

Don't Knock the Rock

(by David Cockburn)

[This article, compiled by S.Y.C. member David Cockburn, was first published over ten years ago. However, after requests from several people (including some who were unfortunate enough to hit one of the many rocks in the area), David has given permission for the article to be reprinted.]

The scientists will tell you that it has something to do with the product of the mass by the velocity. Whichever way it works out for the experts, it still means that when a yacht travelling at six knots hits a rock she does a great deal of damage.

The average sailing yacht of about thirty-five feet weighs about as much as half a dozen small cars. Stop this yacht on a rock which does not move aside for her and there is a lot of energy absorbed somewhere.

Usually it is the keel bolts which accept the sheering load and if they stay together they may be forced back into the keel, leaving oval holes which will leak for ever more. Sometimes you can be lucky and the lead is peeled up like a banana skin, or maybe she is able to ride up on the rock and do relatively little damage. However it happens, it is a sickening feeling as she pitches to a sudden stop.

During the season just concluded several S.Y.C. yachts had this experience in the area to the north and west of "Cerberus". The area has had a number of names bestowed upon it, such as Heath's Horror, Green's Rock and Foxie's Full Stop. The question is: are these all one and the same rock or are there more than one?

DON'T TRUST THE CHART

If you consult the Port Phillip chart you will find a single rock charted near the "Cerberus". The Approaches to Melbourne chart No. 155 is a little more detailed but both charts are lacking in sufficient detail to enable safe navigation around the Red Bluff and the "Cerberus".

There are at least 18 separate rock pinnacles or shallow patches with less than six feet of water at mean low water spring tides to the north and west of "Cerberus". Even at high water there is no margin for safety over these patches if there is a sea running. Under these conditions a yacht can descend three or four feet as she falls off a sea, or runs down the face of a wave.

Strangely enough the older Port Phillip Bay chart engraved in 1915 shows the presence of more of these rock patches than the newer charts. It also shows a buoyed channel which follows almost the same route as is shown on the sketch chart opposite. The channel was surveyed to allow the bulk of the "Cerberus" to be towed from Williamstown to its present resting place in 1926. This survey formed the basis of our own chart, which is reproduced opposite. Although the recommended approach is safe, navigators are warned not to place too much reliance on the precision of this chart. It is possible that there are other rocks not shown on this chart.

RECOMMENDED ROUTE

To approach the "Cerberus" on a direct line from Sandringham or from seaward will put your vessel at risk if you have a draft of more than about three feet. The whole triangle shown within the pecked line on our chart must be considered shoal ground.

This becomes obvious if you stand on the Red Bluff cliffs when a hard westerly is blowing. The area is then splashed with the telltale spume of breaking seas. Many of these rocks stand out of surrounding depths of over ten feet. An echo sounder will not tell you much in these conditions except that you have ten feet amidships when she is stuck hard forward.

The recommended approach from Sandringham is to stand out toward the Anonyma shoal buoy, until Red Bluff cliffs bear 127°T. or 116°Mag., then head for the Red Bluff cliffs. This will take you well clear of Yorkies Rock, which is another nasty knob. Proceed on this course until the starting box of B.R.Y.C. which is on the point to the south-west of the clubhouse is just open on the east end of the "Cerberus". This will be on a bearing of 165°T. or 154°Mag. Proceed on this course keeping the starting box just open on the east end of the "Cerberus", until about 100 feet from the "Cerberus". You may now proceed to any part of the "Cerberus" or into the Black Rock harbour in safety.

When leaving you follow these directions in reverse order, keep the transit mentioned just open on 165°T. or 154°Mag. and change course when Red Bluff bears 127°T. or 116°Mag.

