

TACOMA

Newsletter

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The Tacoma and the Western Flyer

The Western Flyer became famous for a six-week voyage to the Sea of Cortez, by the author John Steinbeck and his friend the marine biologist Edward Rickett. Steinbeck wrote a novel from the trip titled “The Log from the Sea of Cortez” which became an icon of American literature. Some say that it is perhaps the best-known fishing boat in history. This fame didn’t happen overnight. The Sea of Cortez wasn’t a bestseller. Word of the book spread from person to person among those who’d been touched by the story and resonated with it. It’s not a book that people forget easily. As time has passed, the collective memory of the book has grown, along with the legend of the boat.

The Western Flyer was built in 1937 in Tacoma, Washington, as a purse seiner to fish for sardines out of Monterey. The builder was Martin Petrich, Sr., owner of the Western Boat Building Company. Petrich would co-own the boat with fisherman Frank Berry and his son Tony, who was to become the boat’s skipper. The Petriches and the Berries were Croatians from the island of Hvar with a strong fishing tradition.

Eighty-five years later, the Western Flyer has been fully restored and relaunched as a working research vessel and floating classroom. Today, it brings together scientists, students, fishers, boatbuilders, artists, and ocean lovers — building community, sparking curiosity, and inspiring future stewards of the sea.

Check it out on YouTube. https://youtu.be/g-DHWKnL_x4



The Tacoma

It was the Haldane brothers who chose the Petrich design from the “Western Boat Building Company”. Bill Haldane and Harvey Petrich worked out the details of how to build a boat halfway around the world in the small fishing village of Port Fairy Victoria, Australia. Bill wrote to Harvey: “In recognition of our friendship, we have called our boat Tacoma.”

On the 18th of September 1947, the Haldane brothers — Bill, Alan and Hughie — got the phone call from the stationmaster at Port Fairy. “Your logs have arrived,” he said. It was the time to construct lifting frames, and with pulley blocks and timber jinkers, the brothers manhandled the logs to their vacant house block on the banks of the Moyne River, Port Fairy, where the boat was built in 1951.

Now, some sixty years later, the Tacoma Preservation Society (TPS) ensured the restoration and maintenance after the vessel retired from prawn trawling. It was Australia's first purpose-built purse seine fishing boat. With the help of many volunteers and sponsors; the TPS commemorates the story of the pioneering fishing Haldane family from Port Fairy, the construction of one of the most historically significant vessels ever built in Australia, and the impact this vessel made in the SA tuna and prawn fishing industry development in Port Lincoln, South Australia.

The Western Flyer's mission is to stir curiosity through marine research, education, and a blend of science and art inspired by John Steinbeck, Ed Ricketts, and their journey on the Western Flyer.

The TPS is planning to revive "The McCoy Society for Research and Investigation" (briefly known as the McCoy Society for Field Investigation and Research) founded in 1935 at the instigation of the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, with the enthusiastic support of many University people. Its purpose was to undertake multi-disciplinary studies on the biota and ecology of selected locations. Pelican Island, Western Port, Victoria, was the site of the Society's last excursion, with the research results being published in 1999. The society was disbanded after that.

The TPS aims at undertaking a five-day trip to the Sir Joseph Banks Group, previously visited by the McCoy Society in 1936-37, to do marine exploration under the guidance of marine biologists. We aim to find an audience of both laypeople and students interested in marine biology. We will compare the reports from that investigation to the present days environment. More details will be available at a later date.

'The Sir Joseph Banks Islands: reports of the expedition of the McCoy Society for Field Investigation and Research, part 1', Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria, ns, 50 (1938), 310-413.'

'The Sir Joseph Banks Islands: reports of the expedition of the McCoy Society for Field Investigation and Research, part 2', Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria, ns, 51 (1939), 141-86.'

The Sinking of the Mary Ann Simms

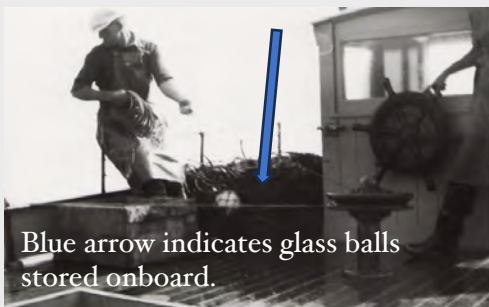
The angled mast of the sunken Almonta (a 1960s wooden 76-ft tuna boat) with its crow's nest bravely holding on, now has a companion. On the sixth of September, Mary Ann Simms on her mooring was in her normal position heading into the wind. The following morning, she had sunk with the wheelhouse visible below water, and the mast holding a blue crow's nest above. The Mary Ann Simms' fate had become the same as the nearby Almonta, abandoned and forgotten by its owner.

One more old lady of the sea may be on its last journey.

Editor's comment (The grapevine): Mary Ann had been moored in the marina for a long period during which she had changed owner. The new owner(s) could not afford the marina fees, and she was moored next to the Osprey platform off Snook's Landing, at the entrance of the marina, where she had been exposed to unfavourable winds and swells.



Glass Fish Fishing Floats



Winching in a shark line aboard the Tacoma. Who would have thought that finding a bunch of glass fishing floats under a house could spark such an interest? They are sold by Captain Ross and go like hotcakes. All proceeds of the sale of the fishing glass floats go to the Tacoma Preservation Society.

