

RATLINES – JANUARY 2026

The official newsletter of the
Wooden Boat Association of Cairns, Inc.
ABN 56 194 994 249

Current Membership: 29

Membership renewal: contact Richard at wbacairns@gmail.com

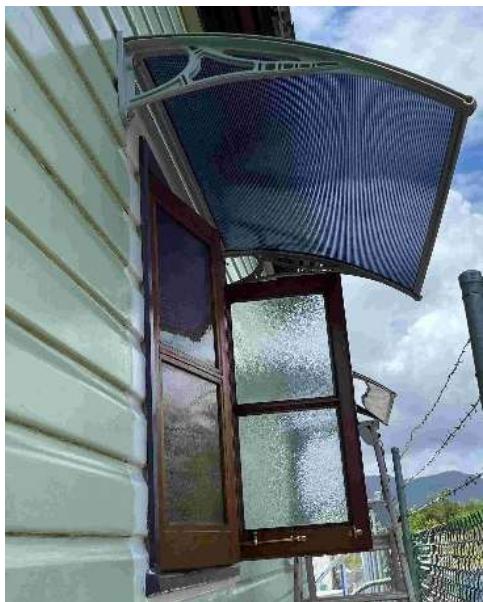
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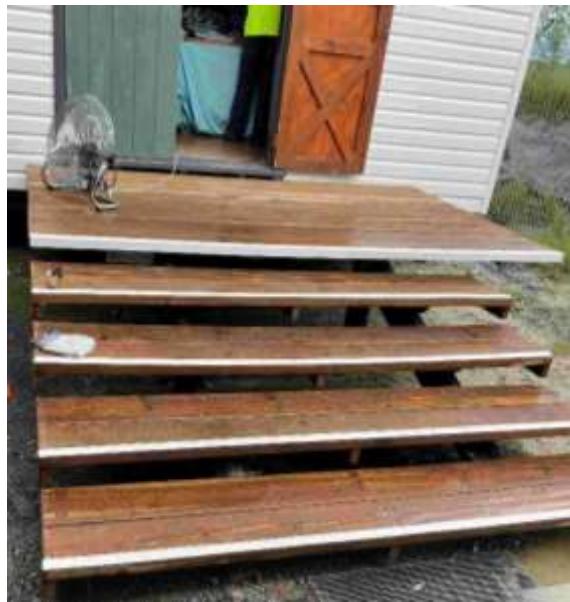


CLUBHOUSE REDEVELOPMENT

Tom has made more impressive progress smartening up the clubhouse, despite the summer heat. And an electrician has installed nifty drop-down power points in the big shed.



**Casement windows
refurbished, varnished and
protected by new awnings**



**White stripes on the steps for
the benefit of the stumble-prone
Secretary and others**



PROJECT SCOOP

Richard reports on recent progress

Thanks to our gaggle of old blokes (Chris, Tom, Glen and Richard), *Scoop* continues to progress with a few changes in the air and some innovative solutions.

Following an earlier change of design when we came to make the templates for the inner side of the hulls, having finished the bottom sheeting, we found that the bows of the hulls had a rounded shape whereas the rest of each hull had a sharp crisp vertical line. So, after some discussion we decided to remove the last section of the lower frame on the bow and reinsert a custom-made solid replacement that restored the crisp vertical lines of each hull. Fiddly careful work but very satisfying as it comes together.



As our work progressed, our chief ancient mariner demonstrated some interesting tricks of the trade, including making our own tools - such as a simple wooden clamp to maintain the bend in timber while we mark the line to cut, a wooden gadget to mark the line of planing for the overhanging ply along the edge of the hulls and, my favourite, a long purpose-built chisel crafted from a lump of steel found on the deck of a navy vessel!

Glen has started the transom supports with a lot of concentration needed to get the joints up to the boss's satisfaction. I think we should provide a mobile stool for him to scoot around on.

