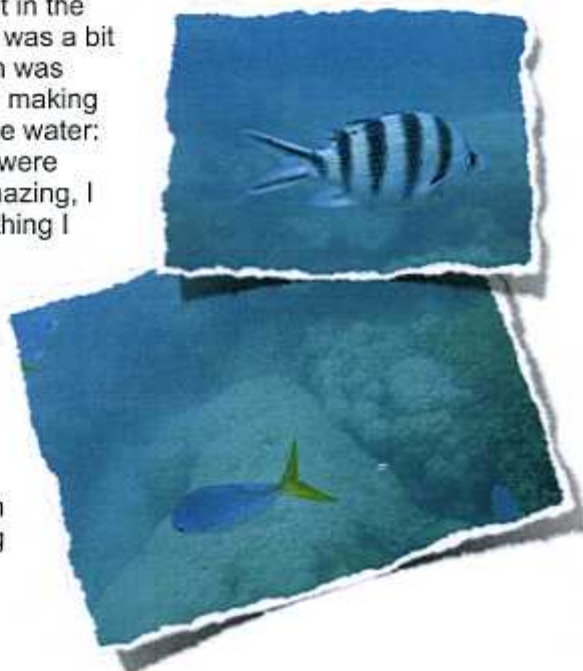


crashing through waves, with the wind gusting off the scale (50+) and only the taste of salt to tell which particular face-full of water was a wave, rather than the rain! Thankfully my stomach decided it had punished me enough and I spent some very happy days barefoot in the rain (still much warmer than at home), enjoying some excellent sailing and jumping in puddles on the deck.



One of the highlights of voyage 12/12 was my first experience of snorkelling; which we did at Blue Pearl Bay, a renowned spot in the Whitsunday islands. There was a bit of rain in the air but the sun was trying to come through and making beautiful dappled light in the water; both the fish and the coral were stunning and the colours amazing, I

was a little overwhelmed. Seeing some of the reef was something I had really wanted to do while I was out there; I had been wondering how to fit it in and suddenly the experience was just handed to me. During a rare break in the rain whilst at anchor we had our first swim off the side; which meant it was time for the rope-swing. I didn't quite have the guts to try a backflip so I settled for a straight jump and enjoying the swimming. Several of us also climbed up under the bowsprit and hung out on the dolphin striker for a while, enjoying the sun. The weather held and we followed our swim with a BBQ on deck and some very inventive and entertaining acts in the SODs opera.





On the last night of a voyage on Young Endeavour there is a rather wonderful tradition. A screen is strung up at midships and a slideshow of photos taken throughout the voyage is projected, to a soundtrack picked by the youth crew: it is a wonderful way to highlight the amount of experiences, new memories and new friends that can be gained over just ten days and many of the youth crew were quite emotional! Next came the task of writing ourselves a letter that will be sent to us in six months time and many of us chose to write each other messages too. Writing a letter to your future self proved rather an odd task, particularly when you have very little idea of where you will be and what will be happening in your life! I refrained from reading the messages that others wrote for me though, so I still have that to look forward to a few months from now.



Our few days in Airlie Beach were a mixture of shopping, good food and chilling out between post voyage jobs from 12/12 and pre voyage checks for 13/12; one such was the rescue aloft drill, which is done by the crew before the start of every voyage. For this particular drill, I was nominated as the 'casualty'. Unfortunately no-one on deck had a camera because, once I got over the oddity of sitting in my harness and pushing the footrope away from underneath me, I rather enjoyed it – and we gained a few spectators in the marina. Next I was issued with some crew uniform and we were ready to begin again...

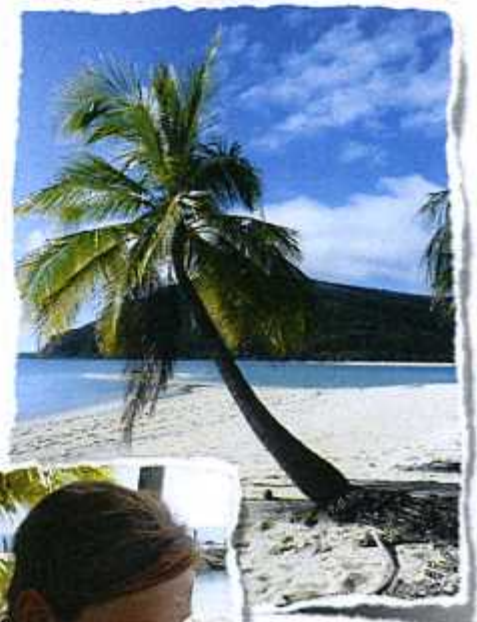


For my second voyage I was shadowing Sail Master Kristy and spent quite a lot of time in the chart room plotting fixes from GPS, radar and visual. I'd not used radar ranges before so this was a new experience for me and it was really good to practice my visual fixes and my chart work generally. It was also great to be able to observe full crew evolutions, such as tacks and wears, from the bridge and to have the opportunity to call tacks myself. Like the last, voyage 13/12 was filled with amazing experiences. On day

four of the voyage we were given the opportunity for a morning swim off the side of the ship with the beautiful Whitehaven beach as a backdrop, before we were ferried ashore to experience the famously white, fine sand of the beach itself. For me the opportunity to experience silent running was another such highlight: all of the electrical equipment (except that which is essential for navigation) was turned off. No fridges humming, no showers running, no heads flushing, no engines, no generators, nothing. Lying on the deck and hearing nothing but the sea was lovely, but it was almost more noticeable below. It was eerily quiet and, as I lay on my bunk writing my diary by the light from my porthole, I could hear nothing but the water against the hull... real sailing.



