

Here Be Solitude...

BY MEL FIELD

IT has been said (and with a great deal of truth) that cruising is a state of mind. Cruising the Vaal Dam with enjoyment and satisfaction very definitely requires the kind of mind than can ignore the realities of muddy water, noisy "glitter" boats towing waterskiers and flat and generally uninteresting land, and appreciate instead the varied and unique attractions of sailing on this large expanse of inland water.

Our Vaal Dam "cruise" started with a phone call from Brian Gardiner of John Robertson Yachts in Cape Town.

"There's a Holiday 23 waiting for you at Port O'Call. Take it for a week and enjoy some inland sailing for a change," he invited Sailing.

We didn't need a second invitation, and on November 18 Linda and I drove from Durban to Springs where we stayed with friends overnight. The next day, Saturday, we stocked up with fresh vegetables, eggs and bread and then set off for the dam, taking a road that led through some pleasant farming land.

Abundant rain has made this part of the Transvaal lush, and the dam the fullest it has ever been. To be more precise, Vaal Dam is now considered to be 100 percent full. A year ago it was only 16 percent full, and more aptly described as a mudhole than as South Africa's fourth largest dam.

Our first glimpse of Vaal Dam was from the top of a ridge on the road that skirts the eastern side of the dam and which leads to the resorts of Aloe Fjord, Port O'Call, the Pennant Nine Yacht Club and also the Vaal Cruising Association. Port O'Call, our destination, is a new resort development that nestles in Sandy Bay and boasts a little "harbour" complete with breakwaters and walk-on moorings.

Thanks to plenty of rain this year, the developers' attempts to grass the entire resort and get some trees growing, are very likely to be successful. In fact, Port O'Call promises to be a proper little oasis some day in an area that can be very dry and arid.

Brian Cousins, the affable and obliging bossman of Port O'Call, presented us with the keys to *Abstract Sun*, a smart, new Holiday 23 trailer/sailer and also a chart of Vaal Dam.

"Don't rely too heavily on it," he advised, adding: "Dry areas shown on the chart are now 30-feet under water in some places."

This, we discovered later, was no exaggeration, and accounts no doubt for the smiles and buoyant confidence seen around clubs, resorts and other dam-based enterprises who earn a crust from the estimated 25,000 people who flock to the dam each year to get their jollies either sailing, waterskiing, camping and picnicking.

The only unhappy people around the place, it seems, are those foolish ones who built their little week-end cottages and shacks close to the water's edge during the drought. Today some of them are under the water. The lucky ones had time to bodily move their shacks or demolish them before the rising dam waters engulfed them.

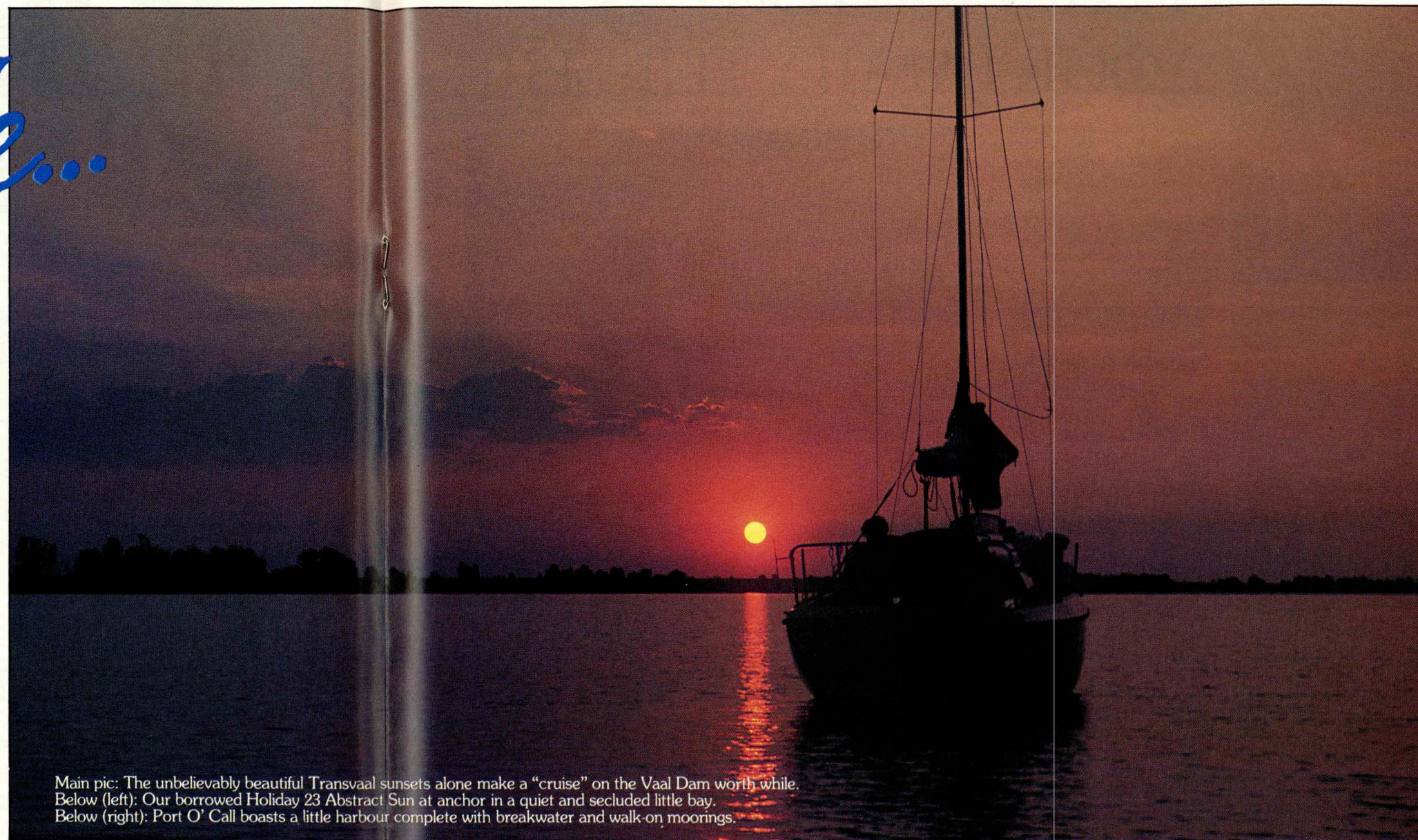
We spent the remainder of the day moving onto *Abstract Sun* and getting to know her. Although only 23 ft long, the popular (there are about a dozen at Port O' Call alone) little pocket cruiser is surprisingly roomy and can sleep five. We were only two, so had more space than we actually needed.

