

EXPLORERS FIVE

One summer evening a Torrens Rowing Club crew of four oarsmen and a coxswain departed from the Port Adelaide Rowing Club ramp for their usual night training row. The crew decided to take out a "Tub" instead of the usual racing four as a couple of them had changed from their usual positions to positions on the opposite side of the boat.

The water was fairly calm and a slight breeze was blowing, but the crew being experienced, were not affected by the conditions.

After passing under the Birkenhead Bridge, the boat moved down through the wharves, which are renowned for the swells that move backwards and forwards beneath the water, but this did not have any effect on the stability of the boat.

As the crew rowed further downstream, the wind blew up and waves with white caps appeared. About 2½ miles from the wharves it began to get really rough and just about this spot, a branch of the river swung to the East and was calm, as it was sheltered by mangroves on both sides.

The Stroke told the Coxswain to turn the boat into the arm, and when it was crossing the main stream it was bounced about like a cork by the side-on waves, which also splashed over the sides and made the crew wet and uncomfortable.

Another small inlet appeared to the South from the arm that they had entered, so it being calm, they turned into it and had a breather, as they had been rowing solidly all the way. The Bow Man remarked that if they kept on rowing up this arm they would eventually arrive back in the main Port River about 1¾ miles nearer the Club shed. His story was confirmed by the Stroke who said that they did it in the Maiden 8 in 1950. The other two members of the crew were a bit dubious, but as the arm appeared to swing back to the West, they thought that the others could be right.

The crew took the boat away to a good start and settled down to a steady row with the Cox steering the boat gently to the West following the course of the arm. The members of the crew realized that something was wrong with the course taken when they came to a pipeline about 3 feet above the water level supported on piles, but as time was getting on they decided to go on. The others still said they had come up this arm in the Maiden 8 in 1950, but must have branched off again before reaching the pipeline.

The boat was set in motion and the oars were pulled in and the boat coasted between two of the piles. The crew resumed rowing and the arm began to get shallower and narrower, so a vote was taken whether or not they should continue and see if it did eventually finish at the Port River. The adventurous spirit came to the fore and the crew rowed slowly on, nearer and nearer to the cranes and derricks on the wharves; the tops of which could be seen in the distance over the mangroves.

After running aground; extricating themselves; the crew followed a channel that seem to go in the direction of the wharves and was deeper than any of the others that branched off at that spot. This channel became narrower and narrower as it wound through the mangroves and the 2 Man suggested that it would most probably finish at a sewer outlet, but the others said it would finish near the wharves. It eventually became too narrow to row, so the Bow Man and the 2 Man took their oars out of the swivels, turned around in their seats and faced the direction that the boat was travelling and used the oars as canoe paddles. They paddled for about 10 minutes with the other members making remarks about Red Indians and warlike Natives. The Bow Man said the he had been in canoe races, but this was much more tiring and also more strenuous than rowing. The 2 Man heartily agreed with him.

After rounding a bend the crew were confronted with a concrete wall with overflow pipes set in it. The only thing to do was to alight and carry the "Tub" to the small Yacht Squadron Base at the Northern end of the wharves not very far distant, so it seemed, looking at the cranes and derricks. All out, and lift the boat was the

order: the portage was about to commence. After sinking up to their knees in mud and the 3 Man sitting down in it and losing his shoes and burrowing down for them, the crew eventually dragged the boat out of the water.

Away they went; the 4 Crew members carrying the boat and the Cox bringing up the rear carrying the four blades. The sight that confronted them when they eventually scrambled up to the top of the concrete wall was a couple of car tracks leading in the direction of the wharves, which were not as close as anticipated. They followed the track but it led to a gate into a shed, which was still a good way from the river. To carry it to the left would mean a hike of about 1½ miles, and then not be sure of finding a place to launch the boat. To the right was a slushy overflow from the sheds and a dump for the wharves of any old scrap metal or rubbish. The crew lowered the boat gently to the ground and the Bow Man went away to reconnoitre, to see if he could find the Yacht Base.

By this time the sun had set and twilight was nearly ended. The Bow Man came back and said that he had found a path through the slush where they would not sink down to their knees. After scrambling over old tins, railway lines and through slushy mud, they eventually came to some wheat sheds set back about 300 yards from the wharves. Following them in the direction of the wharves they were stopped this time by a wire fence. The Cox saw a pushbike light approaching, so he led the procession towards the direction from whence it came.

The Stroke called out and the man on the bike stopped and stared in amazement. When they moved nearer, he backed away, especially when the Cox asked him where the water was. He mumbled something about following the track that he had just come over. So off they tramped leaving a very bewildered cyclist wondering where five chaps would come from in the dark carrying a rowing boat.

They arrived at the Yacht Base, launched the boat with three hearty cheers, scrambled in and pushed off. As it was dark, the Cox stood up in his seat and directed the boat through the maze of yachts and buoys with the oarsmen hastily pulling oars in and out to miss them and calling out every now and again to the Cox when they approached buoys that he could not see. The boat eventually slipped onto the Port River, which by this time had barely a ripple on the surface, and was headed for the Club Shed.

When they arrived back at the Shed the other oarsmen said that they had wondered whether the crew had gone down to the Outer Harbour about 7 miles downstream; but when told what actually had happened they burst out laughing and thought that it should be put in the Odd Spot in the evening paper.

Even now the Coxswain refuses to take the crew out and the 1950 Maiden 8 is not mentioned in the presence of the 2 and 3 Men and the Coxswain.

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For the record: The crew:-

Bow	Ray Sykes
2	Jim Thompson
3	Bryan Draper
Stroke	Frank (Doc) O'Brien
Coxswain	Ken McCoy