The following day we arrived at Brampton Island, ready to visit the apparently lovely resort and buy an ice cream to eat on the beach. We discovered, however, that the resort had been closed around a year and a half earlier. We didn't see this as a reason not to enjoy the beach and headed over by RHIB to check it out; we were dropped off at the resort jetty and took the (slightly longer but not completely overgrown) path through the trees. Just off the jetty, at the edge of the trees was a huge kangaroo, sat stone still and just watching us; and about half way along the path, sat right in the middle of a web built between overhanging trees on either side of us, was the biggest spider I have ever seen; at least the size of my outstretched hand. I don't mind admitting that I ran, rather than walked, underneath that web; and it was definitely worth it when we reached the beach. It looked like a post-card paradise and the sand had formed a natural pool effect in the water, with shallow parts where you could walk seemingly forever into water just up to your knees and parts that dropped off quickly into deeper water perfect for swimming. The beach was lined with coconut palms and I achieved another 'first' when I drank and ate fresh coconut straight from the tree. It was one of those moments that you can't quite describe and can't quite do justice in a photo – and it was one of those moments where you can't quite believe where you are.





As a 'Staffie', command day meant a 'day off' for me and, having dressed up for the occasion and following the handover of the ship to the Youth Crew, all Staffies promptly abandoned ship: straight on to the capping rail and off. Unfortunately I had to follow Navigator Tim's rather impressive dive with a somewhat less impressive and rather boring jump but seeing the Youth Crew gaping as we climbed into the RHIB and did a couple of laps of the ship was most enjoyable: I think we had them worried for a moment! On the last full day of the voyage we did a half day sail with a special needs group from the Mackay area. Some of the Youth Crew really came into their own here and it was a joy to watch. Seeing the awe on the faces of the visitors and watching our Youth Crew use the

knowledge they'd gained over the last ten days and share it, taking on that leadership role and representing the ship so admirably reminded me once again what it is I really love about sail training and the effect it can have. At the end of the voyage the staff told me that they had wanted to ask me to stay for another trip, but unfortunately there were no spare beds on board. They asked if I would like to come back for the following voyage and I gratefully accepted, I wasn't ready to say goodbye to Young Endeavour properly yet. Suddenly I had ten days to fill and decided to head back up to Airlie Beach.

During my time away from Young Endeavour I joined another tall ship, the Solway Lass, who operates 4 day cruises around the Whitsundays. I joined as a volunteer and spent my time mainly in the galley, which was a new one on me and very enjoyable. I was also able to take part in some of the excursions on the islands; including an hour long hike that was rewarded by a beautiful view over the Whitsundays and another paddle in the beautifully clear waters off of Whitehaven beach. I was asked to stay for another trip on Solway Lass and I would have loved to do it, but unfortunately it overlapped with some excursions I had booked, so I had to say goodbye.





I filled the rest of my time in Airlie with a little shopping (I needed a bigger bag by this point in my travels!) and some touristy excursions; a scenic flight over the Great Barrier Reef and a scuba diving experience. Both were amazing. From above the reef, seeing the scale of it, it's hard to fathom exactly what it is you are looking at. The scenic flight also allowed me a chance to see the islands that I had been sailing around over the past month from an entirely new viewpoint and, as we flew over, I spotted the Solway Lass anchored in the bay off of Whitehaven. Scuba diving offered equally incredible views and an experience I will never forget, I freely admit that I jumped somewhat at the first four

foot fish that swam nonchalantly past my face but I soon regained composure and thoroughly enjoyed my glimpse into a beautiful world of amazing colours and shapes and stunning coral and fish. There was one more treat in store for us once we finished our dive, as we were headed back in the tender, we spotted a manta ray; which we managed to glide quietly alongside and watch for a few minutes. As its wingtips broke the surface we could see it was a good 2-3 meters across and we were reliably informed by the dive crew that this identified it as a baby. I'm just glad that I didn't meet it whilst in the water, that *really* would have made me jump!



Before long I was on another overnight coach down to Gladstone to re-join Young Endeavour for voyage 15/12. For this voyage I was assigned to work with Watch Leader Dougie and enjoyed spending more time on the open bridge, working with the Watch Officers when the Youth Crew were undertaking another task. I had a very proud moment when I was able to use some of my new-found confidence in sail theory to balance the rig and reduce the amount of weather helm we were carrying. On day 3 of this voyage we anchored at Lady Musgrave Island and had a longish ride in the tender to get to the beach, during which we saw turtles gliding past us



through the crystal clear water. Once on the island we were in for some wonderful snorkelling, the water was clear and low over the reef so the view was breath-taking.