But what really makes this trailer-sailer ideal for dam and sheltered water cruising is the fact that both keel and rudder can be pulled up (retracted??), enabling it to be taken into very shallow water.

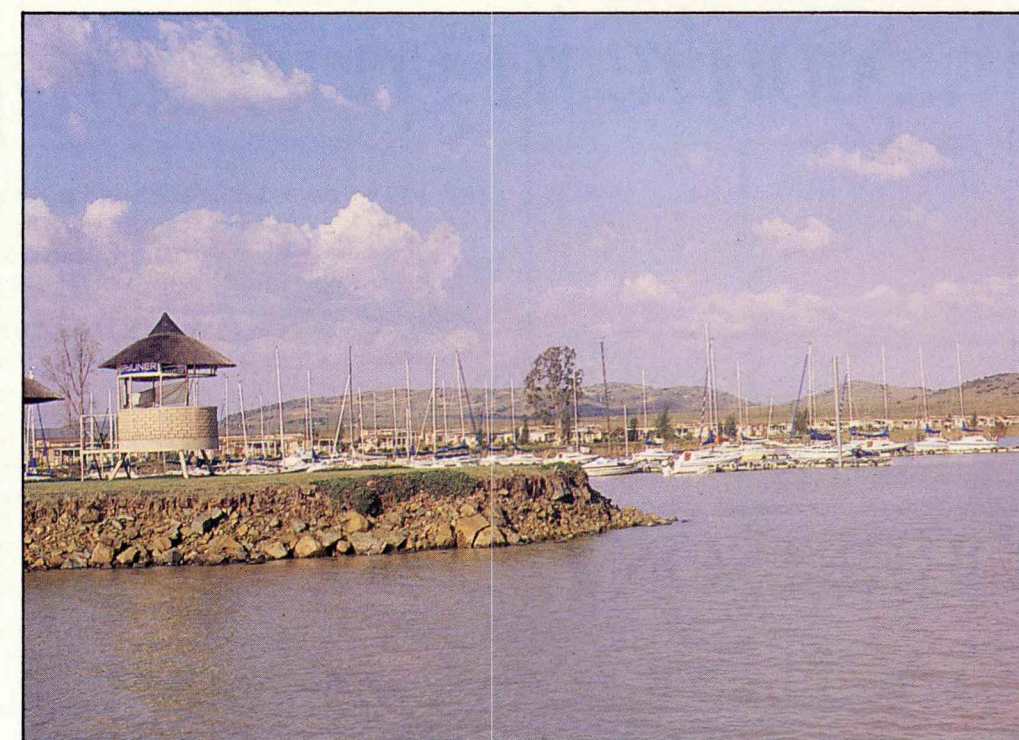
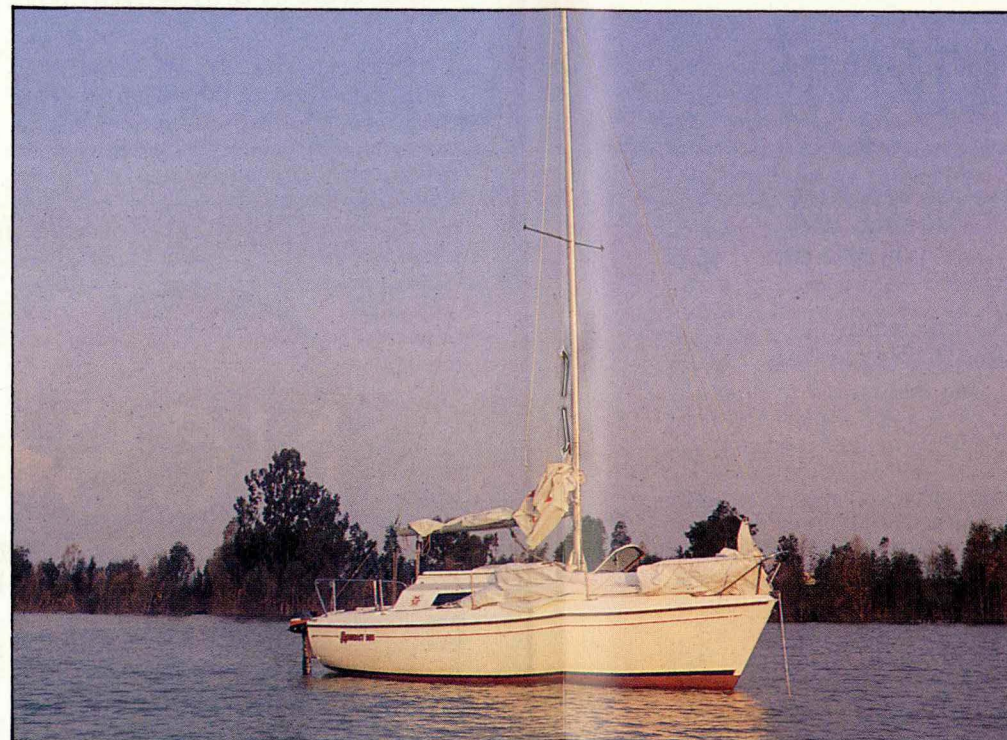
Our Vaal cruise proper commenced at first light the next morning. While Linda brewed up some coffee, I lowered the little outboard on its bracket, hanked on a genoa ("are you sure that's not a stormjib in that little bag?," queried Linda) and took off the mainsail cover. Linda, who had rashly undertaken to do all the navigation, cooking, cleaning, beer pouring and fore-deck work for the duration of the voyage, had rigged the traveller cars and sheets the night before, so I was spared that chore.

The world around us - with the exception of our little feathered friends - was still in the land of Nod and the dam bathed in pastel hues of pink and blue when I backed *Abstract Sun* slowly out of her pen. Linda was amazed, nay astonished, at my skill in doing this, because in the ten years that we've owned our own boat, a 10-ton ferro cutter, I've never managed to get it to go where I've wanted to in reverse.

