

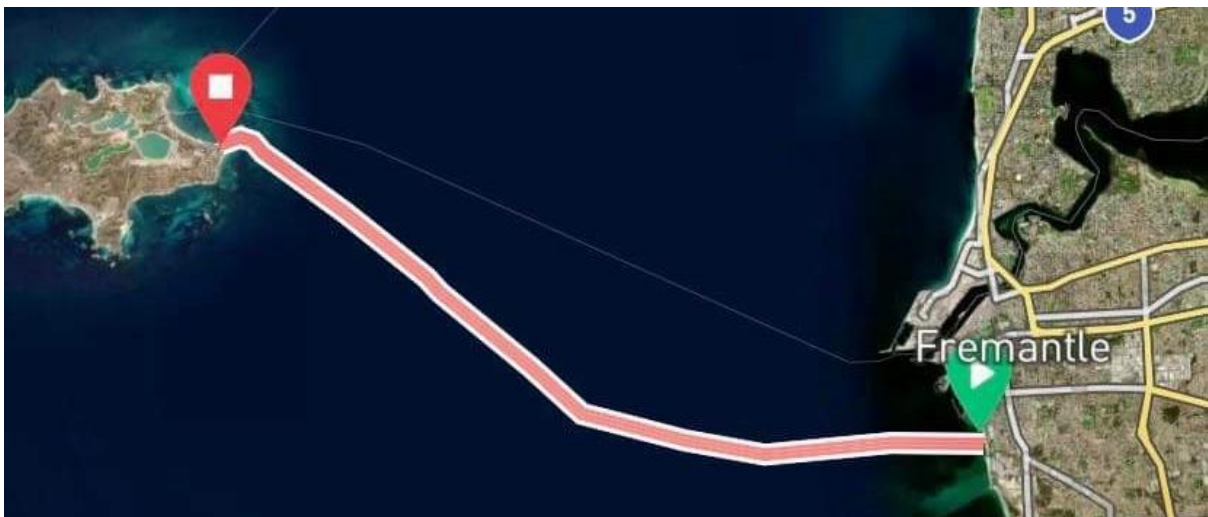
Trip report for the Rottnest island weekend 10-12 December 2023

The weather was pretty average for the week prior so the conditions were closely monitored for several days prior to our departure. I seemed to be constantly comparing Windy, BOM and Seabreeze, with BOM once again proving to be the most reliable. The forecast was for SE winds combined with south-westerly swell from the previous days' windy conditions. With the wind anticipated to turn more southerly as the morning progressed we decided on an early departure and at 7:15am four of us (Dave Oakley, Martin Brennan, Andrew Munyard and myself) headed off from South Beach with some relatively light winds and flat seas.



Heading off from South Beach

Initially we headed due west stopping just shy of the shipping channel for a drink having covered 7.5km in the first hour. From here we headed northwest, staying a couple of hundred metres east of Straggler Rocks and a long line of breakers caused by the southwest swell impacting the line of reefs heading north from Garden Island. A few isolated reefs along this track kept us on our toes, and the wind waves gave us some good assistance with a few good runs to be had. Once we cleared the northern edge of the reefs the south-westerly swell of 1.5-2m kicked in properly, and the interference between this and the wind waves made it a bit more interesting.



Our track from South Fremantle to Rottnest

At this point the windmill and lighthouses on Rottnest provided great landmarks and we continued on to the island. Dave and I thought we would be able to cut across the natural jetty at Phillip Point but were warned just in time by Andrew and skirted around the edge of the marker. I was wondering why that was there.....

We ultimately made landfall after 21.5 km and 3 hours of paddling. We probably couldn't have asked for better conditions with the wind behind us most of the way, giving us a real boost and making it a lot easier to cover the distance at a pretty fast pace. We didn't spot any wildlife along the way apart from a few

gannets and gulls that came to investigate, probably because someone had a tuna omelette for breakfast. It was a great experience and I look forward to doing it again someday.

Once we had dragged the kayaks up into the dunes, cleaned ourselves up we walked into town. Andrew's GPS told us that we only used 1000 calories on the way over, which seemed a bit low, but this deficit was easily replenished with a pie, a coffee and a chocolate bar. I didn't think a coffee had ever tasted quite that good (until the next day).

Once in town, we met up with Mark, T and Trevor who had just arrived on the ferry from Hillarys. Dinner comprised whatever everyone had brought over or purchased at the shop and some interesting trading went on to ensure everyone achieved a balanced diet for optimal paddling performance.

The next day conditions were still pretty windy with strong winds from the southeast, and after Damo arrived on the morning ferry we decided to paddle around the northern end of the island, and maybe try a spot of surfing.

This all sounds fairly innocuous, except that the first stop was the sandbar in Thomson Bay, where the combination of the swell and the wind waves made quite an amazing interference pattern. The more skilful paddlers did particularly well on the waves here, but halfway down my first wave I managed to tip over and had to try every self-rescue technique I could remember a few times in the chop, before finally managing to get back into my boat with Mark's assistance.