Tom has again put his talents to good use milling more timber for the keel and a solid extension for the bow that will have hand holding cut-outs to rescue old blokes from the lake.

Sitting on the bottom of the boat planing off the overhanging ply was a challenge, but again satisfying when the stringers and ply were like one.

Over the next few weeks, we hope to have the bow modification complete and start on the ply sheeting on the inside of the hulls.



CHINA BOUND SHAPES UP

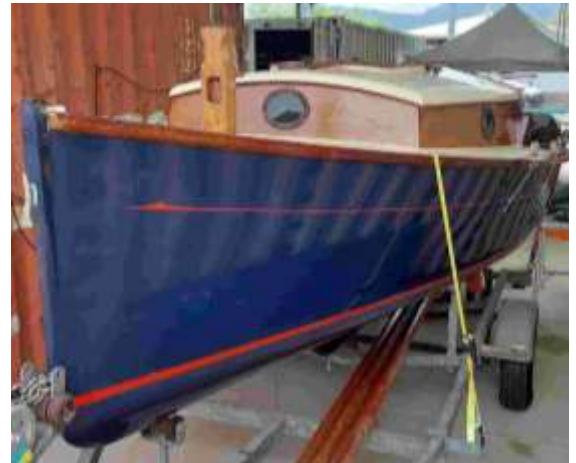
Luis and Sandra report on the restoration of *China Bound*, their 20ft trailer sailer cutter designed by Scruffie Marine, which has been moved into the work bay left vacant by the departure of Roger's *Bitaki Taari*.

We are so excited to have our boat *China bound* at the new club house to finish her restoration.



Luis joined the club back in 2022 and soon after heard that this beautiful boat was for sale. Luis had started the sanding under Tom's advice but with a new mast, tiller and bowsprit needed, and that endless sanding, we really need the encouragement and collaboration of everyone who is keen to be involved.

We have been enjoying getting to know this special bunch of people at the Christmas parties and Tinaroo raids and we officially joined as a family in 2025. The campsite did get quite a bit noisier in the last couple of years! We appreciate the tolerance for the teenagers, they even participated in a race or two.





Sandra has been trying to get as much sailing experience as possible and now has her boat licence and competent crew certificate. The whole family passed our dinghy sailing certificates after a 2-day course. We just need a boat to be able to put the theory in to practice!



Reinventing the Wheel

Roger explains BT's conversion from tiller to wheel steering

Traditionally Bitaki Taari (BT) was steered with a tiller. This meant that the steersperson (let's not be sexist!!), was standing/seated at the stern, with one hand behind holding onto the tiller. Not always comfortable on a long day.

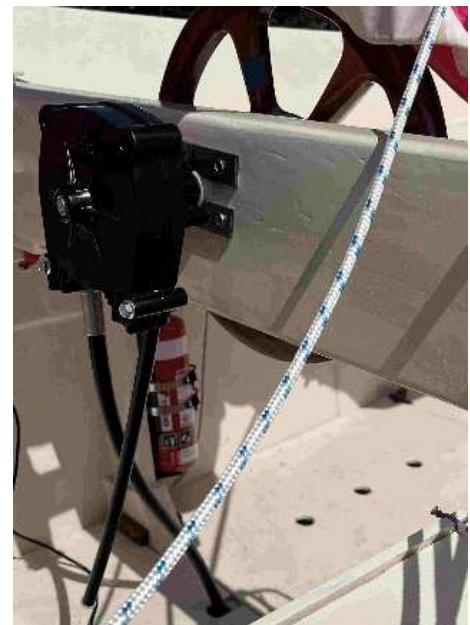
This had/has at least two issues. The tiller could not be left unattended as the boat tended to just head into the wind and the steersperson had to step over two beams to get to the base of the mast to adjust sails. The third issue was the extra weight of the steersperson at the back of the boat. With the narrow hull of a trimaran, this tended to make the stern drag.