Encouraged at this good and skillful start to our cruise, I unhooked the extension tiller, leaned against the lifelines and aimed *Abstract Sun* at the little harbour entrance. "This is the life," I said to Linda.



Main pic: The unbelievably beautiful Transvaal sunsets alone make a "cruise" on the Vaal Dam worth while.
Below (left): Our borrowed Holiday 23 *Abstract Sun* at anchor in a quiet and secluded little bay.
Below (right): Port O' Call boasts a little harbour complete with breakwater and walk-on moorings.



"And this is the way to go," she added. "No customs and immigration formalities and, best of all, we can see our destination."

I agreed. Hitherto our cruising adventures had been marked by indecently long passages and ocean crossings (we're lazy sailors), so to be able to actually see your destination or at least be able to count on reaching it before nightfall, was an undreamed off bonus for us. In my humble opinion it is one of the great attractions of inland cruising.

The other of course is the luxury of allowing the wind to dictate the direction of your day's sailing. On that Sunday morning a northerly breeze told us that we could run for any spot south of Port O'Call.

If you look at a chart of the Vaal Dam, you'll see that your choice of destinations from Port O'Call are fairly varied, and none of them more than an hour or to sailing distance. We chose as our first port of call so to speak, the Pennant Nine Yacht Club, and for no other reasons than that the wind was blowing in that direction and we had a few weeks previously met in Durban the club's Vice Commodore, Ian Taylor and his wife and had promised to look them up at their club.

As you head out of Sandy Bay you have the rather grandly-named Groot Eiland right in front of you, say about 2km from the marina. The chart (SAN 2051 A) doesn't give any depths around the island, but instead is generous with red-shaded areas marked "Foul Ground" and "Dead Trees."

At the insistence of the Navigator, we kept well clear of Groot Island and its hazards and, under light genoa alone, sailed "down" the dam's eastern shoreline which, to a Natalian's eyes, is rather flat but nevertheless pleasantly wooded in areas.

Once we cleared the southern end of the island and aimed for the Confluence, where the dam narrows to a neck about 500m wide, we were able to make out hazy features of Deneysville some 12km to the west. Such was the calm nature of the dam that morning that we had the impression of actually seeing the curvature of the earth. We probably were, because the Vaal Dam is a very big stretch of water indeed.

According to some pamphlets on the dam and its history which an obliging young lady at the Department of Water Affairs in Pretoria sent me recently, the Vaal Dam has a circumference of over 800 km (probably more since the recent raising of the dam wall and copious rainfall in the catchment area) and covers an area of 32,000 ha. In sailing terms hugging the Vaal Dam's shoreline is the equivalent in distance of sailing from Durban to Port Elizabeth.

For the benefit of non-Vaals, here are some other facts about the Vaal Dam:

First, it is situated on the Vaal River itself and at the confluence with the Wilge River near Vereeniging and some 56km south of Johannesburg.

The original Vaal Dam was completed in 1938 and has since been raised twice to meet the growing demand for water on the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging region which generates 77 percent of the country's

mining production, 58 percent of its industrial production and 42 percent of its agriculture production.

So much for essential information about the dam. Now here's a bit of non-essential information: The dam is becoming saltier by the year, caused by minerals in the purified effluents that are returned to the system, and also evaporation. No one we spoke to really seems worried about the salinity of the Vaal Dam, but here's a tip from one saltwater sailor to all you fresh water Vaal Dam sailors - when your boat props start turning pink on the edges and your stainless steel prop and rudder shafts start looking as if they've been nibbled by greebies and gribbles, then it's time to start

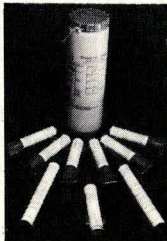
thinking about anodes.

By the time we reached the Confluence the sun was getting high in the sky and with it the temperature. And, because Mother Nature always takes a little when she gives anything, the gentle breeze we started off with an hour or so before started dropping until it hardly filled the sail.

Nevertheless, so light are these little trailer-sailors that it still kept moving through the water, how fast I've no idea because *Abstract Sun* isn't fitted with a speed/distance log. In the generally very light sailing conditions we experienced that week, we developed an outstandingly simple and effective method of determining whether we were going faster or slower.

ONE STOP SAFETY SHOP

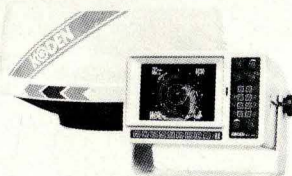
COMET COASTAL PACK FOR YACHTING



Manufactured to Grade 3 & 4 Safety Regulations



HANDY GLORIA GLUTEX FIRE EXTINGUISHERS



KODEN MDC-400 COLOUR RADAR



DSB LIFERAFTS

4, 6 & 8 person Liferafts approved by the South African Department of Transport. DSB Liferafts are manufactured in Germany with the best materials and they meet with the specifications of the International Conference of S.O.L.A.S. (Safety of Life at Sea) 1983.



KODEN CVS-101 COLOUR SOUNDER



SATELLITE NAVIGATOR SN-202

SATS APPROVED LIFERAFT SERVICE STATION & FIRE EXTINGUISHER SERVICING

 **NOVATRADING**

CAPE TOWN: Verbena Street, Paarden Eiland, PO Box 4063.
 Tel: (021) 51-5181.
 WALVIS BAY: PO Box 779. Tel: (0642) 3039, 5357.
 DURBAN: 518 Gale Street. Tel: (031) 25-6201.

If the long, 10m painter attaching *Abstract Sun* to *Bovril* drooped in the water, we were going very slow. If it was out of the water most of the time but occasionally dipping into the water, we were going faster. And if the painter was out of the water all the time, we were going faster still.

Eat your hearts out Stowe, VDO and Walker.

At sea while on passage, one's normal reaction to being near-becalmed would be to fret (futilely) and stalk bad-tempered around the decks whistling (the technical term for this time-honoured nautical custom is "whistling up the wind"). You have to be careful though because sometimes you can whistle up a hurricane, and that's not very *lekker*.

On the Vaal Dam sailors, or rather cruising sailors, are far more philosophical and their attitude to dying winds and being becalmed is "so what, who's in a hurry?"

Certainly, that was our attitude that morning, and why not? We had a whole week ahead of us in which to sail where and when we wanted to. Lovely change for us ocean types.