Dave Oakley carving it up along the sand bar

After this we headed further around the northern edge of the island, and worked our way between a myriad of reefs to Abraham Point, a total distance of about 12km. My boat ended up with a few less layers of gel coat over some of the very shallow reef, as it was really enjoyable cruising in among the bommies, several mushroom rocks, and a natural arch were able to paddle through. One highlight along the way was small tern hatchery where numerous baby terns were seen bathing under their parent's watchful eyes. Mark mentioned he had seen the same group in the same place the previous year so this tiny patch of exposed reef is clearly a favourite spot.

After a spot of lunch we turned around and came back with a bit of wind assistance, and Trevor tried out his sail a few times. The wind was fairly strong at this point, and getting back into Geordie Bay was a bit of a challenge, but the coffees and high calorie food options available made it all worth the effort. After the energy boost, we made our way back around Bathurst Point and headed for home, giving Damo and Dave another opportunity to take on the sand bar. With no more self-rescue techniques left in my quiver I decided to give it a miss this time around and the rest of us made our way back to the southern corner of Thomson Bay after about 24 km. After a cleanup and a break we all headed into town for great dinner at Frankies and called it quits for the day.



Saturday's paddle

After much debate about whether it was going to be possible to paddle back to the mainland on Sunday, the weather conditions made it a pretty unpalatable proposition with 20+ knots on the nose so we organised a ferry and paddled over to the jetty, loaded the kayaks on board (and extra paragraph could be written about the fun times getting the kayaks on and off the ferry but I will leave that part up to your imagination) and made our way home. It was a great trip, and I look forward to the next one. Thanks to Mark for organising it all and to those who planned ahead for us all and ran the gauntlet of the Rotten booking system to get us the house.

Cheers Pip



PS it was suggested that I get Chat GPT to write this report but instead I decided to write it and then get ChatGPT to rewrite into a pirate adventure. Let me know which one you prefer.

Ahoy there! Gather 'round, me hearties, and let me spin ye a tale of our grand adventure upon the treacherous seas surrounding Rottnest Island in the year of our Lord 2023. We, a brave crew of seafarers, embarked on a perilous journey from South Beach, guided by the wisdom of Windy, BOM, and Seabreeze, but trusting most in the venerable BOM to navigate the unpredictable waters.

The elements, they were fickle, with a capricious mix of southeast winds and south-westerly swells that danced upon the waves. Undaunted, we set sail at the break of day, the crew consisting of the likes of Dave Oakley, Martin Brennan, Andrew Munyard, and meself.

With our vessels pointed westward, we ventured forth, halting only for a brief respite near the shipping channel, quenching our thirst and measuring the distance covered – a mere 7.5 leagues in the first hour. Our course then shifted to the northwest, skirting the perilous Straggler Rocks and navigating the breakers spawned by the tempestuous southwest swell.

The sea, she played tricks on us, revealing hidden reefs that demanded our vigilance. Yet, with the wind at our backs, we sailed on, guided by the majestic windmills and lighthouses of Rottnest, looming like sentinels on the horizon.

Approaching the island, we considered a shortcut at Phillip Point, but the wise Andrew, heeding the warnings of the sea, led us along the safer path. Aye, a natural jetty it may have seemed, but danger lurked beneath the surface.

After a grueling 21.5 kilometers and three hours of paddling, we made landfall, the thrill of the sea spray still fresh upon our faces. Our kayaks secured in the dunes, we ventured into the heart of the island, fueled by the promise of a hearty meal and tales to share.

The morn of the next day dawned with the winds still howling, prompting our crew, now joined by Damo, to circumnavigate the northern reaches of the isle. Our first challenge came at Thomson Bay, where the swell and wind waves crafted a mesmerizing dance. Some among us, the skilled few, rode the waves with grace, while I, in my eagerness, found myself submerged, battling the elements until Mark's helping hand restored me to my vessel.

Beyond Thomson Bay, we sailed amid reefs and rock formations, reaching Abraham Point through a labyrinth of submerged dangers. My trusty craft suffered a few scars from the encounter, but the joy of navigating among bommies and mushroom rocks was worth the price.

Lunch consumed, we retraced our path with the wind in our favor, Trevor experimenting with his sail. Geordie Bay, though a challenge, welcomed us with the promise of coffee and sustenance, rejuvenating our weary bodies. As the sun dipped below the horizon, we returned to Thomson Bay, having covered a formidable 24 kilometers.

The morrow brought discussions of a return to the mainland, but the capricious winds discouraged such notions. Thus, we boarded a ferry, laden with tales of triumph and tribulation, leaving behind the wild seas of Rottnest, yearning for the next adventure that awaits.

Fair winds and following seas, Pip

