

Take time to smell the roses.

There is a saying among the tramping community that you should always take time to smell the roses. My sailing version of this is to take time before you launch to look out over the water, look at the clouds and decide what the wind is doing. Last Sunday I was on the shore of lake Ellesmere fixing one of my windstations when I was witness to a classic example of not taking the time to “smell the roses” in sailing terms.

The day was sunny and I could tell by observing the strip of calm water along the shore line that there was a very light Southerly off-shore wind of around three to four knots. My task that day involved climbing a ladder and having very little wind made the job that much safer. It was also the perfect day to be sailing on the lake.

With few people around the voices coming off the water caught my attention. From behind some willows two loaded up windsurfing boards appeared. They were long boards and I say loaded up because the front one had two people and a chilly bin aboard and the second one had two children on it. It looked to me like Dad and his three kids were off on a picnic. They were only around 15 metres off-shore and so I watched with interest to see how they would manage the very light off-shore breeze.

Dad on the leading board managed to sail an easy reach along the shore line and was soon a good 30 metres ahead of the two kids on the second board. On the second board a young person of around eight years was struggling to hold a very small sail up and so rather than reaching nicely along the shore the board was drifting with the off-shore breeze. Dad was shouting instructions back in a language I could not understand so I just watched.

All the action happened quickly in slow motion. It did not take long for the board with the kids on to be 100metres off-shore and by then Dad was a long way ahead. He must have realised running an LTS course at 100 metres was not going to work so he retraced his course back to shore and off loaded the chilly bin and the kid from his board. He seemed to contemplate sailing in pursuit of his other kids who by now were 300 metres off shore when he spotted his rescuer.

By chance another Lake user had just loaded his RIB onto his trailer and was about to drive away. Dad in bare feet scampered along the road beside the lake to the RIB owner. There was a conversation and various pointing gestures then the RIB was re-launched and headed out to the drifting windsurf board which by now was around 500 metres off-shore. All were returned safely to shore.

Did I mention no one was wearing life jackets, only light wetsuits. Yes the lake is shallow but arm-pit deep on me would have been over the head of the children. I also noticed they never tried to paddle the board back which would have been easy had they thought of it. Life jackets, a briefing and a lesson on how to work the sail would have gone a long way to avoid this fright.

As I said at the beginning by taking the time to look around it was easy to see the wind was off-shore and while light some skill was needed to sail a proper course.

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