It was mid-morning when we sailed past the Confluence - and where we saw the first signs of sailing life on the dam other than ourselves. Way up in front of us the white tips of several sails protruded over some low-lying land. They were, we ascertained after studying the chart, sailing in an area designated Big Bend.

"Week-end sailors", remarked the First

Mate, and I sensed that she would far rather we had the whole dam to ourselves. An hour or two later when poor little *Abstract Sun* was rocked to her gunnels by the wakes left behind two large and particularly noisy and obnoxious glitter boats that came too close for comfort and safety, our desire for solitude was considerably stronger.

From the fairly large expanse of water called the Big Bend, the dam takes on a north-south aspect, so once we'd cleared Fools Point (keeping well clear of tree tops and trunks sticking out of the water) we actually reversed our original course to get to Pennant Nine Yacht Club.

"Foul trees to the left of us, foul trees to the right of us," chanted the Navigator from the chart table below, adding (unnecessarily) to the helmsman: "watch out for foul trees."

I told her I was more concerned about the dozen or so yachts that seemed to be heading our way.

Linda shot up on deck in a flash. Even the very suggestion that there might be another vessel sharing the same ocean, or in this case dam, agitates her mightily, and her own interpretation of the internationally accepted *Rules For the Prevention of Collisions At Sea* takes the form of one simple and uncompromising statement: "Any vessel within 10 nautical miles of a vessel in which is sailing Linda Field, is crewed by a blind, drunk and homicidal maniac out to get said Linda Field. Therefore the vessel in which is sailing LF must

give way smartly and get the hell out of it" - "Dead Trees" notwithstanding.

I think she has a point, because to the average cruising sailor the very worst nightmare is to be semi-becalmed and watch what appears to be a whole fleet of racing yachts bearing down on him. My own experience is that in tricky situations like this racing skippers panic, become very flustered, very red in the face and bellow inane and unhelpful remarks like "water", when all they need to do is politely ask one to get out of their way. Oh well, it takes all sorts.

Fortunately for us this time we were spared the ordeal of being caught up in a racing fleet, because as they got closer it became apparent that they were all out for a sail.

As we approached nearer to where the chart says Pennant Nine Yacht Club lives, we could see numerous yachts on moorings in a pleasant bay. In contrast with most of the rest of the dam, the area here is fairly hilly and formed a pretty backdrop to the cluster of large bluegums behind which nestles the PNYC's clubhouse.

Not sure of precisely where to go, I hailed a passing yachtsman and was cheerfully invited to hook onto any one of the club's half a dozen or so green-painted "courtesy buoys."

Without much ado and without even bothering to start *Abstract Sun*'s little outboard, we glided up to the nearest green buoy and hooked on.

We were pleased with ourselves. The good ship *Abstract Sun* had been successfully navigated through the treacherous Confluence, past hazards galore and also survived an attack by two *kamikaze* glitter boats.

Ever practical and concerned about appearances, the Mate suggested we tidy up and go ashore in search of sustenance - the type that comes in chilled cans. I agreed, and half an hour later we were paddling *Bovril* in the direction of the bluegums where most of the discernible human activity seemed to be taking place.

Leaving *Bovril* tied to a semi-submerged jetty in the shade, we strolled towards the clubhouse, a substantial, attractive building. Hopefully our new friend Peter Taylor would be "on board" and with him some cold beer.

"Oh dear me no", said a cheerful lady who introduced herself as the club manager's wife. "They're all taking part in our opening cruise and won't be back until this afternoon. In the meantime make yourselves at home and help yourself to coffee or tea in the galley."

"What friendly folk," Linda observed as we strolled back to *Bovril*, not wanting to intrude on such an important day in a yacht club's sailing calendar.

For the record let it be noted that we had intended returning to the club later that day to "make our number", but what with a promising touch of sunstroke each, general lethargy and feeling marvelously at

peace with the world, we slept the rest of the afternoon and only woke up when there were signs ashore of a general exodus. For the members of Pennant Nine Yacht Club, the week-end was over and home and the week-ahead beckoned...

Before long we had the dam to ourselves again. As darkness intensified, so did the croaking of frogs and chirping of insects and birds. Our first night "at sea", we agreed over sundowners, was memorable, made all the more so by perfect weather and the comforting thought that we were on a good mooring and therefore assured of a good and peaceful night's sleep.

Day 2 of our epic Vaal Dam cruise dawned bright, clear and calm and with a gentle breeze blowing - still from the north. After coffee and rusks we faced our first major decision: Which way to go now?

From PNYC, we reasoned, we could either continue past where we were moored, through the Narrows and into the large Boskopbaai; or take the southern "tributary" of the dam and follow it until it peters out. The alternative cruise from PNYC would be to retrace our steps to Big Bend, then instead of heading north through the Confluence, to continue in a generally south-west direction and simply follow the Wilgerevier which, I'm led to believe, can take you almost to the dorp of Villiers itself. The Navigator thought about this alternative for a moment then pointed to red-shaded areas on the chart ominously labelled "Graveyard Reef" and

"Tombstones" and said "no thanks, we'll go explore Boskopbaai instead."

Decision made, we slipped the green courtesy buoy, hoisted the genoa only and ghosted towards the Narrows, one of the narrowest navigable areas of the dam proper.

I wish we could report finding secluded little palm-tree fringed bays and lush tropical growth down to the water-edge in Boskopbaai, but the sad truth as we discovered is that the land here is depressingly flat and rocky - Karoo-like, you might say. That in itself was enough to discourage us, but our main concern was the presence of numerous tree tops and branches sticking out of the water, even in the apparent centre of Boskopbaai.

Perhaps we were unduly faint-hearted, but taking someone's else's pride and joy into an area like Boskopbaai was not our idea of fun, so we turned around and headed back through the Narrows. We didn't even bother to plot an alternative cruise for the day, but decided to go as far as Misty Bay, anchor for the remainder of the day and night at head for Deneysville the next day.

As the crow flies it's probably no more than five kilometres from PNYC to Misty Bay, but what with having to tack continuously because of the wind direction and the shape of the dam, we must have sailed a good 30km before we made it back through Big Bend, the Confluence and into Misty Bay where we dropped anchor a little after midday.

