

John Young and Leofleda

I got to know John and Ruth Young after buying their boat Leofleda in 2017. John built the 23ft gaff-rigged yacht, with woodworker Dave Kew, in Adelaide, launching her in November 1973. She was named after a Thames sailing barge John had crewed on in England. At this time John was an academic in history, and he managed to get a grant to undertake research on Pacific history. The grant money was used to put Leofleda on a ship to Tonga, from where, after a quick lesson in celestial navigation, he, Ruth and their two younger children set sail to the Lau group of islands of eastern Fiji. Their landfall in Fijian waters could have turned to disaster when they struck a coral reef, but they managed to free themselves without harm. After cruising the Lau group for several months conducting research, the family sailed on to Suva, where again she was lifted onto the deck of a ship for the return trip to Australia.

John, Ruth and family cruised extensively around St. Vincent's and Spencer Gulfs in Leofleda, including visits to Kangaroo Island and Port Lincoln. They were pooped on one occasion running back from Spencer Gulf. In 1991, John and Ruth moved to Tasmania, where they established the Shipwright's Point School of Wooden Boatbuilding, predecessor to the Woodenboat Centre in Franklin. Leofleda was shipped to Hobart and became a fixture in Tasmanian waters, including accompanying early Tawe Nunnugah Raids. After I had bought Leofleda (I shortened the name to Leda), John accompanied me on the short delivery trip up the channel through the Egg Islands to the eastern side of the Huon River, to a temporary mooring at Cradoc.

As I got to know John I came to appreciate what a force of nature he was, even in his eighties. He chased me up to help sail the LBT's newly acquired Montague Whaler around to Dover for the Port Esperance Easter regatta, and to serve on a roster to hire out the Grebe clinker dinghies. I would drop into their Huonville home, where he and Ruth were always hospitable. Apart from boats, John and I shared an academic background in environmental studies and politics. John had been director of the Centre for Environmental Studies at Adelaide University. I read his book 'Sustaining the Earth' while he plowed through my more scientifically oriented PhD thesis titled 'The Environment Crisis and the Social Ecology of Maladaptation'.

I look forward to sailing Leda/Leofleda back to Franklin so the boat that John built, and sailed for 43 years, is present for the memorial service to this energetic and inspiring man.