Being a bit untraditional, I decided that we should convert to wheel steering mounted on the forward side of the aft cross beam. This meant that the steersman (me) could get to the base of the mast easily, and it moved my weight forward.

Various suggestions were made by the WBAC group and mostly rejected! In the end I went for reliability and bought a commercial steering mechanism, with a cheap plastic wheel. The latter was a stop gap until I could make a wooden one.

Keven and I had several discussions and came up with a mechanism that seemed right to us. It involves a long bolt through the top of the rudder housing. This bolt is attached to the end of the steering cable by a pivot point. It was approved by the WBAC experts, Glen and Chris, and so we reinforced the top of the rudder housing, and Keven welded a fitting onto the bolt to create the pivot point. The steering cable also had to be anchored to the rear deck with a semi-moveable fitting to allow for the end fitting to move in an arc.



With all fitted together, yes, the rudder moved, but the plastic wheel was a bit of an eyesore. Then on Christmas morning I got a lovely text from Mark Heaton, offering me a beautiful wooden steering wheel he had made. After grateful thanks, I collected the wheel and it was just right! So, the plastic wheel was hacksawed to bits so I could rescue the central keyed socket that fitted onto the commercial mechanism. This socket was epoxied into the centre of the wooden wheel, and the hole fitted perfectly. Amazing.



The benefits of the wheel are that with a worm drive to the cable, the wheel and rudder stay in position when left to their own devices, so sail handling is easier. With this stability, steering is easier and requires less exertion. I don't have to constantly hold the tiller to counteract the wind.

Overall, I'm very happy with the conversion, though my brain is still coming to terms with which direction I have to move the wheel!! Just ask Tom!!



Roger Fryer
31 Jan 2026



Safe 'n' Simple Mast Raising



Dermot's only concern about his and Christina's recent acquisition of the Hartley 16ft trailer sailer, *Whileaway*, was whether they would be up to raising the mast in the recommended fashion – by hand. This technique involves manually raising the mast as high as possible while standing in the cockpit, then walking forward and clambering onto the cabin top while pushing the mast higher and higher – making sure the mast remains vertical in the process – until the mast is upright and supported by the port and starboard stays.



Dermot's concern was heightened by the experience of the previous owner whose first attempt at mast-raising resulted in a calamitous fall of mast and owner that ripped the hinge fitting out of the cabin top and inflicted significant injuries on the owner. Although the owner recovered, repaired the damage, successfully mastered the art of manual mast-raising and enjoyed six years of happy lake sailing, his decision to sell the boat related to increasing difficulties in mast raising now that he's in his early eighties – an age bracket alarmingly close to Dermot's!

Having bought the boat despite these mast-falling anxieties, Dermot was keen to come up with a system that didn't involve him bearing the weight of the mast while teetering along the cockpit and onto the cabin roof. For example, could the trailer winch be persuaded to raise the mast?