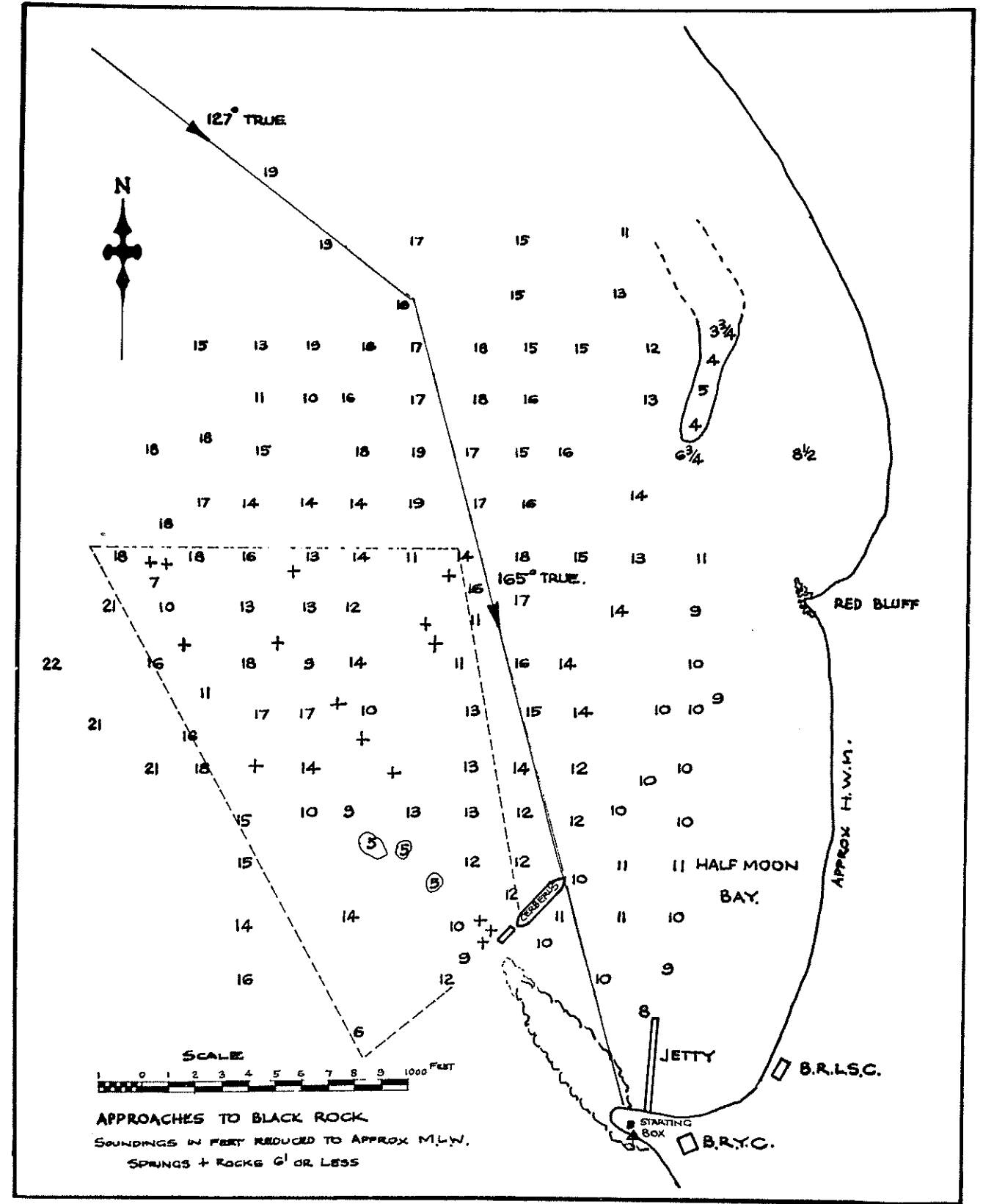
If you wish to proceed further south after a stop at the "Cerberus", on no account just head out to the west or south-west from the "Cerberus" unless you wish to try out your wading boots. There are several very shallow patches on what looks like the most direct way if heading for Beaumaris. Similarly do not attempt to enter the Black Rock harbour or approach the "Cerberus" directly from the southern or western direction. Be careful, too, of Black Joe, which lies shoreward of the recommended track and which appears on chart 155. If you propose taking liberties with Black Joe don't rely entirely on this chart as the reef extends further north than shown and has a number of patches of four feet or less.

WARNING

If you are not impressed with the warning intended in this article you would have been by the reaction of one of our most experienced skippers who accompanied us on one of our survey trips. Although he had sailed this area all his life, he vowed he would never again sail inside the Anonyma buoy.

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