

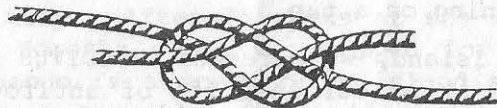
we had an expedition inland with a couple from a French yacht and a local lad, to collect some giant bamboo. It was a wonderful hike through some nice jungle, but also with lovely views across the islands.

Brazil also gave us another fiesta with food, drink, and dancing, as well as a lot of hawkers selling their wares on the street and at markets. The people were all shades of colour from black to white and most seemed to have a very happy disposition. One of our desires was to get a little monkey (marmoset) and although we had the opportunity to buy several, we had to say no because of Australia's strict quarantine laws. Fortunately some friends had a monkey on board and we played with it a lot. We wouldn't let them visit us unless Marmaduke the marmoset came too!

With the southern summer approaching it was time to move off again if we were to get to Australia before winter. Once more we started the trip with 150 mile per day averages with the trade winds on our beam, then into the variables, and finally the grey skies and big swells of the Southern Ocean with albatross winging about. It's cool, grey and lonely, but still an exciting ocean to be in, with another country to visit ahead of us.

To be continued.

MIKE & GAY LEWIS



In the previous edition of "Squadron Quarterly" Beryl described ALONA's experiences following their departure from Darwin up until early December 88 when they left Sri Lanka for India. In this issue we take up her story from the time of their landfall at the southern tip of India.

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Our dawn landfall of Cape Comorant at the tip of India revealed stark mountains and a fleet of tiny raft-like fishing boats, their brown sails bending back in the strong wind as they raced along, giving the appearance of a school of shark fins in the dim light.

The coastal strip is thickly populated with thatched huts close by each other, interspersed with the odd more prosperous red tiled house. Most amazing of all was the large number of huge, many steepled old churches, large as cathedrals, amongst these tiny primitive dwellings. We counted 5 such within about a mile of each other. They were built by the Portuguese long ago, who, after their arrival in India in the early 16th century, introduced the Roman Catholic religion which is still very strong along the SW coast of India.

By chance, we found ourselves off the entrance to Cochin at the same time as BELLE which had come from the Maldives, so we decided to enter and spend Xmas with Megan and Bill, as well as our friends from EAGLES NEST who had arrived the previous day. Such a coincidence we couldn't have planned if we had tried. We all arrived in India in the same order in which we had left Chagos 6 weeks earlier.

Entering Cochin Harbour, we passed close to many Chinese fishing nets. They resemble a huge umbrella frame crudely made of rough bent tree branches roped together and counter balanced with logs weighted with large stones. A net about 40-50' square, suspended under the frame, is periodically lowered into the water then

raised with, hopefully, fish in it. The entrance opens into a large harbour into which flow a number of large waterways. It is a busy port, part of which is a naval base, but after clearing into the country, we were able to re-anchor in a quiet spot far from the main shipping area.

Checking into India was a day-long experience of a very inefficient system with masses of paperwork at various locations - 3 copies of most things were required but they had no carbon paper!

This Malabar coast was the centre of the spice trade with the Arabs and Chinese centuries ago, long before the first European ship, commanded by Vasco de Gama, arrived in 1498, so it's not surprising that we found Cochin to be a fascinating place. The old Portuguese fort at the entrance to the harbour is very European in appearance, a little reminiscent of Venice with the houses built at the water's edge on the canals and harbour. Gondola type canoes as well as ferries plied back and forth all day, and the large covered rice barges were quite picturesque as they went by. The fort houses a Jewish district with narrow winding streets and an interesting 400 year old synagogue, but few Jews remain today. Mattancherry Palace has some wonderful 17th century wall murals, and St Francis' church, built in 1510, was the burial place of Vasco de Gama in 1524. His tombstone is still there, but his body was taken to Portugal 14 years later.

Our anchorage was by the Bolghetty Palace, now a hotel, with 10 other yachts, and a short water taxi ride from the sprawling, prosperous and modern city of Ernakulam. As this was Xmas week, and the population largely Christian, the city was very busy. I bought some decorations to brighten ALONA and our spirits, as this was to be our first Xmas out of Australia. On Christmas Eve we had some friends over for a small party, and on Xmas Day, 16 of us went to dinner at the lovely old

Malabar Hotel; a sumptuous smorgasbord of traditional English and Indian food.