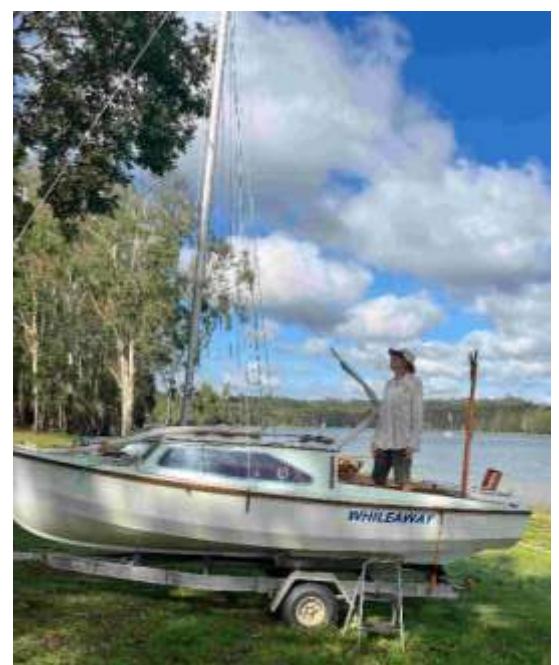
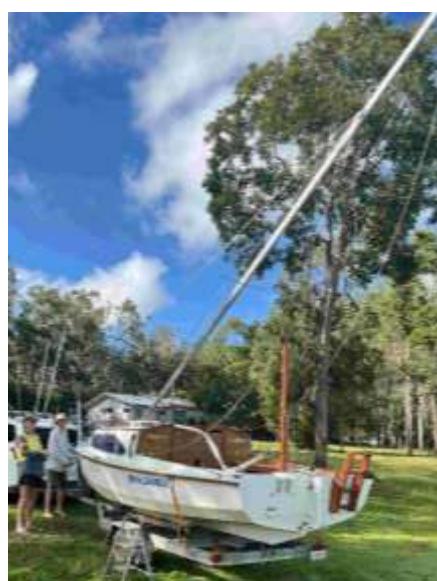
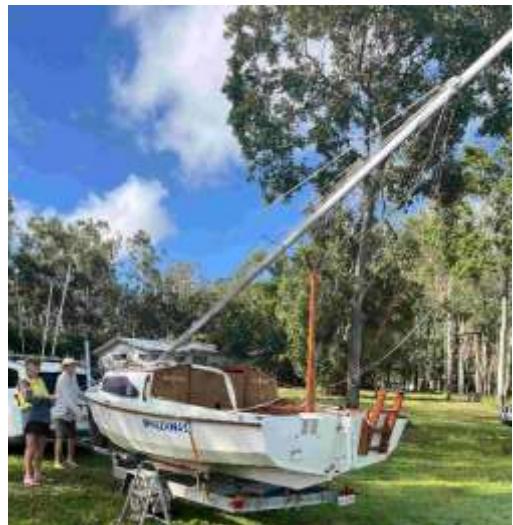
The answer was yes, thanks to the design of the trailer which includes an upward-facing open-ended steel box section just forward on the trailer winch.

The drum of an old trailer winch was attached to a 1.5 metre length of 40 x40 mm steel box section, which can be inserted into the upward-facing box section on the trailer. Threading the trailer winch rope around the repurposed old winch drum and attaching it to a rope secured near the mast-top increased the angle of the winch rope to the horizontal mast from zero degrees to something closer to 20 degrees. Then, by lifting the mast top and resting it on a taller prop than the one used when trailering, the winch-rope-to-mast angle increased further.



After a few experiments, Dermot found that a combination of a 2m mast prop and a 1.5m winch height-extender enabled the winch to raise and lower the mast with relative ease.

The final piece of the engineering puzzle was to attach lengths of 6mm blue & yellow polypropylene “Telstra” rope high up on the mast and thread them through the jib sheet fairleads for use as lateral stabilisers during mast raising and lowering. During raising and lowering operations the lateral stabiliser ropes are handheld (by the winch operator or preferably by willing helpers) and adjusted to maintain the mast centrally aligned as it goes up or down.



How to *Whileaway* a day

Lake Tinaroo Thursday 29 January 2026

Rain, rain, the odd thunderstorm with more rain! The lead up to Thursday's lake trip was not promising, but Dermot has a direct connection to the weather Gods and assured the believers that it would be benign. He was correct, as he usually is, unless he disagrees with Roger!!

A motley crew assembled at the appointed hour and place, except for Roger and Tom, who had a slow run up the range. With Iona still missing her gaff, Tom came up with Roger to offer advice on how to sail *Bitaki Taari* (BT from now on).

Christina had generously allowed Dermot to use her boat, *Whileaway*, with strict instructions that no electrons were allowed on board. In true WBAC tradition, Dermot ignored these and had his backup electric motor on the stern.