We had a swim, tidied up, had another swim and lunch and repeated our slothful and idle ways of the previous afternoon - in other words lazed and dozed until it was cool enough to start thinking of another swim and sundowners.

That evening the constantly changing splendour of the setting sun kept me busy with my camera (I was on a working holiday remember), while Linda concocted a vast salad out of our beginning-to-wilt greens. That and several sundowners made the night. We didn't even bother to listen to the radio, and had it not been for the occasional high-flying and unseen jet passing overhead, we could have been the only people on the dam.

Day 3 dawned as promising and bright as the previous two. The plan today was to crack on all sail and make for Deneysville, a long haul in Vaal Dam terms of nearly 10km.

For the sake of those who will seek to follow *Abstract Sun*'s wake someday it has to be chronicled here that Linda's insistence that morning that breakfast be more substantial than our normal fare of coffee and rusks, precipitated the first and only domestic crisis of the trip.

So far our few meals had been simple affairs - biscuits, canned tuna and the like, with left-overs, cans and paper plates sealed in plastic bags and deposited in one large plastic shopping bag. Without putting too fine a point to it, by Day 3 the nearly-full garbage bag was... well not very nice.



PORT o'CALL IS A

PICNIC

YOU'RE

AND INVITED

AND WHILE YOU'RE HERE, WE'D LIKE
YOU TO SEE OUR BOATS!!

SEE YOU
SUNDAY!

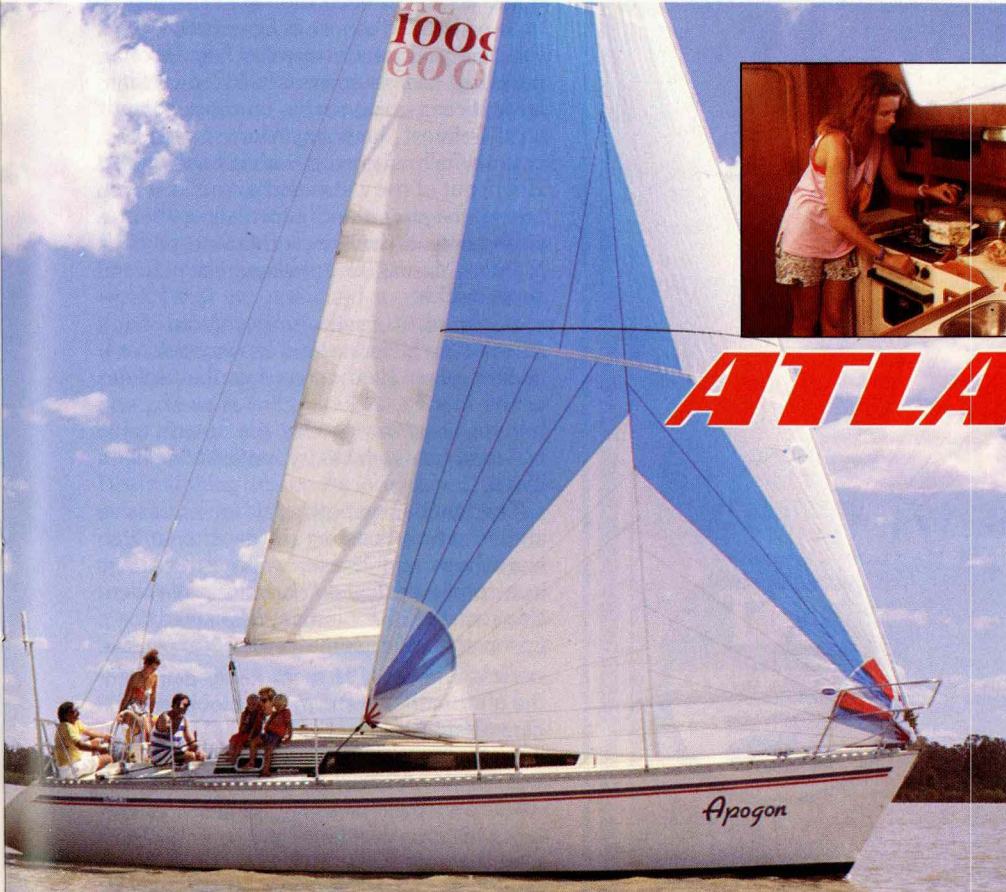
PORT o'CALL

South Africa's most complete boating venue

Port o'Call
Sandy Bay, Vaal Dam
Telephone (01618) 315
PO Box 1460 Vereeniging 1930
Republic of South Africa

Member of the Boating Industry Association of South Africa





ATLANTIS 36

This Lavranos-designed craft has been built to the highest quality standards. The Atlantis 36 incorporates features on a par with international developments.

For more information and to truly appreciate the asset of sailing the Atlantis 36, call Heinz Lindner on: (011) 622-2670/1/2 today, or contact Durban: Agenda Yacht Services (031) 301-4630, Cape Town: Action Yachting (021) 419-4835.





LINDNER YACHTS

FACTORY: 320 MAIN REEF ROAD, DENVER.
P.O. BOX 95167, GRANT PARK 2051. TELEPHONE: 622-2670/1/2.

SAIL THE CREST OF INVESTMENT

THE ATLANTIS 36 — AN IDEAL HEDGE AGAINST INFLATION.

Linda's substantial breakfast of fried eggs, onion and sausage topped the eaters and the bag and hence the problem - what do you do with a full garbage bag on a very small yacht?

Linda favoured sealing the full bag with masking tape and then putting the unwanted and smelly packet in *Abstract Sun's* little anchor hatch until we could dispose of it later that day if and when we reached Deneysville. My solution, which bordered on the genius if I may say so myself, was to pull *Bovril* in at the end of her long tether line and toss the rubbish into her. Which I did.

Linda was shocked. "I don't believe it," she said bitterly. "Our little *Bovril* has served us faithfully for 10 years and on three oceans, only to become a garbage scow on Vaal Dam."

"Well," I said defensively, "it's either *Bovril* or us. And besides, she's used to smelly things, like all those mullet that used to jump into her in Durban."

With Linda still muttering angrily to herself, we upped anchor and just after 7am headed for Deneysville, setting a course that would keep us well clear of Villain Point. Once clear of Villain Point the course is almost due west for Deneysville. Not that

we even bothered to use boat's compass considering we could see our destination on the horizon.