With such a safe anchorage and friends to mind ALONA, we took the opportunity to visit the Periya Game Reserve, high in the Western Ghats, for 2 nights over the New Year weekend. It was an interesting 6 hour journey although terrifying much of the way as the driver played "chicken" with approaching vehicles on the very narrow, winding and rough road. The crowded plains gave way to rural rice fields, brilliant with young growth, and as we climbed we came to cardamon, pepper and rubber plantations until finally we reached the tea growing area. This State of Kerala is Communist, and because the party was holding it's annual Congress that weekend, the roadsides and villages were decorated with red Communist flags and streamers.

The Reserve, at an altitude of 800m, was delightfully cool after the daily 33° of Cochin. We did a 7 am boat trip, lasting 2½ hours, on the lake, hoping to see wild elephants, and weren't really surprised that we didn't. Being the New Year weekend it seemed half of India was on holiday and visiting the Reserve so any self respecting elephant would have gone into hiding.

The day we returned to Cochin was a long, tiring one. The bus, an open sided local one, left at 5.45 am and it was fascinating, while waiting in the bus station, to watch dawn break and India awaken. A colourful scene as buses came and went, people warmed themselves over small fires, and pilgrims in their saffron dhotis, bare chests covered with garlands of orange marigolds and with their possessions carried in bundles on their heads, went by. Two hours later we left the bus and boarded a small ferry which took us along the inland canals and waterways for another 2 hours before catching a bus for Cochin. This one wasn't easy to find but with a lot of help we eventually boarded a packed bus and our booked seats were magically vacated. So, after 2 buses,

a ferry, 2 autorickshaws and a water taxi, it was a tired grubby couple who finally arrived back on ALONA. We have reached the firm decision that to travel again by local transport in India is right at the top of the list of things we won't do again.

Two and a half weeks went by and we still wanted to visit Goa, so after a long morning spent clearing out of Cochin, we set sail north 350 miles to Murmagao. We motor-sailed much of the distance as the wind was very light; on the way enjoying 2 meals of mud crabs bought from a fisherman as we left the harbour. Once again we sailed close to the coast during the day, going out to sea at night, keeping a good lookout for fishing boats.

Entering Murmagao Harbour was a little disappointing after lovely Cochin as there is little of interest to be seen. It is a large open harbour with 2 rivers flowing into it which are separated by a neck of land. On one side of which is the main city of Panaji while we are anchored on the other off a friendly 5 Star hotel, the Cidade de Goa, which invites us to make use of all its facilities. It's great to be able to swim again, the first time since we left the Chagos Islands, and mussels are there for the taking on nearby rocks.

Not only is Goa a favourite holiday place for Europeans but is also very popular with the Indian tourist. We did a touristy day tour of North Goa, in keeping with our vow not to use public transport for sightseeing again, and were the only Europeans on the full bus. It was a rather uninteresting tour as the countryside has been largely denuded of trees which have been replaced by scrubby secondary growth, but it did enable us to have a quick look at the countryside as well as some northern beaches.

The Portuguese heritage is obvious in Panaji with narrow winding streets, old houses with overhanging balconies, lovely wrought iron and red tiled roofs, but it is sad

to see so many are neglected. We still have some beautiful old churches to see before we leave.

During our time in SW India, we have been impressed by the peoples' friendliness and how willing they are to help us in any way they can. They are more Westernised, prosperous and better educated than those we had contact with in Northern India in 1974, and the cities are much cleaner.

Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think I would one day sail to India, so I will be eternally grateful to that "ill wind" which forced a change in our destination and brought us eventually to this exciting and fascinating country.

January is the recognised time for yachts to start crossing the Arabian Sea en route to the Red Sea and Suez, so we plan to leave India next week and sail to Salalah, Oman, 1200 miles westward.

We think of you all often and look forward to getting news of what has been happening in our absence. Keep well and have a very happy 1989.

BERYL MORCOM

