

Basic Detail Report



Sunlight

Vessel number

HV000853

Date

1933

Primary Maker

William Ryan

Description

Sunlight was built in 1933 by the William Ryan Shipyard in Taree. It was launched on the ninth of December 1933 from the slipway at Mitchells Island by the Manning River Dairy Cooperative. For thirty six years until 1969 Sunlight operated as a milk and cream boat on the Manning River under the Lower Manning Dairy Cooperative. 29ft in length, Sunlight was specifically designed for the narrow and shallow reaches of the lower Manning River in the Ghinni Ghinni creek area, regions larger vessels had difficulty navigating. As of 2023 Sunlight is displayed on the grounds of Cundletown and Lower Manning Historical Society. Sunlight has a very graceful and easily driven displacement hull form, the deadrise, turn of bilge and flare above waterline make a smooth run for the laminated timber ribs to form. The carvel hull is constructed of spotted gum along very traditional techniques, the deck is very robust in beams, with the fitting of lodging knees to every deck beam and posts to centreline. The deck perimeter is bounded by an unusually stout laminated sponson, these features assumed to be included for duties of both taking the heavy deck loadings of milk churns and the making of dairy farm wharves on many occasions per day. A bronze and/or copper-based metal shoe runs the full length of keel. This transitions into an elegant bronze support for the rudder. Sunlight had five engines over its working life as a milk boat. The last engine installed was a 49 HP Super Major Fordson now on display at the Cundletown and Lower Manning Historical Society. The Manning catchment is on the NSW mid north coast and covers and estimated 8,420 square kilometres. The Manning River flows for 250 kilometres rising in the Great Dividing Range to the east of the basin, and moves south east through a coastal floodplain to Taree where it splits in two. The southern arm meets the Pacific Ocean at Old Bar, and the northern arm is joined by the Dawson and Lansdowne rivers meeting the Ocean at Harrington. The Lower Manning River is a delta system with several channels creating large islands like the Mitchell and Oxley Islands. The Manning River Dairy Cooperative was originally situated on Mitchells Island at the intersection of Manning River and Scotts Creek, and later moved to the banks of the river at Chatham, Taree. From these locations the milk boats Sun, Sunshine, Sunbeam, Sunrise, and Sunlight travelled upriver and into different branches of the catchment, collecting milk cans from shallow stretches of the river and narrow wharves. The design of each milk boats deck with a sheer allowed for a smooth movement of cans, the roof covering ensuring for appropriate temperature control on return to the cooperative. Shifts for milk boat workers were often long and tough, vessels often operated by only one person, their engines often running from dawn to dusk. This extract from the

Manning River Times 22 February 1952 on Sunlights' sister vessel Sunrise highlights historic significance of the milk boat to the Manning River region: The pride of M.R Co-op. Dairy Society's river fleet, this trim Manning-built cream-boat was a landmark in Manning life in the years between the wars. Plying between the old Mitchell's Island factory and Wingham, the SUNRISE not only made proper use of the waterway for the conveyance of cream, as well as delivering various types of goods, but she also carried passengers. She was the means of many a visitor to the district gaining the best possible impression of the Manning. Staffed by a genial and hard-working crew — Skipper Tom Gale, engineer Bill Carmody, deckhand George McCarthy — The SUNRISE would come steaming up the channel to Tinonee at about 9am pushing up a creaming bow-wave which broke like a young surf along the river foreshore in her wake, often to the discomfiture of anglers in small boats, who would narrowly avert swamping. Captain and crew would busily unload empty cans at the old John See's wharf, and pick up whatever cream had already been brought in, mainly by horse-drawn vehicles. As often as not a group of passengers would embark for the run to Wingham, quite likely a visitor or two for Tinonee would get off. The trip to Wingham was an experience of which one would never grow tired, and Tinonee people almost invariably would take any visitors they had for a half-day voyage. The trip up river was leisurely, insofar as the boat called at farm landing stages alternatively on either side of the river, setting down empties and goods, picking up the cream from farmers who would almost invariably be waiting with their horses and slide to take the empties home. Cheery conversation would take place between farmers, crew and passengers — dogs would bark at the swirling water from the propeller blades, wives and children would wave from the farm-houses here and there — it was a beautiful world of rich alluvial farms, thriving crops, and sleek cattle. All the time George McCarthy would be rowing in the pulling-boat to less accessible landing places, meeting the SUNRISE at rendezvous here and there — he'd just row, row, row. Bill Carmody was up and down the engine-room ladder as required, to help with the gang-plank at awkward places, but he found time to keep the magnificent full diesel engine in spotless condition and perfect running order. At length the last pick-up would be made and the boat would enter a long straight willow-lined reach and proceed to Wingham's £4,000 wharf, where a whole fleet of cream lorries were lined up. (In earlier days, when earlier boats, the YANKEE JACK and EXPRESS plied, this line-up was of covered horse-drawn vans). Cast off the hawser, engine room telegraph would ring, the engine throb, move out astern, back and fill, then head non-stop at a good fast speed for home. Lunch time now, appetites most healthy. Hot water available—various pots of tea made, passengers and crew alike would attack their hampers, Bill and George sitting on deck, Tom in his wheel house at the helm. Back to Tinonee all too quickly—"fares please" in the meantime, very small fares—then passengers ashore, more passengers embark, more cream is taken on (the decks are filling now), blast on the siren to warn the punt, cast off and away... The Manning milk boats further played an active role ferrying passengers and offering aid during times of flood. Towards the late 1960s an increasing amount of milk tankers, the construction of bridges over the river, and the evolution of the highway resulted in the end of the Manning milk boat service. From 1969 to 2005 Sunlight was converted into an oyster boat and owned by three generations of the Laurie family. During this period the vessel was fibre glassed as the copper sheathing deteriorated. From 2005 to 2019 Sunlight was owned by Michael Barlin in dry dock. In 2022 the Australian National Maritime Museum assisted the Cundletown and Lower Manning Historical Society with a Vessel Management Plan for Sunlight. As of 2023 the roof superstructure of Sunlight has been rebuilt to specifications seen in images and information provided by former workers of

the Lower Manning Dairy Co-Op. All work was undertaken by a member of the Ryan Family, and shipbuilder Graham Steber. The museum has 6 of the 10 original pieces of timber to support the roof. The Intended future display is to be on rebuilt sliprails with a winch sourced from 2nd Taree Sea Scouts.