The same, faithful northerly was still blowing, so we enjoyed broad-reaching at a good rate for a few hours, only slowing down when the wind dropped and we started looking out for Beacon Island which the chart shows was lying between us and the impressive lump of yacht masts and buildings we were aiming for.

Neither Linda or I had been here before so couldn't identify the location of the masts. We thought it might be the Deneysville Aquatic Club because of its proximity to the dam wall which we could see and the fact that clearly visible to the south were two separate clumps of masts which the chart suggested could be Castle Marina and Lake Denys Yacht Club.

At that point however being some 2km out our immediate worry was not identifying local yacht club's and marinas but the location of Beacon Island which we figured should be no more than a few hundred metres ahead of us.

Eventually eagle-eyed Navigator standing in the bows spotted a slender pole in the water. "Perhaps the rising water of the dam have covered the island completely," she guessed - correctly (by 30 feet we were told).

Giving the pole a wide berth we approached closer under power and around 11am anchored off Dick Manten's marina which is dominated by a large flying-saucer like building.

We tidied up *Abstract Sun*, dressed (swim togs had been the rig of the day so far) and headed ashore in *Bovril* to see what the fleshpots of Deneysville had to offer, paddling past numerous and some very large, ocean-going yachts on moorings.

"It's almost like going ashore in a foreign country," Linda enthused as we pulled *Bovril* out of the water and set off in search of a garbage can and information about a stranger's welcome or otherwise at Dick Manten Marina, and the nearest pub and supermarket.

Both were forthcoming from Dick Manten (jnr). He assured us we could stay as long as we liked, offered us the facilities of the marina, including hot showers, and told us how to get to the town's only watering hole, a hostelry named Vaal Dam Hotel.

The marina, we noticed, is an impressive infrastructure boasting slipways, boat lifts, workshops, clubhouse, walk-on moorings in a totally enclosed "harbour". We were also struck by the number of damaged boats up on the hard, some of them expensive vessels and most of them badly damaged, the aftermath of a storm that clobbered the dam about a month before.

Appreciating the chance to stretch our legs, Linda and I set off for town along dirt roads and past pleasant homes and cottages. Before the dam rose to its present level the walk from the marina to the hotel would have taken one along a road skirting the edge of the dam. Most of that road is

now under water, and we were forced to make several "inland" detours, which considerably added to the distance we had to walk - and our thirst.

Eventually our footsteps took us down a tree-lined lane towards the hotel which is right on the water's edge and surrounded by trees. And yes, the beer was cold and welcome.

But, the real object in mentioning the hotel is that it is a convenient point to throw in a little bit of interesting aviation history which I unearthed while reading about the dam before we left Durban.

Few South Africans under the age, say, of 20-30, would know that Durban was once the African end of the line for the old Imperial Airways bi-weekly flying boat service from Southampton in England which commenced on January 6, 1937.

Fewer still know that Vaal Dam was not only a regular calling place during the war and until 1947 for south-bound BOAC (formerly Imperial Airways) operating flying boats on the "Horseshoe" route (Southampton - Vaal Dam - Durban - Calcutta) but was also the base of a large flying school set up by BOAC to train its own flying boat crews and also aircrews for the RAF.

Paging through some back copies of *Wings* magazine at Durban's reference library recently I learned that Imperial Airways used Short C-Class flying boats when they inaugurated their service to South Africa. After the war and until the service ceased operations in 1947, Short Solents were used, being a long range civil derivative of the Short Seaforth which in turn had evolved from the famous Short Sunderland.

A *Wings* journalist describing a short flight in a Solent waxed almost lyrical on their luxurious appointments - library, cocktail bar, smoking room, lounge - and proper food served on proper plates.

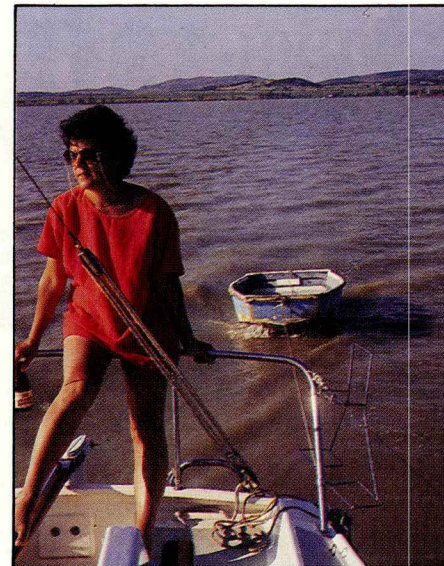
Ah, *sic transit gloria*.

Knowing all this I was quite interested therefore when we arrived at Deneysville to find out if anything - buildings, slipways, workshops etc remained to remind locals of a time when their sleepy little dam-side dorp was once a major staging post during one of the most momentous and romantic eras of civil aviation.

By chance the solitary customer I found in the Vaal Dam Hotel's men's bar when I went looking for service introduced himself as a Johannesburg yachtsman down for the day to work on his yacht. He joined Linda and I on the verandah and when I mentioned my interest in the flying boats, he surprised me by saying that the owner of the hotel had told him that BOAC passengers had used the hotel as a sort of civilised air terminal.

It did not take much imagination to picture the scene those days. Passengers waiting to catch their flight to Durban and further could spend a night in the hotel and relax on the verandah until they were called to catch the ferry to their flying boat lying no more than a few hundred yards off.

No waiting at check-in points, no security



The First Mate was very unhappy about *Bovril's* relegation to a garbage scow, and turned to the bottle for solace and comfort.

searches, no annoying bells/charms announcing arrivals/departures. It would have all been very pukka and civilized.

"Well, that was all very interesting," Linda remarked as we strolled back to Dick Manten's marina.

It was, but not half as interesting as what I subsequently found out. More of that later.

Back on *Abstract Sun* we took it easy for the rest of the afternoon, being somewhat tired from the long walk and wrung-out by the heat and sticky atmosphere.

All we were both looking forward to was a quick trip ashore later and a shower before a few sundowners, supper and bed. On schedule the next day was a bit of sight-seeing and a few business calls.

Oh foolish mortals that we were... we were yet to learn that whatever gods control the forces of nature at sea are not averse to meddling with inland waters as well. Drat 'em.

