South–West Marine Debris Cleanup

Cleaning up the wild west
The South West Marine Debris Cleanup has been running since the late 1990’s. I with the help of Dave Wyatt and the good ship Velocity have coordinated the trips since 1999. The cleanup returns every time to a part of the South West World Heritage Area that has no established tracks. This lack of foot traffic ensures that we are collecting everything that has been washed up on the beaches since our last visit.

Only the generosity of the Fishermen have enabled us to continue this monitoring and educational effort.

We are the only people currently actively cleaning this coastline on a regular basis.
This South-West corner of Tasmania is home to some of the most beautiful and dangerous coastlines anywhere on the planet. As part of the South West World Heritage Area its pristine beauty will be protected in perpetuity and we are doing what we can to maintain that beauty. This coastline contains numerous surf breaks which are regularly surfed by a very few crayfishermen and abalone divers. Here local knowledge is the key and the skipper of the Velocity has surfed here more than anyone else on the planet. National Parks has asked us not to publish maps or identify the names of the places we visit so they may remain untouched and wild. At present it remains one of the least visited parts of Tasmania and we hope to keep it that way.
Dave Wyatt has been fishing and surfing this coastline for the last 20+ years. He has been instrumental in the success of the rubbish cleanup his generosity, local knowledge, seamanship and beach landing ability has enabled us to access the beaches and the waves for the last 10 years. His ship the Velocity is a 53 foot Westcoaster and is an ideal mother ship for the cleanup. It has ample flat deck space and protection from the elements along with accommodation for up to 8 people. The boat does charter work for surfers, the Marine Conservation Branch, the Mark Webber Challenge, Game fishermen and anyone else who wants to explore the SW coast. The usual charter rate is $2000 per day. In the past I have worked 15 or 20 pots for the duration of the trip to cover costs and get a wage for Dave, these days we get a good guys discount.
There are many cultural and historical sites on the part of the coast that we visit. This is the wreck of the Svenor which is on one of our regular beaches. Photo: Jason Reynolds
Bait box straps
Typical west facing beach blowout. Common to see lots of glass bottles from all over the world in these blowouts
Green Island – the west coast rubbish tip
Each beach is different. Some gulches are all plastic bottles the next will be full of foam.
More and more rubbish but we are getting better at collecting it
Sorting rubbish coke bottles are very common
The Dirty Dozen 2001-2013

- Plastic pieces: 40%
- Rope pieces (>1.5 m): 23%
- Rope pieces (0.5-1.5 m): 4%
- Bag pieces: 2%
- Bait Saver Baskets: 3%
- Cans: 2%
- Beverage bottles: 1%
- Bag pieces: 2%
- Rope Pieces (<0.5 m): 5%
- Caps/lids: 4%
- Bait Box Straps: 8%
- Rope Pieces (1-1.5 m): 2%
- Juice boxes: 1%
- Bag pieces: 1%
- Rope Pieces (0.5-1.5 m): 4%
- Juice boxes: 1%
- The end: 5%
The waves on this part of the coast are generally reefs and points with the occasional sheltered beach breaks which are only surfable on lower swells. This break is well inside Port Davey just outside one of the better anchorages on the coast. We usually stop here on the way around the coast to allow those suffering from sea sickness some respite. This anchorage has one of the highest concentrations of small plastic debris on the coast and the beach usually takes a full days work to clean.
The bottle bag
We picked up around 35000 items on the 2013 cleanup. The dirty dozen keeps tabs on the most common items.
Beercan Bay – Consistent beer cans litter this beach 100% local
Recyclable items 2001-2013

- 3397 Cans
- 2113 Beverage bottles
- 926 Water bottles
- 1919 Cleaner bottles
- 1066 Food containers
- 6670 Caps and lids

Stats

Beverage bottles, water bottles and caps and lids all trending up
A CDL will boost our aim to target the sources of local rubbish that can be removed from the fishing cycle which includes bait straps and bait and ice bags.