

Arethusa — a yacht of many lives ...

by Tracy Neal

Arethusa, the remarkable 10.15m (33ft) straight-stemmed cutter made famous by "Pick" Pickmere in the 1930s and 1940s, still survives under her original name.

Since being driven ashore on to Farewell Spit during a storm on the night of December 27, 1955, Arethusa has undertaken a variety of functions.

Today she lies at Collingwood Wharf, Golden Bay, a retired fishing trawler looking for a new direction to add to her amazing history.

In Sea Classics (August) Paul Titchener trace Arethusa's exploits since her construction and launching at Northcote, Auckland in 1917 — but lost

track of her after her salvage from Farewell Spit.

Titchener concluded his article with a plea for information on the fate of the Arethusa.

"Does the proud 70-year-old yacht still sail the waters of the northern South Island — or has she moved on?"

Well, Arethusa is still in the northern South Island but no longer under sail. She is still rigged as a fishing trawler but retired from fishing, along with owner Tom Benjamin of Collingwood, two years ago.

Benjamin bought Arethusa from the Motueka fishing company Talleys Fisheries Ltd eight years ago and fished regularly with her until 1985. He now has her up for sale.

Before Talleys owned her, Arethusa had been converted in 1976 as a pleasure launch — her superstructure being altered significantly.

Arethusa was owned by Walter Winstanley of New Plymouth when she



Arethusa is fitted on to her sledge for her bulldozer voyage across Farewell Spit.

went aground on Farewell Spit while on the relatively short passage from New Plymouth to the Marlborough Sounds.

It was thought that the skipper mistook the Farewell Spit light — perhaps with that of Stephens Island.

Apparently all crew escaped unscathed — suitcases in hand and bone dry!

Although he escaped on this occasion Walter Winstanley drowned some time later (January 16, 1964) while attempting to reach the New Plymouth shore after his 11m (36ft) yawl, *Gesture*, sank. His dinghy overturned during his bid to reach shore.

Arethusa was sold by her insurance company to a Mr Harwood of Takaka after her passage on to Farewell Spit. Keel damage was extensive during the salvage, during which *Arethusa* was dragged by bulldozer over the spit, patched sufficiently for a tow to Collingwood, and then given more permanent repairs.

It was at this stage that the old yacht traded her sails for engine power, making

fishing voyages right around the top half of the South Island from Hokitika on the West Coast to Kaikoura in the east.

Her most recent motive force was a 180hp six-cylinder Ford diesel.

In attempting to track down *Arethusa* there was some confusion over whether she had suffered a name change — to *Val Marie*. However investigation revealed that *Val Marie* was another boat wrecked on Farewell Spit — the area of her “grave” site being named after her.

Arethusa’s name is still very firmly lead-embedded in its original state in her stern.

A fond wish by “Pick” Pickmere’s family for the *Arethusa* to be returned to Auckland and restored to her former sailing condition depends on the enthusiasm and finance that can be raised.



Arethusa discovered — rigged as a trawler and laid up at the Collingwood Wharf in Golden Bay.