Our lesson was learned as we sat in *Abstract Sun's* cockpit that evening enjoying a spectacular thunderstorm that came marching up from the south, engulfing blue sky before it until the whole southern and western horizons were black and shooting out angry bolts of lightning in all directions.

"Goodness golly" (or words to that effect) said Linda nervously when a sheet of lightning flickered across the whole sky and rolling thunder shook the boat and air around us, "I hope it doesn't start raining here as well."

As it happens it didn't, other than a few heavy drops, but the wind started picking up quite noticeably, setting up a deafening clamour of rattling halyards and short, very choppy waves that soon had *Abstract Sun* and every boat on moorings plunging wildly and uncomfortably.

Fortunately I had stowed the genoa away before we walked to town that morning, so didn't have to worry about it. But I was worried about our anchor - a small Bruce - dragging, so crawled up to the bows and let out a lot more line. I then returned to

NORLAM[®] C-CUT[™]

CRUISING GENOA

NORLAM[®] -EXCLUSIVE
NORTH CLOTH IS TOUGH
AND STRETCHES 50%
LESS THAN DACRON

AEROLUFF[®] NORTH
UNIQUE SAIL FLATTENING
SYSTEM MAKES
EFFECTIVE REEFING
POSSIBLE

FAST: NORTH COMPUTER
DESIGN ENSURES TOP
PERFORMANCE

GRADED WEIGHT-
RADIAL CLOTH PANELS
ORIENTED IN LOAD
DIRECTION

BUILT IN U/V
PROTECTION LEECH
AND FOOT

DURABLE
HEAVY
FOOT
PANELS

STRONG:
RADIAL CORNERS
DISTRIBUTE
LOADS EVENLY

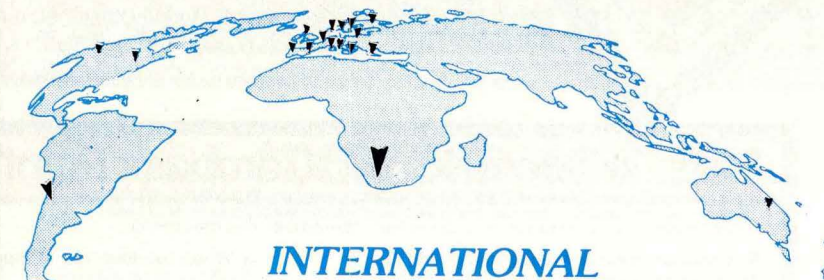


LOFTS AT:
DURBAN: 30 Victoria Embankment, Durban 4001
Tel: (031) 323624
CAPE TOWN: 299 Albert Road, Woodstock CT.
Tel: (021) 477336/7
TRANSVAAL SERVICE: BOATWISE:
59 - 4th Avenue, Linden
Tel: (011) 782-2819

BETTER IDEAS FOR TODAY'S CRUISING SAILOR

Whitlock

STEERING SYSTEMS AROUND THE WORLD



INTERNATIONAL
SALES & SERVICE

- OPEN WIRE SYSTEMS
- CABLE AND CONDUIT
- COBRA SYSTEM

- DIRECT TRANSMISSION
- HYDRAULIC SYSTEMS
- AUTO PILOT DRIVES

powermarine
AND MACHINE (PTY) LTD

P.O. Box 88, Constantia 7848
Tel. No. (021) 73-6484, 73-5729
Telex No. 5-21510 S.A.
Fax No. (021) 62-1307

Still, the flying-boat memories linger...

Julien Girard, the proprietor of a boating shop whom I met in Deneysville when we called there, has a few pictures of flying boats in his office. Through him and a SAA pilot who also lives in Deneysville, Vim Hoek, I managed to trace the photographs to the Public Relations Section of the South African Transport Services whose chief photographer, Vernon Gilroy, went to considerable trouble to find the original negatives (they were in SATS archives) and ran off a few prints for me.

Julien also gave me the name of a Mr Noel Joubert of Deneysville who was based for a while at Deneysville during the war and who used to fly flying boats.

Unfortunately I never met Mr Joubert, but in a telephone conversation he told me that the present Vaal Dam Hotel was actually taken over by BOAC during the war and that until the recent raising of the dam walls and subsequent increase in its water capacity, one could still find old jetty pilings and building etc near the Deneysville Aquatic Club which were once part of the BOAC flying school and base operations infrastructure.

He also told me that when he was there they flew a Short C-Class boat called *Cathay* (apparently a painting of the *Cathay* can be found in Deneysville municipal offices) and that a typical training flight could take them to Victoria Falls, Lourenco



Passengers disembarking from a Short Solent flying boat (British registration G-AHIN) at Vaal Dam, probably in 1947. The spit of land to the right with trees is the present sight of Dick Manten's marina. Note the smartly uniformed launch crews — and hats and suits worn by the passengers. (Photo courtesy SATS).

Marques (now Maputo) and Durban.

I asked him if bad weather and choppy water ever posed a problem to the big flying boats.

On the contrary, he said, and explained that it was only when there was no wind and the water absolutely calm, that they had difficulty landing.

"Because the water was so calm

it tended to reflect the sky and clouds, and it was almost impossible for the pilot to judge his height above the water. In conditions like these we used to either make our final landing approach over land or radio base and ask them to send a power boat out to break up the calm surface of the water and leave a wake."

the cockpit and Linda and I made mental notes of our position in relation to anyone of a dozen or so yachts around us so that we could see if we were dragging or not.

I was not so much worried about any personal danger, because if the worse came to the worse it would be a simple matter to swim ashore. I was worried about the anchor dragging or, far more likely, a mooring cleat actually being pulled out of the decks by the violent snubbing caused by the choppy water.

If we dragged or had a mooring cleat pull out, we decided, *Abstract Sun* would simply drift downwind towards dozens of other moored boats. If so, we could probably hook onto another boat, or hopefully, have our own dragging anchor take hold. Linda generously added another weapon to our survival arsenal.

"If we tie all the sheets and ropes we can find to make one long line, you should be able to swim an end to that nearby boat and we can tie up to it," she suggested.