Phill was early with Yabby, putt-putting around the bay and Richard took *Ninanji* for a sail early. Matthew, on leave from Port Moresby, had arrived to take part in the day, John Breen was helping all to prepare and it was good to see Peter and Gail Rountree up and about. Peter was keen for some fun in his dinghy with the multi-coloured sails.



While Roger and Tom prepared BT, the early birds had their trip around the bay. Roger was a little confused while talking to Richard to see *Ninanji* out on the water. It was John, giving her a try out. Notably he chose not to disembark using Richard's signature full-immersion technique he had demonstrated earlier.



The usual coffee and cake were consumed and the world's problems solved. Roger seated on the ground as Tom had stolen his chair!

The MC for the day, Dermot, determined that Platypus Point was the place for lunch, so final preps were made. Peter and Gayle declined to come over, but stayed at the TSC, and Phillip decided to stay with them and give *Yabby* a run around the bay. John, having provided Roger with some sage advice, and had his brains picked, decided to head home before he got into trouble.



So only the three sailing boats set off into a nice breeze. *Ninanj* had a head start and Richard did not hang around. Soon his sail was seen at Platypus Point. *Whileaway*, with Dermot and Matthew aboard, were enjoying the conditions. *Whileaway* is a Hartley 16 trailer sailer and goes very well with a nice breeze. Apparently, Christina had missed the pleasures of true sailing and so she and Dermot bought *Whileaway* to add to their fleet.



BT got underway with little engine help and soon caught up to *Whileaway*. Roger was keen to try the new steering mechanism and his just-installed-GPS. It was noticeable that *Whileaway* pointed better into the wind than *BT*, something not helped by her having a dodgy helmsman, more intent on playing with his new toy than on steering a proper course. (That's according to Tom!!) After nearly running into *Whileaway*, things settled down a little.

However, the new steering mechanism worked a treat. The wheel, made by Mark Heaton, looks the part and, together with a commercial mechanism connecting it with the rudder, makes *BT* much easier to steer, maintains the rudder position and is lighter on the touch. The biggest problem is/was, in Roger's head (not unusual!), with him tending to turn the wheel the wrong way. This did not help keeping course, so the trip to Platypus Point took two "going abouts" and a final run-in on the motor. Tom providing good advice en-route.



Lunch on the grass in the shade was a leisurely affair. Matthew and Tom were telling stories of their time in Port Moresby, while Roger, Dermot and Richard were catching up with local news and events. The chair had been left behind, so there was no arguing about who should sit on it!

Dermot wished to go exploring up the nearby creek in *Whileaway* with the electric outboard, (If Christina reads this he is in trouble!) so he and Richard set off, and Matthew came aboard *BT* for the trip back to the Sailing Club. With the GPS turned off, Roger could concentrate more on sailing, and the trip back was a lot of fun, as *BT* picked up speed in the freshening breeze and Roger soon realised that going about was preferable to running ashore! However, afternoon tea was needed, so the Sailing Club was reached but with the wind in a different direction to usual, *BT* needed a stern anchor to prevent the amas being damaged on the shore in the choppy conditions.

Looking back across the lake, *Whileaway* and *Ninanji* had sails up and were heading back. Well, more or less. Richard took the long way home to reduce the risk of *Ninanji* tipping, while Dermot realised that sailing with a crew member is easier than sailing solo, especially when trying to drop or raise the centre board and steer simultaneously!

A tired but happy crew, packed up the boats and headed for home. The weather had been fine, no-one got towed and engines started as required,



DUST EXTRACTOR DEMO



Tom (and Sandy) demonstrating our new high-tech dust extractor and face-shield - purchased with a grant from the Australian Men's Shed Association.

Ladies and Gents, this concludes *Ratlines* for January 2026 and, as always, if there's more you want to see or know about, please contact us by return email. Likewise, if you have a story or article you'd like included please send it to us at wbacairns@gmail.com

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