



We started and ended the year in world-class sailing locales in two countries: the Hauraki Gulf, where Team New Zealand defended the America's Cup, and now in Sydney Harbour, the start of the [Sydney-Hobart](#) race.



The view from 2,057' Mt Hobson in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park.

Before visiting New Zealand, our main knowledge of the Hauraki Gulf was that big body of water where the America's Cup races were fought. But it actually is a major cruising destination and marine protected area with excellent walking tracks to sweeping views, beautiful beaches and many sheltered anchorages.

From the [Hauraki Gulf](#), we spent a few days in Auckland and had a great time. While there, we watched the Seattle Seahawks beat New Orleans on their way to a Superbowl victory with a surprisingly large number of other

Seahawks fans. Some were from the US, but many were kiwis.



Seahawks fans in Auckland.



One of Wellington's many sculptures.

We ran south from Auckland, and made our first of two stops in [Wellington](#), New Zealand's capital at the south end of the north island. "Windy Welly" has among the most beautiful downtown waterfronts we've seen--they've done a great job in modernizing the wharf while letting it's commercial roots show through. Along the waterfront and throughout the city are literally dozens of sculptures and other artwork. The city also is full of excellent restaurants, with heavy

emphasis on outdoor seating. We had a hard time leaving the first time, and a similar difficulty on our second visit.



A Fiordland Crested Penguin



Hall Arm in Doubtful Sound, Fiordland.

[Fiordland](#), on New Zealand's South Island, has been on our list of special places to visit for nearly as long as we've been boating. In late January, we finally got there. The photo at the top of this page was taken at 500' Stirling Falls in Milford Sound the day we arrived. Fiordland was even more beautiful than we expected—we travelled to every arm of every sound, and anchored in most. We also made our first penguin sighting in the wild: a Fiordland Crested Penguin.



The summit of Magog, Stewart Island.

From Fiordland we continued south to New Zealand's third-largest island, [Stewart Island](#). There we rounded Southwest Cape and reached 47 degrees 2 minutes, the farthest south we will be in *Dirona* for a very long time. From Harvard Glacier in Prince William Sound, at 62 degrees 16 minutes north, *Dirona* has now traveled across 109 degrees of latitude. That's getting to be a good slice of the globe.

Stewart Island was remote, raw and beautiful. The dramatic scenery seen in the Lord of the Rings films from New Zealand's South Island is intensified here, with weather-carved rock formations on windswept hills. We hiked on several of Stewart Island's excellent tracks and spent an enjoyable few days in their main village, Oban, the first town we'd visited since leaving Wellington eight weeks earlier.



Record calm conditions in the Tasman Sea.

In May we left Nelson, on the north end of the South Island, and travelled 1,360 miles [across the Tasman Sea](#) to Brisbane, Australia. The Tasman has a reputation for being a difficult body of water, and more than one boat hasn't returned from it. We were lucky to cross during a 150-year record for settled weather there—conditions were so calm we could see the stars reflected in the ocean.



Anchored at Fitzroy Reef, Great Barrier Reef.

We spent several months in Brisbane, enjoying this beautiful cosmopolitan city and completing numerous boat projects, before returning briefly to the US. Then we worked north to spend two months on the Great Barrier Reef. One of the reasons we started diving 15 years ago was to get full value from when one day we were able to visit the reef and were not disappointed. We particularly enjoyed the more remote outer reefs—the diving was amazing and we loved being anchored inside the reefs with no land in sight. We got as far north as



Whitehaven Beach, Whitsunday Islands.

the [Whitsunday Islands](#), one of Australia's premiere cruising grounds. There we visited the famous Whitehaven Beach, with its incredibly soft sand and made several view excellent hikes.



[Oracle Team USA Moth sailing hydrofoil.](#)

From the Whitsunday Islands, we ran 960 miles south to the [Hawksebury River](#) system just north of Sydney. What started out as a side-trip, mainly for a convenient place to leave *Dirona* while we travelled back to the US, turned out to be a memorable part of the trip. The scenery and anchorages there were beautiful, but the real surprise was the town of [Gosford](#). We went to Gosford planning to stop just for a few nights, and finally dragged ourselves away after ten days. While there, we had an opportunity to watch [Oracle Team USA](#), the current America's Cup champions, training on [Moth sailing hydrofoils](#).

We've spent all of December in Sydney Harbour, taking in the city attractions and making day trips to tour the dramatic [Blue Mountains](#) and [Bondi Beach](#).

We've also watched several world-class sailboat races, including the [Big Boat Challenge](#), the [Extreme 40s](#) and the start of the [Sydney-Hobart](#) race. Sydney is an awesome city and we're loving our time here. We're looking forward to the city's famous New Year's Eve fireworks, then will have to drag ourselves away.

We plan to spend January and February in Tasmania, attend the Melbourne Formula 1 race in March, and then work our way back up the east coast of Australia and across the top to the Kimberly region in Western Australia. A live map of our current route and recent log entries is always available at <http://www.mvdirona.com/maps/locationcurrent.html>.



[Anchored off the Sydney Opera House and Sydney Harbour Bridge.](#)

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