It was a possibility, I owned, but not a very attractive one. In any case by then the storm had definitely moved past us and

CLOSING DOWN SALE

ALL ITEMS MUST GO!

highest offer above reserve secures the purchase.
(reserve calculated on landed cost)

Trade enquiries welcome

YACHTING INTERNATIONAL

SHOP 4 & 5 RAND ARCADE, 170 HENDRIK VERWOERD DRIVE,
RANDBURG. TELEPHONE (011) 789-4829/30.
PO BOX 910 HONEYDEW 2040. TELEX 42-5023.

the southern evening sky was clearing. After blowing furiously for about half an hour the wind dropped and even the lightning and thunder seemed further away.

Linda and I looked at each. Perhaps our fears of having to spend the night on anchor watch, cold and hungry, were groundless.

Ten minutes later all was calm, and Linda actually poured us each a sundowner. We'd decided to give the weather another half an hour to settle and then row ashore for a shower.

Just then a small red workboat with enormous outboard raced up and stopped behind us, heaving and tossing on the still very choppy water. It was Dick Manten (jnr).

"I think you two should come and spend the night in our marina instead of lying here," he called out.

I thanked him for his concern and generous offer and pointed at the departing storm. "I think we'll be fine now," I told him.

Dick laughed. "That's what you think. Vaal storms always come back even stronger than before."

Hardly had he spoken when the wind picked up suddenly and with such force that *Abstract Sun* was covered in flying spray.

To cut a long story short Dick renewed his invitation to spend the night in their sheltered and safe marina, but by now the wind and seas were far more than *Abstract Sun's* little outboard could handle, so buoying the anchor with a fender, we accepted a line from Dick and he towed us skillfully to his marina.

Hardly had we secured *Abstract Sun* to a stout mooring line when the gale returned as promised – and twice as furious.

By then it was almost dark, and too rough even to contemplate cooking, so we went to bed – grateful beyond measure for the concern and generosity of Dick Manten to

a couple of passing strangers.

I'd be less than truthful if I didn't admit here and now that we were both shattered by the experience. Neither of us had dreamt for a moment that the Vaal Dam was capable of becoming so incredibly violent. Again, the worry was not so much for our own hides, but for the borrowed boat. The next morning we looked at the sad, shattered yachts in Dick Manten's yard and realized that but for the holding power of *Abstract Sun's* little Bruce anchor and Dick Manten's insistence that we shelter in the marina, she too could have been up on the hard awaiting major repair.

The realisation that things could so easily go wrong on what we had come to regard as a very benign Vaal Dam, brought about a change in our cruising schedule. We were not due to return the boat until Saturday morning, but had intended to hand her over to Brian Cousins at Port O'Call on Friday afternoon because we had been invited to spend Friday night and the week-end with friends at Loch Vaal near Van der Byl Park.

Over coffee that morning we both agreed we'd be much happier if *Abstract Sun* was nearer home and preferably on her own moorings. We had intended sailing back to Port O' Call on Thursday afternoon, which would have given us Friday morning to move off the boat. Instead, we decided, we'd sail today (Wednesday) for Aloe Fjord, spend the night there and then make the final 2km run home after breakfast.

After coffee I took *Abstract Sun's* spare fuel jerry can ashore, bought some fuel, thanked Dick for his help and hospitality, and returned to the boat. Half an hour later (but only after retrieving the buoyed anchor) we were sailing briskly for Aloe Fjord, *Abstract Sun* healing gently under a full genoa and main, and *Bovril* following faithfully behind.

"If the wind holds we'll be in Aloe Fjord

before lunch, and if it doesn't we've got enough fuel to motor," I reassured Linda for whom, I suspect, the cruise had somewhat turned sour thanks to last night's gale.

The northern end of Vaal Dam isn't all that exciting but we were both impressed with Aloe Fjord when we arrived there and "nicked" a vacant buoy amongst a whole fleet of small and not-so small yachts.

The fjord itself is fairly large and has at its very end the Vaal Cruising Association and a holiday resort complete with rondavels and a licensed bar/restaurant/dance hall facility.

We rowed ashore and pulled *Bovril* up under some trees. The effects of the full-dam were very evident here. Some derelict buildings half under water and numerous braais sitting incongruously in shallow water a few yards from the water's edge.

The resort is being extensively up-rated, and manager Japie Malan who took time off from a business meeting to find some cold beers for two thirsty visitors, told us that visiting yachtsmen could always be assured of a welcome at the resort and could enjoy its facilities, including restaurant, well-stocked little store and swimming pool.

Fuel and gas is available at the New Aloe Fjord resort as well, in case you're wondering.

By now we were beginning to feel that familiar "let down... end-of-the-holiday" feeling, which just as quickly turns to a downright "I-want-to-go-home" feeling.

There's absolutely no reason why around 5pm that afternoon that I started feeling uneasy. There wasn't a breath of wind, no signs of bad weather or anything to threaten the utter tranquility of being on mooring in the middle of a protected anchorage. But I was, and in the midst of Linda quoting a list of options for our supper that night, I told her that I thought we should get the anchor up and get back to Sandy Bay as soon as possible.

Linda didn't demur, and within minutes we were motoring towards the entrance of Aloe Fjord, both feeling a little foolish at what appeared to be groundless fears, but nevertheless relieved.

With no wind to help us, we had to motor the whole way, and it took nearly an hour before we entered Port O'Call and tied *Abstract Sun* on her own mooring. It was still light so we had time to fold up and bag the genoa and put the cover on the mainsail.

Then, sundowners in hand, we sat in *Abstract Sun's* ample cockpit and watched darkness chase away the last lingering traces of pink and red in the western sky.

Linda stirred. "This time last night we were wondering if we'd end up on the rocks," she remarked.

Half an hour later we were fearing the same fate. For the second evening in succession the Vaal Dam showed us the unpleasant and dangerous side of its face... but that's another story.

RFD

SALES AND SERVICE
LIFE RAFTS SAFETY EQUIPMENT
INFLATABLE BOATS

CAPE TOWN
unilog
P.O. Box 4161
Cape Town 8000 Telephone: 217266

DURBAN
unilog
P.O. Box 29143
Maydon Wharf 4057
Telephone: 259481
A member of the Grincor Group

SEASAVA plus
Measuring up to every emergency at sea.
Weather resistance – ruggedness – stability – visibility.

SURVIVA liferafts
Comprehensive tests ensure maximum reliability.
Impact resistance – weather resistance – ruggedness – stability – visibility – insulation.

unicorn