Glass fishing floats were invented in Norway around 1840 by the Hadeland Glassverk to replace wood or cork for fishing nets. The technology spread globally, glass floats were largely replaced by plastic and other synthetic materials by the 1960s but remain popular collectibles today.



Tacoma Hosts ABC News Breakfast for Algal Bloom Coverage



On a crisp winter morning, Tacoma once again took her place in the national spotlight, serving as the perfect platform to host ABC News Breakfast's live weather crosses with the Ch. 7 weatherman Nate Byrne on Monday 11 August 2025. The focus of the broadcast was a matter of serious concern for our coastal communities — the harmful algal bloom currently affecting extensive areas of South Australia's waters.

Two of Tacoma's own members, 3rd generation prawn fisherman Chay Haldane and Claire Webber, CEO of the SA Sardine Fishery, joined Nate on deck to provide first-hand insights as seafood industry representatives. They spoke about the bloom and its impact.

The interviews highlighted the resilience and adaptability of South Australia's seafood sector, as well as the importance of science in guiding both immediate responses and long-term strategies.

In a playful nod to Port Lincoln's tuna heritage, Nate joined Claire in a hands-on demonstration, polling "Tina Tuna" from the racks onto Tacoma's back deck. Laughter, good humour, and a spray of seawater ensured the segment ended on a high



Engine Room gets a Facelift

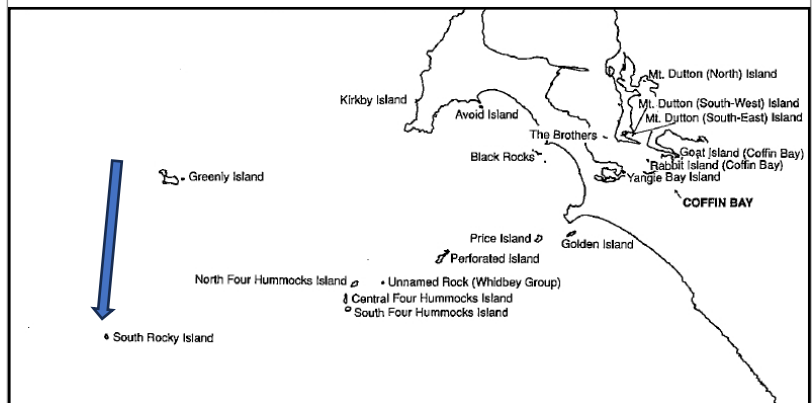


While the winter rain has been most welcome, it's not conducive to painting, so the paint team retreated below decks to the engine room and, with paint colour selection in hand, colour-coded the once all dull grey pipework.

Blue for freshwater, green for saltwater, yucky yellow for diesel and so forth, the engine room plus the bilge has undergone a thorough clean. Other works down below have included a complete rebuilding of the Grenaa bilge pump, including the polishing of the two brass balls. The engineers can now have peace of mind when at sea. After a discussion with the engineers at Grenaa in Denmark, the main engine was given a fine tune with a sturdy spanner, a few threads turned here and there, and the old lady is purring like a kitten.



South Rocky Island 2026 Trip



Ten years ago, TPS celebrated the 60th anniversary of the first tuna being landed on the deck of the Tacoma, using a bamboo pole and live bait. On the 29th of February 2026, it will be 70 years ago, but it is a leap year. Instead, we will leave Port Lincoln on Friday, the 27th, for a five-day trip.

Rocky Island (South) is a conservation park and a protected area 38.8 NM west-southwest of Coffin Bay and 27.5 NM of Point Avoid.

It is considered an El Dorado for tuna fishermen. Once Dinko, the father of Dean Dinko, applied for a loan at a bank. The bank manager asked him what security he would have. Dinko leaned over the bank manager's desk and whispered in his ear, Rocky Island!

On encountering this isolated island, protruding defiantly from angry water far from the mainland, it is difficult to imagine a landscape dominated by the sea had ever existed in any other form; that the continental shelf, now submerged 90 m deep, was once a broad plain of waving grass, shrubs and woodlands only a short geological time ago. A tall range rose abruptly from the plain, and South Rocky Island is the summit of this range. South Rocky Island has probably existed as an ocean-locked island for at least 12,000 years. Eleven plant species and a few coastal bird species have been recorded. No reptiles have been found. New Zealand Fur-seals congregate and breed on suitable rock platforms. A few Australian sea-lions basks higher, among the Grey Saltbush. Sea landings could be achieved with care on calm days.

School Visit to Tacoma

Katie Hughes, Special Education Teacher wrote:

As part of The Eyre Peninsula Transition Program run by the Department of Education immersion experience, students had the amazing opportunity to visit the first tuna boat in Port Lincoln — the Tacoma.

Continue below.

Roping



At Port Lincoln's famous rope dump, a new scavenger has appeared. The Tacoma member, David Raleigh, who has a keen eye for recycling, has thrown his talent for lassoing and artwork into action and is producing a range of rope mats and nautical items. For more



Our students stepped back in time to learn about the early days of tuna fishing in the region. We got to tour the entire boat, learn how it worked, and even try pole fishing for tuna — just like the original crew did! Everyone had a blast trying on the tuna belts, vests, and hats — we really felt like part of the crew. To top it all off, we even got to make our own small resin model of the Tacoma to take home as a keepsake of the day. A massive thank you to Ross for sharing his time, stories, and passion with us. It was an unforgettable experience, and we truly appreciate the chance to connect with such an important part of Port Lincoln's history.



On Top: Students on deck.

On the left: A group of freshmen proudly holding onto their bamboo fishing pole.